

Bird Wing Meeting

January 26, 2016, Boardroom, North Bay Public Library

Renee Levesque, Birdwing Scribe

The first meeting of the New Year was a lively and energetic one. Perhaps because we had not met since November, we had a lot to say. We had a full agenda which, at times, lent itself to animated discussion. There were occasions when we all spoke at the same time and Dick Tafel, Chair, had to call us to order. Marc Buchanan said his ears hurt by the end of the meeting – it was that sort of meeting!

OFO Certificate: Vic Rizzo, as our special guest, was presented with an Ontario Field Ornithologist (OFO) Certificate of Appreciation for hosting birders who came to see the Brambling which paid a visit to his yard in November 2014. Vic was one of 13 people in 2015 to receive a certificate. Every year, OFO pays tribute to individuals and organizations for their contribution to the birds and the birding community in Ontario. If you know of someone who provides access to a rare bird or assists birders in some way, you can send your nomination through the OFO website or by email to Ken Burrell at kenneth.gd.burrell@gmail.com.

Although the awards were announced back in the fall, Vic's certificate came to him by a circuitous route. When Dick was visiting his granddaughter, Kerri, in Markham over the Christmas holidays, she gave him the certificate to give to Vic. How did she come to get it? Well, turns out she is a friend of Ken Burrell's



Vic, his plaque and the Brambling, photos by Renee Levesque

girlfriend who somehow determined Kerri is the granddaughter of Dick. So although Vic was not at the presentation back in the fall when Ken presented the awards, he is but four handshakes away from Ken!

Vic presented quite a humorous rendition of the experience of hosting birders and photographers who came from far and wide. Although in the end he said he wouldn't host anything like this again should a rare bird visit his large bird-friendly yard with its many plants and trees and shrubs and feeders, he nevertheless said it was "a good experience". It was a case of not realizing just how many determined birders there are who want to see a rare bird.

Birds Seen in Last Month: As we always do, we began our meeting by naming ourselves and then two birds we saw in the last month. The New Year is off to a good start - all of us remembered our names and we saw some very interesting birds for this time of the year, birds we don't normally see in the winter. Matt and Ray Walter had a Gray Catbird at their feeder in Thibeault Terrace, and although it did not stay for long, Matt got a great photo of it, as seen at right. An American Robin and a male Northern Cardinal were seen by Dick and Renee Levesque on Pinewood Crescent. Kaye Edmonds had a male cardinal at her feeder and according to

eBird, others have seen at least a couple of cardinals, male and female, in West Ferris. Another rare bird for our area is a

Red-bellied Woodpecker (seen at left) which has been at the feeders in Luanne Chowns' North Bay backyard for the last month.

Other rare winter birds for our area include two White-crowned Sparrows seen by Brent Turcotte at his North Bay feeder and Song Sparrows seen by Vic in his yard. Dark-eyed Juncos are at Matt and Ray's feeders and American Tree Sparrows have been seen by some. Golden-crowned Kinglets have been seen by Lori Anderson in the bush near her farm in Chisholm Township. And the Doug Pattersons have a Common Grackle at their feeder.



Photo by Matt Walter



Photo by Gary Chowns

As Dick reported in his January Bird Bash report, Barbara Stewart saw Trumpeter Swans near Magnetewan, as well as Wild Turkeys (see below).



Photo by Rose McClelland

Lori has a flock of about 60 Snow Buntings at her place and Matt has about 100 Bohemian Waxwings in his area. Evening Grosbeaks have also been seen in large flocks, in Mattawa by the Doug Pattersons and near the university in the vicinity of College Drive and Cedar Heights by Renee. Gray Jays have also been spotted in this area, on Larocque Road.

Flocks of Common Redpolls, some Pine Grosbeaks, some Purple Finches, and some American Goldfinch have been seen, as well as Pine Siskins. The latter were seen by Lori and Ken Gowing at Lori's place and near Mattawa, mixed in with the redpolls. Vic is the only one to have seen any crossbills, White-winged Crossbills near Widdifield Station Road. And Renee has had a Brown Creeper at her place (see below.)



Photo by Linda Stoner

Blue Jays go through bird seed rather voraciously and are keeping the Pattersons' Evening Grosbeaks at bay. And then there is the ever-faithful Black-capped Chickadee (below) which stays year-round, providing winter entertainment for feeder watchers. In fact, Doug Jr. feels it should be voted Canada's National Bird, **although he has not yet voted.**



Photo by Renee Levesque

Woodpeckers seen other than the Red-bellied include Hairy, Downy, and Pileated. For some, like Marc, who lives on Lake Nipissing, getting a Hairy at his feeder is a treat because he doesn't often get woodpeckers. Dick pointed out that North Bay is known for its high number of Hairy Woodpeckers.

Other birds seen in January include Ruffed Grouse, Mourning Doves, White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatches, the latter in seemingly greater numbers than usual this winter, American Crows and Common Ravens.

No one reported seeing any owls, although Dick, Renee and Brent saw a Snowy Owl at the waterfront during the December bird count. One was reported on eBird in January in downtown Powassan and Angela and Gary Martin saw one on Hwy 64 near Verner during the January Bird Bash. The Pattersons hear a Barred Owl near their place in Mattawa, but have not yet seen it, unlike last year when one stayed around their yard for months.



Photo by Kaye Edmonds

Mallards have been seen by many, and Dick and Renee saw an American Black Duck at the Sewage Treatment Plant during the January Bird Bash. Common Goldeneyes were seen in the Ottawa River during the January Bird Bash by Ken and Lori and, as reported on eBird, a Red-breasted Merganser was recently seen in the Ottawa River at Mattawa.

Matt had an exciting raptor story. A Sharp-shinned Hawk (seen at right) landed on his neighbour's front porch with a European Starling in its claws and proceeded to partially eat it before flying off with it. Matt reported his neighbor was "shawked"! (Yes, we are also a very witty group!) Luanne Chowns has also had one in her yard.

And while on the topic of raptors, Gary Sturge did not let us down and once again saw a Northern Goshawk on Stillaway Line. He also saw Bald Eagles, as have Chris Sukha, Lori, Ken, Dick and Renee during the January Bird Bash. Lori reported nine of them at the East Ferris Landfill Site. No one at the meeting reported a Rough-legged Hawk, although according to eBird they have been seen in the area, more recently on Hwy 17 West, and Linda Stoner and Rose McClelland saw one during the January Bird Bash. Subsequent to the meeting, Dick saw a Red-tailed Hawk at North Bay's City Hall. A portend of something?



Photo by Matt Walter

And although not a raptor, a Northern Shrike was seen by Ken at his place and by Dick in Laurier Woods. Dick reported one flew overhead while he was standing in the parking lot and it had a bird or a mouse in its claws.

So as you can see from the above and from Dick's January Bird Bash report, we are off to a good start in birding and bird watching for 2016!

Special 2015 Bird: To highlight the 2015 birding year, we chose one bird that was special or unusual or interesting to us for various personal reasons. Here are some of these birds:

Matt and Ray: Rusty Blackbird, a first ever sighting. The first is always special.

Doug Jr. and Sr.: Barred Owl (seen at right). One stayed in their yard making use of the feeders for months, becoming almost like a pet.

Ken: Also a Barred Owl and, like the Pattersons, a specific one, one Ken named Bart. Bart came to Ken's place daily to get his treat, a tasty mouse – and to hang out with Ken too!

Vic: Northern Mockingbird at his feeders. Not often is one seen in our area and this particular one stayed around for some time. And because Vic was a special guest, he was allowed one more bird, a Spruce Grouse (seen below) at his bird bath. It is very unusual to see one in the city, never mind at a side-yard bird bath!

Marc: The Great Egret he and Fred Pinto saw by chance at Powassan Lagoon during the August Bird Bash. Very rare bird in our area.

Lori: The American Avocet seen by a few of us at Verner Lagoon in May. It is another rare bird for our area.

Dick: The Snowy Owl. On one outing in the Rutherglen area last January, he saw six of them. Dick hopes the Snowy Owl becomes our national bird and he, unlike the Pattersons, has voted.



Photo by Brandi Cramer



Photo by Vic Rizzo

Renee: The Yellow-throated Vireo seen in her yard in early September and a first sighting for her. Not a common bird seen in our area. Dick reports it has been seen here on the rare occasion, but no one reported it on eBird until Renee's sighting.

Gary: One would have thought the Black-backed Woodpecker on the famous Stillaway Line, only because no one else has ever seen it there. But Gary opted for the possible Tundra

Swan he saw in December behind his house in South River. There are some who say it is a Trumpeter and others who declare it a Tundra. It was by itself, which would lead one to think it a Trumpeter, but

recently a Tundra was seen in Southern Ontario among the Trumpeters.



Photo by Gary Sturge

To quote Bev Kingdon, Swan Lady herself, *“There has been a lone Tundra Swan floating around Burlington and also in the North Bay area, so Gary could be correct. Wish I could have*

seen it, but boy sometimes it is really hard to tell. The experts say you can only be sure on the identity by the sound. I understand that, because we have Trumpeters with yellow marks and Tundras with no marks. Keeps one on one’s toes!”

Gary says that the Tundra amongst the Trumpeters that Bev is referring to is his Tundra and we will go along with that because that’s the sort of birders we are – generous, supportive and willing sometimes to suspend disbelief!

Kaye: The Red-breasted Merganser seen in a small section of open water near the marina in Trout Lake during the cold winter of 2015. The Red-breasted is not often seen in our area, never mind in the middle of a cold winter.



Photo by Kaye Edmonds

Christmas Bird Count: Lori reported on the results of North Bay’s Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held on

December 19. It was the 37th CBC in North Bay and interestingly enough yielded 37 species. Another portend like the Red-tailed Hawk on City Hall?

In Lori's words:

Strong winds severely hampered attempts to spot birds on the open waters of Lake Nipissing. Temperature on count day averaged -5 C. The sun shone briefly and there were occasional brief snow squalls. Hiking was pleasant only in sheltered areas.

Total species tallied was slightly above average at 37, but the number of individuals counted was slightly low at 2806. There were 15 Field Observers who covered 600 kms by car, on foot and on bicycle. Eleven others watched feeders and were responsible for upping the species number by five, quite a remarkable number.

One feeder attracted a Red-Bellied Woodpecker, a very unusual species for this region at any time of year, and rarely ever making the CBC.

One record was equalled, the high count for the Bald Eagle, at six.

No records were broken and no new species observed.

Finches, Gulls and Waterfowl were well represented. Some good sightings included the Hooded Merganser, Common Loon (seen at right in its winter plumage), Glaucous Gull, Great Black-Backed Gull, and the Gray Jay.



Photo by Donna McQuay

Raptors and Owls were not on the list!

After a cool, windy day's work, field watchers gathered at the warm home of Marc and Irene Buchanan for a delicious potluck and an exciting tally with all the day's tales told.

As an added note, North Bay was the only CBC in Nipissing District this year. There used to be one in Mattawa and in West Nipissing. So our area is not well-represented when it comes to the CBC. We need to seriously think of getting at least one of the previous CBC areas up and running again.

Vancouver Birds: Dick and Renee happened to be with family in Vancouver over Christmas and each conducted their own bird count. Naturally, Dick saw more species at 56 than Renee's 44, but then Dick was there longer than Renee. Many are familiar with the common BC passerines, such as Stellar's Jay, Spotted Towhee, and Varied Thrush. And the ducks seen during their time in Vancouver were mostly ones seen here, like the American Wigeon, seen in the hundreds by both of them. But there was the Barrow's Goldeneye with its facial crescent (see top of next page), and in the grebe family, there was the Western Grebe. There were Song and Fox Sparrows, but also the Golden-crowned Sparrow. And there were Dark-eyed Juncos, but the west coast version, the Oregon Junco, with its rusty sides.



Barrow's Goldeneye, photo by Renee Levesque

Dick's two highlights were seeing the nocturnal Northern Saw-whet Owl during the day perched in a tree and the colourful and elusive Red-breasted Sapsucker with its bright red head and breast. Dick thought he hadn't seen it before, but turns out he had, in Whistler in 2000. The Red-breasted is a close relative of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker which is not seen on the Pacific slope. Click on <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/red-breasted-sapsucker> for more information and to see a wonderful photo by Brian E. Small. Renee's highlights were two she hadn't seen in BC before, the Chestnut-backed Chickadee and the Bushtit. Unfortunately her camera broke while in Vancouver and she didn't get photos of either of them.

Dick birded primarily at Maplewood Flats near where he was staying with his son, and Renee, at Jericho Beach in Kitsilano, near where she was staying with her daughter. As in many birding areas in which there are trails, there is often a brochure with a checklist of birds that can be seen in those areas. Dick passed around the one from Maplewood Flats and we thought it would be a good idea for Laurier Woods to have a bird checklist available, especially because visitors don't always know what birds to look for and because it is always fun to eventually try to get all the birds listed.

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence: Dick informed Bird Wingers that our application for a plaque to be installed at Pimisi Bay in honour of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence had been approved by Ontario Heritage Trust. It is hoped it will be installed by July at the latest. Dick provided a brief biographical sketch of Louise and for those who want to read more about her, please check out this month's Nipissing Naturalists Club newsletter, *The Woodland Observer*, in which you will find a biography of Louise by Joanne Zytaruk. If you didn't get a copy of the newsletter, you can access the newsletter online at the Nipissing Naturalists Club website, <http://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>. Click on Newsletters on the Home page. (And the Bird Wing summaries are also found there, after *The Woodland Observer*.)

Kaye, whose family had a seasonal trailer in the same area where Louise lived, remembers seeing her around her Pimisi Bay property where she and her husband, Len, lived in a log cabin she called her loghouse nest. Not only will the plaque be installed near Louise's home, but also in a location (Pimisi) that means "I rest over here."

Louise is known internationally for her knowledge of birds and is particularly famous for her study of the male Red-eyed Vireo, seen at right, which she determined is capable of producing 22,197 distinct calls in a single day. (Sorry, Gary!) She counted 2,155 calls between 5 and 6 a.m.; 14, 027 before noon; and 22,197 an hour and a half before sunset and 16 hours after she began counting. Louise also banded 25,000 birds over a 17-year period.

Because the Nipissing Naturalists Club is expected to fund \$5,000.00 of the \$17,000.00 Ontario Heritage Trust requires to install the plaque, Bird Wing will contribute \$100.00 towards that amount. It may not be a lot, but in terms of what we have in our account, approximately \$260.00, it is indeed a lot for us.

Great Backyard Bird Count: The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) takes place over the Family Day holiday weekend, starting on **Friday, February 12, and through to and including Monday, February 15.**

Register online with Bird Studies Canada, Great Backyard Bird Count, if you have not participated before or are not an eBirder. If you have participated before or are an eBirder, no need to do anything, you will automatically be logged in on the days in question.

Count birds for at least 15 minutes on the days of the count and in as many places as you like. (The GBBC is not confined to your backyard.) Then enter your count under Submit Observations on the GBBC home page. If you are an eBirder, enter as you would any eBird sighting on eBird.

For more information, visit: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/get-started/>

Bird Seed: Because bird seed can get costly, especially if you find yourself feeding those voracious Blue Jays, Doug raised the possibility of a discount for Bird Wing members at a store which sells bird seed. This suggestion promoted a lively discussion on types of bird seed, in particular nyjer seed which is vulnerable to spoilage. Nyjer seed, loved by American Goldfinches, Common Redpolls, and Pine Siskins, and which can also attract other small birds like nuthatches and chickadees, is an oily seed that is a good energy source. However, it can dry out and once it dries out, the birds stop coming to your feeder. Nyjer seed also easily becomes moldy and if it does, it is no longer good for the birds. Nyjer seeds in the feeder should be replaced every 3 to 4 weeks if it is not being eaten. You should also shake your niger feeder daily to help prevent clumping and mold. Try to keep the feeder dry to help prevent mold.



Photo by Kaye Edmonds

A weather guard can be of use in preventing seed from becoming wet. Never buy nyjer seed in bulk because of its tendency to easily spoil. For more information, check out:

http://wildbirdsunlimited.typepad.com/the_zen_birdfeeder/2011/01/top-5-things-to-know-about-niger-seed.html

It took a while to get back to the question of a discount, but once we did, Doug had a good solution: We wait until August and at that time a store, like Burrows, could be approached to determine if, with a mass order, we could get a discount on sunflower seeds or mixed seeds. Doug will raise this issue again at that time.

Lori's Evening Grosbeak: One of the Evening Grosbeaks at Lori's has a fleshy white growth on its legs. She noticed it when it began coming to her feeder in December and it continues to come and appears all right except for the growth. Lori uploaded a photo of the Evening Grosbeak (seen at right) to Project FeederWatch and will let us know if she hears what this bird might have.

Common and Hoary Redpolls: Genetic studies recently determined that all the world's redpolls, including our Common and Hoary, represent a single species, that there are no clear-cut genetic differences. Redpolls probably look different in different places more because of environmental differences. (The Hoary and Common continue to be listed as separate species on eBird.)

Alpha Codes: Dick passed out a list of alpha codes to refer to birds. These alpha codes usually, but not always, consist of the first two letters of each word. For example, Common Goldeneye is COGO. But there are exceptions, such as Canada Goose, which is CANG and not CAGO. Birds with one-word names use the first four letters of the bird's name. For example, Bobolink is BOBO.

What does one do in terms of alpha code with Red-throated Hummingbird? You would think it might be RUHU, but you would be wrong. It is RTHU. And then there is the American Three-toed Woodpecker that based on the Ruby-throated



Photo by Lori Anderson

Hummingbird alpha code might be ATWO. But no, it is ATTW. Some find these codes difficult to decipher when trying to read text, and some can't be bothered using the code because by the time they think what the code is, they could have typed the bird's proper name. Perhaps alpha codes are best left to bird banders and ornithologists, to say nothing of Lori who is remarkably good at them.

Bird Families of the World: Dick brought to our attention a book, albeit an expensive one at 80 euro, called *Bird Families of the World*. As this book is no doubt too expensive for most of us to want to buy no matter how good it is, it perhaps will be available at public or university libraries at some point. In the meantime, click on this link and you can read 41 pages of it: <http://www.lynxeds.com/product/bird-families-world>. Scroll down and you will see, **Click to Read**. Be sure to zoom in for ease of reading.

Bird Bash: February's Bird Bash will be held on **February 20 and 21**. Pick your 24-hour period during this time frame.

Bird Wing: The next Bird Wing meeting will be held on **February 23, starting at 6:30 p.m.** It will again be held in the **Boardroom of the North Bay Public Library**.



Photo by Renee Levesque