

BIRD WING OUTING

July 23, 2015

Bird Wing Outing: The Bird Wing outing on July 23 began excitingly enough at Callander Lagoon. One cell was completely dry with only 6 ring-billed gulls sitting on the dry bottom, along with a crashed model plane. The other cell held one Common Goldeneye, many Wood Ducks and a couple of Killdeer (see below). So a bit of a bust, but we neither feared nor cared, because further excitement was ahead.



As we drove the back roads of Chisholm Township on our way to hear the highlight of the outing – keep reading – we thought we might encounter a few interesting species. And we did – many American Robins and European Starlings! Some lucky ones saw a couple of Sandhill Cranes and some other lucky ones heard a Blue Jay and an Ovenbird. But still we neither feared nor cared, because the promised highlight of the outing on Mount Pleasant Road in Chisholm Township still lay ahead: **the hearing of the beautiful evening song of the Vesper Sparrow, and maybe even seeing it.**

When we arrived at the Mount Pleasant location, we quickly saw a couple of Chipping Sparrows and a couple of other sparrows we couldn't make out because of the fading light. But even though we tramped around the area for a goodly while, only Dick Tafel and Marc Buchanan saw the Vesper. None of us heard it, but that may be because at least four Hermit Thrushes were singing loudly the whole time we were there. Their singing turned out to be the highlight of the outing for the rest of us – the majority who didn't see the Vesper. (Here it is, below.)



Birds of July: However, if not a great many species were seen during the bird outing, certainly many birds were seen in the month of July and during July's Bird Bash. As Dick reported in his Bird Bash Report for July 25 and 26, 119 species were seen, more than any other month except May and four above the average for July for the past 12 years.

A July highlight for Renee Levesque, Lori Anderson and Dick, accompanied by Renee's husband, John, and Lori's son, Graham, was a canoe trip through the marsh at Cache Bay. With the water low and the cattails immense, it was tough going at times. Seen were many Marsh Wrens and Black Terns (see below), the latter quite aggressively protecting their territory. Also seen was an American Bittern and heard were two Common Gallinules, as well as Pied-billed Grebes. Unfortunately the Least Bittern wasn't seen or heard, but during a subsequent canoe trip one week later, the Least Bittern, three Common Gallinules and a Sora were seen.



Other interesting July highlights included a Peregrine Falcon seen by Lori and Graham at Verner Lagoon; Semipalmated Plovers, a Solitary Sandpiper, and a Short-billed Dowitcher seen by Marc and Dick at Callander Lagoon; a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (see photo below right) seen by Chris Sukha near Field; a female Brewer's Blackbird on Stewart Road in West Nipissing seen by Dick and Renee; and a Ring-necked Pheasant seen by Linda Stoner (her photo below at left) and Rose McClelland near Restoule.



Ducks seen included a Bufflehead, Hooded and Common Mergansers, and Redheads. Expect to see many more ducks as the weeks progress. Other shorebirds seen were Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs (see Greater below); and Semipalmated, Spotted and Least Sandpipers. Those shorebirds and others will be massing in greater numbers during August and September.



Other predators seen included the Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, Broad-winged Hawk, Kestrel, Merlin, Osprey, and many Turkey Vultures.

Sandhill Cranes are starting to be seen again, some with their young.

The American Coot are at Warren Lagoon, a pair with their three fluffy young.

Other birds seen in July included the Brown Thrasher; Indigo Bunting; Scarlet Tanager; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Gray Catbird; Veery; Hermit and Wood Thrush; Eastern Bluebird; Brown-headed Cowbird; Dark-eyed Junco; Eastern Meadowlark; Bobolink; Evening Grosbeak; Purple Finch; American Goldfinch; Pine Siskin (seen at right); House Sparrow; Winter Wren; and Ruby and Golden-crowned Kinglets.

All the flycatchers, vireos and warblers normally seen in July were seen, as were the Blue Jay; Common Grackle; European Starling; Red-winged Blackbird; and the American Robin, seen almost everywhere these days, including in Kaye Edmond's car!



Hilliardton Marsh: This year Hilliardton Marsh introduced a **banding internship program** to help meet its need for reliable and competent banders. The internship may also help encourage young people to pursue a career in ornithology or another related field. Interns are given a stipend of \$1,000.00. If a college or university student is interested, they can contact Bruce Murphy at Hilliardton Marsh.

The first intern in this new program was Bird Winger Nicole Richardson, featured in the July issue of Hilliardton Marsh's *The Marsh Wren*, not only in one article by top Marshian, Bruce Murphy, but also in an article by our very own Chris Suhka. Bruce referred to Nicole as a

"very remarkable young lady", and Chris reported that Nicole's help was indispensable. Can't get much higher praise than that! (See photo below from *The Marsh Wren* of Nicole banding a Northern Flicker.)



Nicole, a student at Nipissing University, helped out during the two busiest weeks in May and will be banding again the last couple of weeks of August. Under the guidance of Bruce and Chris, Nicole is working towards obtaining her banding permit through the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada.

After completing her May stint at Hilliardton, Nicole headed off to the East Coast, to New Brunswick and Cape Breton, through Bird Studies Canada to work as a High Elevation Landbird Program Field Technician. What sort of job is that, one might possibly ask of such a long-winded job title? It is a job that involves surveying eleven species of birds found at high elevations, with the primary focus, in Nicole's case, on the Bicknell's Thrush.

Nicole will be talking about both experiences during the September meeting of Bird Wing.

In **Chris's article** in *The Marsh Wren*, he summarizes the species and numbers of bird banded at Hilliardton this past spring, the 20th year that birds have been banded at Hilliardton. It was a year of spring records for Hilliardton. In 37 days of banding with 6,343 net hours, 3,410 birds and 70 species were banded – and there is still the fall season to go! Some interesting birds not expected from one year to the next included Nelson's Sparrow, Clay-coloured Sparrow and Gray-cheeked Thrush.

Chris will be banding at Hilliardton from the last couple of weeks of August through to October 19, except for weekends and Mondays. And as previously mentioned, Nicole will be with him for the last two weeks of August. You might want to head up that way sometime during this timeframe.

Banding will include **owl banding from September 16 to mid-October** (see photo at right, courtesy of Hilliardton Marsh). The public is welcome to watch this fascinating process on **Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings from 8 p.m.** If you go, dress warmly and bring a thermos of coffee or hot chocolate. It gets quite cool during the darker fall nights, but so worth it to see an owl up close and in hand.



British Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas: The BC Breeding Bird Atlas is the most comprehensive bilingual wildlife atlas on the web. The first installment is now available. Take a look at <http://www.birdatlas.bc.ca/>

Nighthawk Night: If you happen to be in Toronto on August 28 at 6 p.m. or, if it rains that evening, on August 29, you can take part in Nighthawk Night, helping the Toronto Urban Bird Program monitor Common Nighthawks as they fly over High Park on their way to their southern wintering grounds. Everyone is welcome. Bring chairs and binoculars to High Park's Hawk Hill. For more information, go to <http://birdscanada.org/research/speciesatrisk/coni/>

Ontario Birding News: The spring edition of the newsletter, *Ontario Birding News*, provides reports of birds seen in various regions of Ontario, as well as other birding and even non-birding news. In the northern regional report, Brian Morin, editor of *Ontario Birding News*, after consulting with Dick, makes mention of five sightings in Nipissing District during the spring: the 500 Chimney Swifts seen in May; the breeding Black Terns at Cache Bay; the many Short-billed Dowitchers seen at Callander Lagoon in May (see photo below); the American Avocet seen at Verner Lagoon; and up to ten Bald Eagle nests in our district.

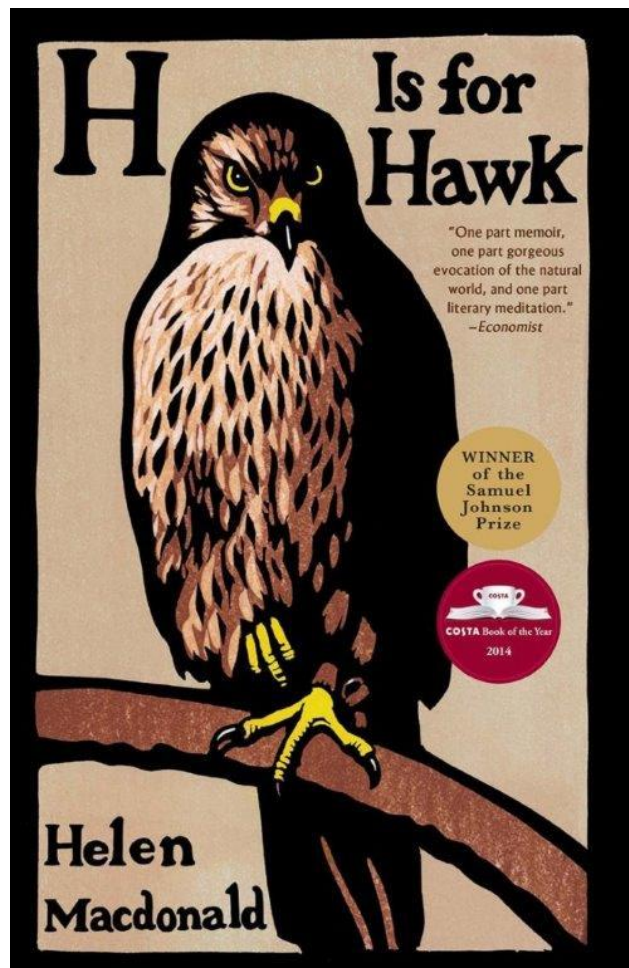


American Woodcock Singing-ground Survey: According to data collected by participants in Bird Studies Canada's survey, in which Bird Wingers Gary and Connie Sturge participated, the number of woodcocks in Ontario has declined by 1% per year between 1968 and 2015. Results also show a 2% annual decline in the province in the last 10 years. Ontario was the third largest province or state to contribute to this North American survey, followed by Michigan and Wisconsin. Perhaps next year, others in our area might like to participate. This newsletter will keep you informed of when and how.

Women and Birding Clubs: In June's issue of *OFO News*, there is quite a shocking little article about women being excluded from some birding clubs. It was not until 1980 that one club, the Brodie Club, founded in 1921, began admitting women – and that was only after a lengthy debate!! And if that is not shocking enough, it wasn't until the same year that the Toronto Ornithological Club admitted women as members!

H is for Hawk: *H is for Hawk* is a beautifully written book by Helen Macdonald, English falconer, writer, poet, illustrator, historian and affiliate at the Department of History and Philosophy, University of Cambridge. After her father, with whom she was very close, died, Helen dealt with her grief through the training of her own Goshawk she called Mabel. The account of this training is a record of Helen's spiritual journey, reconciling death with life and love. To read more about this fascinating book, check out Tim Gallagher's excellent review in *Living Bird*, <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/a-falconer-reviews-helen-macdonalds-acclaimed-bestseller-h-is-for-hawk/>

Coffee: *The Creemore Coffee Company* in the small Ontario village of Creemore makes a smooth, sweet coffee called *White Hawk*, Arabica coffee from the Caravari region of Bolivia, home of the magnificent White Hawks. It is organic, certified Fairtrade, shade-grown coffee that helps preserve the mountain habitat of the White Hawk. It is approved by Bird Studies Canada.



Bird Bash: The next Bird bash takes place over a 24-hour period weekend of **August 29 and 30**. Should be lots of shorebirds, ducks and other migrating birds during this time.

Bird Outing: The final summer bird outing for this year – already – takes place on **Tuesday, August 25**. Meet at the Visitor's Centre at 6:30 p.m. for an outing to Cache Bay. That should

bring out the Sturgeon birders who, of course, will not have to drive all the way into the Visitor's Centre, but can instead consult with Dick as to where to meet.

Text: Renee Levesque

Photos: Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicated on the photo

When you want to see something very badly, sometimes you have to stay still, stay in the same place, remember how much you want to see it, and be patient.

Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk*

Condolences to Lori Anderson on the recent loss of her father.