

Bird Wing Outing Report

July 25, 2017

By Renee Levesque; photos as indicated

On a clear, summer's evening on July 25, Bird Wingers set out to find Christmas in July birds. It may have taken a couple of hours of hunting to find the most appropriate Christmas bird, but found it we did – two Wild Turkeys sitting in a tree on Hornibook Road! We took this as a sign, though a sign of what, we're not sure. Although we were far from home, it was getting late, we didn't know quite where we were, and we hadn't yet seen our target sparrow species, this was without a doubt the highlight



of our outing. Despite the fact it was getting dark, Steve Pitt managed to get a photo (above) of one of the turkeys in a tree – not a very clear photo, but you can make out the turkey's red wattle. (Some of us had never seen a turkey in a tree and some of us did not know turkeys even sat in trees!)



Glad tidings abounded as we made our cheerful way across the road from the turkey trees to an abandoned golf course. Initially we weren't sure whether the GC on the crude sign stood for gun club or golf club, but we quickly found out when Grant McKercher found the par 5 second hole sign.

And then to clinch the fact that it really had been a golf course, what to our wondering eyes should

appear, but a John Daly golf ball – with a heart on it! A fitting symbol for Christmas in July!

So with these signs in mind, we decided to search for one of our target sparrows, the Vesper (pictured at right), even though we knew it wasn't exactly Vesper territory. I would like to say we saw or heard one because that would have made such a beautiful evening of good cheer extra special and show that signs really do mean something.



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However, it was not to be, although we saw four Cedar Waxwings and heard four White-throated Sparrows sing – and who can be disappointed with their distinctive Canadian anthem-like song in the setting sun and the rising of a sliver of a moon.

Perhaps significant because of its name, we also saw a beetle, later identified by Brent Turcotte as a Rose Chafer – his first ID using his new book, *Beetles of Eastern North America* by Arthur V. Evans. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet argues that it doesn't matter that Romeo comes from the house of Montague when she declares, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." – and in this case, it doesn't matter which sparrow we saw – it was still a sparrow with a beautiful song.

Getting home was not easy. Some of us got lost. Grant, Steve and Marc Buchanan left the rest of us to wander in the wilderness on our own. However, in getting lost another amazing thing happened. Lori Anderson turned left when we were most lost and Dick Tafel, Brent and I turned right and yet we all met up on Highway 11, Lori exiting onto the highway one exit ahead of us. I think by that time in our relief that we finally un-lost ourselves, we became easily amazed at almost anything. After all, it was Christmas in July.

This was the end of our outing, but there was a beginning. Some of us saw a Merlin while waiting for all to gather at the former Visitors' Centre and some of us saw a Turkey Vulture on our way to the Sundridge area – another Christmas in July sign perhaps, but not nearly as significant as the two Wild Turkeys.



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But before we headed for the Sundridge area, we spent some time at Powassan Lagoon (above) looking for shorebirds, a birding activity that can be time-consuming because you have to search every nook and cranny of the lagoon mudflats looking for these shorebirds and then once you find them, you have to identify them – not always easy. But we did see 22 Least Sandpipers (one pictured below), three Semipalmated Sandpipers, one Semipalmated Plover and one Spotted Sandpiper. Tree and Barn Swallows flew low over both upper cells, along with at least one Bank and one Cliff Swallow. Cedar Waxwings, which behave like swallows at lagoons, also joined in the hunt for insects.



Other birds seen were five Canada Geese, four Red-winged Blackbirds, five Song Sparrows (see top of next page), three Mallards and

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three Common Goldeneye. As we were leaving, we were greeted by three American Kestrels.

Besides seeing an abundance of wild flowers, we also saw a couple of Twelve-spotted Skimmers, a female Aurora Damselfly, a few bluets, either Marsh or Hagen's, and few Common Baskettails. We also heard a Green Frog.

And although it was nearing 8:00 and we still had a long way to go, we felt satisfied with our Powassan sightings and gleefully headed out on the next leg of our Christmas in July adventure, about which I have already written.

Field

Photographers:

On July 2, Grant and Shirley McKercher watched an Osprey catch a



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large fish from the dock of their home on Lake Nipissing. However, the Osprey, with the fish in its talons, was unable to get airborne. Instead of dropping it, it swam with the fish to a rock and from there was able to take flight with it. Two of **Grant's photos** are here, one of the Osprey swimming, and one of it on the rock with its catch of the day.

On July 6, during the storm, **Steve Pitt** happened to be driving by the Osprey nest at the Lakeshore Drive exit just when the wind was particularly bad. He managed to snap the **photo at right** of the adult Osprey attempting to stay in the nest.



Steve also sent along this interesting photo of a Blue Jay looking very bald indeed. No need for

concern. Blue Jays go through a complete molt once a year in late summer and sometimes you might see one, as Steve did, without head feathers – and sometimes even without neck feathers. They look odd when this happens, but their feathers will grow back. **Steve’s photo is at left.**



In July, **Dick Tafel** was out in his boat on Trout Lake and happened to see a Common Loon sitting on her nest. He didn’t want to approach too closely, but did manage from a distance to get the **photo on the top of the next page** with his cell phone. On August 2, from his window

overlooking Trout Lake, Dick and his wife, Elsa, saw the parents swim by with their very tiny fledgling. Dick reports it was a captivating scene.



Common Loon nesting, Dick Tafel

Dick and I saw another fledgling during the July Bird Bash. We watched from a path a Red-eyed Vireo feed its fledgling which sat very still on a low branch of a tree while its parent flew back and forth with tasty bites that it fed to its young.



That scene was also quite captivating. **I managed to snap a photo of the fledgling** (at left) from the path without disturbing it and its parent.

And in July, **Kaye Edmonds** was walking in Laurier Woods when she heard a strange bird call. She thought at first it was a Common Raven because the sound she heard was rather croak-like. But when she explored where the sound was coming from, she saw

an adult Black-billed Cuckoo and a juvenile sitting on a branch not far from its parent. Kaye was fortunate to get a **photo of the adult** as shown below. Back in May during one of the May bird walks, I and two or three others, including Kaye, thought we heard a cuckoo, but it sang only once and we were not able to locate it and then thought that perhaps it wasn't one after all. But maybe it was the same one Kaye got a photo of two months later.

Bird Bash: August's Bird Bash will take place over a consecutive 24-hour period the weekend of **August 26 and 27**. There should be lots of migrants to look for then.

Bird Wing Outing: We are really breaking out of the box this month by having our **outing on the 5th Tuesday of the month – August 29!** For two reasons: The first Tuesday just squeaked into August – a day sooner and it would still have been in July. And more significantly, some regular attendees will either be on holiday or will have family visiting on August 22. **So the 5th Tuesday of August it is, August 29. Meet at 6:30 p.m. at the former Visitors' Centre for carpooling. Destination: Cache Bay** where we tend to go in August and thereby enabling our Sturgeon Falls birders to join in the fun.



Black-billed Cuckoo, Kaye Edmonds

A little magic is a good thing in birding.

- Gus Axelson, Editor, Living Bird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology