

Bird Wing Report

February 2020

February's Bird Wing meeting was once again held in the Café at coworking 126 to accommodate a presentation by Lisa Hackett on audio bird recording.

Birds seen in February:

Lisa had the honours of going first – always the best position at this time of the year when it can prove difficult to not mention the same birds members had already mentioned, a big no-no at our meetings. Lisa saw Mourning Doves, seen by a few of us, and White-winged Crossbills (below right), seen also by a few of us, generally on area roads in groups of 2 to 8. So nice to see them this winter after most of us not seeing any last winter.

Dick Tafel (and I) saw 4 Red Crossbills on Chemical Road in South River. There were not as many Reds this winter as there were White-wings, but after spending so much time last winter looking for them along Stillaway Line where Gary and Connie Sturge kept seeing them, it certainly was great to see 5 in January by Otto Holden Dam near Mattawa and in February, the 4 on Chemical Road.

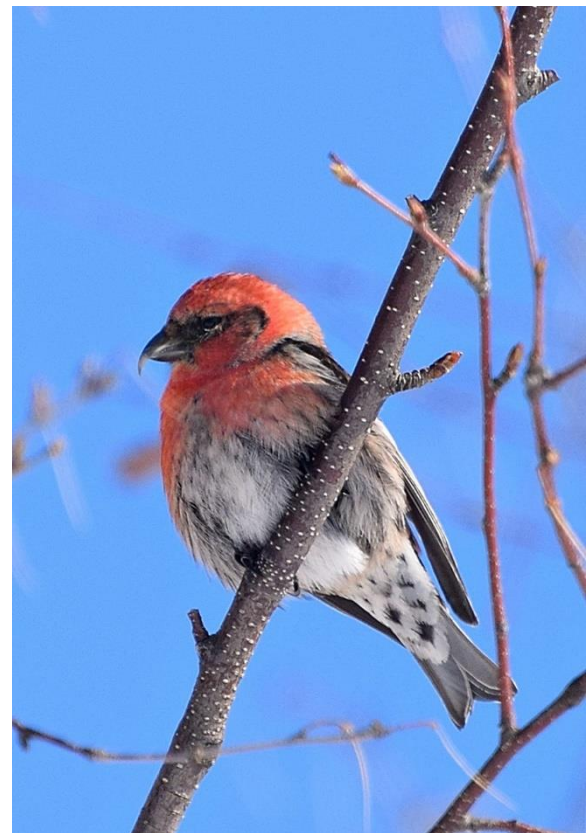
Purple Finches were seen by Carol Fleming. Numbers seem to be increasing these late winter days and many had seen a few. Always nice to look out the window and catch a glimpse of the raspberry-coloured male.

Carol also saw Red-breasted Nuthatches, seen by most of us, and Corinne Urrutia saw the White-breasted Nuthatch, seen only by a few of us.

Last year the Common Redpoll was plentiful, this year, it is the American Goldfinch, seen by Keith Pearson and most of us. The goldfinch's lovely soft yellow colour is getting yellower day-by-day.



Renee Levesque



Renee Levesque

The only member to see a Golden Crown Kinglet (right) was Gary Sturge, in the Trout Creek area. He also saw Pine Siskins, as had many of us.

The only sparrow mentioned was the American Tree Sparrow, the sparrow of the winter this year, seen by Gary Chowns at his feeders. I saw on eBird that Buddy Myles saw three

Chipping Sparrows in Verner. I keep looking for them amongst the many American Tree Sparrows I am also getting this winter.

For three or four days in February, I surprisingly had a Hermit Thrush (below left) in my yard. It fed on berries, suet and dropped seed, but never stayed around for long. Initially it seemed to be frightened off by the Blue Jays, many of which are around this winter. During a Chisholm

Township bird outing, Dick and I counted almost 70 over a three-hour period! More surprising is that only Gary and Luanne Chowns have not had Blue Jays at their feeders!

Another species around in good numbers were the Black-capped Chickadees, seen by all of us.

On the second day that I saw the Hermit Thrush, an American Robin also made an appearance in my yard. And Buddy sent me a photo he took in Cache Bay that showed eight robins in flight. The photo wasn't the greatest because unfortunately Buddy did not have his telephoto lens with him, but when the colour was enhanced, they sure looked like robins. Kevan Cowcill informed me that he heard a Hermit Thrush call in West Ferris. Whether it was mine or a second one, we just don't know, but it was after mine was no longer coming to my yard. (I see from eBird that a robin was also seen in February in the more northern town of Gogama.)



Stephen O'Donnell



Renee Levesque

Kaye Edmonds saw 5 Ruffed Grouse in Laurier Woods, near Dick's bench, and I saw a female Spruce Grouse at the end of Grey's Road. Connie Sturge saw Wild Turkeys at Chisholm landfill site, a very definite place to find them if you haven't seen any.

Snow Buntings (one seen at right), continued to be present in Lori Anderson's Chisholm Township area, seen by a few of us. Lisa and Kaye also saw some on Chadbourne Drive near the airport.

In the world of woodpeckers, Grant McKercher saw the Pileated; Cindy Lafleur saw the Downy; and Keith, the Hairy. Most had seen all three of these woodpeckers. No one reported the Black-backed. Time to find it!

Marc Buchanan's pair of European Starlings continued to explore the tree cavity by Marc's Lake Nipissing beachside house. It was felt by all that the number of starlings was down this winter from previous winters. Dick and I did see about 36 during February's Bird Bash in a tree in Verner, but no surprises there as Verner must surely be the Capital of Starlings!



Renee Levesque

Marc also saw Common Ravens (one seen below), as had most of us, and both Cindy and I saw one carrying a stick. Nest building is underway. Although American Crows are common enough in the City during the winter, they have started to spread out or migrate into the area. Since the meeting, a couple of crows in my yard have replaced my ravens. Cindy mentioned placing peanuts on top of her fence and that it has become a daily race to see who gets the peanuts first, the crows or the squirrels! In fact, the crows arrive every day just sitting there waiting for Cindy to put out the peanuts. I think the most delightful thing about backyard birding is that not only do we get to know our backyard birds, but they get to know us and



Stephen O'Donnell

our habits and sit and wait for us to do our thing, even peering in the window at us, urging us to hurry on.

Kaye saw a Northern Shrike in Laurier Woods and even on her City street.

Gary and Luanne Chowns once again had a Northern Goshawk in their yard. About a couple of weeks after January's meeting in which the Chowns also mentioned a goshawk in their yard, I had one in mine. It stayed around for a good half hour. I didn't see mine go after any birds, but Gary and Luanne's went after one of their many Mallards and almost got one!

Connie saw a Merlin close to her house and Grant saw a Red-tailed Hawk (at right) on Hwy 17 West, always a good spot to see a hawk.

The Peregrine Falcon was once again seen by a few atop its favourite spot, the Pro-Cathedral cross. Someone mentioned that Fred Pinto had seen it a couple of days before our meeting.

And then there is the Bald Eagle seen by some at or near the Powassan landfill site and by Bill Fleming in Callander.

Bill also heard a Barred Owl near his Callander home, maybe the same one Grant used to get in his yard earlier in the year. The Snowy Owl (top of first page) was seen by Paul Smylie on Lake Nipissing, about half a mile out on the lake. One was also seen by Dick and me on Hwy 64 at Trottier Road just past Lavigne, also seen there by Buddy. It was a beautiful male, perhaps the same one we saw in late January at Hwy 64 and Michel Road. Gary and Connie drove many, many miles, twice now, I believe, looking for this Snowy, but to no avail. Maybe by March's meeting, they will have seen it.

In addition to the many Mallards that visit the Chowns' yard, in the world of ducks, Dick and I saw American Black Ducks – many in the Ottawa River at Mattawa – and Common Goldeneye (one seen at left), also in the Ottawa River at Mattawa and at the Otto Holden Dam, as well as the West Arm Narrows.

And as the Chowns had earlier in the year, I also had a Northern Saw-whet Owl pay a visit to my yard one February evening around 6:15. Not sure if it is a coincidence or not, but the Chowns had a Northern Goshawk in their yard and so did I; the Chowns had a Northern Saw-whet Owl in their yard and so did I;



Renee Levesque



Kaye Edmonds

and the Chowns previously had alerted us to Spruce Grouse at the end of Grey's Road and that's where I recently saw one. I am starting to wonder if the Chowns are my lucky omen.

Great Canadian Birdathon Donation:

Dick Tafel presented to Treasurer Gary Sturge a cheque for \$220.00, his percentage from Birds Canada of the amount he received in donations for his participation in the Great Canadian Birdathon.

Barn Swallow Project:

Paul Smylie informed us of a Barn Swallow project for which he hopes to get funding through the Ministry of Environment, Species at Risk Branch. The Barn Swallow is a threatened species in Ontario for many reasons, one being lack of suitable habitat. Paul is recommending building four Barn Swallow nesting structures (pictured at right) in four possible areas – Laurier Woods, Cranberry Trail, the waterfront area and on private land if permission can be obtained for these locations. There is some concern regarding the effectiveness of the nesting structures, so emphasis will be placed on the monitoring aspect of the project over at least a three-year period. Barn Swallows do not necessarily use a new structure immediately. It could take two or three years, or they may be never use the structure, or they may use one in one location but not in another. However, they are nest faithful, so if they use a shelter they will generally return to it.

If funding is obtained, the project would be a collaboration between EcoTec, the company where Paul works, and Nipissing Naturalists Club.



Courtesy of Paul Smylie



Kaye Edmonds

Audio Bird Recording:

Lisa Hackett, (pictured at left) who divides her time between birding in our area and in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, has over the years posted her many sightings and photographs on eBird. But at some point over these years, she became aware she was missing many birds, birds she heard but did not see and

could not identify by song or call alone.

If we do not immediately know what bird is calling or singing and because our auditory memory can be quite short, recording bird songs and calls can be very helpful. We can then listen to the recordings at home and identify the calls and songs through various online services and field guides.

But recording with cell phones can be limited, so Lisa took recording bird songs and calls up many notches. She applied to take the \$2,300 audio bird recording course at Cornell Lab of Ornithology, in Ithaca, New York, and was accepted.

Lisa already owned a recorder, a Zoom H4N Pro, and a shotgun microphone, a Sennheiser MKE 600, but while taking the course, she learned how to use the more effective parabolic microphone, seen with its owner at right. This microphone extends the recording range of the bird call or song by 10 times compared to a standard microphone and also amplifies and isolates the song or call. Because Lisa was able to see for herself during the course just how much more effective a parabolic microphone was, she purchased the Wildtronic Professional Mono Parabolic Microphone. It is a large piece of equipment but can be attached to a tripod for ease of holding. She also purchased a noise cancelling headset, a Sennheiser PXC 550 Wireless, to pinpoint the bird song while in the field and for editing the song at home. By recording audio files in WAV format, a format that provides a more accurate copy of bird song, Lisa left MP3 recordings far behind.



Dave Hackett

But if we are interested in recording bird song, we have to start someplace to see if it is something we really like or want to do, and what better way to start than to use our cell phones and MP3 recordings. Recording bird song must be a passion if we want to invest the money in purchasing the equipment Lisa did. None of this equipment is cheap, but it does provide up to five-star recordings compared to one-star MP3 recordings. For Lisa, recording bird song has become a passion, and an important one that lets Cornell know through postings on eBird just what birds are around, birds we might miss if we cannot recognize, isolate or even clearly hear their songs or calls.

During the course, participants were up at 4:30 a.m. and in the field by 5:30 a.m. learning how to record, and after a break and lunch, spent the afternoon in the lab learning to read spectrograms, visual ways of reading or analyzing bird songs and calls.

So how does Lisa carry all this equipment around? Not only does she have all the above-listed recording equipment to take with her into the field, but she also carries binoculars and a camera. She has a large-wheeled trolley that holds her equipment when out in the field, the large wheels enabling her to access trails and more rugged areas.

What would be very interesting would be to see Lisa at work with her recording equipment and perhaps she would be willing to demonstrate it for us sometime this spring as long as we remain very quiet.

As a gift for her presentation, Dick Tafel presented Lisa with a book entitled *A Short Philosophy of Birds* by Philippe J. Dubois and Elise Rousseau, and a favourite rock of Lisa's made by Kaye Edmonds.

Photos and Links from the Field:

At February's Nipissing Naturalists Club's meeting, **Peter Ferris** gave a presentation on his canoe trip along Broken Skull and Nahanni Rivers in the Northwest Territories. In his slide presentation, I was struck by Peter's photos of a couple of birds he saw along his route, in particular the Golden Eagle (at right). I am highlighting it because we do not often get to see one here and usually not one that isn't in flight. Peter saw many birds and I will highlight a few of his photos from time-to-time.



Peter Ferris

You may recall that in January's Bird Wing report, I made mention of an injured Great Horned Owl found by hydro workers. I was alerted to the story by **Corinne Urrutia**. Corinne has since provided an update on the owl after she contacted The Owl Foundation in the Niagara Peninsula to where the owl had been sent after initially being looked after by the North Bay Animal Hospital. Unfortunately the Great Horned did not make it. It sustained severe electrocution injuries to the

left wing and foot, injuries that had been a few days old by the time it was found, and so was humanely put down by The Owl Foundation.

From Science Daily: “*Electrocution on power lines is a major threat to many bird species across the world,*” in particular birds of prey. For a proposed solution, see <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/12/101203081805.htm>.

Not sure how many raptors die as a result of electrocution in our area. The Great Horned Owl is the first I have heard of.



Keith Pearson

Keith and Nancy Pearson were in Cayo Santa Maria, Cuba, for a week this past December and Keith sent me some photos of birds he saw, one of which is the Loggerhead Kingfisher (at left). He reports he saw 15 species of birds – and the snorkelling was good!

I came across this link from 1Funny.com, <https://1funny.com/a-log-bridge-shared-by-all-walks-of-life/>, on **wildlife crossing a log bridge** in Pennsylvania. Do watch it. It is very entertaining and shows quite a few birds using this bridge, Wood Ducks and Belted Kingfishers among others.

I also came across an amazing news story about the carcass of an **ancient female Horned Lark** that was found frozen and exceptionally well-preserved in Siberia’s permafrost. Through radiocarbon-dating, it is estimated the bird flew during the Ice

Age, almost 46,000 years ago! See <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/frozen-bird-siberia-46000-year-old-prehistoric-found-in-russia-scientists-in-stockholm-study/>.

World Sparrow Day:

World Sparrow Day is on March 20, the day after the first day of spring which occurs this year on March 19. However, because we live in the almost Great White North, when we first began to observe World Sparrow Day in 2017, we extended it to include a week because the chances of our seeing sparrows on one day only can be fairly slim most years. This year, our World Sparrow Week is from **Sunday, March 15, to Saturday, March 21**. A reminder will be sent.

Relatively speaking, we have done quite well despite spring still being our winter. Last year, we saw a total of 36 sparrows comprised of three species – House, American Tree and Song – and as we all recall, last year was one of those horrendous ever-lasting winters. In 2018, we saw 93

sparrows, comprised of 6 species – Chipping, Harris’s, House, Song and American Tree! A good year. And finally, in 2017, we saw only 11 sparrows, comprised of the usual 3 species – House, Song and American Tree. But that was our first year participating and judging by the numbers, things picked up over the next two years.

How do you do the count? You count the number and species of sparrows you see during the week. If you see 10 American Tree Sparrows at your feeder one day and then 22 the next, the number reported will be 22 American Tree Sparrows, not 32. However, if you see the same species elsewhere, then that would be an additional number. **Report the species and number to me after March 21, but before March 24** so the number and species can be reported at the next Bird Wing meeting. Any questions, please contact me at rlevesque1948@gmail.com.



Buddy Myles

The main reason World Sparrow Day came about was because of the worldwide decline in House Sparrows (one seen above). But because we don’t get many House Sparrows here, we decided to include all sparrows, including juncos, seen during the week’s timeframe. It would now appear that internationally World Sparrow Day has evolved to include not only the House Sparrow, but all small common birds. From the World Sparrow Day website: *“The idea was to earmark a day for the House Sparrow to convey the message of conservation of the House Sparrow and other common birds and also mark a day of celebration to appreciate the beauty of the common biodiversity which we take so much for granted.”* However, we will stick to sparrows only as we have already expanded our appreciation to include all sparrows for an entire week. To read more about World Sparrow Day, see <https://www.worldsparrowday.org/index.php>.

Dine With the Author:

When I heard from Grant McKercher and Marc Buchanan that they read all of Steve Burrows' bird mystery novels and enjoyed them, I decided to read one of his novels, *A Shimmer of Hummingbirds*. Because this novel was out of order in the series of these bird mysteries, it took a chapter or two to get all the characters straight in my head, but once I did, I thoroughly enjoyed the novel which takes place in Norfolk, England, and in Colombia, home to 80 endemic bird species. Makes a birder want to go there, not only for the endemic species, but for all 1958 species, 165 of which are hummingbird species, 8 of these endemic. (One beautiful bird found in Colombia is the Green Honeycreeper seen below.)



Grant McKercher

Canada also gets a mention or two in the novel. The main character is from Canada, living in fear that the Canada Goose will be declared Canada's national bird. (Obviously the book was written at the time when we thought we might actually get a national bird.)

But if you can't get to Colombia anytime soon, consider going to Dine with the Author, Steve Burrows, at the Best Western, on **Saturday, May 9**. Although tickets are expensive at \$86.00 a

person, for \$40.00 of that you get a tax receipt. You also are treated to a great dinner. Proceeds go towards the Rotary Club's literacy program and the Callander Public Library. Tickets can be purchased at the Callander library or by contacting Rotarian Colin Thacker at cthacker@vianet.ca.

For more information on birding in Columbia, see, "Birding as Birders See It" at <http://blog.aba.org/2019/11/birding-as-birders-see-it.html>, sent to me by Grant. Read the article and then watch – when you can – the hour-long documentary entitled *The Birders, A Melodic Journey through Northern Colombia*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-jn1_thxK8.

Bird Bash:

March's Bird Bash takes place the last weekend in March, **March 28 and 29**. Should be an exciting time with migration underway. A reminder will be sent.

Bird Wing:

The next meeting of Bird Wing will once again take place at **176 coworking**, 176 Lakeshore Drive at the corner of Gertrude Street, **on Tuesday, March 24, starting at 6:30 p.m.** Our guest speaker will be **Dr. James Abbot**, assistant professor and graduate program coordinator at Nipissing University. He will talk to us about **his volunteer work with FLAP Canada**. Because over 25 million birds fatally collide with windows in Canada yearly, FLAP Canada's mission is *"to inform and educate people to take actions that keep birds safe from daytime and nighttime bird-building collision threats; homes, workplaces or other built structures."*

In honour of St. Patrick's Day: I don't believe Ireland, the Republic or the North, has an official national bird, but the Northern Lapwing was declared the Republic of Ireland's national bird in 1990 by a committee of the Irish Wildlife Conservancy, and in Northern Ireland, the Eurasian Oystercatcher (two with chicks below) was unofficially selected in 1961.

