

Bird Wing Report

August 2023



Notices

Bird Wing Meeting: September's Bird Wing meeting will be held this one time only on a Monday instead of a Tuesday evening. So mark the meeting date on your calendars as **Monday, September 25**. We will meet in the **auditorium of the North Bay Public Library**, downstairs as you come in the door for any newcomers, **starting at 6:30 pm**. A reminder and details will follow closer to the date.

The coveted Nocturnal Owl Survey trophy will be presented at the September meeting to the team of Katharine MacLeod, Fred Pinto, Oriana Pokorny and Jérémie and Joel Corbeil. I don't have a photo of last year's winners, Dick Tafel and Erica Buck, but in honour of Gary Sturge, who loves doing the survey, at right is a photo of the 2018 team winners – Matt Procnier, Connie Sturge and Gary. Rachel Sturge, another team member, was absent when the photo was taken. (For those many who ask about Gary, Connie tells me he is improving and getting stronger every day.)

You might wonder where Kaye Edmonds took this photo given the background of shovels, rakes and hoes. It was during the time the auditorium at the library was being renovated and Lori Laporte graciously allowed us to hold our meetings at Laporte's Nursery free of charge. You can buy bird seed and bird feeders at Laporte's, so holding our meetings there was not totally unusual!

Bird Bash: September's Bird Bash will be held over the weekend of **September 23-24**. A reminder will be sent, but mark the date on your calendar now.



Photo by Kaye Edmonds

Another great outing to Cache Bay

The annual August Cache Bay outing seems to attract the most participants and this August was no exception. Sixteen of us trooped from one Cache Bay birding spot to another, finding a total of 27 species! (On the way, there was a Broad-winged Hawk sitting on a hydro wire on Highway 17 West, and if we count it among the species seen, that makes a total of 28 during the outing.)

I think for most of the participants there were two highlights, watching two young Osprey eat their fish, each on a separate pole (one pictured at right), and seeing two brilliant male Baltimore Orioles – all seen from the get-go at the ballpark. So as not to be left out, many European Starlings, a lone Common Grackle, a few Ring-billed Gulls and a pretty little Eastern Phoebe flew in to make their presence known. I am sure if we stood in the ballpark all evening, more species would have arrived.

However, in late August, the evenings get dark quickly, especially during a cloudy evening, so we had to move on to the dock by the trailer park to look for bay birds. Along the way, we saw a Northern Flicker and three Cedar Waxwings. At the dock area, I was hoping a Sora, an American Coot or a Common Gallinule would show, but unlike some other years, none of these did.



Renee Levesque



Stephen O'Donnell

There were a couple of Double-crested Cormorants and a few Wood Ducks further out in the bay. But it was the Caspian Tern, another crowd pleaser, which once again delighted us this year with its expert diving ability. There were a few Caspians flying and diving and seen from the boathouse side were some Common Tern, pictured at left. The Common Tern is smaller than the Caspian (14.5 vs. 21 inches, the largest of all terns), its bill slenderer, its wings narrower, and its tail much

more deeply forked. These field marks can be difficult to discern unless the tern is nearby. A scope helps.

We then walked along the trail by the trailer park where there is a pond. We had hoped to see the Green Heron at the pond, but we didn't. Still, we saw many passerines - a couple of Song Sparrows, a White-throated Sparrow, a Red-eyed Vireo, two American Redstarts, an American Robin, a couple of American Crows, an American Goldfinch, and a Veery (photo at right).



Renee Levesque

It was then off to the tower, a tower Dick Tafel and I saw a woman climb a few years back, a secret some of us have kept from Ken Gowing because he might want to climb it! No climber this time and as far as I know, no one got caught up in the poison ivy that lines the path leading to another bay look-out. On our way, we heard the haunting call of the Common Loon and as we were about to leave the area, a Belted Kingfisher flew by.

Then a race to the boathouse area before darkness descended. Here I was hoping to see a Pie-billed Grebe (photo below) and with patience, some of us finally saw one through our scopes. Also out among the reedy area were three Canada Geese, more Wood Ducks and some Mallards. There were other ducks, but we couldn't make them out. Some heard the Gray Catbird, a Yellow-rumped Warbler and American Goldfinch in the woods behind the boathouses.



Garry Waldram

Bidding Cache Bay goodnight, we headed down Levac Road in hopes of recreating a vision from August 2018 of 50 Common Nighthawk flying over a farmer's field while he was combining grain, causing the insects to disperse. (Lori Anderson tells me that the grain crop is a nice place for insects to live or spend the night.) But it was not to be. We keep hoping to see the nighthawks in this same area even though



it has now been 5 years since we last saw them there! Unless the farmer is out combining his grain, I think we have to come up with another location. It used to be that after the Cache Bay outing, we would head to the Sturgeon Falls Museum where we would see nighthawks from the parking area by the Sturgeon Falls Museum Trail, a trail that has sorely been let go.

Nor did we see Sandhill Cranes flying and honking in the setting sun as we did last year. (Did you know that Sandhill Cranes have at least 18 vocalizations, not just their noisy honking that can be heard 4 km away. According to The Nature Conservancy, they also make snoring noises while sleeping!)

Nor did we see a bear on Levac Road as one of us did last year. The only animal seen during our outing this time round was a chipmunk! We also saw a snake that made its way under a car. It slithered so quickly, we didn't have time to identify it, but we can attest to the fact that it was a non-garter snake, thanks to Kim Stahl who joined us on our outing for the first time.

Finally to end the evening, some of us met up at Tim Horton's in Sturgeon Falls where we talked about – birds!

For me, the highlight was seeing members I hadn't seen in some time and meeting others I hadn't met before. We were quite the jolly group, I think. Photos of the group are above and at right. It wasn't the best light when I took the photos and because I took them I wasn't in them. However, if you look closely, you can see Diane Deagle taking a photo of me taking a photo of the group.

As for the three who lagged behind, they got their own photo at right, the photo I stepped into.



Photos by Renee Levesque and Diane Deagle

Seeds and Cones

Young birds: At this time of the year, we see many young birds. Sometimes we can readily identify them and sometimes we can't. They are a delight to see, some just sitting on a tree branch with their eyes wide open, wondering what to do, waiting for a parental command, begging for food, playfully flying around getting used to their wing power, all of them learning how to feed themselves and become independent, most to make that long journey south and some to adapt to a long and cold winter. They also confirm for us that their parents did not make that long journey in vain.

In honour of the successfully fledged, I used Stephen O'Donnell's photo of a young Savannah Sparrow for August's cover. Stephen reports, "The juvenile plumage is only worn a short time in sparrows and so can be confusing. The streaks on the breast of the Savannah are coarse, not like the fine streaking that you see in juvenile Song, Swamp and Lincoln's Sparrows."

Sandhill Cranes and Red-winged Blackbirds:

Garry Waldram sent me some photos he took in June of a Sandhill Crane family as they made their way through the reeds along the Kaisbuskong River in Bonfield. It was an idyllic scene (photo at right) until they started getting harassed by Red-winged

Blackbirds who did not give up until the family found an area away from the nesting Red-wings. Gary reports the cranes basically ignored the Red-wings unless they got too close to them or their young one, as the Red-wing in the photo at left definitely did!

Some information about Sandhill Crane names you might not know: according to Gary Ivey, the Western Representative of the International Crane Foundation, "someone long ago observed cranes running and thought they galloped like horses and, therefore, called the males roans presumably because of their color, the females mares, and the chicks colts."

Black-throated Green Warbler: Thanks to Louise de Kiriline Lawrence we are very aware of the vast number of songs a Red-



Photos by Garry Waldram

eyed Vireo can sing in a day – 22,197 songs to be exact – but did you know that the Black-throated Green Warbler can sing its song up to 466 times per hour during courtship? It is no wonder I often hear it sing its *zee-zo-zee* song over and over again during my morning spring walks in my area, although I usually don't hear it unless it is fairly close-by, but Merlin does long before and long after I do.

(From *Birdwatch Canada*, Spring 2023 edition.)

A summer trip: In July, Garry Waldram went on a five-day “photography trip”, taking many photos of birds at each of his stops. He left his home in Calvin Township and headed for Sault Ste Marie, Wawa, Chapleau, Timmins and Temiskaming Shores, visiting White Fish Island, Lake Superior Provincial Park and Hilliardton Marsh before heading home.

During his trip, Garry saw five lifers: Black-crowned Night Heron, Solitary Sandpiper, Virginia Rail (photo above), Sora and Black Tern. He also saw the Peregrine Falcon, an adult and a juvenile (not a lifer for him) at the Sault International Bridge.



Garry Waldram

Lifers and Lost Photo-ops: Garry and Sue Gratton seem to be the two club members seeing lifers these days. (There may be more, but they haven't let me know.) Sue's lifers were the Spruce Grouse and the Wilson's Warbler that she saw on the road to Louck Lake off Summit Drive. Sue also saw the Palm Warbler, not technically a lifer because she saw Palms in Cozumel, but she believes, the first time she saw one here. Oh the joys of being a relatively new birder when seeing all these lifers in a single day add to the excitement of the birding adventure!



Wilson's Warbler, Stephen O'Donnell

Then there are photo-ops lost, sort of similar to missing a lifer, like the Nelson's Sparrow being at Powassan Lagoon, and you got there too late to see it. (I speak from experience.) Garry informed me he has been trying to capture a photo of a Black-throated Green Warbler for months, and "the one time I didn't have the camera with me was when I was at Lake Superior Provincial Park's Visitors' Centre and there was one flitting around and feeding for about 5 minutes within reaching distance and at eye level! I have seen this bird often, but mostly high in trees and not at eye level for such a long period of time." Unfortunate, Garry, because as you well know, eye-level is an ideal level for photographing a warbler. The same happened to me the other day, only it was with a Bay-breasted Warbler, a warbler of which I am yet to get a photo. As luck would have it, I didn't have my camera with me and wasn't there a beautiful adult male at the back of my yard just waiting for me at eye-level on a bare branch, staying long enough for me to focus!

Hilliardton Marsh: Drop-by visits to witness morning bird banding is not encouraged during September and October because banders are not there every day. However, during these months, Hilliardton is amenable to group bookings for bird banding. Cost is \$250.00 per group with a maximum attendance of 25 people. But you can go to Hilliardton and walk around the marsh at no cost at any time of the day to look for birds and admire its pristine beauty. Fall is a lovely time to witness the beauty of the marsh and maybe see some birds too. The photo below was taken in late September 2012.



Renee Levesque

As for public owl banding done during some September and October nights, it would appear from Hilliardton's website that there are few to no tickets left for the already scheduled owl banding nights. There will be some pop-up owl banding nights depending on the weather and these will be advertised on Hilliardton's Facebook. For the pop-ups, cost is \$20.00 per person, with the number of reservations capped at 20. I have been to owl banding nights a couple of

times, once at Hilliardton and another time at Long Point Bird Observatory (October only). To see owls so close-up is certainly something!



Red Crossbills: In August when Garry Waldram saw a number of Red Crossbills in Grand Desert, out I went for two hours looking for them to no avail. The next morning I had seven in my yard! I could have saved myself a lot of trouble, but the drive along Grand Desert was lovely and I did end up seeing other birds, including a Northern Saw-whet Owl! Unlike last winter here, this winter should be a good year for crossbills. I see plenty of cones on many of the conifers. (Photo of a Red Crossbill at left.)

Renee Levesque

Turn out the lights: All creatures and plants respond to the natural cycle of light and dark. Lights in the night disrupt nocturnal activity. Artificial light has a negative and sometimes deadly effect on many creatures, birds included. Bird Wing member Louise Dufresne contacted me to express her concern about artificial night lights and wondered if we as members are taking that into consideration along with our well-documented concern about window collisions and cats.

If you are outside on a summer's evening and use lights, it is recommended you use lights that are covered on the top and direct their rays downward only – and then turn them off when you no longer need them! We can all do our bit by being conscious of the lights in our yards and homes.

Cities are the main danger zones for migrating birds. Some cities are turning off or turning down their bright lights for a period of time during peak migration times. Audubon provides a list of Bird Friendly cities, cities that have Lights Out Programs. (For a list of US cities see: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/existing-lights-out-programs>.) Audubon began this program in 1999, although FLAP Canada was the first to bring awareness of the problem light poses for birds as early as 1993. I know Toronto, Ottawa and London have a Lights Out Program and I am sure there must be others.

I don't know how many birds are affected by the city lights of North Bay or even if anyone has any information on bird deaths in North Bay as a result of night lights.

(Some of the above information is from *all that's wild*, Shades of Hope newsletter, Spring 2023. Shades of Hope is a wildlife refuge Bird Wing supports. You can also make your own donation if you wish. See: <https://www.shadesofhope.ca/donate.html>.)

- *Renee Levesque*

Two local birders shine in Big Atlas Weekend

With bird breeding peaking, late June was a great time to confirm breeding evidence and to fill in the gaps in the atlas dataset. And so, a Big Atlas Weekend was held this year from June 23-25 across four states and two provinces, all currently conducting breeding bird atlases – Ontario, Newfoundland, New York, Maryland and DC, North Carolina and Puerto Rico.



Courtesy of Lisa Hackett

Overall, it was an excellent showing with 252 atlasers submitting 1,700 checklists, reporting 201 breeding species and logging 660 hours. Not to be left out, some area birders helped fill in the Atlas gaps in the Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts.

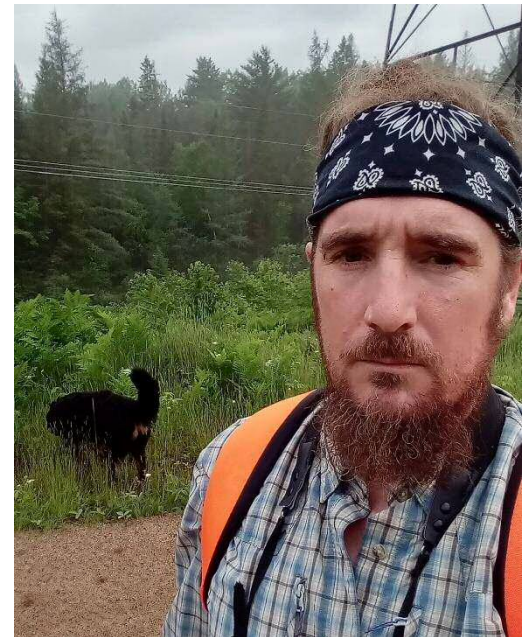
Two of the Ontario Atlasers who were winners of the various challenges that were held during the Big Atlas Weekend just happened to be local birders who are well-known to many of us. In fact, one of these Atlasers, **Lisa Hackett, won the coveted Most Valuable Atlasser! The other, Jeremy St. Onge, won the Social Media Posts challenge.**

Lisa found a whopping **723 breeding evidence birds within eight atlas survey squares**, most of which were in need of some serious atlassing. Lisa told me she atlased squares that were around an hour or so away from North Bay and all on back roads. She said that on the Sunday of the

Big Atlas Weekend it was so smoky that she had to wear a mask. She did mostly point counts and had over a hundred recordings to analyze and upload by the end of the weekend. Lisa, who must have been exhausted after all this, reports the experience was “intense and wonderful.”

Jeremy documented the weekend through posts on Instagram, helping spread the news of the Atlas in the process. I am not on social media, but I know from Jeremy’s 2019 Big Wild Year that he is an excellent promoter. For the Big Atlas Weekend, I followed Jeremy’s posts on eBird.

Jeremy and Lisa receive a Cornell Bird Academy course of their choosing and Lisa, as winner of the Most Valuable Atlasser award, will receive a pair of Vortex Diamondback binoculars. Lisa tells me she was in need of a new pair of binoculars – and no wonder after all her years and hours of birding!



Courtesy of Jeremy St. Onge

Lori's Swallows

All Photos by Lori Anderson

Barn Swallows at Lori Anderson's farm had a very successful breeding season, rearing a fair number of young despite undue pressure from House Sparrows. Barn Swallows have learned to develop compensatory strategies, such as quickly building a new nest once the House Sparrows have settled into their nests; moving into other buildings; and extending their nesting season. Flexibility and good old Barn Swallow smarts paid off! One of Lori's Barn Swallows in its neat nest is the photo at right.

As you will see from the photo, Barn Swallow nests are very neat and tidy and made by forming thousands of balls of mud. It is a lot of work to build a mud nest, so Barns will reuse their nests. (Cliff Swallows also build mud nests, although their nests are gourd-shaped. They also reuse their nests, although sometimes doing minor renovations before moving in.) House Sparrows, a



species that likes living on a farm, will reuse their nests, rarely building from scratch and usually preferring a "takeover" of other species' nests – in Lori's case, the nests of Barn and Cliff Swallows as these are already present in her farmyard.

Hostile takeovers by House Sparrows are not just confined to the nests of Barn and Cliff Swallows, but also to the nest boxes of Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds. And the takeover doesn't just extend to unoccupied nests, but also to occupied nests. When they take over a nest, they "renovate" it to suit their décor, making it "homey" by adding a lot of messy debris.

To help prevent failed Tree Swallow and Eastern Bluebirds nestings, Lori moved her nest boxes out of her farmyard to fields on her farm. The nest boxes are mostly in pairs because it has been Lori's experience that once a Tree couple has taken a box, another Tree couple does not care to move into the box next door, leaving a box available for an Eastern Bluebird. In some cases over the last several seasons, Lori has had Black-capped Chickadees use the second box.

At right is a photo Lori got of two cute little Tree Swallows looking out of their nest box at a world they are about to explore.



For the first time in over 10 years, Lori has not had at least one pair of nesting Eastern Bluebirds! My Eastern

Bluebird nest box in one of Lori's fields was not used. even though for the past two seasons Eastern Bluebirds did nest in it, much to my delight.

Lori reports that for several seasons Cliff Swallows nested on the east and north side of her house (photo below). But because House Sparrows took over these nests, this year Lori did not find any Cliff Swallow nests occupied by other than House Sparrows.

(So you see, Dick, you can't blame Lori if she doesn't find House Sparrows to be as wonderful as you do and I can't imagine how she must feel when you end most of your Bird Bash Reports with "the much maligned House Sparrow".)

I don't know if others have found this, but I have not seen many Cliff Swallows this year so far, just the odd one.

- *Lori Anderson and Renee Levesque*

