

# Bird Wing Report

January 2024



## Upcoming bird events



**Great Backyard Bird Count:** The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), an annual global bird event sponsored by Audubon, The Cornell Lab and Birds Canada, takes place over 4 days, **February 16 through to the 19th**, which happens to be over the Family Day weekend and our February Bird Bash weekend. The GBBC is not confined to your backyard, although if you wish to count birds only in your backyard, that is more than fine. You can watch birds wherever you are, even if you are not in our area but away on vacation, as long as you see or hear birds for **15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days.**

You then enter your birds on eBird either using your desktop or laptop or the eBird Mobile app. Cost is free for eBird over this period. If you are already on eBird, just enter your sightings over these 4 days as you usually do.

Last year, Bird Wing GBBC participants in our area were Dick, Grant, Diane Deagle, Denise Desmarais, J r mie Corbeil, Dorothy Williams Garry Waldram and me.

Nipissing District saw 37 species, although many of those came from Algonquin Park. Still, at least 24 of those species were from us. I am not too sure how many species were seen by Bird Wing members within our area of Parry Sound, but I believe less than 10.

Here is the link for more information on how to participate:

<https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>.

**Bird Bash:** Bird Bash will take place over the same weekend as the Great Backyard Bird Count, **February 17 and 18**, so that your Bird Bash sightings can be entered as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count – provided you enter them on eBird.

**Bird Wing:** Our February Bird Wing meeting, on **Tuesday, February 27, starting at 7:00 pm.** will once again be on Zoom and will feature Bird Wing member Sheldon McGregor talking about his recent birding expedition in Brazil.



*Renee Levesque*



## Birds seen in late December and January

*By Renee Levesque; photos as indicated*



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Although most of the birds I am about to list were mentioned in Dick Tafel's January Bird Bash Report, some who attended the first Zoom meeting of Bird Wing for 2024 did not participate in the Bird Bash, and some spotted a few birds not seen during the Bird Bash.

It was nice to welcome back Cindy Lafleur who has not been available for about a year. Cindy's claim to fame was spotting a Great Egret in Laurier Woods during one of our Bird Bashes, followed shortly by her seeing a Trumpeter Swan in the parking lot outside her place of employment!

**Rick Tripp:** Rick saw 75 Bohemian Waxwings in his backyard and Dick Tafel, Diane Deagle, April McCrum and I have seen up to 300 making their way through Pinewood and the O'Brien Street areas. I don't think I have ever seen such a large flock, also known as a museum. (See photo at heading.) They are very social birds that form large flocks in their search for berry trees scattered throughout the area.



Rick's second bird was the American Goldfinch, a bird seen by some of us.

**Kim Stahl:** Kim saw 14 Wild Turkeys prancing around her sister's yard! But they weren't the only prancing backyard turkeys— Faye Oei saw 16 in her friend's yard in Sundridge. They must have been relieved that Christmas was long gone! I saw two at Nipissing University, but my two weren't prancing. I think it takes a large flock, also known as a rafter, to prance. I know Lori Anderson saw many during the Bird Bash, but she didn't say whether or not they were prancing.

Kim's second bird was one she heard in Laurier Woods at the end of December, a Golden-crowned Kinglet. No one else heard or saw one, although Greg Jaski saw one in the La Vase River area during the Christmas Bird Count.

**Garry Waldram:** Garry had about 30 Evening Grosbeaks (photo at right) coming to his feeders. Few others had seen Evening Grosbeaks, although at some point after the meeting, at least 25 visited my yard.

Garry's second bird was the Dark-eyed Junco that he saw on Development Road. April, who lives in the City, has one that regularly visits her feeders.

**Angela Mills:** Angela hears at least two Northern Cardinals most mornings when she is out starting up her car for work, and we all know Rick gets three at his feeders - the male, the female and the juvenile. Rick wrote an article about this breeding evidence of the Northern Cardinal, so watch for it in next month's Bird Wing Report.



*Renee Levesque*

Angela's second bird was the ever-present and ever-friendly Black-capped Chickadee.

**Cindy Lafleur:** Although many of us have seen Mallards behind the Green Store and at the Sewage Treatment Plant, Cindy had four in her backyard. She also saw a large flock of European Starlings eating the berries from one of her backyard trees. It seems starlings abound this winter in North Bay, large flocks wherever you go.

**Lori Anderson:** Lori saw a Belted Kingfisher on January 7 on Wasing Road, just east of Graham Creek which was still open at the time. Lori reports the kingfisher “seemed perfectly happy and hopeful as it gazed at the creek.” With the continuing milder weather, it may just be as happy and as hopeful as it was on January 7, although maybe it left during our two-week cold spell.



**Garry Waldram**

Lori’s second bird was the Snow Bunting (photo at left.) She sees large flocks or drifts in her farm fields and about 6 tend to come to her feeders, although only sporadically. They have also been seen by Dick, Garry and me. Drift is such an apt name for a flock of Snow Buntings! If you want to see Snow Buntings, drive around farm fields and you will be sure to see a drift.

**Therez Violette:** Therez who lives in Sturgeon Falls saw an American Robin. There have been at least 5 sighted in Sturgeon Falls – must be all those berry trees there. Peter Ferris recently

saw one in North Bay just off Trout Lake Road, maybe the same one Mary Young saw by the Laurentian Ski Hill during the Bird Bash.

Therez’s second bird was the Red-breasted Nuthatch, a bird seen by a few of us.

**Faye Oei:** On the other hand, not many have seen the White-breasted Nuthatch, as Faye did. She also saw Purple Finch, also not seen by many, although seen by me, Sue Gratton and Rick who had a dozen at his feeders.

Faye was “allowed” a third bird because she is still recuperating from her December knee surgery and can’t get around much.





Renee Levesque

Faye complained about the influx of Blue Jays (photo at left) in her yard eating her out of house and home. She can't seem to escape them because even during the Bird Bash, she saw a tree "infested" with them! What is so interesting about this is that in other years she didn't get many Blue Jays. I used to get at least a dozen a day, but this year, only 2 to 4. If it is any consolation, Faye, one year when they weren't eating me out of house and home, they were eating the paint off my verandah! It was a mess by the time they finished. Sue and Rick get about a dozen at their feeders and Garry, as previously reported, about 20. With all his Evening Grosbeaks and Blue Jays at his feeders, it must remind him, if he is a sports fan, of the LA Rams.

**Grant McKercher:** Grant was one of the fortunate birders to see the Northern Hawk Owl (photo at right), an owl that has been seen in the Lake Nosbonsing area since early December and seen by many of us – not Sue, though! The day she went, it did not make an appearance! The sighting of a Northern Hawk Owl is considered sensitive on eBird. Many who saw it, including those who live in the owl's immediate neighbourhood, posted it on Facebook and word got around. I think it is not so much birders and birder/photographers who stress the bird, but some photographers trying to get the ultimate shot.

The Northern Hawk Owl is a non-migratory and solitary bird of the boreal forest. It stays mainly in its remote breeding areas, but sporadically irrupts southward.



Garry Waldram

The last time I recall one staying this long was during the winter of 2014 when one stayed in the Ouellette Road area.

It is called a Hawk Owl because it obviously is and looks like an owl even with its long tail, but it behaves like a hawk, perching on top of a solitary tree and scanning the area below for its meal, primarily small mammals, although in the winter it will eat ptarmigan and grouse.

It is often easy for birders to spot the Hawk Owl because of its position on top of a solitary tree and because it primarily hunts during the day. It is an owl that generally doesn't mind humans as long as they don't come close to its nest site.

It nests in tree cavities created by woodpeckers, in decayed tree hollows and broken tree trunks.

Because it is such a remote bird, it is very difficult to assess its population, and it is actually one of the least studied birds in North America. No wonder then that when it irrupts southward, we all want to see it. And it is seriously cute, or as my daughter says, "menacingly cute." We just have to remember not to stress it by approaching too closely or gathering in large numbers or pushing and shoving to get the ultimate photo.

Grant's second bird was the American Black Duck. Many can be seen on the Ottawa River in Mattawa where Grant saw them; a couple were seen in Bonfield on the Kaibuskong River by Garry; and a couple were seen behind the Green Store – that sentence sounds somewhat like a long-ago song, "what's behind the green door".



**Sue Grafton:** Sue was the only member present to see a Brown Creeper (photo at left), a tiny, handsome tree climber with a long tail and a curved bill, sometimes hard to spot because it blends into the bark of the tree as it spirals its way up the trunk in search of insects.

Sue's second bird was a Bald Eagle, two of which she saw at the South River landfill site and one which she saw in Sundridge. Quite a few of us have seen Bald Eagles this winter, if not out on the lake waiting for a fish, at the various local landfill sites.

**Dick Tafel:** Dick has had large flocks of Pine Siskins coming to his feeders, as have some others. I have had up to about 60 visiting my yard, although not coming to my feeders, but preferring the natural seeds they were still able to get.



Dick's second bird was the Common Redpoll. It was seen by many of us, if not in our yards, eating grit on the back roads.

**Renee Levesque:** Recently I heard a Great Horned Owl from my verandah at 6:45 in the morning. January is a good time to hear one, because it is beginning to look for a mate.



My other bird that may also be showing signs of breeding evidence is the Red Crossbill, seen also by Dick, Grant, Garry and **Stephen O'Donnell whose photo graces the cover of this month's Bird Wing Report.** I saw them on Songis, Papineau and Gibson Mill Roads, where I also saw a flock of 13 White-winged Crossbills (photo at right) in late December. I haven't seen any White-wings since then. (See Grant's McKercher's article on year 4 of the Breeding Bird Survey later in this report in which he mentions winter breeding birds.)

*Renee Levesque*

**Other Birds Seen:** After we all mentioned and discussed our two birds – well, three for Faye – we then mentioned other birds seen. Dick and I were the only ones present at the meeting to see the Northern Shrike (photo at right) – five in total so far this January! The Common Goldeneye was seen by Garry on the Kaibuskong River in Bonfield and by Grant on the Ottawa River in Mattawa. They can also be seen at the lagoon in Mattawa. No one mentioned the beautiful Pine Grosbeak. Not many seem to be around, but they have been seen here and there – in the Songis Road area and on Levac Road, West Nipissing. And finally, the American Tree Sparrow. I get up to 8 daily at my feeder; Sue has one coming to her feeders; and Ken Gowing has two.



*Grant McKercher*



## Another great Christmas Bird Count



*June Telford*

*By Lori Anderson and Renee Levesque; photos as indicated*

On December 16 on the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of North Bay's Christmas Bird Count, the tally get-together was held for the first time at 176 Lakeshore and the venue proved to be very satisfactory. As the field observers - some who started with the rising sun as shown in the photo above taken by June Telford - tramped in from their long day on back roads, in the woods, along trails, around the lake, and at the landfill site, they had one thing on their minds – food! And the pot luck did not disappoint. Amazing how it never does – more than enough for everyone and a great variety of dishes.

After fueling our bodies and singing our Christmas song (which follows this article) the excitement began as one by one, we provided Lori Anderson, compiler, with our species and bird numbers. Our total number of species by the end of the tally party was 38 and we held out that the feeder watchers would hopefully get us over 40 – and they did! Suzanne in Graniteville saw a Dark-eyed Junco, not seen by the field observers; Geri Openshaw saw an American Robin,



*Renee Levesque*



also not seen by the field observers; and Carla Marrin and Sandy Robinson each saw a Barred Owl in their respective yards, an owl not seen by the field observers. So not only did we reach 40 species, but we were one above that at 41! (We had 2 American Robins and 4 Dark-eyed Juncos in 2022, but no Barred Owls.)

It was a tremendous effort by all 17 field observers who discovered 38 species, representing 2528 birds, and by the 30 feeder watchers who came through with the three above-mentioned additional species. In total, they discovered 23 species, representing 522 birds. Together we topped last year's count by 4 species, although the total number of birds was down, from 3,448 to 3,050.

Probably the most exciting find by field observers Stephen O'Donnell, Sue Gratton, Angela Mills and Aris Morosin was the American Goshawk (below), formerly known as the Northern Goshawk. An adult male was discovered on Derland Road in the southern portion of the count circle and was found for the first time on the count in over 10 years. Other raptors seen included a Rough-legged Hawk and 11 Bald Eagles, 9 of them at the East Ferris Landfill Site. No Red-tailed Hawks were seen, although 3 were seen last year.



*Lori Anderson*

More finch species were found than are often found – Red Crossbills, 34, but no White-winged Crossbills; Common Redpolls, 237; Pine Siskins, 61; American Goldfinches, 209; and Purple Finches, 4.

Evening Grosbeaks were greatly down, 35 compared to 257 in 2022; and Pine Grosbeaks were also greatly down, 11 compared to 55 in 2022.



Bohemian Waxwing (at right) numbers were down this year from 80 to 54; Common Ravens were down from 191 to 116; American Crows were down from 139 to 86; Hairy Woodpeckers were down from 40 to 28; and Mourning Doves were down from 37 to 18. No Red-bellied Woodpeckers were seen this year despite their being on CBC counts in other recent years, including last year when there was one.

American Tree Sparrow numbers were up from last year from 5 to 12, as were Ruffed Grouse from 2 to 6, Northern Shrike from 0 to 2, and Northern Cardinal numbers from 3 to 6!

Black-capped Chickadees, Downy and Pileated Woodpecker numbers were about the same for both years.



*Stephen O'Donnell*

The open water allowed field observers Dick Tafel, Renee Levesque, Linda Stoner, April McCrum and Paul Smylie to discover several species of waterfowl – a Common Loon (below), 2 Canada Geese, 44 Common Goldeneye, 3 Hooded and 6 Common Mergansers. Last year, there were 21 more Hooded Mergansers and one more Canada Goose than this year. However this year, there were 26 more Common Goldeneye and 4 more Common Mergansers than last year.



*Donna McQuay*



As always, except the year we forgot, Dick, Linda and I placed a bird ornament in a tree at the Sisters of San Jose summer camp to thank them for “allowing” us to trespass. It almost looks like a real bird in the photo at right.



Linda Stoner

Last year saw some out-of-season species - a Brown Thrasher, a Gray Catbird and 3 Common Grackles. This year we didn't see any out-of-season species, unless we consider the American Robin one; however, June and Kevin Telford saw a Red-winged Blackbird during count week.

Last year 2 Lapland Longspurs were seen, but none this year. To make up for that, Greg Jaski on his hike across La Vase River discovered a Golden-crowned Kinglet, a kinglet absent from last year's count. (Greg also saw 2 of the 11 Bald Eagles just south of the mouth of La Vase.)

Field Observers, in addition to those mentioned above, were Fred Pinto, Marc Buchanan, Grant McKercher, Erica Buck, Brent and Laura Turcotte with Karen Major, Kevin and June Telford, and, of course, Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing who kindly washed all the dishes after our meal!

Feeder Watchers noted that their feeders were not as well visited as they had hoped. Possibly birds were out enjoying the warm weather and finding some food away from feeders – and some away from the eyes of the field observers.

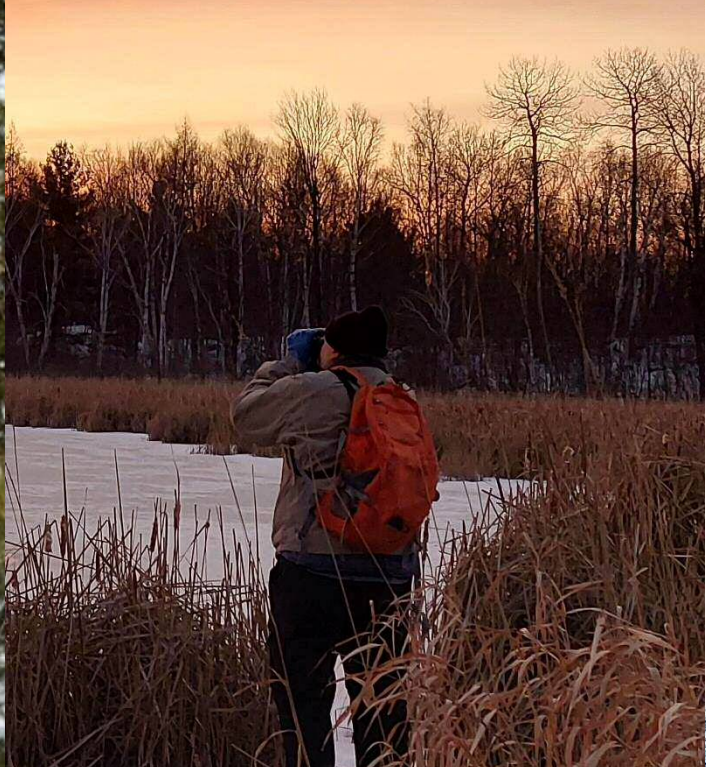


Stephen O'Donnell

Lori puts it so well and so nicely: “Our totals show what 47 bird enthusiasts can find in one winter Saturday in North Bay. Congratulations to all! Thank you so much for your contribution. It is, as always, a pleasure to compile when there is such effort put forth by so many.”

**Note:** If you didn't catch the article in *Bay Today* on December 26, here is the link: <https://www.baytoday.ca/local-news/species-up-but-numbers-down-in-124th-christmas-bird-count-8010615>







## Christmas Bird Count's Coming to Town

You better count birds  
You better look high  
You better count birds  
That fly in the sky  
Christmas Bird Count's coming to town.



We're making a list  
We're checking it twice  
We're going to try not to  
Fall through the ice  
Christmas Bird Count's coming to town.

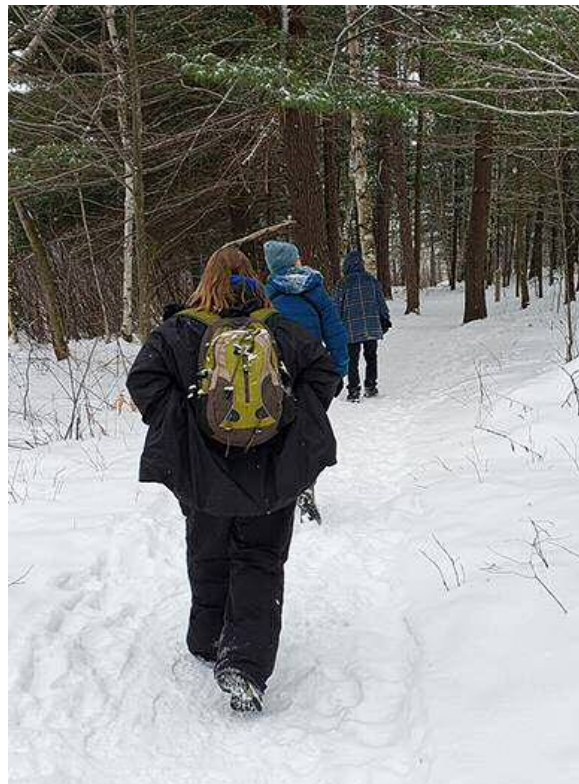
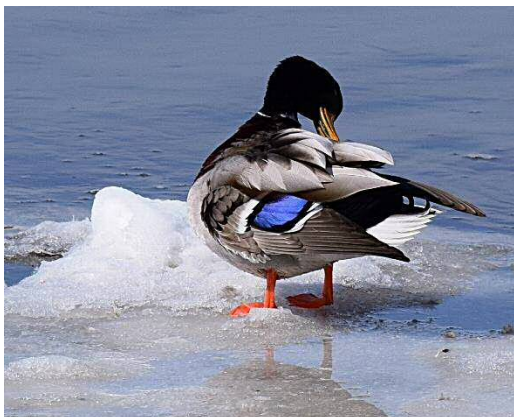


We see birds when they're flying  
We see them on a limb  
We know the Pileated by  
The red toque found on him.

So we're making a list  
We're checking it twice  
We're going to try not to  
Fall through the ice  
Christmas Bird Count's coming to town.

The birders in their gardens  
The birders in the field  
The birders in their cars and trucks  
Will tabulate their yield!

So we're making a list  
We're checking it twice  
We're going to try not to  
Fall through the ice  
Christmas Bird Count's coming to town!





## My first Christmas Bird Count

*By Angela Mills*

This year was my first experience with the Christmas Bird Count. I was fortunate to be teamed up with others of varying birding experience, including one very experienced birder, Stephen O'Donnell. The others on the team were Sue Gratton and Aris Morosin. This was Sue's second Christmas Bird Count and also Aris's first. Sue knows her birds quite well after 3 or 4 years of birding. Aris is a very new birder, who also enjoyed her first Christmas Bird Count, and it was thanks to her quick eye we noticed a flock of birds in a tree. We were not able to determine what they were while they were in the tree, so we had to wait patiently for them to fly off and then we were able to identify them as Common Redpolls. Patience paid off!

We met before dawn to get in place to start birding right at sunrise. We made our way through a variety of environments including urban residential areas, forested areas, and agricultural areas. We visited some areas that are known to frequently host specific species, including the Northern Cardinal and Bald Eagles, and explored other areas to see what we could find.



*Angela Mills*

For the less experienced birders of the group, including myself, we found a number of “lifer” species. But probably the most exciting bird we saw, and a lifer for three of us, had to be the American Goshawk, formerly known as the Northern Goshawk.

It was a long and rewarding day. I'm glad I had the opportunity to learn from the more experienced birders not only about how the Christmas Bird Count works, but also for their help with species identification. Had we not an experienced birder in our group, we likely would have spent much more time trying to figure out what species we were either hearing or looking at rather than moving on to count the next one. However, all members of our group contributed to detecting birds that others would have missed, including many of the single counts we observed.

I am looking forward to participating in the 2024 Christmas Bird Count and continuing to learn from my fellow birders.

**Renee's Note:** New and young birders who may not know the identity of many birds bring to an outing an ability to hear and to quickly notice bird movement, more so than those of us who have reached a certain age. These are very important skills and much appreciated.

## Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count



*Stephen O'Donnell*

In December 14, a few of our Bird Wing members took part in the Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count (CBC) – Stephen O'Donnell, Brent and Laura Turcotte and Grant McKercher. Craig Evans took over from Martin Parker as compiler and did an excellent job, although Martin continued as a field observer. A new field observer, although by no means a new birder, was Kate Dalglish who works for Birds Canada and now lives within the Burk's Falls CBC circle.

It was a count notable for setting a record for the number of Wild Turkeys (at right) seen – 92, breaking by one the previous record set in 2021. A Belted Kingfisher made an appearance for only the fifth time on the count and a Winter Wren made an appearance for only the second time on the count, the last time being 27 years ago in 1996! One almost-record should be noted. The 10 Bald Eagles (at top of page) seen almost tied with the record of 11 set in 2018.



*Gary Sturge*



There were high numbers of Pine Siskins at 918, 159 short of the record set in 1984, and although far from beating a record, there were fairly good numbers of Blue Jays at 309, Common Redpolls at 486, and Red Crossbills at 78.

Some nice finds were an American Robin, 3 Snow Buntings, 4 Dark-eyed Juncos, 2 Northern Shrikes, and 8 Golden-crowned Kinglets, although 146 Golden-crowned were found in 2002.

Some notable lows were Bohemian Waxwings 0; Pine Grosbeaks 0; Evening Grosbeaks 12; White-winged Crossbills 2 (one pictured below); no ducks at all, although there were 7 Canada Geese. Gull numbers were also low with only 4 Herring Gulls and no Ring-billed Gulls. The year 2011 was a good year for Burk's Falls gulls, with 489 Herring, 20 Ring-bills, 4 Iceland, 9 Glaucous and 2 Great Black-backs.

In total, there were 32 species and 3,326 individuals found.



*Stephen O'Donnell*

- *Renee Levesque with input from Craig Evans.*



## Feeder watching by former Bayite in Sault Ste. Marie

*By Sarah Wheelan*

It's my second winter back in the Soo, but my first with my own backyard and feeders. I haven't made it out birding much since my move, but I have been looking forward to setting up the feeders this year to see who's around.

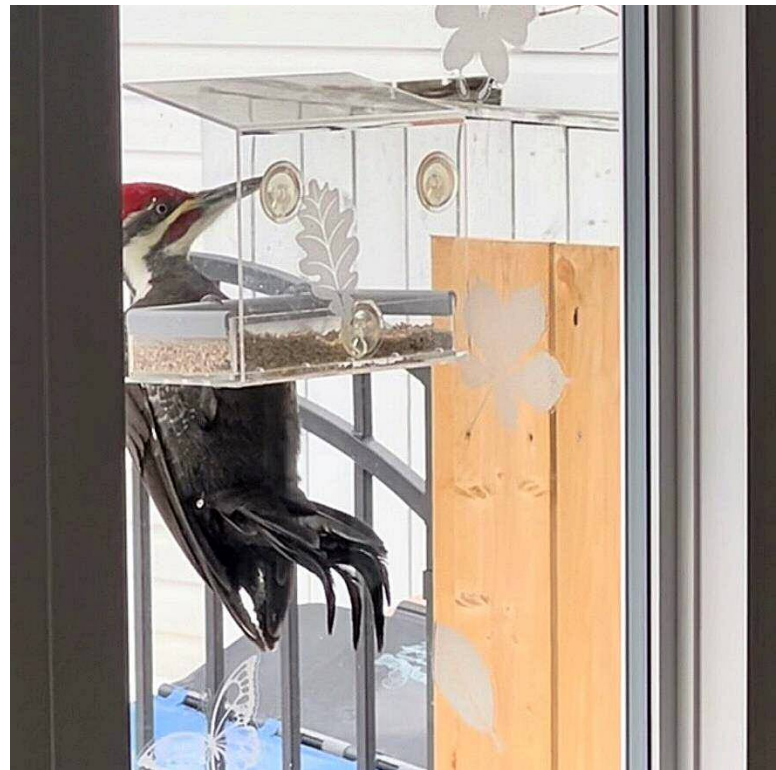
With this slow start to the winter, it's probably anything but a typical year, but so far I have the usual suspects dropping by: Black-capped Chickadees, Blue Jays, European Starlings, Dark-eyed Juncos, American Goldfinches, Pileated, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, the occasional Crow or Raven, and more Rock Pigeons than I'd like.

This year's Christmas Bird Count in the Soo was also on December 16, and when I saw the call out for local feeder watchers in a local birding Facebook group, I signed up.

The local count circle is a 12 km radius centred on the Canada/US border to include the Twin Soos in Canada and the US.

It was a warm, rainy count day, and there wasn't a lot of activity at my feeders: 7 Rock Pigeons, 1 Blue Jay, 1 American Crow, 2 Black-Capped Chickadees, 1 White-breasted Nuthatch, and 2 Dark-eyed Juncos. I was hoping my favourite visitor - a male Pileated Woodpecker - would stop by the window feeder, but as you may expect, he decided to drop by the following day instead. Some birds are just never on our schedule! At right is a photo of "my" Pileated. He has already popped off the top two suction cups on this window feeder!

I miss my Bird Wing friends, our CBC potlucks and the great birding adventures I've had around the North Bay area over the years. I hope you all had a great CBC this year and if you're ever in the Soo, look me up and we'll see what trouble we can get up to on our quest to find birds.



*Sarah Wheelan*

**Renee's Note:** Preliminary results for the Soo, according to Carter Dorscht, compiler: 54 species and over 10,300 individual birds. An American Goshawk was also seen during the count, as were 11 Lapland Longspurs and 2 Eastern Towhees.



# Our new CBC dashboard and the data it can provide

By Angela Mills

Audubon publishes annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data on their website; however, it's not very user-friendly to explore data for results and summaries. With very special thanks to Darcy Gratton, we now have a database and dashboard that can easily take the data as published by Audubon for our local CBC observations and filter results by species and survey year.

Species counts can be displayed graphically as raw data (total counted each year), normalized data (raw numbers adjusted based on differences in CBC effort), and an overview of number of parties, combined hours of effort, and number of species counted each year. It also summarizes the overall maximum and minimum count (raw and normalized) for each species.

A lot can be learned through this dashboard. For example, more than 100 species have been observed over the years since 1982, of which there are only nine species – Rock Pigeon, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, and European Starling – that have been observed during every Christmas Bird Count!

Focusing on the normalized counts of a single species, the **Bald Eagle**, the first observation was in 1995 and it remained sporadic (one or zero) through 2010. Observations jumped to six in 2011, and remained consistently higher, with as many as 26 observed in 2019. (2023 final results are not yet available.) For a screen shot of the dashboard and the Bald Eagle normalized counts, see below.

**Note from Renee:** If you would like to find out about a specific bird or birds observed during the CBC, let me know and Angela will provide me with the data as she did above with the Bald Eagle and I will publish the data in the next report. If there are many requests – and I hope there are – I can spread this out in the monthly reports over the year. It would be nice to publish at least one request per month.





## Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 (BBA-3) update

By Grant McKercher  
Coordinator Region #29 (North Bay)

We are now starting the fourth year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas and gearing up for the last two seasons of this five-year, province-wide project which aims to document all the bird species that breed in Ontario ([www.birdsontario.org](http://www.birdsontario.org)).

Although the peak breeding season for our area is late May to mid-July, there are some species that breed earlier in the year, such as White-winged and Red Crossbills, Canada Jays, Great Horned Owls, Rock Pigeons, and Common Ravens. Crossbills may breed in any month of the year, depending on the local abundance of conifer cones, which are their primary food source (<https://www.birdsontario.org/crossbills/>). So, if you're out birding at this time of year be sure to look for signs of breeding activity (presence in appropriate habitat, singing males, pair bonding, nest building) in these species. The Atlas breeding season/safe date guide is helpful in determining when these species are likely to be breeding in our area - see under *Tools & Resources* at [www.birdsontario.org](http://www.birdsontario.org).



Canada Jay, Renee Levesque

The goals for the next two breeding seasons in the North Bay region will be to fill in gaps in field observation coverage (general atlassing, and point counts) and search for species that would be expected, but have not yet been recorded.

I plan to organize an outing in late April to give an update on the Atlas activities in our area, talk about where we have gaps in coverage, and demonstrate how your birding checklists can be added to the Atlas database.

The Atlas project welcomes participation by anyone interested in birds. It's a great opportunity to improve your birding identification skills and have fun outdoors, while contributing to an important citizen science research project. For more information on how you can participate, the Atlas has recently put together a new introductory guide to the Breeding Bird Atlas-3 (<http://www.birdsontario.org/quick-start>). I am also available to answer your Atlas questions, and can be reached by e-mail at [gmckercher@mac.com](mailto:gmckercher@mac.com).



## Bird of the Year

The American Birding Association has named the Golden-winged Warbler the bird of the year, the first warbler to ever obtain this honour.

The Golden-winged is a very handsome bird, the male with its yellow crown, golden wing patch, black throat and black ear patch, all contrasting nicely with its silver-grey body.

The female looks basically the same, only her colours are more muted. It is frequently found in Southern and Eastern Ontario, and only occasionally in our immediate area. It winters in Central and South America.

The male's most recent appearance was on the Cranberry Trail in May 2022, where it remained basically in the same spot from the time it was seen in May through June, July and August. It was Kevan Cowcill through Paul Smylie who first alerted me to its presence, but word soon spread and other Bird Wing members – Dick Tafel, Grant McKercher, Fred Pinto, Kevin and June Telford, Gary and Connie Sturge, Diane and Alvin Deagle and Sue Gratton, to name some - had an opportunity to see it and hear its very distinctive and repetitive *bzz bzz bzz* song.

There were a few sightings of one during the summer of 2018, mostly in the Astorville area, although former Bird Wing member David Rooke saw one at Seguin Beach in August 2018. He also saw one there in July 2020. The photo David took in August 2018 is at the heading of this article. There were also a few sightings in the early 2000s, mostly in the District of Parry Sound.



David Rooke



Unfortunately this is a songbird whose numbers have declined drastically over the years because of loss of habitat and hybridization with the Blue-winged Warbler (photo below) whose expanding range overlaps with that of the Golden-winged. Although each of these warblers looks very different, the main difference may be only on the surface according to Scott Taylor and David Tews, Cornell Lab post-doctoral researchers, who determined there is very little genetic difference between them. (There have not been many sightings of the Blue-winged in our area. I am aware of only Stephen O'Donnell and Craig Evans seeing and photographing one on Whalley Road West, near Magnetawan, on May 24 and May 27, 2020.)



*Ken James, Wikipedia*

Tom Will, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Midwest Region

Migratory Bird Coordinator, is of the opinion that hybridization is not necessarily a bad thing for these warblers, that it could be “an example of the beauty of evolution”, a way of adapting to environmental change.

Nevertheless, there are efforts being made by the Golden-winged Warbler Working Group, whose members include the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, to restore the numbers of the Golden-winged. The group has set a goal of increasing the population of this warbler by 50% by the year 2050.

*- Renee Levesque.*