

BIRD WING SUMMARY

November 23, 2015

North Bay Christmas Bird Count

North Bay's 37th year of participating in the Christmas Bird Count takes place on **Saturday, December 19**, with a pot luck dinner and tabulation of the results to be held that evening at the home of Marc Buchanan.



Photo by Lori Anderson

Last year we counted 2,835 birds, representing 34 species.

Lori Anderson, Nipissing Naturalist Club and Bird Wing member who one year had a White-crowned Sparrow keeping warm on her Christmas lights (above), is the compiler and has organized teams in our established seven areas as follows:

Area 1, Airport and Four-Mile Lake – with leaders Fred Pinto and Marc Buchanan

Area 2, Thibeault Terrace and Cedar Heights – with leaders Lori Anderson, compiler, and Ken Gowan, compiler's assistant

Area 3, Downtown Core – with leaders Brent Turcotte and Laura Chowns

Area 4, West Ferris and Pinewood Park – with leaders Grant and Shirley McKercher

Area 5, Callander, Corbeil and East Ferris – with leaders Gary and Connie Sturge

Area 6, Trout Lake south and Centennial Crescent – with leaders Dick Tafel and Renee Levesque

Area 7, Trout Lake north, Hwy.63 and Feronia – with leaders Craig and Elaine Hurst

If there are any volunteers who wish to take part as field or feeder watch participants, please let Lori know as soon as possible by emailing her at lori.anderson58@hotmail.com. We have some large areas to cover by car and by trail, and, therefore, some areas could benefit from having two separate groups. Feeder watchers are always welcome, but they must register their intent with Lori as soon as possible and they must live within a 24-km or 15-mile radius of North Bay.

It would appear West Nipissing and Mattawa are not holding a Christmas Bird Count this year. Perhaps this is something that needs to be looked into for next year so that the District of Nipissing is better represented.

Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count

For the 39th year, Burk's Falls will also be participating in the Christmas Bird Count, with Martin Parker as compiler. Its count will be held on **Wednesday, December 16.**

If you wish to participate, and there is always room for volunteers, please let Martin know as soon as possible by emailing him at mparker19@cogeco.ca.

The Count of North Bay, 2014

It is always interesting to compare what is seen this year compared with last year. So in Lori's words (below) are the results of last year's Christmas Bird Count.

The 36th North Bay Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was completed on December 14, 2014, by 18 Field Watchers and 10 Feeder Watchers. The weather was mild. Field Watchers enjoyed surveying on foot and with open car windows. Feeder Watchers commented that there were fewer than normal birds feeding.

Nevertheless, the total species (34) and total birds counted (2835) were healthy averages for the effort put forth. No records were broken, but two highs were matched: Bald Eagle (6) and Song Sparrow (2).

Notable species which do not always make the count, but were observed this year include: Common Goldeneye (2), Common Loon (2), Rough-Legged Hawk (3), Herring Gull (5), Gray Jay (2), Brown Creeper (1), Snowy Owl (1), Bohemian Waxwing, seen below (82), Song Sparrow (2), White-Throated Sparrow (5), Northern Cardinal (2), Common Grackle (6), Pine Grosbeak (16), and Hoary Redpoll (1).



Observed during count week, but not on the count day, were Canada Goose, American Robin and American Tree Sparrow.

Higher than usual count was obtained for Mallard (578), Bald Eagle (6), Pileated Woodpecker, seen at right (15), and Common Redpoll (436).

Lower than expected counts were tallied for Downy Woodpecker (9), Northern Shrike (0), Dark-Eyed Junco (0), and American Goldfinch (10).

Recovered from a low count in 2013 were Hairy Woodpecker (32), American Crow (52), Black-Capped Chickadee (579), Red-Breasted Nuthatch (18), White-Breasted Nuthatch (26), and Evening Grosbeak (53).

Counts of the day were tallied at the home of the North Bay CBC coordinator, Dick Tafel, where great food and tales of the day's adventures were shared.



Dick's and Renee Levesque's team shared a photo of a White-Crested Polish Chicken observed foraging in a driveway of a home on Trout Lake, hoping this unusual find on the shores of Trout Lake would result in a new species for the CBC, if not for all of Nipissing.

However, the finest story was that provided by team leaders, Craig and Elaine Hurst, who had been called to a residence the day before the CBC to assist with a Common Loon in distress (seen below).



The loon, for reasons unknown, had become grounded in a snow-covered yard, far from water, just about all of which was frozen. The Hursts and their friends were able to relocate the loon, which was apparently uninjured, to some remaining open water in Trout Lake at the inlet of Lee's Creek. Craig and Elaine observed the Common Loon fishing in this same open water for the tally on CBC day! Surely it was the same rescued Common Loon now doing well. One couldn't ask for a more heart-warming story for the Christmas Bird Count than this.

Birds Seen in November

As Dick reported in his November Bird Bash report, only 54 species were identified during our Bash despite the pleasant weather. This marked an all-time low. Last year, 76 species were identified despite the cold weather. Dick postulated that our mild fall may have had something to do with it, the weather so mild that the birds just kept on flying through on their journey south.



Ducks seen earlier in the month included the Long-tailed Duck seen by Dick, Renee Levesque and Brent Turcotte in Lake Nipissing; hundreds of Bufflehead seen by many in Callander and Warren Lagoons; a late Redhead Duck seen in Callander Lagoon; American Wigeon and a large raft of Greater Scaup seen at Lavigne; Northern Shovelers seen at Warren lagoon; Lesser Scaup also seen at Lavigne, as well as in all the lagoons and recently by Gary Sturge in South River;

Common Goldeneye and Common Mergansers in Lake Nipissing; and Hooded Mergansers in the pond at Laurier Woods. (Since the writing of this report, on November 26 Angela Martin saw a large raft of about 200 Common Mergansers at her place in West Nipissing.)

November highlights included the Northern Cardinal seen by Brent and Laura Chowns at their feeder and by Luanne Chowns at hers. Gary had seven House Sparrows at his place. They were feeding with the American Goldfinch. The Northern Shrike was seen earlier than usual by Dick and Ken Gowing.

Scoters finally made an appearance and with a scope, good views were offered of the Black, the White-winged and the Surf Scoters in Lake Nipissing. A Common Loon was seen in Trout Lake by Dick, Lori and Ken, and earlier in the month Great Blue Herons were still being seen.

The Snow Geese first seen on October 30 in Lake Nipissing off Marleau Road in Sturgeon Falls continued to be present in early November. Canada Geese abounded earlier in the month and some are still around.



Gary saw a Northern Goshawk on Stillaway Line, thus stealing Dick's thunder who, as the last one of the group to report his findings, was waiting with great anticipation to report that after two years he finally saw one! Dick saw a juvenile on Maple Hill Road, not far from Stillaway. Gary also reported seeing a Red-

tailed Hawk near his place in Powassan and others have seen one on Hwy. 17 West. A Rough-legged Hawk was seen by Fred Pinto near the airport and Lori and Ken saw one during the Bird Bash near Warren. More should be coming, so keep a look-out for them. Bald Eagles were seen by many.

Ruffed Grouse seem to be in abundance this fall, although Jim Haskin was the only one to see a Spruce Grouse (photo below) at his place near the airport.



Woodpeckers seen were the Hairy, Downy and Pileated. The mythical Stillaway Line Black-backed has not yet been seen, not even by Gary!

Many Robins were seen in the early November, but lately only a scattered few here and there. Renee and Kaye Edmonds recently had very light coloured ones in their yards and one of Renee's was leucistic, with a partial white head.

Kaye also reported that during November's Bird Bash, she and Lisa Hackett saw Bohemian Waxwings at Wade's Landing. Some others have seen them within the city.

Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finches, American Goldfinch and Pine Siskins are being seen. Some have had many Evening Grosbeaks and some have had a few American Goldfinch at their feeders, but few are reporting Purple Finch and Pine Siskin, the latter seen by Gary at his feeders.

Ken continues to get an American Tree Sparrow (seen at right) at his place, but earlier in the month there were still Song and White-crowned Sparrows being seen. Dark-eyed Juncos, some of which seem to stay the winter as long as there are feeders available, have been seen by some.

Many have seen the lovely Snow Buntings, at Sunset Park in the city and in the country in and around Lori's. Another bird migrating from the Arctic seen by some is the Lapland Longspur. Dick and Renee had close-up views of them at the Merrick Landfill site during the November Bird Bash.

Recently, Marc Buchanan and Renee had Common Grackles at their places, and Gary, a Red-winged Blackbird. Marc's Common Grackle was leucistic. And who besides Fred hasn't seen a European Starling in their attractive spotted winter coats!



Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches have been seen and, of course, the ever-present Black-capped Chickadee.

And finally the jays – the Blue Jays in numbers in some areas devouring all the feeder seed and the Gray Jays which seem to be more prominent in some areas during hunting season. To the right is Kaye's Blue Jay seemingly in need of comfort after the Evening Grosbeaks moved in and usurped it.



Birds Seen Outside Nipissing

Marc, who recently spent a week in Nevada, reported seeing two lifers, a Chukar and a Greater Roadrunner. The Chukar, introduced from Asia, looks like a large quail but with bright red legs and bill. It likes rocky, grassy or bushy slopes and arid mountain canyons. And who doesn't love the Roadrunner, made iconic by *The Bugs Bunny/ Roadrunner Hour* and later *The Bugs Bunny/Roadrunner Show*? Seems we all long to see one. However, we would have to go to the desert or chaparral country in southwestern United States or Mexico to see it. The Greater Roadrunner, a member of the cuckoo family, is a fast-running ground bird: "*Poor little Roadrunner never bothers anyone. Just running down the road is his idea of having fun.*" (If there is a greater, then there has to be a lesser, and there is indeed a Lesser Roadrunner, found primarily in Central America from Northern Mexico south to Nicaragua.) If you are not familiar with the Roadrunner song, or haven't heard it in sometime, listen to it on You Tube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwYQsZuh2CM>



Craig Hurst reported seeing Wild Turkeys and a Broad-winged Hawk at the side of the

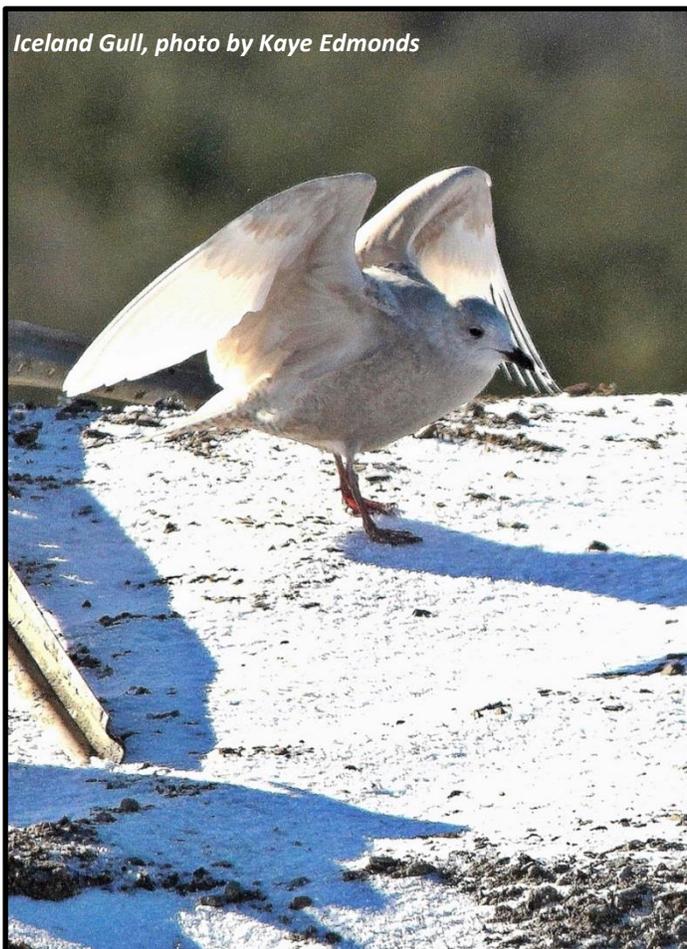


Photo by Donna McQuay

highway on his way back to North Bay from Niagara Falls. On a side trip to Minet Bay in Barrie, the hundreds of Common Loons, which had been present for days and reported daily on Ontbirds, were gone by the time Craig and Elaine got there and so they remained loonless. However, Renee's sister-in-law, who lives by Minet Bay, sent a photo of a Minet Bay loon, seen above, taken by her neighbor, Donna McQuay.

Paradise Found

Landfill sites are a migration winter paradise for gulls and Merrick Landfill Site in North Bay is no exception. On a cold Saturday morning on November 28, nine hardy birders set out for the landfill site to see what gulls and other birds they



Iceland Gull, photo by Kaye Edmonds



Glaucous Gull, photo by Craig Hurst

might find. In addition to some Ring-billed Gulls and hundreds of Herring Gulls, there were two Great Black-backed gulls, an adult and a juvenile, and at least one Iceland and one Glaucous Gull, both juveniles (photos above). The numbers are down from last year at this time, but perhaps migration was delayed because of the warmer weather during most of November. Even at the Niagara Falls Gull weekend, held the same weekend as our outing, there was not the number of gulls normally expected.

Other birds seen were two Snow Buntings, two Lapland Longspurs and about 15 Common Redpolls. These are in addition to one mysterious bird with a long rufous-coloured tail. Although some are leaning towards a Fox Sparrow, others point out that the bird's habits were not indicative of this sparrow and that a Fox Sparrow would be more likely to fly to the low bushes on the road nearby than to the top of the barren landfill site.

At least nine Bald Eagles (photo at right) were seen, juvenile and adult, and one of the workers informed us he counted up to 11 of them.

After almost two hours watching gulls and other birds at the landfill site, seven of the hardier birders headed for the Nipissing/Canadore trails to look for a Boreal Chickadee. It was very reminiscent of last year's November search for the Black-backed Woodpecker on Stillaway Line. Both ventures occurred after a trip to the landfill site and both ventures did not yield the bird we went looking for. There may be a moral to this story - I'm just not sure what it might be.



Photo by Kaye Edmonds

Birds of the Winter

Dick reported on birds we might expect to see this winter. Starting with the gulls, there may be more Glaucous and Iceland Gulls and perhaps, but just perhaps, a Lesser Black-backed and a Thayer's, although for reasons that will remain unsaid but known by some, the black-eyed Thayer's can pose identification problems. Herring Gulls will remain as long as there is open water. Ring-bills are getting to be fewer and fewer, but some are still around.

Bald Eagles will no doubt be seen all winter and Rough-legged Hawks should still be seen. Not many have yet been reported here.

Other winter birds include Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, Bohemian Waxwings, Pine Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls (at right) and Hoary Redpolls, Pine Siskins, Northern Shrike, Red and White-winged Crossbills, and the American Tree Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco which sometimes stay all winter in limited numbers. And we must not forget the owls - the Snowy Owl, the Barred Owl, and perhaps back again after a years' absence, the Northern Hawk Owl, last seen here in 2013.



Photo by Lisa Hackett

Treats for Birds

Kaye Edmonds, unlike many of us, makes her own bird feed. Below are a couple of recipes recommended by Kaye. These recipes are from *Mother Earth News* website and taken from the book, *Bird Food Recipes*, by Rhonda Massingham Hart. (Kaye's edible feeder is seen below.)

Fat and Sassy:

2 parts suet, lard, bacon drippings or saved kitchen fat
1 to 2 parts yellow cornmeal
Dash of sand
1 part fine cracked corn, mullet or hulled sunflower

Melt suet over low heat. Allow to cool and harden, then heat again. Stir in peanut butter and other ingredients, reserving some of the corn or seeds. Allow to cool somewhat and pour into molds or form into balls. Roll balls into loose corn or seed.

Hanging Heaven:

3 parts suet
1 part cornmeal
1 part peanut butter
1 part brown sugar
1 part raisins, dried cherries, etc.
1 part mixed seed or broken nuts
Sprinkling of sand
1 or more coconuts, split in half

Melt suet, allow to cool, then re-melt. Stir in other ingredients. Cook until the mixture is the consistency of porridge. If too thick, add small amounts of water or milk; if too thin, add flour. Pour into coconut halves. Hang coconut halves from tree limbs.

Kaye adds a touch of salt and some sand or eggshells to her bird food, but not usually until January or February when the weather gets cold. She doesn't add these ingredients all the time, maybe once or



Photo by Kaye Edmonds

twice a week depending on how harsh the weather has been and how long it has stayed cold and harsh.

Crushed eggshells provide calcium for the birds during the winter. However, the eggshells should first be washed and then baked in the oven in a shallow pan for 20 minutes at 250 degrees C. This eliminates harmful bacteria from domestic chickens. Eggshells can also be spread on your walkway for birds to nibble on throughout the winter.

Grit, like sand, is necessary to aid in digestion and many have probably seen smaller birds, like the American Goldfinch, getting their grit from between bricks of a house (see photo below). Like humans, birds digest some food more easily than other food.



Birds do not chew food as humans do. They swallow food whole, or if the food is too large to swallow all at once, they will use their bills to break it up. In some cases, they will beat the food against a rock or a branch to break it into pieces.

In the extreme cold weather, Kaye also adds blueberries that she picked in the summer and froze and a handful of dried cherries she buys at Bits and Bins.

Garden birds are poor at coping with salty food, so it is important not to offer them anything that has an appreciable amount of salt in it. Salty foods such as salty fats, salty peanuts, chips and processed food should not be offered. Small amounts of

salt are fine if fresh drinking water is also available. During our winter, birds can get their water from snow.

Once you start feeding birds, you should not stop feeding them during the winter. Once spring has come and insects and berries become available and the birds migrating further north have moved on, you can put your feeders away if you wish until the fall, when natural food is not as available.



As we all know from previous years, Ken seems to have an abundance of mice that he catches and freezes for owls and Northern Shrike. Not recommended for those with a mouse phobia!

Project FeederWatch

It is not too late to register for Project FeederWatch which began on November 14. If you are already a member of Bird Studies Canada, you don't need to do anything but register for Project FeederWatch. If you are not a member, you must join Bird Studies Canada at an annual fee of \$35.00. For more information, click on <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/>.

Book Recommendation

Dick highly recommends the book, *The Living Bird: 100 Years of Listening to Nature*, by Gerrit Vyn, Mountaineers Books, a book that marks the 100th anniversary of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The Living Bird explores the relationship between birds and people through over 250 images by wildlife photographer, Gerrit Vyn, and thought-provoking essays by some of the world's leading naturalists and bird enthusiasts. It is available on amazon.ca for \$36.44, with the following description:

Captured in terrain both exotic and familiar – the Yukon Delta, a woods in Arkansas, a remote village in Russia's Arctic, and even urban Seattle, Vyn's remarkable photographs illustrate nearly 100 North American bird species. The exhilaration of migratory Whooping Cranes, the fragility of the endangered Spoon-Billed Sandpiper, and the wide-eyed beauty of Great Horned Owls all come alive on the page. From enjoying backyard Black-capped Chickadees and Yellow Warblers, to wondering over a Pileated Woodpecker, or to admiring the powerful soar of a Gyrfalcon, The Living Bird educates and inspires.

The photographer, Gerrit Vyn, is a Seattle-based photographer committed to conservation. In his words: *My work often focuses on birds because they are such powerful and visible indicators of environmental health and change. Connecting people with birds is often a first step in opening people's eyes to the natural world around them – and to the unprecedented environmental crises now unfolding. My purpose is to help conservation groups better communicate their stories to individuals and policy makers through powerful, compelling media.*



Photo from amazon.ca

Bird Wing Meeting

There will be no meeting in December, but after the holidays be sure to attend the first meeting of the New Year, on **Tuesday, January 26, 2016, in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library, starting at 6:30 p.m.**

Bird Bash

The December Bird Bash takes place over a 24-hour period the weekend of **December 5 and 6**. (Also of note on December 5, from 10:00 a.m. to noon, Dick will be leading a walk through Laurier Woods, explaining its history. This is the last walk of the year marking the 25th anniversary of Laurier Woods Conservation Area.) **The January Bird Bash will take place over the weekend of January 16 and 17.**

Text: Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe

Photographs: Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicated.

**I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December
A magical thing
And sweet to remember.**

**“We are nearer to Spring
Than we were in September,”
I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December.**

- Oliver Herford