

BIRD WING OUTING
June 23, 2015

The first Bird Wing outing of the summer began on a clear, mild evening at Powassan Lagoon. The sun was low in the sky and cast a beautiful light on the verdant fields and grass surrounding the lagoon. In the lagoon cells, we had good views of a Spotted Sandpiper and a Killdeer, as well as five Wood Ducks, a Mallard family or two, and a couple of Canada Geese. Three types of swallows were catching insects over the lagoons - Tree, Barn and Bank (seen below). Jumping from post to post in a field by the upper lagoons was an Eastern Kingbird. Also seen were Savannah and Song Sparrows and Red-winged Blackbirds.



We then headed off to meet up with Gary Sturge who led us on a driving bird tour of Hwy. 534, Alsace Road, and Hemlock Road.

We saw two Eastern Bluebirds, the male and female, in a tree at the appropriately named Bluebird Farm, just up from Gary's on Hwy.534. We saw more Barn and Tree Swallows, as well as a Merlin, Mourning Doves, a Song Sparrow, a Purple Finch, an American Goldfinch, a couple of American Robins and a couple of Red-winged Blackbirds.

On Alsace Road, we heard, but did not see, the Eastern Wood-Pewee. We also heard a couple of Ovenbirds, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a Veery, a Common Yellowthroat and a Black-throated Blue Warbler (seen at right). Fred Pinto is particularly



adept at hearing and identifying bird songs. Dick Tafel's directional hearing may have been off somewhat, because he would have had us hear the Eastern Wood-Pewee on the other side of the road! However, it's certainly a possibility there was another Eastern Wood-Pewee.



On the way to Hemlock Road, we saw an Eastern Meadowlark near Munro Park and on Hemlock Road, we stopped to listen to a Pine Warbler and a Blackburnian Warbler (seen at left), after Gary rescued a painted turtle from the middle of the road.

After refusing to take us to Stillaway Line, perhaps because he does not want us to see the Black-backed Woodpecker he always sees there, Gary then left us. We made our own way to River Road in Chisholm Township with one purpose in mind – to hear or see Le Conte's Sparrow and the Yellow Rail. If, in addition, we saw or heard the Sedge Wrens, well, that would be a bonus!

On the way to River Road, we saw more Mourning Doves and a couple of Cedar Waxwings (see below). By the time we got to River Road, it was

chilly and the mosquitoes were out and biting. None of us was dressed for the chill, but Dick, who sported shorts, was definitely dressed for the mosquitoes!

But despite these hardships, we were rewarded with hearing a Le Conte's, perhaps two of them. Unfortunately, we didn't see it, unlike in July 2013, when the Bird Wing group on a similar outing got a brief glimpse of one, but not enough of a glimpse for Kaye Edmonds or Renee Levesque to get a good picture of it at that time. Le Conte's is a small, secretive, orange-faced sparrow found in wet grasslands and grassy meadows. According to *The Breeding Bird Atlas*, Le Conte's has been seen in five places within our Nipissing birding area, and has been seen by Fred near the West Arm of Lake Nipissing.

We did not get to hear or see the Yellow Rail, a bird



heard in our birding area only once in the past in the same area by Laura Chowns, Brent Turcotte, Fred and Dick, and subsequently by others once word got out. Fred and Renee did hear what possibly sounded like a Yellow Rail, but the call was not repeated during our half-hour stay on River Road, so we could not be sure. The Yellow Rail is also a small, secretive bird and, therefore, infrequently seen. It is the second smallest rail in North America and breeds in sedge marshes. (The smallest is the Black Rail, no bigger than a sparrow. Its largest North American population is found in Florida and California.)

This was Mary's first visit to River Road, so at least she got to hear the elusive Le Conte's song – not a pretty song, but a hissing grasshopper-like buzz. An evening to remember, Mary!

The Sedge Wren was not seen or heard during the outing, but the next evening, Renee returned to the scene and was delighted to get great views of three Sedge Wrens, one posing long enough on a branch of a bush beside the road for a picture or two (seen at right). She did not hear or see Le Conte's, but once again heard that strange tapping sound she and Fred heard the night before. Again, it did not repeat, so perhaps others who find themselves on River Road might want to see what they might find.



Breeding Bird Survey: Kevan Cowcill and Paul Smylie headed out at the crack of dawn on June 20 to conduct the annual Breeding Bird Survey along their route – Trout Pond Road, through East Ferris Township, to Callander. The Breeding Bird survey, initiated in 1966, is designed "to collect long-term

data on population states and trends of breeding birds" in North America. In Canada, the survey is conducted, under satisfactory weather conditions, between May 28 and July 7. It begins half an hour before sunrise, with three-minute stops every 0.8 km. or every half-mile. There are 50 stops in all and each stop is to be made in exactly the same location from year to year. Every bird one observer hears or sees within 400 metres at each stop is counted. Birds seen between stops or before or after the three minutes are not counted, but can be noted. Because the birds cannot be coaxed by recordings or *pishings* or by any other means, it is very important the observer know the songs and calls of all species expected to be found in the area surveyed. The observer must also be able to visually identify the species.

Paul and Kevan heard or saw approximately 57 species. Some of these included Cooper's Hawk; Black-billed Cuckoo; Alder Flycatcher; Blue-headed Vireo (see below) and Warbling Vireo; Cliff Swallow; Winter Wren; Hermit and Wood Thrushes; Brown Thrasher; Black-throated Blue and Green Warblers; Mourning Warbler; Blackburnian Warbler; Northern Parula; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Indigo Bunting; Bobolink; Eastern Meadowlark; and House Sparrow. For a complete list, contact Paul or Kevan.



The Black-billed Cuckoo was also heard by Dick on Trout Pond Road; seen by Renee on Cooks Mill Road off the north highway; and seen by Kaye on Algonquin Road in Chisholm Township (seen at right).

American Woodcock Singing Ground Survey: The American Woodcock Singing Ground Survey is conducted each year between April 20 and May 20. It is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program, delivered in Ontario by Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. The format of this survey is very similar to the Nocturnal Owl Survey.



On May 17, Gary and Connie Sturge did their survey along Hwy. 534. Depending on the cloud cover, the survey is to start either 15 or 22 minutes after the official sunset because the woodcocks need some darkness to begin their mating call and aerial dance. There are 10

stations, 600 metres apart, along the route. At each station, each Woodcock heard over a two-minute interval is noted. To get to the next station requires great mobility because you have to jump in your car and get to the next station, 600 metres away, in the space of a minute, plus or minus. All 10 stations must be completed within 38 minutes. Gary and Connie beat the 38 minutes by miraculously completing the 10 stations in 31 minutes!!



For the first eight stations, Gary and Connie heard not a *peent*, but then at the ninth and tenth stations, things looked up and they heard three *peents*! Gary reports it was a noisy outing – too many other birds singing, lots of peepers, several cars, an ATV, and someone using a chainsaw. (A chainsaw at that time of the night and in the dark??)

Again, if you are interested in conducting this survey next year, please contact Kathy Jones, Ontario Volunteer Coordinator, Bird Studies Canada. Her email address is volunteer@birdscanada.org, and her telephone number is 1-888-448-2473, ex. 124.

The Marsh Monitoring Program: Further to May's newsletter, Craig and Elaine Hurst continue with their marsh monitoring at two locations within Laurier Woods. They have completed their two required marsh bird surveys and two of the three required amphibian surveys. Craig reports the Virginia Rail responded to their calls from the new boardwalk and he and Elaine thought they heard a Least Bittern, but were not 100% certain. They also noted a Canada Goose family in Arum Pond (see next page).



With respect to amphibians, Craig reports a normal occurrence of early frogs, Spring Peepers and Grey Tree Frogs. Craig hopes to see a greater variety of frogs on his and Elaine's final visit.



Other Birds Seen During June: Many other birds than those listed under the above topics were seen during the month of June. Dick noted many of them and their spotters in his June Bird Bash report.

Some interesting sightings not already noted above or during the Bird Bash:

- Vesper Sparrow - seen south of Rutherglen;
- Northern Waterthrush - seen on Oak Ridge Road off Hwy 11 North (see photo above);
- Rusty Blackbirds - seen on Cooks Mill Road;
- Common Nighthawks - seen at Circle Lake Park;
- American Bittern - near Lavigne, in Magnetewan, and on Widdifield Station Road;
- Green Heron - Renee had one recently by her yard, sitting in a bare tree;
- Red-tailed Hawk;
- Spruce Grouse - seen on the Merrick Quarry Road off the North Highway;

Wilson's Snipe -
seen in West
Nipissing;
Barred Owl - seen
in Mattawa ;
House Wren ;
Scarlet Tanager -
seen near Hemlock
Road (see photo at
right);
Swainson's Thrush;
Canada Warbler -
seen on the trail at
the end of Johnson
Road ;
Hooded Merganser
- near Lavigne;
Whip-poor-wills -
seen at Dreany Lake;
Common Nighthawks - Circle Lake Park;
Baltimore Oriole - Rainville Road (see photo below).



By now eggs have hatched and fledglings have left their nest.

In May's newsletter were Kaye's photos of the female American Redstart sitting in her nest and a photo of the eggs in the Redstart's nest. Now, in Kaye's photo below, are baby American Redstarts.



European Starlings with their young abound and young American Robins sport their spotted chests.

By early July, most Common Loon chicks will have hatched. These chicks can be difficult to see and are vulnerable to predation by gulls and ravens, especially if separated from their parents. Separation can happen when boaters approach too closely, so **if you boat and see loons or other water birds, slow down and keep clear.**

The American Kestrel babies are crying for food in Matt Walter's wonderful photo below.



Chipping Sparrow: Bird Studies Canada featured the Chipping Sparrow in its BirdWatch Canada Fall 2014 magazine. By now many have seen the little Chipping Sparrow with its chestnut cap, white eyebrow and black eyeline. Its preferred habitat is open forest and forest edges, but they have adapted well to city parks and backyards. The nesting season runs from early May through July. Usually four eggs are laid and two broods are often raised each year. Nests can be found in many varieties of trees and shrubs, but especially in coniferous species.



BirdWatch reports that according to Breeding Bird Survey results, the Chipping Sparrow population has been declining slowly but steadily since 1970, at an average annual rate of about 0.7%, a cumulative loss of about 25% over the past four decades.

Canada Warbler: With Canada Day just celebrated, it is fitting to highlight the Canada Warbler, a warbler federally recognized as a Threatened species in Canada. More than 80% of the global population breeds in Canada, with the range extending from the southeastern tip of Yukon to the Maritimes. The highest population densities are in New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario.

Since 1970, about 75% of the Canada Warbler population has disappeared. In our area, one was seen by Lori Anderson and Matt in Laurier Woods, and one seen by Dick on the trail at the end of Johnson Road. The Canada Warbler prefers a cool, damp and dense mixed deciduous-coniferous forest and because of its habitat preference, it is a song bird more often heard than seen.

A young Canada Warbler made Irish birding history on October 9, 2006, when it appeared in a sycamore tree in Kilbaha, Ireland. Over 500 birders travelled to the area, some by chartered flight, just to catch a glimpse of the colourful Canadian bird with a necklace!

Bird Bash: The next Bird Bash is over a 24-hour period **July 25 and 26.**

Bird Wing: The next Bird Wing outing is on **Tuesday, July 28.** Meet at the Visitors' Centre at **6:30 PM.** Location of outing is yet to be determined. Perhaps to West Nipissing to save the Sturgeon birders a trip into North Bay?

Text: Renee Levesque

Photos: Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicated on photo

In honour of Canada Day:

