

BIRD WING FIELD OUTING

May 26, 2015

Field Outing: It was to Laurier Woods we went for the first field outing of the season to look and listen for wood warblers in particular.

The most common warbler that evening was the male and female American Redstart. We saw a Redstart nest in the crook of a young tree not far off the ground. Kaye Edmonds was fortunate to get a wonderful picture of the female sitting in her nest (see below) and later an equally wonderful picture of the eggs when the female left the nest for a few minutes.



Other warblers seen or heard were the Chestnut-sided, Yellow-rumped, Yellow, Black and White and the Ovenbird.

We had hoped to see the Canada Warbler which was seen at Laurier Woods by Matt Walter and Lori Anderson during their Birdathon on Saturday, May 23, but it was not to be. Nor was the Blackpoll seen. It too had been seen on May 23 by Brent Turcotte.

Vireos seen or heard were the Warbling and the Red-eyed.

Thrushes seen were the American Robin and the Veery (seen at right).

The Catbird (top of next page) was heard in a couple of places, as was the drumming of the Ruffed Grouse.





Sparrows seen were the Swamp and the Savannah, the latter by Ray Walter and by some of us as a result of the photo Ray managed to get.

The one marsh bird seen was the elusive Virginia Rail which paid us a very quick visit long enough for Kaye to get a picture of its eye and Renee Levesque to get a picture of its tail. But Matt got the whole bird, (seen at right) not during the outing, but during the Birdathon.



As usual, Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds abounded. But the most exciting event of the evening for some of us was witnessing a murder in the woods – a murder of crows, that is – very upset at something. (see below) Matt scurried over the rocks and through the woods to try to find out what the fuss was about, but despite his agility, he was not able to keep up with the crows.



After running into Craig and Elaine Hurst and dog on their way to monitor the marsh for amphibians, we headed to Main Street West near the courthouse to witness the yearly spectacular descent of Chimney Swifts down their namesake, the chimney. Although some swifts were seen circling, unfortunately none descended. Either we were too late and missed the descent or the swifts had already dispersed to nest. Dick, Renee, Matt and Lori witnessed at least 500 Chimney Swifts perform their balletic descent on May 23, from 9:03 to 9:07 pm.

We felt bad that the Sturgeon birders, Therez Violette and Monique Beuparlant, did not get to see the Chimney Swifts, especially because after the April Bird Wing meeting, when we went to Cedar Heights Road to see the American Woodcock put on its aerial display, it too decided not to perform for us and Therez and Monique had to return all the way home "empty handed".

Ontario Field Ornithologist (OFO) Certificate of Appreciation: North Bay Hydro was recognized in 2014 by the OFO for its "exceptional effort to protect a pair of Osprey that had nested on a hydro pole." When the Osprey built their nest on a pole with a broken insulator and a dangling wire, Hydro re-routed the electricity line to allow the Osprey to remain in their nest. At a Rotary Club meeting in January 2015, Dick presented the certificate to Todd Wilcox, President and Chief Operating Officer of North Bay Hydro, who accepted it on behalf of the utility. Photo of this event can be seen under the heading *Happy Toonies* in January's *RotaryLODE*:

http://www.clubrunner.ca/Data/7010/214/HTML/234093/RotaryLODE_Jan122015.pdf

Last year, most of us saw the Osprey in their nest on the pole at the Lakeshore Exit off Hwy. 11, and this year we are pleased to see the Osprey have returned. Is it the same pair who used to nest until last year at the nearby concrete plant? In April, Renee saw a pair sitting side-by-side at the old nest at the concrete plant. Was it the hydro pole couple visiting their old home, but making the decision to return to the hydro pole, the concrete nest being too messy even for an Osprey?



Surprising Finds: May brought four surprising finds. The first great find was a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher seen by Brent and his wife, Laura. They were at Sunset Park with their children on May 18 when Brent spotted a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. He was able to get a photo, not a great one, but one that confirmed the sighting. It was also seen by Dave Radcliff, who also got a photo. Brent reports that the only other record for this species in our area was in 1988 when one was seen about 9 km. north of Kiosk. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers do not hang around for long, so no wonder it was not seen subsequently. Former Bird Winger, Mark Olivier, saw one in Algoma near Sault Ste. Marie in the fall of 2014 (see below).



The second great find was an American Avocet (see below) seen at Verner Lagoon by Dick and Renee on May 20, and subsequently seen by Therez, Lori and Matt. Unlike the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, which tends not to hang around, the American Avocet stayed put with the Mallards at Verner Lagoon for others to see. Mike Burrell reported that this is the first record of the American Avocet in Nipissing District. Also seen on May 20 by Dick and Renee, and later others, was the Horned Grebe in its brilliant breeding plumage, the third surprising find.



And the fourth find was a flock of between 40 and 50 Short-billed Dowitchers seen by Dick, Lori and Renee at the Callander Lagoon on May 16. (see below) Initially it was thought that maybe 4 or 5 could be Long-billed, but Jean Iron and Mike Burrell confirmed all to be Short-billed and Jean informed Dick they were of the hendersoni subspecies, the most common species in Ontario, suggestive of the Long-billed. You can check out the Long and Short-billed Dowitchers on Jean's shorebird website: <http://jeaniron.ca/Shorebirds/2009/dowitcherid.htm>



Great Canadian Birdathon: Dick, Lori and Matt began their Birdathon in the wee hours of Saturday morning, May 23, picking up Renee at noon. After 18 gruelling but fun-filled hours covering some 350 km., the final count was 103 birds, 2 of which were heard. For his efforts, Dick raised over \$2,000.00 in pledges. Some birds seen were: Bonaparte Gulls, Caspian and Common Terns, and practically all the ducks that can be seen in our area - Gadwall; Wood; Green and Blue-winged Teal; American Wigeon; Northern Shoveler; Ring-necked; Common Merganser; Common Goldeneye; Lesser Scaup; Redhead; and, of course, the ever-present Mallard. Surprisingly, they saw no Black Ducks.

Other birds of the water were the Common Loon, the American Coot (seen at right), and hundreds of Double-crested Cormorants.



Shore birds included Dunlin, Lesser Yellowlegs (see below), Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers, and the aforementioned American Avocet still at the Verner Lagoon on the day of the Birdathon.



A small flock of American Pipits was seen along the Nipissing shore, a special sighting as these little birds breed further north and are seen only during their spring and fall migrations.

Marsh birds seen were the shy Virginia Rail, a compact bird with a long slightly curved red bill, at Laurier Woods, and the Sora, another small shy marsh bird with a short yellow bill and short tail often held upright showing white underneath, at Warren Lagoon.

Swallows seen were the Tree, Bank, Cliff and Barn. Unlike last year, the Rough-winged were not seen. It was too windy of a day for the swallows to sit nicely in a row on the wire over the Veuve River by Rainville Road. However, that area delighted the birders with couple of brilliant Baltimore Orioles, topping off the handsome male Indigo Bunting (below) that had just been seen on Leclair Road.



Species spotted that are not often seen in Nipissing were the House Wren and the House Sparrow. The latter is known as a common, dirty-looking city bird in Southern cities, but here they are not easy to find and when you do, they look prettier than the city House Sparrows.

In West Nipissing at the lagoons and by the agricultural fields were the Bobolink (below) and the Eastern Meadowlark.



Six species of sparrows were seen: Song, White-throated, Chipping, Swamp, Savannah, and White-crowned. Some White-crowns were still around then before making their way further north to breed, but by the time you read this newsletter, they will be gone, not seen again until their migration south in the fall. (Although Renee once had one in her yard in July.)

Woodpeckers seen included all the regulars: Hairy, Downy, Pileated, Northern Flicker, as well as the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Obviously the birdathoners did not get to Stillaway Line or they would surely have seen another woodpecker, the Black-backed!



Two Brown Thrashers (one at left) with their heavy bills and yellow eyes giving them a severe expression were seen, but the birdathoners were not honoured with the Thrasher's exuberant song. Brown Thrashers are mimics, like Catbirds, but they

have a vast repertoire of over 1,100 song types.

If sometimes you think you hear the Northern Cardinal with its *birdy, birdy, birdy*, it could be the Brown Thrasher.

Many warblers were seen, especially at Jocko Point and Laurier Woods, including among many others the Wilson's, Tennessee, Pine, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Blue, the especially beautiful Blackburnian and the necklaced Canada Warbler which is on the Threatened list. Trying to see and identify all the warblers especially at Jocko Point where they were together in the one area, presented a bit of a challenge even with four pairs of eyes. Also hard on the neck! Surprisingly not seen during the 18 hours was the Magnolia Warbler.

Flycatchers seen were Least, Great-crested (seen at right) and Eastern Phoebe.

Pine Siskins and American Goldfinch were seen.

Birds of prey seen were Turkey Vultures; Osprey; Bald Eagle; Sharp-shinned Hawk; Northern Harrier; and American Kestrel, although only two of these were seen after the influx of Kestrels last month. The Bald Eagle was seen at Jocko Point. Renee noticed it first, but thought it was a nest. Lori agreed until something white in this "nest" moved and both women cried out at the same time, "It's a Bald Eagle!"

Sandhills Cranes, about 20 of them, were seen in a field off Levac Road in West Nipissing, thanks to the young eagle eyes of Matt.



Other birds seen before 9:00 pm were the Gray Catbird; the Rose-breasted Grosbeak (below); the Warbling Vireo; the Red-eyed Vireo; and the Veery. And it just would not do to not mention the regulars: Rock Pigeon; American Robin; Black-capped Chickadee; Canada Goose; Blue Jay; Common Grackle; Red-winged Blackbird; European Starling; American Crow; Common Raven; Herring and Ring-billed Gulls.



As night fell, the birders were off to hear the nocturnal birds. They made it from Cache Bay to Main Street West in North Bay just in time to watch the 500 or so Chimney Swifts call it a night and descend in such wonderful order down the one chimney to sleep clinging to its inside wall. The birders almost pledged to get up in time to see the Swifts leave the chimney at the crack of dawn, but were realistic enough to know that would be a hard slog after an 18-hour day of birding.

A late supper and then off to Dreany Lake to listen for the Whip-poor-wills. But after two slow circles around the trailer camp ground, they heard not a thing but frogs. It was too windy a night for the Whip-poor-wills to honour them with their song, a song many of us once took for granted during a spring and summer night.

None of the nocturnal species made their presence known, not the American Woodcock, the Nighthawk, nor any owls.

The quartet missed the competitive aspect of the Birdathon this year and could not take the same gloating pleasure they did last year when they narrowly beat Fred Pinto and Marc Buchanan. Last year it was spotting a Great Blue Heron (below) and hearing the Whip-poor-wills and the American Woodcock at the very last minutes of the competition that did the trick. This year, a few Great Blue Herons were seen, none of them at the last minute!



Fred also raised money for Bird Studies Canada, 25 percent of which, like Dick's, will go to Laurier Woods to eventually be put towards a National Heritage Plaque to be erected at Pimisi Bay to honour naturalist Louise de Kiriline Lawrence.

Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program: On May 27, Renee received an email from Kathy Jones, Ontario Programs Volunteer Coordinator, Bird Studies Canada, stating there is still time

to survey marsh birds this year, although not amphibians. Marsh birds in our area include the Sora (below), the Virginia Rail, the Pied-billed Grebe, the Least Bittern, the American Coot and the Common Gallinule.



It is Kathy's opinion that there may be a number of small marshes and sedge meadows in the area and anyone of them could be surveyed. The online wetland inventories do not cover our area well, if at all, and so Kathy suggests that anyone who is interested should review the BSC fact sheet on establishing a marsh and then take a road trip in the area to see what is available.

If interested in helping with this survey, Kathy suggests you review the existing routes at <https://www.google.com/fusiontables/DataSource?snapid=S1580908GtVJ> to ensure you are not taking an area already taken. Kathy suggests that some areas that may be worth exploring for marshes are off the Kate Pace Trail and the Cranberry Trail.

Keep in mind that marshes are okay to survey, but not swamps or bogs. You can check out marshes in the area at http://www.nbmca.on.ca/site/docs/NBMCA%20Integrated%20Watershed%20Management%20Strategy%20-%20DRAFT_Web.pdf, but keep in mind they do not have to be provincially significant marshes. They can be any marsh.

Bird marsh surveying begins in June, so if interested, please contact Kathy at volunteer@birdscanada.org. And if it is too late for you to get organized this year, you can still look for a marsh so you can be all set for next year.

Also, don't forget that if you live on or near a lake, you can volunteer for the **Loon Survey**. See April's summary for details or contact Kathy Jones.

Carden Alvar: If you want to see the many different species of birds at the Carden Alvar (below), near Orillia, and aren't able to get to the Carden Nature Festival on June 6, consider going with the Nipissing Naturalist Club on **Saturday, June 13**. This will be an all day trip, leaving from the Visitors' Centre at 7:00 am. Carpooling will be the means of transportation.



Bird Bash: June's Bird Bash will take place over a 24-hour period on the **weekend of June 20 and 21**. Be sure to get your results to Dick by the evening of June 22.

Bird Wing: The next Bird Wing field outing is on **Tuesday, June 23**. As yet, the destination is unknown, but Dick will let you know in time and if not – well, it will be a pleasant surprise. Meet at the **Visitors' Centre at 6:30 pm**.

Text: Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe

Photos: Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicated

**My favourite weather is bird chirping weather.
Terri Guillemets**

