

BIRD WING MEETING

January 27, 2015

The beginning of a new year and time again for birders to make a resolution be it to enter sightings on eBird; to take part in Project FeederWatch or the Great Backyard Bird Count; to find a Black-backed Woodpecker or some other species not normally seen; or to compete with others or oneself to see as many species as possible in our area, in the province or world-wide.

Birds Seen Recently: Despite the cold of January, those attending the first Bird Wing meeting of the New Year saw a number of different species during January.

These include, perhaps first and foremost, the magnificent Snowy Owl (seen below). Two male adults and one female or juvenile were seen in Calvin Township and Lori Anderson saw one in her yard even as she departed for the Bird Wing meeting.



Common Redpolls abound this winter, with a couple of people seeing the much whiter Hoary Redpoll. Black-capped Chickadees also abound, with a number of Pine Grosbeaks, male and female, also being seen. Evening Grosbeaks are also making an appearance, as are the handsome Bohemian Waxwings (seen below), some usually seen in our area every winter, feeding off the various berry trees or sitting motionless atop a tree after a good berry feed. So far this winter, they have been located in Thibeault Terrace and Pinewood subdivisions. They were seen by Nicole Richardson on Norwood Avenue during the Christmas Bird Count.



Nicole
Richardson

Rarer winter visitors are the White-throated Sparrow, one at Lori's place and two at Kaye Edmonds'; two Dark-eyed Juncos in Matt Walter's yard in Thibeault Terrace; a Lapland Longspur (see top of next page) seen with a group of Snow Buntings at Lori's, although not in recent weeks. Lori reports the number of Snow Buntings she usually gets is down despite her scatterings of cracked corn.

All three woodpeckers are being seen, the Downy, the Hairy and the Pileated, although not many Downy Woodpeckers. The two nuthatches, the Red-breasted and the White-breasted, are also being seen.

Although the American Crow has been staying here for the winter for many years now, more are being seen in recent years. The Common Raven continues to soar in the outlying areas and the Blue Jay is certainly not a fair weather friend, with up to ten being seen at some feeders. Gray Jays are not being seen as frequently as they once were, but a couple has been seen near Renee Levesque's.

Lori Anderson



The Northern Shrike seems to be present in more numbers than previous years. One was sighted in town in the McIntyre Street West area. Could this be because the Northern Shrike follows flocks of Common Redpolls, much in evidence this winter?

Not many Ruffed Grouse are being seen. However, Matt is pretty sure he saw a Spruce Grouse in a boggy area of the woods behind Thibeault Terrace.

Mourning Doves are at Gary and Connie Sturge's feeder and great masses of European Starlings are being seen in Pinewood subdivision.

Gary and Connie also report seeing a Cooper's Hawk near their home and a Northern Goshawk on Hemlock/Hummel Road.

Many Mallards and a few Black Ducks are at the water treatment plant on Memorial Drive. Dick Tafel and Marc Buchanan saw a Common Goldeneye on the Amable du Fond River during January's Bird Bash and Common Mergansers and one or possibly two Common Loons were seen during the Christmas Bird Count.

Project FeederWatch: For those who aren't involved in Project FeederWatch, it is still not too late to register for this worthwhile Citizen-Science project. **You have only until the end of February to register and if you do, you will automatically be signed up for next winter too. This means new members will have 2.5 months left to participate for the rest of the 2014-2015 season which ends on April 3, 2015, in addition to participating for the entire 2015-16 season** – and this all for the single season rate of \$35.00 payable to Bird Studies Canada. To register and become a member of Bird Studies Canada, go to: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/shopping/membership.jsp?lang=EN> .

Great Backyard Bird Count: This annual count runs for four days, from February 13 to 16, over the Family Day weekend. You can register for this event by using your existing login name and password.

However, if you have never participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) or any other citizen-science project through Bird Studies Canada, you will need to create a new account.

This is the 18th annual GBBC, with more than 100 countries and tens of thousands of volunteers expected to participate in this free activity in support of bird conservation. All you have to do is count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days during the four days of this event. You can count birds in as many places as you like and on as many of the four days as you like. **A separate checklist should be submitted for each new day, for each new location or for the same location if you counted at a different time of day. Count the number of individuals of each species you saw during your count period.**

You then enter your results on the GBBC website (see website link in next paragraph) by clicking “Submit Observations” on the home page and following the instructions. **If you already participate in eBird, you are to use eBird to submit your sightings during the GBBC. Your checklists will be counted toward the GBBC.**

*“The GBBC provides a great opportunity to learn more about birds and connect with nature, and is an ideal way for more experienced birders to introduce friends and family to the wonderful world of birding. **Visit the GBBC website** to explore the species seen in your community, region, or country. You can make a difference for birds by counting the birds in your neighbourhood. Join in the Great Backyard Bird Count. For more information, email Canadian GBBC Coordinator Kerrie Wilcox at gbbc@birdscanada.org. The GBBC is a joint project of Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada.”*

Some interesting statistics from last year’s GBBC:

The top ten species appearing on most checklists in descending order were: Northern Cardinal (seen below); Dark-eyed Junco; Mourning Dove; Blue Jay; Downy Woodpecker; American Goldfinch; American Crow; House Finch; Tufted Titmouse; and House Sparrow.



The top ten most numerous birds reported in descending order were: Red-winged Blackbird (seen below) at 1,609,037; Snow Goose at 1,280,829; Canada Goose at 1,163,527; European Starling at 596,450; Mallard at 542,516; Ring-billed Gull at 466,536; Dark-eyed Junco at 456,627; American Coot at 454,169; American Crow at 371, 813; and American Goldfinch at 371,039.

Worldwide, India reported the highest number of bird species at 819. Indian states made up 60% of the **top ten states and provinces reporting the most species**. In the United States, California and Texas were the only states to make the top ten list of the most species reported, with California reporting 448 species and Texas, 412. The only other states/provinces to make the list were one in Costa Rica and one in Australia. The rest were from India.



Of the top ten countries submitting checklists, United States was first with 124,310, followed by Canada with 13,458. Within the United States and Canada, California submitted the most checklists, followed in descending order by New York, Pennsylvania, Ontario, Florida, Texas, Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina and Michigan. Ontario was the only Canadian province to make the top ten list.



And because of the influx of Snowy Owls last winter, GBBC had a separate list for **Snowy Owl reportings** during the GBBC. Ontario was first in that top ten list with 234 checklists submitted and 366 sightings. The only other province to make the list was Quebec at number 6, with 71 checklists submitted and 116 sightings. All the other sightings in the top ten list were from the United States. In total, 1,600 Snowy Owls were reported as far south and as far west as Kansas. When Renee was recently in Florida, she met a birder, Roger Newell, who twice drove from

his home in southern Florida to Jacksonville in northern Florida, a distance of 236 miles, to see the Snowy Owl which had been reported there. He was not successful in seeing it during his first visit, but like most birders, he persevered and drove those many miles again and was successful his second time. **(The photo above of the Snowy Owl in the Florida sand is Roger's).**

Christmas Bird Count: The 35th Christmas Bird Count in North Bay took place on December 14, 2014, with Lori Anderson doing a remarkable job as our new compiler, along with her assistant compiler, Ken Gowing. There were 18 field observers walking and driving the seven routes within 15 miles of North Bay. In addition, there were 10 feeder counters. Lori reported an average count of 34 species, with 2,835 birds. No previous records were broken, but the 6 Bald Eagles and the 2 Song Sparrows seen matched the record in previous years. The number of Downy Woodpeckers and American Goldfinch seen were low, down from previous years, but there was a higher than normal count of Mallards, Pileated Woodpeckers and Common Redpolls. The most numerous bird was the Black-capped Chickadee.

One bird that was not counted but seen by Dick and Renee at a home on Trout Lake was the Polish Chicken. After much debate among the field observers, it was decided that despite it being a European breed known for its beautiful large silver comb, it is still a chicken and not a rare wild bird that made its way from Poland to the shores of Trout Lake.

After a day in the field counting birds, everyone all gathered at Dick and Elsa's for a wonderful evening of food and laughter. Elsa deserves special thanks for organizing the food and putting up with us and our birding ways!

The Great Loon Rescue: Craig and Elaine Hurst, two of the field observers during the Christmas Bird Count, helped rescue a Common Loon the day before the count. As Craig tells it, they received a call from Monica Habel of Redbridge that a Common Loon was stranded in a snow drift behind the Toy Doctor, a Redbridge business on Hwy. 63 owned by Mark Jasmin, a neighbour of Monica. Mark and his wife, Lisa, and their son, Jordan, have their residence there as well.

With a fish net, blanket and a plastic tub, Craig and Elaine headed out to help in the rescue, not certain how successful they would be at capturing the Loon and returning it to that part of Trout Lake not yet frozen. Already Monica had had to make quick retreats (see picture below) when the Loon decided that attack was the best form of defense. As Craig puts it, "Loons are big birds with very large beaks."



When Craig and Elaine arrived, Craig kept the Loon's attention while Monica lunged from behind to get the fish net over the bird. Once she successfully had done so, she and Craig transferred the Loon from under the net into the plastic tub, not an easy feat by any stretch of the imagination. But somehow they

succeeded. With darkness approaching, they headed to the open shoreline behind the Green Store on Hwy. 63 in North Bay. They managed to slide the bird into the water and once in the water, the Loon dove and swam repeatedly. As the rescuers were leaving, feeling thankful that the Loon was back where it belonged, "it raised itself up and flapped its wings, as if to say thank you."

The next morning, the Loon was still in the same stretch of open water, but was not there later in the day. For the Christmas Bird Count, Craig and Elaine were able to add their rescued Loon to their count. Dick and Renee also saw a Common Loon, but in a different location on Trout Lake from the area Craig and Elaine saw theirs. Was it the same rescued Common Loon or a different one?

A great deal of thanks from all bird lovers to Craig and Elaine and the Jasmin family, and especially to Monica who was determined that somehow she could rescue and save our beloved provincial bird.

Hilliardton Marsh Social 2014: On November 7, Lori and Ken attended Hilliardton Marsh's first annual Social, formerly called the Annual General Meeting, at the New Liskeard Golf Club. The guest speaker was Rick Ludkin of the Canadian Snow Bunting Network. It was to hear Rick that Lori attended because she is, after all, our resident Snow Bunting lady, forever throwing crack corn around her farmland in the winter to attract these birds which work together in large flocks throughout our winters in search for food. (In summer on their tundra breeding grounds, they eat more insects and spiders.)



Lori informed us that Rick is of the opinion that perhaps the Snow Bunting population has not declined in the United States as is thought. It may be that Snow Buntings are just not migrating as far south in the fall as they once did. Geolocators have been placed on the backs of some Snow Buntings to help determine migration routes and it would appear that Snow Buntings do not take a straight north south route, but rather a circular one.

Winter monitoring is the best way to determine numbers and migration routes, but the problem with this is that there are not many who want to stand out in the cold to band Snow Buntings. That is certainly not the case in New Liskeard where banding is done throughout the winter by Bruce Murphy, his partner, Joanne Goddard, and her Kerns Public School students. New Liskeard is the most northern

banding location in Ontario and during the 2012-13 season, 1700 Snow Buntings were banded there, 900 by the Kerns Public School students.



This season may not see as many Snow Buntings banded because by mid-January only small flocks of 60 to 200 birds had been attracted to the two sites, Dawson Point and Kerns Public School. Bruce reports bird numbers are picking up, but because a Northern Shrike is on stake-out at one of the sites, the cages with food inside them that are used to trap the Snow Buntings for banding purposes cannot be set out. The many sunny days we have had this winter also impacts on the numbers. When it is sunny, Snow Buntings seem to find food elsewhere than in the cages. Bruce reports that they hope to band during the March break. If they do, it might be worth a trip to New Liskeard to watch the process.

Aluminum bands are generally used to band Snow Buntings, but some, like Bruce, use colour-coded bands. These colour-coded bands are more easily seen when observing a flock in the snow. The aluminum bands can be very hard to see and read against the snow.

Snow Buntings keep warm at night by digging into the snow to provide a snow covering. However, there are times when the snow covering becomes frozen, trapping the Snow Buntings in the snow holes they dug.

National Bird: Because we seem to be the only country in the world without a national bird, The Royal Canadian Geographical Society is sponsoring a National Bird Project, recently launched by *Canadian Geographic*, to designate an official bird for Canada by 2017, our sesquicentennial. You can vote for your favourite species at <http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/nationalbird/>.

As of the writing of this report, the top five birds in descending order are: Common Loon; Snowy Owl; Gray Jay; Canada Goose; Black-capped Chickadee. Please take the time to vote. At our meeting, Dick and Renee favoured the Snowy Owl and Nicole favoured the Gray Jay. Both parties had compelling reasons, although on the top five list only the Gray Jay and the Canada Goose are not provincial birds. The Common Loon is Ontario's provincial bird; the Snowy owl is Quebec's; and the Black-capped Chickadee is New Brunswick's. What would happen to their provincial status if they won? And is it fair to have one province's bird as our national bird? Check out all the provincial and territorial birds at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Canadian_provincial_and_territorial_symbols

You should also consider this: is the bird you vote for present at some time during the year in all provinces and territories? Many think the Canada Goose is a good choice because it has the word Canada in it, but it is hunted in some States and it does make a mess in our city parks. The Gray Jay (at right) may be a good choice because it is not a provincial bird already; is found in all provinces and territories; does not migrate; is smart and friendly; and is called by some, the Canada Jay, as it should be called because its Latin name is *Perisoreus canadensis*. One of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence's favourite birds was the Canada Jay. She writes in The Lovely and the Wild, "*It has a lovely plushy way of moving, a bright curiosity in its brown eyes, and it commands a wide variety of soft notes with which it advertises its whereabouts and its moods.*" On the other hand, although a very cute bird with some great qualities, it doesn't look majestic like the Snowy Owl.



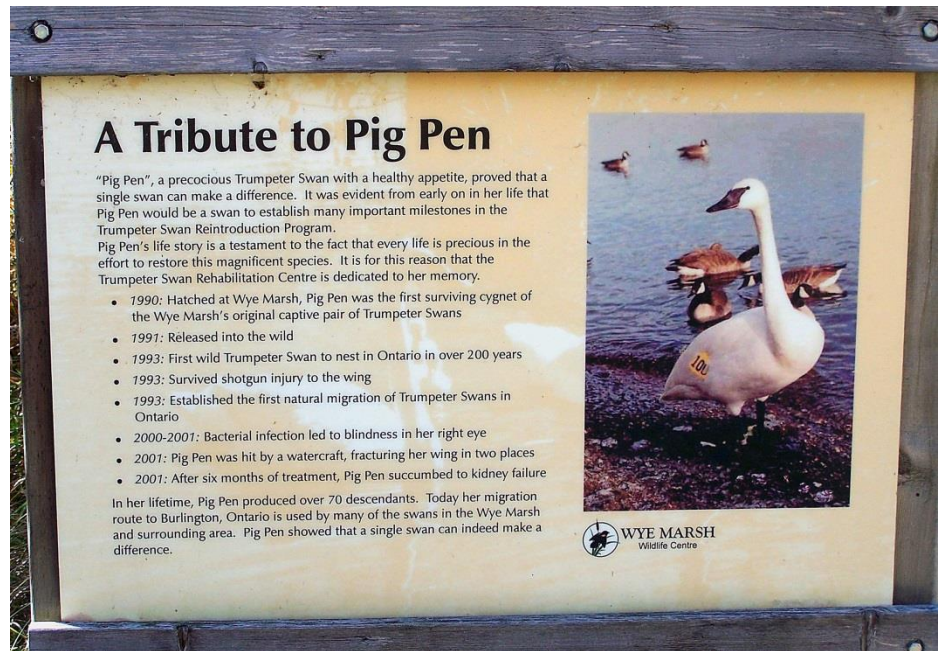
Trumpeter Swan Survey 2015: The North American Trumpeter Swan Survey was first conducted in 1968 and since 1975 is completed every 5 years. The information collected is used to assess and track population status, to evaluate restoration efforts and to develop conservation and management plans. This year in Ontario, the survey was completed on January 31. Winter is an ideal time to survey because swans concentrate where there is open water and accessible food. It is conducted during a short period of time to minimize the possibility that the swans will move and be counted elsewhere.



In our area, there is not much open water, so not many Trumpeter Swans can be found at this time of year. Apparently there may be two in Magnetewan and two in Restoule. The results are not yet available, but Dick reports that he saw none in Restoule while he was there on January 31.

Records show that the number of Trumpeter Swans in North America has risen since the survey began, from 3,722 in 1968 to 46,225 when the survey was last conducted in 2010. In Ontario, biologist Harry Lumsden began a reintroduction program in the early 1980s at Wye Marsh near Midland. For more information on Ontario's Trumpeter Swans, see

<http://www.wyemarth.com/swans>. If you have never been to Wye Marsh, consider a trip there sometime this year. See above, but you will need to zoom in to read.



Window Decals: A reminder if you haven't bought window decals yet, they are available locally at Laporte's on Lakeshore Drive. Consider getting some prior to spring migration when there are bound to be window collisions. And while at Laporte's this spring, keep an eye out for birds visiting their feeders.

eBird: Mike Burrell's talk in November on the importance of entering our sightings on eBird resulted in some new eBirders, like Doug Patterson who now enters his sightings regularly and finds the data and information available on eBird interesting and fascinating. Doug even uploads photos onto eBird now. Because many species that are not necessarily rare in our area still come up as rare, it is important more birders enter their sightings so that one day what the eBird program considers rare for our area will no longer be considered so. Another new eBirder for our area is Matt Walter. Matt has two Dark-eyed Juncos daily at his feeders (male seen below) and many Bohemians Waxwings in his area.



**Matt
Walter**

Weather Network Misidentification: In December the Weather Network website had an article on the Golden-winged Warbler and its ability to predict a large and severe thunderstorm several days in advance. An interesting article indeed, although the only problem was the Weather Network showed a picture of a Chestnut-sided Warbler, identifying it as a Golden-winged Warbler. Renee and Lori noticed this and Renee emailed the Weather Network to let them know. Subsequently, a correct picture of the Golden-winged Warbler was posted, just as sometimes the correct weather is predicted.

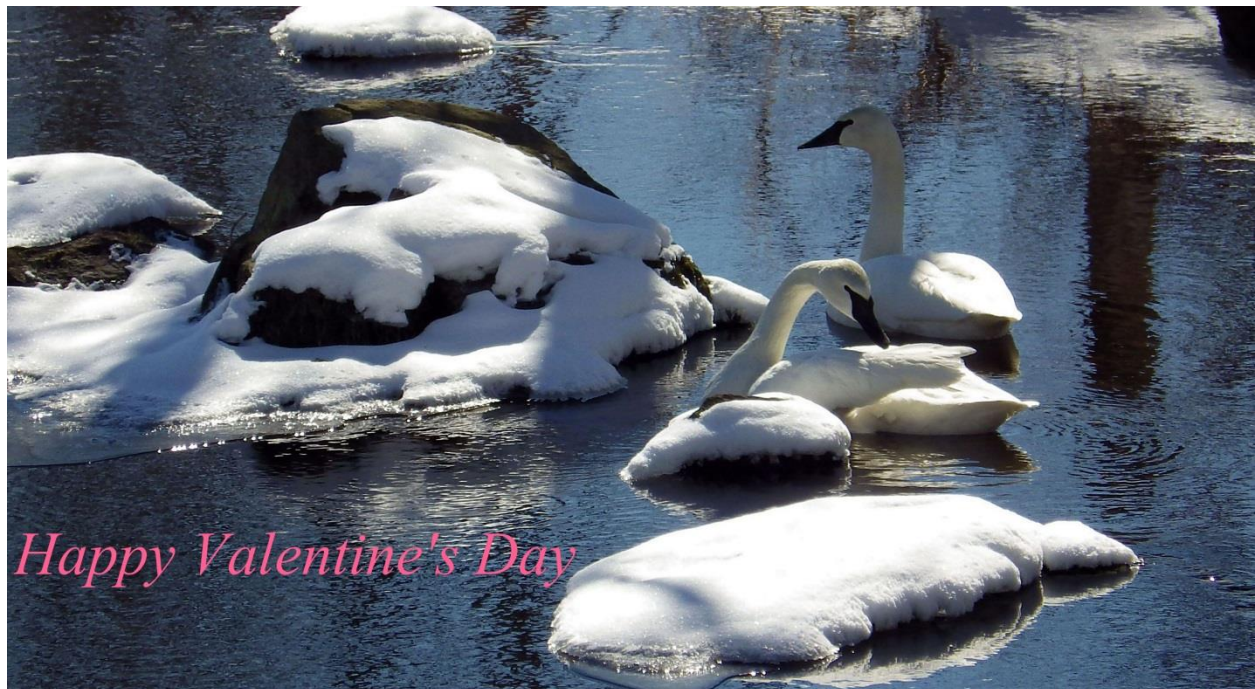
Gyrfalcon: A Gyrfalcon had been seen this winter at Kelly Lake in Sudbury and some of us had hoped to see this large falcon that breeds in Arctic coasts. Unfortunately, when word came to Dick that it had not been spotted there for some time now, the trip was cancelled. Last February, those of us who went to Kelly Lake in hopes of seeing it did not see it, although we did see a fox, some ducks and a Hairy Woodpecker. If anyone makes the trip this winter, it would be good to know if it was seen.

Bird Bash: The next Bird Bash takes place over a 24-hour period on **February 14 and 15**. Please get your results in to Dick Tafel at rtafel@sympatico.ca by the evening of February 16. Bird Bash coincides with Family Day weekend and with the Great Backyard Bird Count so we can expect some good data to be submitted to the GBBC.

Bird Wing Meeting: The next meeting of Bird Wing takes place on **Tuesday, February 24, at 6:30, in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library.**

Text, Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe, with thanks to Craig Hurst for providing a summary of the Great Loon Rescue.

Photos, Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicate on the photo.



PLEASE NOTE: Swans are considered symbols of enduring love, although studies of some species of swans show that males have a tendency to flit from one nest to another for trysts with a string of females!