

SUMMARY OF BIRD WING MEETING

April 22, 2014

The last indoor meeting for the season of the Bird Wing Group was held in the Board Room of the North Bay Public Library on April 22, 2014. It was to have been held at Cecil's Eatery because the auditorium at the library was not available. Although Cecil's had twice confirmed the booking, at the last minute just hours before our meeting, Cecil's called to say another party had been booked instead. But great problem-solvers that we are, we managed to get the Board Room at the library; Cecil's agreed to post a notice on their door that the meeting had been moved; and a late email was sent out to everyone informing them of the change. We are aware of only one Bird Winger who went to Cecil's instead and she, who will not be named, was redirected to the library.

Birds We Can Expect to See in May

Because of my late reporting of the meeting, some species we expect to see in May have already been seen. Although Dick Tafel, Chairman, was sporting a shoulder sling and recuperating from recent shoulder surgery, he nevertheless provided us with a comprehensive list of species we might expect to see. These include:

Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets: Kinglets are smaller than most warblers and are constantly moving. If you don't get a glimpse of their crowns to tell them apart, the Golden-crowned has a boldly striped face unlike the Ruby-crowned.



Wood Warblers: There are about 25 potential warblers to be seen in our area. They don't sit still for long and can be difficult to identify at a glance – even at more than a glance – so a good pair of binoculars, a quick eye and some prior knowledge are very helpful. It can be frustrating identifying some of them, but each year if you keep it up, it gets easier. Some warblers you may have already seen



are the Pine Warbler (*photo above by Kevin Cowcill*); the Black and White Warbler and the Yellow-rumped Warbler, although the latter has not been seen yet by many as in previous years. By mid-May, you should be seeing the American Redstart and the Chestnut-sided Warbler. If you listen carefully, the Chestnut-sided will definitely be *very pleased to meet you!* (*See photo above title, Wood Warblers*) Other warblers you can expect to see soon, if you haven't already, are the Magnolia, the Black-throated Blue, the Black-throated Green, the Palm and the Mourning. The Bay-breasted Warbler with its chestnut throat and upper breast is often found at Marten River among the spruce trees. The Ovenbird is a warbler, although with its chunkier and larger body and thicker bill, it does not seem like one, but more like a small thrush. It is heard singing its song, *TEACHER TEACHER TEACHER* in crescendo, more often than it is seen. Look for it near or on the ground in leafy pine-oak woods and, in migration, in thickets. It has a white eye-ring and an orange patch on its crown, bordered by blackish stripes.

Brown Thrushes: The two to look for in May are the Hermit Thrush, with its rufous tail and habit of cocking it and dropping it slowly, and the Veery, the least spotted of the brown thrushes and arriving later than the Hermit Thrush. The Hermit Thrush is found in coniferous or mixed woods and the Veery can be seen in moist deciduous woods and thickets along streams. It can be hard to spot in thick brush, so listen for its call, a downward *vee-ur, veer-ur, veer, veer*.

Flycatchers: The first flycatcher to arrive in our area is the Eastern Phoebe, already seen by some in early April. Other flycatchers, rather slow to get here, are the Least and the Alder. The Least prefers farms and open woods and the Alder likes swamps and wet thickets. The Least is grayish above and has a bold white eye-ring. Its song is an emphatic sharp *che-BEK or chebek*. The Alder is browner than the Least and safely distinguished from it by its song, *fee-BEE -o*. The Great-Crested Flycatcher should be seen by mid-May. It is a large flycatcher at 8.5 to 8.75 inches, with a bright yellow belly and a bushy crest which it often erects.

Swallows: The swallows we can expect to see are the Tree Swallow which comes surprisingly early (some have already been seen); the Barn Swallow with its long forked tail, the only swallow we get with

a long forked tail; the Cliff Swallow; and the Northern Rough-winged Swallow, which looks similar to the juvenile Tree Swallow, but is not as common in our area as the other swallows.

Vireos: Vireos resemble wood warblers, but their bills are thicker and they are less active. The vireos with wing bars have prominent eye-rings or spectacles, and those without wing bars have eye stripes. The first vireo seen in our area is the Blue-headed Vireo, with its sharply demarcated blue-gray cap, bright white spectacles and throat, bright green back and yellowish wash on its sides.

Tanagers: The only tanager we get in our area is the Scarlet Tanager. The breeding male is flaming scarlet with jet black wings and tail. Certainly a sight to behold! Look for one in Laurier Woods.



Thrashers: The Brown Thrasher (*photo above by Kevin Cowcill*), the only thrasher seen here, is a secretive bird and it can be hard to glimpse in the thickets it prefers. It may be heard before it is spotted. It is an exuberant singer with one of the largest repertoires of any North American songbird. It sings a loud and long series of double phrases, each phrase sung twice before moving on to the next. It is a mimic and does a crude imitation of many birds, including the Northern Cardinal. It is bright rufous above and heavily streaked below, with wing bars and a long tail. It has a cross look with its heavy slightly curved bill and its staring yellow eyes – an anthropomorphic statement if there ever was one!

Gray Catbird: The Gray Catbird is also part of the family of birds that mimic, like the Brown Thrasher and the Northern Mockingbird. Obvious by its name, it is a gray bird. But to make up for its grayness, it sports a black cap and chestnut undertail coverts which may not be noticeable, and flips its tail in a jaunty manner.

Sparrows: Some sparrows we can expect to see are White-crowned; Savannah; Vesper; and Lincoln's. We may also get to see the Fox on its way north. It is a large, plump sparrow with a rusty rump and tail and heavily streaked breast. Look for it, if it has not already migrated through on its way north, kicking

among dead leaves and other ground debris. Or listen for its very musical song. It is one of the few species that sings before it reaches its breeding grounds.

Swifts: The Chimney Swift is the only eastern swift and is usually seen here during the second week of May at its preferred chimney on Main Street West. It is a sight to behold to see hundreds of “flying cigars” funnel into the one chimney at dusk, before all but two disperse to nest elsewhere in other dimly lit enclosed vertical surfaces. Swifts are not able to perch and spend almost all their entire life in the air.

On April 15, 2014, an international swift conference took place in Cambridge, England. Kristyn Richardson of Bird Studies Canada gave a presentation highlighting the results from Ontario SwiftWatch. This is a volunteer-based program in which participants locate and describe nesting and roosting Chimney Swift habitat within urban areas of Ontario. To participate or find out more, click on the link, <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/research/speciesatrisk/chsw/index.jsp?targetpg=index&lang=EN>

Based on information gathered by Ontario SwiftWatch and published in the journal *Population Ecology*, it was determined, using data collected by volunteers at 928 chimney sites across southern Ontario, that “loss of nesting sites is not a primary factor limiting northern Chimney Swift populations.” Only 24% of suitable chimneys were occupied by swifts, suggesting other factors may be responsible for the population decline.



Hummingbirds: The first Ruby-throated Hummingbird in our garden or at our feeder is always an exciting moment. Whether it will arrive a bit later because of the cooler weather remains to be seen.

Home Hardware has put out a pamphlet, *A Warm Welcome Home for Canada's Migratory Birds*. You can access it online through Bird Studies Canada or pick it up at Home Hardware stores. It lists seven meaningful ways one can help birds this spring. They are:

1. Fill your feeders with a variety of seed.
2. Place feeders about 10 feet from a tree or shrub to enable a quick retreat from predators if necessary. Location, location, location is as important to birds as it is to us when we purchase a home!

3. Grow plants: Nectar-producing flowers, flowering trees and shrubs for the hummingbirds; black-eyed Susans and sunflowers for the Blue Jays and the American Goldfinches; and native prairie grasses for the sparrows. If you plant it, they will come!
4. Because droppings and mouldy seeds can cause disease, clean bird feeders with hot soapy water or a vinegar solution about once every two weeks. Rinse and dry thoroughly before refilling.
5. Reduce window reflection. In addition to decals, you can keep blinds half open and place feeders at a safe distance from windows, either greater than 30 feet or less than 3 feet, the latter to avoid collisions at high speed.
6. Keep your cats indoors and dogs leashed when outside.
7. Consider becoming a citizen scientist with Bird Studies Canada. Results collected have a direct impact on conservation action. Previous summaries mentioned various projects requiring citizen scientists and three more are mentioned in this summary. Seriously consider taking part in one or more of them.

Birding and gardening go hand-in-hand, as many of us know, and the benefits of creating an inviting and diverse yard ecosystem for birds are far-reaching. Birds not only provide us with hours of pleasure, but are also pollinators, insect controllers and seed sowers.

Species Seen from late March to late April

Species seen within 50 km. of North Bay by Bird Wing Members during late March to late April include in no particular order:

Dabbling Ducks: Wood Duck; Northern Pintail (*seen below*); Northern Shoveler; Blue-winged Teal; Green-winged Teal



Diving Ducks: Ring-necked Duck; Lesser Scaup; Common Goldeneye; Bufflehead

Mergansers: Common and Hooded (*seen below*)



Grebes: Pied-billed

Shorebirds: Greater Yellowlegs

Gulls: Herring and Ring-billed

Double-crested Cormorant

Sandhill Crane and Great Blue Heron

Wild Turkey (*photo below by Rose McClelland*) and Ruffed Grouse



Turkey Vulture

Northern Harrier

Buteos: Rough-legged Hawk – migrating through on its way north to nest on tundra escarpments and Arctic coasts; Red-tailed Hawk

Northern Goshawk

Osprey

Merlin and American Kestrel (*photo below by Rose McClelland*)



Northern Saw-whet Owl

Woodpeckers: Pileated; Hairy; Downy; Northern Flicker

Tree Swallow

Killdeer

American Woodcock

Brown Creeper (*photo below by Linda Stoner*), Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches and Black-capped Chickadees



Eastern Bluebird

Brown Thrasher

American Robin

Red-wing Blackbird, Grackle and European Starling with their now-yellow bills

Warblers: Only one report, a Pine Warbler seen by Kevan Cowcill at his feeder

Sparrows: American Tree which was seen all winter; White-throated; Fox migrating through on its way north; Song; and Dark-eyed Junco also seen all winter this year.

Blue Jay; American Crow; Common Raven

American Goldfinch and Purple Finch

Owl Surveys

The results of the owl surveys that were completed during April will be reported in May's summary.

Project NestWatch



Project Nestwatch is a program through Bird Studies Canada aimed at getting citizen scientists involved in collecting data on nesting birds. Nest monitoring can provide useful information on the health of bird populations; clutch size; impact of predators on nesting success; nesting habitat; nest site selection; and breeding distribution. You have to be able to monitor a nest or several throughout the breeding season to determine what species the nest belongs to; to record the location of the nest; to monitor the nest every 3 to 5 days until nesting is complete; and to check the nest after the young have left to look for any unhatched eggs or dead young.

You must register to participate in the project and submit detailed data online. It is a fairly involved project, but for those willing to volunteer, detailed information to help you with the project and how to register and provide the data, can be found at <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pnw/>



Canadian Lakes Loon Survey

Bird Studies Canada is also looking for volunteers to participate in a loon survey. This survey is much less involved than Project Nestwatch. It was initiated in Ontario in 1981 and expanded nationally in 1989. The iconic and beloved inhabitant of our lakes with its haunting calls may not be able to maintain its current population levels. Data suggests that Common Loon reproduction has declined over the last 30 years. Causes of this are: human disturbance of nesting sites from boats, canoes/ kayaks, and personal watercraft; water level changes; lake acidity; entanglement of discarded debris, including fishing lines and domestic garbage; nest predation; and habitat loss.

Local human disturbance can be minimized when people become sensitive to the needs of the loon. Some ways to promote this are by distributing brochures about loons; creating information displays; erecting signs; addressing local concerns; and building nest platforms. Nesting platforms should not be built in locations where loons are successfully hatching chicks as they may decrease nesting success. However, if you regularly see paired loons but no chicks, a nesting platform may be an effective option. If you are interested in any of the above methods to help lakes become loon-friendly, you can contact Kathy Jones at aqsurvey@birdscanada.org.

To participate in the loon survey, you need dedicate only at least three dates to visit a lake: a date in June to see if loon pairs are on territory; a date in July to see if chicks hatch; and a date in August to see if chicks survive long enough to fledge. Participants can also work as stewards within their community to share knowledge on better boating, fishing and shoreline practices. More information can be found at <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/clls/>

With the number of people who live on lakes and who boat and fish in our area, there should be some volunteers willing to take part in this survey.

Barn Swallow Study

Participants are also needed for a Barn Swallow Study through Bird Studies Canada, a study that began a year ago. Although the Barn Swallow is still a common bird, its population has declined by 65% over the last almost 50 years. The reasons for the decline are unknown, but the data gathered will help identify habitat needs and guide the design of replacement nesting structures.



Bird Studies Canada would like you to report the first Barn Swallow sightings of the spring in Ontario to <http://goo.gl/4X9wb>. If you would like to find out more about Barn Swallows or act as a steward, you can contact Kristyn Richardson at krichardson@birdscanada.org.

Lori Anderson has reported her first sighting of a Barn Swallow at her place. (*Lori's photo is above.*)

Window Alert

Doug Patterson contacted Laporte's Nursery on Lakeshore Drive about ordering Window Alert decals and Laporte's was more than willing to order them. Renee Levesque followed up with Lori at Laporte's and she said the decals should be available anytime soon. **So for all who do not yet have decals, please get to Laporte's and buy some. They will help prevent a major cause of bird death by window collision.**

Lagoons

A few Powassan Lagoon Keys that **actually work** are now available from Dick Tafel to Bird Wing members as long as they have paid their membership dues to Bird Wing. (More could be said about keys not opening the gate, but perhaps the less said, the better!)

The Nipissing Naturalist Club would like to erect a viewing platform at the Callander Lagoon and Bird Wing is supportive of this.

Treasurer's Report

Gary Sturges reported we have \$255.00 in the bank.

New Name for Secretary

It was decided that instead of the title *secretary*, *Bird Wing Scribe*, as proposed by Marc Buchanan, would be more appropriate - or BWS for short. **The W is never to be dropped unless absolutely warranted!**

Nipissing Naturalist Club Outing

On Monday, May 19th, the Monday of the long weekend, there is to be a field trip conducted by Gary and Connie Sturges' daughter, Rachel Sturge, a member of the Society of Canadian Ornithologist and the

American Ornithologists' Union, to the farm of Lori Anderson in Chisholm Township. Participants will look for and discuss birds, such as the Savannah Sparrow (*seen below*), the Eastern Meadowlark and other grassland birds, present in the fields at Lori's farm. There will also be a discussion by Lori on the impact of modern farming methods on birdlife.



Those wanting to attend should meet at the Visitors' Centre at 7:30 a.m. for carpooling. Those who live in the Powassan area can drive directly to Lori's. At the Bird Wing meeting, Lori mentioned that it was not necessary to schedule the trip so early. Therefore, the time of departure may have changed. You can contact Marc Buchanan or Fred Pinto or visit the Nipissing Naturalist Club website for further details and information, if the outings have been posted there.

Bird Bash

April's Bird Bash results as compiled by Dick Tafel will be posted at some point on the Nipissing Naturalist Club website. To access Bird Bash results and Bird Wing meeting summaries, click on Bird Wing on the left side of the Nipissing Naturalist home page and once opened, on the left side of the Bird Wing page are the Bird Bash results and on the right, the Bird Wing summaries.

May's Bird Bash will take place May 24 and 25.

Bird Wing

Spring seems to have finally sprung, although there is still a dearth of warblers. For the next three months at least, Bird Wingers will forgo indoor meetings for the more exciting field outings. **On May 27th, the fourth Tuesday of May, Bird Wingers should meet at 6:30 p.m. at the Visitors' Centre for a birding outing to nearby Laurier Woods.**

Text by Bird Wing Scribe, Renee Levesque

Photos by Renee Levesque unless otherwise credited. Those otherwise credited are courtesy of Rose McClelland, Linda Stoner, Kevan Cowcill and Lori Anderson.