

Bird Wing Outing

Text and photos by Renee Levesque unless otherwise specified



Outing: Our Bird Wing outing to Cache Bay on **August 23** was a very enjoyable one even without the advertised presence of special guest, Vernon Buckle, from Labrador. He sent his apologies, but got delayed at his sister's in Newmarket. He missed a good time and many bird sightings.

The highlight was all thirteen participants getting good views of the three Trumpeter Swans by the dock near the trailer park. Most of us have seen Trumpeters many times, but this night was special because the landscape in the setting sun was idyllic, how one imagines swans being portrayed in a storybook. It reminded me of a Nipissing version of a John Constable painting. Constable, 1776-1837, was an English romantic painter who painted mostly those areas near his home in Suffolk, now known as Constable Country.





Photo by Marc Buchanan

We spent a long time viewing the swans before moving on to the other side of Cache Bay where the boathouses are. But before moving on, we saw two Spotted Sandpipers, a Caspian Tern, two Great Blue Herons, two Northern Flickers, about 200 Red-winged Blackbirds and an Osprey out fishing. An unusual sighting was a duck that looked somewhat like a manky Mallard with a white neck. (And interestingly enough, during September's Bird Bash, Dick Tafel and I saw it again but from the boathouse area of Cache Bay, but looking somewhat less like a Mallard from that viewpoint.)



Photo by J. Clayton

The other side yielded even more, maybe nothing as spectacular as three swans in the setting sun, although the sunset viewed from the boathouse side was spectacular. From here we saw two more Caspian Terns, 45 Common Terns for those who counted, about 100 Ring-billed Gulls, eight Double-crested Cormorants, a Northern Harrier, three Song Sparrows, one Swamp Sparrow and heard an American Bittern, its call identified by Grant McKercher. Also seen was an American Kestrel, although I forget just where we saw it – maybe at the Ball Park.

From Cache Bay we headed to the Sturgeon Falls museum trail to look for Common Nighthawks. Three of us

spotted one on the way down Fort Road to the museum and others saw it from the parking lot of the museum trail. Despite the darkness, some of us walked a bit along the museum trail to the washed-out bridge. It is a trail in much need of restoration. Although we did not see a thing as I suspected would be the case, we did manage to flush out an American Woodcock for others to see. So a walk in the dark on an unmaintained trail turned out to be fortuitous after all.

The last part of the birding evening was spent at the Sturgeon Falls Tim Horton's before we headed home at around 9:45. I don't know about the other vehicles, but we in Dick's vehicle - Dick, Lori Anderson, Grant McKercher and I - were on tenterhooks with Dick's car almost out of gas and no gas stations opened after Sturgeon Falls until North Bay. I was dropped off first with 18 km. of gas left and assumed the others got home safe and sound and did not get stranded at the bottom of College Drive.

Osprey Fishing Lesson: Further to the above mention of sighting a fishing Osprey at Cache Bay, Grant McKercher told us about an interesting fishing expedition he and Shirley witnessed in August. Titled, *The Fishing Lesson*, and in Grant's own words:

Shirley and I were sitting enjoying our morning tea, looking out onto Callander Bay, when an Osprey approached from the west along the shoreline. She was carrying a sizeable fish in her talons in the typical head forward position. It's always nice to see the successful hunter with her catch!

She then took a sudden turn and headed out into the bay, while at the same time calling out with the familiar high-pitched call we often hear when she is in the area. After a few strong wing beats she unexpectedly dropped the fish into the water - an unusually clumsy fumble for such an experienced bird. And then we saw the reason why - a juvenile osprey had been sitting on one of the shoreline maple trees out of sight

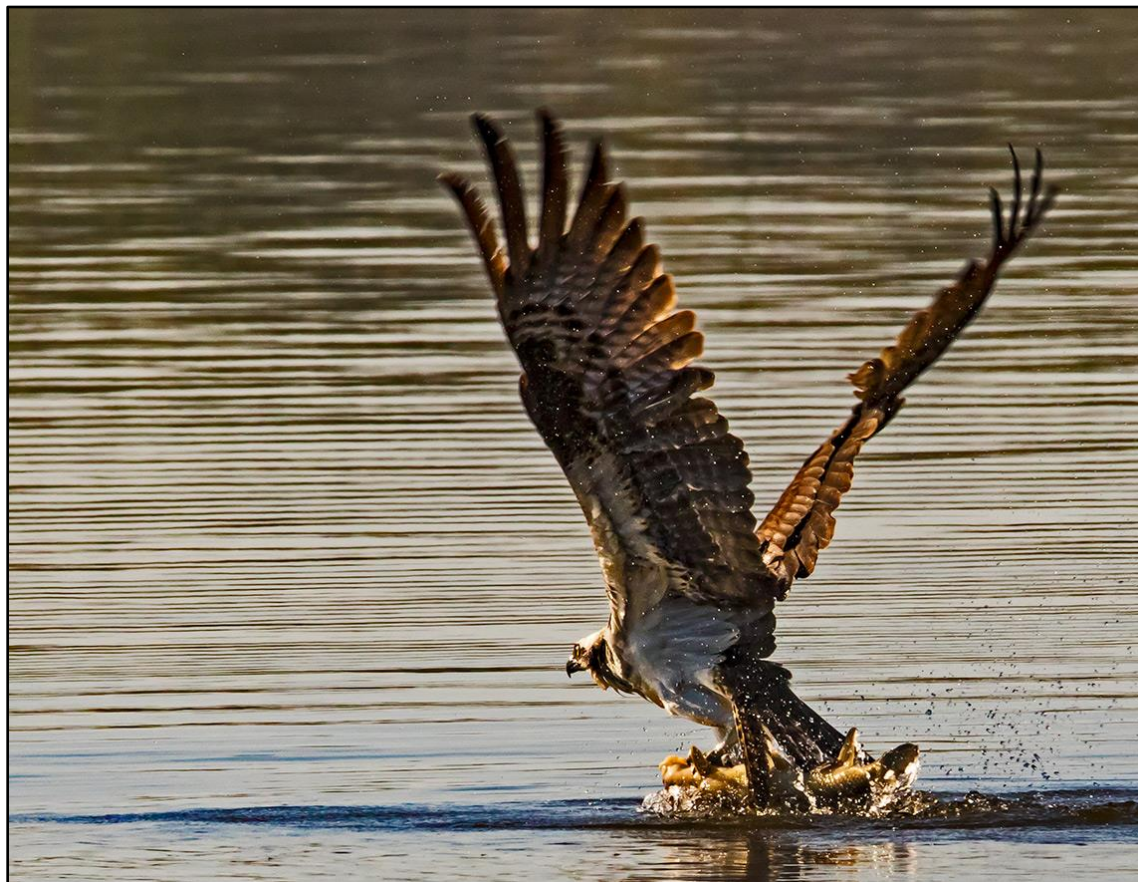


Photo by Stephen O'Donnell

until called. The young one flapped out towards the floating fish and awkwardly attempted to pick it up from the water - unsuccessful on the first attempt! It wheeled around and came in for another approach, but again failed to latch onto the tasty prize. Suddenly we saw from the corner of our eyes, a large dark bird gliding in at low altitude, again from the west, its white head and tail immediately identifying it as a mature bald eagle. It proceeded to deftly swoop down with outstretched talons and scoop up the fish, then turned out over the bay, heedless to the echo of the Ospreys' protesting cries. A breakfast lost and a lesson learned for a young fish hawk.



Photo by Marc Buchanan

White-winged Scoter: On August 1, while Marc Buchanan from his Lake Nipissing home was checking out with his scope the bird situation far out on the lake, he surprisingly spotted an adult male White-winged Scoter (above), a rather early spotting of a White-winged on Lake Nipissing. Unsure he saw what he saw, he grabbed his new Nikon camera - the one he used to take the above photo of the Trumpeter Swan seen on our outing - and got quite a good photo considering the great distance. From the photo, positive ID could be made. The White-winged Scoter and two Black Scoters were later seen from Sunset Park by Dick and me – and a Black Scoter seen on Lake Nipissing from Beaucage Park Road by us during the August Bird Bash.

The White-winged Scoter is the largest of the three scoters, the other two being the Black and Surf Scoters. The male White-winged has a white “teardrop” or “comma” near its eye and an orange/yellow bill with a black basal knob. Its white wing patch is fairly invisible unless it flaps its wings or flies. Outside the breeding season, the male is duller with pale-mottled flanks. The Black Scoter is smaller with a more rounded head and the adult male is all black with a bright orange knob on its bill.

Did You Know?: The summer edition of *Living Bird*, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, has an interesting article on gulls, in particular Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. During the breeding season, these gulls, and presumably other gulls, engage in what is known as a choking display to determine their nesting site. The pair spends considerable time choosing the exact spot where the eggs are to be laid. A repetitive, delicate murmuring, the pointing of the beak at a proposed spot and a choke call – *huoh-huoh-huo* - is given by one partner of the pair when it thinks it has found the ideal spot. The other partner then walks in a deliberate manner in a circle around the spot deciding if it is suitable. If this partner thinks it is, it will join in the choke



display. But a decision is not always arrived at and in the article written by David Bonter and Shailee Shah based on research done at Appledore Island off the coast of Maine, they write that at least one pair of Great Black-backed Gulls on the Island spent their entire summer trying to determine a spot and chocking, but could not reach a decision as to where to lay the eggs.

Recently an adult Great Black-backed Gull was seen on a rock in Lake Nipissing with some Herring Gulls. Expect to see more of both soon.

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Plaque: The Ontario Heritage Trust plaque honouring ornithologist, Louise de Kiriline Lawrence was installed at Pimisi Bay on August 13, following a ceremony at the Parish Hall in Bonfield. For the complete article on this event, please see September's *The Woodland Observer* at <http://www.nipnats.com/>.

Bird Bash: The next Bird Bash will take place over a 24-hour consecutive period weekend of **October 1 and 2.**

September Meeting: Bird Wing reverts to its indoor meetings in September, with the next meeting held in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library on **Tuesday, September 27, at 6:30 p.m.** Continuation of outings during the spring and summer months will be discussed and the newly created owl award will be presented to Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing for their April Nocturnal Owl Survey results. You might want to refresh your memory and re-read these results by visiting <http://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/bird-wing-meetings-outings/>. Go to page 13 of April's Bird Wing report. I had unilaterally declared Lori and Ken the winners because they saw the most owls and had the most drama, but with our chair a believer in Direct Democracy, though he too sometimes makes unilateral decisions, if anyone reading the results feel Lori and Ken should not win the award, please let me know prior to the meeting. The delicious Swedish cookies served at the Louise de Kiriline plaque ceremony will be available as

a return to the indoor meeting— not the actual ones served at the ceremony, but freshly baked ones. If you missed the ceremony, then you need to taste these cookies. They are delicious!

The photo below is in honour of Craig Hurst, 1944–2016, a keen birder who spotted and photographed a Northern Wheatear on his Redbridge property in 2009. The text is from Dick Tafel’s tribute to Craig in the current issue of *The Woodland Observer*.

Such a fellow was Craig! His love of birds started many years ago when he was a teacher in the Toronto area and expanded with every year thereafter. Just a few springs ago near his home, Craig encountered a very rare Northern Wheatear. He was disappointed he was not able to contact others to view it before it quickly continued on its way north. He kept track of birds he saw wherever he travelled, and a trip in the planning to Panama this coming winter with his wife, Elaine, for that major purpose obviously will not now happen.

To read Dick’s entire tribute to Craig, see September’s *The Woodland Observer* at: <http://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

