

Bird Wing Report October 2018

By Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe; photos as indicated

Again this month, the Bird Wing meeting was held at Laporte's Nursery, but not held on the fourth Tuesday of the month, but the fifth! We have become as unpredictable as the birds!! The library recently informed us that the renovations are to continue through to the summer of 2019 and, therefore, Lori Laporte has graciously allowed us to hold our meetings at the nursery through to April. The only month that will be a problem for Lori is the fourth Tuesday of January, January 22. But we have some time to ponder that and solve the problem, so stay tuned.

Rare Birds Seen during the month of October:

Cattle Egret: A Cattle Egret (right) was first seen by Dick Tafel in the late afternoon of October 10 in the Optimist Club Field beside Palangio Arena. Dick called me and some others and I immediately jumped in the car and headed there. The light was still good enough to get some photos and see the egret well. Although I have seen many Cattle Egrets, seeing one where it is not supposed to be is a double-edged sword - great to see it as a rare bird in our area, but also dismaying to see a species out-of-place without its own kind around. Instead there it was in a field of Canada Geese all by itself, ignored by the geese, looking quite miserable. I know, I am anthropomorphizing big time. When I got home I submitted the sighting to Ontbirds and eBird.

Gary Chowns also made his way over to Palangio Arena, but it was too dark by the time he got there to see it well. However, the next day, Gary and Luanne Chowns saw it in Lee Park, as did Kaye Edmonds and Sandra Arseneault. Interestingly, new member, Buddy Miles, saw one in a field of cows on Hwy 64, a few days later. According to Buddy, the cows did not seem to care much for this interloper either. Was it the same egret or a second one?



Kaye Edmonds

Dick informed me that this is the third time he has seen a Cattle Egret in our area. He saw one on Miramachi Road in November 1987 and one on nearby Bayview Road in October 2001. According to eBird, one was also seen on October 21, 2001, by Martin Parker who saw it off Ferguson between Second and Third Avenues in North Bay.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Another rare bird for our area, although one seen at least once or twice yearly in recent years is the Red-bellied Woodpecker (right), seen by Lori Anderson at her feeder for 2 or 3 days. Lori also had one, possibly the same one, come to her feeder on and off for a period of time last year. And last year, one made the Christmas Bird Count, seen in Pinewood, by Lori and Ken Gowing, field observers.

Other Birds Seen During October:

The Rough-legged Hawk has now been seen in our area, one by Gary Sturge on Maple Hill and Purdon Line Roads – where else!! And Grant McKercher and Lori Anderson both saw one on Hwy. 17 on their way to Sturgeon Falls. Red-tailed Hawks have been seen by Matt Procnier on Hwy 11 near Powassan Lagoon and by others on Hwy 17, again on the way to Sturgeon Falls, a particularly good area for hawks if they are not hanging around Gary's neighbourhood. More Rough-legged Hawks should be seen during November.

Some have also seen a Bald Eagle, including Steve Claridge.

Grant McKercher saw the Peregrine Falcon on top of the cross at Pro-Cathedral, a regular haunt for this falcon since last December. However, although Fred Pinto saw it there the day before the 2017 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and Shirley McKercher saw it downtown the day after the 2017 CBC, it eluded the actual count day despite many of us driving down Algonquin Avenue in hopes of adding it to the count.

A species that has not been seen since last winter is the Common Redpoll. (left) Lori had about 45 at her feeders; Dick saw a flock of 75 at Sunset Park; and I saw about 50 at Verner Lagoon. Whether they are migrating through or plan to stay, we will soon find out. Pine Siskins, American Goldfinch, Purple Finch and Evening Grosbeaks were seen at some feeders. Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches were also at some feeders – both were at Rose McClelland's, and the White-breasted at Marc Buchanan's.



Lori Anderson



Buddy Miles

American Robins were still around feeding on berries. Lori Laporte saw some at the nursery and Dick saw a flock of about 40 in Pinewood.

Field Sparrows were about in October, not in great numbers, but Jim Hasler had one at his feeder about 4 days prior to our meeting and Dick and Kaye saw a couple at Sunset Park a couple of weeks prior to the meeting. Dick had a lone Fox Sparrow at his feeder and Lori had a lone Lincoln's Sparrow at her place. Naturally, American Tree and White-crowned Sparrows dominated during October, but the odd White-throat and Song Sparrow stayed around, as did a Chipping Sparrow at Lori's. Dark-eyed Juncos also abounded. (House Sparrows, included here because it is easier for me to include them here, were seen by Lori Anderson and Gary and Connie Sturge.)

Also seen by Jim was a Rusty Blackbird (right) at his feeder the same day as the Field Sparrow. It certainly was a good feeder day for Jim! Many Rusties were seen earlier in the month by some of us.

Dick saw a Ruby-crowned Kinglet in Laurier Woods; Lori had Golden-crowned at her place; and I had both at my place.

A species that has now left our area but was seen a couple of weeks before the meeting were Sandhill Cranes, seen by Connie.

Snow Buntings (below) arrived in October and were seen at Sunset Park and at Cache Bay, among other places. Sunset tends to be the place to find them first come October.



Buddy Miles



Renee Levesque

About six Common Gallinules were seen clearly by Ken Gowing, Lori Anderson, Dick and me at Cache Bay where they breed. It was great to see so many of them so close and Lori was particularly excited because this was the first time she had seen them. Two stayed on into early November.

Although not seen in huge numbers as earlier in the fall, Canada Geese were still around and seen by Curtis Irish. Strangely, Snow Geese were not mentioned, yet some saw more this year than other years, especially in east and west Nipissing where flocks of about 9 were seen.

Great Blue Herons were still being seen late into October. One was seen by me just a day or two prior to the meeting, on Grey's Road, off Four-Mile Road.

And speaking of Grey's Road and seeing a species for the first time, Luanne Chowns saw two Spruce Grouse (right) on Grey's Road. Like Lori, she was quite excited and who wouldn't be seeing a Spruce Grouse even if it weren't for the first time? (Brent Turcotte had seen one at the same location the day before Luanne saw hers.) Dick and Grant reminisced about the time one landed on Dick's head some years back at Marten River Provincial Park.



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Ruffed Grouse were seen by some and the day after I returned from Egypt, three lovely ones made an appearance in my yard. I took it as a sign, although not sure what the sign might mean.

A week before the meeting, Ken saw an American Woodcock doing its little dance as it crossed his road. Last fall, Ken also saw woodcocks late into the fall. I have never seen one doing its road dance and if others have never

seen the dance, check out this You Tube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ne6nj9AgY7M>.

Dick recently saw a Lapland Longspur (left) at the Government Dock which for years has been called King's Landing Wharf, although some of us still call it the Government Dock as it was once called. Some were also seen at Powassan Lagoon.

For the first time in her life, Connie got to report that she saw a Canada Jay. Sure she has seen lots of Gray Jays, but



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how sweet it is to say Canada Jay. And where did she see it? Why where else but on the famed Stillaway Line!

One American Pipit was recently seen by Lori at Ken's place. It would seem the hundred or so in her field have all departed for nicer weather and greener pastures.

Kaye Edmonds had Red-winged Blackbirds at her feeders just prior to the meeting and Common Grackles were at Lori Anderson's feeders.

All three woodpeckers were seen – Downy, Hairy and Pileated. Mourning Doves, Black-capped Chickadees, American Crows, Common Ravens and Rock Pigeons were also mentioned as sightings.

Common Loons in their winter plumage were seen on the Ottawa River, Trout Lake and Lake Nipissing, and Grant saw a raft of at least 15 on Callander Bay. I wonder how Grant's loon with the fishing lure attached to its leg managed. Probably not well.

As every year at this time, Trumpeter Swans were gathering in various spots, including 9 in Cache Bay just prior to the meeting. And over the Thanksgiving weekend, Therez Violette saw Ava (L95) at her spot by the dock.

Gulls seen in addition to the common Ring-billed and Herring Gulls were Greater Black-backed Gulls, one seen by Marc on the Kate Pace Way, three by Gary Chowns at Marathon Beach and by others at Sunset Park and near the Government Dock.



Dick saw a Red-necked Grebe on Trout Lake the day of the meeting and earlier on Lake Nipissing at Sunset Park and at Jocko Point. Dick also saw a Horned Grebe at Jocko Point. Many Pied-billed Grebes were seen by Ken, Lori, Dick and me at Cache Bay, and 4 or 5 on South River by Gary Sturge.

Shorebirds seen included many Dunlins seen by me at Verner Lagoon, some still in their breeding plumage, and one seen by Kaye at Sunset Park. A Black-bellied Plover (left) was also seen at Sunset Park, seen there by Gary Chowns, Dick, Kaye and me. Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs were also seen at all the lagoons and at Sunset Park. Other shorebirds seen included Stilts, Semipalmated Sandpipers, White-rumped Sandpipers and many Pectoral Sandpipers. In fact, there were almost 200

shorebirds at Verner Lagoon towards the end of October.

Ducks seen included the many Buffleheads at the lagoons and on Lake Nipissing and Graham Lake; Common Goldeneye seen by Grant on Callander Bay and by others at various points along Lake Nipissing, as well as at the lagoons; Northern Shovelers seen at Verner and Warren Lagoons; Green-winged Teal seen at the lagoons; American Black Ducks, at least 50 seen at Verner Lagoon at one point; hundreds of Mallards seen at all the lagoons; Gadwalls and Lesser Scaup seen at the lagoons, at Cache Bay and on Graham Lake; American Wigeon seen at the lagoons and at Cache Bay; Wood Ducks, some still in their eclipse plumage as pictured below, seen by many at the lagoons, by Gary Chowns at Restoule and by me the day before the meeting in a pond off Grey's Road; Ring-necked Ducks seen by Lori and Ken on Mud and Graham Lakes – in fact Lori reports at least 2,000 Ring-necked Ducks and Buffleheads made their way to Graham Lake. Must have been quite a sight because Graham Lake, near Lori's, is not that big. Hooded and Common Mergansers were also seen, Hooded at Verner Lagoon and Jocko Point, and Common on Lake Nipissing.



Peter Ferris

I think I got all the birds mentioned except for one – Wild Turkeys seen by Connie. She saw a family of 8 to 10, including several juveniles, at the corner of Schlosser Line and Hemlock Road.

Project FeederWatch:

Project FeederWatch began on November 10 and most members of Bird Wing are signed up to participate in this worthwhile citizen science project. One member who shall remain nameless hasn't. Maybe he is too busy camping out at Sunset Park! For those who haven't yet signed up for Project FeederWatch, see <https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/> to join. It is not too late.



John Levesque

Christmas Bird Count:

Our **Christmas Bird Count (CBC)** is to be held on **Saturday, December 15**. Lori Anderson is our compiler again this year.

The confirmed Field Observers so far are: (Airport) Marc Buchanan, Fred Pinto and Sarah Wheelan; (Thibeault) Brent and Laura Turcotte; (Downtown) Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing; (Lakeshore) Grant and Shirley McKercher; (Callander) Gary, Connie and Rachel Sturge and Matt Procnier; (Centennial) Dick Tafel and Renee Levesque; and (Trout Lake) Paul Smylie and April McCrum.

Because some field observers are not able to observe for the full day, field observers are needed. See contact information below following CBC feeder watchers.

Feeder watchers played a major role last year when the extreme cold, the frozen lakes and the sheer amount of snow that fell just prior to our CBC date made walking access to some of our normal spots difficult. Could be the same this year judging by our early “winter”.

If you are interested in becoming a feeder watcher, whereby you can report on the species and numbers seen from the comfort of your home as long as you are within a 15-mile (24-km) radius of North Bay, or if you are interested in becoming a field observer, **please contact Lori as soon as possible by email at lori.anderson58@hotmail.com or by phone at 705-724-5780.**

As in the last two years, hungry and cold field observers will make their way to Grant and Shirley McKercher’s home for a pot luck dinner and the tally count. Perhaps we might even sing our CBC song again this year just to please Marc Buchanan!

Burk’s Falls CBC will be held on **Wednesday, December 19**. If you wish to be part of the Burk’s Falls count as field observers, please contact Martin Parker at: mparker19@cogeco.ca.

Those in North Bay and area who might be interested are close enough to Lake Bernard, Sundridge, part of the Burk's Falls count area. Lake Bernard has been divided into two areas, Lake Bernard East and West, with Dan Burton field observer for one area and Gary Sturge, the other.

Winter Finch Report:

Ron Pittaway has predicted in his Winter Finch Report that this year will be an irruption year for winter finches. He reports that cone and birch seed crops are poor to low in most of Ontario and the Northeast and, therefore, it will be a quiet winter in the north woods! **So keep your feeders well-stocked because many birds will have a difficult time finding natural food this winter.**

Pine Grosbeaks are expected to move into Southern Ontario and the northern states; Purple Finches will have departed Ontario by December; Red Crossbills will be scarce; White-winged Crossbills have moved east to Newfoundland and west to Western Canada, but some should wander into Southern Ontario and the northern states; Common Redpolls, large flocks which have been seen by some of us, will not be staying here; Hoary Redpolls should be seen within the flocks of Common Redpolls as they move through; Pine Siskins are heading south, as are Evening Grosbeaks, seen from the back at right.

Among the three irruptive non-finch species, Blue Jays have moved south, and Red-breasted Nuthatches, as well as Bohemian Waxwings will be moving south and east.

The moral of this report if it holds true is: Better see these species now because they could disappear, with only some hanging around stocked feeders. Let's hope some stay at least until our Christmas Bird Count.

Interesting articles:

In the absence of field reports this month, I will make mention of two interesting articles I read in the Annual Report issue of *Living Bird*, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Autumn 2018.

There is an article about adding flair to one's life list by including evolutionary distinct birds to the list. It is written by Eliot Miller, an evolutionary biologist, who believes that not all birds are



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created equal. On the avian phylogenetic tree there are some one-offs, “where a single bird species is the only representative of its evolutionary lineage.” In our area there are two representative species Eliot emphasizes - the Pied-billed Grebe and the Osprey, the latter which most of us have seen. We can also put an asterisk beside the Upland Sandpiper as an evolutionary distinct species. It is not often seen here, but Dick and I saw one this past spring on Stewart Road in West Nipissing. (We also saw one a couple of springs ago in the field beside Warren Lagoon.)

Eliot states that the Pied-billed Grebe is the last living member of its genus and, therefore, unique among the grebes. We are fortunate to have them breed at Cache Bay and hopefully next August when we make our annual outing to Cache Bay, we will all see them. (This past August they decided not to appear despite the fact they were quite visible a few days prior and visible after the outing and up until recently.)

And then there are the Ospreys which taxonomically have their own family. Ospreys live on every continent except Antarctica, although, according to Eliot, they likely were there when the continent was warmer. They have subsisted on a diet of fish for an estimated 50 million years! I am wondering if they also subsisted for all those years in untidy nests that seem as if they could fall apart at any minute!

Upland Sandpipers also have their own genus. As sandpipers, they have the unusual habit of living in tall grasses all year round. You will not find them at any of the lagoons! Next year, keep your eyes open in fields that have not been mowed.

The other article is one on air as habitat, written by Hugh Powell. Most people don't think of air as habitat the way they do land and water, but it is a large part of a bird's life. Air is invisible to us and that's why we tend not to think of it as habitat, but as U.S. Geological Survey ecologist Robert Diehl knows, it is “a swirling mixture of wind, precipitation, light, and magnetic field, with just as much potential to concentrate resources as any ocean current.” As Robert puts it so well, “Either the airspace is habitat or flying animals are exceptional for their ability to be outside it.”

Birds that inhabit air space are not limited to swallows and swifts, but to all flying birds and especially those which migrate long distances. These birds are as much, if not more, at risk during their migration as they are in their land and water habitat. Perhaps one day sections of airspace will be protected the way lands and waters are.

Germany and Switzerland Birds:

While in Germany and Switzerland this past summer, Dick couldn't help but do some birding, although his trip was primarily for a



Grant Mckercher

Tafel family reunion in Germany and a family get-together in Switzerland.

Birds Dick saw were: Robin (above); Blackcap, Moorhen, Peregrine, Mute Swan, Garganey, Coot, Mallard, Canada Goose, House Sparrow, Swallow (Barn), Sand Martin (Bank), Black Redstart, Wood Pigeon, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Blue Tit, Nuthatch, Starling, Red Kite, Swift, Black-headed Gull, Rough-legged Buzzard, Chaffinch, Siskin, Wallcreeper, Great Tit, Buzzard, House Martin, Corn Bunting, Great Black-backed Gull, White Wagtail, Tree Sparrow, Raven Garden Warbler, Alpine Chough, Hooded Crow, Magpie, Marsh Harrier and Bonelli's Warbler.

The Bonelli's Warbler (right) is a lifer for Dick. It is now divided into Western and Eastern Bonelli's and I assume Dick saw the Western Bonelli's as pictured at right. It has more of a brownish tinge to its upperparts than the Eastern Bonelli's.



Wikimedia, Francesco Veronesi, Italy

Bird Outing:

As every year in late November or early December, we will have a Saturday morning outing to North Bay's landfill site (below) to see Arctic gulls, like the Iceland and Glaucous Gulls. The date of this outing will be determined at the November meeting.



The late Craig Hurst

Bird Bash:

December's Bird Bash will be held over **the weekend of December 1 and 2.**

Bird Wing Meeting:

The next meeting of Bird Wing takes place on **Tuesday, November 27, at Laporte's Nursery, 1054 Lakeshore Drive, starting at 6:30 p.m.**

And in closing...

Thanks to Steve Pitt for sending me an article on *Know Your Jail Birds*, and the origin of the word Stool Pigeon.

Originally, a stool pigeon was a bird hunter's decoy. It was sometimes a live bird, but usually just a stuffed or wooden dummy fastened to a stool-like structure and set outdoors to lure other pigeons or even hawks to land close enough to be shot or captured with a net.

But by the early 1800s, the expression came to describe someone who was acting as a decoy or bait for the police. Stool pigeons were especially detested by their fellow criminals because they turned on their friends to get more lenient treatment for themselves.

