

Bird Wing Outing June 25, 2019

Text by Renee Levesque; photos as indicated

Outing:

The outing plan: to target three birds – the Eastern Bluebird, the Sora and the Virginia Rail (at right) - and if time and luck were on our side, the Yellow Rail.

But first we met at Powassan Lagoon to see what ducks and grassland birds might be there. There was a multitude of Mallards and many chicks, but no other ducks. There were also about 25 Canada Geese, most of which were immatures. Sarah Wheelan spotted the geese just before they headed into the tall grasses, not to be seen again while we were there.



Matt Walter



Grassland birds were Bobolinks and

Savannah Sparrows. We saw about 5 or 6 male Bobolinks and 1 female Bobolink, as well as 1 or 2 Savannah Sparrows, one shown at left.

Other birds seen were a Song Sparrow, a Common Yellow-throat, an American Crow, a Northern Flicker, a couple of Common Grackles and a few Red-winged Blackbirds. The only swallow seen was a lone Tree Swallow, and the only shorebirds seen were two Killdeer.

Then, with Gary Sturge leading, we were off to see the Eastern Bluebirds (one pictured at right) on Hazel Glen Road. Everyone loves bluebirds with their feathers of blue and red. I once read a great description of the bluebird: It wears



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the blue of the sky on its back and the warmth of the sun on its breast. Many, even those of us not yet born at the time, are familiar with the song made famous by the English singer, Vera Lynn, in 1942 during WW2: *There'll be bluebirds over/The white cliffs of Dover*. Interestingly, the American lyricist, Walter Kent, who wrote the words to the song, did not realize that bluebirds are not indigenous to Britain.

The Eastern Bluebird was once as familiar to many as the American Robin, but bluebirds have always had tough competition for nesting spots from House Wrens and Tree Swallows, and face even tougher competition from introduced House Sparrows and European Starlings.



On our way to Hazel Glen Road to find the bluebirds, some of us saw and some of us heard through open car windows a Chestnut-sided Warbler, a White-throated Sparrow, a couple of Song Sparrows, a couple of American Goldfinch, a large group of European Starlings, an American Kestrel (at left), and as an extra treat, a Cooper's Hawk.

No sooner had we stopped at the bluebird spot when we were rewarded with first a pair of Eastern Bluebirds and then another pair, 2 males and 2 females. And on the other side of the road,

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a Wilson's Snipe was briefly seen sitting on top of a pole. Other birds seen on Hazel Glen were an American Robin, a Savannah Sparrow, a Chipping Sparrow, a Song Sparrow, a couple of American Crows, a Hairy Woodpecker, a Cedar Waxwing and an Eastern Kingbird.



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On our way to Hills Siding Road, we stopped on Peever Line to have a look at a Snapping Turtle laying her eggs (above) on the gravel shoulder. It reminded me that last year on our June outing, we saw a Midland Painted Turtle on Hills Siding Road that delighted Brent and Laura Turcotte's daughters.

On Peever Line we also saw an American Goldfinch and 2 Cedar Waxwings, both brilliantly feathered in the setting sun, and heard a White-throated Sparrow and a Chestnut-sided Warbler. What is more poignant than the song of the White-throat in the distance as the day comes to an end.

On Hills Siding Road at the first major wetland, we heard two Sora Rails, one in the distance and one very, very close, practically in front of us, but it stayed hidden despite being pictured at right. It is not easy to see a Sora without some



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effort and this despite the fact that it is the most abundant and widespread rail in North America.

At the second major wetland, we heard the Virginia Rail. It wasn't its normal call we heard, but rather its grunt call. Another bird at the second wetland was a Great Blue Heron. Other birds heard or seen were a couple of Swamp Sparrows, a Red-eyed Vireo, 3 or 4 Common Grackles and many Red-winged Blackbirds.

We did not get to River Road to look for the Yellow Rail that Laura Turcotte first spied there many years ago. It has not been seen there since, although some of us keep looking! It was getting late and the road was flooded, so we turned around and headed back to Hwy. 11, but not before admiring the lovely Northern Blue Flag Iris (*Iris versicolor*), the provincial flower of Quebec.

Stories from the Field:

Every year, despite discouraging them, robins insist on building their nests inside *Steve Pitt's* carport. This year Mama Robin, who glared at Steve every time he entered the carport, produced three little robins. Steve can't seem to win, but worth losing, Steve, to be able to see the three little nestlings as pictured below!!



After reading May's Bird Wing report, *Janet Sparks* emailed me to tell me that she too had an Orchard Oriole at her place by Wolfe Lake on the Saturday of the long May weekend. Reports Janet, "When I first saw the oriole, I thought perhaps it was a female Baltimore Oriole. I phoned my niece, an avid birder and wildlife biologist who lives near Simcoe, to tell her. When I described it, she told me it was an Orchard Oriole. It wasn't until I read the May Bird Wing Report that I found out it is rare in these parts."

And it seems the pair of American Bitterns that were courting in Janet and Lloyd's yard as mentioned in May's Bird Wing Report are now the proud parents of a little bittern. That's what courting can sometimes do!

Kaye Edmonds sent me photos of Mama Osprey feeding her young. One photo (right) shows the Osprey picking up what remained of the fish. Says Kaye, "I think she got tired of feeding them, picked up the fish and hopped across the nest away from them."



Kaye Edmonds

Renee Levesque:

In 2017, I got a bluebird box for Christmas which Lori Anderson put up at her farm in the spring of 2018. My project for 2018, the Year of the Bird, was to attract bluebirds to it. And because it was a box made specifically for bluebirds, with a sort of guarantee that no other bird but the bluebird would enter it and make it their home, I thought for sure I would get bluebirds. However, despite the fact that Lori

put the box up near Graham Lake and not anywhere near her barn, House Sparrows made it their home. What a disappointment.

Well, this year, Lori put my nesting box up far from her home on her property on Wasing Road and lo and behold a bluebird family made it their home! When I first paid a visit to the box in May, there was no sign of a bluebird anywhere, but then during June's Bird Bash, Lori alerted me to the fact that there were bluebirds inhabiting it and there were eggs in the box. On July 2 as I made my way through the tall grasses and vegetation to the box, out flew Mrs. Bluebird and on the wire was Mr. with a caterpillar in his mouth. They were somewhat perturbed at my disturbing them, so I did not open the door of the nest box to check on the number of nestlings. Instead, I left them in peace, thrilled that this year they chose my nest box. (The nest box beside mine, the only other nest box in the field and one Lori also put up, houses a Tree Swallow family. Both species seem to make good neighbours.)

Dick Tafel: One of Dick's highlights of early summer birding in Chisholm Township was seeing a Sandhill Crane family. At first Dick thought the two shapes he could make out in the distance without binoculars were a couple of deer, but, of course, with binoculars, he realized they were adult cranes. "But what I also saw were two very young cranes walking along between their parents. They each appeared to be not much bigger than a crow. This was a first for me, seeing such small young cranes, cranes that were probably only recently fledged. It was delightful."

Gary Sturge did not need fireworks to help celebrate his Canada Day. What he saw at his place when he looked up was an Osprey without a fish and an adult Bald Eagle with one! I don't know, Gary, the eagle is the national bird of the U.S. and on Canada Day if it had the fish and the Osprey didn't, what might that indicate?

Surveys:

Gary and Connie Sturge completed the *Nightjar Survey* on June 17 – no Whip-poor-wills, but 9 Common Nighthawks (one in flight at left). Gary's



narrative will appear in the September issue of *The Woodland Observer*.

On June 21, I once again joined Paul Smylie for the *Breeding Bird Survey*. We began at Trout Pond Road at 5:00 a.m. and ended on Wasi Road at 10:00 a.m. We heard or saw approximately 70 species, perhaps more.

Our resident honorary doctor has now completed his *Nocturnal Owl Survey* report, so just waiting for one from our resident farmer. **Big hint!!!!**

Restoule Outing, Nipissing Naturalists Club:

Rachel Sturge, Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus, and daughter of Gary and Connie, will be leading a bird walk in **Restoule Provincial Park on August 10 starting at 9:00 a.m.**

Bird Bash:

The next Bird Bash takes place over the weekend of **July 27 and 28.**

Bird Wing Outing:

Our next Bird Wing outing will be held on **Tuesday, July 23, starting at 6:30 p.m.** Outing details closer to the date will be sent to all.

In closing, take a look (right) at what a starling can do to transform an apartment building in Berlin, Germany.

