

# Bird Wing Report



Nipissing Naturalists Club

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## October 26, 2021

*Text: Renee Levesque*

*Photos: As indicated*

We met in person indoors for the first time since February 2020, when Liza Hackett spoke to us about her audio recording course at Cornell Lab of Ornithology and demonstrated how she records bird song in the field. A year and 8 months later, it was certainly good to see many old faces and a new one, Sue Gratton, a Toronto transplant now living in South River. There were only nine of us who met in the downstairs conference room at Twigg's on McKeown and Cartier Streets in North Bay, but we were quite the jolly little group. We were always a jolly group, but absence makes the heart jollier!

### Birds Seen in October

I have to start with one special bird not seen by anyone who attended October's meeting, the Nelson's Sparrow. It was seen by members Stephen O'Donnell and Dan Burton, and non-member Craig Evans who has also become quite the Parry Sound District birder. But it was first seen by Vernon Buckle who drove all the way from Labrador to find this bird for us. Some of you may remember Vernon. He joined us on one of our outings to Cache Bay in August 2015 – hard to believe that was 6 years ago! Seems like yesterday to me. (Vernon is in the photo below with Therez Violette and me.)

**It is Vernon's great photo of the Nelson's Sparrow,** a bird rarely seen here, that graces the cover of this report.

Unfortunately, I never did see the Nelson's despite the fact I was at Powassan Lagoon the same day Vernon saw it. While there, I ran into Dan who saw it

**after** I left. I went back to the lagoon twice with Dick Tafel, our Bird Wing Chair, and one of those days was the day Stephen and Craig saw it. We were there while they were there, but they saw it **before** we arrived and had a photo as proof. And finally I went back with April McCrum before giving up. Grant McKercher was also at Powassan Lagoon that particular weekend, but didn't see it either. Oh well, gives us something to look for next fall or for the rest of our lives.



*Kaye Edmonds*

We not only delight in seeing birds we have never seen before, but at this time of the year, we also delight in common birds we see all spring and summer, knowing they will soon depart. The bird that heralds spring more than any other bird and whose leaving marks that winter is almost upon us is the American Robin, seen by April and most everyone in the group.

This fall hundreds and hundreds of Sandhill Cranes could be seen in the fields of West Nipissing, along Levac, Leclair, Laplage, Gauthier and Roberge Roads, and along Hwy 64 near Verner. At a height of 4 feet and with a wingspan of 7 feet, they are magnificent to watch especially when they take off in flight or engage in one of their dances. In the spring, they do a courtship dance, in the fall when Grant got photos of them, they were probably doing a territorial dance. When you see Sandhill Cranes you can't help but think of them as the prehistoric creatures that they are. One fossil found in Florida dates back to 2.5 million years, making cranes older than many other of today's living birds. As a group, cranes are known as a sedge of cranes or more poetically, a dance of cranes. **Grant's photo is at right.**



There is a lovely poem by Linda Hogan on Sandhill Cranes entitled “The Sandhills”. You can read it at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56188/the-sandhills>. And there is also a birder murder mystery book by Steve Burrows, his 6<sup>th</sup> birder murder mystery book, entitled *A Dance of Cranes*. It is another book about Canadian detective Domenic Jejeune. The cranes in question in this birder murder mystery are, however, Whooping Cranes. You can purchase the book on Amazon.ca at <https://www.amazon.ca/A-Dance-of-Cranes/dp/1786075776>. I have read only a couple of Steve's birder murder mysteries after he was almost to talk at a Rotary Club and Callander Library event that got cancelled in the spring of 2020 because of the pandemic. I enjoyed both. I know Marc Buchanan has read many of them and Grant has read some.

And then there is that other prehistoric-looking bird, the Wild Turkey, the tom with its large red wattle, seen by Connie and Gary Sturge on Hazel Glen Road. A few days after the meeting, Dick and I took a trip out to Hazel Glen to see them and there they were – all 28 of them. Quite the sight. A few of them were engaged in some territorial dispute too, only instead of their wings opened wide, their tail feathers were open like a large fan, not quite as magnificent as a peacock's, but rather regal nevertheless. (Gary is of the opinion that these turkeys wander down

to Hazel Glen from the famed Stillaway Line, but then Gary has turned Stillaway into some sort of mythical place where all birds that the rest of us don't see gather.) Lori Anderson who wasn't at the meeting later informed me there are 14 that wander through her farm fields. (There has been a Wild Turkey wandering around my area since the summer, even spending time on my driveway, but like the Nelson's, I have not seen it.)



The Bald Eagle is another magnificent bird. It was seen at Lake Talon by Mary Marrs and by Gary at his place.

**(Gary's photo of an adult eagle at left.)**

Gary and Connie also recently saw 6 young ones in a field near the Powassan landfill site, and Grant informed us that the nesting eagles in Callander by the Chief Commanda's winter resting place and the Callander wharf successfully hatched 3 young.

Purple Finches were seen by Sue at her feeders and by Gary and Connie at their feeders. Not too many others had seen any, although a day or two after the meeting, I had three males in my yard. Sue also had the Red-breasted Nuthatch at her feeder, as did some

others. The White-breasted didn't get a mention, although I know Dick has some at his feeders and I suspect Grant does too.

Almost all the sparrows didn't get a mention, although I am sure most of us saw the recent sparrows, the White-crowned and the American Tree, as well as some of the spring and summer sparrows, the White-throat, the Song, the Chipping, and the Savannah. But at least April made mention of the Dark-eyed Junco, and in an email to me, Lori mentioned she is inundated with the sparrow Dick loves so much, the House Sparrow.

This fall there seemed to be a fair number of Golden-crowned Kinglets around, some seen by Sue and some seen by others. However, although they arrived in the spring, Dick did not see even one until October! It is such a beautiful little bird as can be seen in the photo at right.

Gary saw a Pine Siskin at his suet feeder. I thought I had seen one too, but I wasn't sure, there not being many around yet. But there are certainly a lot of Black-capped Chickadees around as seen by Jim Hasler and no doubt everyone else. And what is not to love about our faithful little bird that stays with us all year round. My regulars are so devoted to me, they follow me on my morning walk – well mainly because they want me to dig into my pocket and pull out some seed, which I do so willingly because I love seeing them eat from my hand, dig through the seeds to find the type they want, and hang onto my thumb with their little toes.



*Stephen O'Donnell*



*Renee Levesque*

Lori is still getting many American Pipits (pictured at left) in her yard, as well as Red-winged Blackbirds. The only other black bird mentioned was the Raven seen by Jim and many of us. In my area, the Raven has now taken over from the American Crow.

I had seen only one Eastern Bluebird all year - on Alsace Road. I hadn't even seen any at "my" bluebird nest that Lori set up for me on Wasing Road. But then one day this October, after a 21-year absence in my area, nine arrived in my yard and stayed almost 3 weeks.

Interestingly, Gary had seen only one too until the fall when a flock arrived in his area. Same with Dick who finally saw a flock, or more correctly, a hermitage at Jocko Point.

And it was at Jocko Point while Dick was watching the bluebirds that I saw a Red-bellied Woodpecker (photo at right), unfortunately not seen by Dick. It seemed to be part of the bluebird hermitage and when the bluebirds flew, I think maybe the woodpecker did too. No other woodpeckers were mentioned, although I know we have all seen the Hairy, the Downy, and some of us, the Pileated.

Most ducks did not get a mention, although all the ducks that can be seen by some of us at our four lagoons were seen, with the exception of the Canvasback and the Ruddy Duck. Mary saw the Mallard; Gary saw the Lesser Scaup; Lori had the Green-winged Teal at her place; and Dick saw the Surf and Black Scoters, but not the White-winged. Denise Desmarais was recently visiting her son in British Columbia and saw a Surf Scoter for the first time. She said that in addition to seeing her son, the 7 or so lifers she saw made the trip very worthwhile!

Scoters can now be seen on their southern migration in Lake Nipissing at Sunset Park, but best to have a scope to see them.



*Buddy Myles*



*Grant Mckercher*

Like the bluebirds, October was certainly the month of the American Coots (left), mostly young coots, not old coots! At the time of our meeting there were at least 40 or 50 at Callander Lagoon! Some were seen at Cache Bay and 5 or 6 at Powassan Lagoon, although I understand that number has now increased to almost 20. Each year, some of us usually see them at Cache Bay, but this is the first I have seen any at Powassan Lagoon

and I am sure not many of us have ever seen 40 or 50 together in a lagoon in our area. For the first time, Grant had 2 outside his place on Callander Bay. Unlike ducks which have webbed feet, coots have feet that are comprised of large lobed scales and toes that fold back with each step to help them walk on dry land. We don't often see coots up close out of water, but Grant had a coot's eye view of two walking on a log. Grant's photo showing the coot's toes is on the previous page.

With only nine in the group many species did not get mentioned. Three that probably should have been mentioned were the grebes – Pied-billed at Cache Bay; Horned on Lake Nipissing; and Red-necked at Jocko Point. No shorebirds were mentioned either, but many were seen – yellowlegs, sandpipers, and plovers.

And although there are hundreds of Canada Geese about, there has to date only been one Snow Goose (photo at right) seen by some us. However, back on September 24, Sheldon McGregor, saw 8 (7 white and 1 blue morph) in a field off Levac Road, near Cache Bay, with at least 450 Canada Geese.

### **Exciting Birding Moments This Year**

Grant's exciting bird moment was, of course, watching the Sandhill Cranes do their dance, and I would think seeing two American Coots basically in his front "yard".

Connie's was seeing about a dozen Common Nighthawks while she and Gary sat on their deck watching them forage for their evening meal of aerial insects. Dick and I also watched them as the sun was setting at Powassan Lagoon during September's Bird Bash. It was quite a splendid sight – 28 long-winged nighthawks in flight, their white wing patches often showing in the setting sun and red sky.



*Renee Levesque*

At first you might think nighthawks could be bats, and if you had been at Mary's cottage on Talon Lake, you would be correct. Mary's exciting moment was detecting 8 species of bats and 1,140 fly-bys during August.

In addition to the 28 Common Nighthawks, one of my birding moments was seeing a family of Common Gallinules at Cache Bay, two adults and four young. As I recall, there were not many different species around that day, so watching the entire family feeding along the edge of the marshy vegetation on the trailer side/dock side of the Bay made up for the lack of other different birds that day. The Common Gallinule breeds at Cache Bay and there is rarely a year one or two are not seen there, but usually not as many as 6 together and usually seen on the boathouse side. (Photo of an adult Common Gallinule at right.)



Hans Hillewaert, Wikimedia Commons

April's moment was the presence of a male Northern Cardinal in her area and in her yard. He would show himself every now and then throughout the summer. Because April had two female or female type cardinals all winter, she spent time trying to find a pair to determine if they were nesting, but to no avail. Jim also saw cardinals this year and if you attended the September Zoom meeting, you will know there is a possibility a pair may have nested in Rick Tripp's area. Evidence of nesting cardinals in our area is hard to come by and it would be helpful if a nest with nestlings could be found. It is Rick's mission to do so next year if his cardinals return.



Gary's moment was hearing a Boreal Owl (left) during his and Connie's and Rachel's Nocturnal Owl Survey in April. In Gary's own words from the Nocturnal Owl Survey Report, 2021:

*"Further along past a small swamp and the only residence on this road, we broke out the kit and began the call. The first two minutes of silence passed and while I was writing distractedly on the clipboard and Con and Rachel were quietly discussing the merits of something, a Boreal Owl BWOOH call burst forth and Rach and Con erupted in not-so-quiet excitement!"*

*Then the Boom Box went BWOOH. Confusion reigned briefly until we sorted it out. A genuine*

*Boreal Owl had called just before the Boom Box called. The owl called twice more but after the first BARR call decided silence was the better course of action. (Barred Owls will eat Boreal Owls). A Wilson's Snipe calling at this point added to the hysteria. All the BWOOHs and BARRs finally attracted a real Barred Owl who flew out to inspect the ruckus just before the final grunt ended the process."*

Gary's other birding moment was seeing a Belted Kingfisher with a fish in its mouth and the presence of Baltimore Orioles at his place. (There was no Orchard Oriole this year at his place unlike last year.)

Dick's other exciting moment was seeing a couple of Spruce Grouse on the Louck Lake trail. Although he has often seen Spruce Grouse there, he usually sees them on the ground. This time they were on the branch of a Spruce tree. It can be a long walk down the trail to the lake and back, but the journey is rewarded when one sees a Spruce Grouse or a Black-backed Woodpecker, also seen at times along this trail. Imagine if you see both on the one trip! Maybe that will be someone's exciting moment another time.

Dick and the Spruce Grouse go back a long way. If you wish to read Dick's entertaining and amusing story, a story involving Grant and Cal Osborne, a story I edited for *The Woodland Observer*, April 2019, I have attached it as a separate pdf file.



Jim's moment was watching the stocky, thick-necked green and chestnut Green Heron (left) at the marshy area by the new bridge in Laurier Woods. Both adult and juvenile Green Herons were also seen by some of us at Cache Bay where they breed. Sue was also in awe of the Green Heron when she watched one in Toronto's High Park, hunched over intent on catching its meal.

However, that wasn't Sue's only exciting moment. Sue is a relatively new birder and at this stage in her birding career, any new bird is exciting. Therefore, Sue had many exciting moments this year and she is in for many more! How fortunate she and other new birders are. There is nothing like one's first!

### **Winter Finch Forecast**

According to Tyler Hoar's Winter Finch Forecast (<https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2021-2022-by-tyler-hoar>), this should be a good winter for finches and some irruptive non-finches in our area. Those we

can expect to see this winter are: Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills (photo of latter below), some Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks and Red-breasted Nuthatches.



*Stephen O'Donnell*

We may not see many redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks and Bohemian Waxwings, although I'm told the latter has been seen recently in Algonquin Park. Because there was some confusion when I mentioned that these species would mostly be seen from Lake Superior eastward and that would not include us, I checked with Ron Pittaway who used to write the Winter Finch Forecast up to and including 2019 and he confirmed this. These species probably won't be seen in our area based on food supplies being good enough to prevent them from moving south. **BUT**, as Ron says, keep in mind that this forecast could be wrong – finches and irruptive non-finches don't always do what is forecast.

Bird Wing members Fred Pinto and Stephen O'Donnell supplied Tyler with tree cone and seed reports from our areas.

### **Global Big Day**

October 9 marked Global Big Day, a day when birders around the world were encouraged to enter their sightings free on eBird. And the world responded with over 33,000 participants, over 80,000 checklists, and 7,293 species.

In North America, which also includes Central America, 1,553 species were reported by over 23,000 participants who submitted over 49,000 checklists.

The top three species leaders were Colombia with 1,347 species; Peru with 1,223 species; and Ecuador with 1,100 species. Canada saw 330 species. The top three checklist leaders were the US, Canada (6313 checklists) and Colombia.

Of the 330 species seen in Canada, 209 were from Ontario, with 54 species seen in Nipissing District and 53 in Parry Sound District.

Two Bird Wing members submitted lists for our districts, Grant in Parry Sound and I in Nipissing. Kaye Edmonds, Nipissing Naturalists Club, also participated in Nipissing. April who was away at her cottage submitted her sighting of a Barred Owl for Haliburton. Although a reminder was sent to members about this event, it took place over our Thanksgiving weekend and that could explain why many did not participate.

For those interested in statistics, see <https://ebird.org/octoberbigday> and [October 9 for October Big Day 2021](#).

### **Project FeederWatch**

Many Bird Wing members participate in Project FeederWatch, but for those who don't, you should consider it.

**This season, the count goes from November 13 to April 30.**

Even if you don't have feeders, you can participate by counting the birds that come to your yard, although having feeders certainly goes far in attracting birds in the winter when food is scarce, and provides you with an opportunity to watch birds close-up for a lengthier period of time. You really get to know the regulars and their winter habits.



*Kaye Edmonds*

You have to create an account to participate; pick two consecutive days for your count, preferably in advance; watch your yard and feeders on those two days for any amount of time; and record the maximum number of individuals you see simultaneously during your two count days. In other words, you do not add the first and second day counts together. If you see 5 chickadees on day one of the count day and 5 on day two of the count day, you can count only 5 chickadees, not 10.

You count birds attracted to the food and water you provide; birds attracted to your shrubs and trees and other plantings in your yard; and hawks and predatory birds attracted to the birds at your feeders. You do not count the birds that simply fly over your count site or birds seen on non-count days even if the bird you might see on non-count days proves to be a rare bird.

For detailed information on how to count, see: <https://feederwatch.org/about/detailed-instructions/>, and to join or renew, see: <https://feederwatch.org/join-or-renew/>.

### Art Show, Paul Smylie

Bird Wing and Nipissing Naturalists Club member, Paul Smylie, will be presenting his new art work at the Kennedy Building, Gallery 222, located at 222 McIntyre Street at the corner of Fraser and McIntyre Streets. The show opens on **Saturday, November 6, at 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., and continues to Tuesday, December 21, weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.** Paul will be at the opening on November 6.

Paul's show is entitled "*New Works from Nature*". At least 12 of his paintings will be for sale. For more information on Paul's work, see: <https://www.kennedybuilding.ca/events>.

Paul is our second Bird Wing member to show his art. Last year Marc Buchanan's art was on show at the Alex Dufresne Art Gallery in Callander.

### Christmas Bird Count



*Renee and John Levesque*

This year North Bay's 43<sup>rd</sup> Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place on **Saturday, December 18**. Lori Anderson has agreed to once again be our compiler.

The CBC is North America's longest-running citizen science project, a project that began in 1900. It is one of the world's largest wildlife surveys and the data collected is used daily by conservation biologists and naturalists to assess population trends and distribution of birds.

The counts are conducted on a single day between December 14 and January 5. Designated routes within the 24-km (15-mile) count circle tend to stay the same from year to year.

If you wish to participate in the North Bay CBC either as a feeder counter, whereby you can report on the species and numbers seen from the comfort of your home as long as you are within the North Bay count circle, or if you are interested in becoming a field counter taking part in one of the designated routes, please contact Lori at [lori.anderson58@hotmail.com](mailto:lori.anderson58@hotmail.com) or **705-724-5780**.

Because of the continuing pandemic and because our Zoom tally party was such a success last year, the CBC count day will be followed by another Zoom tally party for field counters. Details will follow as we get closer to the date.

There is also a Burk's Falls CBC. Details on this count will be provided at November's Zoom meeting, if not before.

### **Bird Wing Meeting**

It was decided at October's Bird Wing meeting that **the November meeting scheduled for Tuesday, November 23, starting at 7:00 p.m. will be by Zoom** to give all members a chance to participate. We have 62 members and it would be nice to see new members at the next Zoom meeting. If you haven't yet paid for your 2022 membership, please contact Gary Sturge, our Treasurer, at [garysturge@gmail.com](mailto:garysturge@gmail.com). To belong to Bird Wing is only an additional \$5.00 for the year, although you must also belong to Nipissing Naturalists Club. Cost of a single annual membership is \$20.00, a family membership, \$30.00.

There is no meeting in December because the fourth Tuesday of December falls during the holiday period. We will decide come January how we will proceed depending on whether the library, where we used to hold our meetings, becomes available and depending on the pandemic situation.

### **Bird Bash**

November's Bird Bash will be held the weekend of **November 6-7**, and **December's, the weekend of the 4-5**.