



Spring is here and birds are returning to nest. Indeed, "the time of the singing of birds is come". Soon now, it will be well worth your while to arise at sunup for the sole purpose of listening to the dawn chorus. This glorious experience, made possible because returning males are trying to lay out territories and to attract females, will probably be at its best from mid-May 'til mid-June. Once the excitement of nesting is over, most species will quiet down. Thereafter, the better part of their communication will be done through various ticks, chips and chirps.

Presuming you were to get up in time for the dawn chorus, would you be able to pick out the individual songs within this avian symphony? Many birders are expert at this, and put their skill to good use by participating in the Breeding Bird Survey, which is held throughout North America every year. Knowledgeable birders go out on specified routes, (the same every year if possible), make 50 stops at ½ mile intervals, count all of the species of birds they see or hear, and numbers thereof. They then send their results to a central point, where they are collated. These are used in an attempt "to detect changes in North American land bird populations in order to identify population declines and to employ management techniques before a species becomes threatened or endangered". Being able to identify birds by ear is a crucial factor in the above mentioned survey. Otherwise many birds would be missed.

Learning to identify birds by song takes practice, but it is well worth the

effort. Imagine being able, while walking through the woods, to identify the majority of birds you are hearing, by song alone! In fact you may find you are hearing even more than before, because your ear will be attuned. The songs of some birds are easier to learn because they are more familiar, or the birds sing their names. Examples of these are the Black-capped Chickadee and Whip-poor-will. But what about other birds, especially those that are less well known? I think it helps to find words to fit the song, and to say/sing them in rhythm while watching the bird through your binoculars as it sings. Roger Tory Peterson's "A Field Guide to Birds" is a great help in this respect. He often suggests words for various bird songs. Thus, the Olive-sided Flycatcher sings, "quick-three-beers; the Wood Thrush, "ee-o-lay"; the Black-throated Green Warbler, "zoo zee zoo zoo zee" and the Common Yellowthroat, "witchety-witchety-witchety-witch". To me the Barred Owl seems to say, "who cooks for you, who cooks for you - all", and Moreen Ready, of the NLB, always says that the Eastern Meadowlark calls, "I am hee-er". The main thing is to find the words that work for you and they will help you to remember the song. On a recent field trip, NLB members heard a song that was vaguely familiar as well as unusual. The first thought was that it might be a Tufted Titmouse. Then yours truly suggested it might be a Northern Cardinal singing an unusual variation of its song. Both guesses were wrong, for when Bill Cutfield found the bird, it turned out to be a Carolina Wren! We should have known, for it had been singing the lively and buoyant "tea-kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle - tea". It has just been a long time since we had last heard one.

Northern Cardinals are

singing now, and they continue to turn up at many feeders. Elaine St. Pierre, Gladys Burt, Miriam Parish, Hector Capell, Rene Waterfield, Mary Leidenberger and Joe Kenney have all had them. If my memory serves me right Joe said that he has had as many as 8 at his feeder!

Members of the NLB, alerted by Gladys Burt, were lucky enough to see a Brown Thrasher at Jane and Richard Jamieson's place. It had first visited the Burt's feeder and then frequented their neighbour's. This species, normally only seen here during the breeding season, has managed to survive all winter by visiting these two feeding stations. Helen and John Shepherd saw a Brown Thrasher as late as November 23, 1990 and also had Bohemian Wax January 7, 11, and 26. Later, on February 20, a very large flock of these interesting birds were seen near Sand Lake by Shirley Wilson.

During the last week of February, Rob Capell had a group of 23 American Robins feeding on juniper berries near his home. By now most readers will have seen their first robin.

Red-winged Blackbirds were reported by Annette Mess on March 2, John Goodman March 3, Marjorie Bellem March 4, and Katherine Sides on March 5. Thereafter many mentioned seeing this species. Anne White had a Red-winged Blackbird with a red band on its leg at her feeder. Frank Phelan, of Queen's Biological Station, feels it is probably a bird that was banded as part of a study being carried out there. Anne also reported the first Common Grackle and Marjorie Bellem mentioned hearing an Eastern Phoebe.

When Harrison Peters phoned to report "redwings", he also mentioned the dearth of House Finches at his feeder this year. On the other hand he has had a good number of Mourning Doves feeding along with the usual feeder

species.

On March 5, members of the NLB estimated that they saw 700 Canada Geese flying in various sized flocks, and Mary Leidenberger reported seeing this species on March 6. Then on March 17, Dave Willison estimated that he saw close to 3,000 geese in a 1½ hour period at Delta. He also had a Belted Kingfisher there on March 2 and a Northern Shrike near Forfar the same day. My little granddaughter, Elizabeth Anderson, spotted a Northern Shrike near Morton that I missed something that I will not be allowed to forget! Though not in this area, Bill Cutfield was fortunate to have a good look at a Loggerhead Shrike. This is the species of shrike that breeds in our area.

John and Elsie Goodman had a predator at their place which from the description, may well have been a Merlin. On March 13, Bill Cutfield saw a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks near his home presumably the same pair that nested nearby last year.

For those who remember last months column, I must mention that Bill has redeemed himself. He once again promised the NLB eagles and this time he delivered - 6 Bald Eagles in the Ivy Lea area!

Even better on our March 20 field trip we found 2 Bald Eagles - 1 immature bird at Wolfe Lake and a beautiful mature one at Narrows Lock. This latter bird posed for us, sitting close by in brilliant sunlight, then did a "fly past" for all to see. Beautiful! Later in the day I had 2 more immature eagles at Chaffey's Lock. What a day!

Another favourite species, the Eastern Bluebird was reported by Gladys Burt on March 13, so by the time you read this, you too should be seeing bluebirds!

The number to call with your sightings is 359-5178 and until next month.

GOOD BIRDING!

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