

## BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Honking and frequently changing places in their large V formations, Canada Geese are hard to miss as they make their way south to their wintering grounds. This autumn rite seems to elicit a similar response in the human heart that the cry of the Common Loon does. Even when light sleepers are awakened by the noisy honking (for geese migrate by both day and night) they don't seem to mind, and drift off to sleep again as though billed by the cacophony! Sometimes, as we thrill to the passage of these larger, noisier birds, we forget to consider the thousands of smaller ones, that regularly pass through our area on the way to their winter 'homes'. In this vein, one day, early in September, I heard chickadees by my house. Over the years I have learned not to ignore chickadees, especially at migration time, for, other birds that are somewhat quieter often move around with them. So, binoculars in hand, I stationed myself comfortably near the little fake stream that runs into our garden pool and quietly waited. Sure enough, attracted by the running water, the chickadees moved closer, as did their cohorts. I knew this, for by now I could hear other little chips and peeps. Finally, one little chickadee popped into the stream, and amid much splashing enjoyed a bath. All the while I was following little movements in the background, as I tried to identify various tiny fast-moving birds. A furtive looking Ovenbird moved in, backed off, and moved in again for a drink and a bath. Then, what luck! A Canada Warbler appeared, blue-grey above, bright yellow below, resplendent with black necklace and yellow spectacle - a quick bath and it was gone. Several Black-throated Green Warblers vied with one another to bathe in their favourite area of the stream, then sat on a branch, shaking and preening their freshly washed feathers. Bay-breasted Warblers moved in. Luckily, they still retained a remnant of chestnut colour on their sides, otherwise I would have had a struggle to sort them out from the fall plumaged Blackpoll Warbler. I could hear a Pine Warbler singing in the distance. It soon moved in to bathe, giving me a good look at its yellow throat and white wing-bars. Two prim looking Black-and-white Warblers made their



entrance to the stream, and seemed less nervous of my presence than did the other warblers. Two Scarlet Tanagers appeared. Male Scarlet Tanagers lose their scarlet colour in the fall and resemble the yellow-green plumaged female. I thought these were males, for the black of their wings was quite pronounced as was the yellow of their underbodies. Several Brown Creepers - little mouse-like birds - worked over a stump before creeping in for their bath and drink.

So it continued, and by the time this mixed flock left I had seen at least 50 birds. Some I was unable to identify, but I had managed to identify 10 species of warblers apart from the chickadees, creepers and tanagers. All, save the chickadees and perhaps the creepers, were about to embark on another leg of their long migration. Not as spectacular as the hordes of honking geese, but how fulfilling it was to watch these tiny creatures as they prepared their feathers for the long flight ahead and moved on to feed, to make sure their bodies would have enough energy for their journey.

Warblers migrate at night which enables them to fuel up during the day. Presumably, another

advantage to their nocturnal migration is that they are safer from predators, but increasingly, a different kind of danger awaits them. Many die in collisions with manmade structures. Buildings, such as lighthouses, towers and skyscrapers, are all the more lethal if they are lighted or spotlighted. These lights seem to act as a lure - drawing the migrating flocks to them. If weather conditions are such that the flocks are flying low, mortality figures increase dramatically. A case in point. Before strobe lights were installed in place of spotlights at the Lennox Generating station, bird kills were sickening. For instance, on the night of September 5/6, 1981, a total of 5,813 birds were killed in collision with the chimneys. After the installation of the strobe lights there was a sharp decrease in the number of birds killed at this spot.


I have just mentioned one local structural danger to birds, now less dangerous than in the past. But when one considers how many such and other dangers lay ahead for the warblers bathing in my stream today, it is a wonder that any make it to their destination. To underline

this thought, the Blackpoll Warbler, according to the "Wonder of Birds", weighs less than an ounce and often "covers 6,000 miles from Alaska to New England", then this miniscule creature heads off over the Atlantic and Caribbean and for 3 or 4 days is "at the mercy of the sea" - its destination Brazil. So, if you suffer from insomnia and lie awake listening to the honking of Canada Geese, save a little admiration for the many other smaller birds who also frequent the nighttime sky, albeit a little earlier in the season. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds also have a long and dangerous journey to their wintering grounds. Most have left us by the end of September. Nan Miller was wondering when she should take down her hummingbird feeder. This is a worry to many of my readers, as they are afraid if they leave it up, it will detain the birds from their migration. Not so, say the experts. Other factors determine when 'hummers' migrate; so leave your feeder up into October. It just might help a late migrant to keep its strength up at a time when food is scarce.

Leorene Hayes had both hummingbirds and Eastern Bluebirds on September 11. I would appreciate hearing last dates for these two species. My next column will be written during the week of October 13.

I omitted mentioning in last month's column that John and Helen Sheppard had seen Mute Swans on Lower Beverley Lake. It is possible that they were the ones set free earlier at Upper Beverley. Catherine Davies was surprised to discover that Ovenbirds were in her area. This is the thrush-like warbler that nests on the ground in mature woodland. It is difficult to see in spite of its loud "teacher, teacher, teacher," call. Don Fysh had success with his artificial loon nesting island. A pair of loons fledged 1 young there, and stayed around for sometime thereafter, as Don and his wife Maxine were able to enjoy them. Dave and Lillian Willison were lucky enough to hear a Screech Owl calling shortly after telling the North Leeds Birdwatchers that they hadn't had one for ages! Make sure your feeders are in good shape - it's that time of year again! Please call in your sightings at 359-5178, and until next month.

GOOD BIRDING!



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