

## BIRDS OF A FEATHER

by Marg Hendrick

The birding year culminates in the Audubon Christmas Bird Counts, and members of the North Leeds Birdwatchers (NLB) participated in the two which were held locally. Christmas counts take place within 7 1/2 mile radius circles, and participants are required to follow strict rules. The results are published in the birders "Bible" - "American Birds". The Westport count produced 58 species among which were Common Loon, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Merlin, Belted Kingfisher, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Bohemian Waxwing, Northern Cardinal, Lapland Longspur, Red Crossbill and Hoary Redpoll.

A total of 48 species were found on the Rideau Ferry count, which is organized by the Rideau Valley Field Naturalists. Some of the highlights were Canada Goose, Ring-necked Duck, Bald Eagle, Great Horned, Barred, Short-eared and Saw-whet Owls, and Bohemian Waxwings.

The Rufous Hummingbird, which somehow found its way to the Bennett feeder in Battersea, was mentioned in my last column. This little "wrong way Carrigan", which should not even be here during the summer, found itself approximately 3000 miles from its fall destination. The Bennets worked valiantly to provide the bird with food. They used heaters to keep the syrup in a liquid state and supplemented it with proteins provided by Kit Chubb of the Avian Care and Research Foundation.

We can only surmise that as far as the bird was concerned it had completed its migration, and the only way it would reach its Mexican wintering grounds would be by human intervention. Experts agreed that netting the tiny creature would be too risky.

Eventually, a special cage suitable for trapping hummingbirds was constructed. Then on Dec. 19 persons (with the required permits) easily succeeded in enticing the bird into the cage. The plan was to have it rest over in a suitable spot in Ottawa, then to fly it to its southern wintering grounds. However, good intentions notwithstanding the bird refused to eat and died 2 days later. In spite of the sad ending to this story, Mr. & Mrs. Bennett deserve nothing but praise for all their efforts which enabled the hummingbird to survive at their feeder so late in the season.

On Nov. 20 Millie Mott saw 3 large flocks of Canada Geese near Seeley's Bay. Some were also seen by Bob Wanless, Glynn Guthrie and Leoree Wayes in Dec. The latest report of geese came from Leorene who saw a flock near Brockville early in Jan.

In late Nov. and early Dec. Northern Cardinals appeared at the Cutfield, Mess, Sides, Hendrick and Burt feeders. Gladys Burt appeared to be favoured - with 2 pairs coming to hers!

Margaret Keith had a Cardina Wren visiting her feeding station on Nov. 28, 29, and 30. Later, on Jan. 3, that lucky Gladys Burt had a Carolina Wren turn up in her Basement!

It now frequents her feeder. This species, rare in this area, is smaller than a House Wren, has a white eye line, rufous back and buffy underparts.

On Nov. 28 Annette Mess had a group of Gray Partridge walk through her yard. This species, which prefers open farmland or similar habitat, seems to be difficult to find in this area. Flocks of Snow Buntings which also prefer an open situation were seen by John Goodman and Don McNicholls. Pat McManus had a puzzling bird at his feeder which turned out to be a Lapland Longspur. In its winter plumage this species resembles a sparrow.

It too likes open country and is frequently discovered travelling with Snow Buntings.

On her way to join the Nov. 25 NLB field trip, Winona Barker spotted a Northern Shrike. Shrikes, in the absence of mice, will prey on small birds such as buntings and sometimes show up at feeders looking for a bird meal. On the above mentioned field trip, members of the NLB had difficulty identifying a hard to see duck on Big Rideau Lake. They finally realized they were looking at a Gadwall.

Huge flocks of Common Mergansers were seen by Bob Wanless whilst the water was open on Sand Lake. Ellen Bonvill saw a flock of mergansers flying NE, perhaps in search of more open water in which to fish.

A late Osprey, which also likes to "fish", was seen by Dan Nicholls near Morton on Nov. 27.

On Nov. 30 Colin and Eleanor Cope had a Common Grackle at their feeder and also saw Bufflehead on Wolf Lake. Their regular Red-bellied Woodpecker "high-tailed" it and so missed being counted on the Westport count. However, it redeemed itself by returning on Jan. 11. Harrison Peters still has a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers coming to his feeder along with Mourning Doves and a host of other birds that feed there!

Annette Mess was fortunate to find a Brewer's Blackbird at a corn crib near her home. This species has been undergoing a range expansion. The male is all black with a whitish eye. In good light it shows purplish reflections on its head and greenish reflections on its body. Its size is that of a largish Red-winged Blackbird.

John Goodman has had Pine Siskins at his feeder. Marjorie Jackson and Harrison Peters have House Finches at theirs and the Hendrick feeder is still entertaining Dark-eyed Juncos.

Margaret Bulloch was first to mention the presence of Purple Finches, and thereafter the reports of Purple Finches and American Goldfinches are too numerous to detail.

One last interesting feeder observation - a muskrat was seen beneath Dick and Mollie Usshen's feeder.

Pauline Hockey and Pat McManus were rewarded by seeing 4 Bald Eagles while birding near Big Rideau Lake. Eagles seem to be more prevalent now that DDT is not the same problem it once was.

Thanks to directions from Pep Burt, the NLB saw a Great Blue Heron on their Jan. 13 field trip. Even more astonishing were the large numbers of bull frog tadpoles seen swimming near the surface of holes in the ice of a nearby beaver pond. Also observed in one of the water holes was a live Red Salamander, which sported a large cancer-like growth on its body. The following day Harrison Peters discovered another Great Blue Heron near Chantry!

If I do not include the story of Hamlet, our daughter's budgie, I will be a dead duck! In honour of our visit on Christmas Eve, he laid an egg in the see-catcher below his cage! He is now known as Hamletta!

This should lighten your spirits and make you "think spring" - Bill Cutfield saw 5 American Robins near his home on Jan. 1. Moreover, your trip to the South Crosby dump could be cheery, for Ozzie White reports that the little band of wintering robins are still there.

The number to call with your sightings is 359-5178.

Until next month  
GOOD BIRDING

