



**BIRDS OF A FEATHER**  
by Marg Hendrick

It is still October as I write, and this morning I saw snowflakes! A prelude to winter? Perhaps some of my readers will feel that this is a depressing start for this column, but let's look on the bright side.

Late fall and winter not only bring a change in the landscape, but also a change in bird life. Most warblers have already passed us on their way south. Skeins of Canada Geese are still honking by, Ruby and Golden-crowned Kinglets still move around the woods with the ever-present Black-capped Chickadees, and little flocks of Dark-eyed Juncos are back at many feeders. Except for the chickadees, most of these birds will move on, to be replaced by some common winter species, and, if we are lucky, some rare finds.

Winter birding has always been a favourite birding time for me. To be sure, species are fewer and more difficult to find, but what a delight when the unusual is found!

Each winter is different, and indeed some are bleak birdwise; others are exciting! Perhaps this one will be so. As usual, I am approaching the cold weather with a "wish list", and I am hoping that the sharp eyes of my readers will help me to fulfill some of my wishes. What birder can forget the eruption of Great Gray Owls during the winter of 1983-84? In the Kingston area 407 "Great Grays" were reported that year (Weir). I, myself, saw several of these large, tame, tuftless, diurnal owls in this area that winter. Every once in a while, Great Gray Owls move south from their normal range, thereby giving local birders a rare treat. So first on my list is one of these wise-looking, grandfather-faced owls!

While on the subject of owls, this year I would like to find a Boreal Owl in this area. Its name gives a clue to its usual habitat - the boreal forest. However, the Boreal Owl sometimes takes up residence in the Kingston area, and must be present here from time to time. This owl is very tame and similar to, yet a little larger than a Saw-whet Owl. It differs in that its forehead is spotted rather than streaked; its bill is straw-coloured rather than black; and its facial discs are outlined in black. We banded one of these owls in the Montreal area and it was so tame that it declined to fly from the hand when it was time to release it!

If we are lucky this year we might have a big movement of winter finches. Crossbills might be nice! Both Red and White-winged Crossbills have bizarre bills. The lower mandible crosses below the upper mandible. Crossbills are nomadic, moving about in search of food. They frequent evergreen stands

that are loaded with cones - the food of their choice. They use their unusual bills to pry open the cones and then they extract the seeds with their tongue. The last time I saw a large flock of crossbills was in March 1985. At that time I estimated that there were 750 Red Crossbills feeding in a stand of evergreens in the Chaffey's Lock area.

For feeder watchers, wouldn't it be nice if we had an invasion of Common Redpolls this winter? They have not been very abundant the past couple of years. Sunflower seeds will do them nicely, but how they love the expensive niger seed! What a delight to have these cheery little creatures at your window - the male with his red forehead, black throat, brown streaked pinkish breast and the less colourful, yet dainty, female! Should you entertain redpolls, be sure to keep an eye out for, as Peterson puts it, "a 'frostier' bird with an UNSTREAKED whitish rump." This will be a Hoary Redpoll, an irregular, uncommon winter visitor (Weir). I've not yet seen a Boreal Chickadee in this area. Sooner or later this brown-capped, husky voiced chickadee should turn up. Another species that has eluded me here is the Gray Jay the renowned "Whiskey Jack" of northern logging camps. The first one I ever saw reminded me of an overgrown chickadee.

I could go on and on with my wish list. How about a Varied Thrush, Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Mockingbird or Lark Sparrow? Well, I can dream, can't I? And before we know it, winter will be over, and once again spring warblers will be on their way.

We only have a few reports this month as I have not been

as available as usual. My apologies to those who called, and were unable to reach me. Please don't let it discourage you.

Gladys Burt has welcomed back a Northern Cardinal. Gladys is one of the fortunate few who always seems to have cardinals at her feeder once the cooler weather arrives.

There were a few reports of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. John Goodman had one on September 12, Mary Leidenberger one on September 17 and Connie Hayes one on September 20. Did anyone record one later than that?

Mary Leidenberger had an Eastern Phoebe late in September as well as Eastern Bluebirds. On October 20, John Goodman had 3 bluebirds checking out his nest boxes, and I would be interested to hear if anyone has a later date for bluebirds. John also has a Red-winged Blackbird and Dark-eyed Juncos at his feeder. As well, a

White-crowned Sparrow fed there from October 3-13. He also heard a flock of Canada Geese on October 20.

On October 13, Ruby-crowned Kinglets were giving inexperienced renditions of their bubbly song in our wild apple trees. On the same day, 4 Purple Finch appeared at our feeder and a Turkey Vulture sailed overhead.

I've not yet had a full report of the birds seen by the North Leeds Birdwatchers on their trip south. However, I have been told that they had a marvelous time and that among the species seen were 16 Peregrine Falcons! I was unable to participate in their trip, and needless to say, I am envious!

Do get out and enjoy the changing scene, and call me at 359-5178 with your sightings. Until next month,

GOOD BIRDING.

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