

## BIRDS OF A FEATHER

by Marg Hendrick

The Rideau Valley Field Naturalists held their second annual spring bird count on May 25. This count is carried out over a 24 hour period and takes place within a 35 km radius circle, the centre of which is Perth. Volunteers cover designated 10 km grid squares within the circle, counting the number of species seen or heard, as well as the number of individuals. By the end of the time period a combines total of 129 species were found by the participants.

It may be of interest to know that the "newly fledged" North Leeds Birdwatchers (NLB) took part in the count. They found 103 species within their designated areas, of which at least 6 species were unique in the final results. The NLB should be commended, for this represents a significant contribution to the project.

The excitement of migration is over and the breeding season is well underway. By May 20 the Eastern Jackbirds in Marjorie Jackson's nest box were already feeding young. Some other bluebird watchers were not so fortunate, their bluebirds' first attempts at nesting resulted in failure. Claire Mills discovered dead young in her box, the nest material having been soaked by the heavy rains. It is always a good idea to ascertain that the birdhouse you use has adequate drainage holes and good ventilation. Nonetheless, even if this is done, long periods of cold wet weather often bring about tragedy.

June McFadyen found that the bluebird eggs in her box had been thrown to the ground - possibly the work of a House Wren that was present in her yard.

House Wrens seem unable to tolerate close neighbours and frequently exhibit the type of behaviour described above. Sometimes they merely pierce the eggs, thereby rendering them useless. Moreover if a number of boxes are available, the male wren will often make nests in them all, thus denying their use by other species. House Wrens often choose unusual nest sites, almost any cubby hole will do. It is reported in Bent's "Life Histories" that wrens have nested in such things as teapots, boots and watering pots, and I have seen one busily constructing its nest in a clothespeg apron. An interesting observation came from Lorne Pinch, who once witnessed a wren painstakingly building a nest, using amongst other materials approximately 2 dozen 2 inch finishing nails. These were "stolen" from a nail keg and carried to the nest with great difficulty. Whether you choose to like this energetic little bird or not, it is an interesting species to observe

as it fulfills its role in the realm of nature.

Rene and Bob Waterfield have a Killdeer nest in their rockery again this year; and cheers to Manley Charland whose closed-off driveway bears a sign saying, "ROAD CLOSED, KILLDEER NESTING!"

The Waterfields also had a Great-crested Flycatcher visit their yard. This large flycatcher, with its yellow belly and long rufous tail, makes itself known as it moves through the forest uttering its loud "Wheep".

Allan Earl watched a Northern Harrier as it quartered the fields looking for food. The quartering technique, plus the slight dyhedral of the wings and conspicuous white rump help to make the identification of this raptor easy.

Jim Earl, not to be outdone by his father, witnessed a Northern Goshawk as it zoomed in on a European Starling at his feeder. This, the largest of our accipiters, is primarily a bird-eater, and it made quick work of the starling.

Claire Myers noticed a small falcon, the American Kestrel, hanging around a bird box at her place. Kestrels are hole nesters, and will nest in a suitable birdhouse, so the bird may have been house-hunting. One cannot rule out the possibility that it was looking for a bird

meal, though kestrels prefer large insects such as grasshoppers, when they are available. Wintering-over kestrels, deprived of their favoured foods, are dependent on rodents and birds for sustenance.

A male and female Scarlet Tanager were observed by Simon Lawson and his father. The male tanager is strikingly beautiful with his scarlet body and jet black wings and tail. However, by the end of summer he will have lost his nuptial plumage and will resemble the yellowish olive green female, though his wings and tail will still be black, whereas hers will be a dull greyish brown.

On May 22 Margaret Bulloch saw a large flight of Brant Geese over Portland. "Brants" are smaller and migrate later than Canada Geese. They fly in long "waving lines" in lieu of the V formation that their relatives find so useful for their mode of travel.

The NLB had a field trip to Amherst Island where they found many interesting species. A Great Egret, spotted by Mary Anne Leggett was the best find of the trip. Other species seen such as Brant Geese, Ruddy Turnstones, Wilson's Phalaropes, Semi-palmated Sandpipers, Dunlins and Red Knots were lifers

(new birds) for several in the group, so it made for an exciting day. Annette Mess, while birding locally, turned up a group of Least Sandpipers, a species which the NLB had hoped to see on Amherst Island, but unfortunately did not.

Alfred Willows noted a Common Loon's nest built in an exceptionally high location at Lower Beverley Lake. It will be interesting to learn whether or not this nesting is successful. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds always catch our attention and one certainly has George Antoine's. Whenever he gets out his hose the bird appears for its daily shower! Late nesters such as Cedar Waxwings and American Goldfinches, (the latter of which John Goodman notes have now left his feeder) will soon set up housekeeping. Other species that raise second broods will continue their duties, but on the whole bird life will become much quieter in July.

During the latter half of August migration south will begin, and identification will be difficult as many species will arrive in less definitive plumage. Please keep me posted on your sightings at 359-5178, and until September GOOD BIRDING!

# "Not too well done Harry."

Gas barbecues are a convenient and economical way to enjoy outdoor cooking, but they must be used carefully and kept in good condition.

Every summer, backyard chefs are injured and property is damaged in gas barbecue fires. Here are a few safety tips to ensure your barbecue parties don't go up in smoke.

1. There's only one way to connect a propane cylinder to a barbecue - the right way. Follow the manufacturer's instructions closely and keep the fuel hose away from any metal parts which may become hot.
2. Check for leaks regularly: Brush a soap and water solution over hoses and connectors and open the cylinder valve. If there's a leak, bubbles will form in the soap film.
3. Keep your barbecue at least 10 feet from buildings, overhangs and combustible structures.
4. Don't try to light a barbecue with the lid closed. If it fails to light or goes out, turn the gas off and wait five minutes before relighting.
5. When finished, close all valves.
6. Never bring propane cylinders indoors.



7. If you suspect your barbecue isn't working properly, have it checked by a qualified serviceman.

Make sure you don't have to invite the fire department to your next barbecue. For a free copy of the brochure "Living Safely with Propane", contact the Consumer Information Centre at 555 Yonge St., Toronto, Ont. M7A 2H6 - (416) 963-1111 or toll free at 1-800-268-1142.

Ontario residents with an 807 area code may call the 416 number collect.

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