

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

by Marg Hendrick

Birdwatching is a hobby that can be approached from a number of angles. Some folk simply prefer to watch their feeders and note the activity there. Others like to actively birdwatch. You will find them slogging through fields, forests, marshes and other habitats searching for birds, and usually hoping to find a rarity. More often than not these people are referred to as birders. Birders often turn into listers. Listers organize the birds they find into lists. They may have yard lists, city lists, provincial lists etc., usually culminating in what is termed a life list - a list of all the species of birds they have ever seen. Listers can be quite competitive and enjoy their sport very much. There is even an organization that keeps track of the status of listers. As of Nov. 21, 1984 Norman Chesterfield, of Wheatley, Ont. became the undisputed world champion lister. He had identified 6,161 of the approximately 8,800 species of birds in the world. By now he has probably added to his list, but he'll have to keep at it, for there'll always be some avid lister nipping at his heels! Because of their drive and fantastic identification skills, listers often provide information we would lack if it were not for their sport.

However, one does not have to travel the world to gain new information on birds. Many people never list, but enjoy watching the habits of birds. This can be done both in the field or by watching your feeder. All it takes is a little time and the patience to sit back and really watch.

Blue Jays are common in this area and birders are often heard to say, "Oh, it's only a jay." But Blue Jays are very interesting birds. John Goodman's attention was drawn to one as it spewed out a mouthful of corn onto his picnic table. Having done so, the jay then carefully picked up a few kernels and took them to a corner of the yard, where it probed the ground and then deposited the corn. Picking up leaves with its bill, the Blue Jay carefully covered the hiding spot and returned for more kernels to hide in another place. This behaviour continued until all the corn was hidden.

Although this conduct is not uncommon in a Blue Jay, how many of us have ever witnessed it?

While on an early morning walk, I discovered an injured Northern Flicker. When I picked it up it uttered loud alarm calls which it kept up for a long time. All the way home, other birds hearing the flicker, closed in on me shrieking and scolding. Once home I put the injured bird in a small dark box and took it to the Avian Care and Research Foundation located in Verona. There, with the help of her husband, Kit Chubb cares for sick and injured wild birds. If you find a bird in trouble you should make every effort to take it to Kit. Her skilled hands may be able to save the bird, and it will be returned to the wild. If the case is hopeless, the bird will be disposed of in a humane manner. For those unable to deliver injured birds personally, Kit has volunteer ambulance drivers, and she may be able to provide you with one. Call her at 374-2923.

Annette and David Mess climbed Rock Dunder and observed eight hawks, probably Red-tailed, circling there. This species has been quite visible lately as individuals stop over to hunt during migration. Some will probably stay to winter here.

Earl McFadden noticed the predation of Blue Jays and Black Squirrels in his corn fields. Since Dennis Lawson observed a Northern Harrier nearby, and Red-tailed Hawks have also been seen in the area, either or both could be responsible.

Shorebirds seem to like Clifford Smith's lawn - especially the wet area that appears after a rain. Clifford reported a Killdeer

nesting nearby during the early summer. Later he saw an Upland Sandpiper with young feeding on the lawn. Then several times during fall migration Common Snipe have been feeding there, along with a number of Killdeer.

Annette Mess saw a group of 6 Eastern Bluebirds early in October and Eleanor Earl had a group of American Robins in her yard around the middle of the month.

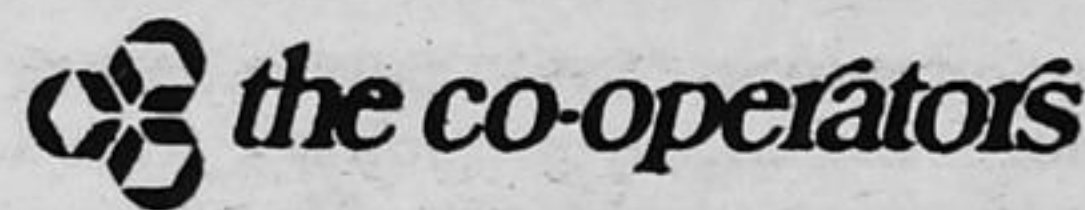
The week of Oct. 6 produced a large number of migrating Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers. They seemed to be everywhere. Goodman's had one sitting on their porch rail. Both male and female Yellow-rumped Warblers look drab at this time of year, but there is no mistaking the bright yellow rump and white tail spots as the bird flies away from you. The night of Oct. 10 many of these warblers must have continued their journey south, for the following morning they were greatly reduced in number.

On Oct. 11 one could see a good selection of migrating sparrows. Among them were Lincoln Sparrows, some of which were singing, a not too common occurrence in the fall. Included in the group were a number of Tree Sparrows - the little rusty-capped sparrow with a "stickpin" on its breast. This is one of our cheery

winter birds, so watch for them at your feeder.

Jansie Keates excitedly reported a Northern Cardinal which was eating wild grapes in her yard. It didn't stay, but it may return when the wild fruit stock runs low, for cardinals often spend much time in the winter at feeders. Be sure to let me know if you are lucky enough to get one at yours.

The birding class went to Charleston Lake for their weekly field trip, and were lucky enough to both see and hear a Common Raven. It was a new bird for several, and an exciting moment for us all. Let me hear about your interesting sightings. The number to call is 359-5178. Until next month, GOOD BIRDING!



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