

LIVING

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A birder's year

(Last in a series of columns on birding)

Half the battle in finding and identifying birds is knowing what to expect. Today, I am proposing a list of some of a typical year's main birding opportunities. For each

month, I have included birds to watch for in your yard, local outings of interest, and places further afield to try. I would like to thank Jerry Ball for his assistance in preparing this article.

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OUR CHANGING SEASONS
Drew Monkman

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/ptbosightings/#ans>. To receive daily reports on interesting observations further afield, I recommend subscribing to Ontbirds. Go to <http://mailman.hwcn.org/mailman/listinfo/ontbirds>.

January and February

Although feeder activity can vary a great deal from year to year or even day to day, the following species are usually quite reliable in the winter months: black-capped chickadee, blue jay, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, mourning dove, dark-eyed junco, American tree sparrow, white-breasted nuthatch, red-breasted nuthatch, northern cardinal, and in more urban areas, the house finch, house sparrow, European starling and rock pigeon. Some years, "northern" finches show up as well. They may include common redpolls, pine siskins, purple finches, evening grosbeaks and pine grosbeaks. White-winged crossbills sometimes even come to feeders. During the winter months, the activity at your feeder may also attract a Cooper's or sharp-shinned hawk, or possibly even a merlin.

Local outings of interest can include Petroglyphs Provincial Park and the Apsley area for northern finches, bald eagles, grey jays and barred owls; local rail-trails for overwintering robins (especially between Hilliard and Cumberland); open agricultural land such as along County Road 2 for horned larks and snow buntings; the Otonabee River between Peterborough and Young's Point for common mergansers, common goldeneyes and possibly even a bald eagle. The Sandy Lake Road, especially near the junction of County Road 46, can also be good for eagles.

Further afield, try the shore of Lake Ontario between Cobourg and Ajax for gulls and winter rarities not seen in the Peterborough area. Cranberry Marsh on Halls Road in Whitby can be especially good. Amherst Island near Kingston is considered the owl capital of Ontario, with snowy owls, saw-whet owls, and long-eared owls usually present. It is also a good area for waterfowl and rough-winged hawks. Presqu'ile Provincial Park sometimes has eiders and harlequin ducks in winter.

March

In addition to the common feeder



Ruby-throated hummingbirds will be looking for nectar feeders in May.

Karl Egressy, special to The Examiner

species, watch for the return of the first migrants, as song sparrows, common grackles and red-winged blackbirds often show up at feeders.

Starting in mid- to late March, drive the roads east and south of Peterborough for the migrants listed above as well as bluebirds, phoebes, meadowlarks and even snipe and woodcock. Also be sure to check open sections of local lakes and rivers for northward-bound ducks and geese. Little Lake, Lake Katchewanooka and Clear Lake at Young's Point are popular stopover points. The flooded field at Mather's Corners on County Road 2 can also be very good for nearly all species of ducks and sometimes tundra swans. On calm nights, drive the backroads of both southern and northern parts of the county to listen for great horned, screech and barred owls. Sawyer's Creek, Buckley's Lake, and the fields around Hiawatha can be good for sandhill cranes at this time of year.

If you want to see ducks, head to Presqu'ile Provincial Park for its annual Waterfowl Weekends. They take place the second and third weekends of the month. Experts are on hand with spotting scopes to help you sort out the thousands of migrating waterfowl. March is also the beginning of the spring hawk watch at Grimsby near Hamilton.

April

Large numbers of northward-bound juncos as well as tree, white-throated, and white-crowned sparrows come to feeders this month. Fox sparrows are also possible.

Check ice-free lakes including Little Lake in Peterborough for waterfowl as well as loons and grebes. Numbers usually peak early in the month. In the evening, listen for the "peenting" and courtship flight of the American

woodcock in damp fields and woodland edges such as Moncrief Line, just south of the Peterborough airport. Check flooded fields such as along Assumption Road for greater and lesser yellowlegs. Watch and listen throughout the Kawarthas for swallows, sparrows, kinglets and, by month's end, the first warblers. The Peterborough Field Naturalists' spring Sunday Morning Bird Walks start up this month.

The Carden Plain on County Road 6 north of Kirkfield is definitely worth a trip any time from late April through mid-June. You can find a variety of rare species such as loggerhead shrikes and even yellow rails. Presqu'ile Provincial Park can be great for early warblers and other songbirds in late April.

May

Everywhere in the Kawarthas, birding is at its best, as long-distance migrants from the neo-tropics arrive back. Rose-breasted grosbeaks and even indigo buntings are possible at seed feeders, while ruby-throated hummingbirds and Baltimore orioles will be looking for nectar feeders.

In May, most birders focus primarily on warblers, vireos, thrushes, flycatchers, orioles, and tanagers. Migrants are most abundant between May 10 and 25. Try the Herkimer Point area at Hiawatha, Petroglyphs Provincial Park, Miller Creek Conservation Area, Trent Wildlife Sanctuary, and local rail-trails. Check out any small-bird activity in your yard, as well, since migrants may be present.

This, of course, is the month that birders flock to Great Lake peninsulas like Rondeau, Point Pelee, Presqu'ile, and Prince Edward Point, where seeing 100 species or more in a day is usually possible.

June

Other than providing niger seed for goldfinches and sugar water for

orioles and hummingbirds, you can give your feeders a rest until September.

With most species nesting, many birders carry out breeding-bird surveys to monitor the number of species and individual birds that are nesting along a given route. Go to www.bsc-eoc.org/bbsont.html. Presqu'ile can still be good for late shorebirds in June. However, many people take a break from birding for a couple of months and focus on butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies.

July

With little happening at the feeder, you may want to focus on shorebird watching this month. In addition to Presqu'ile, the Nonquon sewage lagoons at Port Perry can be especially good. Call 905-985-7973 for information regarding the \$5 permit that is required.

Birding can also be great along quiet concessions and cottage roads. Listen for contact calls, stop, and pish. It is often possible to attract warblers, sometimes with recently-fledged young in tow.

August

Fall migration gets underway in mid- to late August. At the cottage, watch and listen for mixed-species flocks of migrating warblers and vireos. They are often in the company of chickadees. Rail-trails such as the trail from Cameron Line to Base Line can also be great for migrants. Further afield, shorebird numbers at Presqu'ile and Nonquon swell to at least 10 species.

September

Throughout the Kawarthas, fall songbird migration is at its peak. Warblers, vireos, thrushes and flycatchers can turn up anywhere, including city backyards. They are usually in mixed-species flocks, so listen for contact calls. Put your feeder back up, too, because southward-bound sparrows and juncos

start passing through by mid-month. Also, keep an eye on wetlands south of the city for great egrets. Beardsmere Road can be especially good. The Peterborough Field Naturalists fall Sunday Morning Bird Walks begin this month.

A trip to the shores of Lake Ontario can be very rewarding in early fall. Songbirds, shorebirds and hawks are all moving through in large numbers. In addition to Presqu'ile, try Second Marsh in Oshawa and Cranberry Marsh in Whitby. The latter is especially good for hawks. Check out the sod farms north of Port Hope, as well, for golden plover and other shorebirds.

October

This is usually the busiest time of the year for feeders. With luck, the first "northern finches" even show up. Kinglets, along with yellow-rumped warblers, move through in large numbers.

In late October, scan Rice Lake from the bottom of Scriven Line for large rafts of various diving ducks. Road edges throughout our area are great for migrating sparrows. Consider another trip to Cranberry Marsh, this time for golden eagle.

November

Northern finches may show up at feeders. Watch also for bohemian waxwings and pine grosbeaks on fruit trees. Species that have strayed off their usual migration route may appear as well. In more rural areas, watch for northern shrikes, rough-legged hawks, tree sparrows and bald eagles. Check Little Lake and the Bensfort Road landfill for glaucous, Iceland and great black-backed gulls.

Many birders head down to Niagara Falls in late November and early December to see waterfowl around Hamilton and gulls on the Niagara River. Twelve or more gull species are possible. Purple sandpipers may also show up, both at Niagara and at Presqu'ile.

December

For listing purposes, Dec. 1 marks the beginning of the official winter birding season. It ends on the last day of February. In the Kawarthas, it is possible to see at least 60 species of birds during this period.

Local gull-watching is still good. Remember, too, that as a general rule, winter birds are most often found around human habitations, open water and farmland. Between mid-December and early January, Christmas bird counts take place. On area lakes such as Jack, Katchewanooka, Buckhorn and Stony, eagles are often seen sitting on the ice near open water or perched in nearby trees. Watch also for lingering ducks and loons. Great horned and screech owls are quite vocal in December. By playing a tape of its call, you may also see or hear a barred owl.

■ **Drew Monkman is a Peterborough teacher and author of *Nature's Year in the Kawarthas*. He can be reached at dmonkman1@cogeco.ca. Visit his website and see past columns at www.drewmonkman.com. Karl Egressy is a Guelph nature photographer. To see more of his work and to contact him, go to www.kegressy.com.**