

Rarities and oddities abound

A 20-year first was just one of the sightings that delighted Drew’s readers in 2012

This week, I’d like to conclude my chronological list of some of the interesting sightings and anecdotes that readers have sent along over the past year. The photographs, too, are from readers of this column. I would once again like to thank Leo Koski who continues to send me copies of Terry Sprague’s excellent nature column from the *Picton Gazette*.

AUGUST

Several people contacted me this month about hummingbird clearwing moths. These day-flying moths are frequently mistaken for hummingbirds because of their large size, greenish coloration and fast-moving wings as they hover at flowers. **Eric Munro** of Allum Rd., Peterborough was delighted to be able to photograph one in his garden.



DREW
MONKMAN
OUR CHANGING SEASONS

• In mid-August, **Tim Dyson** searched five patches of prickly-ash (a shrub in the citrus family) near Belmont Lake and found a combined total of more than 80 giant swallowtail larvae. He expects that many of these caterpillars are now attempting to over-winter as pupae (chrysalides) and that, as a species, giant swallowtails are in the Kawarthas to stay. Tim was also seeing adult giant swallowtails almost every day during his travels this past summer between Havelock and Stony Lake.

On Aug. 21, **Blair Hamilton** of Pigeon Lake had a female giant swallowtail on his new hop-tree (*Ptelea trifoliata*), less than a week after planting it. “The tip of her abdomen was going onto the leaves and she laid seven to ten eggs.”

• In June, **Terry Hunter** called me to say that a pair of turkey vultures were nesting in his barn, just east of Peterborough. In mid-August, he reported that the two babies had finally fledged. “When disturbed, they made the strangest, high-pitched hissing sound you’ve ever heard,” said Terry.

SEPTEMBER

• On Sept. 1, **Ulrike Kullik** of Havelock observed 15 common nighthawks, a species at risk, circling over her house. “At first I thought they were swallows, but they were too big. I took out my bird guide and clearly saw the white bands on the underside of the wings.”

• In mid-September, **Jo Ann Caskey** sent me the following email. “On June 24, I saw a doe with three fawns on the road close to our cottage on Chandos Lake. Well, yesterday we saw them again, three months older, near the same area! All of them looked perfectly beautiful and healthy. We felt so blessed.”

• On Sept. 15, **Lynne Cotton** saw a least bittern at the Miller Creek Conservation Area near Bridgenorth. “We checked Sibley’s guide and the black cap, the beak and the bird’s size seemed right.” The least bittern is a species at risk.

• The next day, **Michael Gillespie** of David Fife Line, near Keene, found three strange butterflies visiting the pink stonecrop in his garden. At first, he was unable to be certain of their identity but thought they looked like fiery skippers. Checking his field guide, however,



PENNY PIERCE Special to The Examiner



LUKE BERG Special to The Examiner

Among the nature sightings readers took delight in during the last five months of 2012 were (clockwise from top) a very rare tufted titmouse, a Bohemian waxwing invasion and an unusual four-toed salamander, seen here with its belly exposed.



LOWELL LUNDEN Special to The Examiner

Michael saw that this skipper’s range does not extend this far north. He therefore called on the help of **Tony Bigg**, an experienced local butterfly enthusiast. Tony was able to confirm the identification and was thrilled to tell Michael that he had found a new butterfly species for Peterborough County! 2012 was an unprecedented year for southern butterflies like the fiery skipper moving north into central Ontario.

• On Sept. 27, **Pat Roberts** saw an uncommon green heron along the pagoda lake in Jackson Park. “I have been walking there in the early mornings for many years and this is a first. I’ve seen many great blue herons but never this little fellow.”

OCTOBER

• The month began with a report of an uncommon species of salamander. On Oct. 4, **Luke Berg** found and photographed a four-toed salamander on Coon Lake Road near Burleigh Falls.

• On Oct. 6, **Barb Evett** was surprised by two very early American tree sparrows at her feeder. She also enjoyed watching a flock of yellow-rumped warblers as they fed on abundant hackberry gall flies, just outside her front window. The warblers stayed for more than a

week.

• Five days later, **Jake Fell** found a bull elk in the hay field of his farm on the 6th Line of Asphodel-Norwood. This was probably the same animal that had caused traffic interruption on Hwy. 7 between Havelock and Marmora on Oct. 4 and then turned up between Peterborough and Lakefield later in the month.

• **Sean Smith**, an employee of Parks Canada, keeps track of the many birds he sees as he walks to and from work and during his lunch hour. On Oct.12, he sent me one of his typical, species-rich reports. “At noon today, near the campground washrooms at Beavermead Park, I observed a late, female American redstart and a northern parula in a flock of yellow-rumped warblers. Hopping amongst the pots in the tree nursery section of Ecology Park were three hermit thrushes. A shy drake wood duck was in the rill nearby. There were also several cedar waxwings and ruby-crowned kinglets. The feeders at Ecology Park were quite active with a variety of species including white-crowned sparrows, pine siskins and purple Finches. Earlier this morning, there were three green-winged teal and

nine Bonaparte’s gulls flying around Little Lake.”

• On the morning of Oct. 13, **Peter Armstrong** of Rock Rd., near Warsaw, was surprised to find a cold-riddled osprey perched in a tree. Ospreys have usually migrated south by this late date. The temperature the night before had dipped to -4 C.

Paul Anderson, who lives just outside of Bethany, had six trumpeter swans (two adults and four juveniles) land on his pond on Oct. 14. “They were very friendly until they found I had no food. I convinced them to come closer with quiet talk and ‘kissing’ sounds.”

• On Oct. 26, **Penny Pierce** was astonished to find a tufted titmouse coming to the feeder at her house between Lakefield and Selwyn. The bird stayed for about a week. “It was a pleasure to watch. And what big feet!” I believe that this was the first confirmed sighting of a tufted titmouse in Peterborough County in over 20 years.

NOVEMBER

• **Lowell Lunden** of Patricia Crescent was the first to report the huge waxwing invasion that took place in November. “Yesterday morning, Nov. 4, perhaps 75 bohemian waxwings were in our back-

yard. I had never seen even one before. They were after the berries on the flowering crab tree.” A couple of weeks later, **Karen Mooney** was walking by the Little Lake Cemetery when she saw a flock of several hundred of these same birds. They were eating berries from a mountain-ash. “It was amazing to see.”

• On Nov. 8, I received another report showing how well-established red-bellied woodpeckers are becoming in the Kawarthas. **Scott Sargent** wrote: “A client of mine who lives on Sharpe line, near Ida, had a red-bellied woodpecker show up at her feeder a couple of winters ago. This year, the bird had a mate and the pair came to the feeder all summer long. She thinks they were nesting in the woods to the east of her.” Red-bellied woodpeckers were also reported by **Janet Johnstone** and **Doug Latham**, who live on Cameron Line, and **Pam and Paul Money** of Cavan.

DECEMBER

• On Dec. 6, **Marion Kafka** called me to say that she had just seen an almost entirely white long-tailed weasel just outside her patio door. With no snow on the ground, the weasel stuck out like a soar thumb. Marion lives in Peterborough, just east of Highland Heights school.

• In mid-December, **David Woolverton** was walking near Moodie Dr. on the east side of Lake Katchewanooka when he was surprised to see a rare snowy owl sitting on a dock. This is the only snowy owl I’ve heard about in the Kawarthas this winter.

Phil McKeating sent me a wonderful email detailing all of the wildlife he sees at his “urban oasis” on Creekwood Dr. His property almost borders on Harper Park, which is Peterborough’s premier – but largely unknown – natural area. He writes: “From my own back yard, I continue to enjoy nature at its best. Over the years I’ve experienced 50 bird species – from the great gray, barred and great horned owls to a flock of 500 bohemian waxwings. Just a month ago, six wild turkeys strutted the yard like they owned it. Deer are regulars in fall and winter and one year I even had a flying squirrel at night. I’ve seen red foxes, coyotes and porcupines here, as well.”

• **Jim Watt** of Gannon’s Narrows also sees a great deal of interesting wildlife. “On Dec. 27, I had the pleasure of watching a spectacular display of eagle behaviour. An adult bald eagle flew into a pine tree in front of our property. We could not see, however, if it had anything in its talons. The eagle then flew out onto the ice and began devouring a bird – maybe a duck. Feathers were flying everywhere! Then, along came a second adult eagle, but there was no way the first one was sharing. We watched the picnic on the ice for about 15 minutes. Fantastic.” A few days later, Jim watched an eagle try unsuccessfully to take a fish from an otter.

• **Shawn and Kaylee Mowry** reported a barred owl that has been in their Olympus Park neighbourhood since at least early December. “We believe he is feasting on the local rabbit, squirrel and possibly stray cat population. We have found evidence of his feedings in our backyard and the vicinity of the park.”

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