

localnews

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LIVING

Thanks for the (wild) memories

An outdoors writer gets plenty of reader photos and stories . . . and here they are

I would like to take time this week and next to thank the many readers who have contacted me over the past year, either with their own observations and thoughts or to ask questions. These communications are a constant source of interest and inspiration for me. This week I'd like to present a small sample of the many anecdotes and sightings I've received over the course of the past year. These encounters with wildlife show just how close we all are to nature, even right in the heart of Peterborough. I'm always delighted, too, by the many digital photographs readers send, a selection of which you'll find on this page.



Drew Monkman
OUR CHANGING SEASONS

JANUARY

- January started with a number of possible cougar sightings. One reader from south of Havelock wrote about finding cougar-sized tracks near the remains of a dead wild turkey and of getting a picture of a cougar-like cat from a trail camera he had set up. On Jan. 1, Faye Sarah Ginies, 9, reported seeing a cougar by the Independent grocer at Television Rd. and Hwy 7. This is where an animal was seen in mid-December 2008. A third report came from Cannington where Karin Munding saw a cougar on the ice of the Beaver River as it drank from the open water.

- Jon Oldham of the Peterborough Centennial Museum reported one of just a handful of local sightings of snowy owls. The owl was being chased by a group of crows. "It flew from a line of trees adjacent to our parking lot, over the museum and then perched atop the Heritage Pavilion before flying off. The crows remained behind strutting about and squawking as if in victory!"

- I also received several reports of the locally rare red-bellied woodpecker. Bob and Eva McFaul, who live near Whitfield Landing on the Otonabee River, contacted me about a red-bellied coming to their bird feeder. Claire Van Loon also reported a red-bellied at her feeder on County Road 21 near Millbrook. In April, Linda Fierheller had one coming to her feeder in Lasswade on County Road 46.

- All winter long, an adult bald eagle was reported along the Otonabee River. On Jan. 17, Trish Beales found it feeding on a dead goose on the ice below Lock 19.

FEBRUARY

- Bird activity increased in February, too. Sue Hill wrote: "We may have sleet this afternoon but someone has the spring friskies. A pair of cardinals were in the tree at my feeders and the male was feeding the female."



LINDA HEFFERNAN photo

Linda Heffernan hosted this yellow-rumped warbler all winter.



GLENIS BURNIE photo

Glenis Burnie found this bohemian waxwing feasting on berries. Note the chestnut-coloured undertail.



GORDON BELYEA photo

Gordon Belyea spotted this pine marten at a feeder in Algonquin Park.

- Eagle reports continued to come in, especially from Rob Welsh who lives near Boschink Narrows on Stony Lake. Rob also reported lots of coyotes and/or eastern wolves around, several of which were feeding on a deer carcass.

- Many readers commented on the large flocks of white-winged crossbills in the city. Pat Maitland, who lives on Princess St., described how the "tall spruce in my neighbours' yards have been crowded with crossbills. They swoop in and fly about, drop down between the branches, and hold cones in their beaks as they pick at them. Quite a delightful clatter they make." Kelly Simmonds also wrote about how she and her children were intrigued by the mysterious "bright red bird with black and white wings."

- Redpolls were few and far between last winter but Wendy Smith reported seeing one with a completely white head and only a red tuft on the forehead. She correctly identified it as leucistic, meaning an animal in which patches of the body surface lack proper pigmentation.

- Like many of us, Ivan Bateman reported that he was being visited by

pine siskins for the first time in many years. He noted that they are the only birds besides goldfinches that are able to hang upside down on the niger seed feeder.

- Rita Tunnicliffe commented on how gorgeous the planet Venus was in February, glowing like "a New Year's crystal ball" in the western sky.

- Linda Heffernan enjoyed daily visits from a yellow-rumped warbler that was coming to her feeder in downtown Peterborough. This species is a common nesting species in the Kawarthas but normally winters in the southern U.S.

MARCH

- Jen Armitage and her husband were on a bike ride on Irish Line in Ennismore when she saw what she thought was a great grey owl. Jen was so excited that she started researching owls online as soon as she got home and was able to confirm her identification. Several other readers also reported seeing great grey owls earlier in the winter.

- Vic Henderson reported seeing two river otters above Lock 23 on the



JOANNA PRIMAVESI photo

Joanna Primavesi was out walking when she came across this barred owl.

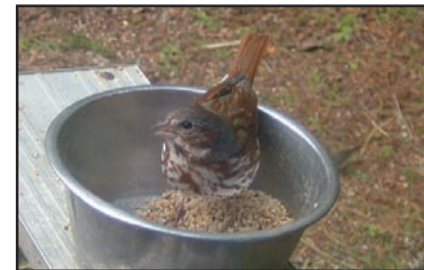
Otonabee River. They were on the edge of the ice. The otters then slipped into the water, swimming and diving downstream.

- Scott Sargent and his wife were walking in their woodlot when they were amused by a pileated woodpecker excavating a nest hole in a tall, dead tree. The bird entered the hole, pecked away inside for a couple of minutes, stopped, looked back out of the hole at Scott and his wife, and then disappeared back inside.

- Ross Jamieson emailed to say that he and his dog, Willow, came face to face with a large wild turkey at the Peterborough Golf and Country Club. "It walked out of a cedar clump right in front of us. Willow was off leash and gave chase for about 30 metres before the turkey took flight and soared up into the trees behind the seventh tee. Unlike Mr. Carlson's unfortunate turkeys on WKPR in Cincinnati "this turkey could really fly!"

APRIL

- Luke Berg, a very keen and knowledgeable 11-year-old naturalist, observed 12 blue-spotted salamanders



STEVE KIRK photo

A beautifully marked fox sparrow visited Steve Kirk in April.

and two spotted salamanders crossing the road on Camp's Line near Birchview Road.

- A very interesting email described some curious mourning dove behaviour. The reader wrote: "I was able to approach two young mourning dove chicks that were perched beside each other on a hemlock branch. I took several pics as they preened and stretched their wings. After, I heard the cooing of a dove off to my right, and shortly afterwards an adult landed on a branch behind the chicks. The adult approached one of them and began to swat the chick with its wing until the latter flew to the cover of the cedar hedge. Then, the adult approached the other chick and gave it several swats until it, too, flew to the hedge. " The reader speculated that maybe the parent was driving the youngster off in order to clear the board in readiness to breed again. He may be right because he soon discovered a new nest, not 30 feet from where the incident occurred!"

MAY

- Sandra Burri was checking out her feeders on Clear Lake when what should appear comfortably perched in a big pine tree but a mother bear and her little cub. "She looked at me from only three feet away, quickly unfurled herself, slid down the trunk and lumbered across the yard to the back bay. Next, the little cub slid down the tree and then raced up another trunk and waited. Mother returned about 20 minutes later and the two of them disappeared."

- George Joncas found a dead opossum on the road near the junction of County Rd. 10 and Hwy. 115.

- Lee Jones, who lives on Chemong Lake, reported that mallard ducks nest every year on their property but that the nesting often ends in disaster. This year, however, "the mother is taking no chances; she is nesting in our hedge about five feet off the ground! We are waiting to see what will happen when the ducklings hatch. I did not know that they would build their nest that high off the ground." Nor did I.

- Another reader, Esther, wrote that, "we have anchored a log at our shoreline and must have over 15 turtles sunning themselves every day. What a beautiful sight. In the late afternoon they move across the inlet and you can see their shells shining as they gather on small logs and rocks. Oh, I could go on forever!"

- There were several sandhill crane reports this month. Gavin Hunter saw two soaring high over Omemee; Didier Anderson had one on her property on County Rd. 38 near Warsaw; and Sarah Petrasek observed two birds just outside of Keene.

Continued next week.

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.