

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

Sparrows. They are everywhere. Adults. Newly fledged. Some late-nesters still singing on territory or, perhaps, early nesters preparing for a second round of nesting and egg-laying. Regardless, these "little brown jobbies" as they are often referred to, are numerous, several species are easily coaxed to feeders and most are marvelous songsters. All have a variety of contact call notes and distress calls that are frustratingly similar. They are all ground or near-to-ground nesters, preferring the protection of shrubby, underbrush and thick, mixed forest growth. Some, like the song sparrow, may over-winter in our area if the weather is not too severe; others, like the Lincoln's are late arrivals on their breeding grounds and early migrants on the return south. And all are gregarious, easily "pished" from perches to make for wonderful observations:

Spotlight on the White-Throated Sparrow:

The white-throated sparrow is, perhaps, one of our loveliest songbirds and one of the larger sparrows, measuring between 6" and 7" in length. Its bright, white throat patch gives it its name, and this diagnostic feature is displayed by both male and female birds. Other shared identification marks include yellow

lores - a small patch of yellow feathering above the bill and between the eyes, and heavily scaled backs. Adult birds are of two colour morphs and are distinguished by head pattern. The darker form has three pure white stripes separated and bordered by black; the second possesses tan stripes, same pattern,

also separated and bordered by black. The obvious eye stripe is lighter or darker, depending on the adult's colour variation. The white-throated sparrow is easily coaxed to feeders and is sometimes seen during mild winters. Its usual habitat is the mixed forests common to our part of Cape Breton where it nests in the thick undergrowth. Its haunting, two-note call (one long note followed by three shorter notes) is heard both mornings and evening and often, during breeding season, many males will sing over a relatively small territory.

Recent Sightings:

As summer progresses in its delightful lazy fashion, juvenile gulls - herring, great black-backed and ring-billed can be found along all stretches of our open coast. Plump and generally grey and heavily streaked, young herring gull harass their parents; great, lumbering newly-fledged black-backed, clumsy both on the ground and in the air, follow beleaguered adults on the ground and in the air. It seems that only the young ring-billed have any sense of propriety as they patiently await morsels from their parent birds. A few white-winged scoter continue to hunt off North Bay, Ingonish and a small raft was also found just north of Cheticamp Island. Northern gannet numbers are very good, with juvenile birds joining adults in their quest for food at St. Ann's Bay and points north in Victoria County and along much of the length of north Inverness County. Several individual American black duck were noted at the ponds of the Bay Road and have returned to the active list with individuals. Large broods of common merganser, mother diligently watching over them, were noted at North River and River Bennett and a pair of red-breasted merganser were noted at the same location. Double-crested cormorant,

both adult and recently fledged young, have been seen in many locations including along the shores of Bras d'Or at Nyanza and at Englishtown, Little River, Ingonish, etc. Great blue heron sightings are rare these days but, nevertheless, several adults accompanied by obviously inexperienced young were seen at the ponds on the Bay Road, at River Bennett and on several ponds in north Inverness County as well as in flight over the shores of the Bras d'Or and St. Ann's Harbour. Belted kingfisher were also noted in those locations. Several greater yellowlegs, either failed nesters or 1st year birds not mature enough to breed, were noted at Jersey Cove and River Bennett. Jim O'Brien, Big Harbour, reported a spotted sandpiper nest along the shore near his home. Loosely constructed among the beach rocks, it contained a single egg. Three male common loon were found on North River recently and lastly, the common tern colony at Jersey Cove is significantly smaller than in years past, an indicator of increased predation by the resident gulls.

Landlubber Report:

I received a call from Peggy MacLeod, Middle River, who expressed great concern about her ruby-throated hummingbirds. Peggy has numerous feeders around her

property to attract one of our most well-known and well-loved birds and often has large numbers (25 - 30) vying for space at the feeders. For reasons unknown, her hummers have disappeared entirely as has her neighbour's, another avid hummer feeder. Unable to supply a reason for

their sudden disappearance I assured I have been seeing them in many locations as well as here at home, where the female makes occasional appearances, the male more often, both at our feeder and in the gardens as, at this time, they are on nests. If anyone else has noted a similar sudden disappearance of their hummers, please let me know. Other sightings, in many locations, too numerous to list here, include both our common vireos, solitary and red-eyed, American robin, hermit, Swainson's and grey-cheeked thrush (only in St. Ann's), ovenbird, blue and grey jay, cedar waxwing (reported by Diana Banks, Big Harbour), American goldfinch, pine siskin, dark-eyed junco, black-capped and boreal chickadee, sparrows - song, savannah, Lincoln's, white-throated and chipping, wood warblers - yellow-rumped, magnolia, mourning, black and white, blackburnian and northern parula. Bev Brett, Oregon Road, reports, in addition to the foregoing species, black-throated blue, bay-breasted and American redstart. A nice selection of eastern North American wood warblers. Flycatchers include olive-sided, least, alder and a single eastern wood peewee at Big Harbour. Common grackle and red-winged blackbird have both fledged their young, and both ruby- and golden-crowned kinglet appear to have settled into the nesting mode. Thank goodness for the barn, tree and cliff swallows as the warmer weather has brought out our various nuisance insects. Woodpecker activity is quiet these days with only downy, pileated and northern flicker noted this reporting period. Red-tailed hawk and American bald eagle complete this report.

My thanks to Bev Brett, Peggy MacLeod, Diana Banks and Jim O'Brien for sharing their sightings. I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.



WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

Kidston Island Beach project summer students



The lifeguards and boat operator for the Baddeck Lions Club took the time to have this photo taken along with Lion Dan Chiasson. Mr. Chiasson is the co-supervisor with Brian Chandler for the Lions Kidston Island Beach Project. The Lions find the funds to hire the personnel and maintain the boat for the free service of getting people to and from Kidston Island Beach. This year the lifeguards include Sarah MacSween, Kendra MacCuspic, Brittany Dunlop, Kirstan Dunlop (Back L-R) and Jenny Muggah Boat Operator and Dan Chiasson (Front). Missing from photo is lifeguard Bailey Chapman. The lifeguards would like the public to know they are offering swimming lessons July 26th to August 13th. To register see any of the lifeguards or give them a call. Their numbers are posted at the Community Wharf.

Baddeck Community Baptist Church Vacation Bible School

at the Baddeck Community Centre

ALL KIDS ARE WELCOME EVERYDAY!
Monday to Friday, July 19th to 23rd ~ 9:30 am to Noon

Evening Services

July 18th to 22nd at 7:00 pm
with Special Visiting Speakers

Please Call 295-2105 for Information

Congratulations to Alderwood!

We, at *Kilkare Waste Services*, would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Management and Staff, and of course the Residents of Alderwood, on their new premises.

This modern spacious facility signals a new level of care and comfort for residents, as well as first rate working conditions for the dedicated staff.

Congratulations to Everyone Involved!



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