

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

It's that wonderful time of year when shorebirds begin to arrive on our beaches to make for easy, out-in-the-open sightings. So, without further adieu, here is a summary of our most common shorebirds found all along the length of the Atlantic shore from Aspy to English-town and few also found around the Bras d'Or.

Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs: The greater yellowlegs is one of our most common waders and, from mid-August to late October, can be observed



at many locations around the county, from the mud flats at Goose Cove, along the shores of the Bras d'Or and along the bars and beaches that characterize Victoria County. Not quite so often seen is the lesser yellowlegs but I hope that the following will help in differentiating the two very similarly-plumaged, long-legged waders. Both species are dark brown above, streaked along throat and breast and with spotted sides and barred underparts. The lesser, however, is markedly lighter than the greater and its legs are not such a bright yellow. The greater is approximately 14" in length and stands about 16" tall. The lesser is much smaller in size, a mere 10 1/2" in



length and stands several inches shorter than the greater. A good I.D. feature is the bill length - the greater's bill is longer than the depth of its head (or from nape to start of bill; the lesser's is slightly shorter than the depth of its head. Both have shrill, loud, repetitive calls, with the greater vocalizing with longer phrases than the lesser. And finally, the greater will wade into water almost up to its belly. The lesser, on the other hand, prefers to remain somewhat drier and will forage closer to shore.

Semi-palmated Plover: One of our most numerous, small shorebirds, the semi-palmated plover is found, at this time of year, on almost all beaches in



Victoria County and beyond as well on the shores of some of the many islands that dot the Bras d'Or. It gets its name from the webbing between its toes (obviously not apparent from casual observation!) and like other "peeps", so named because of their soft, 'cheeping' calls, it is a relatively small, plump bird, measuring between 6" and 7" in length. The semi-palmated plover is brown above and pale beneath and one of its most easily recognizable features is its single 'belt', the irregular black band that separates its white breast from its equally white throat. Adult birds show a bi-coloured bill, orange with a black tip (juvenile birds show an all-black bill); its legs are yellow or orange-ish. The semi-palmated plover also sports a rather jaunty white forehead patch. This active forager can be found on beaches both rocky or sandy, protected or open, as it makes its way to its wintering grounds far to the south.

Black-bellied Plover: Our largest plover (approximately 11 1/2" in length), the black-bellied plover migrates along our eastern shores on its way to and from



its breeding grounds high in the arctic. It is easily identified in all plumages by its distinct white under-tail coverts, black axillaries (feathers beneath wings), black legs and black, heavy, short bill. In breeding plumage the black-bellied plover's black face, breast and underparts contrast sharply with the bold white striping extending across its forehead, nape and down the sides of its breast. Autumn and winter juveniles, as well as adult birds, are much more subdued - the dull grey plumage of autumn is fully apparent by early October. Juvenile birds of this species are somewhat paler in appearance than the adults. Black-bellied plovers can be observed during fall migration foraging along rock and sand bars at low tide for much of the length of Victoria County in the company of greater yellowlegs, semi-palmated plovers and other migrants. The black-bellied plover's plaintive three-note whistle is helpful in locating the birds so

well-camouflaged against the rocky bars typical of our coast.

Rudy Turnstone: The ruddy turnstone is a standout on rock bars with its distinct, horseshoe shaped black breast band often described as a bib, bright legs and thin, dark bill. Approximately 9" in length, this stout and short-legged shore bird is a migrant species found during



late summer, fall and early winter along rocky shorelines where it forages by flipping over small rocks and shells with its bill (thus its common name) in search of the small sand fleas, molluscs, worms, etc. that are the mainstay of its diet. The male of the species shows a chestnut back well-marked with black, a white face and breast and black and white head; the female ruddy turnstone is much browner but also displays the distinct 'bib' patterning and bright, orange-red legs.

Sanderling: The sanderling is a bird usually found in late summer - fall at such locations in Victoria County as Englishtown, Wreck Cove, the beaches at Ingonish and Aspy Bay, etc. Striking in its rusty breeding plumage (sexes similar), by the time this 8" sandpiper makes it back to our latitudes from its breeding grounds in the high north, it has faded to a grey and white basic winter plumage



that it retains well into the next April. Sanderling are easy to identify not so much by colouring but by behaviour - this sandpiper races along the strand just at the point of a wave's highest reach, probing the sand with its long, heavy, black bill for small molluscs and crustaceans exposed by retreating waves. In doing so, it presents an elongated, heads-down profile. This is winter's palest sandpipers - no other sandpiper shows such extensive white underparts, mottled white-grey back and barely-exposed black epaulettes. Its feet and legs are also black. Like other small sandpipers, its call is a sharp 'kip' or 'pip', usually in a short series.

I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.

CARD OF THANKS

Thanks to my family and friends for my 80th Birthday party.

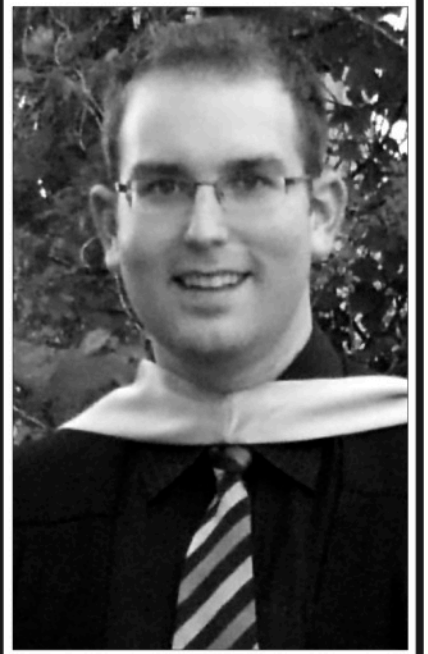
Special thanks to Maynard, Donald P. and Christene, the Brian Boys and Carl for their music.

Thanks to the Legion for their hall, and to the Middle River Highland Seniors for their lovely lunch.

Thanks for gifts and best wishes. God Bless you all!

Maynard Burke

CONGRATULATIONS



James Murray Young of Baddeck graduated in July 2010 from St. Thomas University with a Bachelor of Education degree. James previously graduated in 2007 from St. Mary's University with a double major in Sociology and Criminology and was admitted to the President's Hall of Academic Excellence.

James is the son of proud parents, Jeremiah and Mary Young. "We love you and wish you all the best in your future endeavours."

With love from, Mom, Dad & Family

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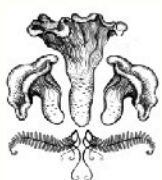
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