

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

Cool mornings. Shorter, but warm and sunny days. Birds in migration! Can it be that autumn is only a short, few weeks off? I must admit that I was shocked to observe a small gaggle of geese (about 20 birds in all) winging their way over Kelly's Mountain one recent, early evening. I neatly rationalized the sighting as the geese moving only from one body of water to another until another local birder, Bev Brett, casually mentioned noting the same behaviour in another species. So, of course, I began to take note. European starling have begun to flock - there are huge numbers of them gathering along telephone wires or foraging on lawns and in fields. Ring-necked duck, many males still in their alternate, eclipse plumage, have begun to collect on small ponds and quiet inlets; likewise American widgeon. Swallow species are virtually absent, their numbers steadily falling for many weeks now. Flycatchers, too, have suddenly disappeared, their food source steadily diminishing as the season wears on. On a positive note - shorebirds have appeared in all their usual locations in Victoria County and any day now I expect to see the first of the anticipated warbler fallouts that presage autumn.

Spotlight on Bonaparte's Gull:

The Bonaparte's gull is a regular late summer/fall visitor to our area and can best be observed on the Bras d'Or at Nyanza at the mouth of the Baddeck River, out on the grassy islands just east of Middle River and across Baddeck Bay off the tip of Beinn Bhreagh where individual groups of 20 - 30 can be found until the Lake begins to ice over. Indeed, many Bonaparte's (Bonnies)



BONAPARTES GULL

over-winter along the open Atlantic from Big Pond in Florence and along the coast to the south-east all the way down to Louisbourg. The Bonaparte's gull is compact (approximately 13" in length) and its flight pattern is distinctive - tern-like, buoyant and with rapid wing beats as it swoops and soars over the water in search of the small fish that are the mainstay of its diet. This petit gull has rather narrow and straight wings and in flight a large, white wedge on the fore-edge of its wing is easily seen. Its mantle is distinctly grey, its legs are red and its black bill is narrow and straight. At this time of year it has retained its distinctive, black cap.

Recent Sightings:

An osprey sighting over North Gut St. Ann's was a highlight of a recent outing due to the fact that very few of these fisher birds were noted this year. In past years, several to many sightings were made with several more reported from local birders. I truly hope the lack of 2010 osprey sightings does not indicate a decline in a population already reduced due to competition with our largest raptor, the American bald eagle (seen in good numbers this reporting period). St. Ann's Bay and Harbour have been very productive locally with shorebird sightings of greater and lesser yellowlegs (also noted in other, various locations such as River Bennett, Nyanza, Ingonish Harbour, etc.), willet, black-bellied plover (32 counted on Sunday, August 29 at Jersey Cove), semi-palmated plover, sanderling, and solitary sandpiper. Broods of common merganser and American black duck have been noted at various locations in the County; American widgeon and ring-necked duck were found at Nyanza and a pair of green-winged teal were observed in flight at Englishtown. Double-crested cormorant, many, many juvenile birds tailing their parents and

great black-backed, herring and ring-billed gull were all noted in various locations as well. Bonaparte's gull can be found at Nyanza. Common tern are surviving nicely at Jersey Cove and appear to be doing marginally better at Nyanza. A small number of these remarkable aerialists were also noted at Ingonish and, as well, along the north coast of Inverness County. Northern gannet were observed on the western side of the Island north of Cheticamp as well as off-shore at Neil's Harbour and Lakies Head and also at the mouth of St. Ann's Bay. I counted 52 black guillemot recently, on a lovely calm morning, all at Englishtown and many already assuming winter plumage. Smaller numbers of these lovely little Alcids were also noted in Ingonish, Neil's Harbour and offshore at River Bennett. Great blue heron stalk the various ponds and shallows around the County; belted kingfisher, preferring the same sort of habitat have been found in many of the same locations. Many birders' favourite, the common loon, have returned from their freshwater nesting grounds and have been observed from Ingonish to St. Ann's.

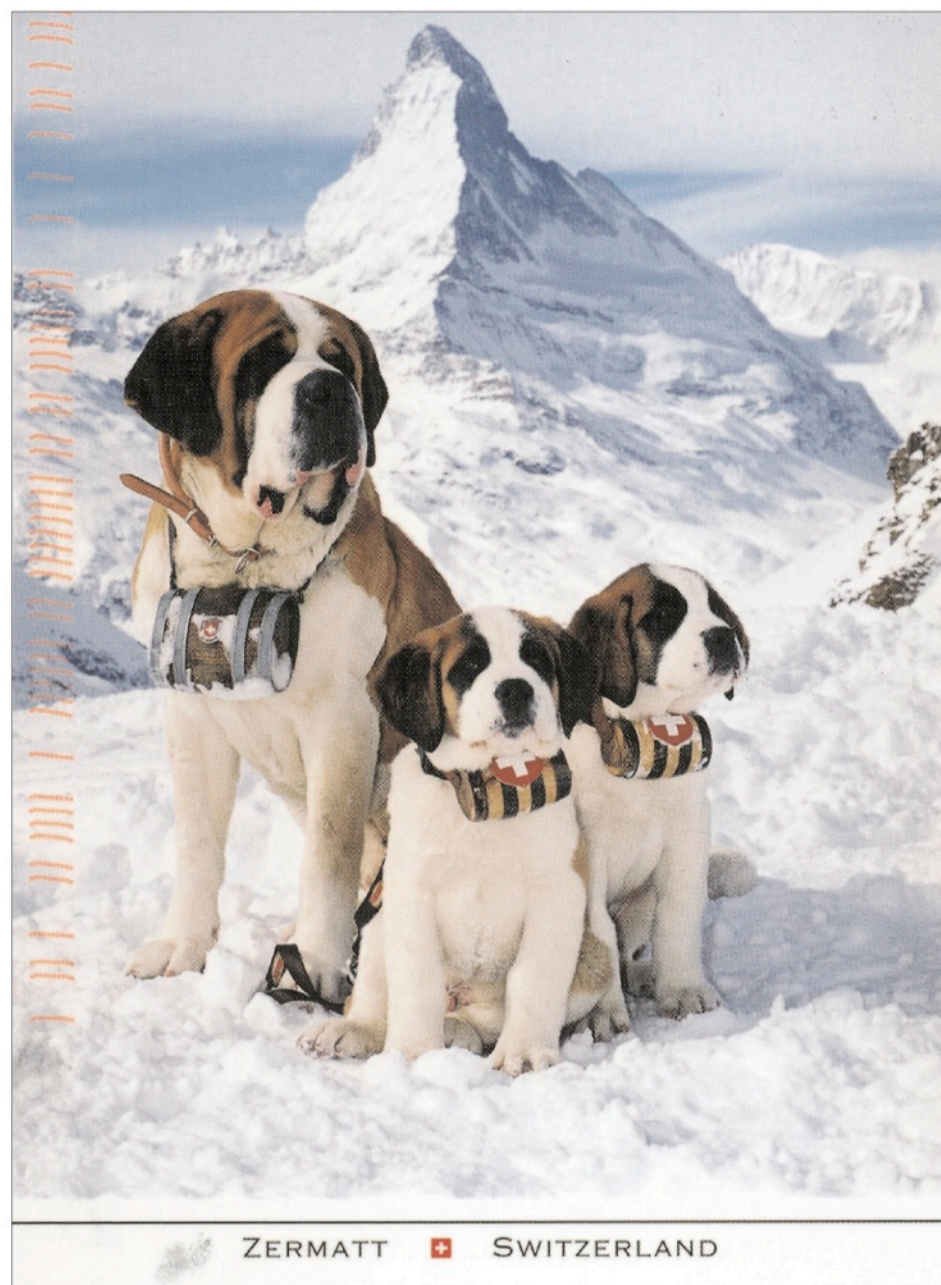
Landlubber Report:

In stark contrast to reports of only 2 weeks ago, passerine sightings have taken a major downturn. Some species, like American robin, are absent as they are double-clutching - that is, having a second brood. Blue jay, usually so visible, are quite scarce these days as well. However a pair of grey jay at Big Harbour and a lone adult at St. Ann's made for nice sightings. As mentioned above, our three swallow species and three of our most common flycatcher

species appear to have already left for southern climes; only yellow-bellied flycatcher was noted this reporting period at Big Harbour. Ruby-throated hummingbird are still busy and active, their young already coming to the nectar feeder in the kitchen window. Even sparrow species, usually so gregarious and cooperative for making close observations, are largely inactive. Only song and white-throated sparrow were noted in various locations during this reporting period. American goldfinch, red-breasted nuthatch, golden-crowned kinglet, dark-eyed junco, both boreal and black-capped chickadee and red-eyed and solitary vireo were noted in any numbers these past few weeks. Woodpeckers found, in several locations include pileated (male in flight), northern flicker, both juvenile and adult birds in small family groups and juvenile hairy and downy were observed. A few wood warblers were noted this reporting period - black and white, magnolia, black-throated green, yellow-rumped, American redstart and northern parula - many in alternate, fall plumage. Indeed, a newly-fledged wood warbler gave me a short run for my money as I watched it tentatively go out to a branch end and simply look around from its vantage point. From time to time it made small noises and would disappear behind a bunch of leaves each time an adult returned to its hiding place, out of my line of sight and therefore unidentified. All that I could say for certain? It appeared to be hunched over ever-so-slightly. Each time the little bird came into the open I looked for any features that would aid me to identify it until, finally, it turned to catch the full sun on its breast and a bright, but very small golden patch appeared. That's when it hit me - a northern parula chick!

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

Postcards from beyond the County lines



Saint Bernards & Matterhorn (4478 m)
The dogs: Apex, Castor & Pollux
Zermatt Switzerland

Toured Austria, Germany
Switzerland. Having the
Time of our Lives. The
Passion Play in Oberammergau
was fantastic. Enjoyed a
snowball on the Matterhorn
viewing station.
Regards to all
Rosina &
Katharine
Gallop



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