

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

Since the unsettled weather began in earnest, birding sightings have dropped off dramatically. Ruby-throated hummingbirds disappeared a few days prior to the first of the big rains and accompanying winds; the wood warblers, in general, not too far behind. Flycatcher species pulled out by late August and even the late-arriving red-eyed vireo appears to have 'left the building'. As mentioned in my last offering, the focus of birding has definitely shifted from passerines (perching birds and songsters in general) to shorebirds and waterfowl. However, I have not yet given up hope for the appearance of migrating wood warblers and can only hope that the weather will return to a more reasonable mildness and sunny days!

Spotlight on the Osprey:

The osprey belongs to a large family of birds of prey with world-wide distribution. A medium-sized bird (22 - 25 inches in length), the osprey is relatively easy to identify in the field either at rest or in flight. Adult birds (sexes similar) are dark brown above and white below with a white head broken by a wide and prominent stripe that extends from the lower eyelid into the back. Its bill is deeply hooked, its talons large and very dangerous looking. Both adult and juvenile



birds show some short, black streaking across the chest. Juvenile birds appear to have scaly plumage but display the same characteristic markings as adult birds; indeed all ages display dark carpal patches in flight and wings are narrow and bent back at the wrist. Fisher birds, osprey are often seen hovering above water prior to diving. Before hitting the water, the osprey will turn abruptly to descend to its prey feet first. Like many species of raptors, the osprey male is smaller than the osprey female.

Recent Sightings: Needless to say, the osprey first reported last issue was one of the highlights of these past few weeks as few other sightings of birds of prey were made. It is my guess that this is the same individual as it was observed in the same location, over North Gut St. Ann's. Waterfowl sightings were also similar for this reporting period and at the same locations. Shorebird sightings include greater and lesser yellowlegs, willet, black-bellied plover, semi-palmated plover, sanderling, and solitary sandpiper. The only new arrival was a small flock of semi-palmated sandpiper, a welcome addition at Jersey Cove. Dare I mention the large numbers of Canada geese seen in many locations? Common merganser and American black duck continue to forage in various ponds and shallows across the County; smaller numbers of American widgeon and ring-necked duck are still active at Nyanza; a few surf scoter and several common loon were noted off North Bay Beach at Ingo-

nish. Double-crested cormorant, great black-backed, herring and ring-billed gull were most prevalent along the Atlantic coast these past two weeks in spite of the winds; Bonaparte's gull are still restricted to the Bras d'Or. Common tern numbers at Jersey Cove swelled dramatically after 'Earl' passed through, likely birds that had nested along the cliffs farther north seeking shelter from the winds. Small numbers of northern gannet were noted on both sides of the north of the Island and the large numbers of black guillemot previously reported have remained inshore from Englishtown to Wreck Cove. Great blue heron, both adult and juvenile birds, were found in a variety of locations; ditto for belted kingfisher. I was thrilled to hear of the presence of a yellow-crowned night heron, a large and robust wader from parts far to the south of us, blown north on the high winds of late and resting comfortably near Mira.

Landlubber Report:

American robin have returned to the active list, many followed closely by juveniles begging for food. Blue jay, too, are once more plentiful, their young easily as large as their parents. The poor vocalizations of this year's broods are a dead giveaway, however. Only two species of sparrow were noted this reporting period and in many locations - song and white-throated. Boreal and black-capped chickadee, American goldfinch,

dark-eyed junco and pine siskin (reported by Angie Aucoin, Big Harbour), small numbers of solitary vireo and even smaller numbers of common grackle (including juvenile birds, very brown in comparison to the adult birds and completely lacking the iridescent cranial feathering) were all observed in a variety of locations as well. Mourning Dove were also reported by Angie Aucoin. Golden-crowned kinglet are, it seems, everywhere there are conifers and brown creeper, usually shy and reluctant to be seen, have been noted at St. Ann's, Big Harbour, Middle River and Englishtown. Family groups of northern flicker have been noted at Big Harbour, St. Ann's and Big Baddeck; hairy and downy woodpecker, juvenile birds making an awful racket wherever they are found, were also noted in good numbers. A male pilot was seen, in flight, near the Gaelic College. The only wood warbler noted this reporting period is the common yellowthroat, both male and female birds still caring for young. Raptors sightings, in addition to osprey, include American bald eagle (juvenile and adult birds in many locations and in excellent numbers) and red-tailed hawk at Big Harbour, also reported by Angie Aucoin.

My thanks to Angie Aucoin for sharing her sightings! I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.

Saoghal na Gàidhlig...

The Gaelic way of living in the world

'Nam sheasamh bho chionn ghoirid aig L' Anse aux Meadows, Talamh an Éisg, air la ciùin samhraidh, a' ghaath chùbhraidh bhàth a' tighinn oirnn bho'n mhuir, cha b' fhuasda dhomh smaoinichadh air suidheachadh nan Lochlannach mu thimcheall 1000 AD 's iad air tighinn gu tìr às déidh turas-chuain bho'n Ghraonlainn. Ach a-rèir fianais àrsaidheachd agus teisteanas nan Sàgathan,*b' iad Eirik, Fear na Gruaige Ruaidhe, agus Leif Eiriksson a' chiad fheadhainn às an Roinn-Eòrpa a rinn tìr dheth 's an t-saoghal ùr.

Anns an aon linn, bha na Lochlannaich a' dèanamh sgrios ann an Éirinn agus Albainn; agus bha buaidh aca nach bu bheag air na h-Eileanan Siar, gu h-àraidh Eilean Leòdhais. Nach e 'Na h-Innse' Gall' (Eileanan nan Coigreach) an t-ainm a th' orra fhathast? Agus 's e 'Gall-Ghàidheal' a chaidh a chur air gach duine a phòs Gàidheal, a rinn suidheachadh agus a dh'ionnsaich a' Ghàidhlig; mar a chanas mu'n déidhinn, bha iad 'nas Gàidhealaich na na Gàidheil fhéin'.

Tha sinn gu math eòlach 's a' sgìre seo air sloinnidhean Gàidhlig a bhuineas dhan t-seann Chànain Lochlannaich, leithid MacAsgaill (bho Àsketil, a tha a' ciallachadh 'coire mòr nan diathan'); MacAmhlaidh (bho Ólafr, 'sinnsear/oighre'); MacLeòid (bho Ljót, 'am fear grànnda'!). Tha m' ainm fhìn, Mac Ìomhair, bunaicht' air Ívarr, no Ingvar (bogha iubhair + fear, i.e. 'saigheadair')—dh'fhaoidte am fear "gun chnàmhan" a tha air 'ainmeachadh ann a' Ragnarsaga! A thaobh ciad ainmean: Ragnhall (bho Rognvaldr, 'uachdaran glic'), Tormod (bho _ormo_r, 'anam/cridhe Thor'), Dùghall (bho'n ainm Dùghall, 'Gall dubh') agus mar sin air adhart.

Tha saoghal nan Gàidheal farsaing is ioma-ghnèitheach; an cuimhne gun deach na Lochlannaich, 'nan linn, gu ruige Constantinople, dh'fhaoidte nach còir iongnadh a bhith oirnn, bhon a chaidh geug nan Lochlannach a nòdachadh a-steach dhan chraoibh aca, gun do chuir a' chraoibh sin a freumhan sìos gu soirbheachail ann an iomadh ceàrnaidh dhen t-saoghal.

Standing recently in L' Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, with the wind fragrant and warm upon us from the sea, I couldn't easily imagine the situation of the Northmen (Norwegians/Vikings) around 1000 AD when they landed here after a sea-voyage from Greenland. But according to archaeological findings and testimony of the Sagas*, it was Eirik the Red and Leif Eiriksson who were the first Europeans to make landfall in the new world.

In the same era, the Northmen were creating havoc in Ireland and Scotland; they had no small impact, especially on the Isle of Lewis, and throughout the Western Isles, which are called the Islands of the Foreigners ('Na h-Innse' Gall') to this day. Each of the many who married Gaels, settled, and learned their language, becoming 'more Gaelic than the Gaels themselves', was known as 'Gall-Ghàidheal', or 'foreign Gael'.

We're quite familiar in Victoria County with Gaelic surnames derived from Old Norse, the language of these Northmen, like MacAskill (from Àsketil, which means 'cauldron of the gods'); MacAulay (from Ólafr, 'ancestor/heir'); MacLeod (from Ljót, 'the ugly one'!) My own name, MacIver, is derived from Ívarr, or Ingvar ('yewbow + man', i.e. archer)—perhaps the 'boneless' Ívarr named in Ragnarsaga! With regard to first names: Ronald (from Rognvaldr, 'wise ruler'), Tormod—anglicised as Norman (from _ormo_r, 'mind/courage of Thor'), Dougall (from Dùghall, 'dark foreigner'), and so on.

The world of the Gaels is wide and various; mindful that the Northmen also went as far as Constantinople in their day, perhaps we needn't wonder, since the Norse branch was grafted into the tree of the Gaels, that it took root with considerable success in all corners of the world.

• See *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America* (Penguin Classics). Translated by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson. Available in Baddeck Library.

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