

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

Migration - a movement of large numbers of a species from a summer breeding and foraging grounds to a place of refuge and sufficient food resources for the winter months. The foregoing explanation is a gross over-simplification of a remarkable phenomenon that affects thousands of species with whom we share Planet Earth and one, in the birding world, that has begun again in earnest. Indicators of what triggers such gross movement is beyond Homo sapiens' modern perception but the signs are all around us. Fewer hours of daylight, cooling temperatures as the planet continues its orbit around our sun and the resulting change in the tilt of its axis. Maturation of plant species and the releasing of seeds and leaves.

Birds in flight are our reminder that summer is past and full autumn is quickly approaching. And the way that birds migrate differ from species to species. For instance, American robins - I counted 127 of our most common thrush flying south over Big Harbour recently. Their call notes alerted me to their presence as small groups of 15-20 birds moved, in spurts, just above and through the spruce canopy there, many coming to feed among the abundant berries still clinging to mountain ash, elderberry and other fruit producers. They did not linger there long - just took enough time to fill their bellies before taking

to the air once again and hurriedly moving on. In stark contrast to the robins' furtive movements, I later saw a small flock of common grackle, 20-25 birds strong, flying high above the tips of the hard and softwoods that line the Cabot Trail beyond the Gaelic College. No surreptitious movement from branch to branch, no hiding among leafy and berry-laden branches for the bold grackle - they flew in a tight formation well above the canopy with sure and strong wing beats covering a surprisingly long swath of sky in a few, short moments.

And shorebirds - Bruce Nunn, Shore Road, Baddeck, and I spoke recently about the large numbers of small shorebirds now abundant at many Cape Breton beaches, all fading fast into winter plumage if not already acquired, all skittish and anxious to continue their journeys south, none remaining still for any length of time and all poised to take to the air at the least provocation. Bruce had been watching sanderling, small but relatively long-legged, shorebirds feeding at the waves' edges, moving swiftly along the newly-exposed sand and pulling from it the small invertebrates that are the mainstay of its diet at several beaches along the shores of Inverness. From time to time and for reasons unknown, these grey, black and white birds would all take to the air as if an unseen hand had swept the beach clean. The flocks wheeled overhead, moving as if one, before returning to the wet sand and their imperative to stay well-fed for the long journey ahead. My thanks to Bruce for his stunning photos, one of which appears here.

Recent Sightings:

Shorebirds and waterfowl are, of course, the main focus for birders these days. Our beaches, unless pure cobble, attract thousands of migrating shorebirds and waterfowl journeying south for the winter months. Some shorebirds, like the solitary sandpiper noted at Schooner Pond, CBRM, forage among the wrack (piled seaweed) just above the tide mark; others, like black-bellied plover, are found both among the beached seaweed or along rock bars common to both sides of the Island, their numbers occasionally containing a single Baird's or white-rumped sandpiper. Semi-palmated plover have been noted, quite literally, from one end of the Island to the other and along stretches of beaches, both sandy and rocky, on the shores of the Bras d'Or. Sanderling, semi-palmated and least sandpiper were found in excellent numbers at Morien Bar where other shorebirds, including short- and long-billed dowitcher traditionally stop over on their way south. Great blue heron, our largest wader, has been seen on ponds and in shallows in many areas of the Island, their young appearing alert and strong. Northern gannet were observed off-shore north of

Cheticamp, Ingonish, Indian Brook, St. Ann's Bay and Louisbourg. Those observed on the west side of the Island were flying north; those off

Victoria

County and CBRM, south. American wid-geon, mallard and ring-necked duck have all begun to gather at ponds large and small; green-winged teal, too, have been noted in small numbers, sometimes with wood duck, on ponds in several locations. In short, the signs of the fall migration are all around us.

Landlubber Report:

A quick review of what was noted this reporting period include, and all reported by Bev Brett, North River, American goldfinch, ruby- and golden-crowned kinglet, northern flicker, hairy and downy woodpecker, black-capped and boreal chickadee, song and Lincoln's sparrow, brown creeper, a barred owl and American bald eagle. Bev also reported black-throated green warbler; other wood warblers noted include yellow-rumped, magnolia, black and white and many common yellowthroat at Big Harbour. Other sightings at Big Harbour, Big Baddeck, St. Ann's, Englishtown and Jersey Cove include pileated woodpecker, both blue and grey jay, purple finch, red-winged blackbird, solitary vireo, cedar waxwing and pine grosbeak. Prior to the winds of Earl, many feeder fans noticed the dwindling numbers of one of our most beloved birds, the ruby-throated hummingbird. Usually a late migrant with small numbers noted until the early days of October, no hummers have been seen or reported since Earl blew through.

My thanks to Bev Brett for her sightings report. I am Bethsheila Kent and I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.

Middle River students enjoy tipi sleepover

Special

The students of Middle River School had a wonderful opportunity to experience Micmac culture just a few minutes walk from their school.

Mary Louise Bernard opened her doors to students and staff and shared stories of her culture, had a friend drum and sing lullabies as well as presented each student with a dream stick before they slept the night outdoors in the Tipi adjacent to her house. Linnaea Oland captures our experience in a journal writing:

"The first thing I thought of when I walked into the tee pee was how nice it would have been to live in one. I looked all around me and stared in curious amazement. As my eyes moved to the opening at the top of the tipi, I started to imagine that I was a native child living in a native village. And as I sat down the roar of silence rang in my ears. Suddenly a shout

broke the silence and pulled me out of my trance. I ran outside of the tee pee, and realized that some of the boys were playing star wars! I immediately joined in. We played for what seemed like an hour until we finally went in to roast hot dogs and yummy marshmallows. They tasted like sugary clouds, I thought, as I popped a golden marshmallow into my mouth. After a while everyone started to feel drowsy. But before I went to sleep I heard soft and beautiful drumming and singing. We also heard some bedtime stories and legends. We each got a dream stick. The dream sticks were supposed to keep bad dreams away.

(mine worked) After a little bit of wiggling and getting comfortable I dozed off into a long restful sleep. I must have had good dreams but I don't remember them!
Linnaea Oland
Grade 6.



Middle River Consolidated School students in front of the tipi in which they spent an enchanting night.



**Gaelic College Foundation
Notice of
2010 Annual Meeting**
Saturday, October 23, 2010 - 1:30 pm
**MacKenzie College, Gaelic College
in St. Ann's, Nova Scotia**
Refreshments to Follow

ALDERWOOD REST HOME INVITATION TO TENDER Snow Removal

Alderwood invites tenders for the **snow removal, salting and sanding** of our parking lot, located at 89 Alderwood Lane, Baddeck, Nova Scotia.

Tenders will be accepted until 12:00 pm (noon), Thursday, October 14, 2010.

Lowest or any tender not necessarily accepted.

Please send sealed tenders to:

Alderwood
C/O Arlene Morrison
89 Alderwood Lane
P.O. Box 218, Baddeck,
Nova Scotia B0E 1B0
Fax: 902-295-1698
arlene.morrison@alderwoodbaddeck.ca

ELLIOTT K. FRASER, LLB.
Barrister • Solicitor • Notary Public
8565 Highway 105, Baddeck Nova Scotia
Tel: (902) 295-1622 • Fax: (902) 295-2847
E-mail: elliott.fraser@ns.sympatico.ca