

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

Heather O'Brien, Big Harbour, called a while back with a tale of caution for all birders and non-birders alike and is a reminder that we should pay careful attention to how birds behave. Near to where Heather lives, a small, leg-banded pigeon was found on the road and it remained in the area for several days. No one thought much of it at the time but the bird did not go near any of the local feeders yet was unafraid of anyone who approached it. It wasn't until the poor creature was found dead that its story began to unfold. It was a passenger pigeon registered in Winnipeg and must have been blown east on the heavy winds of late September when this sad incident occurred. As a domesticated bird, the passenger pigeon is used to people and not only used to them, but dependent upon the kindness of its breeders as they are often fed from the hand. This little bird, so far from its home, was unable to communicate its needs and died of starvation even though stocked feeders were nearby. The moral of this tale? A banded bird demands close attention and a quick phone call to our local DNR can provide vital information to ensure its safety and survival. My thanks to Heather for relating the story to me.

Spotlight on the Surf Scoter:

Our waters provide safe refuge for three species of scoter, all primarily black, all approximately 20 inches in length (plus or minus). The males of all three species have thickened and bright bills in breeding plumage

and all are strong swimmers, flyers and divers. The male surf scoter is the easiest to identify from a distance as it sports two large and bright, pure white patches - a forehead patch reminiscent of a miner's headlamp and the second, a nape patch somewhat larger than its forehead patch. Like common eider, the male surf scoter's forehead slopes dramatically into its thickened, bright orange bill. Its eye is white and its legs and feet, rarely seen, are an astonishing shade of red-orange. Like other scoter, surf scoter are short-necked, stocky birds and form large, compact flocks to migrate from their northern breeding grounds to their coastal wintering grounds. Female birds are, like many other species of duck, a rich, deep brown and sport subdued cheek and face patches. Her bill is uniformly grey. Found in our waters from the Northwest Arm off North Sydney and all around the northern tip of the Island and as far south as Margaree Harbour (perhaps farther south), surf scoter will remain in our waters until late December to early January.



SURF SCOTER

Recent Sightings:

Shorebird sightings have dropped dramatically these past few weeks with sightings of only a few, late black-bellied and semi-palmated plover, a smattering of sanderling and the occasional semi-palmated sandpiper to report. Great blue heron, both adult and juvenile birds continue to linger on ponds and in shallows around the county; ditto belted kingfisher found in several locations this reporting period including St. Ann's, Big Harbour, Nyanza and Englishtown. Common eider were found off Louisbourg as were a large number of black guillemot; American black duck and mallard were noted at the ponds on the Bay Road and along the shores of the Bras d'Or from Baddeck to Whycocomagh. Common merganser were found at River Bennett and Lake O'Law where several common loon were also noted. Many ring-necked duck and American widgeon were found both at the ponds at Nyanza and on the second pond on the Bay Road. Bonaparte's gull can still be found at Nyanza; ring-billed, herring and great black-backed numbers are still good in all the usual places. Double-crested cormorant are still with of, of course, and Canada goose, so common on the Island these past few years, have begun their southward journey in earnest.

Landlubber Report:

Feeders have begun to attract the usual assortment of finches and sparrows including dark-eyed junco, song, white-throated and Savannah sparrow, American goldfinch, purple finch and pine siskin. Mourning dove have also been noted, skittish in the presence of the ever-present blue jay. American robin numbers are holding their own and found on lawns and in thickets feasting on the abundant berries. A late solitary vireo was observed in Big Harbour as were common grackle, red-winged blackbird and a few juvenile common yellowthroat and yellow-rumped warbler. A small flock of evening grosbeak were heard and seen over Big Harbour. Golden-crowned kinglet numbers have been seen and heard in many locations as have been brown creeper. Woodpeckers observed this reporting period include hairy, downy, pileated and northern flicker. American bald eagle is on its annual river excursion taking advantage of the migrating salmon; red-tailed hawk was noted soaring above Big Harbour and I was most fortunate to encounter a Cooper's hawk while visiting the Annapolis area.

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

Saoghal na Gàidhlig...

The Gaelic way of living in the world

Tha grunnan air a' Chladach a Tuath aig a bheil aisling mhór: nach téid torghan na dualchainnt Gàidhlig a bhuineas dhan àite mach á sealladh. Mar a thuirt Stiùbhart MacDhòmhnaill, tha an dualchainnt a thathas "a' bruidhinn a' seo cudthromach dhuinne".

Air an aobhar sin, chuir Comann Oighreachd na Gàidhlig Ceum a h-Aon air bhog 's t-samhradh seo chaidh gus cruinneachadh a dhèanamh de naidheachdan agus de dh'fhiosrachadh air meanbh-chlàran agus bhideothan a chuir cudthrom air beathannan làitheil Seinneadairean Gàidhlig a' Chladaich a Tuath agus nan coimhearsnach.

Fhuaras taic-airgid dhan phròiseict seo, a tha stéidhichte aig Talla nan Seinneadairean Gàidhlig, Cóbh nam Breatainneach, bho ECBC (Corporrachd Iomairt Cheap Breatainn) fo Phrógram Ionadan Coimhearsnachd a thug do bhòrd a' chomainn cothrom uèir ùr a chur troimh 'n togallach gu léir, dorsan dìonach a chur a-staigh agus làrach-lìn a chruthachadh. Le taic-airgid bho Cho-chomann Cruitheachd-obrach Seirbheis Chanada, chaidh Stiùbhart MacDhòmhnaill 'fhasdadh mar neach-stiùiridh, cuide ri dithis luchd-obrach, Òmar Bhochanan agus Uilleam Ó Conaill.

Ged a tha e a' fuireachd a-nis ann a' Digby, 's ann do Bhaile nan Gall a bhuineas Stiùbhart. B' e Ruairidh Nèill Ruairidh, a rugadh 's a' Sgeir Dhuibh, a b' athair dha. Bhon a bha Stiùbhart mu ochd bliadhna a dh' aois, bhiodh a sheanair, Niall Ruairidh, ag ionnsachadh dha òrain luadhaidh, leithid "Hé mo leannan, hó mo leannan!"; bha a sheanair math gu togail an fhuinn cuideachd.

Tha Òmar Bhochanan na h-ogha do Mhòr ni'n Mhurchaidh Dhòmhnaill, Sgeir Dhubh, tè dhe na seanchaidhean anns a' phròiseict Caint mo Mhàthar; tha a' Ghàidhlig aig Òmar agus tha suim mhór aice ann a bhith 'ga roinn le luchd-ionnsachaidh. 'S e fear a bhios a' seinn 's a' dèanamh òran a th' ann an Uilleam O' Conaill, agus bho chionn ghoirid bha a' chiad nobhail aige, The Rock in the Water, air geàrr-liosta a' mheasaidh a chum Bonn Steaphain Leacock 'fhaighinn. A-nis a' fuireachd anns an Tàirbeart, às déidh dhà Ceap Breatainn a thaghadh mar àit' far an fheàrr dhà a dhachaidh a dhèanamh, b' esan a chaidh 'fhasdadh mar fhear-teicneòlais na pròiseict. Aig an aon àm, tha e ag obair air a' Ghàidhlig a thogail.

Rè an t-samhraidh, chaidh tasglann mhór de chlàraidhean a chruinneachadh, cuide ri dà bhideo ghoirid a dhèanamh, Along the Shore agus Ceòl is Caint. Mar a dh'innis Stiùbhart dhan luchd-éisdeachd a bha an làthair aig an taisbeanadh bho chionn ghoirid, b' e am beachd a bh' aig luchd-tadhail an t-samhraidh gura b' ann 's an fhoillseachadh "an rud a b' ùghdarail a chunnaic iad" ann a' Ceap Breatainn.

Théid crìoch a chur air Ceum a h-Aon's an t-Samhain. Bidh feum air barrachd taic 'fhaighinn gus leasachadh a dhèanamh 's an àm ri teachd. Pròiseict airidh air taic dha-riribh!

There's a small group on the North Shore with a big dream: that the lilt of the Gaelic dialect found there will not disappear. As Stuart MacDonald put it, the dialect "spoken here is important to us".

For that reason the Gaelic Heritage Society launched Phase One of a multi-phase Gaelic Cultural Centre at the Gaelic Singers' Hall this June in Breton Cove. Phase One focused on the collection of stories and audio-and video-recordings with emphasis on the daily lives of the North Shore Gaelic Singers and the community.

The project received funding from ECBC (Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation) under the Community Centres' Program which made it possible to completely rewire the building, install secure doors, and create the website for future audio and video displays. The North Shore Gaelic Heritage Society matched the ECBC funding through successful recent events like the Gaelic Film Festival. Service Canada Job Creations Partnerships funded the hiring of staff and the acquisition of computer hardware and software. Dr. Richard MacKinnon of CBU loaned audio and video equipment while Wendy Bergfeldt provided training in interviewing techniques. Stuart MacDonald (co-ordinator), Amber Buchanan and Bill Conall were hired for the project.

Stuart grew up in Englishtown. His father, Roddy Neil R., was born in Sgir Dhu; and his grandfather Neil R. used to teach Stuart milling songs like "Hé mo leannan! Hó mo leannan!" from the time he was about eight years old. His grandfather was also an able precentor of the Gaelic psalms. Amber Buchanan, granddaughter of Sadie MacInnes, Sgir Dhu, Gaelic tradition-bearer featured in the Caint mo Mhàthar project, is herself a Gaelic speaker and active in transmitting the language. Bill Conall, song writer, musician, novelist—his first book, The Rock in the Water, was short-listed for the Stephen Leacock Medal—is now, as he confesses, "a Cape Bretoner by choice", and a Gaelic learner.

A huge collection of new and existing recordings was archived over the summer. The staff then created two short videos, Along the Shore and Ceòl is Caint (Music and Speech) using some of the materials from the archive. As Stuart told the audience at the recent open house to unveil the centre, guests over the summer had remarked that what they encountered at the Gaelic Singers' Hall "was the most authentic thing they had seen" in Cape Breton.

Phase One's work will wrap up in November. The Gaelic Cultural Centre's Board hopes to acquire private and government support for future development and operation. A project worthy of support indeed!

The Gaelic Way of Living in the World is written by Catriona Parsons and sponsored by...



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