

# Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

I recently watched a small flock of Canada geese (19) flying overhead, their bearing true south, and said a small prayer that their journey to their wintering destination would be a safe one. Given that in many areas of the North American continent, these large, graceful and intelligent birds are considered a nuisance and are subject to outrageous steps to deter them from landing in parks, etc., I felt the prayer was in order. Canada geese are certainly noisy, gregarious and sometimes even aggressive, especially when nesting sites or young are threatened. They can and will clean a stubble field in no time flat, will, if you have a pond on your property, nest within close proximity to us humans and will also create a mess on lawns and in gardens that is neither pretty nor easy to clean up. However, Canada geese are monogamous, mate for life and remain in small family groups for extended periods of time; they treat young and old with respect and generally exhibit tolerant behavior in the presence of other waterfowl. So I will continue to pray for them to reach their southern destinations safely and also, to return to the north with the coming of spring intact and as feisty as ever.

### Spotlight on the Baltimore Oriole:

This magnificent orange and black bird (how fitting it is so close to Halloween) is robin-sized (approximately 8 1/4" in length) and like all members of its genus (Icteridae - blackbirds) it is brightly coloured and a most vocal bird during the breeding season. Baltimore oriole have a strong and direct flight pattern and can easily be recognized in flight. During autumn, when these birds are making their way through our area to points south, both sexes (juvenile and adult birds both) show dark wings with wing bars that vary from a creamy-beige to a yellowish-beige. Female and juveniles lack the male's dark hood and, at this time of year, the bright yellow-orange of summer is giving way to more subtle tones. Males, retaining some of their breeding plumage, are distinctly and brightly yellow-orange down the breast with the head and upper parts a crisp, clean black. Baltimore oriole have long, narrow and sharply-pointed bills and are primarily insect and fruit eaters. At this time of year they may be found on such berry producers as maple-leaved viburnum and mountain ash.

### Recent Sightings:

There is little to report with respect to birds on the water as many days during this reporting period were overcast with heavy rains and very limited visibility. However, if one knows where to look there are still white-winged and surf scoter (St. Ann's Bay and points north), a few northern gannet performing their death-defying dives from dizzying heights and a few American black

duck both on ponds and along the shores of the Bras d'Or and the Atlantic. The several mallard noted this reporting period were restricted to ponds. A few great blue heron were noted on the ponds along the Bay Road as well as at both South and North Guts, St. Ann's and at Big Harbour; belted kingfisher were found in the same locations as well as at River Bennett and Indian Brook. A recent walk along the bar at Englishtown/Jersey Cove turned up an astonishing number of common merganser - 64+/-! They were apparently staging there before heading south. That same day I counted 27 black guillemot and at least 80 double-crested cormorant feasting on the mackerel run. Only 9 black-bellied plover and 3 greater and 1 lesser yellowlegs represented the shorebird and wader group. Herring, great black-backed and ring-billed gull were noted in many locations; Bonaparte's were

found on the ponds at Nyanza and out on the Bras d'Or. Best sightings this reporting period include a single horned grebe at St. Ann's Harbour behind the Lobster Galley and a single Wilson's snipe in the long grasses along the Big Harbour Road.

### Landlubber Report:

Hilda Proctor, South Haven, called on October 15 to report 5 Baltimore oriole, the inspiration of this column's highlighted species, in a tree just outside her kitchen window. They remained there for quite some time before moving off, not to be seen again. Although just a short distance down the road from Hilda, these magnificent migrants did not stop in my yard. Feeder activity is gearing up with visits from song, white-throat and fox sparrow, dark-eyed junco, purple finch, pine siskin, American goldfinch, black-capped chickadee, mourning dove, blue jay, red-breasted nuthatch and a few, late common grackle. Out and about, golden-crowned kinglet have been seen foraging in the mid-canopy of our struggling spruce; a little higher in the canopy boreal chickadee were found. Pileated, hairy and downy woodpecker were all noted in several locations this reporting period. Lots of brown creeper were heard and seen in many locations including St. Ann's and Big Harbour. A small flock of evening grosbeak passed overhead while I was walking in St. Ann's; the same thing happened the following day at Big Harbour, this small flock followed by 3 white-winged crossbill also in flight. American robin numbers remain high but that could change dramatically in the next week or so as berries become scarce. A juvenile bald eagle was noted in Big Harbour just coming into adult plumage. No other raptors were noted this reporting period.

My thanks to Hilda Proctor for sharing her oriole sighting. I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.



# Historic light key to community's future

from page one

The St. Paul Island Historical Society is applauding the news, as well the success of MLAs Bain and Clarke in bringing the cultural icon back to its community.

"We are very pleased with the news the lighthouse is coming back to us," said Hamilton Carter, President of the Society. "It will make a big difference to the community as it will certainly be a tourism draw, which will in turn provide a boost to local businesses."

"It's great news," said Sydney-Victoria MP Mark Eyking. "I congratulate the hard work of the society and everybody who convinced government

to move the lighthouse back to its rightful home including MLAs Keith Bain and Cecil Clarke. I wrote to Fisheries Minister Gail Shea and spoke to her on a number of occasions since last year on this issue. Unfortunately this issue's greatest advocate, Victoria County Councillor Robert MacLellan didn't get a chance to see this day. It goes to show, however, that Cape Bretoners are at their best when we work together."

Built in 1917, the lighthouse guided ships through the Gulf of St. Lawrence for approximately 100 years. Many of the lights house keepers families are still residing in the Dingwall area

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