

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

It is that wonderful time of year when there are many sightings to report. Returning migrants are the big news of course, both on the land and on the water. Waders are already turning up in some parts of the Island, songbirds almost everywhere. Bird-song fills the air both mornings and evenings and it is difficult, while out walking, to see everything that is on the move. Therefore, without further ado, let's get to the sightings for this reporting period.

Spotlight on the Laughing Gull:

Although Dennis Laffan of North River spotted one of these uncommon gulls some weeks ago while in Sydney, I neglected to highlight it then. To correct that omission. In general, gulls take 3 - 4 years to come into adult plumage. Until that time, it is often difficult to determine one species from another as many have streaked heads or breasts or both; plumage may change from brown to white or varying shades in between as the birds mature. Bill colour changes as well.



Therefore, for the purposes of this column adult birds are described. The laughing gull is a small gull (to 16" in length) and is a rare visitor to Cape Breton Island. In fact, I have seen only one, several years ago at Morien Bar. Laughing gull belong to the group of gulls known as "hooded" gulls. The laughing gull's head, during breeding season, is a dark, brown-black, this rich colour extending to the nape of the neck and under the chin. A real stand-out among other gulls, its dark red-orange bill is heavy in the manner of gulls such as herring but is distinctly recurved (curved downward). The laughing gull's legs are also dark and richly coloured red-orange; its eyes are pale. In flight, its white underparts and wing linings give way to black outer primaries. Its appearance in Cape Breton is usually the result of heavy south-west winds that carry it from the South Shore, its usual range in Nova Scotia.

On the Water:

Richard McCurdy, Baddeck Forks, called to let me know about a pair of hooded merganser on a pond near his home. A magnificent duck usually associated with fresh water habitat, it may have overwintered in our area due to the lack of ice and extreme cold weather. Green-winged teal were noted at Nyanza; ring-necked duck were found there and at Big Harbour; American widgeon were observed at River Bennett and Port Caledonia. American black duck and mallard can be found in many locations but common goldeneye and both common and red-breasted merganser have already moved on to the ponds and lakes to the north for the breeding season with only small numbers of these species found on the water at St. Ann's, Englishtown, Jersey Cove, River Bennett, Indian Brook and out on the Bras d'Or. Canada geese, needless to say, are widespread and common. A few black guillemot were noted at Seal Island still in dull, winter plumage. White-winged scoter were seen at Indian Beach in North Sydney as were bufflehead. A small raft of long-tailed duck were noted off shore at Port Caledonia and farther along the "Mira Shore", the first great blue heron (9) were found at Homeville. George Crowell, Glace Bay, saw willet at that same location, a good 4 weeks ahead of their usual return. Double-crested cormorant have returned to Nyanza and gulls sighted include herring, great black-backed, ring-billed and a lingering Iceland gull at North Sydney.

Landlubber Report:

Returning common grackle have been joined by the odd male red-winged blackbird (Big Harbour and South Haven), always a good sign that spring has definitely arrived! Mourning dove continue to feed beneath my feeders in the company of numerous dark-eyed junco and song sparrow. A few black-capped chickadee continue to feed as well but all in all, feeder numbers have definitely dropped what with trees budding at an incredible rate and insects already emerging from winter hibernation. Numbers of American robin continue to flood into the area, many males already singing. Both blue and grey jay have been noted in Big Harbour and St. Ann's; ruffed grouse have finally begun drumming in those areas as well. Small flocks of white-winged crossbill were found at Big Harbour; pairs of evening grosbeak were noted in several, separate locations. Small songbirds, both at feeders and in the wild, include American goldfinch, pine siskin, purple finch, golden-crowned kinglet, black-capped and boreal chickadee and red-breasted nuthatch. Common snipe have returned to Big Harbour - this is my earliest recorded sighting of this species that is listed as a shorebird but is found along wet field margins usually far from water. Our woodpecker species are just about at their usual numbers with pileated, hairy, downy and black-backed all seen this reporting period and northern flicker heard in many locations (also reported by Richard McCurdy). Raptor species noted this reporting period include many American bald eagle of varying ages - the breeding pair that nest near the house have begun their annual courtship with great gusto - a small hawk, whether a Merlin or kestrel will remain a mystery as it flew away from me, at Baddeck Inlet and red-tailed hawk in various locations either singly or in pairs as they, too, come into breeding season. Don Anderson, Baddeck Inlet, reported a short-eared owl at North Harbour, Aspy.

My thanks to Dennis Laffan, Richard McCurdy, Don Anderson and George Crowell for their sightings reports. I can be reached at 295-1749 to report your birding news.

Dingwall boys help with winning ways



Congratulations to Elijah MacKinnon, his brother Isaac MacKinnon and their cousin Jonah Dunphy on getting Gold and bringing home the Banner from The Joe LeMontagne Hockey Tournament in Cole Harbour and winning all five of their games during March Break. The three boys all live in Dingwall but travel over the mountains to play hockey with the Cheticamp Atom A Trail Riders. They hosted Atom A Provincials in Cheticamp and won Bronze. They tied their first game 7-7 against the New Waterford Sharks, won their second game 16-3 against Cumberland County, lost their third 4-5 against T.A.S.A. and tied the last game 4-4 with Dartmouth to give them the Bronze. The boys were happy that a Cape Breton Team, the New Waterford Sharks won the Gold.

1st Annual Rural Mental Health Conference



**Thursday May 6, 2010 • 9 to 3 (registration 8:30 a.m.)
Inverness County Centre for the Arts**



Scott Boyd played drums and sang professionally for 20 years in Eastern Canada. He worked in Radio for 15 years then turned to television. For 15 years he was with ASN's Breakfast Television. He helped create the show, then went on to be a host, segment producer, and supervising producer. Scott won a Gold Ribbon from the Canadian Television Association for best variety show in Canada 1993. He also won an ECMA for music promotion and another ECMA for media personality of the year for 2003. Scott moved back to Cape Breton in 2004 and is currently with GIANT Radio. Scott lives with bipolar illness. He will use humor and his lively personality to share the story of his journey of living with a mental illness and his path to recovery.



Dr. B. Duncan McKinlay is a registered Psychologist with the College of Psychologists of Ontario, practicing with children and adolescents in the areas of clinical and school psychology. Dr. McKinlay was diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome at age 19 - he knew that he had a "secret" by age 7. He currently works as clinic lead for "The Brake Shop" - an award-winning and nationally-recognized service he created for youth with Tourette Syndrome & associated disorders at the Child and Parent Resource Institute in London, Ontario, Canada. Dr. McKinlay has received numerous awards for his dedication & successes in his field. Dr. McKinlay has conducted over 450 presentations internationally. He has authored numerous works & been featured on various media shows.



Charlene Murphy RN, MN will present her research *The Experience of Having a Mental Illness, Accessing Services and Living in a Rural Community*. Traditional cultural belief systems, stigma, and fragmented health care services are thought to render the experience of living with a mental illness in a rural community very challenging. While many may argue that the needs are the same for rural and urban mental health services, in fact very little is known about this phenomenon. This study examined the experience of seven people living with mental illness in rural communities of Cape Breton. Six themes were co-constructed: Living with Mental Illness, The Role of Family, Friends and Personal Support Networks, Getting Help, Navigating Health Systems, Help Seeking: Challenges and Influences, Rurality, and Solutions.

A panel of experts will address the current issues of mental health and mental illness in the rural areas of the Cape Breton District Health Authority:

- Dr. Linda Courey, Director, Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Dr. Brian Foley, Clinical Director, Mental health Services
- Charlene Murphy, RN, MN Coordinator, Inverness Health Clinic
- A Rural Family Physician

FREE REGISTRATION TO ALL!

Please call Susan at 258-1911 to register to attend.

CONFERENCE VENUE: Inverness County Centre for the Arts
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