

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

A young birder from North Ingonish, Cassidy Best, called me last week to report a very exciting sighting - a female northern cardinal! I haven't seen one of these truly gorgeous birds since living back in Ontario so the sighting report was both uplifting and a little poignant as cardinals are rarely seen on Cape Breton Island. Cardinals belong to the family Cardinalidae, a rather small family of seedeaters that also includes such uncommon birds to Cape Breton as rose-breasted grosbeak, dickscissel and blue grosbeak, all sighted on the Island at wide intervals. Most sightings of any of these

species is generally in the southern or south-eastern part of Cape Breton, so a cardinal north of Smokey is a rare occurrence indeed! My thanks to Cassidy for calling me with her sightings report and for allowing me to use her photo

taken at her grandfather's house in North Ingonish.

Spotlight on the Northern Cardinal:

A medium-sized bird (to 83/4 inches in length), northern cardinal are generally found to the west and south of Cape Breton Island. Indeed, Dave McCorquodale confirmed to me that Cape Breton sightings have, until last week, been restricted to the Strait and Lake Ainslie areas. Both sexes are conspicuous because of the large, upswept red crest and the large and heavy, thick red to pink-ish bill. The male sports a black face patch that outlines its bill and extends to well below the chin and its breast is deep red, as is the remainder of its plumage. Female cardinals are paler in breast and underparts, show some dark scaling on wings and lack the distinct face patch. The northern cardinal's song is a loud, somewhat liquid whistling and is highly variable. Both male and female cardinals sing almost year round and, if they are in your area, they can easily be coaxed to feeders by black oiled sunflower seed, the seed of choice for many of our winter visitors. Cardinals often nest and roost in close proximity to humans and where they are abundant are found in gardens and parks and in rural areas, along the margins of open woodlands and stream sides.

Recent Sightings:

A single great blue heron has been seen for many days at the pond below the Bell Museum in Baddeck. Remarkably, both lesser and greater yellowlegs were found along the bar at Jersey Cove along with some very wet and unhappy-looking black-bellied plover. A smattering of common merganser were also

present there and out on the open water of St. Ann's Bay, a comparable number of red-breasted merganser were noted. Only several black guillemot were present when I took my recent walk along the sandbar but the presence of a loose groups of scoter, both white-winged and surf (60 - 70 individuals) more than made up for the lack of species diversification. Also noted there were some very late common tern still sporting their distinctive black crowns. American black duck were noted in several locations including Nyanza, the ponds along the Bay Road east of Baddeck and at River Bennett and Ingonish Harbour. Canada

goose numbers continue to decline as the fall migration is in full swing but double-crested cormorant numbers appear to be on the increase as more juvenile birds come into such areas as St. Ann's Bay. The usual gull species

are all present and accounted for - herring, great black-backed and ring-billed, which will remain in our area well into December/early January. Fenella Nicholson, North Shore, called to report the return of "her" long-tailed duck, a personal favourite with both males and females of the species sporting very dramatic plumage. Fenella also reported the return of common goldeneye. A single belted kingfisher broke the silence of a serene morning during a walk along the Cabot Trail recently, its jiggering a welcome noise as few of these strong flyers and divers have been noted recently.

Landlubber Report:

Feeders are going full strength during this wet and rather cool weather with dark-eyed junco leading the pack for sheer numbers, accompanied by black-capped chickadee, mourning dove, blue jay, red-breasted nuthatch, song and white-throated sparrow and, during the early part of this reporting period, several fox sparrow. A few common juvenile grackle were also present until very recently. American robin are still common, although fewer of this, our most common thrush appear to have remained in the area. Purple finch, American goldfinch, pine grosbeak, boreal chickadee and grey jay, also reported by Charlene Vickers, English-town, have all been noted out and about in such locations as St. Ann's, Big Harbour, Jersey Cove and Big Baddeck. And of course, the big news is the female northern cardinal reported by Cassidy Best, North Ingonish!

My thanks to Fenella Nicholson, Charlene Vickers & Cassidy Best sharing their recent sightings. I can be reached at 295-1749 with birding news.



NORTHERN CARDINAL

Local hockey update

by Sam Morrison

As our hours of daylight grow shorter a return to the frigid confines of our local arenas is the norm for hockey players and parents in Baddeck and once again this year early November sees all our local programs up and running.

Starting with the youngest skaters in the Baddeck Minor Hockey system we see 5 skaters enrolled in the Initiation program while 13 players take part in the Novice division. Both of these groups concentrate on skill development for most of the winter with games against other communities starting later in the year on a strictly exhibition basis.

The Atom level of play sees the first truly competitive hockey for our local players and this season a very encouraging total of 16 Victoria County pucksters will hit the ice at the 9 and 10 year old level. Baddeck will join 6 other Atom B squads from the west side of the Island to form a League that should see the Bobcats kept busy as they prepare for the "Road top Provincials."

As we go to press the future of the Pee Wee program in Baddeck remains clouded as a lack of numbers (only 9 players registered) have forced parents and Minor Hockey Executives to try and come up with a scenario (be it house league, combining with another community, etc.) that will keep this group of deserving children on the ice and enjoying the game we all enjoy.

The Cape Breton West Pee Wee AAA team also features a strong Baddeck presence this season as Ted Stonehouse serves as an Assistant Coach while Drew Stonehouse, Landon Trickett and Devon Whitty will all patrol the ice the Eagles. Along with playing in the Cape Breton League the Eagles will see action in Tourneys through out the Atlantic Region.

For Bantam aged players (13 and 14 years old) in the area the 2010-11 season will see Baddeck and Port Hood combine, with 10 Baddeck players and 5 from Route 19 coming together to form what should be a very competitive squad. With ice time shared between the two communities the coming season promises to be a busy one for players and parents alike.

This year's edition of the Cape Breton West Islanders of the Nova Scotia Major Midget Hockey League features a healthy number of Baddeck area

players on their roster as Dakota Bernard, Willie MacDonald, Connor MacEachern, Tyler MacLeod and Mark Trickett all wear the Islander colors this season. While the Islanders do not hit the ice in Baddeck a drive to Port Hood for a home game is definitely a worthwhile endeavor for the true hockey fan.

At the Minor Midget level Middle River speedster David MacKenzie and Baddeck defensive ace Eric Nicholson are integral parts of a strong looking Cape Breton West crew (as we go to press they sport an undefeated record) that will no doubt challenge for Provincial honors this season.

The 2010-11 season promises to be an exciting one for fans of Baddeck Academy hockey as the Boy's team has already shown itself to be a much more competitive outfit this year having already picked up their first win of the year in their League opener versus Inverness while last Wednesday here in Baddeck they came up with a very entertaining and gutsy effort in holding perennial League powerhouse Dalbrae to a 5-1 decision. On the girl's side Bronco Alumni Haley Campbell has taken over the coaching reins and with upwards of 16 players attending the early practices the upcoming season should be an exciting one as they challenge teams from the Sydney area in League play.

The Strait Pirates of the Nova Scotia Junior League feature two Baddeck players as Josh McGrath has emerged as one of the Pirates top offensive threats in this his second year with the squad while rookie defenseman Iain Allison is presently splitting his time between the Pirates and the Baddeck Academy Broncos.

In terms of University hockey the two Baddeck area players presently playing at that level share a unique and gratifying bond in that both are playing on defending National Championship squads. Jessica Wong and her University of Minnesota-Duluth teammates are the defending NCAA Women's hockey champs while David MacDonald's (and my alma mater) St. Mary's Huskies will attempt to defend the CIS men's hockey title they won last winter.

In terms of Junior A hockey this season the only local player I am aware off at that level is Dakota Johnson of Iona who patrols the ice for the Truro Bearcats of the Maritime Junior A league.

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