

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

I have had the great pleasure of travelling the Cabot Trail several times these past few weeks and each time I made that trip I could not help but notice northern gannet off shore of both Inverness and Victoria Counties. Although I have been observing these large sea birds for many years, I still continue to marvel at their amazing diving expertise. The adults, flashing white in the sun (when it is, in fact, visible...) and the juveniles, a great, dark blot in an otherwise spotless expanse of sky, make quite a sight circling high above the water, heads down as they scan the depths for suitable food. Then, without warning, those long, elegant wings are suddenly folded back and the birds plummet from goodness knows what height to disappear, for a few moments, beneath the gently rolling waves only to reappear seconds later with a fish clasped firmly in strong bills. Even as they perch upon the barely heaving water are northern gannet visible well out to sea, their large size an immediate give-away as to species, light or dark plumage the clue as to age.

Spotlight on the Northern Gannet:

Northern Gannet are high-diving seabirds noted for their sudden, headlong plunges for prey from great heights. One of a number of pelagic species found over our offshore waters, northern gannet spend their lives on the open water and come ashore only to breed, returning to the vast, open ocean as soon as their young are fledged. Adult birds are easily identified – they are white overall with black wingtips, a long, white tail and a rich, buffy head. Juvenile birds are dark grey above, paler below and heavily speckled all over. The long, tapered bill is blue-grey in adult birds and black in juveniles. Adult plumage is achieved by the third year. These are extremely large birds, measuring approximately 37" in length and they sport a very impressive wing span, in excess of 6'. Northern gannet are noted for their remarkable aerial displays when hunting. It is their habit to circle above the water in widening circles and then suddenly folding back their wings before diving headlong into the water. These are colonial birds and are noted for forming extremely large colonies on rocky cliffs and off-shore islands.

On the water:

The small colony of common tern at the bar at Jersey Cove has successfully fledged a number of young, the exact count a mystery as of the writing of this column only because the newly-fledged birds remaining close to nesting sites are difficult to discern among the cobbles and heaps of seaweed strewn there by recent winds. Small numbers of young herring, great-black-backed and ring-billed gulls were also noted there as well as at a number of other locations along the rocky shores of Victoria County. The small numbers of both common and arctic tern observed near Nyanza continue to feed in the shallows there but no evidence of young have been noted at that location. Out on the waters of the Atlantic, northern gannet are sharing the wealth of the sea with such species as black guillemot (Wreck Cove), white-winged and small numbers of surf scoter (Ingonish Harbour and North Bay Ingonish) and little else to date. Only along the shores of the Bras d'Or have American black duck, mallard and small

numbers of American widgeon, all with young in tow, have been seen this reporting period. The exception to the rule is ring-necked duck, males only observed at Nyanza, the female and newly-hatched young left behind at nesting sites. Common loon adults have been both seen and heard in such diverse locations as St. Ann's Harbour, Lake O'Law and North Bay at Aspy, juveniles well-advanced and some adults already losing their striking breeding plumage. Of our waders and shorebirds, spotted sandpiper were noted this reporting period in all the usual locations along sandy riverbanks and at the mouths of rivers and streams outflowing into the Bras d'Or. Both greater and lesser yellowlegs were noted in a variety of locations both on the shores of the Bras d'Or, at South Gut St. Ann's, Englishtown, River Bennett and other locations with suitable shallows in which they forage. Belted kingfisher, so long absent at their inland nesting sites, have once again returned to coastal areas to jigger and fish

Land Lubbers' Report:

Again wood warblers make up the majority of passerine sightings these past few weeks. Yellow and yellow-rumped, magnolia, an inordinate number of American redstart in mature hardwood stands, black and white,

common yellowthroat, black-throated green, Wilson's, northern parula, mourning, blackburnian and chestnut-sided all, in suitable habitat. Both red-eyed and solitary (blue-headed) vireo continue to sing although both species have been noted with young in tow. Our thrushes, American robin, hermit and

Swainson's, continue to enliven the woods both morning and evening, their magnificent songs lingering in the still air. Our blackbirds – red-winged and common grackle – are restless as young mature and wander ever-farther from nesting sites. Finch song fills the air as American goldfinch, pine siskin, pine grosbeak and purple finch teach their impatient young to fend for themselves. Ditto for our sparrows, all noted in suitable habitat – song, white-throat, chipping and Lincoln's sparrow. Golden-crowned kinglet are definitely back on the active list as are dark-eyed junco, blue and grey jay. A family of brown creeper were noted at Uisge Ban Falls recently, their soft whistles and chirps ensuring the foraging birds were within hearing range of one another. Cedar waxwing has made a spectacular appearance in so many locations it will be impossible to note them all but evening grosbeak were noted only within the boundaries of the Village of Baddeck. Woodpecker species this reporting period include hairy, downy and northern flicker. Flycatchers observed were a few olive-sided and many yellow-bellied on the margins of black spruce swamps, more least in many locations than in past years and a good number of alder, again, all sightings made in suitable habitat. Ovenbird continue to clamour in the moist woods of lowland areas. Raptors noted were both adult and juvenile American bald eagle, mostly seen along riverbanks where salmon are lurking, several red-tailed hawk, a single American kestrel at Big Harbour and osprey in two locations, one along the Bay Road, the second in the same, Big Harbour location as previously reported.

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



Grab your sneakers & Learn to Run in Baddeck

by Arlene Morrison

There will be a LEARN TO RUN PROGRAM starting in Baddeck!! I have had a lot of people express interest in learning to run. Many had heard about the programs being offered in Sydney and New Waterford through the Cape Breton Fiddlers Run. I contacted the Fiddlers Run organizers and they very willingly shared the guidelines that they followed. Here are some comments from them:

"We know that travel can sometimes be a barrier for people when it comes to physical activity opportunities," says Fiddlers Run Race Director, David Gabriel. "People may not always have the means or transportation to travel to a gym or recreation facility. By expanding the Learn to Run program, our hope is to get people in other communities starting to run so that eventually they feel comfortable just grabbing their sneakers and heading out on their own."

Councillor Kim Desveaux, a New Waterford resident, participated in the Learn to Run program in Sydney last year. After completing the program and finishing her first 5 km race at the Fiddlers Fun Run, Desveaux was keen to get a Learn to Run program offered in her community.

"For me, a busy, working mother, I

looked forward to weekly group runs. I met a lot of people, learned a lot and was so proud of finishing the program and completing the 5km distance."

Over the course of the eight-week Learn to Run program, participants follow a walk/run schedule and eventually work their way up to running a 5km distance. In addition to the weekly group run, physicians and dietitians visit to discuss everything from injury prevention to proper nutrition.

Registration for the program will be on August 17, 2011 @ 6:00 pm. We will meet as a group in the Common Room (front entrance) at Alderwood, located off the Shore Road at 89 Alderwood Lane. There will be a \$10 registration fee that will be donated to Alderwood's Run for the Cure team; "NITA'S NOCKERS". There won't be any running this evening, just the registration.

Please note: registration will be limited. All registrants must be 16 years or older and must have parental consent form signed. Please contact me if you are interested in registering 295-2448 or e-mail: enelra_@hotmail.com. Also, if there are any runners who would like to help out, please let me know!!!

So come on, challenge yourselves!! All you need is a good pair of sneakers and determination!

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Féis an Eilein - Eilean na Nollaig
13th Annual Gaelic Concert Series
"Bu Deònach Leam Tilleadh"
"I Would Willingly Return"

July 26th Mòd nam Fidhlearn - The Fiddler's Court
Tonight our Fear an Taighe Lewis MacKinnon welcomes the duo of Kimberley Fraser (fiddle) and Hilda Chaisson (piano), the Boisdale Trio (fiddle/piano) with Father Francis and Mike Barron (fiddle).

Thursday, July 28th 7-9 - Celtic Guitar
Intermediate/Advanced Classes - Instructor Donnie Campbell - Admission \$10/2 hours

August 2nd A' Moladh Ar n-Òigridh - Celebrating Our Youth
Tonight we are thrilled to present some of our fine young musicians. Bean an Taighe Anita MacDonald will host this evening, welcoming Neil MacInnis (pipes), Stuart MacInnis (guitar), Cullen MacInnis (gaelic song/step-dance) and Allan Cameron (fiddle). Anita will also perform with Evan Bonaparte (guitar) and Lauren MacDonald (step-dance/song/guitar).

All Concerts at 8:00 pm - Admission \$10, children 14 & under \$5
feisaneilein@ns.sympatico.ca • <http://www.feisaneilein.ca> • Ph/Fax: 902-622-2627
Christmas Island Firehall, 8539 Grand Narrows Hwy (Route 223)

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