

Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

The fall migration has already begun with flocks of Canada geese making their way south and filling the late afternoon skies before coming to roost on local ponds and coves. Each morning brings with it lively birdsong for such species as red-eyed and solitary vireo, adults very busy gathering their long-since fledged young together in preparation for their approaching southern journey. Late nesting boreal species such as red-breasted nuthatch and boreal chickadee are once again on the active list, their young remaining close by to where the adults are foraging in the thinning canopies of deciduous trees and perching precariously out at the branch ends of cone-laden conifers. On freshwater ponds and lakes small groups of dabbling and bay or diving ducks are gathering prior to their



PHILADELPHIA VIREO

leave-taking, the males all in drab plumage now that the business of breeding is behind them. And on our beaches, cobble, sand or both, south-bound waders and shorebirds busily search for the small invertebrates and other less-savory critters that are the mainstay of their diet.

Spotlight on the Philadelphia Vireo:

A vireo species I have always associated with the Mira River Valley has made its appearance on our side of the Mountain! The Philadelphia vireo is a small bird, approximately 5 1/4" in length and although it resembles the more common red-eyed vireo, there are some essential differences in their field marks that makes this species a standout. Philadelphia vireo shows a grey head that gives way to a greenish back; its underparts are variably yellow, although at this time of year, the yellow is significantly more pronounced than in spring and extends to the undertail coverts. Like the red-eyed vireo, it has a distinct black eyestripe and bright, white eyebrow but its posture is decidedly more vertical, an excellent clue, like its smaller size, to its identification. The song of the Philadelphia vireo is similar to the red-eyed's, a series of lilting phrases that faintly resemble "here I am, where are you", but its song is much sweeter and slower than that of its larger cousin. Like all vireos, this one can be found foraging in the upper canopy of deciduous trees in search of the insects that are its main source of nutrients.

On the Water:

As mentioned above, ring-necked duck continue to stage on the small ponds along the Bras d'Or Lake near Nyanza along with small numbers of American widgeon and American black duck (seen in many other locations as well). A few common merganser females with young in tow were noted at such locations as River Bennett and St. Ann's Harbour. Common loon, both adult and juvenile birds were noted on St. Ann's Bay, at Big Harbour and along the Mira shore in several locations. Horned grebe, a little earlier than in past years, were noted on St. Ann's Harbour, Schooner Pond (past Donkin) and Little Pond, Florence. Black guillemot, some retaining breeding

plumage, some in drab winter dress, have been observed at Wreck Cove and at several locations between Mira Gut and Louisbourg where common eider romped in the surging waves churned up by Hurricane Irene. A few white-winged and surf scoter were found well out into the waters of St. Ann's Bay where northern gannet amazed with their daring diving skills. Along the shores of Cape Breton the waders and shorebirds can be found – greater and lesser yellowlegs, black-bellied and semi-palmated plover, sanderling, semi-palmated, western and least sandpiper, short-billed dowitcher, dunlin, a few late red knot, a single white-rumped sandpiper at Mira Gut, a very late whimbrel at Morien Bar, ruddy turnstone and, of course, great blue heron. All our gull species are present and accounted for – herring,

great black-backed, ring-billed and the small and delicate Bonaparte's, already losing its crisp black cap in favour of the sooty cheek patch that is its winter trademark. Belted kingfisher numbers are again on the rise as adults return from

inland nesting sites with their gregarious and noisy young. And, last but not least, both common and arctic tern screech and wheel over the heads of unsuspecting beach walkers at many locations around the Island.

Land Lubber Report:

As noted above, there are plenty of vireo around – solitary, red-eyed and Philadelphia, all in hardwoods and all very active and just as difficult to see as they hunt high in the broad-leaved canopies. Wood warblers, both adult and the more challenging to identify juvenile birds noted this reporting period and all in suitable habitat include yellow-rumped, magnolia, yellow, common yellowthroat, northern parula, black and white, and mourning warbler near the cut over woodlots. American robin is the only thrush encountered this reporting period and only in the very early days of this period were swallow species noted – specifically tree and cliff. All our swallow species had a very rough breeding season with many failed nesters due to the unseasonably low temperatures and significant rains that left nests cool and damp, frustrating adults with the failure of their eggs to incubate. American goldfinch, purple finch and pine grosbeak were all noted lately as were red-breasted nuthatch, both boreal and black-capped chickadee (as above) and brown creeper in the conifer woods so common to our area. Woodpecker species noted include all "the usuals" – hairy, downy, pileated and black-backed. Sparrow species noted were song, white-throated, chipping at Big Baddeck, Lincoln's in several locations, Savannah near the coasts and Nelson's sharp-tailed on the saltwater marches along the Mira shore. Raptors this reporting period include Merlin, American kestrel, northern harrier, red-tailed hawk, osprey and, of course, American bald eagle.

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

Sandbagger Tourney & Auction



Willie MacDonald (c) accepted the Sidney Crosby jersey on behalf of the winning ticket holder, Frankie MacDonald, during the auction held along with the annual Sandbaggers Golf Tournament fundraiser event for the rink in Baddeck. Flanking Willie are Cory Cox (l) and David Fraser who were among the team of organizers for the event.

Baddeck

The third annual Sandbaggers tournament took place at the Bell Bay Golf Club in the first week of August, and organizer Cory Cox was able to present the rink with a check of over four thousand dollars.

Up for grabs at the auction was a signed Sidney Crosby jersey which was donated by Marvin Cook; a signed Jessie Wong jersey from her college days; and a chair from Maple Leaf Gardens. The bidding was fast and generous and the winner of the Crosby Jersey, Frankie MacDonald, graciously donated it back to the rink.

Cory Cox, Marvin Cook and their team have now raised over eight thousand dollars for the rink over the last

three years of Sandbaggers tournaments.

This great example of community spirit is what outgoing chairman, Jonathan Saul, hopes will inspire others to donate to the new boards project. "We need one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for a new set of boards and glass. Along with the final tally of cash ticket sales on the jersey this should total almost nine grand and will be a welcome addition to that fundraiser."

The Board of the Baddeck Arena is grateful to the members of the community who donated their valuable time and money. The next fundraising event is the annual golf scramble on the 24th of September and hopefully other donors and volunteers will continue to support the rink.

CB Classic Road Race



Framework Racing Team member, Daniel Murray of Dingwall gets ready to take a drink in the pack of "A" Division competitors during the recent 3rd annual Cape Breton Classic Road Race held in George's River. This year featured three different stages over two days. Racing conditions were hot, windless and humid, making it difficult to breathe for some. Several riders were forced to drop out.



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