

# Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

Slowly, slowly, the spring migrants are making their way into our area, either as short-stay visitors merely stopping briefly for a nutrition break, or as spring arrivals finally back "home" for the season. Reports have come in from many locations in Victoria County of both our usual migrant species and some not so usual. Shorelines and brackish ponds are quickly emptying of bay ducks as ponds in the Highlands are freed from the grip of winter's ice; sea ducks, too, are leaving the shorelines for points far to the north of us as many are sub-arctic nesters. Raptors, too, are returning to rodent-rich woodlots and marshes where their food supply is virtually guaranteed. Before long, the air will be filled with birdsong...

## Spotlight on the Blue Grosbeak:

A member of the Cardinalidae family which includes northern cardinal, some grosbeaks, some buntings, dickcissel and other seedeaters, blue grosbeak are considered rare to uncommon to Cape Breton. The few reports of this beautiful, rather small bird (to 63/4") come from Louisbourg and points to the south-east and, to my knowledge, this is the first reported sighting from Victoria County. The male of the species is a



rich, indigo blue all over with the exception of a wide black band outlining the bill and eyes, two wide chestnut wing-bars and a dark-ish tail. Female blue grosbeak are brown all over with a buffy chin patch, chestnut wing-bars and a small grey rump patch. Juveniles resemble the female of the species. Like other family members, blue grosbeak sport a heavy bill. Almost exclusively seed eaters, these striking birds are wide-spread across the southern part of the continent and are generally not found much farther north than the state of New Hampshire.

## On the Water:

As always happens at this time of year, sightings on the water are rapidly diminishing as common goldeneye and common and red-breasted merganser move north onto recently ice-freed ponds for nesting and breeding. The few remaining pairs noted from Nyanza to south of Smokey seem poised for departure with males displaying infrequently and females staying in close proximity to their chosen partners. American black duck (widespread) and the few mallard noted at Nyanza, Baddeck Inlet, the pond below the Bell Museum on the Bay Road and at River Bennett will soon be retreating into the thick growth of marsh grasses and reeds. Bev Brett, out on a road trip, noted the first of the season's ring-billed duck on the pond at Nyanza. Double-crested cormorant numbers have not increased significantly these past few weeks but that, too, will quickly change. Our resident gulls – herring and great black-backed have not yet been joined by the migrant ring-billed but, again, that too will soon be corrected. A very early greater yellowlegs was seen landing at the small spit near the causeway bridge near the Lobster Galley; a few belted kingfisher were noted in several locations

including St. Ann's, Nyanza and along the Bay Road outside of Baddeck and Canada geese, many in migration, have begun staking out territory from one end of the County to the other.

## Land Lubber's Report:

Most of the sightings reports for this reporting period dealt with passerines, that is perching birds or songbirds. The most dramatic report came from Andrew Watt, North Shore, who found a female blue grosbeak at one of his feeders. Jim O'Brien, Big Harbour, in addition to a few of this and that such as black-capped chickadee and American goldfinch is one among many who have reported dark-eyed junco in the hundreds. It is only at this time of year that we will be treated to colour variants so keep a close eye on those nervous ground feeders for the occasional white-sided with its barely discernible wing bars. Blackbirds such as common grackle and red-winged blackbird can now be found in

suitable habitat; mourning dove have returned to all their usual haunts and purple finch are becoming brighter by the day. Adam Carter, English-town, was amazed to have a large flock of skittish snow bunting invade the feeders at his

home at the beginning of this reporting period. They moved nervously from feeders, to lawns, flew to nearby rooftops and then repeated the process over and over again. I managed to get some quite decent photos... Adam was, again, one of many reporting these lovely arctic nesters and similarly large flocks of snow bunting reports came from Mae Buchanan, South Haven and Karen and Glen Locklear, Tarbot, to give you some idea as to how wide-spread they were and, notably, usually far from the coast which is where they are generally found during migration. Bev Brett, Oregon Road, North River, reports fox sparrow already singing on territory and a sighting of the first of the season's northern harrier. I was fortunate to also encounter one of these beautiful marsh hawks at Big Harbour where I also came across an osprey, previously reported at North River by Bev. Jim Morrow, West Side Middle River reported the season's first white-throated sparrow. There are many American bald eagle around, both juvenile and adult birds, many of the adults in pairs soaring high on updrafts, relaxing before the arduous task of nesting. Other raptors noted this reporting period include red-tailed hawk in several locations including Big Baddeck and St. Ann's, and a very aggressive merlin that raced through the yard on the Easter weekend and terrorized the junco feeding there, snatching one unsuspecting little bird from the air! I was, of course, outraged, but Floyd calmly reminded me that it, too, must eat. Perhaps, but not when I am out gardening - please!

My thanks to Bev Brett, Adam Carter, Andrew Watt, Mae Buchanan, Jim Morrow, Jim O'Brien and Karen and Glen Locklear for sharing their recent sightings. I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.

# Lindsay Rogers Crib Tournament



Photo courtesy of Violet MacLeod

Another successful year has come to an end for the Lindsay Rogers Crib Tournament, held at the Cape North Fire Hall. A debt of gratitude to everyone who attended, since without those participants this couldn't happen each year. Hope to see all next year again! Proceeds from the tournament go toward a \$500 bursary at Cabot High. Pictured above are (l-r): 1st Place - Stanley Burton & Peter Buchanan, 2nd Place - Sheila Briand and Faith Briand, and in 3rd Place were Dorothy MacLeod & Brenda Rogers.



## Summer Employment Opportunities

### Baddeck Visitor Information Centre

#### • Student Travel Counsellor

Applicant must be enrolled and returning to a post-secondary accredited educational program and/or attending high school within Nova Scotia to qualify for this 8-11 week position pending funding approval.

**Term: June - August 2011**

#### • Part Time Travel Counsellor

Applicant must be service oriented and have excellent communication skills. One should be familiar with the many things to see and do in the Baddeck area and all other areas of Cape Breton Island.

As a councilor, you must be comfortable in assisting visitors with planning their travel itineraries. Some training will be provided.

**Term: 24 hours weekly, Mid-June to Mid-October 2011. Applicant must be willing to work weekends. Conversational French would be an asset.**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE IS MAY 15, 2011.**

Please send resume by e-mail to: [lou@dcba.ca](mailto:lou@dcba.ca)

or by mail to: Destination Cape Breton Association  
Attention: Lou Leith  
PO Box 1448, Sydney, NS B1P 6R7

## Baddeck Curling Club

### Fall Fun Draw Dinner & Dance

September 10<sup>th</sup> 2011

**\$29,000 in Prizes!**

Top Prize \$20,000 • 2<sup>nd</sup> \$5,000

3<sup>rd</sup> \$2,500 • 2<sup>nd</sup> \$1,000 • 5<sup>th</sup> \$500

#### EARLY BIRD DRAWS

**July 1st: \$250 or 3 free draw tickets**

**August 1st: \$100 or one free ticket**

Contact any Curling Club member to purchase tickets!

### BADDECK CURLING CLUB ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Tuesday, May 10<sup>th</sup> - 7 pm at the Curling Club**

## ELLIOTT K. FRASER, LLB.

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