

NATURE NOTES – WINTER 2020/21

As we continued to experience the “winter of our discontent” and then entered lockdown, I am sure those of us around the lake heaved a sigh of relief as getting out to exercise was deemed to constitute an essential activity. Although there is much to be observed through the windows, especially if one has bird feeders, being able to get out and about to imbibe some Vitamin D, socialize at a discreet distance with one’s neighbours and generally revel in the natural beauty with which we are here surrounded has been a lifesaver. Snowshoeing or skiing on the lake or trails, walking along the lanes, all provide us with the opportunity to observe what is happening in the natural world this winter. Plus those of us water rats were able to kayak right up to late November!



Although bird counts during winter fade into insignificance compared to the number of species observable in late spring, there have been a few things of note. Firstly, would be the huge irruption of Common Redpolls which can be observed in flocks of up to 100. Careful checking has produced a few of the much rarer Arctic species, Hoary Redpoll, among them. Secondly, there



have been a couple of birds overwintering which one would not expect. The marshy area near the beaver dam on Rainbow Lane has recently produced a Song Sparrow, a species which normally we would not see until the spring. Much warmer than usual temperatures, and the consequent open water around the dam area of Little Silver provided sightings of Belted Kingfisher, another species usually very uncommon in winter. The open water has meant that sightings of Bald Eagles have continued a good part of the winter.

The continued presence of many of us who would have since fled to warmer climes has meant an increase in people feeding birds, leading to some undeclared feeder wars as accusations of “their” birds being seen at a neighbour’s feeder fly to and fro! I still haven’t forgiven a certain personage on Little Silver Lane for taking “our” Red-bellied Woodpecker, which hasn’t graced our feeders since the middle of December. The many birds hanging out at feeders has encouraged the presence of some raptors that enjoy feeding on them. Both Sharp-shinned and Cooper’s Hawks have been seen hunting, and that ghostly predator, the Barred Owl, was observed recently swooping along the lane looking for victims!



Now is time of year when we start to anticipate the arrival of some spring migrants. A first of year Common Grackle was observed yesterday near the Maberly skating rink, and I am sure it will not be too long before we are wishing that they and their equally voracious relations, the Red-winged Blackbirds, would stop emptying our feeders. Check those noisy blackbird flocks though. Spring is a great time to find the much rarer Rusty Blackbird which looks like a smaller version of a grackle with a much shorter tail and thinner beak. March also brings Purple Finches back to the feeders and the first Eastern Phoebe's, announcing their presence by saying their name loudly and repetitively. Before we know it April will be here and new spring migrants will be arriving at the lakes daily.

Mammal watching over the winter has also been very productive with the usual White-tailed Deer, Coyotes, River Otters and Red Foxes, but also sightings of rarer critters such as Fishers. There have been reports of Northern Flying Squirrels, so check your feeders at night - they love to swoop in and gobble up food when no-one is looking!



So looking forward to seeing more of everyone as the weather warms up, the birds come back and the lakes open up. Spring is definitely on its way, the Black-capped Chickadees are singing their "Fee-bee" spring song, in town you can hear House Finches and Northern Cardinals singing on territory, and the first Skunks are out and about.

Alison Bentley
Rainbow Lane Area Rep.