

NATURE NOTES – MARCH 2022

As we emerge from what is hopefully the last winter of being denied residence in warmer climes, I am reflecting that we do indeed have much to be thankful for living here at the lake. The winter proved to be quite productive for feeder birds, although the big invasion of Common Redpolls seen last year was not repeated, with only a few specimens showing up in mid-February. About the same time the first Purple Finches and **Pine Siskins** appeared which made for quite a colourful display as they mixed with the American Goldfinches, some of which are now showing quite a yellow summer tinge.



Feeders in the yard of course mean that local predatory birds show up to the smorgasbord offered for their feeding delight (as do the neighbourhood deer!). Of interest was the presence of a **Northern Shrike** hunting in our yard from January 24 through to the end of February. The faint barring on the chest indicates a

younger bird and it certainly seemed to be trying to hone its hunting skills. This provided some entertainment as the bird pursued chickadees and other small birds through the trees, often to no avail. The usual accipiters were also present and we were treated to the sight of a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** chowing down on its breakfast on a couple of occasions.



Between mid-February and mid-March nothing too much of note was added to the lakes year list, although we did have a **Brown Creeper** frequenting our feeder set up, a departure from its usual habit of climbing up the nearby trees. Check out those claws - such a perfect adaptation for its "creeping". I did make a couple of forays in late February to try for the overwintering Belted Kingfisher photographed by Denis Leroux or the Red-bellied Woodpecker which has evaded us so far this winter. No luck. Then a couple of weeks later the migrant floodgates opened with the arrival of the

first Red-winged Blackbirds on March 13. A couple of days after the first Common Grackles showed up. Amazing how excited we are to see these species arrive only to wish they would move on and stop emptying our feeders. We have since discovered that putting down cracked corn diverts them from the much more expensive sunflower seed.



A trip over to Little Silver Lane on March 17 finally produced not one but two Belted Kingfishers chasing each other around the outlet pond and giving their rattling call. A few days later the first Song Sparrow of the season was heard at the old beaver pond on Rainbow Lane and within a couple of days no less than eight were recorded along Rainbow and Silvery Lanes as they loudly proclaimed their territory. The first Red-shouldered Hawks showed up on Little Silver Lane on March 11 but I didn't catch up with one until March 22 as it screamed its

way along the shoreline of Rainbow Lake. A walk on March 25 provided another sighting, this time of two birds, while the next day two were observed copulating in a tree along Silvery Lane. I suspect that there are at least two pairs in our area. That same March 25 walk also produced the first Great Blue Heron, resplendent in his breeding plumage plumes, while Mallard, Hooded Merganser and Common Merganser were also new for the year at the lakes. Although the latter was a fly over, the rest were huddled in the little pond adjacent to the small lake between Rainbow and Silvery Lanes. Open water is still at a premium and the only Wood Ducks and Bufflehead observed so far have been seen at the Little Silver Lake outflow. The next day's walk provided a fly-over Sandhill Crane and the much-awaited and a little later than expected Eastern Phoebe. Listen for the latter flycatcher making its explosive "Fee bee" calls. They love to hang around houses, barns and sheds, nesting in the eaves, so keep an eye out for them. Apart from their voice, one characteristic that separates them from other flycatchers is their habit of constantly flicking their tail up and down.



Any day now we should be hearing the "peent" call of displaying American Woodcocks, followed by their bubbling and chuckling song as they shoot skywards and then spiral to the ground, only to begin all over again, showing off to the females hiding in the undergrowth. They are quite easily found at last light, so go for a late evening walk and stop and listen at a point where you have a good view of the sky. These birds nest in the area and, if you are really lucky, can sometimes be observed during the day crossing the lanes with their crazy chicken-like walk.

Despite the somewhat unpleasant meteorological conditions expected over the next couple of days, we will begin to see an influx of more bird species around the lakes. Listen out for the maniacal call of the Common Flicker and look out for Rusty Blackbirds in wet areas giving their grating call. The first Brown-headed Cowbirds should soon be bubbling away as the males try to impress their potential mates. By the end of the first week of April we can hope that warmer conditions might melt the lakes and the first Common Loons put in an appearance but fly-overs are more common until later in the month.

Mammals were also in good evidence this winter. Apart from the usual White-tailed Deer and Red and Gray Squirrels, there have been sightings of River Otters, Mink, Fisher and Red Fox. Here is a rather ratty iPhone pic of a fox coming through our yard, probably on its way to the denning site over on the next property. Last week I saw a Beaver hightailing it along our neighbours' driveway and I am sure the Muskrats are also poised to emerge soon. The first Eastern Chipmunks appeared a couple of weeks back and are busy dashing around the neighbourhood exploring all potential nesting and feeding spots. Of course spring would not be complete without the appearance of a Groundhog and our own version of Warton Willie did not disappoint, showing up over on Little Silver Lane quite a while ago.



Just a reminder to everyone that you too can contribute bird sightings to eBird. Last year I persuaded the powers that be to make our lakes an official hotspot: [Rainbow Lake and Little Silver Lake, Lanark County, ON, CA - eBird Hotspot](#). Joining eBird is a matter of seconds and then to record birds you can either do so directly from the hotspot or choose submit in the main menu and pick Rainbow Lake and Little Silver Lake as your location. We have seen 133 species around the lakes since moving here but it would be nice to have a few other folk contributing to the sightings. eBird will also keep tally of your personal sightings and you can submit for anywhere in the world!

Happy Spring!

Alison Bentley
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Thanks to Stewart Bentley for the illustrations (apart from the iPhone one!)