

NATURE NOTES – WINTER 2022/23

Well here we are in the third “winter of our discontent” with COVID still rearing it’s ugly head. After nearly three years of avoiding the “bug” Stewart and I got laid low upon our return from the Dominican Republic at the end of November, so can no longer claim to be NOVIDs. However compared to previous years, 2022 saw lots of trips (hence the lack of Nature Notes from yours truly!!) taking us to such places as Uganda and Papua New Guinea



as we decided to celebrate our 50th by indulging in an orgy of revenge travel. We were



listed in the top 150 eBirders in the world for 2022 but here we are back at the lake, checking out the birds and keeping happily occupied with more mundane offerings than this lovely **Raggiana Bird of Paradise** or the amazing and unique **Shoebill!**

One thing that happens every winter to keep birders engaged, is the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. This event takes place all over the Americas and is a vital part of monitoring winter populations. Folk head out and count birds within a defined 24 km diameter circle on a specific day between December 14 and January 5. Since our arrival in Canada some 49 years ago, we have only missed one or two CBC’s and I have spent almost 40 years as a coordinator and compiler, most recently for the Rideau Ferry CBC. CBC’s are basically citizen science at its best. Yes, observers make mistakes, but the sheer amount of data collected has added significantly to our knowledge of how various wild bird populations are faring in the long term. Also, every year new species are found to be overwintering or even establishing winter populations in certain areas. For the first time this year Stewart and I participated in the Sharbot Lake CBC, whose circle almost

reaches as far as our lakes. We had 19 species, far less than on the Rideau Ferry count before Christmas. The awful weather on January 5 and lack of waterfront on our route were mainly to blame. However we saw a lovely variety of birds as we carefully drove the icy roads. Birds of the day? A couple of flocks of **Bohemian Waxwings**, that beautiful but elusive species, and a majestic Bald Eagle perched on a snag and barely visible in the mist.





Another winter project we get involved in is Birds Canada's Project Feederwatch and it's interesting to note the trends over the years. A couple of years ago we were inundated with Common Redpolls, whereas this year there are none and the **Evening Grosbeaks** have appeared on the scene! It is quite delightful to venture outside to be greeted by their cheerful

chirps and chuckles. A species which has recently started to be regular at our and other feeders is the diminutive **Brown Creeper**, normally seen scuttling up tree trunks. Otherwise it's the usual Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers (has anyone seen a Red-bellied this winter?), White-breasted Nuthatches, American Goldfinches and the occasional Dark-eyed Junco or American Tree Sparrow. Pileated Woodpeckers are around but have yet to alight on our feeders.



A good place to walk at all times of the year is the Tay-Havelock trail, which is within easy reach of us here at the lakes. You can even bike down there in season. A relatively new parking lot off Armstrong Road gives great access and you can head in both directions and find different birds. Winter birds to look for along the trail include Northern Shrike, although one hung out at Rainbow Lane last year, and Golden-crowned Kinglets. The old railway bridge to the west of Armstrong is



an excellent place to find River Otters, although tracks in the snow along the lanes evidence their presence here at the lakes. Another mammal still seen around here in winter is the beautiful **Northern Flying Squirrel**. These guys really like to hang around bird feeders and will also come to feed on scattered seeds. They don't hibernate but lower their metabolism and take shelter in snuggly little groups when really cold weather hits.

So, as winter progresses let's all take time to enjoy what is all around us. I have lost count of the times Stewart and I have given thanks over the past almost three years that we have our little piece of paradise here at the lake and are not stuck in some city apartment. Yes, we love to wander to new and bird-rich corners of the world, but we are always happy to return to the lake, hopefully our forever home!

Alison Bentley

With thanks to Stewart Bentley and Denis Leroux for the illustrations