

“A Lanark Big Year – February 28th – One Bird at a Time!”



February! What can one say about this month of cold and snow? Well for one thing, it has been a season of seeing one bird at a time! Lots of local day trips coupled with outings to the NW and SW corners of the county resulting in a maximum of one new species on any given day. As well I have noticed that Lanark has an incredible mixture of tree species, from the Pines, Spruces, Oaks, Maples, Hackberrys, Hickorys and many more. Last year I guided a couple, who are birding buddies of mine from Ferintosh, Alberta (south of Edmonton), around eastern Ontario and they loved the variety of tree species as much as the eastern birds. He worked as a forester for the Alberta government so he know his trees, and he was amazed at the variety. As well one notices how young many of the trees are, a result of the centuries of logging, both for settlement of the land and to supply the Royal Navy's ship building yards.

This is also a year that the Great Lakes are more frozen then they have been in decades with the result that there may be more and different duck species on any open water there is left. In Almonte, I saw the 5 Redheads just east of the bridge, a first for my Lanark life list. I have walked and driven the Mississippi River several times in the last month and regularly see Common Goldeneyes and Mallards at Appleton, and Carleton Place. I also spotted one sleeping male Red-breasted Merganser in the rapids by the Pakenham Five Span Bridge. He seemed unconcerned about the chunks of ice bopping around him as he dozed. In the last few days 7 Lesser Scaup turned up on the river across from the Carleton Place High School.



In early February, Zaza and I did a tour of the southwest corner of the county. It was another cold but at least sunny day and we worked our way west on County Rd 6 from Perth to Althorpe and then onto to County Rd 36. South on 36 takes you out of the county as we crossed the Tay River which still had an open stretch. We turned left onto Parish Rd to head back toward the county and came across the site of the first Roman Catholic Church in that area established in 1840. It was established by Irish priests from Armagh and all that was visible was a marker. Parish Rd got us back to County Rd 10 (Westport Road) and travelling east we came to the Lanark County sign. So far all we had seen were Crows, Ravens and Blue Jays. Is it just me or are there many more Blue Jays this year? We see them throughout the county as well mobbing feeders. From there we travelled all the way to Merrickville, where just on the edge of town a Sharpie dashed across the road and behind a house. I suspect lunch was ready at the feeder. We ended the day by coming up the eastern edge of the county surveying all the fields for Larks but no luck.



Our second day trip was to Blueberry Mountain. The drive turned up a beautiful Adult Bald Eagle soaring near Hopetown, Purple Finches on Flower Station Road and of course Blue Jays everywhere. We reached the Blueberry Mountain parking lot but there was way too much snow to do any hiking without snowshoes. I now know the area better and plan on hiking the K&P Trail in the spring.

I decided it required a more concerted effort to find Larks so I started driving all of the eastern county roads with large open fields between Pakenham and Merrickville. Persistence paid off. We found a small flock of Snow Buntings on the edge of McArton Rd near the Appleton Road end and stopped. Again Zaza was the first to notice the two Horned Larks just into the open field and separated from the Buntings.

Okay now for the numbers. Remember I had identified 61 target birds for the first three months of 2014, well I have only seen 34 so far; not a single Siskin, Redpoll, Crossbill or Grosbeak in sight. In addition I have seen 8 species I didn't target for this season, such as the Varied Thrush, Robin and some of the Ducks, for a total of 42. It is a slow start for a target of 200.



So remember to let me know of interesting birds you see, such as Owls, Raptors in general, Longspurs and any of the normal winter finches I am missing. Email me at iain.wilkes@hotmail.com

Cheers and may March be better!

Iain

