



## *CBC – Uxbridge*

### **15th Uxbridge Christmas Bird Count December 27<sup>th</sup> 2019**

*by Derek Connelly  
photo by Geoff Carpentier*



Of the 5,158 birds counted this year 23% were starlings!

Numbers of individual birds counted was lower than the fourteen-year average for most species except European Starling (1,210 up from 615), Wild Turkey (180 from 145), Rock Pigeon (479 from 403) and Red-breasted Nuthatch (84 from 64). The number of bird species seen was 44, one less than last year. The 14-year species average is 46. We expected a reduction in species since the bumper cone crop in the

north kept the northern finches such as redpolls, siskins and grosbeaks away this year, but Snow buntings were also missed. While there were no new species added to the total list from previous years, highlights included: Merlin (1), Bald Eagle (1), Winter Wren (3), Song Sparrow (2), Swamp Sparrow (4) and Brown-headed Cowbird (3). Swamp Sparrow had only been observed once before - five years ago. This bird is secretive and hides in the cattails; its presence can be easily missed, especially when it is windy. Winter Wren is also secretive and despite its name, is infrequent in winter being recorded on three previous Uxbridge counts. Finding these birds requires knowledgeable birders with a good ear for calls and spotting skills.

Despite the mild weather on the day, the fog limited visibility of the birders in the morning and there was minimal open water for water birds. Numbers of many of the regular feeder birds were down including: Blue Jay, Dark-eyed Junco, American Goldfinch and American Tree Sparrow.

The field crew consisted of 27 participants in 13 parties who covered 809 km by car, 52 km by foot and 16 km listening for owls at night. One keen individual walked 12 km through the Uxbridge Brook Wetland and was rewarded with a variety of birds. Our youngest member (8 years old) spotted a Merlin from the back seat of Dad's car impressing his family. In addition, 25 others counted and reported the birds at their feeders. Full details can be found on

our website [www.northdurhamnature.com](http://www.northdurhamnature.com) and will be available on the National Audubon website [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) under Christmas Bird Count circle UXON.

Thanks go out to Kim and Anne Adams for hosting the Pot Luck Supper for those in the field, and to all the participants both at feeders and in the field. Also, thanks to Kim Adams for inputting the field data and to James Kamstra, Brian Henshaw and Kim Adams for editing the summary. Once again, another valuable contribution to citizen science was made and an enjoyable day spotting birds.

## *CBC – Beaverton*

### **45<sup>th</sup> Beaverton Christmas Bird Count - December 30<sup>th</sup> 2019**

*by John McLean  
photos by Geoff Carpentier*

Rain, fog, sun, and strong north-easterlies but mostly ice provided the back drop for our annual count. An overnight ice storm left us with an unstable environment on which to perform our birding skills. The good news is that all observers that could make it to the count area returned



unharmd with vehicles intact. No ditches were damaged in the pursuit of birds but six birders were unable to get to the count and those that did burned more nervous than physical energy. Several roads had to be avoided because of ice conditions and foot travel was impossible. I have been involved in more than a hundred Christmas Bird Counts but have never been on one where nobody recorded any walking time/distance.

We anticipated low numbers of species because winter finches remained in the north with the rich cone/fruit crop. The lack of open water on Lake Simcoe also eliminated the possibility of waterfowl and associated birds such as Bald Eagles, kingfisher and certain gulls. Given the number of excuses presented, we were pleased with the results of 37 species (average of 41) and 4 Count Week birds. Numbers of individuals were lower than normal but the observers worked hard to count every possible bird. The complete results will be posted on the NDN website once all feeder watchers have reported.

Some of the highlights include a Merlin (our 3<sup>rd</sup> in 45 years), a Northern Flicker, a record number of Ravens and a Count Week Snowy Owl seen the days before and after count day.

We can't overestimate the value of feeder watchers especially in conditions we experienced on the count. We have a number of rural feeder watchers who accounted for all 3 owl species (Great Horned, Screech and Snowy). They add significantly to the number of individuals that we report each year.

Thanks to everyone who risked their body and vehicle for the sake of research including club members Carol and Doug Apperson, Cara Gregory, Garry Patterson, Derek Connelly and Mark Dorriesfield.



## *CBC4Kids*

*by Jay Thibert*

At the Christmas Bird Count for Kids this year we were reacquainted with many adults and children and a few new enthusiastic birders. The crowd of over 60 gathered on Saturday, November 30<sup>th</sup> at the Nonquon Environmental Education Centre. The Friends of Nonquon planned the day with some notable changes to our past events that have happened since 2012. We moved the count from the David Carrol Classroom to the Pheasant Pen Classroom on Old Simcoe Road. While this site lacks close proximity to the river, it does provide a greater choice of trails to explore. The day started with an outdoor mapping challenge. Children and their families tried to find and identify pictures of birds by navigating to various locations using a map. It proved to be a fun and educational way to get things started.

We headed out on the trails in five groups with Friends of Nonquon volunteers

leading the way. Thanks to the following people for sharing their time and skills: Terri Pellerin, Mark Dorriesfield, Bev Thibert, Greg Moon, James Kamstra, Derek Connelly, Graham Thibert, Mike Whitemarsh, Don Farquharson and Cathy Galberg. In total we observed 11 species and a total of 40 different birds. Highlights include a Brown Creeper, 3 Golden-crowned Kinglets, a Ruffed Grouse and a Northern Goshawk. The day was cool and windy with some sun and cloud. We enjoyed the extra space to hike and explore.

To wrap our event up we introduced Project Feeder Watch to our group. It is a citizen science program run by Bird Studies Canada. You count birds that come to your feeder through the winter and report your data. The program has thousands of participants across North America and is a fun way to learn more about birds and to make a contribution to science at the same time. Two of our families signed up for the program immediately. (Go to [www.birdscanada.org/pfw](http://www.birdscanada.org/pfw) to learn more.)

To help our participants attract birds to their backyards we gave every family a cedar suet feeder, a metal suet feeder and a package of suet. Thanks to Armstrong Seed and Wild Birds Unlimited for providing some of these items. It is always rewarding and reassuring to spend time with young people who are enthusiastic about the world around them. Our next Friends of Nonquon event is on February 22 – Snowshoeing at the Nonquon.

*Editor's Note: This annual event is held in many locations across North America to monitor bird populations in the late fall/early winter but also to engage kids and their families in the wonderful pastime of bird watching.*

## Fact or Fiction?

By Dave Mudd

Photos by Geoff Carpentier

**The well camouflaged, chicken-like bird found throughout Ontario's woodlands is a "partridge".**

The correct species name is "Ruffed Grouse". The Ruffed Grouse is mistakenly called a "Partridge." This leads to confusion with the Gray, or Hungarian Partridge, which was introduced to Ontario from Europe. The Gray

Partridge only persists in a small population in the Ottawa area. They prefer open areas not dense woodlands like the Ruffed Grouse.

(top photo is Gray Partridge and bottom is Ruffed Grouse)



**Moss always grows on the north side of tree trunks. It's a good way to navigate through the woods.**

It's true that moss grows

on the north side of tree trunks and rocks. But it also grows on the south, east and west sides, too! Moss tends to grow where conditions are cool and moist. This is often the case on the north side, which tends to be more protected from direct sunlight. But in the woods all sides are likely to be shaded, so this clue isn't reliable.

## Native Plant Spotlight

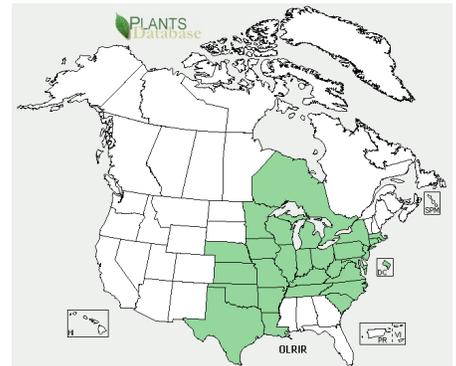
**Stiff Goldenrod *Solidago rigida*  
or *Oligoneuron rigidum***

Story and photo by Brenda Near

Stiff Goldenrod is a wonderful addition to the fall garden. It grows well in sandy, medium to dry soil in full sun to very light shade. As it blooms later in the season, end of August into September, it is a must have in a pollinator garden to provide nectar for fall migrating butterflies and the last bees of the season. The flowers are a ray flower, more like asters than the typical golden rod, forming a flat cluster at the top of a thick stem. The alternating grey-green leaves are rough like sandpaper and add a nice bit of texture to the garden. Plant it at the back of the garden border because *Solidago rigida* grows 3- 5

feet tall. Stiff Goldenrod combines well with native grasses and looks good growing with other

native forbs such as hyssop, coneflowers and asters. It is typically found in meadows, fields and along road sides but is a rarity in the Ontario wild due mostly to



habitat loss. Stiff Goldenrod is native throughout the Great Lakes region.



<http://ontariowildflowers.com/main/species.php?id=66>  
Range map provided courtesy of the USDA website and is displayed here in accordance with their Policies

## *Owl Rehab*

### **Observing Owls at the Owl Foundation's Rehabilitation Centre**

*Story and photos by Cyndi Barron*

We recently had the opportunity to visit the Owl Foundation, to see the rehabilitation work they do with wild Canadian owls that are injured or orphaned. The Foundation is located in the Niagara Region of Ontario.

It is a registered, charitable foundation that takes in rescued, injured, sick, starving and orphaned owls for rehab and eventual release, and once they can survive on their own, they are released back to the area where they were found. If the owl can't be released due to permanent disabilities, they are kept at the centre and once they are healthy they are used as foster parents to orphaned chicks in natural enclosures. Some of the permanent residents are also encouraged to breed and raise their own

chicks, when possible. The chicks are then released into the area where the parents were found.

The foundation is a hospital dealing with highly stressed birds when they arrive, so it is not open to the public. However, with a minimum \$50 donation, 2 people (over the age of 8) are invited to a guided tour of the compound during 2 weekends in September, at an assigned date and time.

The facility has been in operation for over 40 years, and was co-founded by Kay McKeever, who passed away in 2019. It is the only facility in North America that breeds and fosters wild owls back to release status. The grounds have many outdoor aviaries, as well as a walking path through



a treed area where we heard and saw many warblers, Cardinals, Blue Jays, etc. There were many different species of owls at the centre in various stages of rehab, and some permanent residents hiding on the perches.

While we were there, we saw a Red-tailed Hawk and a Peregrine Falcon in recovery. Snowy Owls and owlets, a Barn Owl, Long-eared and Great Horned Owls were just a few of the owls we observed. The centre currently has over 100 birds, with a total of 141 birds coming through in 2019. There are many spacious enclosures with perches, and cover for the birds as well as



flight corridors for the owls to practice hunting, and to build their flight stamina. The various enclosures are built into the hillsides of the property, designed for the specific needs of each owl type. They have

mosquito screens on all the aviaries to try to avoid the West Nile virus being passed on to the owls.

The facility breeds mice and also has rats and quail on hand to feed the owls as they are recovering from vehicle injuries, illness, etc. They do not come into human contact while being fed, as the young owlets are trained to eventually feed themselves in the wild when they are ready for release.

They have dedicated staff who work tirelessly to rehabilitate the owls for eventual release if possible. They also have a volunteer team of drivers across Ontario that bring injured owls to the centre and release them back to their original habitats throughout Ontario. The birds are all banded before release.

We enjoyed hearing about the work being done there, in cooperation with veterinary avian specialists and seeing the many species of birds in recovery. If you are an owl enthusiast, this is the place to tour, during the donor tours in Sept. The donations help rehab owls to a healthy life back in the wilds of Ontario. Donations also help facilitate the maintenance and expansion of the aviary enclosures. If you donate to The Owl Foundation, you will

receive a donor tour and a copy of their biannual newsletter, packed with information on what owls are at the centre, the progress that some are making and stories about how they were found, and the work that the volunteers do there. We enjoyed the day exploring the facility and getting a close look at the many species of owls and other birds being rehabilitated.

## *NDN Eco-Challenge*

Carol Apperson has proposed a challenge for our club members that they may be interested in. It is called the “5-mile Challenge” and was proposed provincially by Carter Dorscht. To reduce your eco-impact bird closer to home, keep track of the birds you see and report them monthly but only from within 5 miles (8 kilometers) of your home. This is just a challenge for you - no prizes or gimmicks... So here’s what you can do, send Geoff an email ([geoff.carpentier@gmail.com](mailto:geoff.carpentier@gmail.com)) at the end of each month in 2020 with your name, the location of the centre of your 5-mile circle, and what you saw that month. Let’s make it a club challenge. At the end of the year Geoff will compile the info and let you know how we did. Who’s in?

## *Scugog Lake Stewards*

The Scugog Lake Stewards fulfill an important role in understanding, analyzing and protecting the watershed that is so vital to our area. Lake Scugog is a vibrant ecosystem that faces challenging times, but with the help of groups like the Stewards it will continue to harbour wildlife and a strong plant community.

The Scugog Lake Stewards has invited all members of the public to comment on their draft copy of the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan “Enhancing our Lake and Watershed”. SLS

Strategic Plan 2020-2013 Draft. As such, they are accepting comments on the Plan at [info@scugoglakestewards.com](mailto:info@scugoglakestewards.com).

To view the plan, please visit their webpage [www.scugoglakestewards.com](http://www.scugoglakestewards.com) An Open House is being planned for February 20, 2020 to go over the plan and hear your comments.

## *Nasty & Nifty Nature News*

### **Quebec Announces Wolf Cull**

When will we ever learn? Quebec has just announced that they will cull any wolves that threaten a specific herd of caribou. Trained shooters would be sent by helicopter if a wolf is found to be threatening the Charlevoix herd, whose numbers have declined to about 30 animals.

Rachel Plotkin of the David Suzuki Foundation says the real issue is habitat loss and human induced disturbance. She says the real solution would be to protect the old-growth forests that caribou need in order survive. The government's response is to kill the predators and then work on the habitat issues. This seems to be backward thinking and is a typical response when an agency wants to appear to be doing something. No wolves have been shot as yet, but that might change quickly if a wolf approaches the herd. (This article has been adapted from a CTV news story broadcast Dec. 11/19.)

### **New Species of Monkey Discovered in Brazil**

In a small patch of forest in remote Brazil, a small monkey from the Titi complex has been discovered, according to scientists working in the Mato Grosso and Rondônia areas of Brazil. Surrounded by agricultural

lands this small swath of forest in the Juruena National Park was hard to get at due to the steep terrain so it was saved. They named the monkey *Plecturocebus parecis* after the name of the plateau. Surprisingly this was the third new monkey species described in Brazil in 2019!

The complete story of the find and identification of this species was published in the journal *Primate Conservation*. 33; S. 1-15 (2019).



### **Cyanide Bombs Kill Thousands of Animals a Year.**

A device known as an M-44 cyanide bomb that contains sodium cyanide has been re-authorized for use in parts of the USA. Used primarily to protect livestock the devices are indiscriminate and kill anything that comes in contact with them. M-44 devices spray deadly sodium cyanide into the mouths of unsuspecting coyotes, foxes and other carnivores lured by smelly bait.

Despite lawsuits and an unsupportive public, the government has blindly gone ahead to authorize the use of this deadly device. According to Wildlife Services' own data, M-44s killed 6,579 animals, mostly coyotes and foxes, in 2018 and 13,232 animals in 2017. Of these, more than 200 deaths were non-target animals, including a bear, foxes, opossums, raccoons and skunks. These numbers are likely grossly under-reported.

This article was modified from one published by The Center for Biological Diversity on Dec. 5/19.

## Nature Quiz

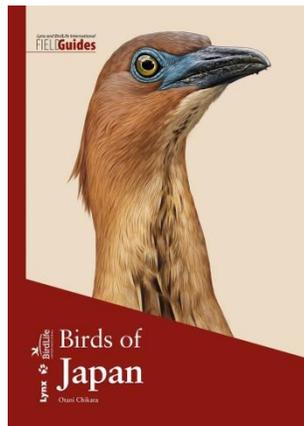
Okay I'm obviously a bird, but what kind? Is that a snowflake I see in the photo? Well, yes, so I'm a species that comes here in the winter and likes water, as I can see water in the background. What am I?



## Book Reviews

by Geoff  
Carpentier

**Birds of Japan.** by Otani Chikara. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. 2019. 43.20€. 392 pages, softcover. ISBN: 978-84-16728-12-1.



High on my places to visit is Japan. I actually spent a few hours there several years ago, but only at the airport so I don't actually have a bird list from there – not a single one! But when I do go, this new book will be with me. I was pleasantly quite surprised how many unique endemics there are in Japan and it was only when I started to review this book that I

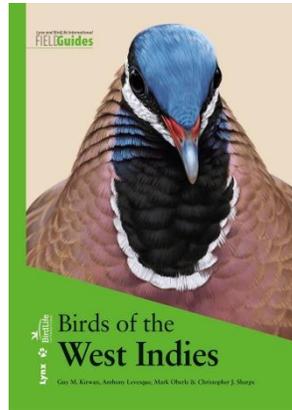
realized how much I had missed by not choosing Japan as a destination in the past.

In this volume Lynx Edicions (the publisher) continues with its high level of attention, - to detail, usefulness and thoroughness. Covering well in excess of 500 species, each one receives ample attention in the form of detailed field notes on identification, supported by beautiful colour plates of birds (in various plumages, in flight and alit and with illustrations of recognizable subspecies). The value of the book is increased with additional information on status and conservation. Where applicable, each identifiable subspecies receive unique treatment to help users of the book identify them. Good maps accompany about 540 of the species accounts for all regularly occurring species in Japan, as do scannable QR codes for every species that takes the reader instantly to more useful online information! Finally, the intro to the book is quite thorough and goes through subjects such as the geography and climate of Japan, habitats, bird conservation, bird topography and how and where to bird there. A detailed section on birding locales follows with an accompanying map and notes of what to see at these unique palces.

**Birds of the West Indies.** by Guy M. Kirwan, Anthony Levesque, Mark Oberle and Christopher J. Sharpe. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. 2019. 48.00€. 397 pages, softcover. ISBN: 978-84-16728-17-6.

Although several good books have been written about the birds of the West Indies historically, none are as current as this newest book from Lynx Edicions. This is of importance as the species structure of many of the world's birds has been revisited as DNA analyses have altered where some species fit in the grander scheme of taxonomy. Even of greater importance is the recognition of many new species of birds as a result of this important work. This new

book reflects the latest science. Covering virtually all of the islands in the Caribbean, this book also has detailed plates on many North American migrants that winter there regularly, so the user won't have to carry two books – one for the West Indies and one for North America. And the quality of the North American species was excellent! I won't go into the details of the species accounts except to say they are excellent and thorough and cover the subjects I wrote of above when discussing the Birds of Japan. Over 600 maps and 1800 illustrations describe the species covered in the book.



So should you buy one of both of these books? If you are going to visit either location anytime soon, then absolutely. These types of books go out of print fairly soon after publication as a rule, so if you want one, may I suggest you get it sooner than later. There is nothing more frustrating than knowing about a great book and not being able to purchase it!

## *Answers to Quiz*

Okay, let's narrow this down - a winter bird that likes to be near water. Obviously any short-billed bird can be ruled out as this one has a long-bill. Not a bird of prey or waterfowl or gull or anything like that. What has a long beak? – Well rails and moorhens and shorebirds do. The orange on the bill rules out the gallinule. So that leaves us with shorebirds and rails. The only rails that we might find here that have orange on the bill are adult Virginia and King Rails. Both are very unlikely in the winter although there a few records of

Virginia Rails overwintering in Ontario. But the face is smoky gray so that rules out both species. So we're left with shorebirds. Again the combination of the long orange bill with a smoky gray face rules out everything except Black-tailed and Hudsonian Godwits and Purple Sandpiper and Surf-bird. There are no records for the Surf-bird in Ontario and even if there were the heavy speckling on the upper breast and the sharp bill (versus a blunt) one rule that out. Both godwits have very long bills that curve upward and don't have speckled



breasts in winter so they're ruled out as well. By the way there are records in Ontario for both species of godwits mentioned here in winter! That leaves us with the adult Purple Sandpiper as our mystery bird. This bird was photographed by Geoff at Sandbanks Provincial Park in mid-December 2019.



## *Last Thoughts*

This seems to be a good year for owls to wander south since mammalian prey in the north is limited in some areas. This forces the birds to move south to find new foods. They can be quite vulnerable as a result as they try to locate prey in unfamiliar landscapes. We have a great influence on some of them, particularly those that appear near urban areas, so we must be cautious how we approach and study them - distance and respect is key. In keeping with my efforts to monitor winter birds, may I ask that if you see any of the northern species, such as Northern Hawk-owl, or Boreal, Snowy or Great Gray Owls, you email me privately ([geoff.carpentier@gmail.com](mailto:geoff.carpentier@gmail.com)) so that their health and presence can be recorded? If you're not sure what species you're seeing, email me anyway and I'll help you identify it!

*Northern  
Hawk-owl  
Geoff  
photographed  
near  
Schomberg  
last week.*



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