

# Strictly for the birds

by Bethsheila Kent

There is no worse sound than a resounding "splat" of something hitting a window. The silence that follows, the tip-toed steps to the offending glass, the furtive glances out onto lawn, veranda or driveway in search of the hapless creature involved in the unfortunate collision. Such was a recent Sunday morning for me when that awful, flat sound interrupted the soothing calm and quiet. My hurried investigations revealed a small bird, an obvious fledgling thankfully unhurt but also obviously shaken. Closer examination of its marking proved it to be a brown creeper and it was standing with its wings folded naturally (nothing broken...), about three feet from the offending window. It appeared to be unharmed, displaying no obvious signs of distress – no elevated respiration rate; its little breast was not heaving nor shivering (all this from close examination with the binoculars). Indeed, it appeared to be quite relaxed and, rather than its small eyes darting from side to side (a fear reaction), it calmly enjoyed the scenery for a good five minutes before finally spreading its wings and fluttering back into the thick brush.

## Spotlight on American Widgeon:

American widgeon is a medium-sized (to 19" in length) dabbling duck found mostly on fresh or brackish water in spring, summer and fall, and on salt marshes in winter. The male is a stand-out with its red-brown breast and flanks, spotted black and white face, dark-green and thick eyestripe that extends well across the ear patch and into the neck and a crisp



white head stripe. Its bill is a blue-grey with a black nail or tip, its belly and underparts are white with black undertail coverts. At rest it shows a distinct white wing patch. The female and juvenile birds of the species are heavily scaled brown, black and buff, are lacking the diagnostic white crown stripe and black undertail coverts. Indeed, at this time of year, the male has assumed eclipse plumage (an alternate plumage held for several weeks after breeding) and resembles female and juvenile birds. Ducklings are nothing at all like their parents and show the characteristic striped brown and buff plumage of very young waterfowl that provides excellent camouflage to fool potential predators.

## Recent Sightings:

Duck species noted during this reporting period include the family of American widgeon at Nyanza, the male in eclipse, the female close by with their brood of 6 ducklings bobbing along contentedly behind the parents. At the same location, and indeed, on many local ponds, were American black duck, their older offspring already dabbling in the various shallows; likewise mallard noted at Baddeck Inlet. A small raft of male ring-necked duck (also in eclipse plumage) were found on the ponds at Nyanza; several broods of common merganser were located on waterways from one end of the County to the other. Common loon were seen at Freshwater Lake in Ingonish, at Englishtown on St. Ann's Bay and out on the Bras d'Or at Big Harbour. Canada geese are everywhere... I watched with some interest a gaggle in flight recently, headed from St. Ann's Harbour over Kelly's Mountain. I figure they were only headed to

the Bras d'Or as it was far too early for migration. Both Bonaparte's and common black headed gull were observed at Nyanza, both on the Bras d'Or and the ponds; herring, great black-backed and herring gull were found in all their usual locations, young attempting to fool their parents into feeding them. The common tern colony at Jersey Cove is holding its own and other common tern were noted along various stretches of the Bras d'Or as well as portions of the Atlantic coast north of Englishtown. Small numbers of northern gannet are routinely seen over St. Ann's Bay. Great blue heron, young nearby, are plying the shallows in many locations and spotted sandpiper were reported by Jim O'Brien, Big Harbour. Other waders noted include greater yellowlegs and willet. Belted kingfisher have returned to open water, their newly fledged young looking very jaunty indeed.

## Landlubber Report:

Recent outings have been very productive, what with almost all our songbirds having completed the rigors of breeding. Wood warblers, faded males and weary females are closely followed by newly fledged young still demanding to be fed. Species noted, all in suitable habitat, include yellow-rumped, magnolia, black and white, common yellowthroat, northern parula, blackburnian, black-throated

green, yellow, American redstart, Tennessee and chestnut sided. Flycatchers noted this reporting period were olive-sided, least, alder and yellow-bellied. Both local vireo species were also noted – solitary and red-eyed -

still singing vigorously. Numerous hermit thrush have been heard singing – I counted 12 individuals during a recent walk at Big Harbour! Swainson's thrush continues to sing at Englishtown and there appear to be more American robin young than adults these days on lawns, in trees and in flight. Ovenbird were noted At St. Ann's, Big Harbour and Big Baddeck. Sparrow species noted include song, white-throat and Lincoln's. Dark-eyed junco, red-breasted nuthatch, American goldfinch, purple finch, both golden- and ruby-crowned kinglet are very active. In fact, I was most privileged to have the opportunity to observe a male ruby-crowned feeding three of its young recently out of the nest and scattered along the length of a rather robust branch of an apple tree in Big Harbour. What that little bird went through to fill those gaping mouths! Tree, cliff and barn swallows are still with us, noisy and busy as usual. Common grackle and red-winged blackbird are also very active with many young in flight with their parents. Evening grosbeak were encountered at Big Harbour, Nyanza and Baddeck. The only woodpecker species noted this reporting period was northern flicker, large family groups out and about in a variety of locations. American bald eagle were also noted in a variety of locations, many perched atop snags overlooking our various salmon rivers; red-tailed hawk were seen at Kelly's Mountain and Ingonish; northern harrier was noted at Hunter's Mountain and a Merlin was seen in St. Ann's.

My thanks to Jim O'Brien for his recent report. I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.

# "Meet the Artist" series



The Water's Edge Gallery is enjoying another successful "Meet the Artist Series", with local pottery artist Linda Wright of Big Hill Pottery. Here she demonstrated her craft with samples of her work as well as bringing in porcelain clay that she then used to show the first stages of creating her pottery. The series is held once a week in Baddeck at The Water's Edge Gallery and will end at the end of August. Come meet your local artists and see what they do!

## Brock Fownes and the Keltic Cowboys Are Back!!

with two gigs...

Featuring Naomi Wedman on Fiddle with Dave Brooks, Mike Brooks and Rhonda Broadfoot

1. Bras d'Or Yacht Club, Baddeck  
Saturday, August 14<sup>th</sup>  
9 pm to 1 am  
(a fundraiser for Alderwood Recreation)

2. Baddeck Legion, Branch #53  
Friday, August 20<sup>th</sup>  
9 pm to 1 am



## 20th Annual Féis an Eilein "An Ficheadamh Bliadhna" "The Twentieth Year" August 16th to 21st, 2010

A Féis is a community-based festival designed to promote the Gaelic language & culture of an area in part through the provision of educational and social activities for people of all ages.

### Monday, August 16<sup>th</sup>

Féis Children's Concert & Weiner Roast 7-10 pm at Grand Narrows Waterfront

### Tuesday, August 17<sup>th</sup>

Céilidh nam Piobairean The Pipers' Céilidh 8 pm

### Wednesday, August 18<sup>th</sup>

Youth Activity Day 10 am - 2 pm

Intermediate/Advanced Gaelic Language 9:30 am - 4 pm

Symposium 7:30 pm

Comunn Féis an Eilein: Twenty Years of Language, Music and Culture

### Thursday, August 19<sup>th</sup>

Intermediate/Advanced Gaelic Language 9:30 am - 4 pm

Milling Song Workshop 6 - 7:30 pm

Traditional Milling Frolic 8 pm

### Friday, August 20<sup>th</sup>

Fiddle Workshop 2 - 3:30 pm

Gaelic Song Workshop 3:30 - 5 pm

Square Dancing Workshop 3:30 - 5 pm

Family Square Dance 9 pm - 1 am

### Saturday, August 21<sup>st</sup>

Gaelic Language Workshops noon - 1:30 pm

Gaelic Hymn Workshop 1:30 - 3 pm

Step Dancing Workshops 3 - 4:30 pm

Gabh do Naidheachd - Tell Your News 3 pm

(only the "Tell Your News" event at the Grand Narrows Hotel B&B)

Family Square Dance and Céilidh 9 pm - 1 am

Unless otherwise noted, all events at the Christmas Island Fire Hall!

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