

Strictly for the birds

by *Bethsheila Kent*

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count season is in full swing with 3 counts completed as at the writing of this column - St. Ann's/Baddeck on Friday, December 17, Louisbourg on Saturday the 18th and the Sydney's count today, December 20th. The count period runs from December 14 until January 5 and all counts, regardless of where, quite literally, on earth they take place - this is an international effort enjoying a continuous run for more than a hundred years - must be completed within the allotted timeframe. The thinking behind this is that all avifauna, with the exception of a few individuals too weak to migrate, blown off course or just downright ornery and unwilling to migrate, will be where they ought to be for the winter months.

The first three counts all saw good weather which helped immeasurably. Only the Sydney's count today saw poor weather move into the area but that wasn't until well after noon when most field observers would have completed their routes. There were no rare or unusual sightings on the counts completed but there were some great sightings both at feeders and in the field. As the years slip by, it seems more difficult to find birders willing to expend the effort so all three counts in which I participated saw fewer feeder counters and fewer field parties. Regardless, the results were excellent with more than a thousand individuals and at least 46 species counted in each area. There are still several more Cape Breton Island counts to go in Ingonish, Cheticamp, Glace Bay and Port Hawkesbury so if you are still itching to get out and count birds for science, please contact me and I will put you in touch with the appropriate coordinator.

Spotlight on the Canada Goose:

The red-necked grebe is not only our largest grebe (measuring 20 inches in length) but in my humble opinion, our most beautiful. A late fall/early winter visitor to our coastal waters (it nests and breeds on large, inland lakes) the red-necked grebe is observed each year on the protected bays and coves along the east and south-east shores of Cape Breton Island. Rarely do we have the opportunity to observe this bird in its colourful, breeding plumage but the winter red-necked grebe can easily be identified from a distance by its long, graceful neck, narrow and roundly compact body that appears to be tail-less, and long, rather thick, dull yellow bill that is almost as long as the bird's head. A striking white stripe that contrasts strongly against the dusky throat extends from beneath the lower mandible (lower

portion of its bill), along its chin and curves upward in an arc to frame a greyish cheek patch. The nape of the red-necked grebe's neck and the crown of its head are a rich, dark grey, as is its back. In flight a double white-wing patch is visible. The red-necked grebe, like other birds of the species, is extremely shy and will escape any perceived threat by diving, even with its young on its back - the chicks just hold on!

On the Water:

All three counts reported the following species: red-throated and common loon, horned and red-necked grebe, double-crested and great cormorant, Canada goose, American black duck, mallard, surf, white-winged and black scoter, long-tailed duck, common goldeneye, both common and red-breasted merganser, ring-billed, herring and great black-backed gull and black guillemot. The St. Ann's count included green-winged teal, unusual for this time of year.

The Louisbourg count included northern gannet, greater scaup (as did the Sydney's count), common eider, bufflehead, Bonaparte's gull, razorbill and a single dovekie. The Sydney's count included Iceland and glaucous gull, annual returnees to the harbour at North Sydney.

On the Land:

Again, all three counts included the following species: American bald eagle, both adult and juvenile birds, red-tailed hawk, ruffed grouse, rock and mourning dove, downy, hairy and pileated woodpecker, grey and blue jay, American crow, raven, black-capped and boreal chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, golden-crowned kinglet, American robin in surprisingly low numbers, European starling, cedar waxwing (still no reports of Bohemians), song sparrow, dark-eyed junco, American goldfinch and evening grosbeak. Barred owl was found on the St. Ann's count, as was black-backed woodpecker, brown creeper, purple finch and pine siskin. A female Baltimore oriole was reported in Baddeck by Jennifer Lundgren. Three killdeer were noted on the Louisbourg count, a huge surprise for the field observers who happened upon them, myself included. Sadly, the individual I found at Main a Dieu beach was not in my circle and I had to "give it away" to the appropriate party, an early Christmas gift!

I would like to say a very big THANK YOU! to everyone who participated - as I am reporting 3 counts, listing all individuals who participated would take far too much space! I can be reached at 295-1749 with your birding news.



RED-NECKED GREBE

District 4

Looking forward to reviewing Sustainability Officer's reports

by *Merrill MacInnis*
Councillor for District 4

Greetings from District 4. 2010 saw many changes in the District and all through Victoria County. The loss of our most senior and long serving member of council, Robert MacLellan, occurred in August. He was dedicated and a hard worker and his presence is missed around the table. We welcome John Buchanan, newly elected to Council, and look forward to getting to know and working with him.

The purchase of new equipment and hiring of new personnel for our waste management is working well and receiving positive feedback. The management and staff of this department deserve our thanks for a job well done. Our new Economic Sustainability Officer, Nona MacDermid has put in a busy four months assessing the assets and needs of the County. We look forward to her reports and direction as important steps are taken to unlock more of the potential of Victoria County.

The tourist season from all reports seems to have been on par with other recent years. Members of this industry should be commended for their

efforts to extend and enhance the shoulder seasons, months which are seeing increasing numbers of visitors to the area. Another crucial section of the economic viability of Victoria County is our fishery. 2010 saw favourable catches but prices for our harvesters are still suffering due to the global economy.

Road improvements are happening throughout the County. In District 4 this year construction in the Goose Cove area is a greatly appreciated improvement to our world famous Cabot Trail. We thank everyone involved including all levels of government and especially those workers onsite. We look forward as this work continues in 2011 and beyond.

Last but not least our new Alderwood facility is an accomplishment that everyone in the County can be proud of. Since its official opening in May there have been rave reviews. We appreciate the dedication of management, staff and volunteers who all provide excellent service to our residents.

On behalf of my family I wish you a healthy, prosperous New Year filled with peace and happiness.

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FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Alderwood would like to sincerely thank all of the volunteers who made our Festival of Lights a tremendous success.

We had over 300 visitors touring our home and all appeared very impressed with our decorations!

Alderwood Residents, Staff and Board of Management wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



Best Wishes to One & All from

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Thank You For Your Continued Support!

We hope everyone has a very happy, safe and prosperous New Year!



David, Nick, Danielle & Staff



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