

Media gets in on action



BY DAN McASKILL

The tradition continues!

The Christmas Bird Counts were both the kick-off and kick-on event for the Wildlife '87 Celebration in Canada. Prince Edward Island had the honor of kicking-off the celebration when the Honorable Tom McMillan joined Rosemary Curley, the Natural History Society's President, at the Hillsborough Causeway on December 27th, 1986. This event was commemorated with a 90 second broadcast on CBC's National News and a spot on the ATV Regional News that evening. The following week, Tom presented the Society's more outstanding sightings to Canada on the Gzowski show. One year to the day later, Tom McMillan and his daughter Kelly rejoined the Natural History Society's Hillsborough Count to launch Canada into its second century of wildlife conservation. This time ATV carried the event on its regional news, the Patriot and Guardian carried a number of stories and photographs, and CBC's Holly Bridges and Wayne Collins both carried stories. Diane Griffin served as our national public relations person by presenting the Society's sightings on the Gzowski show. The competition was not to be outdone however. Edmonton counters made the Guardian with a CP story and photograph and, with a North American record of over 1,000 participants, they were most deserving of this distinction. Victoria set the new national record for the most species seen with 139 species recorded.

The Christmas Bird Counts are the most prestigious birding event in North America. Canada started its participation in the counts in 1900 with counts at Scotch Lake (New Brunswick) and Toronto. Charlottetown's first count was in 1902 but sometime after that the counts stopped. In 1971 Mr. Rick Howie from the National Park and the Natural History Society established 2 new count areas, the National Park Count and the Hillsborough Count. These two counts are part of the over 180 official count areas in Canada and the 1,500 count areas in North America which comprise the Christmas Bird Counts. A new area was established in 198 centered in Milltown Cross and this area has been counted as a fun event for the past five years.

Thanks to the mild temperatures and a great day weather wise the National Park count yielded 44 species on the count day (December 19th) and 46 in the count period. The most outstanding sighting was that of a Turkey Vulture, the second recorded sighting of this species on P.E.I. This will alter the status of the species in Prince Edward Island from hypothetical to accidental. Other unusual sighting included a Short-eared Owl, a Double-crested Cormorant, a Northern Gannet, a Dovekie, 2 Robins, a Swamp Sparrow, and a Northern Shrike (with a kill).

The Hillsborough Count occurred after several very cold days which allowed some ice to form on the Hillsborough River but compared to many years the river was quite open and the bays were mostly open water. The turnout of counters was great and, while cold, the wind was relatively low compared to last years gales. Thirty-eight species were recorded including 3 Great Blue Heron, 250 Canada Geese, 1 Greater Scaup (female), 8 Mourning Doves, 2 Common Grackle, 5 Song Sparrows, and 1 White-throated Sparrow. The Hillsborough Count was followed by a potluck at Diane and Kevin Griffin's and those that made it had a great feast. Thanks for hosting the crowd Diane and Kevin!

The Montague counters faced high winds, blowing snow, and cold weather. Many common birds were in hiding but the high number of feeder reports helped boost the number of species. Twenty-eight people took to the highways and reports were submitted from 24 feeders for a total of 44 species seen. Sightings of a Bald Eagle, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Rusty Blackbird, and a Northern Flicker highlighted this count.