



Some winter views

BY GEOFF HOGAN

I've been keeping in touch with the winter birding situation on Prince Edward Island through contacts at my nature store in Charlottetown. Here are a few notes regarding this winter.

Overall, it has been a season of contrasts. Like last winter, many people are saying that they have far fewer birds at their feeders. This is especially true in the urban (and to some extent suburban) areas of the Island. On the other hand, there are some excellent feeders in country areas (my own included). In towns, most people see only Black-capped Chickadees, Blue Jays, Starlings, House Sparrows and Pigeons. There have, however, been good flocks (20-30) of American Goldfinches at various town feeders. Other finches are much less common. I am only aware of one feeder that has had a few Purple Finches all winter. Evening Grosbeaks can be found across the Island but they may not be as plentiful as in most years. Lots of White-winged Crossbills are about - including one seen Feb. 19 with nesting material. Pine Siskins are here but not common. A few feeders have reported them.

There have been numerous reports of American Robins this winter - more than any previous winter in my memory. One man near Wheatley River reported 50-60 regularly. Also, many overwintering Northern Flickers are being seen at feeders, which is most unusual. Other oddities: 1 Brown Thrasher at a feeder in St. Catharines since December; 1 Northern Mockingbird at a feeder in New Glasgow since December feeding on dead flies in a garage every day; at least 1 Pine Warbler in Crossroads; 1 Rose-breasted Grosbeak (juv. male) at a feeder in Mt. Stewart Feb. 19-20; plus the first ever P.E.I. record of a Barn Owl in January. The dead bird was found tangled in chicken wire by Scott Ellands of Poplar Grove when he checked the family's hen house. Barn Owls are usually found in the United States and range as far north as Southern Ontario. Photos of the bird were taken and the body will be mounted.

There have been a scattering of Mourning Doves about, becoming fairly typical now in most winters. I have heard of a single Common Redpoll, contrasting with two winters ago when the region was inundated with them. Small numbers of Common Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds are being reported also. The usual wintering raptors are about (Red-tailed, Rough-legged and Sharp-shinned Hawks) although the buteos may be less common than in some years.

This is not meant as a complete list, but should give you some idea of the highlights of this winter and how it compares to past ones.

And one late report - a male House Finch has been sighted in Charlottetown in February, the second confirmed sighting on P.E.I.

On February 8, returning from my usual ski to the mailbox, I came across a lone Snow Bunting hopping around the field, only able to travel a few feet at a time. It looked sure to be dinner for owl, hawk or fox, so I easily caught it and took it home. Feeding it cracked corn and water and keeping it warm must have done the trick, because after two days it was able to fly about 30' in the house. When I released it on a bright, sunny afternoon, it flew quite well and made my day.

- GS

