

was in any danger. It was more the excitement of being so close to those two wild creatures of the night, to see them in their natural habitat, and to have made eye contact with them. I'm sure they forgot all about me as soon as they were a short distance off, but I did not forget them. I have seen a lot of wildlife on my land during the two years that my kids and I have been settled there, but this encounter was by far the most memorable. This coming winter, on the nights when the full moon slants deep into my woods, I'll once again walk midst the long shadows, in anticipation of another encounter with these spirits of the night woods.

BLACK SKIMMER SEEN

by J. Dan McAskill

On August 3, while we were camping with our family, Robin Phillips glanced off shore from Jacques Cartier Provincial Park and suddenly said there was a sea bird skimming the water with its beak. I spun around and there, about 100 yards from us, a dark-backed bird was skimming the water with its lower beak leaving a narrow wake in the water. I scrambled to reach my binoculars and ran the 10 yards to the bank to watch this bird slowly make its way out of sight around the point about a half kilometre to the west. The bird was flying with stiff wing beaks just above the water gaining velocity before lowering its beak into the water and skimming the top few centimetres of water for distances between 30 and 60 metres. It repeated the skimming behaviour 5 times before it disappeared from sight.

Conditions were perfect for observations with full sunshine, hardly a ripple in the water, and the Ring-billed Gull sized bird moving laterally at first then slowly moving across the bay until it was flying obliquely to my line of sight. I was using 8 X 26 Bushnell binoculars and was able to see the dark above and light below pattern. The wings were relatively V shaped. I could not distinguish the bill colour.

AUTUMN BIRDING CLASSIC #4:

by J. Dan McAskill

The planning for a bird count is part of the fun that leads up to it. Ears and eyes are attuned to pick up rumours, reports, or sightings of any rarities that might help set an unprecedented total for the day. The favourite spots of previous years are hard to resist and one ponders over new sites that might be more beneficial. In the final run up to the day, ears listen at first for the long term weather forecasts and finally the late night forecast the evening before the count. On the evening of October 2nd, the fears of bad weather were realized. The weather report forecast winds up to 90 km/hr with rain in the afternoon.

Low winds speeds are essential for the good listening conditions necessary to hear distant owls responding to the playing of cassette tapes with their calls. The forecast suggested very poor conditions for owl calls both during the night and the next evening. We decided to postpone the start until 4:30 am rather than the normal 3 am or earlier.

The birding team also evolved as shift schedules eliminated one counter. Ray Cooke, Roberta Palmer, Linda Thomas and myself ended up being the team. Our count was conducted between Charlottetown and East Point on October 3rd between 4:30 am and 7:15 pm. The high winds were present with gusts up to 90 km/hr and it was very cold in the wind due to wind chill. The brilliant star light of early morning was quickly replaced by dense fast moving cloud. The rains held off until mid afternoon and, when they did come, they were quite light and of short duration.