

Northumberland County

Winter Bird List for 2023-2024

by Peter Gadd, Nature Miramichi

Since the late fall of 2011, Dave McLeod of Nature Miramichi has collated a list of birds sighted in Northumberland County from Dec. 1 until the end of February each winter. With the collaboration of many observers over the years, mostly in the east of the county, **124 bird species** have been recorded. The list usually includes between 75 and 80 species.

The birds on the list fall into one of four categories:

- 1) **Year-round residents**
- 2) **Late departing** (and early returning) migrating summer breeding species,
- 3) **Winter visiting species** from further north and
- 4) **Vagrant** (or extended range) species.

The purpose of recording the presence of birds through the winter months provides an interesting database. Studying trends over the years can help identify changes in bird populations and give insight into the effects of global warming. It also is a means of sharing information about rare species that show up from time to time. It helps in the understanding of the biodiversity in our Northumberland County and the realization that winter is not such a quiet time for wildlife.

People who maintain bird feeders through the winter have the best opportunity for interesting sightings. But also, those who are out and about in the countryside may also see some of the variety of winter birds that do not visit feeders.

Some of the less common but expected bird

species that might visit feeders any time during the winter include **Northern Cardinals**, **Evening Grosbeaks** and **White-breasted Nuthatches**. **Rare Red-bellied Woodpeckers** and a **Carolina Wren** at the limit of their normal range, have spent time at our feeders in the winter, in the past. Some birds that normally migrate south for the winter may hang about if they are confident about a secure food source; **White-throated Sparrows** for example.

There are perhaps two dozen bird species that visit Northumberland County and elsewhere in New Brunswick for their "winter get-away", that travel from much further north. They can be found in open water just offshore in the Northumberland Strait or Gulf of Saint Lawrence, in open wind-swept fields where the snow accumulation is thin, in our forests and at our feeders. Examples include **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Snow Buntings**, **Bohemian Waxwings**, **Common Redpolls**, and **American Tree Sparrows**.

On occasion a lost bird or vagrant



Yellow-headed Blackbird, a vagrant from central and western North America - winters in Central America.



Cooper's Hawk, sometimes seen here in winter, just a little north of its normal winter range.



Northern Shrike, a winter visitor from Northern Quebec and the Territories, and a hunter of small birds and rodents.

might find its way to the county by accident during the 3-month winter period. This is most likely due to being caught up in a weather system and being blown off course. Over the years there have been visits from **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** (going to garden feeders), A **Barnacle Goose** (in the company of migrating Canada Geese), the **Eurasian Mistle Thrush** (which found a good local source of Mountain Ash berries and protected it for the entire winter) and just this past January a **Purple Gallinule**, a long way from its Central and South American winter grounds. Although this bird was found alive in Tabusintac and transported quickly to the Atlantic Wildlife Institute outside Sackville, it sadly did not survive due to hypothermia and malnutrition.

The current list of species for 2023-2024 can be viewed at www.miramichinaturalistclub.com

There is a New Brunswick provincial Winter Bird List maintained each year and can be viewed at <https://nbwinter.gbnature.com>

If you should come across a bird in Northumberland

County during the winter that you think could be an unusual or seldom seen species please contact the writer at gadd1313@nb.sympatico.ca



Barrow's Goldeneye, a winter visitor from the north shore of the Saint Lawrence River.



Purple Gallinule a member of this species found in Tabusintac Jan. 16, 2024. Last known member of the species to visit Northumberland Co. in May 2009.



Snowy Owl, a visitor from the very far north of Canada.



White-winged Crossbill, a year-round resident of the back country, that doesn't come to feeders.



Mistle Thrush, an ultra rare vagrant Eurasian bird with a Mountain Ash berry.