



Little Blue Heron (Juvenile)

Who May Be Flitting Around Your Neighbourhood?

By Peter Gadd, Nature Miramichi

One never knows who might be around. The “who” in this case is referring to birds.

In the Miramichi region this past year we have had visits from a number of birds that are not often seen. This of course is true every year. Some of these birds belong here but are considered rare, perhaps because they are at the extreme of their normal range. Others are vagrants, perhaps a little lost, taking a break before they are on their way again. Birders are always on the lookout for something unusual, one never knows “who” might show up.

In May of this year a **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** found its way to Hay Island, Neguac. This bird is usually found in central and south America but occasionally makes its way north. With its extremely long tail, its glide as it returns to its perch after snatching its insect prey in mid-air, is lovely to watch.

Also, in May this year a **Glossy Ibis**, a colourful bird that probes for food in wet, muddy soil, paid a visit to Miramichi Marsh in Chatham, at the very extreme of its normal range that includes the eastern seaboard of the United States.

In August, a **Little Blue Heron**, whose normal range is very similar to the Glossy Ibis, also paid a visit to Miramichi Marsh and stayed for about 6 weeks. This



In May this year a Glossy Ibis visited Miramichi Marsh in Chatham. This colourful bird was at the very extreme of its northern range.

was a juvenile of the Little “Blue” Heron species (about 2/3 the height of the more familiar Great Blue Heron) and as such was almost entirely white.

Speaking of birds that are white (usually), in October, a number of migrating **Snow Geese** spent some time in the Napan area feeding in agricultural fields along with **Canada Geese**. This species, travelling from their breeding grounds in the far north, are more

commonly seen passing through western NB.

Another northern breeding species is the **American Golden Plover**, seen during its south ward migration on Hay Island, Neguac. This individual was still in its breeding plumage and is very similar to its “cousin”, the more common **Black-bellied Plover**.

The **American Coot** is a medium sized wetlands bird, that occasionally visits the area and paid a brief visit to Miramichi Marsh this spring, again at the extreme of its usual more southerly range.

Those who maintain bird feeders in their garden, or yard, from time to time are treated with brief visits from such birds as the **Indigo Bunting** and **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**. **Northern Cardinals** are being seen a little more often in north-east NB, but to see juveniles of this species is rare.

In July of this year an albino **Chipping Sparrow** was observed in Nelson, on St. Patrick’s Drive. This is a common species of course but its appearance was very unusual.

These special sightings often take place because they happen in locations frequently visited by people. Birders however also go searching in other more remote spots. Checking out Ballast Island, just off-shore from Douglastown, a **Lapland Longspur** and **Harlequin Duck** were seen last May.

There are many birds whose remote habitat is deep in the woodlands, not places people get to on a regular basis, so sightings of these birds are not made often. These birds include **American Three-toed Woodpeckers**, **Bicknell’s Thrush** and **Boreal Chickadees**. Of course there are a number of owl species, but due to habitat and their mostly nocturnal behaviour, any sighting is considered rare. A **Great Horned Owl** was heard in a couple of locations nearby last winter.

Not quite in the immediate Miramichi region there are two rare birds worth mentioning. In February, in the Tabusintac area, a bird that spends summer in Florida and winters even further south, the Purple Gallinule, was found on a lawn in the snow. How it arrived there, then, no one knows. A valiant rescue attempt unfortunately failed and the bird died at a wildlife recovery centre. More positively a **Wilson’s Plover** was found at the Cormierville Marsh, south of Bouctouche, the first such sighting in NB.

More than two dozen sightings of birds considered rare were made in the Miramichi region so far this past year. Many visits are during the spring and fall migrations where some birds can get a little lost,



Indigo Bunting



American Golden Plover



Above: A rare sight, an albino Chipping Sparrow was spotted in Nelson this past summer, on St. Patrick’s Drive.