

## *Note*

### **The Birds of Quetico Provincial Park and the Atikokan Area: An Update**

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It has been just over 10 years since *The Birds of Quetico Provincial Park and the Atikokan Area* was published (Elder 1994). The area covered by my book was the former Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Atikokan District, which extended from the boundary of Rainy River and Thunder Bay Districts, west to the Seine River, and from the Canada-United States boundary, north to the Turtle River and Pekagoning Lake, and included

Quetico Provincial Park and Atikokan.

Since 1994, a number of new species have been recorded in the area. In addition, several species have experienced noteworthy changes in status. The following is an update and brings currency to the original publication. I have not included changes to the earliest and latest dates as they are too numerous, but have included two unusual records of species that over-wintered successfully.

#### **New Species**

The book presented accounts for 252 species. An additional 11 species are annotated here, bringing the species total for the area to 263.

#### **Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)**

A flock of four associated with Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) that stopped during migration from 15 to 18 March 1995 on an open grassy area in the middle of Atikokan was the first record for the area.

#### **Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*)**

The American Ornithologists' Union has recently recognized the Cackling Goose (Banks et al. 2004, Rising 2004) as a full species comprising four former small subspecies of the Canada Goose, including Richardson's Canada Goose (*B. canadensis hutchinsii*). A few of these small "Canada Geese" are usually seen in the area each year during spring and fall migration. On 9 October 2004, a flock of six Cackling Geese joined a large flock of Canada Geese on the Atikokan golf course. They stayed until late October, when a snowfall forced all the geese to move on.

#### **Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*)**

A hunter shot one immature bird from a flock of six on Mercutio Lake, northeast of Atikokan, on 15 September 1999. This is the first and only record for the area.

**Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)**

On 9 October 2004, a hunter shot a single immature on a marsh near Atikokan. It was a lone bird and was the first record for the area.

**Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)**

On 7 May 1993, D. Graham observed a single light morph adult Swainson's Hawk over Atikokan (Bain 1994). It remains the only record of this western hawk here.

**Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)**

The first area record was made on 31 October 1993 when a juvenile appeared in the writer's Atikokan backyard, attracted by the rib cage of a moose carcass (Figure 1). The gull stayed for two days, feeding constantly and keeping all other birds away, including Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*). It was undoubtedly a starving migrant. A second Glaucous Gull, also a juvenile, was found on 26 October 1996 in a small flock of loafing Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*) and Herring (*L. argentatus*) Gulls in Atikokan.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*)**

The first area record for this southern woodpecker occurred on 15 December 2003. A male frequented a feeder in Atikokan from then until it was last seen in late March 2004 (rather than mid March as previously reported; Crins 2004). It would take a single dog kibble, put out for Gray Jays (*Perisoreus canadensis*), wedge it in a crevice in the bark of a tree, and then peck off pieces to eat.



**Figure 1: Juvenile Glaucous Gull feeding on a moose rib cage in a backyard in Atikokan, Ontario, 31 October 1993. Photo by David H. Elder.**

**Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*)**

A singing male found on 27 May 1998 by D. Graham at the mouth of the Atikokan River on Lower Steep Rock Lake, just west of Atikokan,, remains the only record for the area (Dobos 1999).

**Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*)**

A molting male on 10 May 2001 and a full-plumaged male on 1 June 2004 (Crins 2005), both at feeders in Atikokan, are the only area occurrences. The 2001 record has yet to be reviewed by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC).

**Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*)**

The American Ornithologists' Union (AOU 1995) split the Rufous-sided Towhee (*P. erythrophthalmus*) into two species in 1995: Spotted Towhee (*P. maculatus*) and Eastern Towhee (*P. erythrophthalmus*). A single record of a distinctively marked Spotted Towhee visiting an Atikokan feeder for some time, beginning on 27 October 1984, remains unique in the area. Three other towhee occurrences reported in my book (Elder 1994) involved the Eastern Towhee. All of these towhee records have yet to be reviewed by OBRC.

**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*)**

One of these beautiful mountain-dwelling finches found its way to a feeder at Sapawe, 30 km east of Atikokan (Figure 2). It was first seen on 22 January 1995, and remained to early March (rather than mid March as previously reported; Dobos 1996).



**Figure 2: Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch at Sapawe, Ontario, 19 February 1995. Photo by David H. Elder.**

## New Introduced Species

### Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)

This swan has been recorded several times from the area just west of Quetico Provincial Park. A pair with two young frequented a large beaver pond south of the Namakan River in 2001. A single adult Trumpeter Swan was found by Ralph Brown on a marshy pond system near Atikokan on 12 May 2005. On 10 June 2005, I found three adult-plumaged Trumpeter Swans at the same site. These are the most easterly records for the area. It is likely that all Trumpeter Swans recorded here originate from reintroduction programs in the midwestern United States, particularly Minnesota. All swans must now be carefully observed to ensure correct identification. Ontario's introduced Trumpeter Swan population is currently considered not established by the OBRC since these swans are not yet self-sustaining (Burke 2003).

### Changed Status

Since the original publication in 1994, several species have undergone significant changes in status, with some increasing in numbers and others decreasing or disappearing entirely.

### Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Cormorants are now recorded annually in increasing numbers and may be breeding in gull colonies on the larger lakes of the park and area.

### Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Bald Eagle numbers in Quetico and the Atikokan area certainly equal or exceed historical levels. This is due to a reduction of pesticides in the food chain, public awareness, and an increased food supply provided by anglers and hunters, municipal landfills and road kills. The availability of a territory with large trees suitable for nesting may be the only population-limiting factor. An unusual ground nest was reported on a rocky island in Pickerel Lake in Quetico during 2004 (Martin 2005). Since 1990, Bald Eagles have wintered annually in varying numbers at the Atikokan landfill site.

### Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)

Prior to 1995, this gull was very uncommon, with most records being of non-adults during late summer and early fall, and no evidence of nesting here. Since then, numbers have increased dramatically and there are now several breeding colonies on the larger lakes north of Atikokan. It is now a common area bird, often seen feeding or loafing on large, open, grassy areas in Atikokan.

### Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)

Formerly a fairly common migrant and breeding tern in the marshes near Atikokan, it has not been recorded since 1997.

### Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)

Now rarely observed, Common Nighthawks formerly nested on the flat gravel roofs of Atikokan stores and in area burns and cutovers. In late August, large south-moving flocks, sometimes containing over 100 birds, were expected. They no longer occur.

### Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*)

A few pairs of swifts formerly nested each year in some of the large chimneys in the downtown section of Atikokan. None has been recorded since 2001.

**Purple Martin (*Progne subis*)**

Formerly a frequent breeder southwest of Quetico, most colonies are now gone. There is no obvious reason for the disappearance; the martin houses placed along lakeshores by cottagers are still there.

**Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)**

Cardinals are now recorded annually at almost any time of the year, and have included a pair and a singing male in July. Most have been found visiting feeders. This increase seems to be part of a northward advance of the species across northwestern Ontario.

**Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)**

This impressive species no longer nests in the marshes near Atikokan, but is recorded annually during spring migration in mixed blackbird flocks.

**Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)**

There were formerly several nesting colonies in and around the Atikokan area. Each colony slowly declined in numbers and then ceased to exist. None has been recorded since 1997. The reason for the decline is unknown, but similar disappearances have occurred in the Thunder Bay area.

**House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)**

First recorded in Atikokan in 1991, this species (Figure 3) slowly increased during the mid 1990s and then abruptly disappeared. None has been recorded since 1998.



**Figure 3: Male House Finch (left) and male Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) at Atikokan, Ontario, 17 April 1995. Photo by David H. Elder.**

## Unusual in Winter

### Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*)

An individual spent the winter of 1990-91 at the writer's feeder in Atikokan.

### Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*)

One wintered successfully at my feeder in Atikokan in 2003-04.

## Acknowledgements

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