

# Nature Notes

by Bill Wilson

*(Unabridged version; from The **rare** Review – Fall 2013)*

Initially a winter visitor in the 1990s and first decade of this century, the BALD EAGLE has established year-round feeding territory in and about **rare** at the confluence of the Speed and Grand Rivers. Large trees along the river provide daytime roost sites and hunting perches that have been consistently used by eagles since first observed here in the 1990s.

Fifteen species of waterfowl were observed during spring monitoring at the confluence of the Speed and Grand Rivers. Highlights included: 38 RING-NECKED DUCKS on March 31; 13 BLUE-WINGED TEAL and 7 GREEN-WINGED TEAL on April 19; and both TUNDRA SWAN (small flocks) and TRUMPETER SWAN (3). COMMON MERGANSER is a regular winter visitor and spring migrant; 4 drakes remained on June 23.

For their April site visit, **rare** staff and bird monitors walked the Fountain Street Flats sector of the reserve from the shoreline of the Speed River to the property boundary at Moyers Blair Landing Park, City of Cambridge. Migrants sighted included GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLETS, FOX SPARROW, BLUE-WINGED TEAL, three PIED-BILLED GREBES and a pair of BALD EAGLES.

Spring 2013 will be remembered by bird banders and monitors at **rare** for its cool temperatures and clear blue skies during most banding/monitoring mornings. Atmospheric conditions over the lower Great Lakes did not produce significant fallout of birds, and as a result, **rare** banders Kevin Grundy and George Hentsch had more “unemployed” fingers to count than birds to remove from banding nets. Recaptured birds, however, did provide highlights: a male AMERICAN REDSTART banded at **rare** in 2008 was re-caught. Breeding at **rare**, this insectivorous warbler winters in Mexico south through Central America and West Indies to Ecuador and southern Venezuela. So far, this individual has made 10 migration trips. On May 4, Kevin re-trapped two YELLOW WARBLERS: one first banded in 2008 and the second in 2011. This species which is the most common warbler breeding at **rare** also winters from Mexico south through Central America.

In mid-May, Marilyn Armstrong observed 22 WHITE-TAILED DEER in the Osprey Meadow; Michael Collins reported a COYOTE with at least one pup in the Thompson Tract.

In June, while birding in the vicinity of the **rare ECO Centre**, Ruth Kroft found her first hummingbird nest. Such a nest is rarely located. During the 2001-2005 Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, only three per cent of confirmed breeding records for RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD were nests. The status of grassland birds in Ontario has become a focus for conservation efforts. For example, in 2010, BOBOLINK and EASTERN MEADOWLARK were designated species at risk – endangered - in the province. GRASSHOPPER SPARROW has declined during the last decade in the Carolinian Region of the province by 48 per cent (**rare** lies at the northern interface of the Carolinian/Lake Simcoe-Rideau Regions).

The habitat of these species has been negatively impacted by urban sprawl and intensification of agriculture in southern Ontario. Supporters of **rare** who attended this year’s research symposium in May will recall University of Guelph researcher Eric Harvey’s presentation about his Tall Grass Prairie Research Study. The grassland area set aside for his research, the adjacent regeneration field currently in “old field” stage of succession and the managed hayfield nearby provide a total of about 90 acres (36 hectares) of habitat for grassland birds. This spring, monitors documented breeding evidence for six species of sparrow including a successful nesting GRASSHOPPER SPARROW and both BOBOLINK and EASTERN MEADOWLARK were “on territory” and exhibiting breeding behaviour. Monitoring continued throughout the early summer to determine the breeding status of these species at **rare**. Stay tuned for more details.