

The Miramichi Naturalist

“In my backyard” by Julia Connell

I have learned a lot since first watching birds for the Breeding Bird Atlas, four years ago. We are into our fifth & last year for collection breeding evidence for the Atlas. I was like a lot of people, not paying much attention to what was flitting around in the trees. Like the summer I spent about 15 minutes looking for the cat I heard in the bushes, which I found out my first year in the Nature Club that this was a Catbird! How embarrassing! How ironic is that that a bird would sound like a cat?

My backyard has proved to be full of birds. I've enjoyed watching the Northern Flickers choosing their nesting site. An old dead branch in one of the large maples proved to be attractive to them. The first year the starling evicted them from their cavity, threw out all their eggs & proceeded to start up housekeeping. I found 3 eggs in the grass on the other side of the driveway. Within a few days the Flickers had reclaimed their nest site. They did succeed in raising 4 young which fledged later than normal.

I had 2 unsuccessful nesting in my yard this spring. In April, a pair of Crows had started setting up house in one of the tall spruce trees. I watched them make many trips with sticks, grasses, and moss. Once serious housekeeping starts, birds tend to become very quiet so as not to give away their nest sites. Nobody wants the predators to know where their precious cargo is at! Unfortunately, there was a strong wind & rain storm. It destroyed the nest with half of it hanging down. I could see 3 eggs resting in the hanging end & found 2 different egg shells on the ground. How disappointing! The eggs were a grayish green color with darker specks all over. This was my first time ever seeing Crows' eggs. This nest was abandoned. I presume that either the squirrels or some other bird ate the rest of the eggs. Nothing goes to waste in nature.

A Robin had a nest on the eaves of our house & had laid 3 eggs. She had been on them for several days when I noticed her on the ground one morning, didn't think too much of it at the time until I saw her still there in the afternoon. She seemed to have injured her wing & couldn't fly. The two of them hung around for a couple of days before they too eventually abandoned this nest. Within a few days, something ate the 3 eggs that were in the nest.

While some sites don't produce nestlings there are others that do. My Flickers are back this year raising another family. A pair of Tree Swallows has accepted one of my bird boxes as home. This will help to keep the mosquito population down! It's fascinating to watch them swoop & dive, catching mosquitoes on the fly!

I have been anxiously waiting for the Baltimore Orioles to return. They have been coming here every year for a long time. Last year there were actually two pairs. These have to be the prettiest birds. The male has a black hood and upper back, bright orange rump and underparts and black tail with orange outer feathers. His orange is the same color as an orange. The female is a toned down color from the male. Upper parts are brownish-olive with a very pale orange under part. One female finally showed up the last week in May. Finally the male came the first week in June. The female is visiting the feeding station of jam, another bowl with suet and another holding an orange half. So far she seems to be filling up on suet. Although I see all the tiny seeds that are in the suet flung all over the feeder. Obviously she doesn't like the seeds. I won't mind in the least to clean up this mess, so long as they keep coming so I can continue to see them! I never tire of looking at these spectacular birds!

I have a pair of Downy Woodpeckers & a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers coming to the suet feeder quite frequently. These 2 woodpeckers look very similar but the Hairy is a little more than two inches bigger than the Downy. His chirps are also quite a bit louder. I find the Downy is a quieter bird.

Now I'm just waiting for a pair of Eastern Bluebirds to visit and choose one of my other nest boxes. All in all, a very exciting summer ahead!

Submitted by Julia Connell
Miramichi Naturalist Club



