

The Miramichi Naturalist – 2

Spring arrivals

A chipmunk lives in a burrow under a birch tree in my yard and has been active since late March. I have seen him (I will call it him but I don't know if it's a male or a female) during the last few days moving his belongings to a summer place under the garden shed. While food was available and plentiful last fall, he carried what seemed like buckets of black oil seeds and hazelnuts to his burrow. Since winter ended early, he finds himself with leftover food that he doesn't want to waste and with cheeks full, he hauls it to his new pad.

The spring migration is winding down for the duck species and a good number of the songbirds have already arrived. Miramichi Marsh behind Retirement Miramichi is buzzing with activity from beavers and muskrats to teals and Red-winged Blackbirds.

The Yellow-rumped Warblers, which are normally the first warblers to arrive, did so in large numbers this spring. I spotted 6 at one time in my backyard gleaning cold tolerant bugs from the birch leaves. Keep an eye out for the White-crowned Sparrow. He is the one with the black and white striped bicycle helmet and is only passing through on his way to Northern Canada. Reports of sightings from southern New Brunswick began around May 5th.

Every spring, many naturalists head for the woods at dusk with a CD player and a thermos of coffee to survey pre-determined routes for owl activity. Those who have completed their surveys have reported that the number of owls was high. There was also a report of a rare Boreal Owl along the Mullin Stream Route. Other more common owls encountered were Great Horned Owls, Barred Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls.



Janice Richard of West Collette arrived home to find a litter of four Red Fox kits in her yard. The mother was likely out hunting to feed her demanding little ones. Unlike wolves or coyotes, the male fox only supports the female until shortly after the birth of her kits. From the picture of two of them, they look to be around 7 weeks old.

For the last 3 years in a row, Warbling Vireos have spent the summer near my house and last Friday, one showed up in my backyard. It's not a very spectacular bird but one that is not commonly seen around here.

This is also the time to keep an eye out for those rare birds that sometimes overshoot their range on their way north and end up in our area. Last year we had Indigo Buntings and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. For a lucky few who were able to see it, a bizarre looking Purple Gallinule showed up in Lavillette and stayed for a couple of weeks. Its summer range is the extreme southeastern US. Some of our uncommon species to look out for are the Whip-poor-will, the Scarlet Tanager, the Baltimore Oriole, the Eastern Bluebird and the Northern Mockingbird.

The early spring also means an early snowmelt and an early black fly season. Let us hope that an early arrival will also mean an early departure.