

The Miramichi Naturalist
The Fledglings by Leonel Richard

The first fledged American Robin was seen on May 28th this year which, I imagine, is quite early. On that same day I spotted a fledged Common Grackle which is also earlier than in most years. I am always amused by newly fledged birds because even though they are the same size as their parents, they are totally helpless. They sit on a branch and wait for their provider to arrive and while they wait, they look around the same way a country kid does after getting off the bus in a big city. They can find interest in a simple leaf or a blade of grass and sometimes even in their own feet.

A lady from Nova Scotia was coming to Miramichi to visit relatives a few weeks ago and e-mailed me to get information on places to go bird watching while she was in the area. I suggested she should not miss the

Miramichi Marsh just behind Retirement Miramichi. She later emailed me to say that she did go and was truly awed by the variety of life to be seen there. She even got a picture of a soaking wet Ermine with an equally wet Meadow Vole in its mouth. The best time to go is early morning or late in the day.

After seeing the devastation caused by the busted oil well in the Gulf of Mexico, many of us wonder if it will have an effect on our corner of the natural world. It is difficult to say to what extent but there will be an effect and it will be negative. The one good thing is that it happened after the majority of the migrating birds had already passed through on their way north. Unfortunately, millions of shorebirds will pass through there again on their way south in a few months. They will stop to feed



Newly hatched Spotted Sandpiper - Photo by Nelson Cloud



Adult Red-breasted Nuthatch (r) feeding young - Photo by Phil Riebel

on the mudflats and beaches along the gulf coast and nobody knows what will be there to greet them. If they can't find enough food to fatten up, they won't make it across the Gulf of Mexico to South America. To make things even worse, the climatologists are predicting a very active hurricane season coming up. Hopefully, the well can be capped sooner rather than later.

From 1986 to 1990 the Maritime Provinces were surveyed for evidence of breeding birds with the results published under the name "Atlas of the Breeding Birds of the Maritime Provinces". The fieldwork for this five year project was mostly done by volunteers. They numbered over 1120 people and put in a staggering 43,000 hours.

In 2006, the fieldwork for the second atlas was begun and looking at the results of the first four seasons, some obvious changes have taken place in the interim. The most worrisome changes obviously are the declines in many species however some species have increased in numbers and some have extended their ranges northward and eastward to breed in the Maritimes.



Fledgling Song Sparrow - Photo by Peter Gadd

You may have noticed Canada Geese during the summer months in recent years. While the first atlas had no Canada Geese in the Miramichi region which consisted of 53-10 km by 10 km squares; in this atlas the geese were present in 37 of the squares. Other species such as the Philadelphia Vireo, the Pine Warbler and the Bald Eagle have also increased in numbers. Many more species have shown a marked decrease in numbers such as the Killdeer, the swallows (barn, bank, cliff and tree), the House Sparrow, the Chimney Swift, the Eastern Kingbird and others. This could be due to a variety of reasons from habitat loss, both here and where they spend the winters to excess predation due to ecological imbalance. Nature is never simple.