

Report on Waterbird Migration Watch at Battle Island, Nipigon Bay October 2011 by Greg Cleary and Joseph Youngman

Introduction

We came to Battle Island on October 4th and left on the 10th. Morning waterbird counts were done on the 5th through 10th at the west end of Battle and on the 5th, 6th, 7th and 9th counts were done at the east end as well. On the 10th a 1 ½ hour count was done from a point along the north shore that could monitor migration past the east end. We recorded all species seen during our stay on the island.

Waterbird Migration

The hope for this trip was to document a significant waterbird (loon, grebe, duck) migration out of Nipigon Bay, southward out through the Simpson and/or Wilson channels. We did see significant waterbird migration, especially through the Simpson channel. But the first four days of our trip had south and southeast winds and during those four days the total count was only 19 birds in 20 hours of observation! Was this pathetic number due to the bad winds or are these two channels (and Nipigon Bay itself) just lacking in large numbers of waterbirds migrating through? In the early morning of our fifth day, the wind was out of the NW and stayed there through the day. On that day, the 9th, we saw 352 waterbirds pass south out of the Simpson channel and 87 pass south through the Wilson channel. The following day, we had to quit our main west end count by 10:35AM and the “east end count” was done at a spot along the north shore for only 1.5 hours. In spite of the short count on the 10th, we saw more loons migrating that day (36) than all other days combined. Another interesting observation was the 18 loons we saw on the water during our six mile boat ride back to Rossport. The boat ride was in effect, a narrow six mile transect through the Wilson channel and Nipigon Bay. Do those 18 loons represent a small fraction of the total loons resting on Nipigon Bay that day?

The 527 waterbirds we saw moving out of our two channels don't represent a really large movement for 6 days of observation, but they are not insignificant either. The limited duration of our visit and the bad winds for the majority of our days certainly limit the conclusions that can be drawn from our observations. All in all, I think we've shown that the channels at Nipigon's eastern end may well have large waterbird migration flowing out of them in the fall, but only future observations can make that certain.

Passerine Migration

We found Battle Island to be quite empty of birds on our arrival and throughout the first four days of our stay. The only bird observed repeatedly throughout the island was the Red-breasted Nuthatch. Black-capped Chickadees were rare, we had a few Yellow-rumped and Palm Warblers on our first couple days and a few Kinglets (both species), one Northern Flicker, one juvenile Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, one or two Downy Woodpeckers. A few dozen Dark-eyed Juncos were seen here and there and a few

American Pipits and Horned Larks were found on the shorelines. Pine Siskins were seen a few times and most interestingly, several flocks of siskins, totaling 480, were seen leaving Battle Island's east end, moving east on the morning of the 5th.

During the early morning hours of the 9th, a NW wind brought in a new wave of migrants. Chip notes were heard before we left our tents. The island's Junco population had tripled or more and several sparrow species arrived. We had up to six Fox Sparrows, one each of Harris' and White-crowned Sparrows. A flock of about 50 Robins was seen as well. Later on the 9th, a Northern Shrike was seen near the dock, though it was not an obvious new arrival as were the sparrows.

Raptors

Only two raptor species were seen. Bald Eagles were seen every day of our visit. Most days three or four were seen, mostly adults but one or more immatures as well. Battle Island did not seem to be a special focus of eagle activity. The south end of Simpson often seemed to be where eagles first appeared each day. Merlins were only seen twice during the six days. Compared to our experience at other Lake Superior islands that's not a lot of Merlin activity. I assume that the north shore in the fall is not a place with large concentrations of prey for a Merlin. A third raptor was mentioned by the former lighthouse keeper, John Joiner. He said Peregrine Falcons had nested on the cliff just below the lighthouse this year. I investigated the cliff a bit, looking for suitable ledges. There was one large ledge and it had significant amounts of whitewash on and below it but it seemed to have too much outward slope for a nest site. There were other smaller ledges nearby that could well have been used as a successful PEFA nest this year. The larger ledge certainly seemed like it may well have entertained one or more PEFA's late in the season.

Gulls

The two observers are not especially tuned in to gulls and we made only modest efforts to monitor them. Gull numbers were quite small – perhaps 10 to 20 per day. As with eagles, Battle Island itself did not seem to be a center of activity. We only saw Herring and Ring-billed Gulls. On the day of large waterbird migration there did seem to be an actual gull migration south through the Simpson channel. 37 gulls came southward out of the channel and moved south over Lake Superior during our four and one half hour count that day. We can't be sure, but these seemed to be a separate movement of gulls from the locals who tended to move out and back during the day, while these birds seemed to be moving only southward.

Species List

Canada Goose
 Common Merganser
 Redhead
 Scaup Species
 White-winged Scoter
 Common Loon
 Red-throated Loon
 Red-necked Grebe
 Common Raven
 Bald Eagle

Merlin
 Herring Gull
 Ring-billed Gull
 Saw-whet Owl
 Brown Creeper
 Golden-crowned Kinglet
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
 Red-breasted Nuthatch
 Black-capped Chickadee
 Northern Shrike
 Downy Woodpecker
 Northern Flicker
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

American Robin
 Hermit Thrush
 Dark-eyed Junco
 Harris' Sparrow
 White-throated Sparrow
 White-crowned Sparrow
 American Tree Sparrow
 Savannah Sparrow
 American Pipit
 Horned Lark
 Pine Siskin

Waterbird Migration at Battle Island October 2011

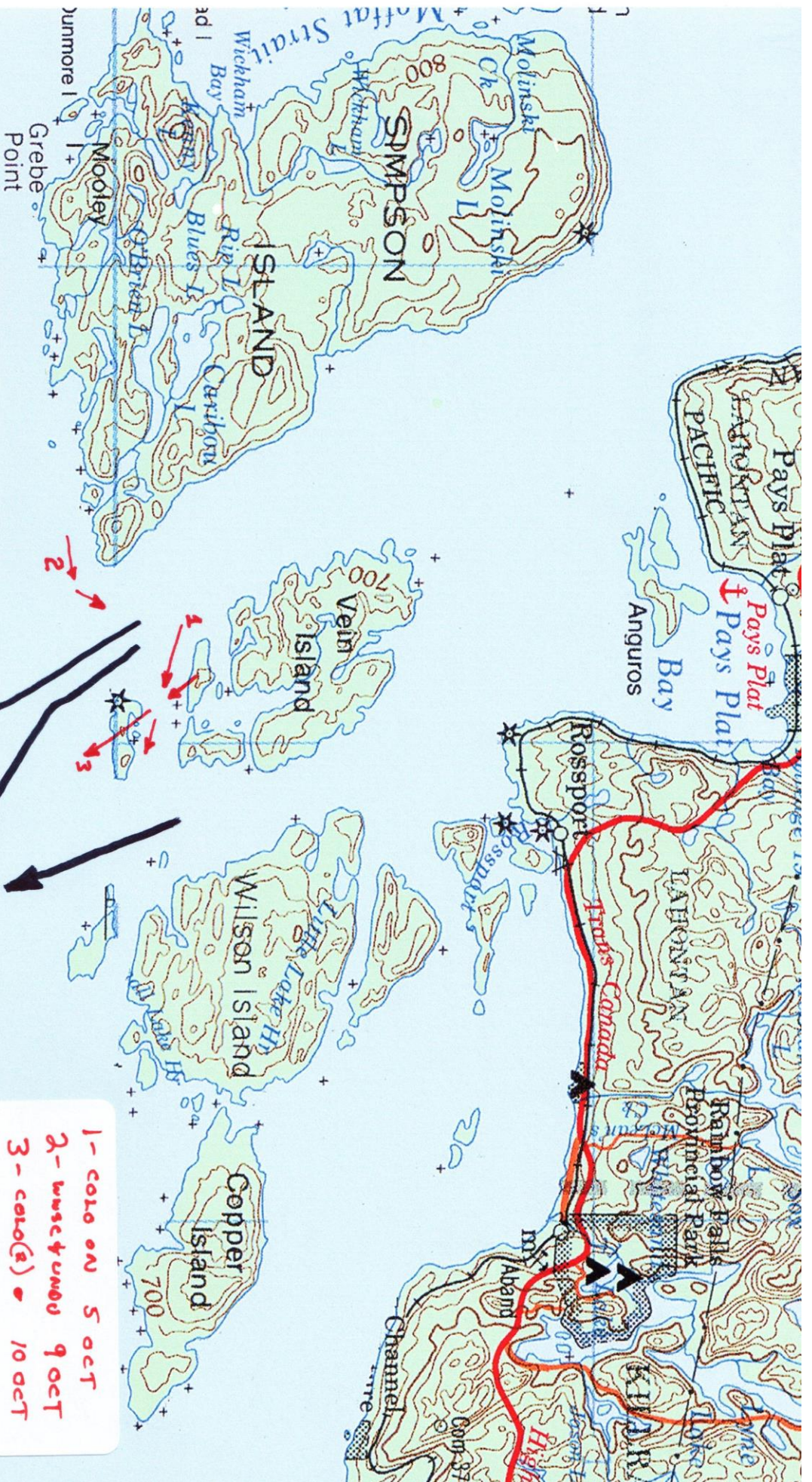
	5th		6th		7th		8th		9th		10th		Totals
	E	W	E	W	E	W	E	W	E	W	E	W	
Loon Species		2			1				2				5
Common Loon		1		5	3	1	N	2		9	4	32	57
Red-throated Loon							O			5			5
Red-necked Grebe									4	14	2	1	21
White-winged Scoter							C			59			59
Scaup Species							O			21			21
Redhead							U			1			1
Common Merganser			1				N	1	2				4
Merganser Species							T		2	60			62
Unidentified Duck									56	177	3	15	251
Unidentified Waterbird				1	1				21	6	7	5	41
Daily Combined Totals	0	3	1	6	5	1	0	3	87	352	16	53	527
Canada Goose			1							102	10		113
Hours of Observation	2.5	2.5	3	4	3.5	4	0	4.5	4.75	4.5	1.5	3	37.75

E= count done at eastern tip of island

W=count done at western tip of island

The "E" count on the 10th was done from the North shore, NE of dock

Observers - Greg Cleary and Joseph Youngman



SMALL RED ARROWS
INDICATE LESS USED
FLIGHT PATHS

LARGE BLACK ARROWS
INDICATE THE WATER
FLIGHT PATHS
OBSERVED

- 1- color on 5 oct
- 2- wuschumou 9 oct
- 3- color(s) 10 oct

WATERBIRD FLIGHTS 5-10 OCTOBER 2011 SEEN FROM BATTLE ISLAND

