

# **Report on Waterbird Migration Survey at Slate Islands May 2015**

## **by Joseph Youngman and Greg Cleary**

### **Introduction**

From previous waterbird studies at Michipicoten in 2007 and Battle Island in 2011 I suspected that there would be a significant movement of waterbirds using the Slate Islands as a navigation point in spring and possibly the fall as well. While they could use either the eastern or western edge of the islands as their flight line I assumed that the western side made more sense. Greg and I came to Horace Cove on Patterson Island on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, brought by Paul Turpin of Rossport. We planned on counting from the western edge of the island straight west of Horace Cove but that crossing proved very difficult and a decent count site was located straight south of our campsite on Horace Cove. This site gave clear views from the SE to the W and worked fine for our purposes (48° 37.850' 87° 2.324'). The site was about 70' above water level. As expected a moderate waterbird migration was recorded from the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 9<sup>th</sup>, totaling 692 waterbirds in 41 hours of observation. Common Loon was by far the most abundant with 500 passing by. We had thought of sending one person overland to the eastern edge of Patterson to check on migration along that shore but didn't do so, due to the dense forest cover. We therefore have no data at all on possible migration there.

### **Waterbird Migration**

The birds were seen first either to the SSE, S or SW and were clearly moving generally NNW past the western edge of Patterson Island. Some were seen to approach the island from the south and veer around it and many were first seen to the SW and were just brushing along the western edge. We recorded 9 species of duck, loon or grebe and just one individual each of Double-crested Cormorant and Canada Goose. Seven species appear on our Species List for the trip which were not seen actually migrating past. These include: Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, Common Merganser and Horned Grebe.

Unlike some other count sites on Lake Superior there wasn't much difference in flight paths of different species. Common Loons did occasionally fly slightly behind us (over land) going from SE to NW but they were not seen passing over the bulk of the island, just clipping it somewhat.

### **Raptor Migration**

We saw five species of raptors at or near our count site. Of those only Bald Eagle were assumed to be local residents. Merlin was seen only twice and Peregrine Falcons were seen five times and could well have been either migrants or residents. Peregrine Falcons were seen on three different days and may represent up to four individuals. In two of those sightings the falcon was first seen well offshore approaching the island. A single Rough-legged Hawk was seen moving west and then north over the lake to the south and west of the count site on 5 May. A single Northern Harrier was seen moving NW across the SW edge of the island on 4 May. Two unidentified raptors were seen coming in to Patterson off Lake Superior from the south or southwest during the count.

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## Passerine and Shorebird Migration

Groups of small passerines were seen on many days at the count site. Several times groups of up to 15 were seen moving NW along the shoreline. Only 23 passerines were seen in situations that seemed to clearly show they had just come in from the south off the lake. One passerine, probably a sparrow, was knocked into the water by a Herring Gull as it approached land. The gull then swallowed it whole. During the fog and drizzle in the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> seven warbler species were seen along the beaches of Horace Cove. Also feeding on the beach that morning were several sparrow species, Least Flycatcher, Pine Siskin and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May a group of over 100 White-throated Sparrows was found foraging on the forest floor inland.

## Breeding Birds

A Broad-winged Hawk acted territorial along the north and east shores of Horace Cove during all days of our visit. A pair of Common Goldeneye acted like they might be nesting on Horace Cove. Common Ravens acted territorial – chasing a Bald Eagle. We had numerous Winter Wren singing in the forests which were likely breeders. We had many other passerine species that could have been breeders or migrants.

## Map of Flight Paths



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### Waterbird Count Table

	4-May	5-May	6-May	7-May	8-May	9-May	Total
Common Loon	25	165	74	92	112	32	500
Red-throated Loon	1	3			1		5
Unidentified Loon	3	2				1	6
Red-breasted Merganser	2	6	7	8	89	8	120
Unidentified Duck	4	4		9	3		20
Common Goldeneye	1						1
Unidentified Waterbird		4		6			10
Double-crested Cormorant		1					1
Scaup Species				5	6		11
Canada Goose				1			1
White-winged Scoter				2	4		6
Blue-winged Teal					2		2
Mallard					3		3
Red-necked Grebe					5	1	6
Daily Totals	36	185	81	123	225	42	692
Count Hours	6	8	8	8	8	3	41

### Species List

Canada Goose	Bald Eagle	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Wood Duck	Northern Harrier	Brown Creeper
American Black Duck	Broad-winged Hawk	Winter Wren
Mallard	Rough-legged Hawk	Sedge Wren
Blue-winged Teal	Merlin	American Pipit
Green-winged Teal	Peregrine Falcon	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Ring-necked Duck	Sandhill Crane	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Scaup Species	Killdeer	Magnolia Warbler
White-winged Scoter	Spotted Sandpiper	Cape May Warbler
Long-tailed Duck	Solitary Sandpiper	Nashville Warbler
Bufflehead	Greater Yellowlegs	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Common Goldeneye	Wilson's Snipe	Palm Warbler
Common Merganser	Ring-billed Gull	Common Yellowthroat
Red-breasted Merganser	Herring Gull	Wilson's Warbler
Red-throated Loon	Belted Kingfisher	Chipping Sparrow
Common Loon	Northern Flicker	Savannah Sparrow
Horned Grebe	Eastern Phoebe	Song Sparrow
Red-necked Grebe	Least Flycatcher	Swamp Sparrow
American White Pelican	American Crow	White-throated Sparrow
Double-crested Cormorant	Common Raven	Common Grackle
American Bittern	Black-capped Chickadee	Pine Siskin
Turkey Vulture	Tree Swallow	

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