

Birds – West Ironbound Island

James Hirtle

19 June 2009

There are a number of colonial nesting species on West Ironbound.

Firstly, there has been a double-crested cormorant colony on the island for the past four years. The number of nests for this colony has dropped from 150 down to 38. This year, on an initial visit to the island, all nests were occupied. On a second visit all nests had been abandoned and the colony failed for whatever reason.

Gull breeding is healthy on the island. Last year there were about 150 pair of herring gulls and this year I would estimate about 100 pair. With greater black-backed gulls there are probably about 30 pairs nesting, which is down substantially from last year.

The good news is that my initial estimate of great blue heron nests on the island was about 7-10. I would now say that there are 15-20 nests. A lot of the nests had actively begging young who were very vocal. This is very significant.

Another significant species on the island is the blackpoll warbler. They breed along our eastern shores, but are rare locally in regards to breeding. Although I've not been able to confirm breeding, they have been present on the island for the last four years. This year I saw a single female and three singing males.

Other bird species present and I've confirmed as breeding both past and present, on the island are Common eider (low numbers only), red-eyed vireo, American robin, European starling, yellow-rumped warbler, savannah sparrow, song sparrow, and white-throated sparrows and common grackle.

Possible breeders, but not confirmed are: mallard, great cormorant, willet, black guillemot, northern flicker, blue-headed vireo, American crow, Common raven, black-capped chickadee, boreal chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, ruby-crowned kinglet, hermit thrush, northern parula, yellow warbler, magnolia warbler, black-throated green warbler, common yellowthroat, dark-eyed junco (agitated behaviour), purple finch, red crossbill, pine siskin, and American goldfinch.

In migration only was an Eastern wood pewee seen on the island.

James Hirtle:

I have a BSC in biology, and birding has been a serious hobby for 25 years. I've been writing a weekly birding column for the local paper (Lighthouse Publishing in Bridgewater) for a little over nine and one half years. I co-ordinate the Lunenburg Christmas Bird Count and participate in a least five other counts every year. I help the co-ordinator for the White Point Christmas Bird Count. I've been the co-ordinator for Lunenburg County for the Piping Plover Guardian Program (now the Coastal Guardian Program) for about 20 years and have worked closely with both the Department of Natural Resources and Bird Studies Canada and Environment Canada during that timeframe. I also conduct shorebird surveys, beached bird surveys, keep nest records, run two owl monitoring routes, and conduct Breeding Bird Surveys. Currently we are in our fourth year for the Breeding Bird Atlas for the Maritimes and I am the Coordinator for Lunenburg County. I also participate in the Spring Migration Count, and am a member of the Nova Scotia Bird Society. For the Bird Society I usually run three or four field trips during the year. Various groups and clubs often call upon me for talks and presentations as well."