

## **BIRDS.**

(Source – from presentation by Richard Pope on behalf of Willow Beach Field Naturalists to Cobourg Council, July 7th, 2014)

There have been 74,212 birds recorded in and around the harbour going back to 1948 of an **ASTONISHING 267 SPECIES**

Many species need sheltered waters so that such areas become crucial for birds. Our harbour is one such area and it is important to note that it is the only suitable extensive area of sheltered water between Presqu'ile and Oshawa, a distance of almost 100 km. of Great Lakes shoreline.

It is obvious that reduction of available space in the harbour will impact greatly upon the bird life. The area west of the centre pier is a haven for species that prefer less open water. The gulls roost on the ice here; gulls and shorebirds also flock precisely on the short stretch of beach slated in the marina plan for gantries and expanded boat launches.

In winter, Cobourg is known as one of the two or three best spots in Ontario to see gulls. When the water is iced, huge numbers of gulls often concentrate on the ice to rest and loiter, perhaps attracted by the good visibility and lack of disturbance. They like to roost on the open ice, often just where the expansion is suggested to take place. These flocks can number thousands of birds and sometimes as many as 10 species have been present, an astonishing total.

Over the years we have recorded 15 gull species in total, some extremely rare (e.g., Mew Gull, Franklin's Gull), but on any given day at least 5-6 species are present.

It is well-known that we have a large much-loved resident population of Mallard Ducks and Canada Geese. People are even prepared to defy the law to feed them. It may be less well-known that all fall, winter and spring we have a good mix of duck species (including rare Harlequin Ducks and King Eiders) and geese (including Snow Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose and Cackling Goose). Particularly in winter we find substantial numbers of wintering waterfowl feeding in the harbour, especially in bad weather. This is when the aspect of harbour as refuge is most important.

Our harbour is **MUCH VISITED** by naturalist groups from all over the province. Every year reports of various rarities bring birders flocking to Cobourg Harbour. Birders from the US visit us in winter because birds like Long-tailed Duck, readily seen here, are never seen in the south. And every year the Ontario Field Ornithologists have an outing to our harbour and Presqu'ile. At the OFO convention held in Cobourg at the Best Western on September 14-16, 2012, we set an all-time high record of 178 area birds (exceeding the previous high of 177 at Long Point in 2010), which was tied in 2013 by Point Pelee. Cobourg and its harbour are well-known on the Ontario birding map. 245 people came to Cobourg for the 2012 conference. The economic benefits of such events and of the more general attractiveness of the harbour to birders should not be ignored.

Many reports of birds found in Cobourg Harbour, some extremely rare in Ontario, have been submitted to the Ontario Bird Records Committee (e.g., Mew and Common Gull, American Oystercatcher and Snowy Egret). Over the last 20 years over 50% of the rarest species of birds found in the Cobourg area have been associated with the harbour.

### **The Harbour and the West Headland.**

It must be understood that the harbour and the West Headland represent one inseparable natural area, which is without doubt the most widely sought natural experience in town.

In the summer of 2013, the headland was seriously degraded as a natural area as a direct result of the dredging of the harbour. In fact, as early as April 2013 the natural aspect of the headland and its natural habitat – its “green infrastructure” – had finally been pretty well destroyed. Habitat for plants, birds and butterflies was unnecessarily ruined by dredging sludge and its subsequent removal by heavy equipment. Numbers of plant, bird and butterfly species plummeted.

Much worse is obviously to come if a deep channel is to be cleared along the east side of the headland. It is senseless to destroy the headland as a result of excessive changes to the harbour.

Any degradation of the west side of the harbour and the West Headland destroys plant habitat and reduces the rich bio-diversity of the area.

**BUTTERFLIES.** A selection of the more common ones:

- Black Swallowtail
- Tiger Swallowtail sp.
- Giant Swallowtail
- Cabbage White
- Clouded Sulphur
- Orange Sulphur
- Spring Azure
- Summer Azure
- Mourning Cloak
- Red Admiral
- American Lady sp.
- Question Mark
- Common ringlet
- Buckeye
- Monarch
- Wild Indigo Duskywing