



OFO CODE OF ETHICS

As the number of birders increases, we must all make every effort to act in a positive and responsible way. We must also convey a responsible image to non-birders who may be affected by our activities. Most people appreciate birds but this appreciation can be quickly destroyed by the irresponsible actions of a handful of birders. In the past a code of ethics was not considered necessary, but times have changed and as more and more pressure is put on our environment it is essential to do whatever we can to lead by example. Each of us must show consideration to other birders, landowners, habitat, birds and other wildlife at all times. We are ambassadors of birding and our actions today will reflect the respect we receive in the future.

- **The welfare of the birds *must* come first.** Whatever your interest, from scientific study to listing, always consider the impact of your
- activity on the bird. Respect bird protection laws. We are all responsible to ensure we abide by them at all times.
- **Habitat protection.** Habitat is vital for the existence of birds and we must ensure that our activities cause minimum damage to our environment. Use trails to avoid trampling vegetation.
- **Keep disturbance to a minimum.** Although some birds can tolerate human activity, this varies from species to species and from season to season. Use common sense and extreme caution around nests. Migrants may be tired and hungry and should not be kept from resting or feeding. When photographing birds, study their reaction and if they become agitated, back off. Avoid the use of flash photography on owls. Tape recordings and similar methods of attracting birds may cause stress for territorial birds. They should be used sparingly and avoided in heavily birded areas. Do not deliberately flush birds. Patience is often rewarded.
- **Rare breeding birds.** If you discover a rare breeding bird, do not feel under any obligation to report your find to other birders. Record the details of your discovery. You may wish to file the nest with the Ontario Nest Records Scheme at the Royal Ontario Museum. Avoid visiting known sites of rare breeding birds unless they can be viewed from a distance without disturbance.
- **Rare birds.** Rare migrants or vagrants are the species most sought after by birders. If you discover a rarity, consider the circumstances carefully before releasing the information. You must take responsibility for the decision to release the find. You should consider whether an influx of birders will disturb the bird, people or other species in the area; whether habitat will be damaged; and where people will park. Inform the landowner of the find, explain what may happen and obtain permission to tell other birders. Ask the landowner for a list of dos and don'ts, for example, where birders may stand to get a good view and what restrictions there may be on time of day. Also ask which areas are off limit. If you decide to release the news, give precise directions and instructions. If possible include a phone number. At all times make as little noise as possible. Remember, most non-birders will be surprised by the number of visitors who wish to see a rare bird.
- **Respect the rights of landowners and occupiers of land.** Before entering an area, be aware of the rules about access such as by-laws of Conservation Authorities, National and Provincial Parks, and Regional Authorities. Many landowners and authorities allow birders access to areas normally off limits. Always act in a responsible way and if you are asked to leave, do so immediately. Do not block gateways or cause damage to fences, and leave gates as you find them. Do not obstruct people who may be working in these areas.
- **Have proper consideration for other birders.** When telephoning for information, do so at reasonable hours of the day. Try not to disrupt other birders' activities or scare the birds they are watching. Many other people enjoy the outdoors; do not interfere with their activities. Be polite to other birders and helpful to beginners. If you see people obviously disturbing birds or significantly damaging habitat, explain to them the effect of their actions but be courteous, they may not be aware of the effect they are having.
- **Increase our knowledge about birds.** Keep notes of your sightings and send them to area compilers. Send rare bird reports to the Secretary, Ontario Bird Records Committee.
- **When birding in other countries, provinces or regions.** Find out if there is a local code of ethics or any special rules that should be respected.

This Code of Ethics was written by the OFO Executive and adopted as policy in June, 1994. We hope that all OFO members endorse this code. We welcome your input.