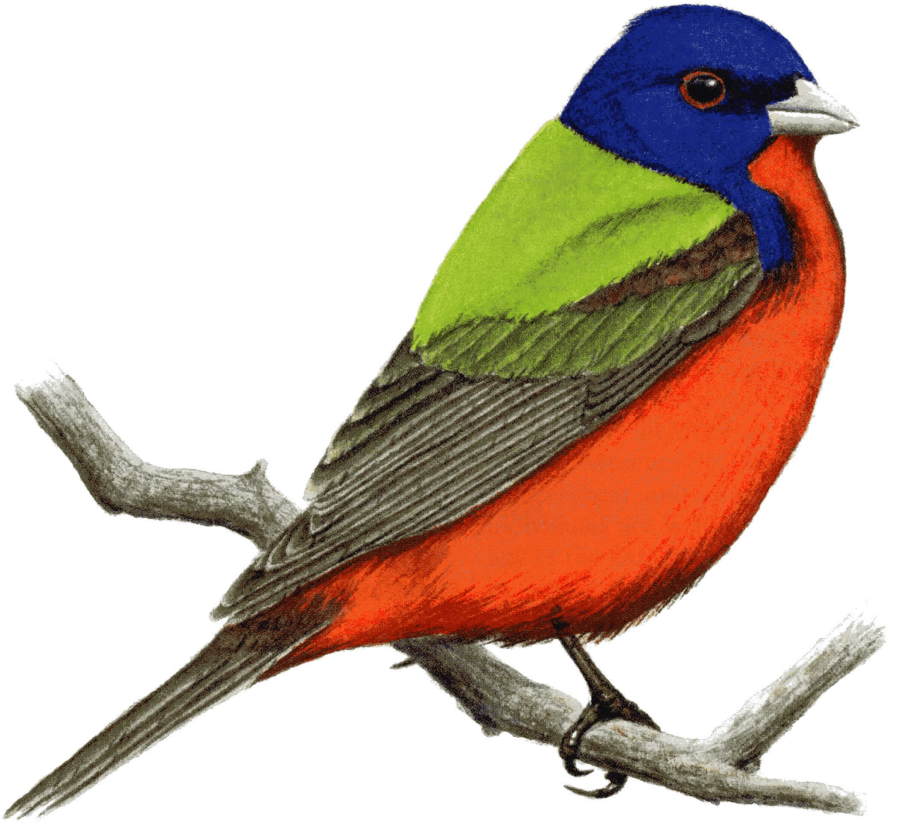
ONTARIO BIRDS



Journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists
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Ontario Field Ornithologists

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Ontario Field Ornithologists is an organization dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It formed in 1982 to unify the ever-growing numbers of field ornithologists (birders/birdwatchers) across the province, and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among its members. The Ontario Field Ornithologists officially oversees the activities of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC), publishes a newsletter (*OFO News*) and a journal (*Ontario Birds*), operates a bird sightings listserve (ONTBIRDS, coordinated by Mike Street), hosts field trips throughout Ontario, and holds an Annual General Meeting in the autumn.

All persons interested in bird study, regardless of their level of expertise, are invited to become members of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Membership rates can be obtained from the address below. All members receive *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News*. Please send membership enquiries to: **Ontario Field Ornithologists, Box 455, Station R, Toronto, Ontario M4G 4E1**

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Ontario Birds

The aim of *Ontario Birds* is to provide a vehicle for documentation of the birds of Ontario. We encourage the submission of full length articles and short notes on the status, distribution, identification, and behaviour of birds in Ontario, as well as location guides to significant Ontario birdwatching areas, book reviews, and similar material of interest on Ontario birds.

Material submitted for publication should be on computer disk, or typewritten (double-spaced). Please follow the style of this issue of *Ontario Birds*. All submissions are subject to review and editing. Submit items for publication to the Editors at the address noted above.

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by *Peter Lorimer*

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Articles

Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1999

Kayo J. Roy

Introduction

This is the 18th Annual Report of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). It covers the activities of the OBRC during 1999 when the Committee received and reviewed 156 records of species on the provincial Review List. Of this total, 74% of the submissions were accepted, and five records that required additional data or a more detailed review were referred to the 2000 Committee. The reports were sent in by a wide range of birders, both expert and novice, who for the most part submitted well written and thorough accounts, often including field notes and sketches. Photographs or video tapes were also included with a substantial number of submitted reports.

The members of the 1999 Committee were: Margaret Bain, Robert Curry (Chair), Robert Dobos, Kevin McLaughlin, Doug McRae, Ron Pittaway, Kayo Roy (non-voting Secretary), and Ron Tozer. Ross James served as Museum Liaison (non-voting) to the OBRC in 1999. Mark Peck assumes the duties of Museum Liaison for 2000.

The official Ontario Bird Checklist increased by one species this year with the addition of Heermann's Gull, raising the provincial total to 473. Incredibly, this bird was found along the Toronto waterfront where it still remains as this report is being published. Another exceptional observation was a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch at Long Point Tip, the first documented for southern Ontario. No new breeding species for the province were added in 1999.

All the records received by the OBRC are archived at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto. Researchers and other interested individuals are welcome to examine any of the filed reports at the ROM, by appointment only. Please write Mark Peck, Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Biology, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2C6, E-mail: markp@rom.on.ca, or telephone 416-586-5523.

Listing of Records

The format of this report follows that used in last year's annual report (Dobos 1999). Accepted records are listed by their English and scientific

names following the Seventh Edition of the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list (AOU 1998). Following the species names, a binomial numbering system appears. The first number indicates the total number of accepted records (by the OBRC) prior to 1 January 1982 (the formation date of the OBRC); and the second is the total number of accepted records from 1982 to 1999 (including those listed in this report). An asterisk in place of the first number indicates that documentation was not required for the occurrence of that species prior to 1982. Date(s) of occurrence, number of birds, sex, plumage, and location(s) are provided when known. Counties, districts, and regional municipalities are shown in italics. The plumage terminology used here follows the Humphrey and Parkes (1959) system as approved at the 11 September 1999 OBRC Policy Meeting. See Pittaway (2000) for a detailed explanation of plumage and molt terminology. The names of all contributors of documentation are listed. Those contributors who were known to be the finders of the bird are underlined. Others present when the bird was found, but who did not submit a report, are listed when known.

The Committee makes every effort to verify documented information prior to accepting and publishing a record. It is, however, still possible that some inaccuracies occur. We would clearly welcome a written communication to the Secretary from anyone with any pertinent information that would correct or strengthen any record. There may be occasions where dates or other listed details in a record differ from those quoted in other published sources. We have used the most accurate information that was available to us.

All records that were not accepted because of uncertain identification or origin are listed separately. Contributors of all "not accepted" reports receive a letter from the Chair explaining the reasons for the decision, along with copies of the comments of the voting members. These reports are also kept on permanent file at the ROM. A "not accepted" report can be reconsidered by the OBRC if new evidence is submitted to the Committee for review.

Changes to the Review List

At the OBRC Annual Meeting in March 2000, the Committee removed American Avocet from the southern Ontario Review List. The criterion used for delisting was 25 or more published records in southern Ontario during a five year period. American Avocet remains on the Review List for northern Ontario.

Acknowledgements

The OBRC would like to extend their appreciation to the many observers who took the time to submit documentation, photographs, sketches, and videos of their observations of rare birds in 1999. We are thankful to the following people who assisted in many ways to provide the Committee with additional

data, photographs, videos and other material evidence: Bob Andrle, Sam Barone, Al Boisvert, Allen Chartier, Barry Cherriere, Bob Curry, Willie D'Anna, Bruce Di Labio, Dave Elder, Chris Escott, Nick Escott, Dave Fidler, Jim Flynn, Michel Gosselin, Tom Hince, Phill Holder, Jean Iron, Ed Johns, Paul Lehman, Jon McCracken, Martin McNicholl, Mike Morgante, Karl Overman, Mark Peck, Alf Rider, Ron Ridout, Roy Smith, Michael Tate, Ron Weir, Jul Wojnowski, Alan Wormington and Wilf Yusek.

I wish to extend a very sincere thank you to Mike Street for allowing me full access to ONTBIRDS (the listserve sponsored by the Ontario Field Ornithologists) on matters dealing with the OBRC. This forum for channelling data, especially dates and places, has been invaluable in maintaining accurate records, and many rare bird reports were submitted to the OBRC because of direct appeals through ONTBIRDS.

To the 1999 OBRC members, I thank you for your assistance and cooperation. Your confidence and support are very much appreciated. I am grateful to Rob Dobos, the previous Secretary, for his very considerable assistance as I assumed the duties of Secretary.

Figure 1: First basic Ross's Gull at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*, on 17-18 May 1999. Photo by *Alan Wormington*.

Figure 2: Juvenal Piping Plover at Van Wagners Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth,* from 12 to 16 September 1999. Photo by *Wilf Yusek.*

Figure 3: Basic Lewis's Woodpecker at Hallecks, *Leeds and Grenville,* from 1 to 7 October 1999. Photo by *Albert Boisvert.*

Figure 4: Juvenal Cave Swallow captured and banded at Long Point Tip on 4 November 1999. Photo by *Christine Jamieson.*

Figure 5: First alternate Kirtland's Warbler at Forest, *Lambton*, on 9-10 June 1999. Photo by *Alfred H. Rider.*

Figure 6: First alternate male Bullock's Oriole at Willowdale, *Toronto*, from 1 to 18 April 1980. Photo by *Donald R. Gunn.*

Figure 7: First basic male Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, captured and banded, at Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk*, from 8 to 10 July 1999. Photo by *Leo Deloyde.*

Accepted Records

Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis* (0/13)

1999 - one, alternate, 20 June, Lake-of-the-Woods (Windy Bay), *Rainy River* (David H. Elder, also found by Karen Mikolieu).
- one, basic, 27 November, Niagara-on-the-Lake (McFarlane Point), *Niagara* (Donald Ford, also found by John Sparling, Eric Braaten).

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* (2/20)

1998 - two, juvenal, 14 November - 29 December, Van Wagners Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth*, and Hamilton/Burlington Beachstrip, *Hamilton-Wentworth/Halton* (one bird 14-18 November and 3-29 December, two birds 28 November - 1 December), Toronto (Sunnyside Beach), *Toronto* (one bird 17 November), and Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Niagara* (one bird 27 December) (Mark Chojnacki, Linda J. Nuttall, Robert K. Yukich, Barry Cherriere, Robert Z. Dobos) - photo on file.

The pattern continues as the majority of gannets found on the Great Lakes are juvenal birds, consistently appearing in late fall or early winter (Wormington 1985).

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (1/6)

1999 - one, definitive basic, 10-11 January, Port Credit Harbour, *Peel* (Donald E. Perks, Ann White, also found by John Lamey, Jerry H. Guild).
- one, definitive alternate, 25 April, Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area, *Prince Edward* (Ronald D. Weir).

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* (7/34)

1999 - one, juvenal, 14-16 August, Holiday Beach Conservation Area, *Essex* (Paul D. Pratt, Ann White, also found by Elaine Sinnott).
- one, definitive basic, 17 August, Mississauga, *Peel* (Nicholle Smith).
- one, juvenal, 7 November, Port Rowan, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Norman C. Murr, Stanley J. Bajurny).

1998 - one, juvenal, 9 August, Ottawa, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Michael Tate, found by Gordon McLean).

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor* (2/22)

1999 - one, definitive alternate, 18 May, Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma* (Robert J.C. Elliott, also found by Mary Elliott).
- one, definitive alternate, 30-31 May, Presqu'ile Provincial Park, *Northumberland* (Martha Robinson, also found by William Gilmore, Margaret Tourney).

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea* (5/26)

1999 - one, first alternate, 13-24 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Blake A. Mann, Sandra Eadie, Mark Chojnacki) - photos and video on file.
- one, definitive alternate, 25 May, Ottawa (Mud Lake), *Ottawa-Carleton* (Jean-Pierre Cheff).

The Ottawa bird is only the second accepted record for the area. The first also was a definitive alternate, at Rockcliffe Park in April of 1970 (Wormington 1986).

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* (0/2)

1998 - one, 27 June, Pelee Island (Scudder), *Essex* (Ethan J. Meleg, also found by David Hodare).

This observation of the bird in flight directly over the marina at Pelee Island is only the second accepted record for Ontario. The first was at Turkey Point Marsh, *Haldimand-Norfolk*, on 12-14 and 29-30 October 1991 (Bain 1992). Three other records for Ontario listed by James (1991) have not yet been considered by the OBRC.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (2/28)

1999 - two, first basic, 10 October, Kohler, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Gerald Chapple, Kenny Burrell, Robert Curry, also found by Nina Chapple).

Ibis species *Plegadis* sp. (3/28)

1999 - one, 12 September, Presqu'ile Provincial Park, *Northumberland* (Richard Pathak).
- one, 28 November, Long Point (Causeway), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Mark Chojnacki, also found by Linda J. Nuttall) - video on file.

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus* (2/23)

1999 - one, 25 April and 2 May, Kendal (Ganaraska Forest Centre), *Durham* (25 April), and Wesleyville, *Northumberland* (2 May) (Rayfield Pye, Margaret J.C. Bain, also found by Ralph Page).
- one, 28-29 April, Point Pelee National Park and Sturgeon Creek (29 April), *Essex* (Alan Wormington, also found by Henrietta T. O'Neill) - photos on file.
- two, basic, 20-21 May, Long Point Provincial Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Barry D. Jones, John L. Olmsted, Jul K. Wojnowski).
- one, 3 November, Ancaster (Dundas Valley Conservation Area), *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Bruce W. Duncan, also found by Anthony Horvat).

1998 - one, 9-11 November, Caledonia, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Robert Z. Dobos, found by James Cram, Margaret Cram).

1999 was a banner year for this species, with four accepted records.

Ross's Goose *Chen rossii* South Only (0/25)

1999 - one, first basic, white morph, 16 February - 14 March, Dundas, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (16 February), Oakville, *Halton* (20 February), Bronte Harbour, *Halton* (28 February), and Mississauga, *Peel* (10-14 March) (Gavin Edmonstone, Barry Cherriere, found by Roy Hough) - photo on file.
- one, white morph, 27 February, La Salle, *Essex* (David Boyce).
- one, white morph, 2-7 April, Townsend (Sewage Lagoon), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Barry D. Jones, Norman C. Murr).
- one, definitive basic, white morph, 30 October, Winchester (Sewage Lagoon), *Stormont Dundas & Glengarry* (Robert A. Bracken, Christina Lewis, also found by Colin Rogers).
- one, definitive basic, white morph, 5 November - 3 December, Toronto (Humber Bay Park East), *Toronto* (Craig S.A. McLauchlan, Roy B.H. Smith, William J. Crins, Kayo J. Roy, found by Leon Schlichter) - photos on file.

From 1991 to 1998, there were 20 accepted records in Ontario (Dobos 1999). The five records above indicate that this species continues to increase in southern Ontario.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* (1/23)

1999 - one, definitive alternate, 17-27 January, Fort Erie, *Niagara* (Michael M. Morgante, Kayo J. Roy, also found by Donald Mills, Rick Young).

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* South Only (2/13)

1999 - one. first basic, female, 1-24 December, Stoney Creek, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Robert Curry, also found by John L. Olmsted).

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* North Only (0/16)

1998 - two, females, 8-9 November, Thunder Bay (Bare Point), *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott) - photos on file.

Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis* (5/18)

1999 - one, first basic, 19 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).
- one, definitive basic, 19 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).
- one, first basic, 5 June, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).
- one, first basic, 13 June, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).

The 13 June record is the latest accepted date for Ontario.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni* (8/34)

1999 - one, juvenal, 3 October, Whitby (Cranberry Marsh), *Durham* (Michael Boudreau, David Gascoigne, also found by Colleen Boudreau, Martin Bence, David Shannon).
- one, juvenal, 6 October, Seacliff, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, Kevin A. McLaughlin).
- one, definitive basic, 6 October, Seacliff, *Essex* (Kevin A. McLaughlin, Alan Wormington).
- one, juvenal, 6 October, Seacliff, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, Kevin A. McLaughlin).
- one, definitive basic, dark morph, 11 October, Port Stanley (Hawk Cliff), *Elgin* (Barry Cherriere, also found by Thomas Bolohan, David Brown, Su Ross).

1998 - one, 22 October, Seacliff, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).

1997 - one, juvenal, light morph, (banded), 17 October, Malden Centre (Holiday Beach Conservation Area), *Essex* (Robert Pettit, banded by John St. Louis) - photos on file.

1996 - one, juvenal, male, (banded), 13 September, Malden Centre (Holiday Beach Conservation Area), *Essex* (Robert Pettit, banded by Martin Wernaart) - photo on file.

Here is another species whose occurrence appears to be increasing, with five accepted records in 1999. The 1996 and 1997 records (Carpenter et al. 1999) represent the only banded records of this species for the province. It is interesting to note that of the 34 accepted records since the formation of the OBRC in 1982, 63% were September or October sightings.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* North Only (0/2)

1998 - one, definitive alternate, 26 May, Hilliardton, *Timiskaming* (Barry Kinch, also found by Bruce Murphy).

This is the second accepted record of this species for northern Ontario. The first was in September of 1990 when four birds, likely a family group, were observed in Hearst, *Cochrane* (Curry 1991).

Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* South Only (1/38)

1999 - one, juvenal, 12-16 September, Hamilton (Van Wagners Beach and Hamilton Beachstrip), *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Gerald Guenther, Vince Giuliani, Wilfred Yusek, Sam Barone) - photos on file.

This bird had two colour bands on the right leg, yellow over red. It had been banded at Michigan's Whitefish Point (Bain and Shanahan 1999b).

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana* (7/58)

1999 - five, (three male, two female), 18 May, Bronte Harbour, *Halton* (John L. Olmsted, also found by Richard G. Snider).
- one, basic, male, 20-25 August, Aylmer Wildlife Management Area, *Elgin* (David A. Martin).
- one, basic, male, 29 August - 26 September, Ajax (Corner Marsh), *Durham* (David Worthington, William J. Crins).

1998 - one, basic, female, 13-17 November, Hamilton Harbour (Windermere Basin), *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Robert Z. Dobos, found by Robert Henry).
- two, basic (one male, one female), 26 November - 6 December, Hamilton Harbour (Windermere Basin), *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Barry Cherriere, Alan Wormington) - photos on file.

Documentation for sightings of this species in southern Ontario is not required after 31 December 1999. The species remains on the Review List for northern Ontario.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* (0/19)

1999 - one, first basic/first alternate, 6 June, Amherstview (Sewage Lagoon), *Lennox & Addington* (Ronald D. Weir, Paul Mackenzie, found by Kenneth F. Edwards) - photo on file.

A rare Ontario occurrence in June. The species breeds on the Arctic tundra of northern Siberia and winters widely in Africa, southern Asia and Australia (Paulson 1993).

Heermann's Gull *Larus heermanni* (0/1)

1999/00 - one, first basic/first alternate, 14 November 1999 - August 2000 (at least), Toronto Harbour, *Toronto*, (14 November - August at least, not present continuously), Hamilton Harbour (LaSalle Park), *Hamilton-Wentworth/Halton* (23 February and 6 March), Etobicoke (Humber Bay Park), *Toronto* (25-30 March), and Bronte Harbour, *Halton* (16 April) (Bruce E. Massey, Robert K. Yukich, Craig S.A. McLauchlan, Roy B.H. Smith, Raymond Geras, Edmund D. Johns, Kayo J. Roy, Linda J. Nuttall, Mark Chojnacki, Christopher J. Escott) - video and photos on file.

This remarkable first record for Ontario is also the second and most easterly record for North America. The first record was that of a bird observed in Michigan and Ohio from August 1979 to November 1981. These dates, as well as the full details of this Ontario sighting, were fully described by Yukich (2000). The bird is still being observed in the Toronto Harbour area as this report is being published.

Mew Gull *Larus canus* (3/13)

1999 - one, definitive basic, 26 January, Cobourg Harbour, *Northumberland* (Roger Frost).

California Gull *Larus californicus* (0/26)

1999/00 - one, definitive basic, 7 November 1999 - 3 January 2000, Queenston, *Niagara* (Drew J. Campbell, Gordon Bellerby, found by Willie D'Anna).
- one, definitive basic, 21 November 1999 - 16 January 2000, Niagara Falls, *Niagara* (Willie D'Anna, Kayo J. Roy, Christopher J. Escott, also found by Betsy Potter, Dean DiTommaso, Sharon Skelly) - video on file.
- one, third basic, 26 December 1999 - 6 January 2000, Queenston, *Niagara* (Willie D'Anna, Marcya Foster, also found by Donald Powers, Michael Powers).

1999 - one, definitive basic, 19 December, St. Catharines (Municipal Beach, Port Weller), *Niagara* (Kevin A. McLaughlin, Robert Z. Dobos, also found by George M. Naylor, Robert Waldhuber).

1998 - one, definitive basic, 6-19 December, Niagara Falls (Chippawa), *Niagara* (Betsy Potter, Michael M. Morgante, Jean Iron, Winnie Yung, also found by Willie D'Anna, William Lee, Walton Sabin).

This species has become an annual vagrant to the Niagara River area during late fall and early winter (Dobos 1998). It is probable that some are returning from visits in previous years. Some observers have indicated seeing a difference in mantle colour among the adult California Gulls along the river. Jehl (1987) described a smaller, darker-mantled race (*L. c. californicus*) and a larger, lighter-mantled race (*L. c. albertaensis*). Most birds seen in Ontario match *albertaensis* in size and mantle shade. Birders should pay special attention to the mantle colour of adult California Gulls observed in the province.

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus* (0/2)

1999 - one, definitive basic, 2-9 January, Toronto (Sunnyside Beach), *Toronto* (Robert K. Yukich, Juha Varrela, Glenn Coady) - photos on file.

Well documented reports with diagnostic photographs clearly confirm this identification of the bird observed. This is the second record for the province, the first being a definitive basic in Niagara Falls, *Niagara*, from 24 November to 29 December 1992 (Bain 1993). Readers are directed elsewhere in this issue for details of this observation (Yukich and Varella 2000).

Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* (0/7)

1999 - one, first basic, 17-18 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Phil Bristow, Alan Wormington, Craig S.A. McLauchlan, also found by M.C. Powell, J.P. Martin, R.M. Andrews, L. Cook).

Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus* (2/3)

1999 - one, basic, 14 December, Burlington, *Halton* (Robert Curry).

1998 - one, basic, 14 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).

Chuck-will's-widow *Caprimulgus carolinensis* (*/9)

1999 - one, female, 14 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Blake A. Mann).

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus* (2/10)

1999 - one, male 7 May, Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma* (Robert Knudsen, also found by Joanne Knudsen).

This is the first accepted spring record for Ontario.

Lewis's Woodpecker *Melanerpes lewis* (1/2)

1999 - one, basic, 1-7 October, Hallecks, *Leeds and Grenville* (Bruce Di Labio, Michael Tate, Florence Jerome, Edmund D. Johns, Albert Boisvert, found by Valerie Woodhall, Les Woodhall) - photos on file.

This amazing find is the third accepted record for Ontario. The last southern Ontario report was the Point Pelee and Windsor observations, 29 years ago in the winter of 1972/73 (Dobos 1996), which were considered by the Committee to pertain to the same individual. The bird reported at Langtry's Bridge (near Emo), *Rainy River*, on 27 May 1934, and observed by Edgar Sullivan (Snyder 1938) is considered a valid record, but since no description exists, the observation cannot be reviewed by the OBRC. The only other report pertains to a bird photographed in May 1995 in Englehart (Dobos 1996).

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus* North Only (0/7)

1999 - one, basic, male, 30 January - 7 March, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (David H. Elder, also found by Mary C. Elder).

1998/99 - one, basic, male, 15 November 1998 - mid-June 1999, Arrow Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Frank Stewart, Nicholas G. Escott) - photo on file.

Ash-throated/Nutting's Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens/nuttingi* (0/1)

1999 - one, 24 November, Port Stanley (Hawk Cliff), *Elgin* (Glenn Barrett, also found by Pam Martin, Robert Hubert, Gary Hubert).

Although there are five previously accepted records of Ash-throated Flycatcher by the OBRC, this is the first time the Committee has assigned a reported Ash-throated to this species group. The two species are very similar in appearance, and likely only safely separated in the field by voice (Chris Benesh, pers. comm.). Since this bird at Port Stanley was not heard to vocalize, the Committee chose not to assign the bird to either species. The Committee recognizes the precedent this may create for reports of *Myiarchus* flycatchers in Ontario, and recommend that future documentation must convincingly eliminate one or the other of these two species. Identification criteria of Nutting's Flycatcher are referenced to Howell and Webb (1995), Kaufman (1998), and National Geographic Society (1999).

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus* North Only (0/7)

1997 - one, alternate, 21 May, Pass Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Annette van Niejenhuis, also found by Brian Moore) - photos on file.

Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus* (1/5)

1999 - two, basic, 19-24 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Robert Z. Dobos, Alan Wormington, Craig S.A. McLauchlan).

This is the sixth accepted record for Ontario, all spring sightings from Point Pelee National Park. It was reported that these two birds may have been a territorial pair, and that one bird may have lingered to at least 27 June (Bain and Shanahan 1999a). However, no documentation has been received by the OBRC for these later observations.

Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva* (0/20)

1999 - five to ten, 2 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Kevin A. McLaughlin).
- twenty-eight, 3 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Kevin A. McLaughlin).
- two (one juvenal, *pallida*, deceased), 3-4 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (James N. Flynn, Barry Cherriere, found by G. Thomas Hince, specimen collected by Robert Curry) - photos on file, specimen (skin) at ROM (#66156).
- three, 3 November, Erie Beach, *Chatham-Kent* (E. James Burk).
- four, (one juvenal, *pallida*, banded), 3-4 November, Long Point (Tip), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Ian Richards, Christine Jamieson) - photos on file.
- nine (different birds than above), 4 November, Long Point (Tip), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Ian Richards, Christine Jamieson).
- six, 4-6 November, Erieau, *Chatham-Kent* (Steve Charbonneau, Blake A. Mann) - photos on file.
- eight, 5 November, Long Point (Tip), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Ian Richards, Christine Jamieson).
- sixteen, 5 November, Long Point Provincial Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Gordon Bellerby, Donald Graham, Kayo J. Roy, Maggie Smiley).
- three, 5 November, Turkey Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Gerald Guenther).
- one, 5 November, Port Burwell, *Elgin* (David A. Martin, also found by Linda Wladarski).
- two, 5 November, Point Pelee National Park (Tip), *Essex* (Kevin A. McLaughlin, Michael Tate).
- two, 5 November, Point Pelee National Park (Sanctuary Pond), *Essex* (Michael Tate).
- one, 6 November, Highland Glen, *Lambton* (Karl Overman, also found by James Lesser, Randy Horvath, Georgia Reid) - photo on file.

An unprecedented number of Cave Swallows descended on Ontario along the north shore of Lake Erie between 2 and 11 November 1999. It is believed that between 90 and 125 individuals might have been involved in this phenomenal event in Ontario, and at least another 80 elsewhere in eastern North America (Curry and McLaughlin 2000). Although only two of the birds were determined to be of the southwestern subspecies *pallida*, it is very likely that all of the others were also *pallida* (Curry and McLaughlin 2000). A complex series of weather related factors may have caused the displacement of these birds from Texas to Ontario and eastern North America (Curry and McLaughlin 2000). The OBRC is still awaiting documentation for the following Cave Swallow reports: two birds, 3 November, at Sturgeon Creek, *Essex*; 25 birds, 4 November, at Long Point Provincial Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk*; one bird, 10 November, at Long Point (Tip), *Haldimand-Norfolk*; and one bird, 11 November, at Long Point Provincial Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk*.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea* North Only (2/11)

1999 - one, 25-26 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Audrey Heagy, also found by Jeremy Bryan, Fiona Walker, Marya Miller).

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (7/17)

1995 - one, first basic, female, 21-22 September, Sydenham, *Frontenac* (Kit Chubb) - specimen (skin) at ROM (#31104).

This record came to light in a letter written to *Ontario Insects* (Chubb 1996) about a bird feeding on insects on a residential lawn in Sydenham. One of the insects the bird ate, an earwig (Dermaptera), buried its claspers at the back of the bird's tongue, one on each side of the glottis, suffocating the bird instantly.

Mountain Bluebird *Sialia currucoides* (3/24)

1999/00 - one, basic, male, 25 November 1999 - 1 April 2000, Fisher's Glen, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Norman C. Murr, Stanley J. Bajurny, found by Sandra Maxwell).

1999 - one, basic, male, 25 April - 20 June, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (Roger M. Simms, David H. Elder).

- one, basic, female, 19 December, Wiarton, *Bruce* (Ethan J. Meleg, also found by Joseph W. Johnson).

The Rainy River bird was paired with a female Eastern Bluebird (*S. sialis*) indicating that hybrid breeding may have occurred.

Townsend's Solitaire *Myadestes townsendi* (4/31)

1999 - one, basic, 7-9 November, Pinery Provincial Park, *Lambton* (David A. Martin, also found by Linda Wladarski).

1998 - one, basic, 12-13 October, Caledon East, *Peel* (Simon Linington).

- one, basic, 19 October, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Wendy Jess).

- four, 11-13 December, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Jody Allair, also found by Jessie Antoniak, Tricia Newport, Karl Reimer).

1997/98 - one, basic, 24 December 1997 - 1 February 1998, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Ethan J. Meleg, found by Brian D. Rennie) - photos on file.

The four birds together at Thunder Cape is almost certainly the largest group ever seen in eastern North America.

Sage Thrasher *Oreoscoptes montanus* (3/6)

1998 - one, basic, 17 May, Pelee Island (Stone Road Alvar), *Essex* (John Hampshire, James E. McAllister).

Sprague's Pipit *Anthus spragueii* (0/3)

1998 - one, basic, male, 6-19 July, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (Roger M. Simms, Robert Curry, found by John Lamey).

This is the third accepted record for Ontario, all from the north. An additional record at Rainy River from 3 to 12 July 1980 (James 1991) has yet to be reviewed by the OBRC.

Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii* (7/16)

1999 - one, first alternate, male, 9-10 June, Forest, *Lambton* (Alfred H. Rider, found by Cynthia Cook) - photos on file.

Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana* (2/15)

1999/00 - one, basic, female, 18 December 1999 - 12 January 2000, Oakville (Shell Park), *Halton* (Gavin Edmonstone, Mark Cranford, Dan Olech) - photos on file.

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus* (2/10)

1999/00 - one, first basic, male, *arcticus/montanus*, 1 December 1999 - 19 January 2000, Whitby (Lynde Shores Conservation Area), *Durham* (Brian Henshaw, Christopher J. Escott, Frank Pinilla, also found by Ronald Huizer, David Shirley) - photos and video on file.

1979/80 - one, first basic, male, mid-November 1979 - 22 March 1980, Kenora, *Kenora* (M. Warnick) - photo on file.

The Kenora record surfaced in a letter written by Ken Gardner to W. Earl Godfrey on 29 May 1980 describing the details of this observation, and enclosing a photograph of the bird. The OBRC obtained copies from the Canadian Museum of Nature to document this sighting.

Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus* (6/44)

1998 - one, alternate, 8 May, Long Point (Tip), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Christine Jamieson).

1974 - one, 20-22 April, Hornepayne, *Cochrane* (John B. Miles) - photo on file.

Henslow's Sparrow *Ammodramus henslowii* (*/5)

1999 - two, alternate, 14-15 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Craig S.A. McLauchlan, also found by Norman C. Murr, Stanley J. Bajurny).

- one, alternate, 18 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Ian Moore, also found by Steven Huggins, David Barnes).
- one, alternate, male, 9-11 June, Gloucester, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Michael Tate, found by Paul Bisson).

1997 - one, alternate, 5 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (John Reaume, also found by Scott Fairbairn) - photo on file.

Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus* (1/2)

1998 - one, definitive alternate, male, 14-18 April, South Purgatory Point, *Bruce* (Terry Julian) - photo on file.

This third accepted record for Ontario has an interesting story behind it. The young finder had described a bird he saw, sketched and photographed to a local tour leader and asked, what were the chances that he had observed a Black-headed Grosbeak at his backyard feeder. The leader replied that his chances were little to none. The finder promised to send him his sketch and photo, and when they were received, the red-faced leader sent an apology to the finder for his snap judgment, and sent the documentation to the OBRC.

Blue Grosbeak *Guiraca caerulea* (8/38)

1999 - one, definitive alternate, male, 10 May, Sturgeon Creek, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, James N. Flynn, found by Carolyn J. Keefe) - photos on file.

- one, definitive alternate, male, 10 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Vicki McKay).
- one, female, 19 May, St. Williams (Backus Woods), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Jul K. Wojnowski, found by Rohan van Twest).

1981 - one, first alternate, male, 4-8 May, Etobicoke, *Toronto* (Joyce Given) - photos on file.

Lazuli Bunting *Passerina amoena* (1/3)

1979 - one, first alternate, male, 10-mid May, Pickle Lake, *Kenora* (Donald Koval, also found by Irvine M. Gardner, Marilyn Koval) - photo on file.

This observation, the first of four Ontario records, is an old record listed in James (1991). Details and photographs of this sighting were contained in a letter dated 29 May 1980 to W. Earl Godfrey. The OBRC was able to obtain copies of this documentation from the Canadian Museum of Nature.

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* (2/8)

1999 - one, definitive alternate, male, 6-11 May, Kenora, *Kenora* (Gerry Crandall).

Dickcissel *Spiza americana* North Only (1/11)

1999 - one, alternate, male, 28 May, New Liskeard, *Timiskaming* (Elsie Vokes, James Vokes) - photos on file.
- one, first basic, male, 19 September, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (David Okines, also found by Audrey Heagy).
- one, basic, female, 2 October, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Charles M. Francis).

Bullock's Oriole *Icterus bullockii* (3/2)

1980 - one, first alternate, male, 1-18 April, Willowdale, *Toronto* (Robert Curry, Donald R. Gunn, found by M.A. Biro) - photos on file.

Great-tailed/Boat-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus/major* (0/1)

1999 - one, basic, female, 29 August, Honey Harbour (Burnt Island), *Muskoka* (Richard G. Miller).

This is the first reported Great-tailed Grackle record which the Committee has placed into this species grouping. There are two previous accepted records of Great-tailed Grackle, but none of Boat-tailed Grackle. The Committee chose not to assign this report to either species since it did not adequately separate the two species, such as no details of vocalization.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch *Leucosticte tephrocotis* (1/7)

1999 - one, first basic, male, *littoralis* group, 8-10 July, Long Point (Tip), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Michael Bradstreet, Jane Bowles, Leo Deloyde) - photos on file.

This remarkable record, the first documented for southern Ontario, involved a bird that was banded and photographed by the Long Point Bird Observatory.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (0/2)

1999 - one, basic, 20 May, Sturgeon Creek, *Essex* (Paul D. Pratt).

A second record for Ontario of this bird whose range is expanding in North America (Lang 1992).

Not Accepted Records

Identification Uncertain

The documentation submitted for the following reports was for the most part found to be inadequate to unequivocally identify the species claimed. Any of these reports may be re-submitted, should additional documentation become available.

1999
- Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), one, 17 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- Little Blue Heron, one, 4 May, Staples, *Essex*.
- Little Blue Heron, one, 8 May, Toronto (Leslie Street Spit), *Toronto*.
- Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, one, 23 May, Wheatley Harbour, *Essex*.
- Black Vulture, two, 29 April, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- Black Vulture, one, 23 July, Trafalgar, *Halton*.
- Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), one, 12 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*), one, 3 May, Rock Chapel, *Hamilton-Wentworth*.
- Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*), one, 13 March, Amherst Island (Stella), *Lennox and Addington*.
- Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), one, 29 August, Thedford, *Lambton*.
- Northern "Red-shafted" Flicker (*Colaptes auratus cafer*), one, 30 January, Toronto (Lambton Woods), *Toronto*.
- Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*), 5 May, Comber (Big "O" Woods Conservation Area), *Essex*.
- Northern Wheatear, one, 8 and 12 January, Sharbot Lake, *Frontenac*.
- Sprague's Pipit, one, 22 and 25 September, Windsor, *Essex*.
- Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*), one, 12 May, Prince Edward Point, *Prince Edward*.
- Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*), one, 12 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- MacGillivray's Warbler (*Oporornis tolmiei*), one, 10 May, Wheatley Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent*.
- Western Tanager, one 18 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- Spotted Towhee, one, 12 July, Kingston (Lemoine Point), *Frontenac*.
- Lark Sparrow, one, 15 October, Rock Chapel, *Hamilton-Wentworth*.
- Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*), one, 10 October, Cobourg, *Northumberland*.
- Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*), one, 17 March, Melancthon, *Dufferin*.
- Black-headed Grosbeak, one, 14 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- Black-headed Grosbeak, one, 15 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- Blue Grosbeak, one, 12 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- Blue Grosbeak, one, 13 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.

1998
- Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*), ten, 12 October, Iron Bridge, *Algoma*.
- Bewick's Wren, (*Thryomanes bewickii*), one, 19 September, Windsor, *Essex*.
- "Pink-sided" Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*), one, 5 December, Windsor, *Essex*.
- Black-headed Grosbeak, one, 10-mid May, Sheshegwaning, *Manitoulin* - photos on file.

1997
- Bewick's Wren, one, 21 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.

The above record was originally reviewed and accepted by the 1997 Committee (Dobos 1998). Upon review of new information concerning the observation, the 1999 Committee determined that the documentation submitted did not conclusively support the identification stated in the report.

- Henslow's Sparrow, one, 4 May, Kirkfield (Carden Alvar), *Victoria.*
- Bullock's Oriole, one, 16 August, Toronto (Leslie Street Spit), *Toronto.*

1995 - Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, one, 21 September, Hamilton (Van Wagners Beach), *Hamilton-Wentworth.*

1994 - Henslow's Sparrow, one, 22 May, Raglan (Purple Woods Conservation Area), *Durham.*

1993 - Henslow's Sparrow, one, 9 June, Haltonville, *Halton.*

1984 - Bewick's Wren, one, 28 April, Long Point Provincial Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk.*

1981 - Bullock's Oriole, one, 31 October, Peterborough, *Peterborough.*

The above record was originally reviewed and accepted by the 1996 Committee (Dobos 1997). In light of new information related to identification criteria (Lee and Birch 1998, Jaramillo and Burke 1999), all records of female and basic plumaged Bullock's Orioles were re-reviewed by the 1999 Committee. After recirculation and considerable discussion, the acceptance of the above report was overturned. The report listed below was originally considered by the 1997 Committee, which deferred a decision pending availability of the information mentioned above (Dobos 1998).

1975 - Bullock's Oriole, one, 24 October, Cape Chin, *Bruce.*

Not Accepted Records

Identification Accepted, Origin Questionable

Records in this category are those considered by the Committee to be likely escaped birds or birds released from captivity. However, as with all submissions to the OBRC, such records may be reviewed at any time should new information arise suggesting a wild origin.

1999 - Ferruginous Hawk, one, juvenal, 3 April - 21 May, Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area, *Prince Edward* (Ronald D. Weir, Joel H. Ellis, Craig S.A. McLauchlan, Christopher J. Escott).

The identity of this bird was clearly not in doubt, but its origin was felt to be questionable. The fact that the species is a short distance migrant and does not have a clear pattern of vagrancy in the east, and the extended length of time the bird remained in the area, caused members to be cautious and reject the report based on origin. An additional factor the members had to thoughtfully consider was that this species is kept in captivity by falconers.

Updates/Corrections to Previous OBRC Reports

1998 Report (Ontario Birds 17: 62-83)

- under Corrections, the correction relating to a Rufous Hummingbird record listed under "1991 Report (Ontario Birds 10: 43-63)" should have read "1992 Report (Ontario Birds 11: 46-63)".

1994 Report (Ontario Birds 13: 46-65)

- under Accepted Records, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, 1993, add "Kayo J. Roy" as a contributor.

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Yukich, B. and J. Varella 2000. Slaty-backed Gull at Toronto. Ontario Birds 18: 73-77

Figure 8: Ontario Bird Records Committee members for 1999: Left to right: Rob Dobos, Ron Pittaway, Kevin McLaughlin, Margaret Bain, Bob Curry, Kayo Roy, Ron Tozer (Doug McRae, absent). Photo by *Mark Peck.*

Kayo J. Roy, 13 Kinsman Court, Fonthill, Ontario L0S 1E3

Slaty-backed Gull at Toronto

Bob Yukich and Juha Varella

The Discovery

On 2 January 1999, I (BY) was birding the Toronto waterfront with Juha Varrela, a friend from Finland who was visiting over the holidays. It was a cold, cloudy day (-11°C), with a few flurries and a raw northeast wind. We were just finishing up a morning's birding and were looking over the gulls and waterfowl at Sunnyside before our return home. At about 1200h, as we approached from the west, we saw a small group of gulls sitting on the ice inside the breakwater between the foot of Ellis Avenue and Colborne Lodge Drive. While they were still in the distance, I raised my binoculars to give them a quick scan before approaching any closer. The majority appeared to be Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*), but I immediately noticed a dark-backed gull among them which I thought was a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*) because it had a lot of dark streaking on the head. I pointed it out to Juha, and we continued toward it until we were almost opposite the spot where the gull rested.

We were now fairly close to the bird and, looking through my binoculars, I could see it sitting on the ice, its legs hidden from view. It appeared to be in definitive basic (adult winter) plumage. However, the mantle looked too dark and the smudge around the eye did not seem dark enough for the *graellsii* race of Lesser Black-backed Gull. I began to think that it was just a Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*), but that was not right either, not with all the dusky streaking on the head. Next I thought of the *intermedius* race of Lesser Black-backed Gull. The mantle colour was perfect for it. But, this gull looked too large, about the same size as nearby Herring Gulls, and the overall structure, especially the head and bill, was not right for any race of Lesser Black-backed Gull. Juha was very familiar with all of those races from Europe, and especially from Finland. He also had experience with many of the darker Old World races of Herring Gull, but this bird did not match anything that he was familiar with.

I began to think that it might be a hybrid. Whatever it was, it was good! I asked Juha if he had his camera. He said that he did, and ran to his van to get it. Meanwhile, I started studying the bird through my scope (60 mm Kowa with ED glass and a 27x eyepiece), from a distance of 30 to 40 m. I now began to consider Slaty-backed Gull (*L. schistisagus*) after noticing that this bird had quite a large white tertial crescent. I also realized that the chances of this species showing up here were quite remote. Juha returned with his camera (35 mm, hand held with a 300 mm

lens and fast film). Positioning himself as close to the shoreline as possible and opposite the bird, he began taking photographs. I continued studying the bird. Then the gull stood up, revealing bright pink legs — a promising sign.

After noting as much as I could on the bird, I was hoping to see it fly so that we could see whether it had the diagnostic "string of pearls" pattern of white spots that Slaty-backed Gull shows on the outer primaries. At one point, several of the gulls, including our dark-backed bird, flew up briefly and landed almost immediately. Juha was still clicking but was not sure whether he had gotten a good flight shot or not. It happened so quickly that I really didn't see much more on the bird. Finally, several of the gulls flew off, but our mystery bird remained with a few Herring Gulls. A short time later, after he had taken about 30 exposures, Juha began walking back towards me. Suddenly our gull flew up and eastward. Juha did not have time to get another shot, and I tried in vain to see the wingtip pattern as it moved away from us. After flying a short distance, it turned and began coming back toward us. I was hoping that it would fly over our heads so that we could see the pattern on the underside of the primaries, but it veered northward and continued flying over the Gardiner Expressway and High Park, all the while gaining altitude. Finally it disappeared from our view. Total observation time had been about 20 to 25 minutes.

When it first flew, I had a micro-second view of the underside of the primaries. I sensed they might have had the pattern I was looking for, but I could not be sure. In flight, it had a slightly heavy bearing, and the wings did not appear particularly long. Not much else was noted. We then continued walking a short distance in an eastward direction, checking out the various ducks and gulls. After another 15 minutes or so had passed, we returned home, but first we checked the gulls sitting on the ice at the south end of Grenadier Pond. Our bird was not there.

One week later, on 9 January, Glenn Coady and Patrick Stepien-Scanlon saw what they believed to be the same gull farther to the east on the ice inside the breakwater opposite the Boulevard Club. Their description fit the bird that we saw. Patrick also had a paler mantled Lesser Black-backed Gull nearby to compare with. Unfortunately, the gull in question was on private property with no public access and both observers had to content themselves with somewhat distant views. They watched the gull fly out over the lake at dusk, and it was not reported again.

Juha was returning to Finland in a couple of days after our sighting and would not have time to get his slides developed here. We agreed that once he had them developed in Finland he would send me duplicates of most of them. We still were not sure whether he had captured anything on film that we had not already seen in the field.

After the slides were developed in Finland, Juha e-mailed me saying that he had one good flight shot of the upper wing. When he compared it with photographs of known Slaty-backed Gulls, the primary pattern matched perfectly. Everything else had matched up also. We were pretty excited!

About a month after having seen the bird, I received the slides. I looked at them carefully and compared them with various photographs of Slaty-backed Gulls. I also referred to *The Large Gulls of North America* video narrated by Jon Dunn, which I found especially helpful. I felt that the photographs of our bird matched Slaty-backed Gull in every way. Subsequently, the Ontario Bird Records Committee accepted our reports as confirming the second record of Slaty-backed Gull for Ontario (Roy 2000). The first Ontario sighting involved a bird on the Niagara River from 24 November to 29 December 1992 (Bain 1993).

Identification Points

The Slaty-backed Gull appeared to be the same size as the Herring Gulls it was with, maybe a bit chunkier, and with a similar shaped head and bill. I believe that this gull was probably a female because of its relatively small size and small bill. Slaty-backed Gulls can exhibit much sexual dimorphism. The mantle colour was a dark slate, darker than on the *graellsii* race of Lesser Black-backed Gull but paler than that of a nearby Great Black-backed Gull; it was intermediate between the two. The large white tertial crescent was noticeably larger than that on any of the Herring Gulls, and its large round-shaped scapular crescent was also larger than on any of the nearby gulls. The visible folded black primaries contrasted slightly with the dark mantle. Each primary was tipped with white, beginning with a fairly small apical spot on P10. These spots became successively larger inwardly, through to P6, the white tip of which was often just visible at the edge of the white tertial crescent. At times I could see the underside of the outermost primary, P10. It showed a small white tip with a narrow band of black next to it, followed by a large, oval-shaped white "mirror" that completely covered both webs.

The bill was similar to that of nearby Herring Gulls, moderate in size with little swelling at the tip, and not much gonydeal angle (almost parallel sided). The basal two thirds of the bill was a chalky yellow, and the tip was a brighter orange yellow. There was a medium-sized red spot near the tip of the lower mandible, and a small dusky mark (possibly extending slightly onto the upper mandible) posterior to and touching this spot, suggesting a fourth year bird. The crown appeared rounded or slightly flattish, depending on the bird's posture. The eye was pale yellow as in Herring Gull. The orbital ring was not noted.

The head, neck and breast were

Figure 1: Slaty-backed Gull at Sunnyside Beach, *Toronto*, 2 January 1999, showing diagnostic "string of pearls" in primaries. Photo by *Juha Varella*.

Figure 2: Slaty-backed Gull, 2 January 1999, showing deeper chest and longer neck than nearby Herring Gull. Photo by *Juha Varella.*

streaked and mottled with greyish browns. The dense streaking around the eye formed a dark eye-patch extending posteriorly in a point, upwards and toward the rear of the crown. It also extended in a similar fashion in front of the eye, but possibly more bluntly so. This eye-patch was not as dark as is usually seen in definitive basic Lesser Black-backed Gulls of the *graellsii* race. There were short dusky streaks on the crown that continued down the nape, more heavily so down the hindneck and darkest on the lower hindneck. The front and sides of the neck were also streaked dusky, being perhaps more mottled on the lower neck. The underparts were white with large well-spaced mottling across the entire breast. This mottling had a more brownish hue than the rest of the streaking, which was more greyish brown. The tail was all white. The legs were a bright pink, and this colour was matched by a few Herring Gulls with the brightest legs.

The most important photograph (Figure 1) reveals the upperside of the gull in flight, showing well the wide white trailing edge of the secondaries which extends into the inner primaries, much wider than on any of the Herring Gulls in the photo. The wing also shows a conspicuous white leading edge. Most important is the "string of pearls" effect created by the white "tongues" in P7, P6 and P5. These are separated from the white tips on each feather by varying amounts of black. P10 shows a large white "mirror", and P9 and P8 have no mirrors at all, just white tips. The amount of white in P8 on Slaty-backed Gull is variable; it can sometimes have none at all, as in this individual (although there could be a slight mark on the inner web of P8, hidden by the outer web of P7). Difficult to see in this photograph, but visible upon close inspection, is the grey inner web of the outer primaries (mostly covered by the black outer web of the primary next to it). This feather pattern (black outer web and grey inner web) is right for Slaty-backed Gull. Also evident in Figure 1 are the wide-based wings, noticeably wider than on any of the Herring Gulls.

The photograph of the bird standing (Figure 2) shows the deeper chest and longer (and thicker) neck of this gull when compared with the Herring Gull next to it. The wide white tertial crescent and large scapular crescent are also visible in this photograph.

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Some Relationships Between Fall Hawk Migration and Weather Features at High Park, Toronto

Donald W. Barnett

The annual fall migration of diurnal raptors over High Park, Toronto, Ontario has been monitored systematically since 1993. The location provides a significant, internationally recognized site for migrating species that fly westward along the north shore of Lake Ontario. The monitoring station is located 1.5 km north of the shoreline on a small hill 37 m above the lake level, with an observation season running from late August to the end of November.

The number of daily sightings of raptors has been highly variable during the last seven years and anecdotal information has suggested that, out of the swirling complexity of raptor migration, some aspects of weather might account for some of that variation. Data from 1996 to 1998 have been analyzed to determine whether certain measurable weather elements were related to daily raptor counts. Over the three-year period, a total of 1462 hours was spent recording the number of birds observed per hour by species, as well as the associated weather elements. In addition to time of day, hourly readings were taken for wind speed and direction, relative humidity, and barometric pressure. Wind speed was classified as light (0-11 km/h), medium (12-19 km/h), strong (20-38 km/h), and very strong (>38 km/h). This scale is comparable to the Beaufort Wind Scale classes of 0-3, 4-5, 6-8, and ≥9, respectively. Wind direction was recorded using the four cardinal compass directions and four intermediate directions. Relative humidity was broken into classes of 26-40%, 41-55%, 56-70%, 71-85%, and 86-100%. Barometric pressure was broken into five equal intervals from 99.0 kpa to 103.99 kpa. Relative change in barometric pressure also was recorded.

The number of each species of raptor during each class of each weather element (e.g., wind directions of north, northwest, west, and northeast) was recorded, both as the absolute number of birds observed and as a percentage of the total number of that species observed over the three-year period. The number of hours during which each class of each weather element occurred is expressed as a percentage of the total hours of observation.

Fourteen species of raptors

were recorded during the period. However, only the results for Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*), Red-tailed Hawk (*B. jamaicensis*), and American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) are discussed in this paper, because these four species represent quite different examples of length of migration season and dates of peak migration, and they account for about 84% of the total raptors observed during the three-year period. For the purpose of testing whether weather elements had any influence on raptor migration, it was initially assumed that there was no relationship between weather elements and migration. In other words, testing was done against the assumption that equal numbers of a given species would be migrating under all weather conditions.

Table 1 indicates that the four species of raptors do not migrate in equal numbers throughout the day. The peak flight period for Sharp-shinned Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk tends to be between 1000h and 1400h, whereas for American Kestrel, peak numbers were recorded later in the day (1200h to 1600h).

A comparison of diurnal raptor numbers with coincident weather elements at High Park indicates that there are some predictable classes of weather elements that are associated with greater than expected numbers of birds at this site. For all four species studied, there is a significant relationship between medium wind speeds and higher than expected numbers of migrating raptors (Table 2). Strong winds were associated with higher than expected numbers of Sharp-shinned Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, and American Kestrel. Northwest winds were strongly related to heavy flights for all four species. North winds resulted in higher than expected numbers of

Table 1: Cumulative numbers of selected autumn migrating raptors in hourly intervals (Eastern Standard Time) at High Park, Toronto, during the period 1996-1998.

Species	0700-0800h	0800-0900h	0900-1000h	1000-1100h	1100-1200h	1200-1300h	1300-1400h	1400-1500h	1500-1600h
SS	152	437	1212	2412	2597	2205	1639	1141	637
BW	3	272	1094	4689	5716	4200	2758	1948	957
RT	6	29	158	583	1323	1543	1474	926	472
AK	34	76	139	223	276	299	338	359	337
Total	195	814	2606	7907	9912	8247	6209	4374	2403
% of total	0.51	2.13	6.80	20.64	25.87	21.53	16.21	11.42	6.27

Table 2: Cumulative numbers of selected autumn migrating raptors observed relative to wind speed, wind direction, relative humidity, and barometric pressure classes, at High Park, Toronto, during the period 1996-1998.

Species	Sharp-shinned Hawk				Broad-winged Hawk			
Wind Speed	L	M	S	VS	L	M	S	VS
# of birds	3788	5864	2542	373	4962	11035	5587	0
% of total birds	30.14	46.66	20.23	2.97	22.71	50.50	25.57	0.00
% of total hours	48.43	33.31	16.35	1.85	48.43	33.31	16.35	0.00
		⬆	⬆	⬆		⬆	⬆	
Wind Direction	N	NW	W	NE	N	NW	W	NE
# of birds	1028	8734	620	553	3238	17366	816	179
% of total birds	8.18	69.50	4.93	4.40	14.82	79.47	3.73	0.82
% of total hours	7.80	40.42	8.14	5.27	7.80	40.42	8.14	5.27
	⬆	⬆			⬆	⬆		
Wind Direction	SW	S	SE	E	SW	S	SE	E
# of birds	845	316	435	36	55	112	83	2
% of total birds	6.72	2.52	3.46	0.29	0.24	0.51	0.38	0.01
% of total hours	19.84	5.06	10.33	3.08	19.84	5.06	10.33	3.08

Species	Sharp-shinned Hawk					Broad-winged Hawk				
Relative Humidity	26-40	41-45	56-70	71-85	86-100	26-40	41-55	56-70	71-85	86-100
# of birds	808	3206	5996	2323	234	666	9397	8275	3500	13
% of total birds	6.43	25.51	47.71	18.49	1.87	3.05	43.01	37.87	16.02	0.06
% of total hours	4.32	12.32	39.89	27.17	16.29	4.32	12.32	39.89	27.17	16.29
	⬆	⬆	⬆				⬆			
Barometric Pressure	99.00 -99.99	100.0 -100.9	101.0 -101.9	102.0 -102.9	103.00 -103.99	99.00 -99.99	100.0 -100.9	101.0 -101.9	102.0 -102.9	103.0 -103.9
# of birds	130	1410	7915	2765	357	3	4610	12962	4276	0
% of total birds	1.03	11.14	62.99	22.00	2.84	0.01	21.00	59.32	19.57	0.00
% of total hours	0.89	10.40	58.76	27.50	2.46	0.89	10.40	58.76	27.50	2.46
	⬆	⬆	⬆		⬆		⬆	⬆		

Note: Arrows (⬆)denote percentage of total birds higher than percentage of total hours.

Species	Red-tailed Hawk				American Kestrel			
Wind Speed	L	M	S	VS	L	M	S	VS
# of birds	1246	3751	1535	44	540	1326	363	52
% of total birds	18.95	57.04	23.34	0.67	23.68	58.13	15.92	2.28
% of total hours	48.43	33.31	16.35	1.85	48.43	33.31	16.35	1.85
		⬆	⬆			⬆		⬆
Wind Direction	N	NW	W	NE	N	NW	W	NE
# of birds	509	4749	214	679	108	1761	163	56
% of total birds	7.74	72.22	3.25	10.33	4.74	77.20	7.15	2.46
% of total hours	7.80	40.42	8.14	5.27	7.80	40.42	8.14	5.27
		⬆		⬆		⬆		
Wind Direction	SW	S	SE	E	SW	S	SE	E
# of birds	271	12	103	39	116	37	37	3
% of total birds	4.12	0.18	1.57	0.59	5.09	1.62	1.62	0.13
% of total hours	19.84	5.06	10.33	3.08	19.84	5.06	10.33	3.08

Species	Red-tailed Hawk					American Kestrel				
Relative Humidity	26-40	41-55	56-70	71-85	86-100	26-40	41-55	56-70	71-85	86-100
# of birds	473	2235	3565	260	43	161	1011	633	437	39
% of total birds	7.19	33.99	54.21	3.96	0.65	7.06	44.32	27.75	19.16	1.71
% of total hours	4.32	12.32	39.89	27.17	16.29	4.32	12.32	39.89	27.17	16.29
	⬆	⬆	⬆			⬆	⬆			
Barometric Pressure	99.00 -99.99	100.0 -100.9	101.0 -101.9	102.0 -102.9	103.0 -103.9	99.00 -99.99	100.0 -100.9	101.0 -101.9	102.0 -102.9	103.0 -103.9
# of birds	3	294	3578	2497	204	23	499	1310	359	90
% of total birds	0.05	4.47	54.41	37.97	3.10	1.01	21.88	57.43	15.74	3.95
% of total hours	0.89	10.40	58.76	27.50	2.46	0.89	10.40	58.76	27.50	2.46
				⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆			

Sharp-shinned Hawks and Broad-winged Hawks. Red-tailed Hawks responded in significantly higher numbers to a northeast wind direction, as well. All other wind directions resulted in fewer than expected migrating diurnal raptors. The significance of wind direction classes in raptor migration also is shown in Table 3, where during large raptor flights of more than 100 birds, northwest winds coincided with flights accounting for 80% of the total birds (30,794 of 38,310 birds of the fourteen species recorded) during 1998 and 1999.

There is a strong correlation between relative humidity levels of 41-55% and higher than expected numbers for all four raptor species studied. Sharp-shinned Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk also responded with higher than expected numbers to the 56-70% relative humidity class. Since relative humidity tends to be inversely related to time of day, at least during the flight period of diurnal raptors, it is difficult to evaluate the importance of this weather element to raptor migration. However, in general, it appears that significant peak migrating raptor counts were associated with relative humidities of less than 70%. Correlations between absolute barometric pressure classes and raptor counts are inconsistent among the four species examined. There is a strong correlation between Sharp-shinned Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, and American Kestrel counts and the 100.00-100.99 kpa class. However, this class resulted in fewer than expected Red-tailed Hawks flying. For Red-tailed Hawks, the 102.00-102.99 kpa class resulted in higher than expected numbers of birds (Table 2). Table 3 also shows a strong relationship between the total number of migrating hawks during the pooled 1998 and 1999 autumn flight seasons and rising barometric pressure. A combination of rising barometric pressure and northwest winds during these two years accounted for 69.6% of all migrating raptors on major flight days (days during which more than 100 raptors were observed). It appears that rising barometric pressure may be more important than the absolute baro-

Table 3: Pooled totals for all raptors (14 species) observed at High Park, Toronto, on days where total raptors exceeded 100, during 1998 and 1999 (49 of 175 observation days).

Total Birds	Total migrating with NW winds	Total migrating with rising BP	Total birds combined NW winds and rising BP
38310	30794	28202	26662
%	80.4	73.6	69.6

metric pressure reading in determining the strength of a raptor flight.

From the data collected for the four subject species, it is possible to produce a profile for each species that outlines the weather element classes under which greater than expected numbers of birds would be migrating. In general, a profile of the weather and timing conditions associated with greater than expected autumn raptor migrations would include the late morning and early afternoon (1000h to 1400h) on days with medium to strong winds from the northwest. Relative humidity accompanying these conditions would be less than 55%, and barometric pressure would be rising, generally with an absolute reading below 102.0 kpa. As noted above, each of the four species dealt with here has slightly different preferences, so the individual profiles would differ slightly from each other.

It is understood that the above data are specific to High Park and may not apply to other monitoring sites in Ontario. It would be useful in the future to determine if birds farther north of Lake Ontario respond to similar or different wind directions and weather conditions, and if, at High Park, we are observing birds compressed into a lakeshore corridor by northwest winds or weather conditions.

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Avian Botulism Outbreak Along the Lower Great Lakes

Geoff Carpentier

The tranquillity of a stroll along the beaches of Lakes Erie and Huron was broken last fall by the presence of dying and rotting ducks, grebes, loons, shorebirds and gulls. Allegations were rampant and speculations rose high! As the causes of bird mortality are often obscure and symptoms overlap greatly, it is essential that diagnostic examinations be undertaken to accurately identify the source of the deaths or illnesses. Eventually, a naturally occurring, but often fatal, disease organism was identified as the causal agent — avian botulism Type E.

First reports of the incident were widely distributed via the ONTBIRDS e-mail service sponsored by the Ontario Field Ornithologists, whereby Ontario birders assisted in field assessments and therefore played a key role in identifying impacted areas and species involved. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada [Canadian Wildlife Service], the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, the Ontario Ministry of Health, Parks Canada, Health Canada and the University of Guelph [Animal Health Laboratory and Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre] have been involved in monitoring the outbreak and in determining the cause and potential abatement or preventative options.

Identification and Impact of the Outbreak

Botulism is a paralytic, often fatal, disease resulting from ingestion of pre-formed toxins produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum,* and is one of the most significant diseases that affect water bird populations. Although seven types of botulism [identified as A through G] and several subtypes have been identified, only Types A, C and E impact water birds. Type A seems to be limited to domestic fowl populations and will not be further discussed here. Botulism [Types C and E] seems to have a fairly short history in North America, with most outbreaks being reported within the last ninety years and most frequently within the last twenty years. The first reported case of Type C for Canada was in 1913. Other outbreaks of Type C have been documented for the USA, Mexico, Uruguay, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain and South Africa, plus at least 10

other countries on all of the continents, except Antarctica. Over 75% of the reported cases of Type C have been detected subsequent to 1970. Most of the reports of Type E for North America have been noted in the Great Lakes region.

Type C botulism is often referred to as Western Duck Sickness and commonly impacts puddle ducks, geese and swans in prairie sloughs and shallow lakes. Additionally, shorebirds, coots, pheasants, raptors, gulls, herons, pelicans, songbirds, dogs, ranch mink, and lions [one case involving captive animals] and fish are susceptible to the bacterium at varying response levels.

Type E botulism, strongly associated with fish, is poorly understood from a causal perspective, but manifests itself in the spring or fall and targets diving birds, such as loons, grebes and ducks, most frequently. Secondary impacts may be noted in some shorebirds and gulls. Intoxications may arise from the incidental ingestion of the spores from the water column, from scavenging opportunities or from a combination of these sources. The frequency of occurrence of *Clostridium botulinum* in either spore [resting] or vegetative [growing] form in live fish remains largely unknown, but these bacteria were confirmed in sturgeon (*Acipenser* sp.) in Lake Huron in 1999 and outbreaks of Type E botulism in people have occurred numerous times as the result of the consumption of uncooked fish. It should be noted that in the 1999 epizootic [refers to a disease which is temporarily prevalent in a population of animals], Common Loons and Red-breasted Mergansers, the principal avian species affected, are fish eaters. Fish were undoubtedly the primary source of toxin, but the distribution of toxin within fish and its effect on fish health and behaviour are unknown.

Botulism is an extremely potent toxin that affects the nervous system by blocking nerve transmission at the synapse between nerve endings and muscle fibres, resulting in flaccid paresis [an incomplete type of paralysis]. This paralysis is progressive, beginning with the wings [often noted by the stricken birds' propensity to propel themselves across the water using only their wings] and subsequently the legs, nictitating membrane of the eye and eventually the muscles of the neck, which may produce "limberneck", which is often considered to be the hallmark of the disease. As the muscles in the neck are impacted, the bird cannot hold up its head and generally dies from drowning or of respiratory failure due to the paralysis of the respiratory muscles.

Biology, Causal Effects and Prevention

The bacterium can survive under a variety of conditions, but is usually

associated with sustained high summer air temperatures, fluctuating water levels [likely more significant for Type C epidemics] and the presence of carcasses [providing an organic source]. Situations involving the absence of oxygen [anaerobic conditions], air temperatures ranging between 15.5°C and 35.5°C [optimally at 25°C], water temperatures around 25°C, a sediment pH of 7 to 8, salinity of <5 parts per trillion and a source of animal protein favours the development of spores which may be the causal agent associated with Type E botulism. These spores are resistant to low temperatures and low moisture conditions and may remain viable for years. Presumably, these spores are transferred through the blood to the muscles. Once the bacteria multiply and die, the toxins are released and the clinical symptoms are manifested. Type C botulism seems to be more closely related to birds eating invertebrates that carry the toxin. Typically this would involve various maggots of flesh flies and blowflies. As little as 2 to 5 toxin-bearing maggots may be enough to kill a duck! A poorly understood relationship with bacteriophages [bacteriolytic viruses that affect bacteria] exists which likely determines if the toxin is produced during the bacterium's growth and multiplication stages.

Type C outbreaks can be minimized if water level fluctuations are avoided during the hottest part of the season. Reflooding of dry areas should be avoided until cooler fall temperatures prevail. Although most authorities advocate the removal of fish carcasses [to remove a medium for maggot development] and any dead or dying birds, there is little concrete evidence to support the fact that this is effective in stopping an outbreak. In Western Canada, despite massive clean-up efforts, botulism mortality remains high on affected lakes. For Type E botulism, control is much more difficult and it may be that the only control device that is available is to collect and bury or otherwise remove the carcasses as soon as possible after discovery. However, some authorities feel that this may not make much of a difference, except to the occurrence of botulism in scavenging birds.

The 1999 Botulism Outbreak in Ontario

Over a period of approximately ten weeks, hundreds or perhaps thousands of water birds, representing several species, died along parts of Lake Huron [Kettle Point to Grand Bend] and Lake Erie [Point Pelee National Park to Rondeau Provincial Park and Turkey Point/Long Point]. Complementary observations were made along the southern shore of Lake Erie [Ohio and Pennsylvania] during this period. It has been speculated that several events may have occurred as follows: (1) a low mortality event

throughout most of the month of September, with an increase about 28 September that lasted a few days; (2) a significant event, commencing 26 October and lasting about two weeks; and (3) a low mortality event in early November. It is further speculated that the first cases of botulism [Type E] may have arisen as early as late July or the beginning of August, probably on 18 July, when large numbers of gulls and shorebirds were noted on Lake Erie. To support this, botulism was confirmed from a Great Black-backed Gull from Long Point [Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre, Guelph, Ontario] and other gulls in Erie, Pennsylvania earlier in the summer [National Wildlife Health Center, Madison, Wisconsin]. Type E botulism was confirmed in Red-breasted Merganser, Common Loon, Ring-billed Gull, and Red-throated Loon from Lake Huron and in Red-breasted Merganser, Common Loon and Great Black-backed Gull from Lake Erie.

The species involved have been well documented, but the numbers of birds have not. Estimates vary widely from about 1700 individuals, consisting of mergansers, mostly from Lake Erie and loons, mostly from Lake Huron, to an MNR estimate of over 2000 loons along the Lake Huron shore, to a much higher estimate of over 7000 birds, of at least sixteen species. Certainly thousands of birds and at least 700 loons were impacted, but the absolute numbers cannot be determined. Therefore, caution must be exercised in using these data to assign accurate numbers to the outbreak. The collections undertaken were happenstance and no accurate records were maintained. It is therefore better to abandon the numbers reported and focus on species involved. To this end, and based on the information from a variety of sources, I have tried to summarize known information in tabular form (Tables 1 and 2).

Reports of birds dying from botulism are widespread and fairly common in certain areas. Incidents involving Type E botulism are much rarer and, as mentioned, are generally confined to the Great Lakes region. Outbreaks have been recorded in Ontario in at least 1994 [Goderich, involving Herring and Ring-billed Gulls] and 1998 [Lake Huron, involving dozens of loons]. In both cases, the type of botulism was not confirmed. An outbreak in Kent County in 1941 likely involved Type C botulism. Other proximal outbreaks included a kill involving approximately 8000 birds in lower Lake Michigan in 1963, where Type E botulism was confirmed.

When one looks at the data presented in Table 2, some interesting patterns become evident. Loons were more frequently impacted on Lake Huron , but mergansers were most affected on Lake Erie. The reason for this geographic pattern is

Table 1: Summary of Reported Species of Birds Impacted

Species	Lake Huron	Lake Erie
Common Loon *(Gavia immer)*	X	X
Red-throated Loon *(G. stellata)*	X	
loon sp.	X	X
Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*)	X	X
Red-necked Grebe (*P. grisegena*)	X	
grebe sp.		X
Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)		X
Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*)	X	
Red-breasted Merganser (*M. serrator*)	X	X
merganser sp.		X
Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*)		X
Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*)	X	X
Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*)	X	
duck sp.		X
Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*)		X
Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*)	X	X
Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*)		X
Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*)	X	X
gull sp.		X
Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)		X
Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*)		X
sandpiper sp.		X

Table 2: Summary of Observations in Botulism Outbreak (Ontario) 1999

Location	Date	Comment
Long Point (Lake Erie)	August	Great Black-backed Gull
Point Pelee National Park, Rondeau Provincial Park, Long Point, south shore of Lake Erie (Ohio & Erie, Pennsylvania)	early September to October 26	shorebirds and carp - Pelee gulls - south shore of Lake Erie gulls and Great Blue Heron - Long Point
Grand Bend (Lake Huron)	October 24	Common Loon and Oldsquaw
Ipperwash (Lake Huron)	October 24	Common Loon, Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Horned Grebe, Oldsquaw, Surf Scoter, Ring-billed Gull and Great Black-backed Gull

Rondeau Provincial Park (Lake Erie)	October 26	Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Red-breasted Merganser, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull
Pinery Provincial Park (Lake Huron)	October 27	Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, grebes and gulls, Sturgeon
Erie Beach (Lake Erie)	October 27	Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Red-breasted Merganser, Greater Scaup, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull
Port Burwell, Port Bruce, Port Stanley, Rondeau Provincial Park and Wheatley (Lake Erie), Sarnia, Grand Bend (Lake Huron)	October 28	mergansers - Rondeau to Wheatley loons - Sarnia to Grand Bend sturgeon - Sarnia Ring-billed Gull and Great Black-backed Gull - Port Stanley
Grand Bend	October 29	Common Loon, Red-throated Loon
Pinery Provincial Park, Ipperwash	November 2	loon - Pinery loon - Ipperwash low numbers of other unidentified species
Rondeau Provincial Park, Point Pelee National Park	November 3	mergansers, grebes, loons, Bonaparte's Gulls and Oldsquaw
Long Point, Turkey Point Provincial Park (Lake Erie)	November 4	a few gulls at Long Point tip many dead mergansers noted off-shore (date?) Major outbreak in Pelee and Rondeau area in late August involving many gulls and shore-birds (Spotted Sandpipers and Sanderlings mostly)
Pinery Provincial Park	November 4 -5	loons, Common Mergansers, Oldsquaw
Pinery Provincial Park	November 10	loons
Grand Bend, Port Franks	no date	loons, grebes and mergansers

unclear, but may simply be related to the frequency of occurrence of the species involved in the two zones. For example, mergansers, particularly Red-breasted, are very common along the Lake Erie shore, while loons seem to follow the Lake Huron shore and stage along its reaches. The shorebird impact may be more directly related to the pres-

ence of the disease, or again it may reflect the availability of staging areas along the Lake Erie shoreline that do not exist on Lake Huron.

It is difficult to predict if we will have another outbreak of botulism in the near future, but I do hope that, if we do, the observers and agencies monitor both the species involved and the numbers as well. With good record keeping, perhaps we can better assess the species differential between the two bodies of water and therefore draw conclusions as to why it prevailed where and when it did.

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Photo Quiz

Bob Curry

Ontario birders, living as we do surrounded by several Great Lakes and their associated bays and marshes, spend lots of recreational hours examining waterfowl. So when we see swimming an essentially all brown bird with a short neck and roughly triangular bill and head profile, we know it is a duck. It is not a goose, as they have longer necks and a cone-shaped bill with, usually, a tomium or "grinning patch".

Of course, there are plenty of brown ducks to consider. Generally, the next step is to determine whether our duck is a member of the "pond ducks" or dabblers, or whether it is a diving duck. Frequently, habitat and behaviour can do this. The "puddle ducks" occur in marshes and ponds and tip-up to feed off the bottom. The various diving ducks usually occur on deeper bodies of water where they dive to feed at the bottom or on fish, depending upon the group. But what if, as in this case, our duck frequents shallow water and accompanies dabblers but does not seem quite right to be included with them?

From the photos, we can see that we have a "solid", chunky duck but we are not afforded direct size comparisons with females of the Mallard complex (Mallards, American Black Ducks, and their hybrids). However, those birds have longer necks, and bills that have varying amounts of yellow or orange-yellow. In addition, a close inspection of the bill shows extensions from the base towards the eyes, a feature not possessed by any dabbler.

Among the diving ducks, the scoters are moderately large and have bills which are basally swollen. However, they are darker in colour, not buffy brown in overall tone. Female White-winged Scoter, with the white secondaries concealed, would still be darker blackish-brown and with at least some suggestion of two rounded whitish patches on the sides of the head. Surf Scoter has a triangular head and bill in profile, but again the overall colour is blackish-brown and there are two large white patches on each side of the head. Female Canvasback has a sloping bill-head profile, and thus a triangular head and bill, but it has rather smooth, unpatterned brownish-grey plumage, and in particular, a grey back and flanks.

All of the above mental sifting can be done in a few seconds or minutes depending upon the experience of the observer and brings us

to the conclusion that our large brown duck is an eider. Now it gets interesting! Both large rather plain-faced eiders can and do occur on the Great Lakes, usually in winter. The King Eider is a regular but rare winter visitor to the lower lakes. Usually it occurs singly or in very small numbers, but it has occurred in flocks. Rick Snider and I counted 91 on 12 March 1997 along the south shore of Lake Ontario, west of Jordan Harbour. The Common Eider is much more rare. In recent years, since the zebra mussel has colonized Lake Ontario, usually one or two Commons are found each winter.

Adult and immature males of these two species are comparatively easy to distinguish. Eiders undergo an almost continuous body molt from juvenal to a Basic I plumage in early fall and into an Alternate I in late fall and through the winter. As a consequence, immature males of both species acquire enough white and dark plumage to be relatively easily distinguishable. The same cannot be said for females.

However, there are several features apparent on our quiz bird which when carefully noted serve to separate the two female eiders. Head-bill profile can be an early clue; King Eider has a more concave upward maxilla and rounded forehead than Common, which is straighter. Think of the profile differences of Redhead and Canvasback, or the more subtle differences of Tundra Swan versus Trumpeter Swan. But beware that some King Eider females seem to have a more sloping bill-head profile and look very much like Commons.

There are some body-plumage differences between the two females. However, these are more different in adult females so it is useful, although not critical to final identification, to age the bird. Again, remember that body molt is virtually continuous so that statements about age are relative rather than absolute. Take particular note of the flank markings. On Common Eider, by late winter when the bird is in Alternate I plumage and in its second calendar year, the flanks are barred vertically in black. On King Eider, these are black chevrons. Are these bars straight or curved on our bird? Or somewhat in-between! Some other features indicate that the photo bird is in its first winter. First, the offset long scapulars (see these just forward of the folded primaries) are not as long or as curved as they would be in an adult female. Second, note also the white tips of the secondaries and greater upper wing coverts creating two white lines (these bound the speculum so well known in dabblers) which tend to be much-reduced in older females of both species. So this bird appears to be in its first winter of life and the flank markings seem to suggest King Eider.

Our young female eider is of a rich tawny hue. Common Eider

females vary in plumage from greyish brown to warmer tawny colour in some populations (subspecies). Despite the fact that there is considerable colour variation even within Common Eider populations, a greyish or dull brown bird has a good chance of keying out as a Common Eider and a reddish-brown bird is much more likely to be a King Eider, especially in Ontario.

The head and bill is the key area to examine closely as the species' diagnostic features are found herein. Note the broad, rounded light area immediately above the eye and the faint light line extending down the side of the head from the eye. Common Eider too has white "around the eye" but in that species it is a broad light superciliary line which extends back from the eye. This feature also tends to create a darker-capped appearance in Common. Note also the dark gape line, which curves slightly upwards from where the mandible and maxilla meet. In Common Eider, this line is straighter. Some texts and observers suggest that King Eider is smiling, although it seems more a Mona Lisa smirk to me! There is also a tendency towards a lighter area on the face at the base of the bill in King.

So, it looks as if we have a **King Eider**. Close examination of the bill will clinch it. Note that the entire bill is blackish grey. Most Common Eider females have a yellowish-green nail. The bill lobe is rather broad and does not extend close to the eye. In Common, this lobe that extends closer to the eye approximates in shape the tine on a tuning fork, although in some subspecies it is somewhat broader. Now note that the feathering on the forehead above this lobe extends as far forward as the feathering on the sides of the head. In Common, the feathering on the sides extends in more of a point and right to the nostril, and the forehead feathering does not extend as far forward. This feature, which can be seen by careful study with a good telescope, is absolutely diagnostic.

So next time you go to see an eider, even if it has been reported as one species or the other, take the time to study it carefully and look for the features described herein. It will be satisfying to know that you are identifying the bird rather than "going with the flow".

Barry Cherriere photographed this immature female King Eider on 20 February 2000 at LaSalle Dock on Hamilton Bay, in Burlington.

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