

# ONTARIO BIRDS



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# Articles

## Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2003

William J. Crins

### Introduction

The Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) evaluates documentation that it receives of any record of a species or recognizable form that is on the Review List for Ontario (see [www.ofo.ca/obrc](http://www.ofo.ca/obrc)). This 22nd annual report deals with the results of the adjudication of 115 records reviewed by the OBRC during 2003, of which 88% were accepted. In addition, reports of a Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) have been forwarded to outside experts for evaluation, and a decision by OBRC is still pending. A total of 118 observers submitted documentation for review by the 2003 committee. Reports were submitted by a wide range of birders, from experts to novices, and often were accompanied by photographs (prints, digital images), copies of field notes, sketches, and, in several cases, digital videotapes.

The quality of the reports submitted generally was good, with thorough descriptions and accounts of the circumstances relevant to the observations usually being provided. However, one trend seems to be emerging. With the ease of posting digital images onto the OFO web-

site, there is a tendency to rely on the visual images as the only source of data to document records. Written reports of the details and circumstances of some of these observations are not being submitted. We urge observers to submit written reports to accompany the images that they send to OBRC or post on the OFO website. Such reports are very helpful in providing context for the photographic evidence.

The members of the 2003 committee were David D. Beadle, William J. Crins (non-voting secretary), Robert Curry (chair), David H. Elder, Christopher J. Escott, Nicholas G. Escott, Ronald J. Pittaway, and Ronald G. Tozer (Figure 1). Mark K. Peck continued to serve in the role of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) liaison (non-voting) to the OBRC in 2003.

The official Ontario bird checklist has increased by one species to 476 species, with the addition of Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*).

### Listing of Records

The format for listing the number of accepted records for each

species remains the same as that used last year (Crins 2003) and in the previous year (Roy 2002). A single number is used to indicate the total number of accepted records of a Review List species. The former trinomial and binomial systems no longer are used. Accepted records are arranged taxonomically by their English and scientific names following the Seventh Edition of the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds (American Ornithologists' Union 1998) and its 42nd supplement (American Ornithologists' Union 2000). 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 that of Humphrey and Parkes (1959). For a detailed explanation of plumage and molt terminology, see Pittaway (2000). The names of all contributors of documentation are listed. Those contributors who are known to be the discoverers of the bird also are underlined. Others present when the bird was found, but who did not submit reports, are listed when known.

The committee attempts to verify documented information prior to the acceptance and publication of a record. However, inaccuracies do creep in from time to time. The committee welcomes written communication to the secretary from anyone with 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.

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 chairperson explaining the reasons for the decision, along with copies of the comments obtained from the voting members. These reports, as well as documentation for all accepted records, are kept on permanent file at the ROM. A "not accepted" report can be reconsidered by the OBRC if new evidence, in the form of additional documentation, is submitted to the committee for review. Researchers and other interested individuals are welcome to examine any of the filed reports at the ROM, but an appointment is necessary. Please write to Mark K. Peck, Natural History Department, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2C6 (e-mail: markp@rom.on.ca or telephone 416-586-5523).

### **Changes to the Review List**

The first documented records of Kentucky Warbler (*Oporornis formosus*) in northern Ontario have led to the addition of this species to the Review List for northern Ontario. Brewer's Sparrow, noted above, is added to the Review List for northern Ontario, as well.

### Acknowledgements

The OBRC would like to extend its appreciation to the many observers who took the time to submit documentation of their observations of rare birds in 2003. We thank the following people who assisted the committee in the acquisition of additional data and other material evidence that supplemented the information submitted directly by observers and committee members: Kenneth F. Abraham, Gordon Bellerby, Colin Bowen, Robert A. Bracken, Terry Carr, Allen T. Chartier, Bruce M. Di Labio, Robert Z. Dobos, Sandra Eadie, Christian Friis, Christina Lewis, Jon D. McCracken, Mark K. Peck, Ian M. Richards, Ronald C. Ridout, Kayo J.

Roy, Sarah E. Rupert, R. Terry Sprague, and Alan Wormington.

The committee also is indebted to Mark Cranford for his continuing efforts in ensuring that ONT-BIRDS (listserv of the Ontario Field Ornithologists) remains a useful source of information on rare birds appearing in Ontario. In addition, the photographic pages on the OFO website, maintained by Sandra Eadie, provide an excellent source of documentation for rarities. These sources of information make the secretary's job of securing documentation much more efficient. Finally, I want to thank the members of the 2003 committee for their support and assistance during the year.



**Figure 1: Ontario Bird Records Committee members for 2003. Left to right, standing: Ron Tozer, Bob Curry, Dave Elder, Chris Escott, David Beadle; seated: Bill Crins, Nick Escott, Ron Pittaway. Not in photo: Mark Peck. Photo by Mark Peck.**



**Figure 2: Little Blue Heron in alternate plumage present at Point Pelee National Park, Essex, on 13 May 2003. Photo by Alan Wormington.**



**Figure 3: Two Cattle Egrets present at Moosonee, Cochrane, between 13 and 16 October 2003. Photo by Alan Wormington.**



**Figure 4: Glossy Ibis in definitive basic plumage present at Holiday Harbour, Chatham-Kent, between 17 and 30 October 2003. Photo by James N. Flynn.**



**Figure 5: White-faced Ibis in definitive alternate plumage photographed at Sturgeon Creek, Essex, on 5 May 2003. Photo by Stephen T. Pike.**



**Figure 6: Band-tailed Pigeon in definitive basic plumage present at Westree, Sudbury, between 26 September and 20 October 2003. Photo by Charles J. Whitelaw.**



**Figure 7: Eurasian Collared-Dove present at Marysville, Hastings, between 5 and 17 May 2003. Photo by Albert Boisvert.**



**Figure 8:** White-winged Dove in basic plumage present at Kakabeka Falls, *Thunder Bay*, between 14 and 19 June 2003. Photo by *Brian Rusnick*.



**Figure 9:** Cave Swallow in basic plumage, one of two found at Erieau, *Chatham-Kent*, on 8 November 2003. Photo by *Alan Wormington*.



**Figure 10:** Townsend's Solitaire in basic plumage present at Point Pelee National Park, Essex, from 28 October until 17 November 2003. Photo by *Stephen T. Pike*.



**Figure 11:** Male Kirtland's Warbler in alternate plumage present at Point Pelee National Park, Essex, on 17 May 2003. Photo by *Barry S. Cherie*.



**Figure 12:** Male Brewer's Sparrow in alternate plumage at Thunder Cape, Thunder Bay, on 27 May 2003. Photo by *Nicholas G. Escott*.



**Figure 13:** Lark Sparrow in definitive alternate plumage present at Point Pelee National Park, Essex, on 3 May 2003. Photo by *Brett Groves*.

## Accepted Records

### **Eared Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis* **North Only** (11)

2003 - one, alternate, 29-30 May, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (David H. Elder, found by Sid Hadlington).

This species has not yet been confirmed as a nester at the Rainy River sewage lagoons, *Rainy River*, but it has now been present there during at least a portion of the breeding season for three consecutive years (2001-2003).

### **Black-capped Petrel** *Pterodroma hasitata* (26)

2003 - one, 23 September, Waverly Beach, *Niagara* (Winnie Poon, David R. Don, Willie D'Anna, William W. Watson, found by Alan Wormington, David D. Beadle).  
 - one, adult, basic, male, *P. h. hasitata*, 27 September, Waverly Beach, *Niagara* (Brandon R. Holden) – specimen (skin) in ROM (#91639).

A great deal of anticipation among birders preceded the arrival of Hurricane Isabel in southern Ontario on 19 September 2003, because of the possibility of storm-borne vagrants. Although there seem to have been fewer hurricane-associated birds than were expected, several significant records were documented. Among them were two Black-capped Petrels, one of which was found dead several days after the hurricane had passed.

### **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* (4)

2003 - one, 22 September, Van Wagners Beach, *Hamilton* (Daniel R. Salisbury, Alan Wormington).

This bird was associated with the passage of Hurricane Isabel. Previous records of this species include a specimen from Gull Lake, *Muskoka*, in the spring of 1897 or 1898, a specimen from Long Beach, *Niagara*, on 14 August 1955, likely associated with Hurricane Connie (Roy 2001), and three birds seen on 10 September 1996 at Waverly Beach, *Niagara*, associated with Hurricane Fran (Dobos 1998).

### **Storm-Petrel species** *Oceanites* or *Oceanodroma* species (3)

2003 - one, 22 September, Port Bruce, *Elgin* (David A. Martin).  
 - one, 27 September, Crescent Beach, *Niagara* (Alfred L. Adamo).  
 - one, 27 September, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (Christian Artuso).

These three records of unidentifiable storm-petrels, seen under less than ideal circumstances, at fairly long distances or in strong winds, were associated with the passage of Hurricane Isabel, as well.

### **Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus* (28)

2002 - one, juvenal, 11 and 15 November; 11 November, Shirley's Bay; 15 November, Ottawa, *Ottawa* (Philip Wright).

**Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* (50)**

- 2003 - one, alternate, 13 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Diego Garcia-Bellido, Jean H. Iron, Alan Wormington) – photos on file.

**Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* North Only (18)**

- 2003 - one, 8 October, Gowganda, *Timiskaming* (Gertrude Trudel, also found by Paul Trudel) – photos on file.  
 - two, 13-16 October, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Alan Wormington, Peter Kapeshesit, found by Dan Ryder) – photos on file.  
 - one, 20 October, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Allan G. Harris).  
 - one, mid October 2003, Blake Township, *Thunder Bay* (Sharon Walker) – photo on file.

Previous records of Cattle Egrets from northern Ontario all occurred between 20 October and 8 November (Dobos 1998). Thus, the record from 8 October in Gowganda broadens the window of occurrence in the north.

**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea* (34)**

- 2003 - one, first alternate, late April – 18 May, Echo Bay, *Algoma* (Don Hall, Vivian Hall) – photos on file.

**White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* (3)**

- 1970 - one, juvenal, 27 September, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Joseph P. Kleiman, T. Dennis Coskren, Dennis F. Rupert, Alfred H. Rider, also found by Jeffrey A. Greenhouse, William W. Smith, Norm Chesterfield, Ray Knight).

An observation probably involving the same bird has been documented at Harsen's Island, Lake St. Clair, Michigan, on 19-26 September 1970 (Payne 1983). This location is approximately 77 km due north of Point Pelee. Bain (1992) and Roy (2000) summarized the two previously published records of White Ibis in Ontario. A full description of one of these records and the associated circumstances, from Turkey Point, *Norfolk*, on 12-30 October 1991, has been published by Lamey (1991). The present record, from 1970, predates the other two reports by over 20 years. James (1991) listed two additional reports of this species for which documentation has not yet been reviewed by the Committee.

**Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (42)**

- 2003 - one, definitive basic, 17-30 October, Holiday Harbour, *Chatham-Kent* (Dean J. Ware, James N. Flynn, Alan Wormington, Russ Jones) – photos on file.  
 2002 - one, alternate, 28 April – 1 May, Aylmer, *Elgin* (David A. Martin, found by Gordon Longhurst).

A note on the feeding behaviour of the Holiday Harbour bird was published by Horvath (2004).

**White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi* (3)**

- 2003 - one, definitive alternate, 5 May, Sturgeon Creek, *Essex* (Stephen T. Pike, Sam Barone, found by Edward P. LeBlanc) – photos on file.

It is highly likely that an unidentified dark ibis reported by Alan

Wormington near the entrance to Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*, late on 4 May, involved the same bird. The circumstances surrounding this third documented occurrence have been described by Wormington (2003a). The previous two records both occurred in 1995, one in Darlington and Bowmanville, *Durham*, on 20-21 July, and the other in Etobicoke, *Toronto*, on 21 September (Dobos 1996, Wormington 2003a).

### **Black Vulture** *Coragyps atratus* (45)

- 2003 - one, definitive basic, 9 August, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).  
 - one, 8 September, Townsend, *Haldimand* (Tom Thomas).  
 2002 - one, 27 April, Mer Bleue, *Ottawa* (Langis Sirois).

### **Ross's Goose** *Chen rossii* South Only (38)

- 2003 - two, basic, white morph, 12 April, Pendleton, *Prescott & Russell* (Robert A. Bracken, Christina Lewis, also found by Paul Mirsky, Beverly A. Scott).  
 2002 - one, basic, white morph, 29 April – 1 May, Aylmer, *Elgin* (David A. Martin, found by Ross C. Snider, Terry Ricker).  
 - two, basic, white morph, 13-15 November, Mississauga, *Peel* (Robert Curry, found by Robert Z. Dobos).  
 - one, basic, white morph, 14-25 November, Kingsville, *Essex* (Russ Jones, found by Dean J. Ware) – photo on file.

The two birds observed on 13-15 November 2002 were accompanied by two other birds that were considered to be hybrids between Ross's Goose and Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*).

### **Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* (26)

- 2003 - one, alternate, male, 30 April – 7 May, Shirley's Bay, *Ottawa* (J. Burke Korol, found by Hervé Tremblay).

In addition to the Ottawa record, a bird thought to be a first alternate male hybrid between Tufted Duck and Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) was observed and documented by Dean J. Ware, at Hillman Beach, *Essex*, on 27 December 2002, and at East Beach, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*, on 29 December 2002.

### **Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* South Only (19)

- 2003 - one, 10 and 19 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Kevin A. McLaughlin).  
 - one, 8 October – 1 November, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (Felix Weiss, Christian Friis, Rosalind Ford, also found by Genevieve Purugganan).

Wormington (2003b) noted that some had speculated that the Point Pelee bird may have been present in adjacent waters in Ohio and Michigan, periodically, from November 2002 until July 2003.

### **Mississippi Kite** *Ictinia mississippiensis* (32)

- 2003 - one, definitive basic, 6 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Cheryl Edgecombe, David R. Don, also found by Wolfgang Luft, Thomas A. Crooks, Rosalynn Price,

Frank Morley).

- one, definitive basic, 13 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Mark DeAbreu, also found by Sharon Antonopolous).
- one, first basic, 13 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Kevin A. McLaughlin, Frank Pinilla).
- one, first basic, 14 May, Grimsby, *Niagara* (George A. Meyers).

### **Swainson's Hawk** *Buteo swainsoni* (44)

- 2002 - one, basic, dark morph, 15 September, Toronto, *Toronto* (Jerry DeMarco, Glenn Coady, Jim Watt).
- 1984 - one, basic, light morph, 29 October, Holiday Beach Conservation Area, *Essex* (Michael A. Kielb, also found by Alfred J. Maley).

### **Purple Gallinule** *Porphyryla martinica* (12)

- 2003 - one, juvenal, 26-27 September, Holiday Beach Conservation Area, *Essex* (Robert C. Pettit) – photos on file.
- one, juvenal, 28 September, Shirley's Bay, *Ottawa* (John Walmsley, George Hollinworth) – photos on file.

The timing of these two occurrences suggests that these birds may have been directed northward by Hurricane Isabel, which passed through southern Ontario about a week earlier.

### **Piping Plover** *Charadrius melodus* (48)

- 2003 - one, 31 August – 4 September, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Ian M. Richards, Brett Groves, Vicki L. McKay, found by James Cole, Angie Cole) – photos on file.

This bird had no coloured or metal leg bands, so its source population cannot be determined (Wormington 2003c). Observers of Piping Plovers in Ontario should record band colours and combinations when possible, since this will assist in the determination of origin, and perhaps also in the management of this endangered species.

### **Willet** *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus* North Only (14)

- 2003 - one, 7 June, Sable Island, *Rainy River* (Leo Heyens).

### **California Gull** *Larus californicus* (38)

- 2003 - one, definitive basic, 1 January, Toronto, *Toronto* (Jean H. Iron, also found by Kevin A. McLaughlin) – photos on file.
- 2002 - one, third basic, 22 November – 31 December, Queenston, *Niagara* (Willie D'Anna, found by Jean H. Iron, Barbara Mann) – photos on file.
- one, definitive basic, 23 November – 1 December, Queenston, *Niagara* (Willie D'Anna, found by Jean H. Iron).
- one, second basic, 30 November, Niagara Falls, *Niagara* (Brandon R. Holden, Willie D'Anna, also found by Eric Holden).

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* North Only (6)

- 2003 - one, definitive alternate, 28 April – 5 May, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott, found by Brian Moore).

This is the first documented record of this species in northern Ontario in over 10 years, the last one being seen in Moosonee and Moose Factory, *Cochrane*, on 16-20 May 1992 (Bain 1994).

**Ross's Gull** *Rhodostethia rosea* (9)

2003 - one, definitive basic, 12 September, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, also found by Paul E. Turnquest, Beverley J. Rider, and Alfred H. Rider).

A brief account of this early fall record has been published elsewhere (Anonymous 2003c).

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* South Only After 1990 (8)

2003 - one, definitive alternate, 1 June, Deschênes Rapids, Nepean, *Ottawa* (Robert A. Bracken, Christina Lewis, also found by Jan Slumkoski).  
 - two, definitive alternate, 1-2 June, Deschênes Rapids, Nepean, *Ottawa* (Robert A. Bracken, Christina Lewis, also found by Jan Slumkoski).

The Ottawa River is the only location in southern Ontario where this species is observed regularly, usually after cold fronts in late May and early June.

**Sooty Tern** *Sterna fuscata* (5)

2003 - one, definitive basic, 22 September, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (David J. Milsom, Robert J. Cermak, Lynne Dryden, Mick Dryden, Ross Mackintosh, Sandy Mackintosh).

This bird undoubtedly was associated with the passage of Hurricane Isabel. Three of the previously documented records were associated with Hurricane Fran, in September 1996, and the first record for the province was associated with Hurricane Connie in 1955 (Dobos 1997).

**Band-tailed Pigeon** *Patagioenas fasciata* (10)

2003 - one, definitive basic, 26 September – 2 October, Westree, *Sudbury* (Charles J. Whitelaw, found by Al Brethour, Frances Brethour) – photos on file.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* (6)

2003 - one, 5-24 May, Marysville, *Hastings* (Margaret J. Bain, Albert Boisvert, Christopher J. Escott, found by Bruce Ripley) – photos on file.  
 - one, 8 and 24 May 2003, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Alan Wormington).

The documentation for these two birds adequately eliminated the possibility of escaped Ringed Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia risoria*), or a hybrid between that species and Eurasian Collared-Dove. Dobos (1999) provided a summary of this identification problem, and some additional references to assist observers.

**White-winged Dove** *Zenaida asiatica* (14)

2003 - one, basic, 15-17 May, Presqu'île Provincial Park, *Northumberland* (William D.

Gilmour, Christopher J. Escott) – photos on file.

- one, basic, 14-19 June, Kakabeka Falls, *Thunder Bay* (Brian Rusnick, Nicholas G. Escott, also found by Cec Girard) – photo on file.

### **Groove-billed Ani** *Crotophaga sulcirostris* (6)

1977 - one, 15 October, Goderich, *Huron* (Matt Oswald).

Convincing documentation was provided for this observation from 1977. James (1991) and Wormington and Curry (1990) list five other records for Ontario. These six records have occurred within a narrow window, between 9 October and 1 November.

### **Chuck-will's-widow** *Caprimulgus carolinensis* (15)

1989 - one, male, 28-29 May, Presqu'île Provincial Park, *Northumberland* (Ian M. Richards).

### **Rufous Hummingbird** *Selasphorus rufus* (15)

2003/04 - one, first prebasic molt, male, 21 November – 7 January, King Pitt, *Frontenac* (Phill Yendt, Carol M. Horner, Harold E. Stiver, William J. Crins, found by Mildred R. Yendt) – photos on file.

This bird was extremely cooperative, and the Yendt family was most generous in providing access to large numbers of observers. Excellent photographic documentation of this bird has been provided on the OFO website.

### **Red-bellied Woodpecker** *Melanerpes carolinus* **North Only** (12)

2003/04 - one, basic, male, mid November – late March, Atikokan, *Rainy River* (David H. Elder, found by Colin Young).

2003 - one, basic, male, 24 May – 1 June, Rainy River mouth, *Rainy River* (Chris Martin, also found by Gordon Martin).

- one, basic, male, 8 October, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock) – photo on file.

- one, basic, female, 19 October, Rosspport, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington, also found by Mark W. Jennings).

### **Gray Flycatcher** *Empidonax wrightii* (3)

2003/04 - one, basic, 14 December – 7 January, near Cayuga, *Haldimand* (Jeffrey H. Skevington, Harold E. Stiver, Alan Wormington, Christopher J. Escott, Kenneth M. Newcombe, also found by Richard P. Skevington, John Harvey) – photos and video on file.

This bird, found on the Fisherville Christmas Bird Count, remained active and was observed by many birders until extremely cold weather arrived. The record is fully described by Skevington (2004). The two earlier records of this species are from the Toronto Islands, *Toronto*, on 11 September 1981 (Pittaway 1995), and from Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*, on 7 June 1993 (Bain 1994).

### **Gray Kingbird** *Tyrannus dominicensis* (7)

2003 - one, 26 July, Amherstview, *Lennox & Addington* (Owen Weir, also found by Teresa Weir).

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** *Tyrannus forficatus* (44)

2003 - one, juvenal/first basic, 5 October, Rondeau Bay Estates, *Chatham-Kent* (Blake A. Mann, Keith J. Burk) – photo on file.

**Loggerhead Shrike** *Lanius ludovicianus* North Only (10)

2003 - one, alternate, 24 May, Big Fork, *Rainy River* (Chris Martin, also found by Gordon Martin).

**Fish Crow** *Corvus ossifragus* (10)

2003 - one, basic, 12 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Glenn Coady, also found by Fred Bodsworth).  
 - one, 14 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (J. Burke Korol, Alan Wormington, also found by Jon “Sandy” Dobbyn).

**Cave Swallow** *Petrochelidon fulva* (33)

2003 - one, 6-7 November, Cranberry Marsh, *Durham* (J. Douglas Lockrey, also found by Karl Jennewein, Dan Kaczynski).  
 - three, 7 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Kevin A. McLaughlin, also found by Robert L. Waldhuber).  
 - two, 7 November, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (Fergus Nicoll, Jane Hayden, Christian Friis) – photos on file.  
 - two, 8 November, Erieau, *Chatham-Kent* (Alan Wormington, found by Steve Charbonneau) – photos on file.  
 - one, 8 November, McGeachey’s Pond, *Chatham-Kent* (Blake A. Mann).  
 - two, 8 November, north of Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).  
 - one, 26 November, Cranberry Marsh, *Durham* (J. Douglas Lockrey, Ronald J. Pittaway, also found by Dan Kaczynski).

Following on last year’s incursion of Cave Swallows, involving six documented individuals (Wormington 2002, Crins 2003), there was another small invasion in 2003, this time involving at least twenty-one birds, of which eleven were documented by reports submitted to the Committee (Wormington 2003d). Curry and McLaughlin (2000) provided a detailed account of the first major Ontario invasion, involving between 90 and 125 birds that occurred in November 1999. Clearly, early November is the time to look for this species along the lower Great Lakes. The individual at Cranberry Marsh on 26 November was observed being caught by a juvenal Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*).

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** *Poliptila caerulea* North Only (15)

2003 - one, 8 October, Marathon, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott).

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* (28)

2003 - one, male, 23 June, Point Petre, *Prince Edward* (Robert E. Maurer, Jr.).  
 - one, first basic, 10 October, Moose Factory, *Cochrane* (Alan Wormington, Mark W. Jennings) – photos on file.

**Townsend's Solitaire** *Myadestes townsendi* **South Only After 2000 (52)**

- 2003 - one, basic, 28 October – 17 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* ([Alan Wormington](#), [Stephen T. Pike](#), Russ Jones) – photos on file.  
 - one, basic, 9 November, Pinery Provincial Park, *Lambton* ([Blake A. Mann](#), also found by Lance Allin).

**Virginia's Warbler** *Vermivora virginiae* **(5)**

- 2003 - one, alternate, male, 14 May, Port Lambton, *Lambton* ([Blake A. Mann](#)).

**Hermit Warbler** *Dendroica occidentalis* **(7)**

- 2003 - one, alternate, female, 7 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* ([Karl R. Konze](#), Nathan Garber, also found by Marianne B. Reid, Linda Bright, Camille Tremblay, Marcelle Lagace).  
 - one, alternate, female, 13 May, Cabot Head, *Bruce* ([A. David Brewer](#), also found by Stephane Menu, Valerie Larochelle, Kevin Dance).

The bird at Point Pelee provided a particular identification challenge because of the complete lack of any black coloration on the throat, a plumage variant that is known but uncommon in this species (Anonymous 2003a).

**Kirtland's Warbler** *Dendroica kirtlandii* **(31)**

- 2003 - one, alternate, male, 15 May, Long Point (Courtright Ridge), *Norfolk* ([Henri Robert](#), also found by Michael S. W. Bradstreet).  
 - one, alternate, male, 17 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* ([Emilia Rauckis](#), Barry S. Cherriere, Lois Knaggs, Donald Ford, also found by Marius Rauckis) – photos on file.

**Kentucky Warbler** *Oporornis formosus* **North Only (2)**

- 2003 - one, first alternate, male, 29 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* ([John M. Woodcock](#)) – photo on file.  
 - one, basic, male, 13 October, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* ([John M. Woodcock](#)) – photo on file.

These two occurrences constitute the first records for Kentucky Warbler in northern Ontario. Both birds were captured, banded, and photographed at the Thunder Cape Bird Observatory, one during spring migration, and the other during fall migration.

**Spotted Towhee** *Pipilo maculatus* **(14)**

- 2002/03 - one, basic, male, 15 December – 6 April, Blair, *Waterloo* (Barry S. Cherriere, found by William G. Wilson) – photo on file.  
 1993 - one, basic, male, 24 January, MacLarens Landing, *Ottawa* (V. Bernard Ladouceur).

**Brewer's Sparrow** *Spizella breweri* **(1)**

- 2003 - one, alternate, male, 27 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* ([John M. Woodcock](#), Nicholas G. Escott, also found by Allan Hale) – photos on file.

This bird, captured, photographed and banded at the Thunder Cape Bird Observatory, is an addition to the documented avifauna of Ontario.

**Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla* North Only (15)**

2003 - one, male, 20 July, Black Sturgeon Lake, *Thunder Bay* (David Grosshuesch).

**Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus* (69)**

- 2003 - one, definitive alternate, 3 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Brett Groves, found by Karl R. Konze, Ian M. Richards) – photos on file.
- one, alternate, 8 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Sharon Pawlowski-Dankovic, David Dankovic).
  - one, alternate, 12-13 May, Wiarton, *Grey* (Joseph W. Johnson).
  - one, first alternate, 12-13 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Blake A. Mann, found by Alison J. Bentley, Stewart Bentley).

**Golden-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia atricapilla* (9)**

2003 - one, alternate, male, 19 May, Hurkett Cove Conservation Area, *Thunder Bay* (Susan Robinson, also found by George A. Williams).

In addition to being seen, this bird was also heard singing its diagnostic song.

**Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus* (4)**

2003 - one, first basic, male, 18 November – 28 December, Cedar Hill, *Lanark* (J. Michael Tate, Andrew Keaveney, Terry Osborne, Harold E. Stiver, J. Burke Korol, Christopher J. Escott, found by Bob Jurmain) – photos on file.

This bird was seen by many observers during its six-week stay.

**Blue Grosbeak *Guiraca caerulea* (56)**

2003 - one, female, 12-19 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (J. Burke Korol, found by Donald Pye).

**Lazuli Bunting *Passerina amoena* (6)**

2003 - one, alternate, male, 21 May, Toronto, *Toronto* (Scott Clarke, also found by Lhot Alconera).

This bird was found while the observers were jogging and walking in E. T. Seton Park in Toronto. Despite not having optical equipment with them, a good description of the bird was provided that eliminated any doubt about its identity. Unfortunately, it did not remain in the area.

**Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* (17)**

- 2003 - one, first alternate, male, 19 May, Long Point (Courtright Ridge), *Norfolk* (Kenny Burrell, also found by Henri Robert) – photos on file.
- one, definitive alternate, male, 22 – circa 26 May, Moose Factory, *Cochrane* (Donald Faries, found by Bertha Faries) – video on file.
  - one, definitive alternate, male, 1 June, Vickers Heights, *Thunder Bay* (Gordon Milne) – photo on file.

The Moose Factory bird constitutes the most northerly record known from Ontario.

**Dickcissel *Spiza americana* North Only (13)**

2003 - one, basic, 13 October, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Allan F. Gilbert).

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (3)**

2003 - one, basic, 24 August, Leamington, *Essex* (Todd R. Pepper, found by Jeanette B. Pepper).

The two previous records of this species are of single birds in Eastnor Township, *Bruce*, on 16-18 February 1994 (Pittaway 1995), and Sturgeon Creek, *Essex*, on 20 May 1999 (Roy 2000). It has been suggested (Anonymous 2003b) that the individuals at Sturgeon Creek (1999) and Leamington (2003) could pertain to the same bird, especially since it is known that a Eurasian Tree Sparrow remained around St. Francois Xavier, Manitoba, for more than four years. The two Essex County locations are only about 8 km apart.

**Not Accepted Records****Origin Uncertain**

Records in this category are considered by the Committee to be correctly identified, but the origin of the bird(s) is suspect. Such birds may have escaped or may have been released from captivity. However, if new evidence suggesting wild origin becomes available, such records may be reconsidered by the Committee.

2003 - Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*), one, 19 April, Amherstburg, *Essex* (John B. Schmelefske, also found by Mike Jaber).

It is becoming increasingly difficult to dismiss reports of this species as involving escaped birds. There are breeding populations in the Chicago, Illinois and New York, New York areas. At some time in the future, if more reports are forthcoming, the status of this species in the province may need to be reconsidered.

- Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*), one, 18 March, Guelph, *Wellington* (Stuart A. Mackenzie).

**Not Accepted Records****Identification Uncertain**

The documentation received for the following reports generally was found not to be detailed enough to eliminate similar species unequivocally. In a great many cases, the Committee members felt that the species being described probably was correctly identified, but that the details provided in the report, perhaps due to the circumstances of the observation conditions,

were insufficient. It should be noted that any of these reports may be re-submitted if additional documentation becomes available.

- 2003 - Storm-petrel species, one, 19 September, Port Bruce, *Elgin*.  
 - Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), one, 2 June, Toronto, *Toronto*.  
 - Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), one, 20 September, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.  
 - Eurasian Collared-Dove, one, 13 May, Toronto, *Toronto* – photos on file.  
 - Eurasian Collared-Dove, one, 20 August, Port Hope, *Northumberland*.  
 - Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, one, 6 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.  
 - Fish Crow, one, 1 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.  
 - Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*), one, 18 October, west of Marentette Beach, *Essex*.  
 - Kirtland's Warbler, one, 5 June, Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Niagara*.  
 - Red-faced Warbler (*Caredellina rubrifrons*), one, 9 May, Bronte, *Halton*.  
 - Abert's Towhee (*Pipilo aberti*), one, 17 February, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay*.
- 2002 - Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*), one, 29 August, Alliston, *Simcoe*.

## Corrections/Updates to Previous OBRC Reports

### 2002 Report (Ontario Birds 21: 54-76)

- under Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, add "Ronald C. Ridout, Ian M. Richards" after "John Ferris, Julie Ferris".
- under Crested Caracara, change "*Caracara plancus*" to "*Caracara cheriway*".
- under Purple Gallinule, change "Elliot Lake" to "Blind River".
- under Piping Plover, 2001, Long Point, change "alternate" to "first alternate", change "10-15 June" to "24 May – 23 June", change "found by Ian Richards" to "found by Jerome Fischer et al.". A note can be added to indicate that this bird was banded as a chick at the mouth of the Platte River, Michigan, in the summer of 2000 (*vide* Jon McCracken).
- under Piping Plover, 2002, Port Colborne, change "9-12 October" to "9-18 October".
- under Lewis's Woodpecker, change "18 January – 7 March" to "5 January – 5 May".
- under Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 2002, Caledon East, change "Nathan Miller" to "Nathan Hiller".

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William J. Crins, 170 Middlefield Road, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 8G1

## Feeding Strategies of American Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers

David H. Elder

During the winter of 2000-2001 (December to March), I observed the feeding activities of several American Three-toed Woodpeckers (*Picoides dorsalis*) and Black-backed Woodpeckers (*P. arcticus*) near Atikokan in northwestern Ontario. The woodpeckers were regular visitors to a stand of Black Spruce (*Picea mariana*) that had been killed by the water of a pond created by Beavers (*Castor canadensis*). The spruce stand was about two hectares (4.4 acres) in size, and was located on the north side of Highway 11, five kilometres east of Atikokan. The trees had been dead for about a year. During regular weekly visits to the site, the number of woodpeckers present varied from none to a maximum of seven (four Black-backed and three American Three-toed), but usually one or two individuals of each species would be found. I became curious about the feeding strategies of the two species when, during early visits to the site, I frequently found both species feeding on the same tree.

### Discussion

American Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers tend to feed primarily by flaking bark from

recently dead coniferous trees and consuming insect larvae that are found (Bent 1939, Short 1982, Dixon and Saab 2000, Leonard 2001). My observations revealed that competition and possible conflict were avoided by significant differences in the feeding behaviour used by each species

Dead and dying trees are immediately beset by bark- and wood-consuming insects, part of the decomposition process. While there are always a certain number of dead and dying trees in any given area of forest, an extensive tree kill, whether due to fire, flood, disease or insects, presents the essentially boreal Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers with a concentrated potential food supply. Both species are quickly attracted to these opportunities. The insects that are available to the woodpeckers appear to be most abundant during the first year after the death of the tree, and are found immediately beneath the bark and in the first few millimetres of wood. Trees that have been dead for more than two years do not seem to support these particular insects, or the larvae have bored into the tree to a depth that makes them inaccessible, and

are thus considerably less attractive to these woodpeckers.

White-spotted Sawyer Beetles (*Monochamus scutellatus*) are attracted to newly dead conifers which are the source of food for their larvae (Escott 2001). The larvae are initially found just below the bark, and create shallow, round galleries. Toward fall, they burrow farther into the tree prior to winter dormancy. Other wood- and bark-eating insects are also attracted to the dead trees, including bark beetles (Borror et al. 1976) that create small, many-branched galleries, again just below the bark on the surface of the sapwood.

Both of the three-toed woodpeckers are somewhat similar in appearance, being rather chunky in stature, and black and white in colour, with males having a yellow forehead. The Black-backed Woodpecker is slightly larger and more robust than the American Three-toed Woodpecker, and this size difference permits a different feeding method. As noted above, both species are bark flakers. The American Three-toed appears to flake almost exclusively, and seeks insect larvae that are present in the inner layers of bark and just at the wood surface (Figure 1). The flaking action, a sideways swipe of the head, removes small pieces of bark and exposes the insect larvae. The action is done deliberately, steadily and rather quietly. I often had to listen very carefully to hear the flaking activity of an American

Three-toed Woodpecker, and frequently saw the bird before I heard it.

Not so with Black-backed Woodpeckers; I was often aware of their presence some distance from the stand of dead spruce, since I could hear loud pecking. Black-backs vigorously remove large pieces of bark when flaking and also drill a short distance into the wood of the tree (Figure 2). The holes they create are rectangular in shape and usually only a few millimetres deep. The holes are quite distinctive and allow the woodpecker to reach, with the aid of its tongue, larvae that are well inside the tree.

American Three-toed Woodpeckers are believed to specialize in the larvae of bark beetles (Scolytidae; Murphy and Lehnhausen 1998), whereas the main food of Black-backed Woodpecker is the larvae of wood-boring beetles (Cerambycidae and Buprestidae; Bent 1939, Villard and Beninger 1993, Murphy and Lehnhausen 1998), including the White-spotted Sawyer Beetle (Escott 2001).

### **Conclusion**

By using a different feeding strategy and targeting different prey species, these boreal woodpeckers can take advantage of opportunistic abundant food sources without competing. I often saw both species feeding in the same tree with no apparent conflict. Their ability to find and utilize large stands of dead trees created by fire,

flood or insect damage is quite remarkable and has been noted by many observers. One can wander through kilometres of boreal forest and only infrequently encounter either of these woodpecker species. But, find a stand of newly dead trees and there they are, often in high numbers.

It is obvious that trees dead for more than two years do not have a strong attraction for either species. This is undoubtedly due to the species of wood-eating insects and their life cycles that utilize dead trees soon after their death and for a short period thereafter. The larger, sturdier Black-backed Woodpecker feeds on insect larvae found under the bark and in the outer wood layers of recently dead conifers by flaking and drilling. The smaller American Three-toed Woodpecker flakes off bark only and does not appear to drill for its prey.



**Figure 1: Flaking of bark on Black Spruce by American Three-toed Woodpecker, showing exposed insect larvae galleries, 6 January 2001, near Atikokan, Ontario. Photo by David H. Elder.**

### **Acknowledgements**

I want to thank Ron Tozer for his comments on this article and for assistance with the literature.



**Figure 2: Flaking of bark and holes drilled in Black Spruce by Black-backed Woodpecker, 6 January 2001, near Atikokan, Ontario. Photo by David H. Elder.**

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David H. Elder, 23 Birch Road, Box 252, Atikokan, Ontario P0T 1C0

## **Bird Monitoring at Toronto's Exhibition Place Wind Turbine**

Ross D. James and Glenn Coady

In December of 2002, a modern, tall wind turbine was installed at Exhibition Place close to the lakeshore, in downtown Toronto. This was a joint venture of Toronto Hydro and WindShare, with the cooperation of Exhibition Place. By the close of 2003, this turbine had generated more than one million kilowatt hours of electricity for the city. This paper presents the results of a bird monitoring program undertaken in 2003 to assess the potential impact of the turbine on bird populations.

The turbine is a Dutch LW 52 Lagerwey 750 kw horizontal axis model, with a tower standing 94 m high. The variable pitch blades are 24 m long, and rotate at a maximum rate of 27 rpm. The generator is quiet enough that it would not interfere with normal conversation right below it. The distant songs and calls of White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows (see Appendix 1 for scientific names of birds) were audible when standing right below the turbine. The blades swish through the air, but make little more noise at ground level than the wind would be making in the trees. The noise of the blades, however, might be loud enough higher in the air to alert birds at close range to

the presence of potential danger.

The turbine is at the western end of Exhibition Place, almost due south of the end of Dufferin Street, and just north of Lakeshore Boulevard. The turbine is surrounded by paved roadways and parking lots, and the open lawns with planted trees and shrubs of the Exhibition Place grounds. Buildings are 50 m to the northeast, just more than 50 m to the northwest, and about 70 m to the east. The open water of Lake Ontario lies about 100 m south, beyond Lakeshore Boulevard. Within 50 m of the tower are mainly open lawns that were kept closely mowed, and paved roadways. Immediately around the turbine was a circle of bark mulch. There were only a couple of small shrubby patches that would have been more difficult to search. Part of the lawn was over-shadowed by the canopies of larger trees. About 15 percent of this area could not be searched directly because of a chain link fence separating the Exhibition Place from Lakeshore Boulevard. The lawns beyond the fence could be scanned from inside the fence.

### **PROCEDURES**

Direct visual searches covered a 50 m



**Figure 1: Exhibition Place wind turbine, Toronto, Ontario. Photo by *Toronto Hydro Corporation*.**

radius around the turbine (except beyond the fence as noted). Searches started just after dawn and lasted about one hour each. The searcher (Coady) walked a pattern that covered the area at intervals of 5 m or less. The early start minimized the potential loss of any dead birds to diurnal scavengers such as crows, gulls, or squirrels, and avoided the possibility that people might find something.

Searches in spring were conducted twice a week over five weeks, from 27 April to 31 May. Autumn searches were three times a week for six weeks, 18 August to 27 September. Searches were spaced to get fairly even coverage (less so in spring), but were random with respect to weather. Many different conditions from full sun to light rain, and from calm to strong winds, were encountered. Notes were made about live birds and potential scavengers near the turbine.

A "removal by predators" study was conducted in conjunction with the searches, to assess potential losses of dead birds to predators prior to their being found on searches. In total, 50 dead birds were placed out within 50 m of the tower, 17 in spring and 33 in autumn. Thirty-one were small (warbler-sparrow size), 17 were medium-sized (thrush-jay size), and three were larger (woodcock-gull size). All birds were removed after a week or more, when no longer of much interest to a predator because of the state of decay.

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### RESULTS

#### Living birds

In total, 44 species of birds were noted on the ground or in trees and shrubbery near the ground, in or near the search area. The most numerous were Canada Goose, Ring-billed Gull, European Starling, Common Grackle, and House Sparrow. The most numerous and frequent were Ring-billed Gulls in parking lots, on lawns, or on nearby breakwaters, at almost every visit. They were found foraging on the lawns around the turbine at least a dozen times, with as many as 46 present. Through the weeks the exhibition was operating, they were attracted to the grounds every day.

European Starlings and Common Grackles were present almost every day. Starlings were observed gathering nest materials on the lawns below the operating turbine, and no doubt foraged close by every day. Canada Geese were close to the turbine on at least half the visits in the autumn, with as many as 31 present.

Less commonly seen species close to or on the ground included Rock Pigeon, American Crow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin,

Cedar Waxwing, Chipping Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch, and American Goldfinch. A pair of Red-winged Blackbirds nested in the shrubbery below the turbine blades.

Least often seen at or near the ground were Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, House Wren, Swainson's Thrush,



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On two occasions, Coady visited the Toronto Islands following a morning search at the turbine. On these occasions there were many wood-warblers seen on the islands, several hundred in one instance. But, only one species of wood-warbler had been noted in the trees near the turbine on each of these days. Numbers of wood-warblers were always small near the turbine.

In addition to birds seen on or near the ground, 22 species were noted flying near the turbine, at the height of the blades, when in operation. The most commonly seen were Ring-billed Gull, European Starling, Chimney Swift, American Crow, and Rock Pigeon. Flocks of Ring-billed Gulls arriving to forage on lawns and parking lots soon after dawn always took a flight path that clearly avoided coming close to the turbine. As with gulls, approaching Canada Geese took a flight path that avoided direct approach, going around the turbine before landing. They had obviously also adapted to the presence of the turbine prior to the start of this study.

A flock of Bobolinks was observed flying directly at the rotat-

ing blades, but easily changed course at close range and flew around. A group of 15 Chimney Swifts was cruising about foraging for some time one day, but they seemed well aware of the turbine and avoided coming too close. A single Red-breasted Nuthatch apparently flew right between the blades turning at about 20 rpm and was unharmed.

Other species seen flying near the turbine at blade height were Mallard, Double-crested Cormorant, Black-crowned Night-Heron, American Kestrel, Killdeer, *Calidris* sandpiper sp., Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Common Nighthawk, Northern Flicker, Tree Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Common Grackle, and American Goldfinch.

### Scavengers/predators

The mammalian predators seen in the vicinity of the turbine were mainly Grey Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*), as many as 15 in one day in autumn, and seen almost every day. There were as many as three free-roaming house cats (*Felis catus*) seen in the vicinity. Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) were seen twice. Striped Skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*) were possible, though none were seen. The only one of these species regularly likely to be attracted to the open lawns and roadways of the turbine area would be the squirrels.

Few people were seen close to the tower in early morning. More were likely close-by during the 24th

of May celebrations or during the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE), but few people will pick up dead animals anyway. Dogs (*Canis familiaris*) were a possibility, though few were normally close, and they can be very inefficient at removing dead birds (James 2003).

Potential avian scavengers most likely were Ring-billed Gulls, present on many days and walking on the grass. Crows were also a possibility, but were fewer and typically passing at a distance.

### **Removal by predators study**

Although fewer birds were placed out in spring, proportionately more were removed then, at a time when there were far fewer gulls and crows present. This suggests the squirrels were the main agent, at a time when their alternate food supply may have been scarce. Only 3 of 17 (18%) were removed within a week of placement.

In the autumn, when searches were more frequent, only one of 33 birds (3%) went missing within the 2 to 3 days before a second visit was made. However, 3 of 33 (9%) went missing within one week. This was at a time when gulls in particular were more numerous and squirrels were also more numerous, with young of the year. Apparently the squirrels were now more interested in seeds and nuts. Gulls, crows, and Raccoons were probably well supplied with junk food at the exhibition for part of the time, and apparently had more readily available

food elsewhere. Given the potential number of scavengers present, particularly squirrels, there was relatively little scavenging.

If we consider all birds removed within one week of placement, only 12% were removed. This is probably a higher rate than should be used for the autumn period, at a time when most casualties might be expected (more nocturnal migrants than in spring), since searches were more frequent (only 3% went missing between searches). Search efficiency trials were not undertaken, since the area searched was almost all short grass or pavement that could be searched very easily. Even if something was overlooked one day, it probably would have been found on the next visit.

### **Avian mortality**

The searches found one dead bird in spring and one in the autumn period. Both could have been local residents and not migrants. In spring, it was a European Starling on 14 May, and in autumn, an immature American Robin on 30 August.

### **DISCUSSION**

Given the ground conditions, search efficiency was probably very high. Experience elsewhere has shown that under such conditions even individual feathers are readily found (James 2003). Nocturnal migrants are considered to be at greatest risk of collision with tall structures (although still at low risk

at structures less than 150 m high) as they are travelling in low light conditions. The chances of a collision with a wind turbine in daylight, even in coastal situations, is virtually zero (Crockford 1992, Pearson 1992, Winkelman 1995). The searches were conducted during periods of heaviest nocturnal migration, and were more frequent in autumn when inexperienced young of the year greatly enhanced numbers of nocturnal bird migrants.

None of the larger birds placed out were touched. If any larger bird had been hit by the turbine, it is probable that it would have been eaten in place, and remains would have been readily visible. This was the result with larger birds found by scavengers at the Pickering turbine. If the number of birds found dead (two) is adjusted by a predator removal rate of 12% (using all that disappeared within a week, both spring and autumn) and further adjusted by the 15% of the area that could not be searched directly, the total projected mortality is still fewer than three birds. The mortality estimate, assuming all mortality did occur during the study period, would probably not have exceeded three birds. If any additional mortality did occur outside the study period, it is unlikely to have been more than one additional bird.

Although mortality monitoring did not span the entire year, it covered the time of the year when mortality is most likely to occur. This is the period of heaviest migration of

small nocturnal migrants. Michael Mesure (pers. comm.) of Fatal Light Awareness Program has pointed out that the ten top species in tall building kills in Toronto usually suffer the greatest mortality in October after the surveys at Exhibition Place had finished. However, several of the species of heaviest mortality at tall buildings are warblers, the vast majority of which have already left the province by the end of September. Why the remaining smaller numbers should be more susceptible in October is uncertain.

Other species suffering high mortality in October at tall buildings are later migrants. However, there is but a single flashing red light on the Exhibition Place wind turbine at night, and this is unlikely to compare with lighted tall buildings as an attractant to birds. Also, there were very few nocturnal migrants attracted to Exhibition Place compared to the Toronto Islands, because there is little habitat of interest at Exhibition Place. The study at the Pickering wind turbine (James 2003) did continue through October and November and no additional mortality of nocturnal migrants was recorded.

Mesure also indicated that most of these migrants killed in October at buildings were daytime casualties (86% in 2003). This clearly indicates that it is windows, and not just obstacles, that are the primary agent of mortality. Windows are not a factor at the wind turbine.

It seems unlikely to us that the later migrants would have suffered any mortality at the Exhibition Place wind turbine.

Many of the diurnal raptor migrants also pass through Toronto in October and November. However, these birds are moving in daylight with good visibility, conditions under which collisions with anything other than glass are highly unlikely. Many birds, particularly larger ones, are known to avoid flying within about 50 m of towers, particularly if there are moving parts (Faanes 1987, James 2003, this study). Even though diurnal migrants may be abundant in areas near communications towers, they are almost totally absent from tower kills where tens of thousands of nocturnal migrants are killed (Avery et al. 1978). Buteos and American Kestrels, for example, were commonly observed flying at turbine blade heights in a Minnesota wind farm (73 turbines) and none were known to have been killed through 20 months of continuous monitoring (Osborne et al. 1998).

Mesure has also pointed out that Ring-billed Gulls usually just grab small birds and depart, leaving no trace such as feathers, evident with mammalian predation. However, while gulls regularly foraged on lawns and parking lots adjacent to the search area, they did not ordinarily come into the search area. They typically avoided the turbine, as they also did at Pickering (James 2003). They certainly were

not a factor in removing placed-out birds through September. They are much more likely to be a removal factor where they have learned there is a more constant supply of food, such as at tall downtown buildings.

The mortality experienced at the wind turbine is only a tiny fraction of the numbers of birds regularly occurring in the area. The local birds seemed well aware of the turbine and lived around it much as usual. Nocturnal migrants were probably relatively few in the immediate vicinity because of the built-up nature of the area. The mortality is closer to that of individual houses where birds hit windows at a rate of between one and 10 per year on average, and much higher at some rural area homes surrounded by trees (Klem 1990, Dunn 1993).

The level of mortality experienced at the Exhibition Place wind turbine is absolutely insignificant when compared with the thousands of birds killed annually in Toronto at tall buildings (Evans Ogden 1996; [www.flap.org](http://www.flap.org)). Each of the free-roaming cats seen are capable of killing as many as 1000 small animals per year, including birds (Coleman and Temple 1993). Each free-roaming cat in Toronto probably kills more birds per year than the Exhibition Place wind turbine did in 2003.

Although mortality at the turbine is likely to vary from year to year, it is unlikely to exceed the low level of 2003 by any significant

amount and could be lower. Large mortality events at wind turbines in North America have never been reported, and they are unlikely in future (Erickson et al. 2001). The Exhibition Place wind turbine will not have a significant direct impact on bird populations, but could have a very significant indirect impact through providing clean energy to the city.

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## Appendix 1: Scientific names of bird species.

Double-crested Cormorant, <i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	Hermit Thrush, <i>Catharus guttatus</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron, <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	American Robin, <i>Turdus migratorius</i>
Canada Goose, <i>Branta canadensis</i>	Northern Mockingbird, <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>
Mallard, <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Brown Thrasher, <i>Toxostoma rufum</i>
American Kestrel, <i>Falco sparverius</i>	European Starling, <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Killdeer, <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	Cedar Waxwing, <i>Bombcilla cedrorum</i>
American Woodcock, <i>Scolopax minor</i>	Tennessee Warbler, <i>Vermivora peregrina</i>
Ring-billed Gull, <i>Larus delawarensis</i>	Yellow Warbler, <i>Dendroica petechia</i>
Herring Gull, <i>Larus argentatus</i>	Chestnut-sided Warbler, <i>Dendroica pensylvanica</i>
Great Black-backed Gull, <i>Larus marinus</i>	Magnolia Warbler, <i>Dendroica magnolia</i>
Rock Pigeon, <i>Columba livia</i>	Black-throated Blue Warbler, <i>Dendroica caerulescens</i>
Common Nighthawk, <i>Chordeiles minor</i>	Yellow-rumped Warbler, <i>Dendroica coronata</i>
Chimney Swift, <i>Chaetura pelagica</i>	Blackburnian Warbler, <i>Dendroica fusca</i>
Ruby-throated Hummingbird, <i>Archilochus colubris</i>	Bay-breasted Warbler, <i>Dendroica castanea</i>
Downy Woodpecker, <i>Picoides pubescens</i>	Black-and-white Warbler, <i>Mniotilta varia</i>
Northern Flicker, <i>Colaptes auratus</i>	American Redstart, <i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
Warbling Vireo, <i>Vireo gilvus</i>	Ovenbird, <i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>
Red-eyed Vireo, <i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	Canada Warbler, <i>Wilsonia canadensis</i>
Blue Jay, <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	Chipping Sparrow, <i>Spizella passerina</i>
American Crow, <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	Song Sparrow, <i>Melospiza melodia</i>
Tree Swallow, <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	White-throated Sparrow, <i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>
Cliff Swallow, <i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	White-crowned Sparrow, <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>
Barn Swallow, <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Bobolink, <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>
Red-breasted Nuthatch, <i>Sitta canadensis</i>	Red-winged Blackbird, <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>
White-breasted Nuthatch, <i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	Common Grackle, <i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>
Brown Creeper, <i>Certhia americana</i>	Brown-headed Cowbird, <i>Molothrus ater</i>
House Wren, <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	House Finch, <i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>
Golden-crowned Kinglet, <i>Regulus satrapa</i>	American Goldfinch, <i>Carduelis tristis</i>
Ruby-crowned Kinglet, <i>Regulus calendula</i>	House Sparrow, <i>Passer domesticus</i>
Swainson's Thrush, <i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	

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## Gray Flycatcher: Third Record for Ontario

Jeffrey H. Skevington

### Introduction

The date 14 December 2003 is a day that is unlikely to fade in my memory. John Harvey, Richard Skevington (my father) and I started the Fisherville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in our traditional area near Taquanyah, west of Cayuga, in the Regional Municipality of Haldimand, Ontario. The morning was overcast and winds were light from the southeast. Heavy snow throughout the morning made conditions for birding tough, but the birds made up for our misery. While walking through the marsh, my father yelled that he had a shorebird. When I arrived, I was very surprised to see a Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*). We suggested that it was time to hang up the bins and call it a day, as we could not expect to top such a bird.

Fortunately, we continued and at 1245h, we topped it. We had walked into a small wetland on the north side of Indiana Road West, 1.9 km west of River Road (42° 58' 46" N, 79° 54' 17" W), hoping to see the usual flock of American Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*) and perhaps a few Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) or the like. I went straight to the cattails and starting spishing, with Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) and Swamp

Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*) on my mind. Dad yelled from where I had just walked and said that he had a flycatcher. I backtracked expecting to find an Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) and was shocked to see an *Empidonax* flycatcher.

Excited expletives soon followed as I realized that the flycatcher was a western *Empidonax*! The long bill, long tail with extensive white edges on the outermost feathers, and general coloration immediately eliminated any eastern *Empidonax* species. We spent a minute yelling at John to come over, another minute or two uttering more expletives, and then a few minutes debating whether it was a Dusky (*E. oberholseri*) or Hammond's (*E. hammondi*). I thought at that point that it was a Dusky but some things were not adding up.

After a few minutes taking notes, I ran back to the car and grabbed Sibley (2000), my scope and my camera. A quick look in Sibley made me smack myself in the forehead. I had not even considered Gray Flycatcher (*E. wrightii*) because of the green back and yellowish breast and belly on our bird. All of the inconsistencies nagging me about Dusky Flycatcher now made sense. The bird was a Gray

Flycatcher, apparently in first winter (first basic) plumage. Even though I had lived in California for a year, I had not seen this plumage. Alternate-plumaged Gray Flycatchers that I was familiar with were very pale and much greyer overall than this bird. Now the phoebe-like tail bobbing made sense. I spent 30 minutes writing more notes on the bird and attempting my first digiscoped photos (thankfully not reproduced here).

Even though I was absolutely confident at this point that we were looking at Ontario's first winter record of Gray Flycatcher, we were nervous about whether or not others would agree with us. *Empidonax* identifications are notoriously difficult to make and I expected some flack over the next few days, particularly if the bird hung around.

The flack started as soon as expected. When we went to the count summary, people immediately suggested that we were looking at a phoebe and when shown the photos, most only allowed that it was an *Empidonax*. Only John Miles seemed to buy our identification, reiterating some of our earlier expletives as he looked at the pictures.

We posted the sighting on ONTBIRDS in the evening and the next day more flames started to appear as people questioned the identification. Fortunately, the flaming was short-lived, as Alan Wormington went and saw the bird on 15 December and later that day

posted a comment on ONTBIRDS that "identification of the bird as a Gray Flycatcher was exceptionally straightforward". The flycatcher was last reported on 7 January 2004, and was seen by hundreds of people, with no further dissention. The record has been accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (Crins 2004).

### Identification

So, what was the process that we went through to identify this bird? Most birders would immediately recognize the bird as an *Empidonax* flycatcher: a small, drab, warbler-sized passerine with two wing bars, a narrow eye ring and a narrow insectivorous bill. The assumption might be that it would be a Least Flycatcher, the latest *Empidonax* migrant and a species that might occur in December, but this would be exceptional too. We considered this briefly, but it was never a serious consideration. The most noticeable diagnostic features that we commented on immediately, and which differentiate it from other *Empidonax* species, were: tail regularly pumped/dipped, as in Eastern Phoebe; long narrow bill with black tip ventrally; narrow complete eye ring, with no flaring at the back of the eye; pronounced contrast between green back and grey head; white throat contrasting with pale yellow breast and belly; and the call, a "whit" similar to Least Flycatcher, but somewhat softer than that species. Alan Wormington

later reported (ONTBIRDS, 15 December 2003) that he heard the bird utter a “double note” vocalization once or twice that he described as “tsee-up”. This may be a partial song (see Peterjohn and Gustafson 1990, Sterling 1999, Sibley 2000).

The most striking character that eliminated all eastern species of *Empidonax* from consideration was the long, narrow, straight-sided bill, with a black ventral tip. Eastern species of *Empidonax*, and Cordilleran (*E. occidentalis*) and Pacific-slope (*E. difficilis*) Flycatchers, have broader, slightly convex bills. Patterns of the lower mandible are useful in differentiating *Empidonax* flycatchers. Three western species (Hammond’s, Dusky and Gray) are the only species with yellow lower mandibles with dark tips. The lower mandible is completely yellow in all others (although Least is variable and can show some dark below). The dark tip is most extensive in Hammond’s, covering over half of the mandible. The dark coloration is usually restricted to the tip in Dusky and Gray. The dark tip grades into the pale base in Dusky and Hammond’s, and contrasts sharply in Gray. Hammond’s Flycatcher has a distinctly shorter bill than Dusky and Gray. So, based only on the very distinctive bill shape and coloration, we are left considering only Dusky and Gray (and possibly Hammond’s if we have any doubts about bill length).

Call notes of *Empidonax* flycatchers are also usually distinctive,

and only four species have *whit* calls as given by this bird: Least, Willow (*E. traillii*), Dusky, and Gray. Hammond’s gives a sharp *peep*. That means we were clearly dealing with Dusky or Gray, after only a moment’s observation. The distinctive phoebe-like tail-dipping behaviour performed regularly is unique to Gray Flycatcher, and had I ignored plumage characteristics that I did not recognize, I should have realized that this was what it was immediately.

This is the short version of how the bird was diagnosed. However, because no single character should be used to make any identification, many more details were examined which confirmed the identification.

The behaviour of the bird was fairly distinctive; it always perched low and often flew down to take insects on or near the ground (although other species will do this in cold weather when insects are low). Interestingly, we noted that the bird was taking a lot of insects off the snow, and amazingly, out of the water. We saw it pick a caddisfly larva (Trichoptera) out of very shallow water at least twice.

The head is smoothly rounded in Least, Gray, Dusky and Yellow-bellied (*E. flaviventris*); very slightly crested in Hammond’s, Willow, Alder (*E. alnorum*) and Acadian (*E. virescens*); and moderately crested in Pacific-slope and Cordilleran. The eye ring is faint to nearly lacking on Willow, Alder and Acadian Flycatcher; conspicuous,



**Figure 1:** Gray Flycatcher near Cayuga, Regional Municipality of Haldimand, Ontario, on 15 December 2003, showing long narrow bill, round head, and pale yellow breast and belly. Photo by *Harold E. Stiver*.



**Figure 2:** Gray Flycatcher near Cayuga, Regional Municipality of Haldimand, Ontario, on 22 December 2003, showing green back and rump, short primary extension, and long tail with white on outer edges. Photo by *Jean H. Iron*.



**Figure 3: Gray Flycatcher near Cayuga, Regional Municipality of Haldimand, Ontario, on 1 January 2004. Photo by Kenneth M. Newcombe.**

slightly thinner above the eye and broader behind the eye in Hammond's, Cordilleran and Pacific-slope (Cordilleran and Pacific-slope are white or yellowish white, exaggerated into a point behind the eye); narrow and even in Yellow-bellied and Gray; variable in Least, but typically not as narrow as in Gray; and conspicuous and contrasting with the face in Least and Yellow-bellied, showing less contrast with the grey face in Gray. A pale area on the lores is present but variable in all species; however, it continues in a pale band across the forehead only in Gray.

Primary extension is short in Gray, Least, Dusky, Pacific-slope, Cordilleran and Yellow-bellied, and long in Hammond's, Acadian, Alder

and Willow. The tail is long in relation to length of the wingtips in Dusky, Gray, Cordilleran and Pacific-slope; moderate length in Least, Acadian, Alder and Willow; and short in Hammond's and Yellow-bellied. The tail is noticeably broader in Acadian, Willow and Alder.

Gray Flycatchers have obvious white outer edges on the tail. The white is brighter and more extensive than in any other *Empidonax*. This was distinctive on our bird and drew our attention immediately. Note that Kaufman (1990) warns that despite our experience, this character is difficult to assess in the field. Dusky is the next most likely species to show white on the outer tail feathers, but several species can give the impression of showing this

character, particularly when the tail is somewhat splayed (Paul E. Lehman, pers. comm.). Throat colour is yellow to greyish yellow in Pacific-slope, Cordilleran, Yellow-bellied and immature Acadian; white and contrasting with the face in Least, adult Acadian, and most Alders; and grey with no sharp contrast between the head and throat in Willow, some Alders, Hammond's, Dusky and Gray (very pale grey to nearly white, but no sharp contrast between throat and sides of head). This was the only character that we observed that did not match perfectly with Gray Flycatcher. We noted a white throat contrasting with sides of the head. I assume that the contrast was emphasized due to a recent molt, as the bird appeared to be in very

fresh plumage.

Colour of the back and contrast with the head varies depending on the plumage. In December, Dusky, Hammond's, Gray and some Least Flycatchers should have extensive contrast between the head and back (greenish back and greyish head). There is little contrast in some Leasts, Alder and Willow (uniform olive-brown), Cordilleran and Pacific-slope (olive-green washed with brown) and Yellow-bellied and Acadian (green).

Wing bars and tertial edgings contrast strongly with blackish wings in Least, Yellow-bellied, Acadian, and to a lesser extent in Willow and Alder; in western species, the wings are greyish and so show less contrast, with the least contrast shown in Gray. Buffy wing bars in December

**Table 1. Accepted and pending Gray Flycatcher records in eastern North America.**

Province/State	Location	Observer(s)	Date(s)
Massachusetts	Littleton	James Baird	31 October 1969 (collected)
Ontario	Mugg's Island, Toronto	David Broughton, Ross D. James	11 September 1981
Ohio	Magee Marsh Wildlife Management Area, Lucas County	Bruce G. Peterjohn, Mary E. Gustafson, Ray Hannikman, Larry Rosche	20 to 22 August 1988
Delaware	Cape Henlopen State Park	W. French, B. Fintel, B. Murphy, N. Murphy, Jon L. Dunn, et al.	6 November through December 1991
Ontario	Point Pelee National Park	Alan Wormington	7 June 1993
Ontario	Near Cayuga, Haldimand Regional Municipality	Jeffrey H. Skevington, Richard P. Skevington, John Harvey, et al.	14 December 2003 to 7 January 2004
North Carolina	Hank's Chapel, near Jordan Lake, Chatham County	Josh Rose, Bill Lupardus, Glenn Simon, Deb Carter, et al.	28 December 2003 to 19 January 2004

occur in all plumages of Hammond's, Dusky, Acadian and in immature Least, Pacific-slope, Cordilleran, Yellow-bellied, Willow and Alder. In Gray Flycatcher, wing bars and tertial edges are whitish. Pacific-slope and Cordilleran wings are dusky with dull white wing bars. Adult Alder and Willow may have white wing bars and tertials in December if they have not recently completed their molt.

Molt pattern and timing is an important part of identifying *Empidonax* species. Our bird appeared to be an immature in relatively fresh, first basic plumage (in adult plumage, yellow areas will fade/wear to whitish, and green will fade to grey; wing bars will fade towards white and become narrower; sharply pointed rectrices will become more rounded). For more discussion of molt in *Empidonax* species, see Kaufman (1990), Pyle (1997), and Sterling (1999).

### **Extralimital Records in Eastern North America**

Gray Flycatcher is an extremely rare bird in eastern North America at any time, and seemed even more unlikely in the winter. To put this into perspective, Alan Wormington stated on ONTBIRDS (15 December 2003): "On the long drive home today, I contemplated if any other CBC observation was as outlandish as this bird found by the Skevingtons. The only one I could think of was Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*), but I couldn't

decide which of these two CBC birds is more remarkable".

There are two previous records of Gray Flycatcher for Ontario. The first occurrence was on 11 September 1981 at Mugg's Island, Toronto, involving a bird netted and banded by David Broughton, and later examined and photographed by Ross D. James. The photographs, detailed documentation of colours and measurements, and an outer tail feather are filed at the Royal Ontario Museum (James 1982, Pittaway 1995). Alan Wormington recorded the second Ontario observation on 7 June 1993 at Point Pelee National Park, Essex County (Bain 1994), on a day of heavy *Empidonax* migration when a record count of 68 Yellow-bellied Flycatchers was tallied (Ridout 1993).

I am aware of only four other records of Gray Flycatcher in eastern North America (see Table 1), involving observations in Delaware (Paxton et al. 1992, Boyle et al. 1992), Massachusetts (Finch 1970, Veit and Petersen 1993), North Carolina (Paul E. Lehman, pers. comm.), and Ohio (Peterjohn and Gustafson 1990). The most interesting of these was the bird discovered on the Jordan Lake CBC in North Carolina, and seen from 28 December 2003 to 19 January 2004. This observation has yet to be reviewed by the state records committee, but photos on the web (<http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/pix/grayflycatcher.html>) are convincing. This bird coincided well with

our record and perhaps arrived with the same weather system. Given that two records occurred almost simultaneously, it may be that this species occurs more often than we expect in the east and is under-recorded. Perhaps not, but given that ours is the third record for Ontario, it suggests that this is a species for which we should all be on the lookout.

### Acknowledgements

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tributing information on previous eastern North American records of this species, and to Ron Pittaway, Ron Tozer, and especially Paul Lehman and Alan Wormington, for their comments on draft versions of the paper. The photographs accompanying this article by Jean Iron (<http://www3.sympatico.ca/jeaniron/index.htm>), Ken Newcombe (<http://www.kennewcombe.com>), and Harold Stiver (<http://ontfin.com/>) are amazing, and we appreciate them allowing us to use them here.

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Jeffrey H. Skevington, Invertebrate Biodiversity, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, K.W. Neatby Building, 960 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C6

## Notes

### Common Grackle Anting with Moth Ball

David H. Elder

I live in Atikokan in northwestern Ontario. In mid July of 2003, I received a phone call from a local lady inquiring about an unusual activity by a Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) on the lawn of her yard. She had spread a number of moth balls (naphthalene crystals) along the edge of her flower gardens to keep house cats away. A grackle, one of several that were feeding on the lawn, had picked up a moth ball in its bill and then reclined slightly on its side with its uppermost wing partly raised, its tail spread and its side feathers fluffed up. In this position, the grackle had repeatedly rubbed the moth ball through and over the feathers of its underwing and flank feathers. This activity had continued for several minutes until the grackle suddenly dropped the moth ball, shook itself vigorously and walked away to join the other members of the feeding flock. Her question was "what was the bird doing?", of course. I told her the grackle had been "anting", a curious behaviour that has been recorded in many species of birds throughout most of the world, and went on to explain in a general way why it was done.

#### Discussion

As implied by its name, birds

engaged in this activity have usually been observed using ants (Landsborough Thomson 1946, Pettingill 1970, Terres 1980). Anting occurs in two ways: "passive" anting, in which the bird simply sits or partly reclines on or beside an ant nest, raises its feathers, and lets ants move through and over them; and "active" anting. In the latter, an ant is caught, held in the bill, and directly applied to the feathers. The ant reacts to this disturbance by exud-



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ing formic acid as a defense. Formic acid is quite pungent, and the bird may detect this by smell and/or taste. It is apparently this stimulus that causes the bird to begin anting. An ant may be wiped through the feathers several times until its formic acid is reduced. The ant is then dropped and replaced by a fresh one. The ants are seldom eaten during the process. Over 200 passerine bird species have been observed anting (Terres 1980), including Common Grackles (e.g., Smith and Tozer 2004). In addition, Whitaker (1957) summarized reports of 16 non-passerine species exhibiting the behaviour.

The purpose of anting is somewhat unclear. It has been suggested that the acid applied to the feathers may assist in feather maintenance by helping to rid the bird of unwanted and troublesome mites, lice and other ectoparasites that live on the feathers and skin. However, Potter (1970) found no positive evidence for this purported function in a

review of the anting literature. A more widely accepted explanation is that the acid may sooth skin irritation associated with molt and the growth of new feathers. This hypothesis is supported by the observation of anting occurring most frequently during August in North America, when many bird species are replacing their feathers (Terres 1980).

The use of moth balls for “anting” has been noted numerous times (e.g., Hill 1946, Terres 1980, Whelan 1995). Moth balls are just one item in a long list of reported ant substitutes that includes beetles, the flesh of citrus fruits, cigarette butts, hot chocolate, soapsuds, and sumac berries (Terres 1980). Most of these are acidic to a degree, and have a pungent odour. It is believed that the detection of the acidity stimulates birds to use them in anting.

### Acknowledgements

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David H. Elder, 23 Birch Road, Box 252, Atikokan, Ontario P0T 1C0

## Ring-billed Gulls Steal Food from Dunlin

David H. Elder

During the second week in May of 2002, I had the opportunity to observe an interesting behavioural interaction between Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) near Point Pelee National Park, Essex County, Ontario. On 12 May, a heavy rain-storm in the morning resulted in widespread flooding in the agricultural fields near the park. The flooded sections of the fields attracted numbers of migrating shorebirds of several species, immediately. The fields also attracted a large number of gulls that seemed to use them as loafing sites. In the days following the storm, the water slowly drained from the fields, shrinking the size of the pools and concentrating the birds in them.

On 15 May, while scanning the shorebirds and gulls in standing water covering the corner of a field adjacent to the road, I noticed Ring-billed Gulls repeatedly chasing Dunlin. At first, I thought the gulls were chasing the small shorebirds in an attempt to catch them, but further observation showed what was actually happening.

A large flock of Dunlin was actively feeding in the shallow water covering the corner of the field. Individuals probed rapidly as they walked about and were fre-

quently rewarded with the capture of small earthworms (Lumbricidae) that had likely been forced near the surface of the soil by the floodwaters. On finding a worm, a Dunlin would stop walking and then attempt to manipulate the four to five-centimetre long worm into a position so it could be swallowed.

This pause by the Dunlin was the signal for a nearby Ring-billed Gull to launch itself at the shore-bird. The Dunlin then took wing also, worm dangling from its bill, and tried to elude the gull by twist-



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*David Renaud*

ing and turning. Invariably, after a short chase, the Dunlin dropped the worm, which was immediately snatched up and eaten by the gull. The Dunlin would then land and resume its search for another worm. The gull landed also, and waited for another chance for an easy bit of food. Neither species seemed overly concerned about what was happening, and several chases were ongoing at any given moment. The chases were seemingly ignored by other feeding Dunlin and loafing gulls.

### Discussion

The Dunlin were taking advantage of a temporary feeding opportunity involving flooded-out earthworms of a size they could eat, and the loafing Ring-billed Gulls capitalized on the efforts of the Dunlin. The gulls simply stole food from the Dunlin. A couple of days later the flooded fields had dried out completely, the Dunlin had moved on, and the gulls were seeking out other food sources.

One species of bird stealing food from another is not uncom-

mon. I have watched Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) steal fish caught by Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), and once observed a Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) take a freshly caught vole (*Microtus* sp.) from a Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*). Ring-billed Gulls have been noted pirating food from a variety of bird species, particularly ducks (Anatidae; Clapp et al. 1983, Ryder 1993).

In a situation similar to my observations, Payne and Howe (1976) reported Ring-billed Gulls stealing earthworms from Dunlin "in a plowed field recently flooded by rains" near Saginaw Bay, Michigan. Given the conditions, they concluded that the "worms were so easy for Dunlin to find and capture that it was not worthwhile to expend much energy fighting or fleeing gulls or to sacrifice feeding in optimal sites to avoid gulls".

### Acknowledgements

I want to thank Ron Tozer for comments on an earlier draft and assistance with the literature.

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David H. Elder, 23 Birch Road, Box 252, Atikokan, Ontario P0T 1C0

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## August 2004 Quiz

Glenn Coady

For this issue's photo quiz, we are presented with a large, long-bodied waterbird with a dagger-like bill. It is probably fair to say that most observers would immediately recognize this bird to be a loon. As there are but five species in the genus *Gavia* (four of which have occurred in Ontario), the differential identification of this bird involves few potential candidates. Breeding-plumaged adult loons are pretty straightforward to identify. However, juvenile, first summer and nonbreeding-plumaged birds present observers with more of a challenge.

Compared to our quiz bird, Red-throated Loon is a much more delicate bird with an obviously finer head, neck and bill. Red-throated Loon would also be expected to show a straighter culmen and a lower mandible with a prominent appearance of an upward tilt (though this might not be apparent in some juveniles, whose bill profiles are still developing). The quiz bird has a very dark and virtually unmarked back. Red-throated Loon in either juvenile or winter plumage would have a back that is finely spotted and streaked with white. Accordingly, we can rule out Red-throated Loon for the quiz bird.

At the other end of the spectrum, Yellow-billed Loon is a much more heavily built loon than our quiz bird. In juvenile or nonbreeding

plumage it would never have a head and nape as dark as on our quiz bird. It usually shows a dark patch near the ear coverts which contrasts markedly with the bird's overall lighter head colour. A Yellow-billed Loon would have a much heavier and paler bill, with a straighter culmen and a more pronounced gonydeal angle, and almost invariably shows no dark marking to the distal culmen, which our quiz bird does. Our quiz bird also shows a very round head profile, lacking the prominent "bumps" on the forward and rear crown that are evident in most postures in a Yellow-billed Loon.

Having ruled out the possibility that our quiz bird is either the smallest or largest of the loons, we are left with a choice of whether this is a Common Loon or a Pacific/Arctic Loon. Nonbreeding-plumaged Arctic Loons from the Old World show a lot of white in the area of the flanks near the water line. As our quiz bird does not show this feature, we can likely assume that the choice is one between Common Loon and Pacific Loon. Arctic Loon has not yet occurred in Ontario.

Fortunately, there is a whole suite of field characteristics we can assess that are useful in separating Common and Pacific Loons in nonbreeding plumage.

Pacific Loon has a shorter, finer bill, with a less prominent gonydeal

angle than Common Loon. Our quiz bird has a relatively fine and short bill for a loon, and there is very little gonydeal angle. These features tend to favour Pacific Loon.

Pacific Loon shows a crisp, straight-bordered and sharply contrasting demarcation between the bright white foreneck and the very dark (almost black) hindneck. The central line of demarcation is usually the darkest part of the neck, giving a three-toned effect. Common Loons tend to show “fuzzy”, jagged neck markings with a white partial collar often extending into the dark hindneck, and dark areas often encroaching into the whitish foreneck. These features strongly suggest our quiz bird being a Pacific Loon.

Pacific Loons tend to show a very “puffy-headed” appearance with a rounder and “softer” look to the head profile, with a near absence of the “bumps” and flattened central crown of the Common Loon. Again, our quiz bird appears to be a Pacific Loon in this regard. However, be cautioned that in certain postures, both these species can demonstrate prominent bumps and a flattened central crown.

Pacific Loons tend to have very dark backs, with the back colour usually contrasting with the lighter nape. Common Loons tend to show exactly the opposite, with the hind-crown and nape almost invariably appearing darker than the back. Our quiz bird has a very dark back, which is as dark or perhaps darker

than the nape. Again, this is more consistent with Pacific Loon.

Pacific Loons tend to have the area around the iris uniformly dark (with at most a narrow eye-ring), so that the eye is surrounded and harder to pick out in the dark head colour. Common Loons more often than not have white markings around the eye in nonbreeding plumage, particularly in front of, and above, the eye. Once again, this supports our quiz bird being a Pacific Loon.

Most Pacific Loons show a dark “necklace” or “chinstrap”, which is clearly evident on our quiz bird. Common Loons seldom present a pattern that mimics this field character.

Thus, using a whole suite of useful field characters, we can be very certain that our quiz bird is a **Pacific Loon**. I photographed this Pacific Loon in basic (winter) plumage at Santa Barbara, California, on 8 May 1992.

For an excellent review of loon field characters, I recommend you go back and read Bob Curry’s Photo Quiz of a juvenile Common Loon (*Ontario Birds* 12: 126–128), and the very informative discussion of the fine points of identifying small loons in winter by Ron Pittaway and Michael King (*OFO News* 16(3): 6–8). I particularly enjoyed Bob’s description of the puffy-headed appearance of Pacific Loon being reminiscent of an “aroused cobra”, a very apt visual analogy that is easily remembered.

# Ontario Field Ornithologists

**President:** Jean Iron, 9 Lichen Place, Toronto, Ontario M3A 1X3  
(416) 445-9297 E-mail: jeaniron@sympatico.ca

Ontario Field Ornithologists is an organization dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It formed in 1981 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 Mark Cranford; hosts field trips throughout Ontario; and holds an Annual Convention and Banquet in the autumn. Current information on all of its activities is on the OFO website ([www.ofo.ca](http://www.ofo.ca)), coordinated by Sandra Eadie. Comments or questions can be directed to OFO by e-mail ([of@of.o.ca](mailto:of@of.o.ca)).

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*Editors:* Bill Crins, Ron Pittaway, Ron Tozer

*Editorial Assistance:* Kevin Clute, Jean Iron

*Ornithology Consultants:* Michel Gosselin, Ross James, Mark Peck

*Art Consultant:* Christine Kerrigan

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