ONTARIO BIRDS

VOLUME 27 NUMBER 2
AUGUST 2009

JOURNAL OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

ONTARIO BIRDS

VOLUME 27 NUMBER 2
AUGUST 2009
PAGES 57— 112

ARTICLES

Cover Illustration: Merlins by *Barry Kent MacKay*

ISSN 0822-3890
Publications Mail Agreement No. 40046348

Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2008

Ian M. Richards

Introduction

The Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) evaluates documentation it receives of any record of a species or recognizable form that is on the Review List for Ontario (see www.ofo.ca). In addition, it reviews documentation relating to new species, new subspecies, and new breeding species for the province. This 27th annual report details the results of the adjudication of 113 records by the OBRC during 2008, of which 106 (94%) were accepted.

A total of 121 observers submitted documentation for review by the 2008 Committee. Written reports were often accompanied by photographs (mostly digital images, but also a few prints), as well as field notes and sketches.

As noted in recent years, the trend toward submission of only photographic evidence, with little or no supporting written evidence, is an ongoing problem. This makes it much more difficult for the Committee to compile dates of occurrence. In addition, many details and circumstances associated with an observation, such as behaviour, comparisons to nearby birds and vocalizations, cannot be determined from photographic evidence alone. As such, we urge observers to submit written reports with their images submitted to OBRC. For those submitting photos to the Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) website, please send the same photos, along with written documentation, directly to the OBRC Secretary. That being said, the OBRC reserves the right to use, as evidence, photographs that have been posted on the OFO website.

Guidance regarding the documentation of rare birds can be found on the OBRC page of the OFO website (www.ofo.ca/obrc/guidelines.php).

The members of the 2008 Committee were: William J. Crins, Robert Z. Dobos, Jean Iron, Blake A. Mann, Mark K. Peck (also serving as Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) liaison), Ian M. Richards (non-voting Secretary), Ronald G. Tozer, and Alan Wormington (also serving as Assistant to the Secretary) (Figure 1).

Two new species, Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) and Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula*), are added to the provincial list, bringing the total to 482 species. In addition, southern Ontario has now recorded its first Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*), while northern Ontario had its first records of both Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*) and Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*).

Figure 1: Ontario Bird Records Committee for 2008. *Left to right, back row:* Ian Richards, Alan Wormington, Blake Mann, Bill Crins, Rob Dobos; *front row:* Ron Tozer, Jean Iron, Mark Peck. *Photo:* Mark Cranford.

Listing of Records

In the following species accounts, the total number of accepted records is indicated by a single number in parentheses. 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 (AOU 1998) and subsequent supplements (42nd to 49th; see www.aou.org/checklist/north/ print.php). Date of occurrence, number of birds, sex, plumage, and location are provided when known. Place names in italics refer to a county, regional municipality or district in Ontario; they also appear in colour. The plumage terminology used here follows that of Humphrey and Parkes (1959). For a detailed explanation of plumage and moult terminology, see Pittaway (2000). The names of all contributors of documentation are listed, while

those contributors who are known to be the discoverers of the bird are also underlined. Additional discoverers of the bird are also listed (if known), even if they did not submit documentation. The OBRC file number is shown in parentheses at the end of each record.

The Committee attempts to verify documented information prior to the acceptance and publication of a record, but occasionally inaccuracies will occur. Anyone with pertinent information that would correct or strengthen a published record, such as dates of occurrence, number of birds, plumages, location, discoverers, etc., is urged to communicate this to the Secretary.

All records that were not accepted because of uncertain identification or questionable 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 written by 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, by appointment only. Please contact Mark K. Peck, Department of Natural History, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2C6 (e-mail: markp@rom.on.ca or telephone 416-586-5523).

Acknowledgements

The OBRC appreciates the efforts of the numerous observers who took the time to submit documentation of their observations of rare birds for consideration by the 2008 Committee. We also thank the following people who assisted the Committee in acquiring additional data and other material evidence that supplemented the information submitted directly by observers and Committee members, or by providing expert opinions on evidence submitted to the Committee: Kenneth F. Abraham, Margaret J.C. Bain, Pierre Bannon, Jean Claude Bermond, Jon L. Dunn, Nicholas G. Escott, Jean-Francois Giroux, Michel Gosselin, Karl R. Konze, Tony Leukering, Mark W. Lockwood, Steve Mlodinow, Ronald J. Pittaway, Peter Pyle, Steve Percival, Brian D. Ratcliff, Gordon Ross, Diane Salter, Louise Schmidt, Roy B.H. Smith, Kim Toews, Brian Wheeler, John M. Woodcock and Doug Woods.

OntBirds, the listserve of the Ontario Field Ornithologists, continues to be a useful source of information pertaining to rare birds that appear in the province; it is moderated by Mark H. Cranford. In addition, the photographic pages on the OFO website, maintained in 2008 by Frank Horvath and Sandra Horvath, provide an excellent source of documentation for rarities. These sources of information make the Secretary's job of securing documentation much more efficient. During 2008, Alan Wormington, in his role as Assistant to the Secretary, provided valuable assistance in tracking down documentation for reports. I also wish to thank the members of the 2008 Committee for their support and assistance during the year.

Greater White-fronted Goose ***Anser albifrons***

South Only Before 1998 (56)

1994 – one, juvenal, 30 November, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (found by Kevin D. Clark, Christopher Clark; 2008-101) – photos on file; specimen (mount) in private collection of Kevin D. Clark.

Barnacle Goose ***Branta leucopsis*** **(1)**

2005 – one, definitive basic, male, circa 20 November, Baie Des Atocas, *Prescott and Russell* (Jean Buswell, also found by Henri Poupart, Jean-Claude Bermond; 2008-051) – photo on file; specimen (mount) in private collection of Jean Buswell.

Figure 2: Definitive basic male Barnacle Goose, Baie Des Atocas, *Prescott and Russell*, circa 20 November 2005. *Photo: Jean Buswell.*

This species has often been reported in Ontario, but the provenance of such sightings has always been questionable. However, the current individual was banded as a juvenile on 9 November 2004 in the Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve on the Isle of Islay, Scotland, so its origin can clearly be established. The bird, representing the first accepted record for Ontario, was shot travelling with Canada Geese.

Mottled Duck ***Anas fulvigula*** **(1)**

2008 – one, male, 1 May – 6 June, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, Todd R. Pepper, Stephen T. Pike, found by Dean J. Ware; 2008-102) – photos on file.

The Committee considered the possibility that this individual, the first for the province, came from one of the established, introduced populations, such as the east coast (South Carolina) or Oklahoma. However, there was no evidence to suggest this to be the case. In addition, there is a well established pattern of vagrancy of birds from the species native range (Texas and the Gulf coast) into the mid- and upper Mississippi Valley (states such as Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and North Dakota). Furthermore, the introduced populations have been in place since the 1970s to early 1980s, so even if the bird was from these areas, it would still be considered a wild bird from an established population.

Figure 3: Mottled Duck at Hillman Marsh, *Essex*, from 1 May - 6 June 2008. *Photo: Stephen T. Pike.*

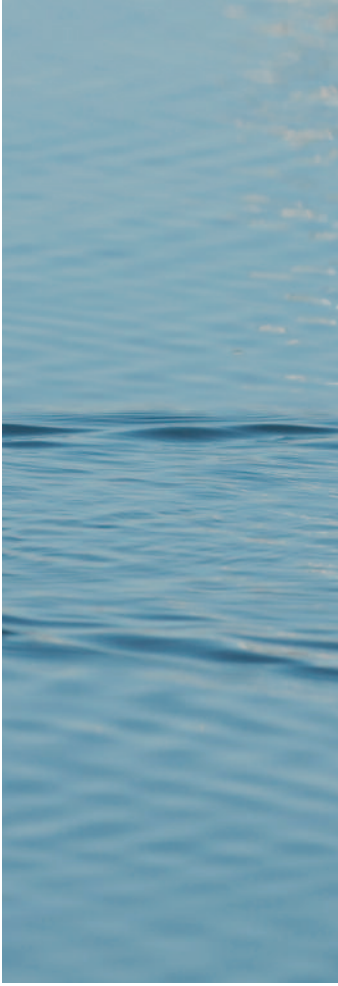

Figure 4: Definitive alternate male Tufted Duck at Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma*, from 8-15 May 2008. *Photo: Kirk Zufelt.*

Tufted Duck ***Aythya fuligula*** (28)

2008 – one, definitive alternate, male, 8-15 May, Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma* (David Bell, Doug Sheepway, Todd R. Pepper, Kirk Zufelt, found by Robert D. Knudsen; 2008-021) – photos on file.

Harlequin Duck ***Histrionicus histrionicus*** North Only (21)

2008 – one, female, 20 May – 9 June, Wawa, *Algoma* (Kenneth A. McIlwrick; 2008-081) – photos on file.

– two, adult females or juvenals/first basic, 22 October, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock, also found by Maureen Woodcock, Manuel Ballesteros, David J.T. Hussell, Erica H. Dunn; 2008-071) – photos on file.

Eared Grebe ***Podiceps nigricollis*** North Only (17)

2008 – one, alternate, 20-30 May, Wawa, *Algoma* (Kenneth A. McIlwrick; 2008-082) – photos on file.

– one, first alternate, 26-30 May, White River, *Algoma* (Kenneth A. McIlwrick; 2008-083) – photos on file.

– one, alternate, 31 May, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Ernest Hunter; 2008-031) – photo on file.

The Moosonee bird is a remarkable record, representing the first for the Hudson Bay Lowlands of Ontario.

Northern Gannet ***Morus bassanus*** (38)

2008 – one, juvenal, 9-12 November, Fifty Point Conservation Area, Hamilton/Niagara, to Van Wagners Beach, Hamilton and Burlington Beach, *Halton* (Brandon R. Holden, also found by Kevin A. McLaughlin; 2008-084).

– one, juvenal, 13 November, Fort Erie, *Niagara* (James M. Pawlicki; 2008-085).

Considering these were the only observations reported from Ontario in the fall of 2008, there is the possibility that both records refer to the same individual.

Frigatebird species ***Fregata sp.*** (3)

2008 – one, basic, male, 12 October, Colchester, *Essex* (Dana Ogglesby, G. Tom Hince, Paul D. Pratt, also found by Ken Ogglesby, Brad Smith, Bob Wickett; 2008-061) – photos on file.

This bird was submitted as a Magnificent Frigatebird *(Fregata magnificens*), but based on the documentation received, the Committee was not able to assign a species. Details of this record have been published elsewhere; see Morin (2008) and Pratt (2008).

Adult males of this family are notoriously difficult to identify, and considering the documented vagrancy of this group including Lesser Frigatebird *(Fregata ariel*) at the mouth of the Detroit River, Michigan, on 11 September 2005 (Brennan and Shultz 2006), it is best not to assume that any frigatebird in Ontario is a Magnificent. The other two Ontario records of frigatebird species were 15 October, at Mississippi Lake, Lanark, and 30 October 1995, at Snow Road Station, *Frontenac* (the bird was not seen between these dates)(Dobos 1997) and 1-2 August 2005 at Port Elgin/Frenchman Bay, *Bruce* (Crins 2006). The two accepted records of Magnificent Frigatebird were 28 September 1988 at Point Edward, *Lambton* (Wormington and Curry 1990), and 28 October 1995 at Stoney Point, *Essex* (Dobos 1997).

Figure 5: Basic male frigatebird species seen at Colchester, *Essex*, on 12 October 2008. *Photo: Dana Ogglesby.*

Little Blue Heron ***Egretta caerulea*** **(67)**

2008 – one, second basic, 28 April – 6 May, Long Point (Old Cut) (28 April) and Port Rowan (28 April – 6 May), *Norfolk* (Ted Maddeford, Tom Rook, Lea Haist, Jean Iron; 2008-011) – photos on file.
– one, definitive alternate, 16 May, Tilbury, Chatham-Kent (Robert Curry, also found by Glenda J. Slessor; 2008-041) – photos on file.

Black-crowned Night-Heron ***Nycticorax nycticorax*** **North Only (3)**

2007 – three, two definitive alternate and one juvenal, 2 July – 27 August, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (David Welbourne, Bert Harding, Nicholas G. Escott; 2008-001) – photos on file.

This record represents the first nesting of this species for northern Ontario, and only the third accepted record overall. The previous records were of single adults on 27 June 1984 at Wolverine Lake, *Cochrane* (Wormington 1987) and 18-20 May 1991 at Hazelwood Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Bain 1992).

Figure 6: Juvenal Yellow-crowned Night-Heron at Grimsby, *Niagara*, on 24 August 2008.
Photo: Raymond J. Barlow.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron ***Nyctanassa violacea*** **(41)**

2008 – one, juvenal, 24 August, Grimsby, *Niagara* (Raymond J. Barlow; 2008-042) – photos on file.

Glossy Ibis ***Plegadis falcinellus*** **(52)**

2008 – three, definitive alternate, 8 May, Tilbury, *Chatham-Kent* (Robert Curry, also found by Glenda J. Slessor; 2008-044).

– one, definitive alternate, 13 May, Orillia, *Simcoe* (Barry J. Kinch; 2008-012) – photos on file.

Ibis species ***Plegadis sp.*** **(44)**

2007 – one, 10 November, Big Creek Marsh, *Norfolk* (Andrew Keaveney; 2008-022).

Black Vulture ***Coragyps atratus*** **(59)**

2008 – one, 1 April, Grimsby, *Niagara* (A. Geoff Carpentier, also found by Kim Baker, Brian Henshaw, Ian M. Richards, Terrie Smith; 2008-032).

(right) Figure 7: Definitive basic Black Vulture on 22 June 2008 at Tobermory, *Bruce*. *Photo: Tom Thomas.*

- one, 9-14 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Donald E. Perks, Gary A. Houghton, found by Richard Salembier; 2008-023) – photos on file.
- one, basic, 15 June, Sarnia, *Lambton* (Robin Cunningham, also found by Elizabeth Link; 2008-033) – photo on file.
- one, definitive basic, 22 June, Tobermory, *Bruce* (Tom Thomas, also found by Tim King; 2008-034) – photos on file.
- one, 1 October, Victoria Harbour, *Simcoe* (James P. Coey; 2008-052).

1947 – one, basic, male, 21 July, St. Davids, *Niagara* (Marion Miles; 2008-111) – specimen (skin) in ROM: #74864.

Due to ill health, the Point Pelee bird was captured and taken to the Wings Avian Rehabilitation Centre in Amherstburg. Here it was determined to have a neurological disorder, possibly caused by botulism or West Nile Virus (Wormington 2009a). The St. Davids bird represents the first accepted record for the province (see Hope 1949; Baillie 1957; Beardslee & Mitchell 1965). An earlier Black Vulture was shot at Embro, *Oxford*, on 6 October 1941 but this specimen has since been lost (Wormington 2009b).

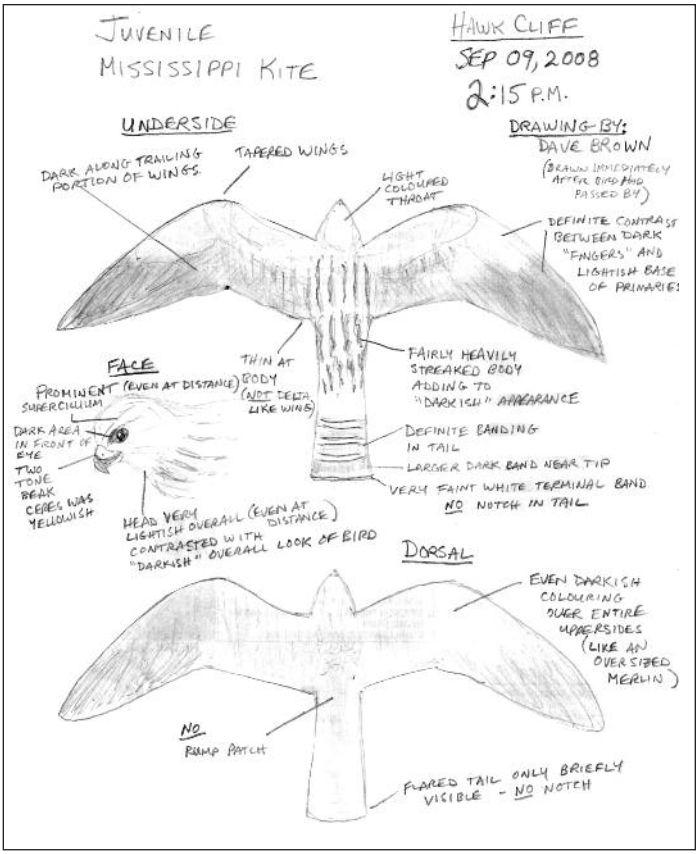

Figure 8: Mississippi Kite in juvenal plumage at Port Stanley, *Elgin*, on 9 September 2008. *Sketch: David R. Brown.*

Mississippi Kite ***Ictinia mississippiensis*** **(34)**

2008 – one, definitive basic, 5-6 May, Hillman Marsh (5 May) and Point Pelee National Park (6 May), *Essex* (Alan Wormington; 2008-091).

– one, juvenal, 9 September, Port Stanley, *Elgin* (Matt Oswald, David R. Brown, Colin Horstead, also found by Ronnie Goodhand, Brian Hawthorne, Wayne Parnall, D. Keith Sealy; 2008-053).

The Hawk Cliff bird represents the first fall record for the province, not surprising considering the species ongoing expansion to the north. The Hillman Marsh bird is the earliest for Ontario, with the previous earliest being 6 May, in 2000 (Roy 2001) and 2003 (Crins 2004), and both at Point Pelee National Park.

"Dark Morph" Broad-winged Hawk ***Buteo platypterus*** **(5)**

2007 – one, definitive basic, 28 July, Northern Light Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Steve Boar; 2008-024)

– photos on file; specimen (mount) in private collection of Steve Boar.

This record, a bird found dead on the roadside, is the first accepted for northern Ontario. Only four previous reports have been accepted by the Committee: 18 August 1992 at Woodstock, *Oxford* (Dobos 1998), 19 September 2004 at Port Burwell and Port Stanley, *Elgin* (Crins 2007), 24 April 2007 at Grimsby, *Niagara*, and 26 April 2007 at Burlington, *Halton* (Richards 2008).

Figure 9: Definitive alternate Piping Plover at Oliphant, *Bruce*, from 5 June - 21 July 2008. *Photo: Brendan A. Toews.*

Snowy Plover ***Charadrius alexandrinus*** **(6)**

2008 – one, alternate, male, 16-17 May, Long Point Provincial Park, *Norfolk* (Kenneth G. Burrell, Ron Ridout, found by Anna Calvert; 2008-045) – photos on file.

Piping Plover ***Charadrius melodus*** **(67)**

2008 –`two (pair), definitive alternate male and female, two fledged juvenals, 4 May – 7 August, Sauble Beach, *Bruce* (Brendan A. Toews, found by Doug Pedwell; 2008-054) – photos on file.

– four (two pairs), definitive alternate males and females, eight fledged juvenals,, 7 May – early August, `Wasaga Beach, *Simcoe* (Frank Horvath, Sandra Horvath, David J. Milsom; 2008-062) – photos on file.

– two (pair), definitive alternate male and female, one fledged juvenal, 5 June – 21 July, Oliphant, *Bruce* (Brendan A. Toews, found by Stewart Nutt; 2008-055) – photos on file.

– two, definitive alternate, 4 July, Sauble Beach, *Bruce* (Brendan A. Toews, also found by Kim J. Toews; 2008-072) – photos on file.

The pair at Sauble Beach was the same breeding pair as in 2007 (see Richards 2008, Toews *et al*. 2008). One of the chicks was depredated on 7 July, while the male was killed by a Merlin (*Falco columbarius)* on 22 July. The female departed south on 14 July, while the second juvenile remained by itself to 7 August. The Oliphant birds were banded previously revealing the following history: the female hatched in 2006 on North Manitou Island and nested in 2007 at Ludington State Park, Michigan, while the male was banded as a chick at Sturgeon Bay, Michigan, in 2007. The female left Oliphant on 7 July, while the male and juvenile remained to 21 July. Only one of the eight Wasaga Beach chicks survived, with four dying during a severe thunderstorm on 22 June. A separate pair of adults, one of which was colour-banded, appeared at Sauble Beach for one day only, on 4 July.

Figure 10: Curlew Sandpiper in juvenal plumage at Fort Erie, *Niagara*, from 28 September – 14 October 2008. *Photo: Jean Iron.*

American Avocet ***Recurvirostra americana***
North Only
South Before 2000 (71)

2008 – one, alternate, 30 May, Wawa, *Algoma* (Kenneth A. McIlwrick; 2008-086) – photos on file.

Willet ***Tringa semipalmatus*** North Only (16)

2008 – one, 10 May, Marathon, *Thunder Bay* (Greg Stroud; 2008-025) – photo on file.

Curlew Sandpiper ***Calidris ferruginea*** (27)

2008 – one, juvenal, 28 September – 14 October, Fort Erie, *Niagara* (Willie D'Anna, Sandra Eadie, Jean Iron, found by Peter Yoerg; 2008-063) – photos on file.

Ross's Gull ***Rhodostethia rosea*** (10)

2008 – one, definitive basic, 28-31 January, Niagara Falls, *Niagara* (Winnie Poon, found by Brandon R. Holden; 2008-047).

This bird was originally discovered on the New York side of the Niagara River above the Falls, from the Ontario side, on 27 January by Willie D'Anna, Jean Iron, Kevin A. McLaughlin and Betsy Potter. The bird remained to 1 February on the New York side.

Mew Gull ***Larus canus*** (20)

2008 – one, definitive basic, 6 December, Queenston, *Niagara* (Jean Iron, Willie D'Anna, Kevin A. McLaughlin, also found by Ronald J. Pittaway, Betsy Potter; 2008-092) – photo on file.

Plumage characteristics seemed to be inconsistent with the expected *brachyrhynchus* subspecies, and even suggested a Kamchatka Gull (*L.c. kamtschatschensis*), which would be a first for the province. However, the Committee felt the documentation did not allow a subspecific identity to be assigned.

California Gull ***Larus californicus*** (54)

2008 – one, definitive alternate, *albertaensis*, 12-20 March, Rockton, *Hamilton* (Robert Curry, Kevin A. McLaughlin, Brandon R. Holden; 2008-046) – photos on file.
– one, definitive alternate, *albertaensis*, 1 April, Rockton, *Hamilton* (Brandon R. Holden; 2008-036) – photos on file.
– one, first basic, 1-4 November, Orillia, *Simcoe* (Kirk Zufelt; 2008-073) – photos on file.
– one, second basic, 23 November – 13 December, Queenston, *Niagara* (Willie D'Anna, Jean Iron, also found by Betsy Potter; 2008-093) – photo on file.

It was determined that the two occurrences at Rockton pertain to different birds, based on distinct plumage differences.

Slaty-backed Gull ***Larus schistisagus*** (6)

2008/09 – one, definitive basic, 13 December – 24 January, Niagara Falls, *Niagara* (Jean Iron, Willie D'Anna, Kevin A. McLaughlin, Scott Whittle, also found by Ronald J. Pittaway, Betsy Potter; 2008-094) – photos on file.

2007 – one, third basic, 20-27 November, Woito, *Renfrew* (Christopher R. Michener, Bruce M. Di Labio, Winnie Poon, also found by Manson Fleguel; 2008-002) – photos on file.

The four previous records were at Niagara Falls, *Niagara*, from 24 November to 29 December 1992 (Bain 1993), Toronto, *Toronto*, from 2-9 January 1999 (Roy 2000), Wheatley Harbour and Hillman Marsh, *Essex*, from 22-26 January 2006 (Crins 2007), and Niagara Falls, *Niagara*, from 2-13 December 2006 (Richards 2008).

Arctic Tern ***Sterna paradisaea*** **South Only (14)**

2008 – one, definitive alternate, 29 May, Cobourg, *Northumberland* (Margaret J.C. Bain, also found by William D. Gilmour, R. Douglas McRae, Richard Pope; 2008-026).

This record fits the usual migration pattern of this species in spring in southern Ontario.

White-winged Dove ***Zenaida asiatica*** **(30)**

2008 – one, 14 May – 1 June, Lake on the Mountain (14-15 May) and Prince Edward Point (23 May – 1 June), *Prince Edward* (Margaret J.C. Bain, Christopher J. Escott, found by Pamela Stagg; 2008-027) – photos on file.

– one, 27 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock; 2008-064) – photos on file.

– one, 20 July, Oliphant, *Bruce* (Robert Curry, also found by Barry Playford, Joanne Playford, Glenda J. Slessor; 2008-048) – photos on file.

– one, 21 July – 18 October, St. Catharines, *Niagara* (Paul E. Chapman, Kayo J. Roy, Scott A. Watson, Sandra Eadie, Brian R. Ahara, also found by Sue J.H. Chapman; 2008-056) – photos on file.

Common Ground-Dove ***Columbina passerina*** **(3)**

2008 – one, 1 November, Long Point (Squires Ridge), *Norfolk* (Stuart A. Mackenzie, also found by Ross W. Wood; 2008-095) – photos on file.

This record is only the third for the province, and the first for the south. The two previous records were on 29 October 1968 at Red Rock, *Thunder Bay* (Wormington 1987) and 14 August 2002 at Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Crins 2003).

Figure 11: Juvenile Common Ground-Dove at Long Point (Squires Ridge), *Norfolk*, on 1 November 2008.
Photo: Stuart A. Mackenzie.

Figure 12: Burrowing Owl, at Pelee Island, *Essex,* on 25 April 2008 . *Photo: Michael V.A. Burrell.*

Burrowing Owl ***Athene cunicularia*** **(6)**

2008 – one, 25 April, Pelee Island, *Essex* (Michael V.A. Burrell, Kenneth G. Burrell; 2008-013) – photos on file.

This occurrence represents only the fourth record for southern Ontario, and the first in the province since 1995. The previously accepted records for Ontario were 7-8 May 1982 at Kleinburg, *York* (James 1983), 4 October 1986 at Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Wormington 1987), 27 May 1989 at Walpole Island, *Lambton* (Wormington and Curry 1990), 19-24 April 1991 at Arnprior, *Renfrew* (Bain 1992), and 13 May 1995 at Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Dobos 1996).

Say's Phoebe ***Sayornis saya*** **(12)**

2008 – one, 28 April, Terrace Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Susan Bryan, Michael Bryan; 2008-014) – photos on file.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher ***Tyrannus forficatus*** **(54)**

2008 – one, definitive alternate, male, 5 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Peter Sproule, found by Kay Janssens, Sharon Jorgensen; 2008-015) – photos on file.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher ***Tyrannus savana*** **(8)**

2008 – one, 5 October, Prince Edward Point, *Prince Edward* (Dennis Smyth; 2008-103) – photo on file.

– one, first basic, nominate *savana*, 22 October, north of Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, Todd R. Pepper, Robert Epstein, Stephen T. Pike, found by Brad M. Ouellette; 2008-104) – photos on file.

The photographic documentation for the Point Pelee bird shows the strongly emarginated outer primary and pale back that is indicative of the nominate savana subspecies. These two fall records are typical of this species in northeastern North America, an austral migrant that breeds in temperate South America during our winter months, and migrates north to "winter" in more equatorial regions. The only accepted spring record of this species for Ontario was 26 April 2004 at Stouffville, *York* (Crins 2005).

Bell's Vireo ***Vireo bellii*** **(10)**

2007 – one, first basic, nominate bellii, 7 September (not 21 September as published by Bain 2008), Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Maureen Woodcock, also found by Alana Demko, Calvin Knorr, Belen Perez; 2008-114) – photos on file.

This is the first record for northern Ontario, and represents the most northerly occurrence of the species in North America.

Figure 13: Say's Phoebe at Terrace Bay, *Thunder Bay,* **on 28 April 2008.** *Photo: Michael Bryan.*

Figure 14: Fork-tailed Flycatcher north of Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*, on 22 October 2008.
Photo: Robert Epstein.

Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus* (12)

2008 – two, basic, 7-8 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, found by D. Keith Sealy; 2008-096).

This record fits the pattern of occurrence in Ontario, with Point Pelee having had all but two of the accepted records, and all falling between 21 April and 29 May. The only accepted records outside Point Pelee were at Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent,* on 20 May 2000 (Crins 2007) and 14 May 2003 (Crins 2004).

Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva* (61)

2008 – two, 8 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, Blake A. Mann, also found by Kevin A. McLaughlin; 2008-105).
four, 8 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Blake A. Mann, Alan Wormington, also found by Kevin A. McLaughlin; 2008-106).
– two, 8 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Blake A. Mann, Alan Wormington, also found by Kevin A. McLaughlin; 2008-107).
– three, 9 November, Turkey Point, *Norfolk* (Kenneth G. Burrell, also found by James G. Burrell; 2008-065).
– one, 9 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, also found by Richard P. Carr, Stephen T. Pike; 2008-108).
– two, 9-10 November, Erieau, *Chatham-Kent* (Michael J. Nelson, found by Irene Woods; 2008-113) – photo on file.
– three, 10 November, Niagara Falls, *Niagara* (Brett Fried, found by John E. Black, Daniel R. Salisbury; 2008-066).

– one, basic, 10-17 November (but not observed between these dates), Prince Edward Point, *Prince Edward* (Bruce E. Ripley; 2008-076) – photos on file.

2003 – one, 9 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Randy P. Horvath, also found by Robert A. Horvath; 2008-075).

The birds at Point Pelee on 8 November were all actively migrating, allowing the Committee to concur with the observers that each group represented different birds. As in recent falls, this species made a strong showing in 2008, further documenting its dramatic range expansion. Of the two birds at Erieau, only one remained to 10 November (the other was killed by a feral cat on 9 November).

Rock Wren ***Salpinctes obsoletus*** **(5)**

2008 – one, 15 November, Marathon, T*hunder Bay* (Martha Allen, Greg Stroud, also found by Christine Vance; 2008-078) – photos on file.

The four previously accepted records were 6-7 December 1964 at Port Weller, *Niagara* (Roy 2001), 12 February – 5 March 1989 at Etobicoke, *Toronto* (Wormington and Curry 1990), 1-6 May 1993 at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Pittaway 1995), and 4-7 May 2004 at Elk Lake, *Timiskaming* (Crins 2005).

Townsend's Solitaire ***Myadestes townsendi*** **South Only After 2000 (66)**

2008/09 – one, basic, 20 December – late March, Parry Sound, *Parry Sound* (Stan Fairchild, Ted Krug, also found by Liz Simms et al.; 2008-115) – photo on file.

2008 – one, 16-23 February, Point Petre, *Prince Edward* (R. Douglas McRae; 2008-004) – photo on file.

– one, 21 May, Oxley, *Essex* (Michael Stoakes, Sherry Leonardo, Karen Stair, also found by Becky Selzer, Terry Stair, Elizabeth Stoakes; 2008-016) – photos on file.

2007/08 – one, first basic, 21 December – 3 April, Nepean, *Ottawa* (Francine Streeting, Tony F.M. Beck; 2008-003) – photos on file.

A second bird joined the Parry Sound bird in January 2009, also remaining until late March.

Figure 15: First basic Bell's Vireo, at Thunder Cape, ***Thunder Bay*****, on 7 September 2007.**
Photo: Maureen Woodcock.

Audubon's Yellow-rumped Warbler ***Dendroica coronata memorabilis/auduboni*** **(10)**

2008 – one, alternate, male, 25 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Catherine L. Carroll; 2008-028).
– one, definitive basic, male, 13 December, Point Pelee National Park, Essex (Alan Wormington; 2008-109).

Black-throated Gray Warbler ***Dendroica nigrescens*** **(15)**

2008 – one, basic, male, 23 November – 4 December, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Blake A. Mann, also found by James T. Burk; 2008-087) – photos on file.

2007 – one, first basic, female, 10-16 December, Port Burwell, *Elgin* (Ron Ridout, Michael V.A. Burrell, Sandra Horvath, found by Aaron Allensen; 2008-017) – photos on file.

Townsend's Warbler ***Dendroica townsendi*** **(7)**

2008 – one, definitive alternate, male, 3 August, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock, also found by Maureen Woodcock; 2008-038) – photos on file.

2007 – one, female or first alternate male, 5 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Gary Sadler; 2008-005) – photo on file.

The Thunder Cape record is the first for northern Ontario and also represents the first accepted fall record for the province. These two birds are also the first accepted records since 2000 (Roy 2001). All the accepted spring records fall between 20 April and 18 May.

Kirtland's Warbler ***Dendroica kirtlandii*** **(40)**

2008 – one, alternate, male, 15 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Brandon R. Holden, Bruce M. Di Labio; 2008-059) – photos on file.

2005 – one, alternate, male, 9-14 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Darlene Friedman, John E. Schuman; 2008-057) – photos on file.

Two birds were present at the same time at Point Pelee National Park in May 2005. Numerous photographs were obtained of the two, but for the majority of photos, the Committee was unable to assign them to a specific individual; thus one of the birds remains undocumented

Figure 16: Definitive alternate male Townsend's Warbler at Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay,* **on 3 August 2008.** *Photo: John M. Woodcock.*

Figure 17: Alternate male Western Tanager at Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma*, from 7-8 May 2008.
Photo: Kenneth A. McIlwrick.

Prairie Warbler ***Dendroica discolor*** North Only (4)

2008 – one, first alternate, male, 29 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock; 2008-067) – photos on file.

This record was only the fourth for northern Ontario, and the third for the Thunder Cape Bird Observatory. The other records were 26 September 1993 at Thunder Cape, Thunder Bay (Dobos 1996), 27 May 1998 at Atikokan, *Rainy River* (Dobos 1999), and 20 June 2006 at Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Crins 2007).

Western Tanager ***Piranga ludoviciana*** (28)

2008 – one, first alternate, male, 24-27 April, Pass Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Douglas D. Thomas; 2008-019) – photos on file.
– one, first alternate, male, 4 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Blake A. Mann, also found by Stephen R. Charbonneau; 2008-020).
– one, alternate, male, 7-8 May, Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma* (Kenneth A. McIlwrick, found by Jack Jones; 2008-040) – photos on file.
– one, first alternate, male, 7-12 May, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Gayle Rowland, Michael Rowland; 2008-039) – photo on file.
– one, female, 16-18 May, Sunshine, *Thunder Bay* (Jeff Robinson; 2008-049) – photo on file.

2007 – one, basic, 2-7 November, Long Point (Old Cut), *Norfolk* (Ron Ridout, found by Diane Salter and Fergus Nicoll; 2008-006) – photo on file.

2008 was a remarkable year for this species, with five records from just the spring. The previous high number of accepted records in one year was three birds in 1995. Of the 28 accepted records for the province to date, 17 have occurred in spring and 10 in fall/early winter; of the spring records, all but one have occurred in May

Figure 18: Spotted Towhee at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*, from 11 November 2008 - 26 March 2009. *Photo: Alan Wormington.*

Green-tailed Towhee ***Pipilo chlorurus*** **(6)**

2007 – one, first basic, 19-22 September (not 24 August to 22 September as published by Bain 2008), Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock, also found by Alana Demko, Elizabeth Donadio, Jeff Moker, Maureen Woodcock; 2008-007) – photos on file.

This was only the second record of this species for northern Ontario. The first record was also at Thunder Cape, on 10 June 2006 (Crins 2007). The other accepted records for the province were late March – 18 April 1954 at Welland, *Niagara*, 30 March – 1 April 1954 at London, *Middlesex,* 24 November 1956 at Terra Cotta, *Peel*, and late October 1985 to 24 April 1986 at Windsor, *Essex* (Wormington 1987).

Spotted Towhee ***Pipilo maculatus*** **(22)**

2008/09 – one, definitive basic, male, arcticus, 11 November – 26 March, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, Stephen T. Pike, Frank Horvath, Sandra Horvath; 2008-110) – photos on file.

2006/07 – one, definitive basic, male, arcticus, late September – 14 March, Kenora, *Kenora* (Cindy Gilbertson, Carole Eady; 2008-029) – photos on file.

Eastern Towhee ***Pipilo erythrophthalmus*** **North Only (7)**

2008 – one, basic, male, 6-14 November, Rossport, *Thunder Bay* (Harold G. Smith; 2008-088) – photo on file.

– one, basic, female, 23 November – 29 December, Nipigon, *Thunder Bay* (Gordon J. Laird; 2008-097) –photos on file.

– one, basic, female, 12-15 December, Rossport, *Thunder Bay* (Colleen Kenney; 2008-089) – photos on file.

Figure 19: Definitive alternate male Lark Bunting at Eagle River, *Kenora*, from 25-30 May 2007. *Photo: Carolle Eady.*

Field Sparrow ***Spizela pusilla***
North Only (17)

2008 – one, first alternate, 12 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock; 2008-068) – photos on file.

Lark Sparrow ***Chondestes grammacus*** (82)

2008 – one, 5-9 May, Karalash Corners, *Algoma* (Kenneth A. McIlwrick; 2008-090) – photos on file.
– one, first alternate, 13 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock; 2008-069) – photo on file.
– one, first alternate, male, 24-28 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock; 2008-070) – photos on file.

2007 – two, males, 14 May – mid June, St. Williams, *Norfolk* (Karl Egressy, Rick Lauzon, Derek Lyon; 2008-050) – photos on file.
– one, 19 May, Michipicoten Island (Schafer Bay), *Thunder Bay* (Greg Cleary; 2008-098).

Both the birds at St. Williams were singing (territorial) males. Another singing bird was seen nearby at St. Williams on 12 May 2007 (see Richards 2008) but is treated as a separate record since there is no evidence to support otherwise.

Lark Bunting ***Calamospiza melanocorys*** (26)

2008 – one, first alternate, male, 11 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Gordon Atkins, Andrew Keaveney; 2008-060) – photos on file.

2007 – one, alternate, male, 9-10 May, Ruthven, *Essex* (Margaret Brackell, also found by Howard Brackell; 2008-099) – photos on file.
– one, definitive alternate, male, 25-30 May, Eagle River, *Kenora* (Carolle Eady; 2008-008) – photos on file.

Blue Grosbeak ***Passerina caerulea*** (68)

2008 – one, definitive basic, male, 15-18 December, Lion's Head, *Bruce* (Mary Morgan, Clive Morgan; 2008-116) – photos on file.
– one, definitive alternate, male, 12-18 May, Squaw Bay (Pass Lake), *Thunder Bay* (Lynn Quackenbush, found by June Huston; 2008-079) – photos on file.

The Lion's Head bird is the latest fall record for the province.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch ***Leucosticte tephrocotis*** (12)

2008 – one, basic, male, nominate *tephrocotis*, 8 March, Crozier, *Rainy River* (Shirley A. Skirten, Wayne R. Skirten; 2008-080) – photo on file.

2006/07 – one, basic, nominate *tephrocotis*, 16 December – early March, Red Rock, *Thunder Bay* (Brian D. Ratcliff, found by Judy Swanson; 2008-030) – photo on file.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow ***Passer montanus*** (4)

2008 – one, 10 May, Port Burwell, *Elgin* (Aaron Allensen; 2008-100) – photos on file.

The three previous records of this species were 16-18 February 1994 in Eastnor Township, *Bruce* (Pittaway 1995), 20 May 1999 at Sturgeon Creek, *Essex* (Roy 2000), and 24 August 2003 at Leamington, *Essex* (Crins 2004).

NOT ACCEPTED RECORDS

Identification Accepted, Origin Questionable

Birds in this category are considered by the Committee to be correctly identified, but their origin is questionable. These birds may have escaped or may have been released from captivity. However, if new evidence suggesting wild origin becomes available, such reports may be reconsidered by the Committee.

2007 European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), one, 5-6 November, Englehart, *Timiskaming* (Michael Werner, found by Pam Yantha; 2008-010) – photos on file.

The sightings of Eurasian songbirds, such as European Goldfinch, continue although there is still no evidence to suggest that they are now established in the province.

Identification Uncertain

The documentation received for the following reports generally was found not to be detailed enough to eliminate similar species unequivocally. In many cases, Committee members felt that the species being described probably was correctly identified, but that the details provided in the report, perhaps due to factors such as the conditions during the observation, were insufficient. It should be noted that any of these reports may be re-submitted if additional documentation becomes available.

2008 Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, one, 4-5 September, Windsor, *Essex* (2008-043).

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta)*, one, 27 July, Townsend, *Norfolk* (2008-035).

Couch's Kingbird *(Tyrannus couchii)*, one, circa mid-July – 15 August, Port Robinson, *Niagara* (2008-037).

Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii)*, 23 April, Grimsby, *Niagara* (2008-018).

2005 Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*), one, 15 May, Windsor, *Essex* (2008-074).

Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena)*, one, 1 June, Long Point (Old Cut), *Norfolk* – photos on file (2008-009).

Literature Cited

[AOU] American Ornithologists' Union. 1998. Check-list of North American Birds, 7th Edition. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

Baillie, J.L. 1957. Recent additions to Ontario's bird list. Ontario Field Biologist 11:1-3.

Bain, M.J.C. 1992. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1991. Ontario Birds 10:43-63.

Bain, M.J.C. 1993. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1992. Ontario Birds 11:46-63.

Bain, M.J.C. 2008. Ontario. North American Birds. 62:61-66.

Beardslee, C.S. and **H.D. Mitchell.** 1965. Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region. Bulletin of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences 22:1-478.

Brennan, C. and **J. Shultz.** 2006. A second North American record for Lesser Frigatebird (*Fregata ariel*). North American Birds 60:164-165.

Crins, W.J. 2003. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2002. Ontario Birds 21:54-76.

Crins, W.J. 2004. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2003. Ontario Birds 22:54-74.

Crins, W.J. 2005. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2004. Ontario Birds 23:54-75.

Crins, W.J. 2006. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2005. Ontario Birds 24:4-74.

Crins, W.J. 2007. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2006. Ontario Birds 25:50-68.

Dobos, R.Z. 1996. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1995. Ontario Birds 14:50–71.

Dobos, R.Z. 1997. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1996. Ontario Birds 15:47-66.

Dobos, R.Z. 1998. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1997. Ontario Birds 16:51–80.

Dobos, R.Z. 1999. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1998. Ontario Birds 17:62-83.

Hope, C.E. 1949. First occurrence of the black vulture in Ontario. Auk 66:81-82.

Humphrey, P.S. and **K.C. Parkes**. 1959. An approach to the study of molts and plumages. Auk 76:1–31.

James, R.D. 1983. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1982. Ontario Birds 1:7-15.

Morin, B. 2008. What a Day. Ontario Birding News 13 (4):1.

Pittaway, R. 1995. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1994. Ontario Birds 13:46-65.

Pittaway, R. 2000. Plumage and molt terminology. Ontario Birds 18:27–43.

Pratt, P. 2008. A Frigatebird in Colchester! The Egret 24 (4):4.

Richards, I.M. 2008. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2007. Ontario Birds 26: 82-106.

Roy, K. J. 2000. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1999. Ontario Birds 18:53-72.

Roy, K. J. 2001. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2000. Ontario Birds 19:45-64.

Toews, B.A., **K.J. Toews** and **C.E.J. Cartwright**. 2008. The successful nesting of the Piping Plover at Sauble Beach marks a return to the Canadian Great Lakes after 30 years. Ontario Birds 26:16-48.

Wormington, A. 1987. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1986. Ontario Birds 5:42-62.

Wormington, A. 2009a. Point Pelee Birds – Annual Summary for 2008. The Egret 25 (1):13-22.

Wormington, A. 2009b. The Rare Birds of Ontario: A Catalogue of Distributional Records. Unpublished manuscript.

Wormington, A. and **R. Curry.** 1990. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1989. Ontario Birds 8:4-33.

Ian M. Richards, 2230 Heidi Avenue, Burlington, Ontario L7M 3W4

The Southern Expansion and Urbanization of The Merlin in Ontario

Nesting Merlins in Waterloo Region, 2008

Bill Read and William G. Wilson

Figure 1. Merlin pair, female in flight, Victoria Park, Cambridge, 29 May 2008. The dead limbs of this Sugar Maple are in perch tree #6 (Table 4) where food exchange occurred between the pair during incubation and nestling stages.
Photo: John Millman

[The Merlin] breeds in the unsettled districts of the interior from Muskoka northward.... C.W. Nash 1905 annotated Ontario Checklist (Iron and Pittaway 2002).

The Merlin (*Falco columbarius)* has a Holarctic breeding range, from Alaska to Labrador and Newfoundland, and throughout northern Europe and Asia from Iceland, Scandinavia and Russia, to Kamchatka (Sodhi *et al.* 1993; Burton 1989). There are three subspecies in North America, with *Falco columbarius columbarius,* the Taiga Merlin (Figure 1) breeding in Ontario (Pittaway 1994).

This report outlines the historical distribution and southern expansion of the Merlin in Ontario in relation to the five breeding bird atlas regions: Hudson Bay Lowlands, Northern Shield, Southern Shield, Lake Simcoe-Rideau and Carolinian (Figure 2, from Cadman *et al.* 2007). Emphasis is placed on expansion south of the Southern Shield

region and, specifically, into urban centres. Seasonal expansion into these centres is described, particularly within the Grand River Watershed (GRW – Figure 2) where, in 2008, the first successful nesting of the Merlin was documented in Cambridge, Waterloo Region. Waterloo Region lies in the centre of the GRW at the interface of the Lake Simcoe-Rideau and Carolinian regions. This location is also within the periphery of the Hamilton Study Area (HSA – Curry 2006). The authors hope that the literature review and personal communications from birders, naturalists and researchers, about the Merlin's southward expansion, will encourage further observations and study by OFO members of the changing dynamics of urban bird communities.

Figure 2. The five breeding bird atlas regions of Ontario, from Cadman *et al.* 2007, also showing the Grand River Watershed and the City of Cambridge. With permission, *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005*.

Early Years

The first records of the Merlin in Ontario were of birds collected and documented in the late 1700s by Hudson Bay Company fur traders along the Hudson and James Bay shorelines (Houston *et al.* 2003). More than mere shooters or collectors, these traders provided both specimens and accounts of birds to the Royal Society and the British Museum. Little documentation was provided about the Merlin in these early accounts, perhaps because it was a familiar species to Europeans, and thus did not garner the same interest as newly-discovered North American species (ibid). In cataloguing Canadian birds, Macoun and Macoun (1909) considered the Merlin abundant along the James Bay shoreline. Today, encountering Merlins in the Hudson Bay Lowlands region is considerably more likely than elsewhere in the province (Gahbauer 2007).

In the first treatise on the birds of Ontario, McIlwraith (1894) acknowledged the difficulty delineating the breeding range of this falcon. He would only state that it was a migratory visitor to Southern Ontario that "quite likely [bred] where there was plenty of room for it to do so without being observed". Breeding range descriptions published in the early decades of the 1900s included

the Hudson Bay Lowlands, the Northern Shield and Southern Shield regions, south to Muskoka and Haliburton Districts (Macoun and Macoun 1909; Baillie and Harrington 1936). The only nest record in the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region during this time was a May-June 1936 nest in Ottawa (Lewis and Smith 1939). Snyder (1951) echoed earlier comments concerning its breeding range. He stated that the Merlin "builds its nest", thus reinforcing the view that this species was seldom observed or studied in its nesting habitat, a view also held by some earlier naturalists (Houston and Schmidt 1981). Examining bird records from provinces and states throughout eastern North America, Duncan (1993) concluded that the Merlin was a common migrant during the late 1800s and early decades of the 1900s. Lack of substantive documentation for this conclusion in Ontario was attributed to few observers with lack of experience and knowledge of migratory concentration points, as well as the quality of field optics and field guides during this period.

During the mid-1900s, observing and learning about this falcon in its breeding habitat was seldom a case of "going birding." In the 1960s, for example, Ontario birders could consult two comprehensive studies of breeding Merlins, undertaken in the 1940s in the Northern and Southern Shield regions respectively (Craighead and Craighead 1940, Lawrence 1949), or they could plan a northern birding trip. But to where? *A Naturalist's Guide to Ontario* (Judd and Speirs 1964), based on information provided by naturalists and nature clubs throughout the province, made only one reference to the Merlin (a.k.a. pigeon hawk). That reference was specific to Whitefish Lake, 60 km southwest of present-day Thunder Bay, where the Craighead brothers had conducted their 1940 study and where nesting was known since 1929 (Baillie and Harrington 1936).

This example says more about the lack of information than the actual distribution of the Merlin. In fact, nests were also documented in Thunder Bay (formerly Port Arthur and Fort William), in the 1940s, as well as subsequently during 1962-1964 and 1984-86 to present day (Escott 1986, N. Escott pers. comm.). Speirs (1985) summarized records of confirmed nesting of the Merlin from 1924 to mid-1960s: seven reports from the Northern Shield and four from the Southern Shield regions. As early as 1966, Merlins regularly nested in Agawa Bay Campground, Lake Superior Provincial Park (Baxter 1985). Godfrey (1966) illustrated its breeding distribution south to at least Haliburton District in the Southern Shield region. By 1974, Merlins nested on Manitoulin Island (Speirs 1985).

Years of Decline

Throughout much of eastern North America, raptor populations declined during the 1950s and 1960s due to chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides. For Merlins, levels were apparently high enough to cause egg-shell thinning (Temple 1972). With the banning of chlorinated

hydrocarbons in the 1970s, recovery began. In 1972, the Merlin was placed on the Blue List, the American Birds' early-warning list of bird populations under threat (Tate 1981). In assessing the Ontario population, Fyfe (1976) described the Merlin as declining or stable and considered its relative abundance rare-medium. Duncan (1993) compares and contrasts population changes in Merlins before and after "the DDT era" in eastern North America with particular reference to Ontario.

Also in 1976, a continental Merlin Working Group (MWG) was formed. A survey form was sent to more than 60 people known to have an interest in Merlins, with the intent to compare pre- and post-1950 breeding status across North America (Oliphant 1985). The *F. c. columbarius* populations had 2-3 young per successful pair whereas the prairie population of *F. c. richardsonii* had 3-4 young per successful pair. The MWG acknowledged the meagre information available about pre-1950 eastern *F. c. columbarius* populations.

Recovery and Expansion: An Overview

During the recovery period of the 1970s, nesting reports for Ontario reiterated a familiar refrain that "says more about the inaccessibility of the species' range than its true numbers" (Goodwin 1979). Peck and James (1983) mapped the distribution of 24 breeding records; all but three were located in the three northern regions from Muskoka and Haliburton Districts north to the Hudson Bay coastline. In the mid-1980s, *Bird Finding in Canada* described locations along the Trans-Canada Highway through north central Ontario where Merlins, including nesting ones, could be observed (Bennett 1985a, 1985b, 1986).

The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, 1981-1985 (OBBA1) (Cadman *et al.* 1987), provided the most thorough coverage to date of the distribution of nesting birds, confirming that the Merlin had extended its breeding range into the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region, particularly northern Grey County, and was well-established on Manitoulin Island. Possible nesting during this period was reported on the Bruce Peninsula, Luther Marsh, the Sauble River and Rideau Lakes area (Weir 1987a). Reports submitted to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) show that qualified observers were acutely aware throughout these decades and into the 1990s of the unusual occurrence of Merlins in this region (ROM files: 1971, 1982, 1994).

In 1986, the Merlin was delisted from the Blue List and designated a Species of Special Concern (Tate 1986). Provincially, during the second half of the 1980s, increases in number were noted during both spring and fall migrations. For example, in 1990, the number observed south of the breeding range on fall migration was 2.5 times greater than the 1982-88 average (Weir 1990). Merlins nested in Sault Ste. Marie in the late 1980s (K. McIlwrick pers. comm.) and in Sudbury in 1987 (J. Lemon pers. comm.) Nest

records received by ROM for Timiskaming (1985), Haliburton (1994) and Renfrew (1997) brought the known total to 105 nests in 14 districts and counties in the province (Peck and James 1999).

The second Ontario atlas, 2001-2005, (OBBA2) (Cadman *et al.* 2007) revealed dramatic increases in Merlin numbers in every region of the province, particularly in the Southern Shield and Lake Simcoe-Rideau regions. In the latter, excluding Manitoulin Island, breeding evidence was documented in more than 160 atlas squares, with breeding confirmed in 68 squares, compared to 16 squares during the first atlas with only one confirmed breeding. Much of the increase was in natural areas: "open country... forest with scattered clearings or adjacent open habitat such as grasslands, wetlands, lakes or burns" (Gahbauer 2007). Five records were submitted for the Carolinian region, of which one was a confirmed nesting; in OBBA1, there were no breeding records for Merlins there. As well as expanding their breeding range south, Merlins were increasingly colonizing urban centres in the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region.

Seasonal changes in Merlin numbers within and south of the Southern Shield region, with particular reference to the Grand River Watershed (GRW)

Migrating

Migration along the lower Great Lakes offers the best opportunity to observe this falcon (Pittaway 1999; Stabb 2009). Migration data from regional hawk watches are readily accessible online (HMANA.org). Duncan (1993) reviewed Merlin counts in both migration seasons at selected hawk watches, including Beamer CA and Hawk Cliff, that showed a steady increase during the 1980s. Although the occurrence of Merlins inland from the lakes is highly variable, throughout the 1980s both spring and fall counts showed continuous increases of migrants through Southern Ontario (Weir 1985, 1987b, 1990).

The GRW extends from the Dundalk Plateau to Lake Erie, a drainage area of 6806 km^2. About three-quarters of the GRW lies within Wellington County, Waterloo Region and the Hamilton Study Area, all of which have numerous bird records for much of the last one hundred years or more. Luther Marsh in the upper GRW is a well-known wetland complex and Important Bird Area (Cheskey and Wilson 2001).

Soper (1923) cites a 1905 autumn record of A. B. Klugh as the only record of the Merlin in Waterloo and Wellington Counties during the early decades of the 1900s. At Luther Marsh, Sandilands (1984) considered the Merlin an occasional migrant. Brewer (1977) noted ten records for Wellington County, describing its status only as migrant. Guelph Field Naturalists' bird records to 1991, show the Merlin as a rare migrant (R. Van Twest pers. comm.). Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists' (KWFN) records, beginning in the early 1950s, show migrating Merlins as very rare until the 1980s.

In Waterloo Region, only one record, that of a spring migrant, was recorded between 1962 and 1981. Since the mid-1980s, Merlins were observed in small numbers throughout the spring and autumn months and, as expected, twice as frequently in autumn as in spring (KWFN records; records of W.G. Wilson). In the HSA, Curry (2006) cites McIlwraith (1894) who described the Merlin as a common migrant in the mid-1800s, and North (field notes) who considered it to occur regularly during the 1930s and 1940s. Curry (pers. comm.) saw only one Merlin between 1966 and 1976; today, he describes the species as an uncommon transient in the HSA.

Overwintering

Summarizing Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) 1968 to 1977, Speirs (1985) showed that no Merlins were recorded in the count areas of the Northern Shield region, except in Thunder Bay. During this time, it was recorded in very small numbers in the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region, most notably Manitoulin Island, and at Long Point and around the western end of Lake Ontario in the Carolinian region. In the period 1982-1991, the winter average for southern Ontario was 11 individuals, so the 27 Merlins recorded in 1992

Table 1: Occurrence of Merlins on CBCs in selected urban centres in four atlas regions. (count week = cw)

CBC Location	First year observed including cw	No. of years observed to 2008 including cw	Max. No. Merlins observed (years) to 2008
Northern Shield region			
Thunder Bay	1942 ('43-'54=0)	35	4 ('87)
Southern Shield region			
North Bay	1998	2	1('05)
Sault Ste Marie	1990	9	4('02,'07)
Sudbury	1990	1	–
Lake Simcoe-Rideau region			
Barrie	1974 ('75-'97=0)	5	2 ('99,'07,'08)
Belleville	2003	3	3 ('08)
Guelph	1973 ('74-'86=0)	13	2 ('06)
Kingston	1972 ('80-'93=0)	14	3 ('00,'05)
Ottawa-Gatineau	1939 ('40-'59=0)	24	7 ('06)
Owen Sound	1983	4	1
Peterborough	1954 ('55-'80=0)	10	2 ('54,'03,'06,'08)
Port Hope-Cobourg	1989	11	2 ('98,'06)
Carolinian region			
Cambridge	1994	8	3 ('08)
Hamilton	1953 ('61-'79=0)	20	3 ('02, '05 –'07)
Ingersoll	1999	7	2 ('04,'05,'07)
Kitchener	1984	9	2 ('85)
London*	1981	10	4 ('07)
Niagara Falls	--	0	--
Peel-Halton	1987	9	4 ('08)
St Catharines	1993	4	2 ('94)
St Thomas	1978 ('79-'94 =0)	8	2 ('00)
Toronto	1954 ('55-'67=0)	19	3 ('05,'07,'08)

* In the 100-year history of the London CBC, which began in 1909, Merlin was not observed until 1981.

were a "record high, aided by feeding stations to host prey" (Weir 1992). CBC records show Merlin sightings increasingly occurring in urban areas during the 1980s and 1990s south of the Northern Shield and the Southern Shield in particular (Table 1).

In southern Wellington County, the Merlin is a rare but regular winter visitor particularly prior to freeze-up, with regular sightings in the last 5 years in downtown Guelph (R. Van Twest pers. comm.). In Waterloo Region, Merlins were observed in early January during four years between 1954 and 1961 and, as noted earlier, only once in the next 20 years. From 1984 to the present, Merlins have been observed each winter except in 1988 and 1990 (KWFN club records; records of M. Burrell, P.F.J. Eagles, B. Read and W.G. Wilson). Winter sightings in Hamilton and Brantford led Curry (2006) to suggest that overwintering birds made it impossible to determine extreme migration dates and that the Merlin was "almost overdue" as a breeding species in the HSA.

Summer

Speirs (1985) cites about a dozen records of summer sightings in the Lake Simcoe-Rideau and Carolinian regions between 1947 and 1980, none of which indicated nesting south of Muskoka. In 1989, a Merlin sighting in Whitby on 29 July was acknowledged as the only summer record that year south of the breeding range (Weir 1989). A sighting on 5 August 2001 was a record-early fall migrant at Point Pelee (Bain 2001).

For Luther Marsh, Sandilands (1984) cites one record, 2 July 1983, which is also documented in OBBA1 as a possible breeder. In OBBA2, observations of Merlins at Luther Marsh during the breeding season documented it as a probable breeder (D. Lamble pers. comm.). In Guelph and vicinity no records exist for June and July; there is one record for May (R. Van Twest pers. comm.). KWFN records from 1954 to 1993, and those of Waterloo Region birders to 2007, have only two July records: 31 July 1985 (B. Read) and 29 July 1991 (C. A. Campbell). Until 2008, no sightings had been reported for Merlins in Waterloo Region between 14 May and 28 July, the nesting period at this latitude (Sodhi *et al.* 1993). Curry (2006) cites three July dates for Merlins in the HSA; on 5 July 2003, a likely failed breeder returned to Brantford and maintained its territory from that date and throughout the winter.

Landscape features of portions of Luther Marsh are suggestive of the northern habitat of breeding Merlins, and observations during both atlas periods gave cause to anticipate future nesting. It was a surprise, then, when the first report of nesting for GRW came from an older residential section of Fergus (R. Brown pers. comm.), but also another confirmation that certain urban environments are viable nesting habitat for this species.

Nesting Urban Merlins within and south of the Southern Shield region

With the exception of a nest in Ottawa in 1936 (Lewis and Smith 1939), Merlins began nesting in the late 1990s in the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region. In 1998, there was evidence of Merlins breeding in south Oshawa (Bain and Shanahan 1999). Beginning in 1999 and throughout the atlas period, at least nine locations in Ottawa had nesting Merlins (E. Ticknor pers. comm.); in 2000, there were at least five confirmed nests in Ottawa-Carleton (Bain and Shanahan 2000). During and following the second atlas, Merlins were also nesting in several urban centres within the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region, e.g. Owen Sound 2002 (ROM Files), Peterborough 2002 (Dextrase 2003), Kingston 2003 (R. Weir pers. comm.), Port Hope 2004 (ROM Files 2004, Weir 2008), Perth 2007 (J. Buehler pers. comm.) and Fergus 2007 (R. Brown and B. Wyatt pers. comm.). The Fergus nest, from which young successfully fledged (K. Barker pers. comm.), represents the first nesting in the GRW. In 2008, Merlins were found nesting in Cambridge by the authors, and in Waterloo (M. Geleynse pers. comm.). A nest located in London in 2008 (P. Read pers. comm.) was the first recorded urban nest for the Carolinian region.

Merlin Expansion South of the Lower Great Lakes

The southern expansion of the Merlin's breeding range extends to some of the northern states bordering the Lower Great Lakes. Merlin was considered rare and possibly breeding in New York State as early as the late 1800s, but not verified as a nesting species until 1992. During the first atlas, 1980-1985, it was not recorded (although later reported in the Adirondacks). In the second atlas, 2000-2005, Merlins were recorded in 131 atlas blocks (McGowan and Corwin 2008). No wonder the cover illustration of the recently published New York atlas is of the Merlin. An urban breeding pair was first discovered in 2003 in a cemetery in Binghamton. Since then nests have been found in Ithaca, Rochester, Buffalo and elsewhere.

A similar story exists in Pennsylvania. During the second Pennsylvania breeding bird atlas, 2004-2008, the first nest was found in a park in Bradford about 100km south of Buffalo. By 2007, Merlin nests were located in the Poconos and western Pennsylvania. A total of five nests was confirmed during the atlas. In the past decade in Ohio, Merlins have overwintered in several urban centres in cemeteries with large conifers. To date, no nests have been found (B. Whan pers. comm.). Historically, Merlins may have nested in Ashtabula County and northeast Ohio. Historical claims of breeding in the state are in doubt (*Ohio Breeding Birding Bird Atlas II, 2006-2010*). In the

remaining years of the atlas period, nesting Merlins are anticipated. In Michigan, Merlins breed in the Upper Peninsula and northern counties of the Lower Peninsula; there are no nesting records in the southern counties of the state (Natural Features Inventory; B. Petit pers. comm.).

How far south might this falcon extend its breeding range? Oliphant (pers. comm.) sees no reason why it can't continue to extend its breeding range to the Mexican border for there is no competition from other bird-feeding specialists to that southern latitude.

First Nesting in Cambridge

On the afternoon of 23 April 2008, Read observed a pair of Merlins in Victoria Park, Galt-Cambridge. This urban park is approximately 15 hectares in size, with about 4 hectares of recreational open space and 11 hectares of woodlot. As well, the park lies within the old neighborhood of West Galt, whose streets and laneways are lined with mature trees, both coniferous and deciduous (Figure 3).

Beginning 5 May, observations by Read indicated that nesting might be taking place: incessant calling — *kee-kee-kee…*, accompanying Flutter Flying and High Circling over the park's open space. (See Feldsine and Oliphant 1985 for illustrated descriptions of 14 courtship displays of the Merlin). On 6 May, Read with Bill and Heather Wilson, observed courtship activities, including male to female food transfer, in an area of the park where a nest was subsequently found; a nest previously been used by American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos)*. The nest (43°21′32″N; 80°19′32″W) was exposed atop an Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), about 24m tall, with dbh=83cm (Figure 4). The nest tree is one of a dozen, well-spaced (10-30m) mature trees surrounded by tennis courts, a ball diamond and a children's play area (Figure 5). The nest tree borders the south fence of the tennis courts. To the east of these facilities, and the nest tree, is a 1.3ha cricket pitch, and to the west a small parking lot and walking trail on the edge of the woodlot. Eight sets of flood lights atop 10m poles illuminate the nearby tennis courts and playground to 23:00h; the closest set is16m from the nest tree.

The discovery of a Merlin nest in Victoria Park presented an opportunity to observe and monitor the nesting behaviour of these Merlins in an urban setting.

Figure 3. The view of Victoria Park, Cambridge looking south toward the cricket pitch and clubhouse, 2008. Note perch tree #1 (see Table 4). *Photo: John Millman*

Figure 4. An old crow's nest atop an Eastern White Pine in Victoria Park, Cambridge, 2008, became the first documented Merlin nest in Waterloo Region. *Photo: John Millman*

During the next four months, the authors and several local naturalists with experience in monitoring undertook a nest-watch that continued until the dispersal of young. During the 122-day period from first observation of the pair (23 April), to dispersal of the young (22 August), the nest site was visited on 96 days. Sixty-seven visits of 0.25h to 0.5h were made to search the grounds about the nest site for feathers of prey species and moulted Merlin feathers, and to check on the welfare of the Merlins; 74 visits lasting 0.75h to 11 hours were made to monitor nest site activities (Table 2). On 30 of the monitoring visits, two or more monitors were present.

Figure 5. The nest tree was adjacent to the south end of the tennis courts, Victoria Park, Cambridge, 2008. *Photo: John Millman*

Table 2: Feather searches and monitoring, Merlin nest site, 5 May to 22 August 2008, Victoria Park, Cambridge, ON

	Dawn to10:00h	10:00h to14:00h	14:00h to 18:00h	18:00h toDusk
No. of Feather Searches	19	19	22	7
Total hours observation	7.75	6.25	13	2.75
Average (h)	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.4
Median (h)	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.3
Range (h)	0.3-0.5	0.3-0.5	0.3-0.5	0.3-0.5
No. of Monitoring Visits	16	17	25	16
Total hours observation	31.3	34.3	42.3	21
Average (h)	2	2	1.7	1.3
Median (h)	1.5	1.25	1.25	1.25
Range (h)	0.75-4	0.75-4	0.75-4	0.75-2.5

Observations were made with binoculars and telescopes. Communication between monitors was maintained by FRS radio. Field notes and times of activities were recorded. On 24 July, during the nestling stage, Marco DeBruin videotaped feeding behaviour at the nest. Monitors maintained 30^{+}m distance from the nest tree; no attempt was made to climb the nest tree or adjacent trees. Since all observations were made from ground level, only the dates of fledging, 25 and 26 July, are certain. All other dates of nesting stages are extrapolated based on Sodhi *et al.* (1993) with incubation period of 30 days (Table 3).

Figure 6. The male guarding the nest site from perch tree #2 (see Table 4), 26 May 2008, Victoria Park, Cambridge.
Photo: John Millman

Several precautions were undertaken to enhance survival of the young, particularly during the nestling stage. The City of Cambridge Environmental Planning Department and Parks Department were informed of the nest and its status. On 17 July, a raccoon was observed about 200m from the nest tree in a Red Oak (*Quercus rubra)* at a height of 20m. Whitewash below a nest can alert raccoons to potential prey (M. Wernaart, M. Geleynse pers. comm.). The raccoon was live-trapped and relocated. As a further precaution, the nest tree was wrapped at shoulder height with aluminum siding.

Table 3: Time line for Merlins nesting, Victoria Park, Cambridge, ON, 2008.

Nesting Stages Observed by Monitors	Dates 2008	#of Days on Site/ Length of Nesting Stage (days)	Total hours of monitoring
Pair first observed	23 April		
Courtship*	5 May** -22 May	14/18	8.75
Egg-laying* + incubation*	23 May-26 June	33/35	24
Nestling*	27 June-25/26 July	25/29	49.25
Fledgling	25/26 July-21 August	23/27	48
Dispersal	22 August		

*extrapolated from date of fledging **start date of monitoring

Figure 7. Google Earth image showing locations of nest tree (N) and perch trees (1-7), Victoria Park, Cambridge. (see Table 4). Panoramic photo (see Figure 3) taken at D. Photo (see Figure 5) taken at T. *2009 Google*™

Perch Trees

One of the most frequently observed behaviours of the Merlins throughout the nesting period was Prominent Perching. Both male and female, but predominantly the male, perched for prolonged periods of time surveying the surroundings (Figure 6), thus guarding the nest. Seven trees in and about the recreational open space of the park (Figure 7) were regularly and frequently occupied by the adults for specific activities (Table 4).

Observations made during monitoring are discussed for each stage of nesting. Discussions of prey species and hunting, and agonistic behaviour of the nesting Merlins, are presented separately.

Pair Formation

Pair formation begins one to two months prior to egg-laying (Sodhi *et al.* 1993). The most conspicuous behaviour during this stage was Flutter Flying, a mechanical toy-like flapping reminiscent of the flutter flight of the Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*), accompanied by rapid, intense calling *kee-kee-kee*. . .repeated multiple times, of varying lengths and given by both sexes. In time, the male's call could be distinguished from the female's, the former being higher pitched; however, we could not distinguish a difference in speed of the call notes between the sexes as suggested in Sodhi *et al.* (1993). The only other courtship display observed during this period

was Food Transfer, specifically perch-to-perch, from male to female. Copulation was observed on 16 and 26 May; copulation can occur 60 times per pair for a breeding season with increasing frequency during pre-laying and egg-laying periods (ibid).

During early to mid-May, the female was observed sitting on the nest for periods of time initially suggesting to us that she was incubating eggs, e.g. 90 minutes on 9 May. On 12 May, she was on and off the nest several times; the longest stay was 20 minutes. Oliphant (pers. comm.) points out that it is usual for the female to occupy the nest for periods of time prior to egg-laying.

Egg-laying and Incubation

During the last week of May, and the beginning of incubation, the local public school held a games event in the park. What a sight! The tennis courts were full, and over 400 children and adults were participating in various activities. Even though the route for most of the running events passed directly below the nest tree, the Merlins showed no overt displays of aggression or agitation to the ongoing activities.

The first egg (assuming four eggs) was probably laid on 23 May, with incubation starting on 28 May and hatching on 27 June. Eggs are laid at two-day intervals, with incubation starting one day

Table 4: Perch trees and activity in relation to Merlin nest (nest height = 24m), Victoria Park, Cambridge, ON, 2008.

Tree # & species	Height of perch above nest (m)	Distance from nest (m)	Merlin Activity
#1 Norway Spruce (*Picea abies)*	9	38	male guarding nest
#2 Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*)	-6	15	male guarding nest during incubation
#3 Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*)	12	140	male guarding nest
#4 White Oak (*Quercus alba)*	11	92	male/female guarding nest
#5 Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)	2	48	female in shade under canopy
#6 Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)	-2 to -4	35	food transfer + plucking
#7 Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*)	4	75	male to fledgling food transfer

before the last egg is laid (Sodhi *et al.* 1993). During this time, the female remained on the nest for extended periods of time, with the male frequently perched atop either perch tree #1 or #2 (Table 4). Observed food exchange during incubation was perch-to-perch at perch tree #6, with the female plucking and consuming the prey item before returning to the nest.

Moult begins during the breeding season, starting in May and continues into September, with females moulting earlier than males (ibid). In near-daily search, Read found ten moulted feathers on eight days, between 25 May and 25 June: nine primaries and secondaries, and one tail feather. The moulted wing feathers were from the female; at no time was the male observed without a full complement of primaries and secondaries although he was missing a tail feather, aiding in distinguishing sexes.

Nestling Stage

Hatch date was extrapolated to be 27 June. Extended periods of monitoring (three to 11 hours) took place over six days between 5 July, when the young were about one week old, and 25 July when the first two fledged. Visits and monitoring that lasted two hours or less, continued as well.

On the sixth day after hatch the female continued to brood the young, and was observed periodically brooding them during the second week. Sodhi *et al.* (1993) states that brooding continues until the seventh day and beyond during inclement weather. Located in the crown of the pine, this nest was neither concealed nor protected from the elements. During brooding, and earlier during incubation, the female was observed on the nest with her tail facing the sun. On one occasion, at mid-day, the female was observed sitting on the nest with her wings spread, as if to shield the young from the hot sun. On 11 July, despite a record rainfall of 10^{+}cm overnight, the young did not appear to be negatively affected. Mortality of nestlings is common during heavy rainfall, high winds and cold weather (Oliphant pers. comm.).

During this stage, much of the observed activity was the feeding of the young. Monitors initially observed the female feeding two young (Figure 8), then three, and eventually four on 19 July. Food transfer from the male to the female took place at perch tree #6 (Table 4). The female plucked the prey there and then took it to the young. On 16 July, the female was observed on the nest with an intact, male House Finch, the only observation of an unplucked prey brought to the nest. Laing (1985) estimated an average of ten prey per day during a study in Denali National Park, Alaska. Calculated prey requirements determined from hand-raised birds for a pair and four young is about 800 House Sparrows for a 120-day nesting season (Oliphant and Tessaro 1985).

Sodhi *et al.* (1993) identifies peak hunting activity during breeding to be

Figure 8. Two of the four young, 18 July 2008, a week before fledging. During the final week before fledging, there is rapid replacement of down by contour feathers (Oliphant and Tessaro 1985). *Photo: John Millman*

early morning and late afternoon. At the Victoria Park nest, feeding of the young began as early as 05:45h and continued to as late at 20:16h. For example, on 8 July, six feedings occurred between 05:45h and 07:23h, but did not recommence that day until 15:00h when as many as four took place by 16:30h, for a total of 10. No monitoring took place that day after 16:30h. On 25 July, the day of first fledging, five mid-day feedings were recorded between 10:00h and 13:43h, followed by seven feedings between 16:10h and 19:31h.

Throughout this stage, the young exhibited no overt aggression towards each other even when prey was brought to the nest. Their passive demeanour caused monitors to comment on their "polite table manners". Palmer (1988) notes little aggression among siblings. On one occasion, a few days before fledging, one nestling picked or preened down feathers from the head of a sibling.

The female was observed feeding in early morning and late afternoon; she consumed food both on the nest and while perched nearby. There was no direct

evidence that the female hunted during the nestling stage. During a two-decade study, Sodhi *et al.* (1992) observed only three occasions when females killed prey during this stage. The male was not observed feeding during this stage.

Fledging Stage and Dispersal

The first young fledged at 19:45h on 25 July and flew to a nearby tree; a second bird fledged five minutes later, crashing through nearby tree limbs and landing on the ground. Recently fledged Merlins that become grounded usually will climb or hop up on low-lying bushes and branches to get themselves off the ground. In this park all the lower branches are cut to allow the grass mowers around under the trees. Since this fledgling would be vulnerable to predation or mauling by dogs and cats if left on the ground, Read took the bird home for the night and arranged with a local falconer to care for the bird until it could be released safely. The next morning at 07:00h, he decided to check the nest area before delivering the first fledgling, and found another fledgling on the ground. Neither grounded bird made any attempt to resist handling, thus reinforcing the decision to remove them. At no time was Read or any of the other monitors attacked by either parent, nor was there any vocal agitation. Later that morning, the fourth bird successfully fledged at 09:03h, and flew more than 30m, exhibiting a strong flight. At 09:11h the male brought prey to this fledgling.

Falconer Jim Wilson of Glen Morris agreed to house the two fledglings in order to give them time to develop their primaries more fully and to practice flying. They were brought back to the park mid-morning on 28 July for banding and release. At no time during the handling and banding of the young was there any overt aggression displayed by the adults. The loud continuous vocalizations of the two young, however, attracted the attention of tennis players. Both fledglings were identified as females based on their size and weights, 202g and 211g. At Hawk Cliff in 2007 and 2008, banded Merlin females had an average weight of 204g (n=34); males weighed on average, 153g (n=24) (Don Fowler pers. comm.). Later, when all four fledglings were observed together, their similar size suggested they were all female.

The two fledglings that were released at the nest tree, hopped up branches and made short flights until they reached the top. Following the release, the fledglings remained near the nest site and the male brought food within the hour. Fledglings remain dependent on adults and stay near the nest site from one – four weeks after fledging (Sodhi *et al.*1993). At the end of the first week, their flying skills had greatly improved and they were chasing each other and making longer flights. On 3 August, eight days after the young fledged, the nest site was monitored for 13 consecutive hours, beginning one hour after sunrise. Observations typified behaviour of fledglings during this stage of development. The male delivered prey

Figure 9. Hatch-year female with decapitated House Sparrow delivered by adult male, 1 August 2008, seven days after fledging. *Photo: John Millman*

to the young until 07:35h resuming again at 15:57h and continuing until 19:40h (Figure 9).

For much of the day the fledglings perched quietly, sometimes four together in the same tree with two on the same limb, or four within the same cluster of trees but in separate trees. One fledgling perched lengthwise on a branch and for more than half an hour; one perched on the roof ridge of a nearby house. On one occasion, the two banded females perched together and exhibited bill-touching behaviour. The longest inactive period was from 12:05h to 13:20h. Training flights, of approximately 10 minutes each, on seven occasions, were intermittent throughout the day until 20:10h, at which time all fledglings went to roost (sunset at 20:39h).

The fledglings would chase one another, flying as many as three in tandem, or fly alone. These flights were low over the open space, as low as a half metre above ground, or over the street and house tops and neighbouring yards. As well as tail-chasing one another, the fledglings chased Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), dragonflies (*Odonata*), Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) and Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*). By 6 August, the fledglings began flying consistently above canopy level, venturing a half kilometre from the park. On 15 August, training flights would end with the young vying for position on the same perches. Interestingly, no fledgling was observed to occupy the parental perches (Table 4). On 18 August, three fledglings were observed at more than twice the height of the neighbourhood trees. During one episode of tail-chasing, pursuit by one of the fledglings was broken off when an American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis)* was seen by the pursuit bird; it chased the goldfinch for approximately 50m but was unsuccessful in catching it.

All four young were last seen in the park on 14 August. After that, only three young were observed and they remained together until 21 August. One may have been killed, or that fledgling may have made a kill on its own and became independent. Oliphant (pers. comm.) said that Saskatoon fledglings were independent at three weeks of age. Sometimes, the young roosted at night in a cluster of conifers in a neighbouring yard adjacent to the cricket pitch, about 150m from the nest tree; in time, they would roost in the park's woodlot. Mid-morning on 22 August, the three young were seen about a kilometre from the nest site in a group of Red Pine (*Pinus resinosa*) bordering a townhouse complex across from a shopping plaza. The young did not return to their roost on the evening of 22 August, nor were they seen on any subsequent visits to the park. On 28 August, a female juvenile or adult Merlin was seen actively hunting near the park. On 14 September, the Merlin pair was seen in Victoria Park. On 22 September, a male Merlin was observed in perch tree #1, the last sighting in Victoria Park.

Prey Species and Hunting Success

Merlin prey were identified from carcasses on the ground, plucked feathers, wings and tails collected about the nest site, particularly beneath plucking perches, as well as observations of Merlins with intact carcasses. After hatch, and as the young became older, food exchanges occurred with prey items already plucked and decapitated, making identification difficult.

Of 39 prey items recovered about the nest site, ten bird species were identified with House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus)* accounting for 41% (Table 5). Sodhi *et al. (*1993) cites three comprehensive studies of nesting Merlins in urban habitats in Alberta and Saskatchewan where the House Sparrow was the principal prey species, 64 to 76%. Three probable Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota)* prey

may have come from a colony of over 100 pairs located under a bridge in downtown Galt about 700m from the nest. Two species, Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus)* and Bay-breasted Warbler (*Dendroica castanea*), are migrants; the remaining prey species are common-to-abundant breeders in the area. Merlins are opportunists and very successful hunters; if a bird of songbird size presents itself, a Merlin will likely chase it and often catch it.

Once brooding was discontinued the female would frequent perch tree #5, a shaded location (Table 4). She was not observed hunting. According to Oliphant (pers. comm.), the female does not need to hunt and will stay close to the nest if the male is able to catch enough prey. Despite all the prey delivered by the male, a kill was only observed on one occasion: on 5 July, from a 10m high perch about 90m from the nest. The male quickly dove, captured a House Sparrow and returned within seconds to the same perch. That this kill was opportunistic was reinforced by the caching of the prey on a bough of perch tree #1. Prey was taken 25m to 4800m from nests in the Saskatoon studies (Sodhi 1992).

There appears to have been a high prey availability about this nest. Four observed activities support this conclusion. Aggression of young towards adults or other young was never observed when prey was brought to the nest. When the female was feeding one young, other young did not attempt to intervene. On occasion, when the female was observed bringing food to the nest, no response came from the well-fed young. Other times, the male was observed calling in the nest area with a food item and this did not elicit a response from the female.

In the nestling stage, during three feeding periods on two different days, the male delivered 18 prey. These feeding periods lasted 2h 18min, 2h 48min and 3h 21min. On average, prey was delivered in intervals of 22 minutes (median=23 minutes; range 5 – 40 minutes).

Table 5: Prey Species of Nesting Merlins, Victoria Park, Cambridge, ON, 2008.

Species	# Identified
House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)	16
American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*)	6
House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)	3
Probable Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)	3
Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea)*	3
Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)	3
Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*)	1
Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica)*	1
Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*)	1
Bay breasted Warbler (*Dendroica castanea*)	1
Dragonfly sp.	1

During a 3-minute period on 24 July, the day before fledging, there were three prey delivered between 15:13h and 15:16h with interval times of one and two minutes respectively. The time intervals suggest cache retrieval, extreme opportunism and/or that both parents were involved.

Prey was observed being cached on at least four occasions, suggesting young and parents were at times satiated. During feather searches, four intact prey were found directly beneath known perch trees. These included a Swainson's Thrush, an American Goldfinch and two House Sparrows. Merlins will cache prey "well within 50m" of the nest (Palmer 1988).

Agonistic Behaviour of Nesting Merlin

Aggression towards other species changed during the nesting cycle. During courtship, egg laying and incubation, the male aggressively chased Blue Jays out of the immediate nest area. On 26 May, the male chased a Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) that attempted to climb the nest tree. Common Grackles were attacked by the adults throughout the nesting stages; during the incubation stage, the male attacked a Common Grackle, knocking out three of its tail feathers. The female pursued a Common Grackle during the nestling stage and on three occasions during the fledgling stage. During the latter stage, both parents attacked a Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) which had landed on a tree occupied by fledglings.

American Crows were observed in small number on the grounds of the park and as fly-bys; they were never observed in the nest tree. On occasion, the male chased a group of five or six crows from the open space, but for the most part crows were ignored. Sodhi *et al.* (1992) annually observed frequent attacks on crows, particularly by the male, when they approached within 100m of the nest. Four of five Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) that flew over the nest area were attacked by the male who dive bombed them from above. On two occasions, a Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura)* was observed in the vicinity of the nest; one was vigorously attacked.

Raptors breeding in Cambridge that are predators of Merlin include Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*), Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) and Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*). Great Horned Owl was absent in Victoria Park woodlot, with the closest known nest 2.5km away. Cooper's Hawk nests about 3km from the nest site, but none was seen in Victoria Park until after dispersal of the young. Two pairs of Red-tailed Hawks nested within a kilometre (B. Read, W. G. Wilson pers. obs.). Of 26 physical interactions observed between Merlin and other species, nine were aerial pursuits of Red-tailed Hawks. The male undertook these aerial pursuits throughout the nesting period, and by mid-July was sometimes joined by the female.

On one occasion, they pursued and dive-bombed a juvenile that was about 400m from the nest. American Crows were also observed joining in these attacks. After the Merlin young fledged, the adult female was observed on two occasions 300m north of Victoria Park in a cemetery frequented by two fledgling Red-tailed Hawks. She was very vocal and made repeated dives at them.

Factors Limiting Merlin Nesting in Urban Centres

The primary factors limiting nesting of the Merlin in urban centres are the availability of suitable nest sites and the availability of suitable prey species (Oliphant pers. comm.). Merlins do not build a nest but rather use old but intact corvid or hawk nests that may be modified to some degree (Sodhi *et al.* 1993). Oliphant (pers. comm.) states that of hundreds of Merlin nests of which he's aware, all but one were located in coniferous trees. In southern Ontario, crows are in abundance in much of the Carolinian and virtually all the Lake Simcoe-Rideau regions, with approximately half their nests reported to be in conifers (Sandilands 2007). In many towns and cities of southern Ontario, Eastern White Pine, Red Pine, Norway Spruce and White Spruce are common plantings in parks, cemeteries and residential yards. Merlins require a continuing supply of crow nests since they rarely use the same nest in two consecutive years (Sodhi *et al.* 1993). During 2008, the nest in Victoria Park was reduced in size by half due to its use by the Merlins and the effects of weather. Merlins may reuse the same nest the following year if it is still intact (Oliphant pers. comm.).

An analysis of Merlin nest-site habitat by Sieg and Becker (1990) demonstrated that nest trees were surrounded by well-spaced taller trees and were located on landscapes providing both easy access to the nest tree and good visibility of the surroundings. The Victoria Park nest site exhibited these characteristics. In non-urban habitat, Merlins nest along forest edges or forest openings adjacent to lakes, rivers, bogs or prairie parkland, probably to facilitate hunting (Sodhi *et al.* 1993). This may explain the proximity of open space, such as a cricket pitch, within its urban habitat. The Waterloo nest discovered in 2008 was located in a cluster of Red Pines in a residential front yard across a busy street from playing fields.

In general, the primary prey of Merlins are the most abundant song birds in a region, 20-40g in weight, that frequently leave cover where they become vulnerable to predation (Sodhi and Oliphant 1993). Seven of the prey species of the Victoria Park Merlin are both ubiquitous and abundant-to-common in the region, with House Sparrow and American Goldfinch the most numerous. In Peterborough, the principle prey was Cedar Waxwing (Dextrase 2003). These three species are some of the most abundant song birds in the Carolinian and

Lake Simcoe-Rideau regions: House Sparrow, 2.1 million; American Goldfinch, 3.3 million; and Cedar Waxwing, 1.1 million (Cadman *et al.* 2007). With this apparent abundant supply of prey and suitable nest sites, Merlins will likely continue to nest in and expand into urban centres in these regions. The urban centres of the Carolinian region that lie within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton areas, the Niagara Peninsula and the counties of southwestern Ontario are locations with relatively abundant populations of House Sparrows (Lang 2007). Nevertheless, the population trend of the House Sparrow is one of decline in North America (Curry 2006; Lang 2007; Peach *et al.* 2008).

Will Merlins return to nest in an urban centre like Cambridge? Oliphant and Haug (1985) believe that urban Merlins are, for the most part, birds fledged from urban nests. Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) raised in urban environments will themselves select that environment in which to nest (B. Ratcliff pers. comm.).

How many pairs of Merlins would be able to nest in an urban centre such as Cambridge? Observations of earlier expansion and nesting in other Ontario centres may offer clues. In the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region, Merlin began nesting in the Kingston Region in 2003 where it has nested annually; five years later, the number of nesting pairs is $10^{\pm}3$ (Weir 2008). In Port Hope, Merlins first nested in 2004; two pairs have nested annually since 2005 (R. Frost pers. comm.).

In the Southern Shield region, Merlins have nested in two major urban centres for about 20 years. In 1931, one nest near Sault Ste. Marie was noteworthy (Speirs, 1985). Beginning in the late 1980s, Merlin numbers increased to as many as 20 to 25 nesting pairs within the city (K. McIlwrick pers. comm.). As many as half a dozen Merlins overwinter and when migrants return, McIlwrick describes spring in the city as "alive with calling Merlins". Recently, Merlin numbers in the city appear to have decreased. Decline in principle prey species may be a factor. House Sparrow, for example, is "almost extirpated in the Sault"; House Finch has also decreased in number. A decline in bird feeders a few years ago resulting from a city-wide ban on feeding Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) complicates an explanation.

In 1987, the Merlin nested for the first time in Sudbury, and since then one to three pairs have nested most years, and exclusively in spruce. (J. Lemon pers. comm.). Lemon observed Merlins hunting in pairs, an infrequent behaviour for hunting wintering waxwings in urban centres (Sodhi *et al.*. 1993). Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) and finches are the primary prey; there are no House Finches, and House Sparrows were last recorded on the 2000 CBC when 12 were observed (J. Lemon pers. comm., D. Schoenefeld pers. comm.). The only counts of House Sparrow undertaken in Cambridge have been during annual CBCs. The twenty-year average, 1977 to

1996, is 1447, with a five-year average, 2004 to 2008, of 637.

The changes in the infrastructure, the landscape of human communities, the complexities of predator-prey relationships and their implications for urban Merlins, have been examined by Bailey (2002). In considering four decades of nesting Merlins in Saskatoon, and several decades in other Saskatchewan urban centres, Bailey offers insight into the dynamic nature of urban bird communities in which native and introduced songbird species interact with recovering populations of raptors. Birders throughout the urban centres of Ontario have the opportunity to observe, document and respond to the current and coming changes in bird communities in their own urban landscapes. Couple these interactions with the potential impact on bird populations of projected future climate change in southern Ontario (Price 2004) and the relevance of such field study is readily apparent. The flux of nature is forever with us.

Acknowledgements

We thank Jerry Guenther, Marco and Donna DeBruin and Heather Wilson who ably assisted in the observing and recording of Merlin activity. We thank Omar Abdulrahman, Jason Bracey and Cathy DeBruin who also provided assistance during the latter portion of the nestling stage and throughout the fledgling stage.

Special thanks to falconer Jim Wilson for providing a flight cage and food for the two grounded Merlins, and for advice and assistance for their care and release.

Thanks to Mark Peck, Royal Ontario Museum, for providing access to study skins and assistance and expertise in identifying feathers. Feather identification was also provided by Stuart McKenzie and Yousif Attia, Birds Studies Canada. Thanks to Andrew Couturier, BSC, for use of the map (Figure 2), and for modifications to the basic map.

We especially appreciate the comments provided by Lynn Oliphant in answer to our many questions, and John Millman for sharing his photographs with us. We were saddened to learn that John passed away 12 June 2009.

We also wish to thank those who provided references, individual sight records, club records and personal anecdotal information about Merlin breeding and other activities in the province as well as, in some cases, CBC count data: Rick Brown, Karen Barker, Judy Buehler, Mike Burrell, Mike Cadman, Glenn Coady, Bob Curry, Ken Dance, Paul Eagles, Karl and Marienna Egressy, Nick Escott, Roger Frost, Don Fowler, Martin Geleynse, Jim Heslop, John Lemon, Ken McIlwrick, Martin Parker, George Prieksaitis, Pete Read, Chris Risley, Dieter Schoenefeld, Stanley Teeple, Eve Ticknor, Trent Turcotte, Rohan Van Twest, Ron Weir, Martin Wernaart and Bryan Wyatt.

We thank the many CBC co-ordinators who provided count data, particularly 2008-09 data: Cliff Bennett, Freeman Boyd, Anne Brown, Drew Campbell, Ted Cheskey, Derek Connelly, Bruce Di Labio, Diane Dobson, Manson Fleguel, Marcel Gahbauer, Christine Hanrahan, John Haselmayer, Leo Heyens, Marcie Jacklin, Glenda Jones, Elizabeth Kellogg, Ray Kiff, William McIlveen, Bob Noble, Rayfield Pye, Kayo Roy, Dieter Schoenefeld, Janet Scott, Dave Skinner and Linda Thrower.

Out-of-province information was gratefully received from John Brenneman, Stuart Houston, Bob Petit and Bill Whan.

April Souwand, Senior Environmental Planner, Planning Services Department, City of Cambridge, and Dave Stuart, Director of Open and Recreation Space, City of Cambridge, were informed of the Merlin nest and its location and offered assistance should the need arise.

Finally, a special thank you to Heather Wilson for her field observations, provision of comfort food during both field work and writing. In particular, we most appreciate her editorial advice and contribution to the first draft of this document.

Information Sources

HMANA. The Hawk Migration Association of North America. http//www.hmana.org

Natural Features Inventory, Lansing, MI. Merlin. http://web4.msue.msu.edu/ mnfi/abstracts/zoology/Falco_columbarius.pdf

Ohio Breeding Birding Bird Atlas II (2006-2010). http://www.ohiobirds.org/obba2

Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas II(2004-2008). ttp://www.carnegiemnh.org/atlas/home.htm

ROM Files: P. Pratt 1971; A. Ryder 1982; S. Giilck 1994.

Literature Cited

Bailey, M. 2002. Changing predator-prey relationships in urban areas in Saskatchewan. Birders Journal 4(11):142-144.

Baillie, Jr., J.L. and **P. Harrington**. 1936. The distribution of breeding birds in Ontario. Part I. Transactions Royal Canadian Institute 21:1-50. (Reprinted 1976).

Bain, M. and **D. Shanahan**. 1999. Cross Canada round-up, October and November 1998: Ontario. Birders Journal 7(6):279-280.

Bain, M. and **D. Shanahan.** 2000. Cross Canada round-up, August and September 2000: Ontario. Birders Journal 9(5):221.

Bain, M. 2001. Cross Canada round-up, August and September 2001: Ontario. Birders Journal 10(5):228.

Baxter, T.S.H. 1985. The birding handbook: eastern Lake Superior. Superior Lore, Wawa, Ontario. 133 Pp.

Bennett, G. 1985a. Birdfinding the Trans Canada Highway: Lap 21: Temagami to Cochrane, Ontario. Birdfinding in Canada 5(1):3-5.

Bennett, G. 1985b. Birdfinding the Trans Canada Highway: Lap 23: Moonbeam to Hearst, Ontario. Birdfinding in Canada 5(3):3-5

Bennett, G. 1986. Birdfinding the Trans Canada Highway: Lap 28: Lake Superior Provincial Park. Birdfinding in Canada 6(2):10-12.

Brewer, A.D. 1977. The birds of Wellington County. Guelph Field Naturalists Club, Guelph, Ontario. 38 Pp.

Burton, P. 1989. The birds of prey. Gallery Books, of W. H. Smith Publishers, Inc., New York, NY. 208 Pp.

Cadman, M.D., **P.F.J. Eagles** and **F.M. Helleiner**. 1987. Atlas of the breeding birds of Ontario. University of Waterloo Press, Waterloo, Ontario. 617 Pp.

Cadman, M.D., **D.A. Sutherland, G.G. Beck, D. Lepage** and **A.R. Couturier** (eds). 2007. Atlas of the breeding birds of Ontario, 2001-2005. Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Ontario Nature, Toronto, Ontario. xxii + 706 Pp.

Cheskey, E.D. and **W.G. Wilson**. 2001. Luther Marsh Important Bird Area Conservation Plan. Important Bird Areas of Canada. ON Nature, Bird Studies Canada, Birdlife International, Canadian Nature Federation. http://ibacanada.

Craighead, J.S. and **F.C. Craighead.** 1940. Nesting Pigeon Hawks. Wilson Bulletin 52:241-248.

Curry, R. 2006. Birds of Hamilton and surrounding areas. Robert Curry and the Hamilton Naturalists Club, Hamilton, Ontario. 647 Pp.

Dextrase, H. 2003. Nightmare on Belmont Street. Food habits of nesting Merlins. OFO News: 21(3):6-7.

Duncan, B.W. 1993. Merlins in Ontario: population changes. Birders Journal 2(1): 48-60.

Escott, N.G. 1986. Thunder Bay's Nesting Merlins. Ontario Birds 4(3):97-101.

Feldsine, J.W. and **L.W. Oliphant**. 1985. Breeding behaviour of the Merlin: the courtship period. Raptor Research 19(2/3): 60-67.

Fyfe, R.W. 1976. Status of Canadian raptor populations. Canadian Field-Naturalist 90:370-375.

Gahbauer, M.A. 2007. Merlin, pp. 192-193 *in* Cadman, M.D., D.A. Sutherland, G.G. Beck, D. Lepage and A.R. Couturier (eds). 2007. Atlas of the breeding birds of Ontario, 2001-2005. Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and Ontario Nature, Toronto, Ontario. xxii + 706 Pp.

Godfrey, W.E. 1966. The birds of Canada. National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa, Ontario. 428 Pp.

Goodwin, C.E. 1979. The nesting season. Ontario Region. American Birds 33(6):858-860.

Houston, S., T. Ball and **M. Houston**. 2003. Eighteenth-century naturalists of Hudson Bay. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, Quebec, and Kingston, Ontario. 333 Pp.

Houston, C.S. and **A. Schmidt.** 1981. History of Richardson's Merlin in Saskatchewan. Blue Jay 39:30-37.

Iron, J. and **R. Pittaway**. 2002. 1905 Bird checklist of Ontario: comparing 1905 and 2002. OFO News 20(1): 6-18.

Judd, W.W. and **J.M. Speirs**. 1964. A naturalist's guide to Ontario. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Ontario. 210 Pp.

Laing, K. 1985. Food habits and breeding biology of Merlins in Denali National Park, Alaska. Raptor Research 19:42-51.

Lang, A.L. 2007. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), pp. 628-629 *in* Cadman, M.D., D.A. Sutherland, G.G. Beck, D. Lepage, and A.R. Couturier (eds). 2007. Atlas of the breeding birds of Ontario, 2001-2005. Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and Ontario Nature, Toronto, Ontario. xxii + 706 Pp.

Lawrence, L. de K. 1949. Notes on nesting Pigeon Hawks at Pimisi Bay, Ontario. Wilson Bulletin 61:15-25.

Lewis, H.F. and **Smith, R.W.** 1939. Apparent nesting of the Pigeon Hawk (*Falco columbarius*) in the City of Ottawa. Canadian Field-Naturalist 53:45-46.

Macoun, J. and **J. Macoun**. 1909. Catalogue of Canadian birds. Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

McGowan, K.J. and **K. Corwin**. 2008. The second atlas of breeding birds in New York State. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York. 696 Pp.

McIlwraith, T. 1894. Birds of Ontario, Second Edition. Wm .Briggs, Toronto, Ontario. Pp.216-217.

Oliphant, L.W. 1985. North American Merlin breeding survey. Raptor Research 19(2/3):37-41.

Oliphant, L.W. and **E. Haug.** 1985. Productivity, population density and rate of increase of an expanding Merlin population. Raptor Research 19(2/3):56-59.

Oliphant, L.W. and **S.V. Tessaro.** 1985. Growth rates and food consumption of hand-raised Merlins. Raptor Research 19(2/3):79-84.

Palmer, R.S. 1988. Handbook of North American birds. Vol. 4 & 5: diurnal raptors. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut. Pp. 291-314.

Peach, W.J., **K.E. Vincent**, **J.A. Fowler** and **P.V. Grice.** 2008. Reproductive success of house sparrows along an urban gradient. Animal Conservation 11(6):493-503. http://www.creaky.net/Kate_Vincent_org/reproductive_success_of_house_sparrows_along_an_urban_gradient.pdf

Peck, G.K. and **R.D. James**. 1983. Breeding birds of Ontario: nidiology and distribution. Vol. 1: nonpasserines. Life Sciences Miscellaneous Publication, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario. 391 Pp.

Peck, G.K. and **R.D. James.** 1999. Breeding birds of Ontario: nidiology and distribution. Vol. 1: nonpasserines (additions and revisions). Ontario Birds 17:105-123.

Pittaway, R. 1994. Recognizable forms: Merlin. Ontario Birds 12:74-80.

Pittaway, R. 1999. Fall Hawkwatching. OFO News 17(3):1-8.

Price, J. 2004. Potential impacts of climate change on the summer distribution of southern Ontario's passerine birds. Ontario Birds 22:20-30.

Sandilands, A.P. 1984. Annotated checklist of the vascular plants and vertebrates of Luther Marsh, Ontario. Ontario Field Biologist, Special Publication No. 2. 134 Pp.

Sandilands, A.P. 2007. American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), pp. 382-383 *in* Cadman, M.D., D.A. Sutherland, G.G. Beck, D. Lepage and A.R. Couturier (eds). 2007. Atlas of the breeding birds of Ontario, 2001-2005. Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and Ontario Nature, Toronto, Ontario. xxii + 706 Pp.

Sieg, C.H. and **D.M. Becker**. 1990. Nest-site habitat selected by Merlins in southeastern Montana. Condor 92:688-694.

Snyder, L.L. 1951. Ontario Birds. Clarke, Irwin & Co., Toronto, Ontario. 248 Pp.

Sodhi, N.S. 1992. Central place foraging and prey preparation by a specialist predator, the Merlin. Journal Field Ornithology 63:71-76.

Sodhi, N.S., I.G. Warkentin and **L.W. Oliphant**. 1992. Breeding ecology of urban Merlins. Canadian Journal of Zoology 70:1477-1483.

Sodhi, N.S., L.W. Oliphant, **P.C. James** and **I.G. Warkentin**. 1993. Merlin (*Falco columbarius*). *In* The Birds of North America, No. 44 (A. Poole and F. Gill, Eds.).The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

Sodhi, N.S. and **L.W. Oliphant**. 1993. Prey selection by urban-breeding Merlins. Auk 110:727-735.

Soper, D. 1923. The birds of Wellington and Waterloo Counties, Ontario. Auk 40:489-513.

Speirs, J.M. 1985. Birds of Ontario. Volume 2. Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., Toronto, Ontario. 986 Pp.

Stabb, M. 2009. Return of the raptors. ON Nature 49(1):26-31.

Tate. J. 1981. The Blue List for 1981: The first decade. American Birds 35:3-10.

Tate, J. 1986.The Blue List for 1986. American Birds 40:227-236.

Temple, S.A. 1972. Sex and age characteristics of North American Merlins. Bird-Banding 43:191-196.

Weir, R.D. 1985. The spring migration. Ontario Region. American Birds 39:291-296.

Weir, R.D. 1987a. Merlin, pp. 128-129 i*n* Atlas of the breeding birds of Ontario (Cadman, M.D., P.F.J. Eagles and F.M. Helleiner, eds.). University of Waterloo Press, Waterloo, Ontario. 617 Pp.

Weir, R.D. 1987b. The autumn migration. Ontario Region. American Birds 41:80-84.

Weir, R.D. 1989. The nesting season. Ontario Region. American Birds 43:1310-1313.

Weir, R.D. 1990. The autumn migration. Ontario Region. American Birds 44:81-97.

Weir, R.D. 1992. The winter season. Ontario Region. American Birds 46:258-260.

Weir, R.D. 2008. Birds of Kingston Region, Second Edition. Kingston Field Naturalists, Kingston, Ontario. 611 Pp.

Bill Read, 24 Brant Place, Cambridge, Ontario, N1S 2V8

William G. Wilson, 550 Moore Street, Cambridge, Ontario, N3H 3B2

GENESIS 33 SERIES

LIGHT AND COMPACT, TRUE PROMINAR PERFORMANCE

Lightweight (21 oz.)
Precise Color Definition
Diopter Lock
Large Focusing Knob & Smooth Focusing
Close Focus of 1.5m (5.0 feet)

Kowa
Crystal Clear Optics™

Check Out Our Award Winning TSN-883 Spotting Scope

www.kowa-usa.com
Kowa Optimed
20001 S. Vermont Avenue
Torrance, CA 90502
800.966.5692

Northern Mockingbird in Kenora in 1965

Martin K. McNicholl

THE THOROUGH REVIEW by Roy Smith and Winnie Poon of the changing status of Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus poyglottos)* in Toronto and surrounding areas (Smith and Poon 2006) also provides an overview of the current and historical status of mockingbirds in Ontario generally. It stimulated me to draw attention of Ontario birders and ornithologists to a previously published record near Ontario's western boundary in a source generally overlooked by Ontario observers.

On 19 November 1965, a long-billed, largely grey bird with white patches in its darker wings and tail appeared at the Kenora, Ontario, feeder of Mr. and Mrs. Tommy Thorpe. Although they were able to identify all their regular feeder birds, this one was unfamiliar to them. They consulted with my uncle, Jim Howe, who was somewhat more knowledgeable on identification of the commoner birds of the Kenora-Sioux Lookout area of Ontario. The bird was also unfamiliar to him, but it seemed to fit the description and drawing of a Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*) that been described the previous week-end in a Winnipeg bird column after it wandered to a bird feeder in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba (Mossop 1965). The Thorpes contacted Harold V. Hosford, the bird columnist in Winnipeg's other main newspaper of that time to inform him of their mystery bird and their tentative identification. Hosford invited David R. M. Hatch, Northern Great Plains editor of *Audubon Field Notes* at that time [when that region included the prairie provinces], Peter M. Press and me to accompany him to Kenora to try to confirm this identification. On 19 December 1965, we travelled to my Uncle Jim and Aunt Mary Howe's house in Kenora and then continued with them to the Thorpe's where we soon saw the bird and identified it as a Northern Mockingbird (Hosford 1965c). This was presumably the same bird reported at Kenora on 29 December 1965 by Goodwin (1966), but this Kenora record was not included in Speir's (1985) compilation of Ontario records.

Although mockingbirds were far out of their normal range in Kenora in 1965, they were occurring with increasing frequency at that time in the prairie provinces and adjacent U.S. plains states (reviewed by Brazier 1964a, 1964b), and Hosford (1965a) had speculated that one that I saw in Winnipeg's Brookside Cemetery in May that year might become Manitoba's first nesting record. Herbert W. R. Copland also saw one that June in the Alf Hole Goose Sanctuary, near Rennie, slightly west of the Ontario/Manitoba border (Hosford 1965b, Taylor 1985). In subsequent years, they have become slightly more frequent in Manitoba, with about five records documented annually (Holland and Taylor 2003), and the first known nesting occurring in Pinawa, another location near the Ontario/Manitoba border, in 1972 (Taylor 1985, Holland and Taylor 2003).

As many Winnipeg naturalists own or have access to cabins or cottages on lakes in the Great Canadian Shield between the Ontario/Manitoba border and Lake-of-the-Woods, and others undertake canoe trips in or including that region, Ontario researchers reviewing population trends, range changes and precise seasonal ranges of Ontario bird species should be aware that the two newspaper bird columns mentioned above and publications of the Manitoba Naturalists Society (formerly Natural History Society of Manitoba) contain records of birds observed in that area of Ontario (see McNicholl 2003:20-21) that may not have been also published in Ontario periodicals.

Literature Cited

Brazier, F. H. 1964a. Status of the Mockingbird in the Northern Great Plains. Blue Jay 22: 63-75.

Brazier, F. H. 1964b. Additional records of the Mockingbird. Blue Jay 22:151-152.

Goodwin, C. E. 1966. Winter season December 1, 1965 – March 31, 1966. Ontario-western New York region, Ontario. Audubon Field Notes 20: 416-418.

Holland, G. E. and **P. Taylor.** 2003. Northern Mockingbird Moquer polyglotte. p. 307 *in* P. Taylor (ed). The birds of Manitoba. Manitoba Naturalists Society, Winnipeg.

Hosford, H. 1965a. This may be year of mockingbird. Wild Wings. Winnipeg Tribune 15 May 1965.

Hosford, H. 1965b. Oddball records started in May. Wild Wings. Winnipeg Tribune 12 June 1965.

Hosford, H. 1965c. A case of mistaken identity. Wild Wings. Winnipeg Tribune 24 December 1965.

McNicholl, M. K. 2003. History of ornithology in Canada's keystone province. pp. 10-27 *in* P. Taylor (ed.). The birds of Manitoba. Manitoba Naturalists Society, Winnipeg.

Mossop, H. 1965. A wandering jay. Chickadee Notes No. 565. Winnipeg Free Press 13 November 1965.

Smith, R. B. H. and **W. Poon**. 2006. The changing status of the Northern Mockingbird in the Greater Toronto area. Ontario Birds 24: 106-159.

Speirs, J. M. 1985, Birds of Ontario. [Volume 2]. Natural Heritage/Natural History, Toronto.

Taylor, P. 1985. Wings along the Winnipeg. The birds of the Pinawa – Lac du Bonnet region, Manitoba, revised edition. Manitoba Naturalists Society Eco Series No. 2, Winnipeg.

Martin K. McNicholl, 105-8752 Centaurus Circle, Burnaby, B.C. V3J 7E7

ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

President: John Black, 17 Valerie Drive, St. Catharines, Ontario L2T 3G3 (905) 684-0143, E-mail: black@brocku.ca

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 listserv (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**), coordinated by Carol Horner, Valerie Jacobs and Doug Woods. Comments or questions can be directed to OFO by e-mail (**ofo@ofo.ca**).

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 4EI.

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.

Submit material for publication by e-mail attachment (or CD or DVD) to either :
rossjoann.james@sympatico.ca
glenn_coady@hotmail.com
or **chip.weseloh@ec.gc.ca**

Please follow the style of this issue of *Ontario Birds*. All submissions are subject to review and editing and may be submitted to peer review beyond that of the editors. For photographic material used in *Ontario Birds* the copyright remains in the possession of the photographers.