OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

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Distinguished Ornithologist

Jean Iron

The OFO Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Dr. Ross D. James will be the second recipient of the Distinguished Ornithologist Award.

Ross recently retired early from the position of associate curator of ornithology at the Royal Ontario Museum. Ross's contributions to the scientific study of birds and his work on the conservation of birds in Ontario are significant.

Ross is the author of numerous scientific and popular publications, including the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario* (1991) which is the authoritative guide to the occurrence and status of birds in Ontario. He is coauthor with George Peck of the two volumes of the *Breeding Birds of Ontario: Nidiology and Distribution*. He regularly contributes articles to *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News* and serves as the principal referee of articles submitted to *Ontario Birds*. Ross is a charter member of the Ontario Bird Records Committee having also served for several years as secretary. An authority on vireos, Ross authored the Yellow-throated Vireo account and is coauthoring the Blue-headed Vireo account in *The Birds of North America* series.

Less well known are Ross's considerable contributions to the conservation of birds in Ontario. His expertise is sought by numerous federal and provincial committees dealing with vulnerable, threatened and endangered birds and their habitats.

Ross James will receive the Distinguished Ornithologist Award and Honorary Life Membership at the OFO Annual General Meeting in Burlington on Saturday 17 October 1998.

What's Inside

500,000 Oldsquaws?

Ron Pittaway

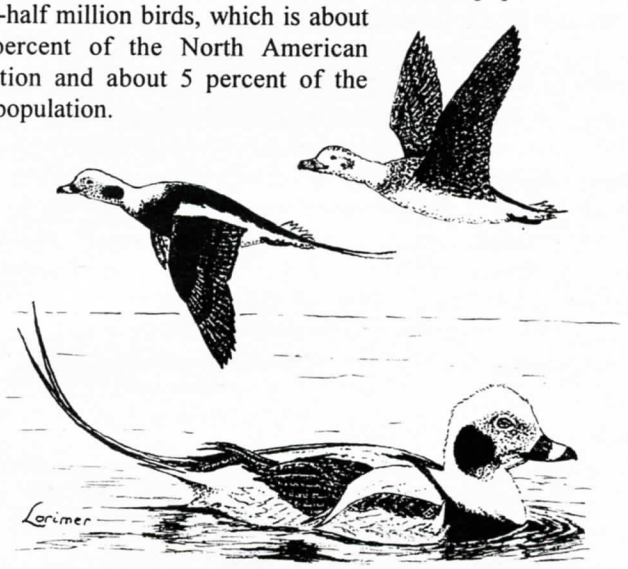
The Oldsquaw is probably the most abundant sea duck in the world with a population of 10 million including 3-4 million in North America. Historically, thousands of Oldsquaws have wintered on the Great Lakes, particularly on Lakes Ontario and Michigan. The large concentrations off Kingston and Toronto are well known to Ontario birders. About 35,000 now winter near Kingston. On 1 March 1998, Glenn Coady with Gerry and Gwen Binsfeld saw a remarkable 80,000 Oldsquaws at the west end of Lake Ontario.

How many Oldsquaws winter on Lake Ontario? I asked waterfowl biologist Ken Ross of the Canadian Wildlife Service. In November 1997, he conducted an aerial survey of Lake Ontario. Many of the Oldsquaw flocks were far offshore. Ken believes that there may now be 500,000 Oldsquaws wintering on Lake Ontario.

Why is Lake Ontario an important wintering area for Oldsquaws? Most of this deep lake stays open every winter whereas much of shallow Lake Erie usually freezes over. Large numbers of Oldsquaws also winter on Lake Michigan which has large areas of open water. Unknown numbers winter on Lakes Huron and Superior, but both of these lakes are subject to extensive ice cover.

Why are Oldsquaws increasing? Historically, the winter diet of Oldsquaws in Lake Ontario was mainly crustaceans, not bivalve mollusks. However, the recent increase correlates strongly with the arrival of Zebra and Quagga Mussels. Some Oldsquaw populations that once went to the Atlantic Coast may be *short-stopping* to winter on Lake Ontario because of the super abundant mussels.

In summary, Lake Ontario has long been an important wintering area for Oldsquaws. The current winter population may be one-half million birds, which is about 12.5 percent of the North American population and about 5 percent of the world population.



Winter Oldsquaws in alternate plumage by *Peter Lorimer*

Favourite Birding Hotspots

Ojibway Prairie

Paul Pratt

General Description. A visit to the Ojibway Prairie Complex in the southwestern corner of Windsor can add several species otherwise missed at Point Pelee. In addition, the tallgrass prairie and oak savanna communities provide an opportunity to view wildflowers, butterflies and other wildlife seldom encountered elsewhere in Ontario.

The Complex is made up of three municipal parks, a provincial nature reserve and private lands totalling over 350 hectares. Walking and bicycle trails wind through tallgrass prairie, savanna and oak woodland which support common nesting species such as Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Ring-necked Pheasant and Indigo Bunting. The area is also an excellent migrant trap for birds in both spring and fall. Some outstanding rarities of past years include Lewis's Woodpecker, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and Dickcissel. 238 species have been recorded in the area.

1. *Ojibway Nature Centre, Ojibway Park*

From E.C. Row Expressway (Highway 2) take Matchette Road south one kilometre to the park. Most visitors visit here before exploring other regions of the Complex. Windsor's Department of Parks & Recreation operates the Ojibway Nature Centre which is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. year-round (free admission). Information on recent bird sightings, checklists and trails are available from the naturalist staff. The Nature Centre feeders attract titmice, chickadees, nuthatches, cardinals, goldfinches and jays year round. A large picture window overlooking the feeder area provides easy viewing during inclement weather.

This 66 hectare park supports exceptional wet Pin Oak and dry Black Oak forests. The park attracts many migrants and species such as Eastern Screech-Owl, Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Carolina Wren are common residents.

The Centre web site: **http://www.city.windsor.on.ca/ojibway/** includes a bird checklist, field trip and Christmas Bird Count reports, maps, birder's guide to Essex County, local rare bird alerts and a latest sightings page.

2. *Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve*

The provincial nature reserve is located on the east side of Matchette Road opposite Ojibway Park. The Nature Centre parking lots serves both properties. Over 105 hectares of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna, scrub and woodland are accessible by several walking trails. While the wildflower show is best in late July or August, nesting birds are more easily found in spring. Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant, American Woodcock, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Bluebird, Orchard Oriole, Indigo Bunting and occasionally Red-headed Woodpecker can be found in the reserve. Usually at least one pair of Yellow-breasted Chats can be found by searching thickets and bramble patches.

3. *Black Oak Heritage Park*

This municipal park is located one kilometre west of Ojibway Park off Broadway Street. A two kilometre trail begins at Broadway Park playground and winds through the northern half of the park. This undeveloped 52 hectare parkland supports one of the finest Black Oak-Pignut Hickory savannas in Ontario. Woodland nesting species can be hard to find in Essex County but this park is a good spot for birds such as Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Adjacent to the park are several weedy agricultural fields, which are good for migrant sparrows, finches and warblers.

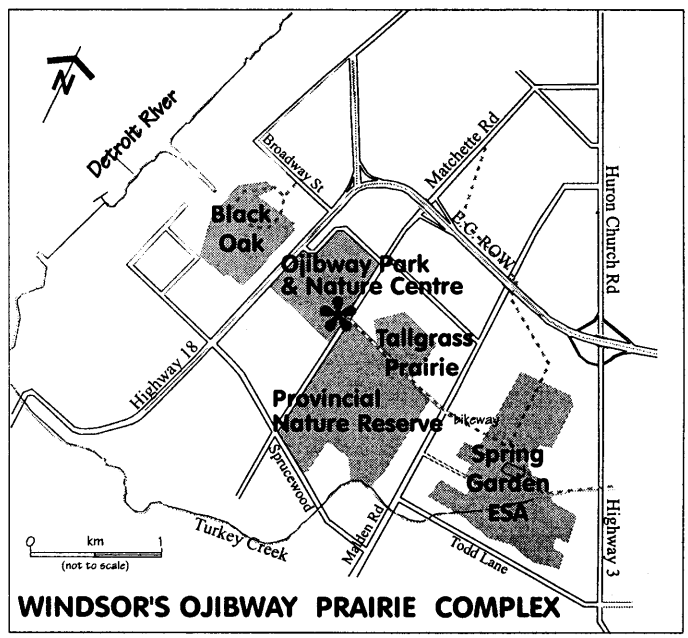
4. *Tallgrass Prairie Heritage Park*

This 18 hectare municipal park is located on the north side of the nature reserve along the Titcombe road allowance. A series of picturesque ponds attract species such as Green Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Warbling Vireo and Baltimore Oriole. This is also a good spot for warblers in migration.

5. *Spring Garden Road Prairie Environmentally Significant Area*

150 hectares of undeveloped private and public land are located south of Spring Garden Road between Highway 3 (Huron Church Road) and Malden Road. The Windsor Bikeway winds through the area providing convenient access to patches of woodland, savanna and prairie glades. Here is the last holdout for Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake in extreme southwestern Ontario and one of the richest sites for butterflies anywhere in Canada. An old settling pond on the site typically has Great Egrets and other marsh birds. White-eyed Vireo and Blue-winged Warbler have nested here in recent years.

In spring and fall, these parks function as migrant traps for many birds, islands of habitat in an otherwise poor environment for food and shelter. In the early morning hours, warblers, thrushes and other migrants can often be seen flying into Ojibway from neighbouring residential areas. Grounding of migrants, especially during periods of bad weather can produce impressive concentrations of birds in these parks, up to twelve species of warblers in a single Choke Cherry!



Paul Pratt has been the naturalist for the City of Windsor for the past 20 years and an active birder for 30 years.

Small Winter Grebe ID

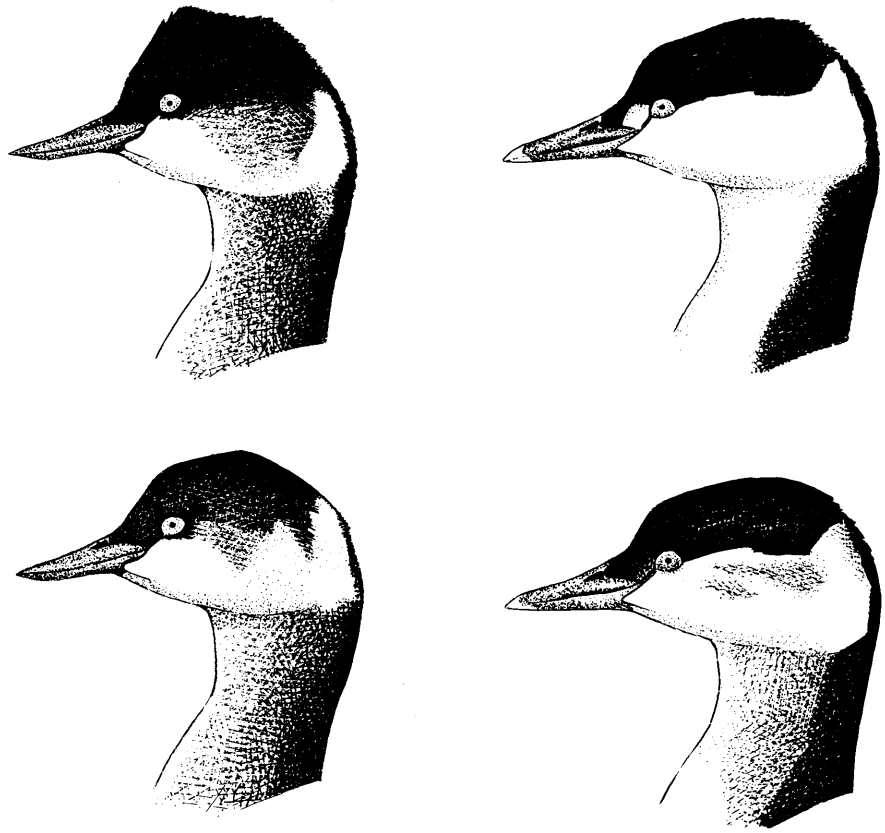
Ron Pittaway and Michael King

The identification of most Horned and Eared Grebes in basic (winter) plumage is straight forward, but a few individuals are difficult to separate. Here we discuss the fine points of telling those tricky birds apart.

Status: The Horned Grebe is a locally common migrant. It is a rare breeder in northern Ontario. The Eared Grebe is an increasingly regular but very rare migrant. It is casual in summer. Eared first nested in Ontario in 1996.

Jizz: Compared with the Horned Grebe, typical Eared shows a thinner neck, a more triangular head shape and a thinner bill that is uptilted at the tip. Eared usually has a much higher and downy "fluffed butt" appearance. Eared also appears to have brighter red eyes that are visible at a greater distance. Many young Eared Grebes in the fall have more yellow instead of red eyes.

Identification: A typical Horned Grebe (top right) has a black crown that extends down only to the lower side of the eye where it gives way abruptly to white on the face. Most of the face and neck is white. A typical Eared (top left) has more extensive dark on the head that extends below and behind the eyes and onto the ear region. The transition from black to white on the head is gradual and the ear coverts are gray not white. The neck is more extensively gray in most Eared (Godfrey 1986).



Typical Eared (top left) and Horned (top right) Grebes in full basic plumage. Confusing juvenal/first basic Eared (bottom left) and Horned (bottom right) Grebes by *Michael King*

Pitfalls: Some young Eared Grebes (bottom left) in the fall show less upturn to the bill tip, leading to confusion with Horned. Also, diving Eared with sleeked head feathers can look deceivingly large billed. A few young Eared Grebes in the fall retain the juvenile's buff tinged upper neck which may look reddish (bottom left), leading some to think that they are seeing a Horned Grebe with remnants of alternate (breeding) plumage. Some Eared Grebes show both of the above characters. Occasionally, a young Horned Grebe (bottom right) in the fall has dusky mottling on the sides of the face and neck, leading to confusion with Eared. Conversely, the odd Eared has a whiter neck than usual. Finally, a Horned Grebe molting from alternate to basic plumage in the early fall or from basic to alternate in the spring might be called an Eared.

Fine Points: If you still are not sure whether it is a Horned or an Eared, look at the tip of the bill. Horned (top and bottom right) normally has a distinct whitish tip to the bill on both mandibles, which the Eared lacks. Also look for a big pale loral spot (between the eyes and the bill) that is found on many Horned Grebes (top right), but it is lacking in Eared. These features are best seen at close range. *The most confusing birds necessitate concentration on the division of black and white immediately behind the eye. The division is sharp and horizontal on Horned. The Eared shows "a downward indentation of blackish or gray into the white cheeks"* (Kaufman 1992).

Habitat: Migrant Eared Grebes prefer more sheltered habitats than Horned such as a bays, harbours and small lakes. If you see a Horned Grebe at a sewage lagoon, it is probably an Eared!

Migration: Eared Grebes migrate somewhat earlier in the fall than Horned, beginning in August. A bird before mid-September in southern Ontario is likely an Eared Grebe.

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Kaufman, K. 1992. The Practiced Eye: Identifying the Monochrome Grebes in Winter. American Birds 46 (5):1187-1190.

Taverner Cup 1998

On Saturday 30 May, Mike Runtz, Peter Burke, Doug McRae, Colin Jones and a designated driver won the 1998 Taverner Cup with 171 species. Mike attributes the team's success to their strategy of seeking out breeding species and sticking to a strict time schedule. In second place were the 1997 winners: Bruce Di Labio, Chris Traynor, Richard Brouillet and driver, Andre Charron. This year 13 teams competed with more expected next year.

Prairie Warbler Survey 1997

Don Sutherland

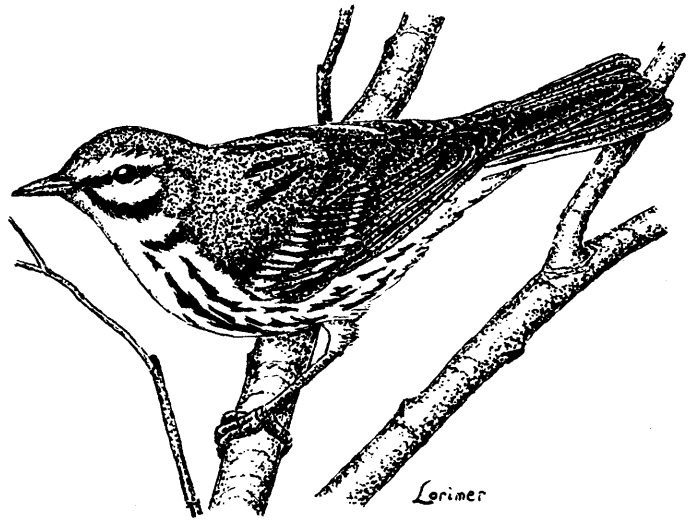
In 1984, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada designated the Prairie Warbler as a *vulnerable* species in Canada based on Lambert and Smith (1984). Much of their information resulted not from systematic surveys, but from a compilation of field observations. Austen and Cadman (1994) recommended an upgraded status of *threatened* on the grounds that both the species' local extirpation from several southwestern Ontario sites and significant continental and eastern North American declines "should be regarded as a strong warning for potential Prairie Warbler declines across the province".

In 1997, the Natural Heritage Information Centre undertook the first systematic survey of the distribution and abundance of the Prairie Warbler along the southeastern shoreline of Georgian Bay, where the largest population occurs (Harris 1997). Between 31 May and 30 June, C. Harris and D. Whittam conducted censuses along the Muskoka shoreline from northern Simcoe County north to Dillon Township in Parry Sound District. Most survey points were accessible only by boat. Search effort was restricted to documented historic occurrences (those sites with some record of occupancy within the past 20 to 30 years) and sites judged visually to be suitable habitat for the species. Where Prairie Warblers were encountered, the territories were mapped, the site photographed and standardized survey sheets were completed. Data gathered at each site included time, weather, estimated vegetation cover and composition, topography, evidence of past fire, associated bird species and the behaviour of the resident Prairie Warblers.

At 420 sites surveyed, 345 singing male Prairie Warblers were found in 174 (41%) sites. The largest concentration was in the Honey Harbour to Cognashene area of Muskoka District, where 108 territorial males were at 69 of the 107 (64%) surveyed sites. Other concentrations of singing males included Go Home Bay (29), San Souci (28) and Massasauga-Blackstone Harbour Provincial Park (49). This latter area is of particular interest because Simpson and Simpson (1973) said it supported the largest breeding colony in Canada.

The results of the 1997 study allow for an interesting comparison with figures for the Muskoka and Parry Sound areas contained in Lambert and Smith (1984), who provided population estimates of "about 160 pairs" for Muskoka District, and a range of 85 to 291 pairs for Parry Sound District. Their figure for Muskoka compares favourably with the 164 pairs in the present survey. However, in Parry Sound District, the 78 pairs encountered in 1997 suggest that their lower estimate of 85 pairs was a more realistic assessment of the population and that the upper limit of 291 pairs, based largely on Simpson and Simpson (1973), was excessive.

In addition to providing the most current and comprehensive occurrence data for the Prairie Warbler in the core of its provincial breeding distribution, the information gathered during the 1997 survey will allow for an analysis of the characteristics of Prairie Warbler habitat, the role of fire in the maintenance of the species habitat and protocols for future surveys.



Prairie Warbler by *Peter Lorimer*

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Lambert, A.B. and R.B.H. Smith. 1984. The Status of the Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*) in Canada. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

Simpson, R. and H. Simpson. 1973. The Biology of Blackstone Harbour-Moon Island Provincial Park Reserve. Parry Sound District. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

Don Sutherland is a zoologist with the Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC) in Peterborough, part of the Ministry of Natural Resources. The above article was adapted from the NHIC Newsletter, Volume 4, Number 1, Winter 1997/1998.

Where To See Prairie Warblers

In the Georgian Bay region, perhaps the easiest car-accessible Prairie Warblers can be found at McDonald Lake (a.k.a. McDonald Bay), part of the McRae Lake Provincial Wilderness Area, just north of Honey Harbour. From the south, drive north on Highways 400/69 to the Honey Harbour/Port Severn vicinity. From the intersection at the Honey Harbour exit (Muskoka Rd. 5), continue north on Highway 69 about 14 km, watch the west side of the highway for Woods Landing Road. Turn left onto Woods Landing Rd., watch for a parking area on right (north) about 200 m west of the highway. Park here, follow the marked portage north from the parking area about 200 m to the south end of McDonald Lake. From the end of the portage, you can bear left, ascending the wooded slope to obtain a vantage from which the barren, east side of the bay may be surveyed. Under calm conditions, singing male Prairie Warblers can be heard fairly easily over the distance of 100-200 m. Best times are mid-May to late June. With a telescope, scan particularly the dead tops and branches of the white pines and scrubby oaks. Alternatively, a canoe can be carried across the portage to McDonald Lake, allowing for both a more intimate and extensive survey of the shoreline. For those unfamiliar with the song of the Prairie Warbler, it can at times seem somewhat ventriloquil, but with perseverance, one should be able to locate the source. *Don Sutherland*

Ducks in Synchrony

Jean Iron

The abundant Zebra and Quagga Mussels beds of western Lake Ontario now attract thousands of diving ducks in winter such as White-winged Scoters, Greater Scaup and Common Goldeneye. Just watch the huge flocks diving and surfacing. They go underwater in close succession, then after about 40 to 50 seconds, pop to the surface almost simultaneously. A flock moves together with amazing synchrony.

When actively feeding, a whole flock may disappear below all at once. A typical dive cycle involves searching for a mussel bed, getting a mussel, returning to the surface and pausing to recover from the physiological demands of the dive. Ducks often bring mussels to the surface and swallow them whole, to be ground up in their muscular gizzards. The dive cycle repeats itself after a short recovery period that depends on the length and depth of the preceding dive.

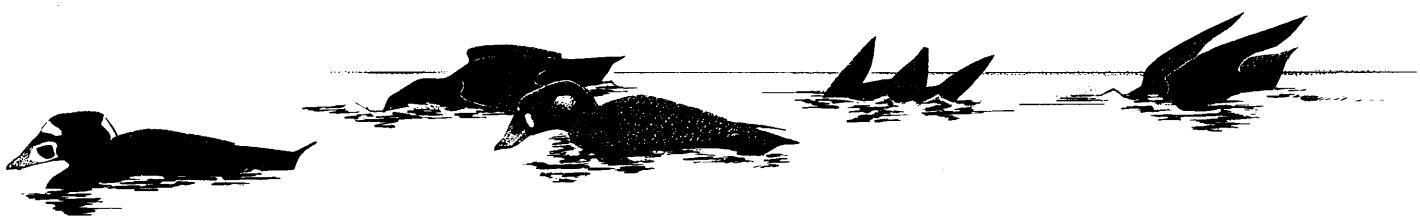
I wondered what causes the sychronous diving behaviour of large flocks of ducks. A literature search showed that several factors affect the level of diving synchrony in foraging ducks. Guy Beauchamp (*Auk 109(4):819-827, 1992*) studied diving behaviour in Surf Scoters and Barrow's Goldeneyes. He found that diving synchrony increased with flock size; larger flocks dived and surfaced in greater unison, whereas individual ducks in smaller flocks waited longer to follow diving companions. Flock size also affects its cohesiveness; the larger the flock, the closer together individual ducks are. Beauchamp (1992) proposed that increased synchrony in large flocks helps ducks to avoid collisions. Swerving and bumping can cause injury or loss of prey.

Another factor that determines diving synchrony is the size of the mussel bed. Even though mussels may be abundant, they are not all available to foraging ducks. The ones closest to the openings in the mussel beds are the easiest to grasp, so the ducks concentrate on these smaller areas. A large number of ducks exploits a relatively small area.

Kleptoparasitic gulls pirate food from surfacing ducks and may affect their diving behaviour. These large gulls are opportunistic feeders, often accompanying flocks of diving ducks. Previous researchers found that ducks dived with increased synchrony when gulls were present. They hypothesized that flock cohesion helps the ducks defend themselves against thieving gulls. However, Beauchamp's study did not support this finding

There is a difference between the foraging behaviour of diving ducks and other diving birds such as grebes, loons, mergansers and cormorants. Diving ducks spend more time on the surface recovering between dives. They feed on fixed prey such as mollusks and can pace their recovery time between dives because their prey does not escape. Differently, loons, grebes, mergansers and cormorants surface only for split seconds and continue their dives, adapting to the movements of fish. To increase their chances of catching fish, they delay the recovery time from the physiological demands of successive dives and rest later. In this way they can continue fishing for longer periods.

Next time you see a flock of diving ducks, study their diving habits. Are they diving in synchrony? How long is the recovery time between dives? Compare their behaviour with that of loons, grebes, cormorants and mergansers seeking moving prey.



Diving Surf Scoters by *Michael King*

Bird Quiz

Ross James

1. What common deciduous forest dwelling songbird is noted for continuing to sing through most of the summer heat, even after most other birds have given up? Singing for one day at the height of the spring song period, how many times would you guess it might sing; more than:
1) 5000 2) 10,000 or 3) 20,000 times?

2. Mammals typically have seven vertebrae in their necks, even the giraffe. How many do birds have?

3. "Light as a feather" is an often heard phrase. Are they really so light? Which do you think weighs more, the bones or the feathers of a Bald Eagle?

4. What long-billed shorebird can open just the tip of its beak to seize food?

5. Which species of heron has been known to use bait when it goes fishing?

6. Ordinarily we cannot see the ears on a bird's head. Which group of birds does have very conspicuous structures for gathering sound waves to help them locate food?

7. Which bird uses smell to help it locate food?

Answers page 9

Owling At Night by Ron Pittaway

In this article, I discuss the calls, habitats, best times and techniques for calling and listening to owls at night on their breeding grounds in Ontario. I cover eight species of mainly nocturnal owls: *Barn Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Great Gray Owl, Long-eared Owl, Boreal Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl.* The more diurnal *Snowy, Northern Hawk, Short-eared and Burrowing Owls* are not covered.

Where To Hear Owls: For the purposes of this article, Ontario is divided into three owling regions: *southern, central and northern.* Each region has its dominant species. The *southern* region lies south of the Canadian Shield. The Great Horned Owl and Eastern Screech-Owl are the two commonly heard breeding owls in this mostly urban and agricultural landscape with scattered woodlots. *Central* Ontario extends from the southern edge of the Canadian Shield north to latitude 47 degrees which is an east-west line running about 60-80 kilometres north of Sault Ste Marie, Sudbury and North Bay. This is lake and cottage country dominated by hardwood and mixed forests on the uplands and boreal-like mixtures of conifers in the lowlands. Barred Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls are the dominant species. *Northern* Ontario lies north of latitude 47 degrees and it is mainly boreal forest. Boreal and Great Gray Owls are found in areas with high vole populations. Northern Saw-whet, Great Horned, Long-eared and Barred Owls are also possible, but northern owls move or fluctuate in numbers on the breeding grounds depending on the availability of their preferred prey.

Time Of Year: Owls are most vocal on their breeding territories in late winter and early spring. February, March and April are the best months for hearing owls. Try to go owling early in the spring before loud calling frogs drown out the owls. Some owls, such as Eastern-Screech, Great Horned and Barred, may call year round on permanent territories. Other species, such as the Boreal Owl, call for a very brief period in the spring. The species and number of owls calling in any given area varies from year to year. Owls vocalize less and may not breed some years if food supplies are low. Most owls hoot less when they have eggs or young in the nest. The dependent juveniles of most owls have distinctive begging calls that can be heard in summer and sometimes into early fall. Migratory owls on their winter ranges are rarely vocal.

Time of Night: Owls may call throughout the night, but the best times are the two hours immediately after nightfall and the hour before sunrise. Owls appear to be active for longer periods on moonlit nights, but overcast and dark nights with no moon can be excellent too.

Weather: The ideal weather for hearing owls is the combination of clear nights with no wind (less than 15 km/h) and temperatures above –10C. However, owls may call on overcast nights even in a light rain if there is a bright moon behind the clouds. Wind is the most important factor affecting owling success. Owls seem to call less on windy nights and wind makes it difficult to hear them.

Equipment: The following equipment is essential for owling: a strong flashlight, tape player with owl calls, extra batteries, binoculars, maps, snack and thermos of coffee. Playing and rewinding tapes in cold temperatures quickly wears down the batteries. Invest in an adapter cord that plugs into your cigarette lighter.

Taped Calls: Tapes greatly improve your chances of hearing and seeing owls. Owls on breeding territories usually respond to calls of their own species. Start with the calls of the smallest species and work up to the larger species since larger owls are known to eat smaller owls! Upon arriving at a site, wait a minute before broadcasting the call. Repeat the call several times and then stop and listen for at least three minutes. Each species varies in its response to a perceived intruder or mate on its territory. Eastern Screech-Owls usually respond quickly whereas Barred Owls often approach unseen and/or wait much longer to hoot back. Some owls may come to taped calls without calling themselves. Watch for owls that may perch in a nearby tree or fly over you. When using tapes, prepare to be swooped!

Ethics: The most important birding ethic is that the welfare of the birds must come first. Do not use tapes in heavily birded areas and stop using the tape once an owl responds. Some owls, such as the Barred Owl, may become extremely agitated if tapes are played too close to the nest. A strong flashlight is very useful. Interestingly, owls usually do not seem concerned about a light shining on them, but do not overdue it. Use your binoculars to get a good look at a spotlighted owl!

Aesthetics: To keep quiet, owling is best done with two or three people. Get away as far as possible from houses and traffic. It takes considerable practice learning how to be still and quiet. Do not slam car doors, but gently push them closed; they do not need to be fully closed. A loud door slam will set off dogs barking. Walk a short distance from the car to get away from the car's noises as the motor cools down. If you must talk, speak in whispers. Wear sombre clothing and dress very warmly in layers. Even though the temperature is –5C, it may feel like –20C when you stand still for several minutes. If you are cold, you tend to shuffle around and you may not hear owl calls. Improve your hearing by cupping your hands behind your ears; you also may hear faint calls that would otherwise go undetected.

Safety: Always go owling with a friend and tell others where you are going. A cell phone is a valuable safety device. Owling at night usually means roadside birding. The best areas are back roads away from highway noise, houses and barking dogs. Ideally, check out any new routes by day before owling at night. Identify the habitats that have a high potential for owls. Back roads and road shoulders can be soft in spring. Find safe places to stop or pull off the road. Start with a full tank of gas and bring a snack. Begin at the farthest point of your route so that you have a shorter distance to drive home in the wee hours of the night. Prepare to be stopped by police and conservation officers who will be surprised to find you in the middle of nowhere at night! Identify yourselves and explain that you are listening for owls. Allow officers to inspect your vehicle and trunk if asked. An OFO decal on your car may enhance your credibility with police.

Barn Owl: This is a very rare and declining resident (because of more intensive agriculture and fewer small mammals) of southern Ontario, although some shift southward in winter. They roost by day in barns, silos or the dense crown of a conifer or leafy hardwood. At dusk, Barn Owls leave their roosts to hunt low over weedy fields and marshes with a slow wavering flight. By comparison, Short-eared and Long-eared Owls hunt with deep

wingbeats and long glides. Barn Owls are very white below, making them look like ghosts against the darkening sky. At all seasons, Barn Owls give short hoarse hissing calls in flight while hunting. During the breeding season, they give a distinctive long drawn-out hissing scream that becomes louder and harsher towards the end. They respond to tapes of their territorial call. Mouse squeaks also attract them.

Eastern Screech-Owl: This is a fairly common permanent resident of small deciduous woodlots (particularly those near water) in southern Ontario. Large trees with cavities are a habitat requirement. Screech-owls are strictly nocturnal and more common than most birders suspect. They do not screech, but give a horselike whinny in the fall and winter and a soft toadlike trill in the spring and nesting season. A tape of the whinny will elicit an almost instant response in fall and winter. Try the trill in spring when they are less responsive. Both calls are easily imitated. They usually respond with the same call as the one broadcast to them. Calling screech-owls often seem much farther away than they actually are.

Great Horned Owl: This is a fairly common resident of large woodlots bordering scrub and weedy fields in southern Ontario. Great Horned Owls frequent the same areas where Red-tailed Hawks are found during the day. They are rare in central Ontario, such as Algonquin Park, where the forest is unbroken. They are uncommon in northern Ontario where Snowshoe Hares are their preferred prey. Their loud deep hooting *hoo, hoo, hoo-oo, hoo, hoo* is a familiar night sound in most of the province. The female's hoots are longer, higher pitched and more clearly enunciated than the male's. Resident birds hoot throughout the year, but they are most vocal in January, February and March as early nesting begins. Great Horned Owls are sometimes seen at dusk on a high perch silhouetted against a darkening sky. Their flight is rapid and direct.

Barred Owl by *Peter Lorimer*

Barred Owl: This is a non-migratory owl. Its loud barking rhythmic hoots are distinctive and far-carrying. They seem to say *Who cooks for you, who cooks for you-ALL*? They often give a much faster, maniacal, almost monkeylike version of this call. Barred Owls are most vocal from March to May. Male and female sound alike. They often wait up to 10 minutes before responding to a tape and sometimes fly in silently to investigate. Territorial birds in spring will respond to a tape by hooting even in broad daylight. Interestingly, they often respond to a human imitation of a wolf howl. Their centre of abundance is the extensive unbroken forests of central Ontario where the Great Horned Owl is rare. Barred Owls inhabit both dry uplands and swampy woods. They prefer mature (old-growth) hardwood-hemlock stands (with little or no understory for ease of flying) near water. Large holes in large trees (usually dead) for nesting are a habitat requirement.

Great Gray Owl: Its preferred nesting habitat is mature Black Spruce/Tamarack bogs adjacent to mature aspen stands, often using an old goshawk's nest. High vole numbers are a habitat requirement. From March to May, the territorial song of the male is a series of six to ten soft muffled hoots, *whooo, whooo, whooo, whooo, whooo, whooo, whooo, whooo*, slowing and descending in volume towards the end. The series is repeated at regular intervals. The call does not carry very far. With a little practice, it is easy to do an imitation of a Great Gray Owl. It helps to cup your hands around your mouth when calling. Close to the nest, listen for the single higher pitched *whoop* contact call of the female. Hooting is often drowned out by calling frogs in May.

Long-eared Owl: This secretive owl is strictly nocturnal. It prefers to nest in mixed or coniferous woods, including conifer plantations in the south. It often uses an old crow's nest. Adjacent open country for hunting in flight and high vole numbers are habitat requirements. Northern Ontario birds are migratory; most returning mid-April to early May. The territorial hoot of the male is a drawn out and low cooing *hooooo*, like the sound made by blowing over an empty bottle, quiet but audible up to one kilometre. Usually 10 or more hoots are repeated in an evenly-spaced series with a long 2-4 second pause between hoots.

Boreal Owl: They prefer mature spruce forests with a mixture of aspen (poplar) for breeding. Large diameter trees, often aspen, with old Pileated Woodpecker or flicker holes for nesting are a habitat requirement. Boreal Owls tend to avoid pure stands of Jack Pine. The typical hooting is rapid series of about 10 snipelike winnowing notes *po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po-po*. Intervals between calls are very short. They also do a slower and longer rendition of this call. Close birds on territory responding to a tape give a very fast and almost continuous response, making one wonder if they ever take a breath! Boreal Owl calls are loud and carry two to three kilometres. However, they call for only a very brief period in March and April. Occasionally, Boreal Owls have been heard south to Muskoka, Algonquin Park and Ottawa.

Northern Saw-whet Owl: They breed in moist mixed or coniferous woods near water. Old woodpecker holes for nesting are a habitat requirement. Saw-whets give a long series of short, evenly spaced, monotonous, hooting whistles, *too too too too* ... about 2 notes per second, audible up to 300 metres in the forest or one kilometre over water. The call is easily imitated. Calling may start as early as late February in central Ontario, peaking from mid-March to late April with a few heard to late May.

Acknowledgements: For much valuable help and information, I thank Dan Brunton, Michel Gosselin, Jean Iron, Chris Lemieux, Peter Lorimer, Christy MacDonald, Kay McKeever, Dave Shepherd, Robert Taylor, Ron Tozer and Mike Turner.

Hawk Cliff: Where Do We Go From Here?

Dave Martin

Juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk
Photo Barry Cherriere

A tradition extending back at least 55 years is fast coming to a close. The annual four month-long pilgrimage of hawkwatching fanatics to Hawk Cliff on the Elgin County shoreline is in jeopardy for a number of reasons. Adjacent landowners have cooled to the constant flow of traffic most fall weekends and have petitioned the township to close the road. Unrelated vandalism and forays by ATVs across private crop lands have somehow been attributed to the hawkwatchers. The landowner to the east of the hawkwatching site planted fast-growing willows, ostensibly as a wind break, so that within a couple of years the view to the east (where the hawks are coming from) has been blocked. It didn't help relations that someone cut down the first planting of willow saplings. The high lake levels of the past couple of years have seriously undermined the cliff resulting in up to 30 metres of lost hawkwatching ground. The former vehicle turnaround disappeared in a mud slide. The St. Thomas Field Naturalists who organized the Hawkwatch weekends (which draw thousands of enthusiasts) for years are increasingly concerned about the club's liability due to the serious and unpredictable erosion and almost cancelled the event in 1997.

The fall migration of hawks along the Erie shoreline has been known for over a century and Hawk Cliff has attracted hawkwatchers for almost 60 years. One of Canada's best-known ornithologists, Frank Farley, was born in Elgin County. He lived in St. Thomas only until he was 17 years old but managed to collect enough records to publish in 1881 *A List of the Birds of Elgin County, Ontario*. He noted that the Sharp-shinned Hawk is "a very common hawk during the migrations", and as for Broadwings, "sometimes these hawks appear in large flocks in the fall...." The Rough-legged Hawk and Pigeon Hawk (Merlin) are noted as rare migrants.

Another famous late 19th century naturalist, William E. Saunders, is credited with popularizing the fall hawk migration along Lake Erie. Wake (1994) states, "...Saunders discovered as early as 1912, the fall migration of hawks at Port Stanley on Lake Erie." Rayner (1993) suggests, "for years Saunders had become increasingly aware of autumn flights passing west along the north shore of Lake Erie, but it wasn't until 1931 that he recorded his first notes linking the cliffs east of Port Stanley with the migration itself." Cartwright (1997) notes, "in late September, 1942, he (Saunders) camped with others east of Port Stanley, on a cliff overlooking Lake Erie to watch the hawks fly past."

Hawkwatchers were still camping at the *Cliff* until the 1990s when they could get the owner's permission. If they couldn't camp, they were there most days anyway, even when the prospects for hawk flight were slim. In his first year of retirement, a Hawk Cliff raptor bander is rumoured to have gone to the *Cliff* in late August to band American Kestrels, not to return home until just before Christmas when the male Northern Harriers stopped flying. Such is the draw of Hawk Cliff to both the banders group (which started up in 1969) and the watchers.

Hawk Cliff is not just a place to watch hawks, it's a state of mind. The camaraderie, sharing and socializing have been just as important as the ability to see good flights of hawks. Other hawkwatch sites along the Erie shore may produce numbers equal to or greater than Hawk Cliff on some days, but no site will ever replace the *Cliff* as a site where like-minded enthusiasts can gather to share their expertise and 'tall' stories.

While the die-hards will continue to haunt the *Cliff* for years to come, others have started to search out other spots. Along the Erie shoreline many roads dead end at the cliffs. Any of these west of Clear Creek (near Long Point) offers the possibility of good hawkwatching. Sites farther west on the Erie shoreline will typically produce higher numbers but on a good migration day it hardly matters whether one sees 10,000 or 20,000 Broadwings!

Over the past five years, Linda Wladarski and I have tested several sites east of Port Bruce and found comparable numbers to those reported at Hawk Cliff. Most sites in the stretch of shoreline from Port Burwell in the east to Port Stanley in the west provide good hawkwatching opportunities. Last fall, in an attempt to find a spot where large numbers of cars and watchers could congregate, we tested three sites at Port Burwell on six days. Our numbers were comparable to Hawk Cliff on five days and higher on the sixth day when the winds were from the southeast. The numbers of hawks of rarer species were remarkably similar, seldom varying by more than a few (e.g. 6 versus 7 Bald Eagles). At Port Burwell, the flats along both sides of the mouth of Otter Creek provide plenty of parking and a great view to the north, east and south, which is needed to see the Osprey and falcons that follow the shoreline, and the larger hawks and vultures that are often inland. As a bonus, one can see migrating ducks, loons and cormorants over the lake, scan the hundreds of gulls loafing along the pier and beach, and watch the kingfishers, herons and puddle ducks in the creek. On three occasions passing Peregrines diverted their flight to flush the gulls on the flats. On another day, 11 Ospreys, at intervals of 3 to 4 minutes, drifted along Otter Creek to the lake before resuming their westward movement.

The day-use portion of Port Burwell Provincial Park also provided exciting hawkwatching. From the beach to the shoreline cliff lies a 200 metre expanse of low dunes and wet meadows. The westernmost parking lot has a great view to the east and of the ridge to the north. On two days in early September we were besieged with over 400 Sharpshins in a five hour period. Nine Merlins on September 13 was a personal one day record. On several occasions, Merlins perched on a dead snag in full view of our party.

An advantage of Burwell over Hawk Cliff is the many other birding opportunities on-site. When hawkwatching is slow one can shift to gulls and shorebirds by walking over a dune to one of the best beaches on the Erie shoreline. Small numbers of Little Gulls are regular here in early fall in the huge flocks of Bonaparte's. The sandy beach attracts Sanderlings, peeps, plovers, occasionally Red Knot and thousands of gulls. Alternatively, one can walk the roads through the day-use which

are bordered by dogwood thickets, wet meadows and cattail sloughs looking for September warblers and early fall sparrows. In late September, the meadows are literally carpeted with Grass-of-Parnassus and two species of gentians, a magnificent sight if you've never experienced it. As well, there is a nature trail that leads to upland maple-beech forest and pine plantations.

Adult Broad-winged Hawk
Photo Barry Cherriere

Although our search for a new location for Hawk Cliffers seems successful, we were tempted not to divulge this location. On most days in September we were the only users except for the odd beachcomber. We watched undisturbed for hours as hawks and Monarch butterflies streamed by, wandered over to the beach from time to time to see if anything new had shown up and when our backs needed a stretch, poked around the day-use roads enjoying the fall flowers and butterflies in the wet meadows. Nevertheless, in the interests of birding solidarity, we reveal that this site is one of the best that we have found for hawkwatching and other natural history pursuits.

Port Burwell is located on the Lake Erie shoreline midway between Long Point and Hawk Cliff. Although it can be reached from various east-west routes, access from Highway 401 is south from Ingersoll through Tilsonburg on Highway 19. Birders from the Toronto/Hamilton circuit can easily return home via Long Point, about 20 minutes east of Port Burwell.

In the fall of 1998, Port Burwell Provincial Park will stay open for campers until Thanksgiving weekend. Hawkwatching experts from the Hawk Cliff Foundation will be on site on September 19 and 26 and October 11 to help campers and day visitors enjoy the hawk migration.

Contact

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Dave Martin is a Hawk Cliff Foundation member (i.e. obsessed with hawkwatching) and active naturalist in southwestern Ontario.

Bird Quiz Answers *from page 5*

Ross James

1. Thanks to Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, who spent what must have been one long and tedious day counting, at least one Red-eyed Vireo sang 22,197 times in one day (Lawrence 1953, Canadian Field Naturalist 67:47-87).

2. The number varies from 11 in parakeets to 25 in swans. With forelimbs specialized for flight, birds must use their beaks for everything from food gathering to nest building. The increased number of vertebrae is just one of the specializations giving birds highly mobile heads.

3. For a Bald Eagle weighing about 4000 grams, the weight of feathers would be almost 700 grams or close to 17% of the weight, whereas the skeleton would weigh only about 270 grams or 7% of its mass. In general, the feather coats of birds weigh two to three times as much as their bones.

4. Bird beaks are generally perceived as rigid. However, almost all birds can flex the upper part of the beak on the skull at the forehead. In addition, American Woodcock can open just the tip of the beak to seize an earthworm deep in the mud; much easier than trying to open the entire beak. Other long-billed shorebirds such as dowitchers, godwits and snipe also have this ability.

5. Green Herons have been known to drop a piece of bread, an insect, or perhaps some other small object on the water, hoping to attract small fish that might become dinner. If the bait floats away they will retrieve it and drop it again.

6. Birds always lack large external ears such as we have, despite names like Eared Grebe and Long-eared Owl. However, owls have large faces that help them to focus sound waves in much the same way as our external ears do. The small feathers towards the back of the facial disk are broad, flat and curved to form a sort of disk. The feathers in front are loose to allow sound through.

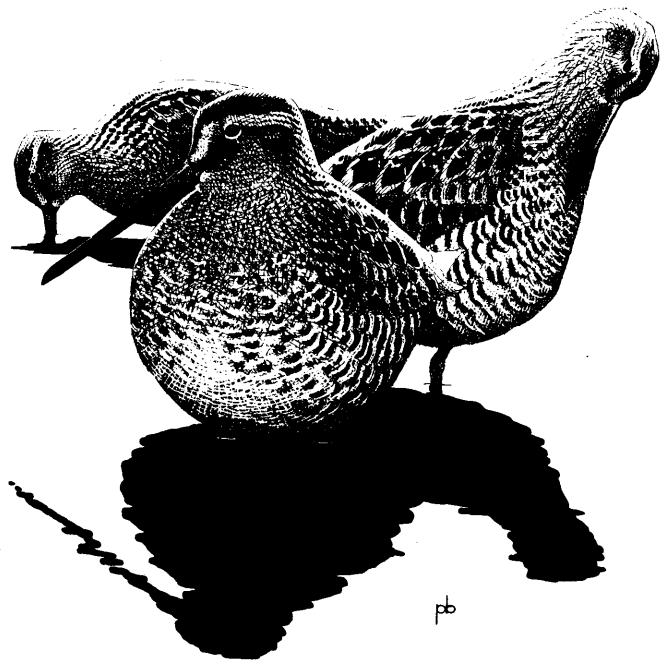
7. Turkey Vultures are attracted by the smell of rotting flesh. Just how far away this is useful no doubt varies with atmospheric conditions, and they also use their eyes. But, because of capabilities with their noses, Turkey Vultures are believed to be able to exploit forested environments with more limited visibility, not just wide open plains where eyes are the tools of choice.

Short-billed Dowitcher

Ross Harris

My interest in dowitchers began with a 1977 field trip to Schefferville, Quebec. Schefferville is an iron ore mining town in the middle of the Ungava Peninsula, well north of Sept-Iles and right on the Quebec-Labrador border. I had just finished my undergrad schooling and was lucky enough to get a summer job with the then National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ornithology Department. Dr. Henri Ouellet, Rick Poulin and I headed to Schefferville for a month of bird study. One of our missions was to find a Short-billed Dowitcher nest. If I remember correctly, there was even the offer of a reward for the discovery (the liquid libation of your choice).

In June 1977, Rick Poulin discovered the first known nest and eggs of the nominate race *Limnodromus griseus griseus*) of the Short-billed Dowitcher! The first confirmed nestings of any race of the Short-billed Dowitcher had been documented in Alberta only in 1924 (downy young) and 1925 (nest and eggs) (Rowan 1927). Although an "eastern" dowitcher was recognized long before the Alberta discoveries, it was not until 1958 that Henri Ouellet and Raymond McNeil, again on a National Museum expedition, actually confirmed (recently-fledged young) that this eastern race nested in interior Ungava. Before that, no one knew for certain where they nested. The first Ontario Short-billed Dowitcher nest was not discovered until 1992 (Soulliere 1993).



Griseus Short-billed Dowitchers in alternate plumage by *Peter Burke*

I followed up that 1977 visit with field trips in 1978 and 1980, specifically to study the breeding biology of this dowitcher for my Master of Science thesis. On 30 May 1978, I found my first dowitcher nest; it contained one egg. This was important because then I could determine the incubation period, from clutch completion (four eggs) to hatch. Joe Jehl and Dave Hussell had made the only known determination of incubation period for Short-billed Dowitcher at a nest in Churchill, Manitoba (Jehl and Hussell 1966). However, I was destined not to make the second determination. On 13 June (I forget whether it was a Friday), a freak blizzard started. I was sitting in a blind watching *my* nest and the snowdrift that was slowly building up alongside the incubating parent. Three days later when I next checked the nest, after the storm finally had ended, my prize nest was under a foot of snow and deserted! Those four eggs are now in the collection of the Canadian Nature Museum. I found other dowitcher nests subsequently, but never prior to clutch completion.

I have to agree wholeheartedly with William Rowan (1927) when he wrote that "The nest of these trustful and confiding birds must be about the hardest of all shorebirds to find". I found incubation shifts to be quite long (up to 19 hours in one case), and certainly not on a regular schedule. Therefore, trying to find nests by looking for adults frequently flying in and out on incubation shift changes was not a successful strategy. If there was any so-called strategy to finding nests, it was simply prolonged, exhausting bog slogging; just keep walking back and forth covering good nesting habitat. Dowitchers sit very tightly on their nests, so tightly in fact that I virtually place-kicked them off the nest before I found one. They also are extremely quiet about the nest. In one case, it turned out that I had been walking within about 10-20 feet of a nest repeatedly for two weeks, without any indication of the nest's or even the birds presence, before I took a slightly different course one day and almost stepped on the incubating adult.

Short-billed Dowitchers begin arriving at Schefferville in the third week of May, when there is still plenty of snow on the ground. The late May to early June period is a time of great activity: aerial display flights and songs, aerial chases, and migrating flocks. Within the first few days of June in a typical year, the clutch is complete and essentially round-the-clock incubation begins. Both sexes incubate. Shortly after the eggs hatch in late June, the female parent departs on southbound migration. The male parent cares for the brood until they fledge in mid- to late July. Then the male departs the breeding grounds. The young begin departing the Schefferville area in August. These three waves of dowitchers departing the nesting area correspond with the three waves of migrating dowitchers that we see moving through southern Ontario in summer: alternate females, alternate males, juveniles.

Aside from the mystery of its breeding biology, dowitchers have had a tumultuous taxonomic history and most of the older dowitcher literature dealt with this problem. The taxonomic controversy culminated in a classic study by Frank Pitelka (1950). He examined nearly 3000 (!) specimens of dowitchers at museums throughout North America, making measurements, studying plumage characteristics and investigating molt. The resulting classification is the one that we still use today; that is, three races of Short-billed Dowitcher (eastern/*griseus*, central/*hendersoni*, and western/*caurinus*), and the Long-billed Dowitcher. There is one other member of the genus *Limnodromus*, the Asiatic Dowitcher. It is mostly *hendersoni* that we see in Ontario, but *griseus* is regular in small numbers. Of course, once the AOU

Continued on page 11

OFO trips

Leslie Street Spit

Norm Murr

The 9 May OFO trip started with a Northern Mockingbird, uncommon on the Spit, seen by the early arriving trip participants. We walked to the west side of the base and found two calling Marsh Wrens, another uncommon Spit bird. A little further in the willows, we saw a singing Northern Parula, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Palm Warblers. The Parula was a life bird for some as were the Marsh Wrens, so the outing was already a success.

We next walked out the causeway to Peninsulas D, C and the base of B. On the way we saw a Lesser Yellowlegs, Eastern Kingbirds, nesting Common Terns and Double-crested Cormorants. At the triangle pond we looked over the Dunlin and Least Sandpipers. During lunch, a Turkey Vulture passed overhead.

After lunch we scoped another life bird for many, two Brant at less than 100 metres in the third bay, alongside the Black-crowned Night-Heron colony. Shortly after we saw the beaver near its lodge. Walking back along the causeway towards the base, a participant noticed a Red-necked Grebe in breeding plumage on the lake and we all had a close look. Within minutes we spotted an immature Iceland Gull.

In total, our group of 22 birders saw 72 species, a little thinner than usual, but this seems the norm in the Toronto area this year. The weather was great and the participants a joy to lead.

I would like to thank Stan Bajuny, Larry Morse and Craig McLauchlan who helped locate many of the birds and made this first OFO Spit outing a success. Next October, I hope to welcome back the day's participants.

See Norm Murr's Favourite Birding Hotspots Guide to The Leslie Street Spit in the October 1997 issue of OFO NEWS, volume 15, number 3, pages 2-3.

Future Field Trips

September 12 (Saturday) and October 10 (Saturday) Hawk Hill, High Park. Toronto Hosts: Greater Toronto Raptor Watch. Meet in the Grenadier Restaurant parking lot at **9:00 a.m.** Use Bloor St. entrance at High Park Ave. ****New Trip****

September 13 (Sunday) Presqu'ile Provincial Park. Leader: Don Shanahan. Meet at Beach 4 parking lot at 8:00 a.m. Fall migrants, shorebirds, raptors.

October 3 (Saturday) Westmeath Dunes, Ottawa River. Leader: Chris Michener. Join Pembroke Area Field Naturalists at Westmeath Municipal Dock, turn left at blue house at **8:00 a.m.** Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, raptors, migrants, extensive unspoiled beach and riparian habitat. Call Chris: 613-625-2263 ****New Trip****
e-mail: cmichener@renc.igs.net

October 10 (Saturday) Leslie Street Spit. Leader: Norm Murr. Meet at the base of The Spit parking lot at Leslie and Unwin Avenue at **8:00 a.m.** Fall migrants and waterfowl. ****New Trip****

October 18 (Sunday)Van Wagners Beach, Hamilton. Leader: Bob Curry. Meet at Hutch's Restaurant on Van Wagners Beach at 8:00 a.m. Jaegers and gulls.

October 24 (Saturday) Holiday Beach. Leader: Paul Pratt. Meet at the hawk viewing tower at Holiday Beach Conservation Area on County Road 50 (3 km south of Malden Centre, 30 km west of Kingsville) at **9:00 a.m.** Migrating raptors.

October 25 (Sunday) Grand Bend Area. Leaders: Tom and Jill Hayman. Meet at Colonial Hotel on Hwy 21 in Grand Bend at **9:00 a.m.** Fall migrants, also possible: Red-throated Loon, Brant, jaegers and rare gulls. ****New Trip****

Ontario's Champion Birders

This year at the *World Series of Birding*, Bruce Di Labio, Tom Hince, Paul Pratt and driver Glenn Gervais decided not to do the full state category but to compete against the local teams by restricting their birding to Cape May County only.

They beat out the local competition and won both the Cape Island Cup (for highest total in Cape May County) and the LGA Cup (for best effort in a Limited Geographic Area). They recorded 176 species on Saturday 9 May despite 90 km/h winds, 60 mm of rain and cold weather. The local Cape May Bird Observatory came in second with 173 species. The Ontario team became the first out-of-state team ever to win either cup and in the process became the only team in the event's 15 year history to have won in all 4 categories in the *World Series of Birding*.

Always looking for new competition, the team is thinking ahead to next year's Great Texas Birding Challenge.

Short-billed Dowitcher *continued from page 10*

accepted Pitelka's conclusions and the dowitchers were split officially, birding articles on identification began appearing. Those articles still are appearing and some of the best have been by Ontario authors such as Alvaro Jaramillo, Ron Pittaway, Brian Henshaw and artist Peter Burke.

It likely will be a long while before I am back in a subarctic fen, but I certainly get much more enjoyment from any dowitchers I see now because of those three summers in Schefferville.

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Winter Finch Forecast

Ron Pittaway

Looking at the large tree seed crops developing this spring in Central Ontario, it appears that this winter will be excellent for winter finches in places such as Algonquin Park. White Birch and Yellow Birch have bumper crops, but if White Birch crops are heavy in the boreal forest the redpolls will stay there. Huge cone crops are ripening on Eastern White Pine, Red Pine and White Spruce, so Pine Siskins (and Red-breasted Nuthatches) should be common and perhaps some White-winged and Red Crossbills. Large berry and seed crops are also developing on many other trees and shrubs. We missed a hard frost that would have killed flowers and conelets, but a severe drought could cause seeds to abort.

Notes from the OBRC

Ron Tozer

The Annual Spring Meeting of the Ontario Bird Records Committee was held at the Royal Ontario Museum on 28 March 1998. This all day session was largely spent in discussion and votes concerning bird records where a final decision had not been reached during the earlier round(s) of voting conducted by mail. In addition, the committee examined several specimens (including Black-capped Petrels, Sooty Tern, Northern Fulmar, and Greater Shearwater) and completed specimen data sheets for those records. OBRC members are indebted to Ross James for spending the day with us, and retrieving many specimens from the museum's collection for our perusal.

There was extended discussion and reconsideration of previously evaluated records of White-winged Junco and Willow Flycatcher (from Northern Ontario). It was decided to defer any new votes and recirculations of earlier records concerning Bullock's Oriole, pending the availability of expert opinion and forthcoming published material on identification. Members concluded that there was not sufficient new information to warrant reconsideration of Ontario's Crested Caracara records. Full details concerning all of the approximately 170 records reviewed by the OBRC for 1997 will appear in the Annual Report to be published in the August issue of Ontario Birds.

The 1998 OBRC members are: Ron Tozer (Chair), Rob Dobos (Secretary), David Brewer, Peter Burke, Bob Curry, Nick Escott, Richard Knapton and Ron Pittaway. We would like to thank out-going members Margaret Bain and Don Sutherland for their hard work over the past three years. We are pleased to announce that Bob Curry will be taking over as Chair in 1999. The OBRC is fortunate to have such a capable and experienced individual in this important role.

The OBRC is exploring the development of a computerized database for all the bird records that the committee has evaluated since its inception in 1982. Such a database would be particularly useful in replying to the requests for information on Ontario's rare birds that are regularly received by the OBRC. In addition, a proposal has been forwarded to the OBRC by Ron Weeks of the Michigan Bird Records Committee concerning our potential participation in an electronic database of Great Lakes rarities. OFO members will be kept advised of developments in these matters in future reports.

Finally, many members will have seen species or forms on the OBRC Review List during this year's spring migration. As always, I would like to encourage everyone to document these rarities and submit reports to the OBRC. Visit the OFO Web Page **www.interlog.com/~ofo** for a Report Form and to see the Review List. Reports should be sent to:
Rob Dobos, OBRC Secretary
1156 5th Concession Road West, RR 2
Waterdown ON L0R 2H2
E-mail: rob.dobos@ec.gc.ca

Bird Humour

What kind of baggage does a Turkey Vulture take on a flight?
Answer: carry-on

Portrait of an Artist
Peter Lorimer

by Maggie Lorimer

Ferruginous Hawk by *Peter Lorimer*

Peter credits his parents with launching him towards his love of bird art. His father was a fine watercolourist, while his mother possessed a great passion for nature and tea. The huge tea consumption at the Lorimer home made young Peter a successful collector of the bird cards that came in the tea packets. He soon began to spend countless hours searching for their real life counterparts around his home, though some, such as Clark's Nutcracker, proved scarce in the wilderness of Prince Edward County. Peter followed his father's footsteps into the realm of ink, graphite and watercolours, and after several years of self-directed study found success as a painter of landscapes and florals. A few years ago he decided to marry the two passions together and stopped producing paintings in order to study nature art. He now works almost exclusively with ornithological subjects, and prefers to concentrate on the birds that are of interest to Ontario birders. In his paintings and sketches, Peter believes that it is essential not only to produce good likenesses, but also to reveal something uniquely inherent in each bird species. Consequently, he spends many more hours observing and researching his subject matter than he does drawing and painting. As for tea, it still figures prominently in the Lorimer home, though Peter has broadened his horizons to include other brews. Peter is a member of OFO and now lives in Weston.

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