OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

Volume 21 Number 2 June 2003

Portrait of an Artist

Betsy Potter

Willie D'Anna

Betsy's mother encouraged art and creativity in her household. When it was Betsy's turn to set the kitchen table and she was in the middle of a drawing, her mother would let her off the hook. One wonders if that privilege was ever abused! She has two sisters, one who plays and teaches piano and one who is a visual artist like her. Betsy attended Empire State College and although she never completed her degree program, she has continued to work in the studio to this day. She has been inspired by a diverse group of history's great artists: Van Gogh, Chagall, Klee, Charles Burchfield, Ben Shahn, Frida Kahlo, and Lauren Harris, the latter of the renowned Canadian *Group of Seven*.

Although always interested in nature, it was not until she met her life partner, Willie D'Anna, and they both discovered birds, that she turned her creative eye in that direction. At various times, her concentration has been on the birders themselves, the birds, or the landscapes they occupy. An active conservationist, her recent works have revolved around the theme of man versus the environment.

Despite her productivity, Betsy has spent little time on the business aspect of her art. As a result, her art piles up around the house, circulating between the studio, closets, and the walls. She has worked with several different methods of visual expression but prefers the old standbys of painting and drawing. See more of Betsy's art on pages 8, 10 and 11.

American Redstart by *Betsy Potter*

Bob Curry

Distinguished Ornithologist

Jean Iron

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Bob Curry will be the 2003 and sixth recipient of OFO's Distinguished Ornithologist Award. Bob is well know in Ontario and North America as one of the continent's finest field ornithologists.

Bob Curry began birding in Hamilton over 50 years ago under the guidance of the legendary George North. Bob himself has mentored some of Ontario's top birders. He was a founding life member of OFO and has been a strong supporter over the years. Bob has published many articles in *Ontario Birds* and other journals. He was Photo Quiz Editor of *Ontario Birds* from 1993 to 2002. Bob also was a founding member of the Ontario Bird Records Committee and a member during 16 of its 22 years, serving as Chair for 8 years and Secretary for 2 years.

It was fitting that the inaugural meeting forming OFO in November 1982 was at Aldershot High School in Burlington, where Bob was with the geography department. Now retired, Bob and his wife Glenda Slessor live in Burlington, where they are active birders and members of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club. Bob is currently writing the *Birds of Hamilton*, which will be one of the most authoritative and extensive regional bird books ever produced in Ontario.

The Distinguished Ornithologist Award will presented to Bob Curry by Bill Crins, a former student and co-editor of *Ontario Birds*, at the OFO Annual Convention and Banquet at Point Pelee on 20 September 2003.

What is the Saw-whetter?

George Fairfield

When perusing a reprint of a natural history book that was first published in 1840, I was interested to find a reference to the "Saw Whet" that was apparently written before the origin of the saw-whet call was known. The writer, P.H. Gosse (1840), who knew the call well did not know the source of the call nor was he able to find anyone who did.

In his book *The Canadian Naturalist*, Gosse describes the call of the "Saw-whetter" as "the measured tinkle of a cowbell, or regular strokes upon a piece of iron quickly repeated". He goes on to say "In spring, that is, during the month of April, May and the former part of June, we frequently hear, after nightfall the sound....from its regularity it is usually thought to resemble the whetting of a saw, and hence the bird from which it proceeds is called the Saw-whetter. I say 'the bird' because though I could never find any one who had seen it I have little doubt that it is a bird. I have asked Mr. Titian Peale, the venerable Professor Nuttall, and other ornithologists of Philadelphia, about it, but can obtain no information on the subject of the author of the sound. Carver in his amusing travels, mentions it as being heard near Lake Superior, naming it...the Whetsaw. It may possibly be known, but I find nothing in Wilson or Bonaparte. Professor Nuttall was acquainted with the note, but he told me plainly that the bird was unknown. I conjecture it may be some of the herons or bitterns; or possibly, from a passage in Bonaparte's Ornithology, the Evening Grosbeak (*Fringilla vespertina*). He says of that bird, "their note is strange and peculiar; and it is only at twilight that they are heard crying in a singular strain. This mournful sound, uttered at such an unusual hour, strikes the travelers ear, but the bird is seldom seen."

Saw-whet Owl by *Brenda Carter*

William Brewster (1925) stated that "Their general resemblance to the sounds produced by filing a large mill saw was very close, I thought." However it is more likely that the song was compared to the filing of a regular crosscut saw. Before the advent of the chain saw every farmer and woods worker used the standard crosscut saw for cutting firewood or saw logs and was familiar with the sound produced when he filed the teeth.

The present writer's first acquaintance with the Saw-whet's call was at Lower Green Lake (now part of the Rocky Island Storage Dam forebay) in the boreal forest 120 km northeast of Sault Ste Marie. Our Ontario Hydro survey crew was tented on the north shore of the lake close to an extensive spruce swamp. On the evening of 1 April 1949, we heard a high steadily repeated call. Eli Niganobe and I took our flashlights and went out to see what was calling. The sound came from close by in the spruce swamp. We puzzled over the source of the call. Although I had set myself up as an expert on all matters to do with birds, I had no idea what was calling. Eli conjectured that it might be the mating call of the Snowshoe Hare.

Remembering the success I had had in calling in screech owls at home in Toronto, I tried imitating the call. My whistling must have been a good match because to our delight within a few seconds a Saw-whet Owl flew out of the swamp and landed on the ridgepole of the tent. Eli said that although he had lived in the area all his life this was the first time he had seen a Saw-whet Owl.

We called the rest of the crew but their commotion leaving the tent frightened the bird and he flew off in the direction from which he had come. We described to our friends what they had missed. They were not impressed and were less than impressed at having been called away from their poker game.

Literature Cited

Brewster, W. 1925. The birds of the Lake Umbagog region of Maine. Bull. Mus. Comp. Zoo., vol. 66, pt. 2, pp. 211-402.

Gosse, P.H. 1840. The Canadian Naturalist. Pp. 92-93. John Van Voorst. 1 Paternoster Row, London UK. Facimile edition reprinted by Coles Publishing Company, Toronto, 1971.

OBRC Notes

Peter Burke

On 6 April 2003, the OBRC met at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto for their Annual General Meeting. The Committee for 2002 voted on over 100 records this year. Thanks to all observers who submitted documentation to the committee for review.

Bill Crins will continue to act as Secretary for 2003, after a demanding first term. New voting members for 2003 are Ron Pittaway and Bob Curry. Both of these birders are an integral part of the workings of the Ontario birding community and we are lucky to have them offer their time once again. Bob will act as Chair for 2003. Alan Wormington and I are stepping down after completing our terms. Many thanks to Alan for providing expert insight into the many difficult identifications and committee matters.

Two of the objectives I made for myself as Chair were to update the Rare Bird documentation information and submission procedure and to get the OBRC's database up and running. I hope that many of you have visited our web page on the OFO website *www.ofo.ca* to see what is available to you for documenting your rare birds. The database has proven to be a tougher issue to deal with, as I have discovered that in order to produce a user-friendly, powerful application we must proceed carefully to ensure the highest quality. Chris Escott continues to dedicate himself to this goal and I want to thank him for keeping me informed of his progress. Furthermore, entering data into the database will require many hours of work, which is also a difficult problem to solve for a volunteer based committee.

At the same time, we are now looking to go electronic as some other rare bird committees have done across North America. One of our goals is to make part of the database accessible to you the observers who contribute to our work. Stayed tuned for more news on this in the future.

In the same vein, a number of reports are now submitted with digital photos or video. The OBRC would like to request that these photos not be altered in any way, such as with Photoshop, in order to preserve the integrity of the evidence. If this is not avoidable, please indicate what has been altered and how. Further, we would like to ensure the highest quality image possible is available for review even on "obvious" rarities, so please keep these things in mind when sending in such documentation.

Trumpeter Swan

A number of observers have asked the OBRC what the "official" status of Trumpeter Swan is in Ontario. We addressed this issue again at our April AGM after contacting the head of the Trumpeter Swan re-introduction program, Harry Lumsden. Our decision is based on the ABA's "rules" regarding introductions of species across North America. Basically it comes down to a set of four criteria that deal with the species' ability to survive on its own, with no further human intervention. Most importantly, a species must be able to survive on the basis of its productivity outweighing its mortality such that it is self-sustaining. The current population is about 400 in southern Ontario, which is still a relatively low number of birds to sustain themselves. It should be noted that there is a small population, about 30 birds, in the Kenora area as well. Calculated population viability models performed by biologists project that this population still needs to grow in order to be self-sustaining in Ontario, based on current figures of productivity and mortality. Human-raised birds are being introduced into the wild and will continue to be so for a while still. The swans are continuing to expand on their own, taking to new sites every spring but it should be kept in mind that Trumpeter Swans don't usually breed until they are three to four years of age. Thus, in the committee's opinion, it is still too early to "accept" these birds as part of our avifauna. At the request of Mr. Lumsden, we ask birders to keep sending in numbers of neck collars and wing tags to the project in order to assist with calculating the statistics that we have based our decision upon; things may very well change in a few years and you can help to determine this. You can contact Harry <theholtentwo@cs.com>.

We look forward to receiving your documentation of provincial rarities via the OFO website: *www.ofo.ca* or by mail to:

Bill Crins, OBRC Secretary
170 Middlefield Road
Peterborough ON K9J 8G1
E-mail: bill.crins@sympatico.ca

Burdock Birds Update

Jean Iron

In the June 2002 issue of OFO News 20(2)8-9, I reported kinglets that were killed by sticking to the burrs of burdock in Toronto. Last summer, Ron Pittaway and I cut most of the burdock. In the fall, we found no dead kinglets where the year before many kinglets had died. We thought the burdock was Common Burdock (*Arctium minus*). However, Bruce Parker (pers. comm.) pointed out to Ron and me that the burdock in Brookbanks Ravine is Great Burdock (*A. lappa*).

In Search of Short-eared Owls

Marcel Gahbauer

For Ontario birders, finding good numbers of Short-eared Owls in winter has been easy in recent years at both Fisherville and Amherst Island. However, their local abundance at such sites is misleading, as the Short-eared Owl population is far from healthy.

Canada was recently estimated to have 20,000 to 40,000 pairs of Short-eared Owls (Kirk and Hyslop 1998). These numbers appear reasonably large, until one considers that the Short-eared Owl's breeding range extends across all provinces and territories. Even more troubling are the steady declines in the population: an average of 2.57% per year on Canadian Breeding Bird Survey routes from 1966 to 1994, and 1.8% per year on North American Christmas Bird Counts from 1959 to 1988. A report to COSEWIC in 1994 resulted in the Short-eared Owl being designated a vulnerable (i.e. special concern) species largely due to the long-term downward trend of the population (Cadman 1994).

Habitat loss is a key problem, as the grasslands favoured by Short-eared Owls have been greatly reduced over the past century. However, through much of its range, apparently suitable habitat is unoccupied, suggesting other problems may exist. An underlying concern is that the short lifespan of the Short-eared Owl may make it particularly vulnerable to short-term population pressures – the North American longevity record for the species is under 4.5 years (Patuxent Wildlife Research Center 2002).

In many ways, the Short-eared Owl remains a considerable enigma. It is a secretive breeder, usually concealing its nest among high grasses, and flushing only very reluctantly. As a result, relatively few nests have been described in any detail. Most notably though, there is minimal knowledge about its movements. As of 1992, only 47 band recoveries had been compiled (Holt and Leasure 1993). The species is known to be somewhat nomadic in response to the fluctuations of its primary prey, the Meadow Vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*). However, the extent of these movements has never been documented, nor is there any knowledge about the relationship between breeding and wintering populations. Clarifying the extent of both nomadism and migration would be an important step toward establishing accurate population estimates.

An opportunity now exists for Ontario birders to assist with unraveling some of the Short-eared Owl's secrets. Earlier this year, I helped establish the Migration Research Foundation (MRF), a non-profit organization conducting studies of animal movement in support of conservation and management efforts, especially pertaining to species at risk. The Short-eared Owl is an ideal candidate for such research, and as one of the few areas in eastern North America to support the species throughout the year, southern Ontario is a good region to target. MRF is developing a long-term research program, eventually involving radio and/or satellite telemetry. However, the first phase will involve banding as many Short-eared Owls as possible this summer, then attempting to identify them at their wintering sites to begin drawing links between breeding and wintering grounds.

Short-eared Owl by *Brenda Carter*

We need your support to make this project a success. If you know of breeding sites that have been occupied in recent years, please check on their activity this spring and reporting their location to us. We also welcome news of any Short-eared Owls you may find while atlasing or birding, especially if they show any territorial behaviour. Please notify us of your sightings as promptly as possible, so that we can begin to contact landowners if necessary and arrange to visit the sites before the juveniles begin to disperse.

To report sightings, or for more details about planned research activities, please contact MRF Project Coordinator Leslie Hunt, e-mail: <leslie.hunt@migrationresearch.org> or by phone: 613- 596-9802. Information collected at nest sites will be shared with the Ontario Nest Records Scheme and the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas.

Literature Cited

Cadman, M.D. 1994. Status report on the Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

Holt, D.W. and S.M. Leasure. 1993. Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*). Pages 1-22 *in* The Birds of North America, No. 62 (A. Poole and F. Gill, Eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, DC.

Kirk, D.A. and C. Hyslop. 1998. Population status and recent trends in Canadian raptors: a review. Biological Conservation 83: 91-118.

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. 2002. Longevity records by species number. USGS website:
http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/homepage/longv1st.htm

Book Review

Birders: Tales of a Tribe

Bill Crins

Cocker, Mark. 2001. Birders: Tales of a Tribe. Atlantic Monthly Press, New York, New York. $39.95 Canadian.

Back in the early 1980s, I remember first reading *Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book* (Oddie, B. 1980. Eyre Methuen Ltd., London, England) with great amusement. That book introduced North American birders to the British birding lexicon, introducing us to terms such as 'dip out', 'twitcher', and 'string'. This book by Mark Cocker, although different in style, brought back memories of Oddie's book, and led me to reminisce about my own birding experiences over the past three decades. This book is set mainly in Britain, with some chapters dedicated to world birding, and relays experiences there, but many of them are common to birders and birding everywhere.

Birders: Tales of a Tribe portrays the development of the author's birding 'career' through the use of anecdotes that serve to illustrate the various stages in his hobby, as well as the psyche of birders with whom he has been associated, directly and indirectly. In some ways, this is a popular treatise on the psychology and sociology of birding. All of us will be able to recognize familiar characters, including ourselves, and situations in our own birding experiences. As the author states, the relationship between bird, light, and human observer has become "... surrounded by an entire subculture and a type of tribe, with its own rules, structures, history, customs, language, etiquette and values." The writing style is fluid, and this was truly an enjoyable book to read.

Much of the book deals with rarities, their discovery and pursuit, which is the focus of much birding energy everywhere. The first chapter begins with a recent birding trip by the author and his group to the Himalayas in search of the elusive Satyr Tragopan. The purpose of this first chapter is to set the stage for the beauty of birds and their settings, and why birders do what they do. The next few chapters then describe the author's early experiences with birds: how he became interested in birding; early, somewhat embarrassing teenage birding experiences; the value of mentors; the exhilaration of seeing life birds ('ticks') in his local birding area; his early birding equipment; his first chases of rarities; etc. Although not as extensive as that found in Bill Oddie's book, there is a bit of discussion on birding terms, as well.

The chapters dealing with 'twitching' are quite enjoyable because of the colourful characters described in them. There are the top listers, those who chase any and all rarities regardless of the consequences, the teenage birders trying to get rides to see rarities in remote locations, and the knowledgeable local experts at places such as Cley. These chapters also describe the camaraderie and the competitive spirit among birders, the oral tradition regarding birding exploits, the pub lunches, which I recall fondly from a trip to visit friends and to bird in Norfolk and Suffolk a few years ago, and the joys and responsibilities associated with finding rarities.

There are several chapters dealing with the subject of 'stringing'. These are fascinating. They include discussions of the central concept of honesty in reporting and its relationship to the reputation that a birder develops among peers, and the possible reasons for self-delusion, ulterior motives, and fraudulent reporting. The author provides an interesting commentary on the relationship or lack thereof between having a long list of species and having a good reputation as an observer: "Even top twitchers acknowledge that the number of species seen is secondary, if not immaterial, to your reputation. In fact to have seen a large number of species without any parallel credentials as a field observer invites its own kind of scorn." He provides several real examples of 'strings' from Britain, leaving out certain details for obvious reasons, as well as some fabricated examples to illustrate the types of 'stringing' that have occurred.

The last few chapters of the book lead to the subject of world birding, eventually circling back to the opening chapter on the Satyr Tragopan. A link is made by comparing the chase for a rarity in one's home country with observing that species in its natural range, where it may be common. The expansion of one's horizons to the entire avifauna of the world also is commented upon: "Abroad spoils us and we can never be the same again." Several interesting anecdotes are presented on foreign birding trips, conveying the sense of adventure, discovery, and sometimes even danger. However, he does not diminish the value or interest in local birding; he simply conveys the excitement of seeing large numbers of additional species in new and unusual places.

Following the narrative, there is a brief section with useful contact information for Britain-based bird conservation organizations, journals, rare bird alerts, and books. This section is likely to become outdated quickly, and the book list is strictly a matter of personal choice, but it is still an informative, if limited, adjunct to the main part of the book.

This book was fun to read, and contains fascinating insights into what makes the people who participate in our hobby tick, so to speak. I recommend this non-technical and well written book to all birders.

Nature-friendly Golf at Whitevale

Geoff Carpentier

Stewardship, community involvement, educational focus, guidance and recognition—these are the guiding principles for and the mission of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System of Canada (ACSSC) and its affiliate, Audubon International in the United States.

I recently became involved with an ACSSC project through a referral from the Ministry of Natural Resources. Having not heard of the organization or the programs it supports, Terrie Smith, Kim Lendvay and I went to see one of their local projects at the Whitevale Golf Club, Whitevale, Durham Region. Our host and guide was Brian Sambleson, local coordinator for the project at the golf club.

The ACSSC sponsors programs for backyards/ individual properties, schools, golf courses and business/corporate properties. Its mandate is to:

- Educate members about protecting and enhancing wildlife and habitats, specific to their sites, through environmental planning, water quality management, water conservation, wildlife habitat management, integrated pest management, resource management and public outreach.
- Encourage stewardship participation through workshops, presentations, publications, volunteer activities, and press releases.
- Recognize stewardship through certification and publicity.
- Develop science based educational materials to inform members and the general public to protect, enhance, and/or improve wildlife habitats and natural resources.
- Promote responsible environmental stewardship.
- Offer guidance to members to help them achieve positive stewardship results.

Their website *www.acssc.ca* provides complete program details.

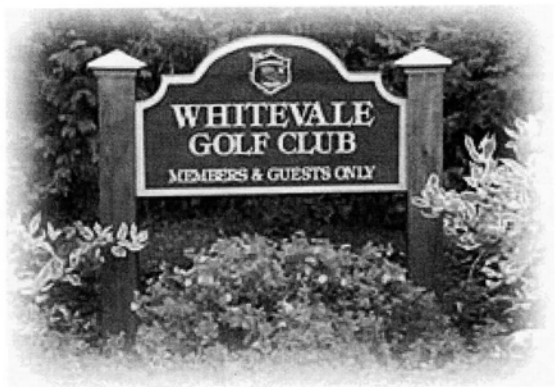
The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System Program for Golf Courses is designed to recognize and support golf courses, their staff and volunteers who work to ensure environmental benefits for people and wildlife on the property.

The program requires participation and success in several areas. Six certification categories have been developed and must be met by participants to achieve full certification:

- Environmental Planning
- Outreach and Education
- Wildlife and Habitat Management
- Integrated Pest Management
- Water Conservation
- Water Quality Management

In support of this, the Royal Canadian Golf Association, who donated $35,000 towards the educational component of the program, and the Canadian golf industry have developed a Code of Practice. It includes provisions to enjoy, enhance and protect nature, to avoid activities that endanger or threaten habitats, to assist in conservation efforts, to develop and implement environmental enhancing programs, and to support conservation strategies.

Whitevale Golf Club



Located in the picturesque Hamlet of Whitevale, just 40 minutes northeast of downtown Toronto, Whitevale is a challenging 18 hole, member owned golf course established in 1959.

Unencumbered by houses and roads, Whitevale's beautiful terrain includes hills and valleys. Duffin's Creek meanders through the course and is a part of the Seaton Hiking Trail. The lands to the north of the club have recently been designated part of the Rouge Valley System of parklands by the federal government.

The executive, staff, members and volunteers of Whitevale Golf Club work cooperatively toward ensuring a high degree of environmental quality for both people and wildlife on the course property. Whitevale strives to become designated as an Audubon Sanctuary, an honour achieved by about 20 of 250 golf courses in the program.

The club first became involved with the ACSSC in

Bluebird boxes at Whitevale Golf Club. Photo by *Brian Sambleson.*

2000, when they submitted an Environmental Plan. The plan was accepted in 2000 and the club was on its way. This program, under the auspices of the Royal Canadian Golf Association, aims to harmonize the areas of the Golf Course under cultivation with the natural surrounding areas. By early 2001, they were already incorporating components of the project into the club amenities. In March of that year, they built and installed 20 bluebird boxes along the fairways and the adjacent conservation lands. By fall, the houses were 50% occupied, primarily by wrens and swallows. The bluebirds remain elusive, but more boxes were added in 2002 and some relocated to better attract the species. I provided advice to this end in 2001 and 2002. Now it's up to the birds. With 42% occupancy in 2002, tenants again included Tree Swallows, House Wrens and a lone Black-capped Chickadee family, but no bluebirds yet. All this nesting data has been submitted to the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project.

The club has set aside 80 acres of the course as naturalized areas, preserved essentially for wildlife, mindful that the odd golf ball might stray into these areas.

The club publishes a monthly newsletter from April to October and posts information on the clubhouse bulletin board to keep staff and members up to date. A component of this is a report on the doings of the committee that oversees this project. As part of their outreach program, they publish not just updates on successes but news items such as the history of a long-lived Snapping Turtle that calls one of the ponds home, information on migratory trout and salmon moving up Duffin's Creek to spawn, and surveys to look for the presence of endangered species in Duffin's Creek. In this regard, the Redside Dace has been found. Advice is given on feeder use and maintenance, including the need for regular cleaning.

By the fall of 2001, they had prepared an extensive package as their Wildlife and Habitat submission for certification by the ACSSC. Certification was granted in February 2002. Submissions were drafted by mid-2002 in the Water Conservation, Integrated Pest Management, Outreach and Education and Water Quality certification processes. Certification in the Water Conservation project has been granted. Local schools have been contacted, particularly as part of the Outreach Program, to instill an awareness of the environment in these young people. A Resource Advisory Group of consultants is overseeing program initiatives.

Enhancements to the club property continued throughout 2001-02, with the addition of hummingbird feeders, bird feeders, bat boxes, a new Purple Martin house, native plantings and beautiful new gardens designed with birds in mind. This, coupled with an awareness of the needs of wildlife, has benefited local wildlife. The gardens are maintained in a nature friendly manner in the off season, in that seed heads and debris

A profusion of native flowers and grasses. *Photo by Brian Sambleson.*

aren't cleaned up but left as a winter food source for birds and small mammals. The maintenance of wildlife corridors in an area beset with rapid development is paramount to the health of the local environment.

What members see as a result of adopting the Audubon philosophy are more natural fields and grasses offering distinctive contrast to the beautifully cultivated playing areas, encouraged growth of native trees, shrubs, flowers, and increasing numbers of birds and wildlife. An added benefit is the harmonization achieved with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority by being good stewards of the land around Whitevale.

As part of the Pickering Christmas Bird Count, I visited the property in December and found some interesting birds, including Northern Harrier, Great Horned Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Flicker and American Robin.

This is a most worthwhile project with significant benefits to people and wildlife. I applaud the ACSSC and the staff and members of the Whitevale Golf Club.

Favourite Birding Hotspots

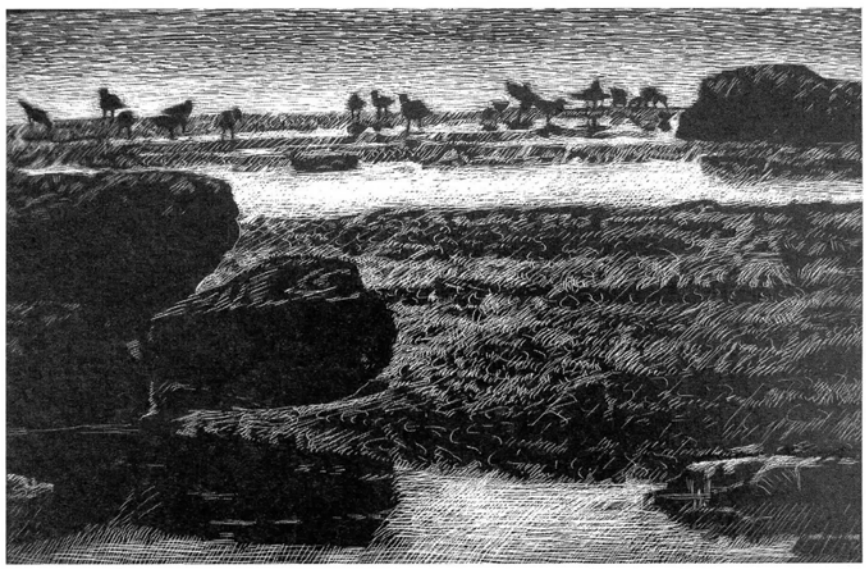
Lake Erie Shore

Summer Birding From Rock Point To Fort Erie

Willie D'Anna

Starting in mid-July, I regularly make the trek from Niagara Falls, New York, across the border to the Lake Erie shore. Despite having two of the Great Lakes close at hand, the shorebird habitat on "my" side usually is poor. While Ontario's Niagara Peninsula birders also suffer from the same deficiencies on their Lake Ontario shoreline, such is not the case along the north shore of Lake Erie. From Fort Erie to Rock Point Provincial Park and even beyond, most of this beautiful shoreline is highly favored by these long-distance migrants.

In addition to shorebirds, many other species of waterbirds pause to rest and feed along this stretch of the lake including herons, gulls, terns, and waterfowl. The shorebirds occasionally lure in a Peregrine Falcon or a Merlin, as well as the accipiter hawks. Although most of the songbirds have become rather quiet by the time the fall shorebird migration is in full swing, some uncommon southern breeders can add spice to your list. The latter include Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hooded Warbler, and Orchard Oriole.



Shorebirds at Rock Point Provincial Park
by *Betsy Potter*

Birding the Lake Erie shore is easy with most of it very accessible. Practically any shorebird is possible with about 27 species of regular occurrence during the fall migration. See Ron Pittaway's article, "Southbound Shorebirds" in the June 1999 issue of *OFO News*, Volume 17, Number 2 for an annotated list of species and when they are most likely to be found in southern Ontario. Although some shorebird species show a predilection for certain beaches, these preferences are usually slight. And while some beaches accrue a greater number of shorebirds on average, it seems that any shorebird is possible at any one of the beaches. Thus, if you want to be sure not to miss a species, you should check every accessible beach. On the other hand, a leisurely trip through Rock Point Provincial Park might prove just as rewarding.

In this guide I will highlight some of my favorite beaches, which are numbered on the map. Sites discussed in the guide are numbered on the map. There are many others that are also worth checking if you have the time. The latter spots are indicated on the map with an X. Please note that the productiveness of any beach depends on the water level. In recent years Lake Erie has been low with ample habitat throughout. In years with higher water levels, shorebirds will still be present in smaller numbers. However, the most productive beaches will change. Thus, as the water level changes, finding the best beaches becomes a learning experience. You need to be flexible.

Mats of algae are one of the main attractants for shorebirds. This decaying matter can create an unpleasant odor. The upside to this is that most beaches have few users as well as a tranquil beautiful shoreline. Along most of the shore, the birds will allow a close approach if done carefully. Still, a spotting scope will add greatly to your enjoyment as well as help you to identify more distant birds.

Rarities

The list of birds along this stretch of Erie shore includes a great number of rarities. The most remarkable are the Black-capped Petrels at Morgan's Point in 1955 and at several beaches near Fort Erie in 1996, Wilson's Storm-

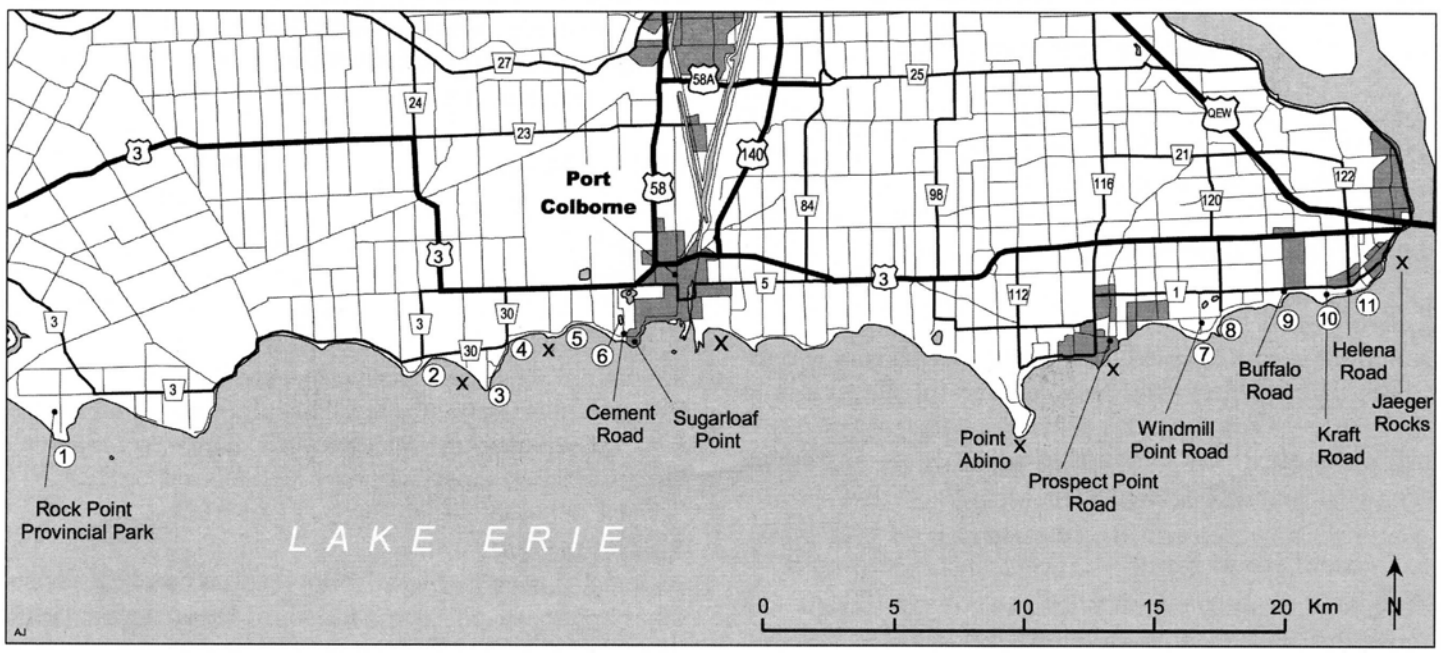
Petrels at Long Beach and Erie Beach, North America's only Slender-billed Curlew at Crescent Beach, and no less than three Wandering Tattlers, one at Sugerloaf Point and an incredible two records from Windmill Point. Other great summer rarities at sites not discussed below include Little Blue Heron, American Avocet, and Red Phalarope at Fort Erie, American Oystercatcher at Thunder Bay, and Acadian Flycatcher multiple times at Point Abino. Other rarities that are fairly regular or that have occurred multiple times at more than one location include Piping Plover, Willet, Hudsonian Godwit, Western Sandpiper, Purple Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Ruff, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes, Franklin's Gull (now much rarer), Little Gull, Loggerhead Shrike (now very rare), Connecticut Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush.

1. Rock Point Provincial Park

This park is often the best shorebird spot along the shore. At the entrance station (fee), pick up a map and a bird checklist and proceed to the southeast corner of the park. Park in the visitors parking area and walk east to the bluff, then south along it to the stairs on your left. Note that the trail you are on also continues to the right along the south bluff. This trail can be great for songbird migrants in late August and early September. After making your way down the stairs to the beach, you will work westward along the shore. But first note the mass of Double-crested Cormorants congregating on Mohawk Island to the south. Caspian and Common Terns also breed there. Check the bay to the east which has had many uncommon summer diving ducks and Horned Grebes. The first 300 metres or so of shoreline are prime shorebird habitat. The remainder beyond is usually sterile sandy beach. During the peak of migration in late July and early August, there can be hundreds of shorebirds. After this, numbers drop off rapidly but good concentrations can still occur and rarer species become increasingly likely as the season progresses. Yellow Warblers, one of the earliest fall songbird migrants, abound in the willows on the back side of the beach. Other warblers and songbirds are also seen, including the occasional Orchard Oriole. After scouring the beach and looking for songbirds if desired, you might want to visit Jim Smith's banding station. To do so, return to your car and drive to the west side of the park, parking in the last parking lot. Walk through the gate heading west, then go north at the T-intersection about 50 metres to a trail off to your left which leads to Jim's banding station. Jim is knowledgeable and congenial and enjoys showing his birds. Be aware though, that when the station is busy, he may not be able to devote much attention to guests. Still, just getting a look at birds in the hand can be a thrilling experience. Summer rarities found at Rock Point include Swainson's Hawk, Marbled Godwit, Black-headed Gull twice, Black-legged Kittiwake, Prairie Warbler, Western Kingbird, Dickcissel, and Western Meadowlark.

2. Grabell Point

About 250 metres east of where County Road 3 turns north, the lakeshore road (County Road 30) comes very close to the base of Grabell Point, which stretches off to the southwest. The algae mats here can be extensive with shorebirds often visible from the car. Unfortunately, the shoulders are very narrow and parking is not allowed. To bird Grabell Point, park along the side of County Road 3 and walk along the lakeshore road to the beach.



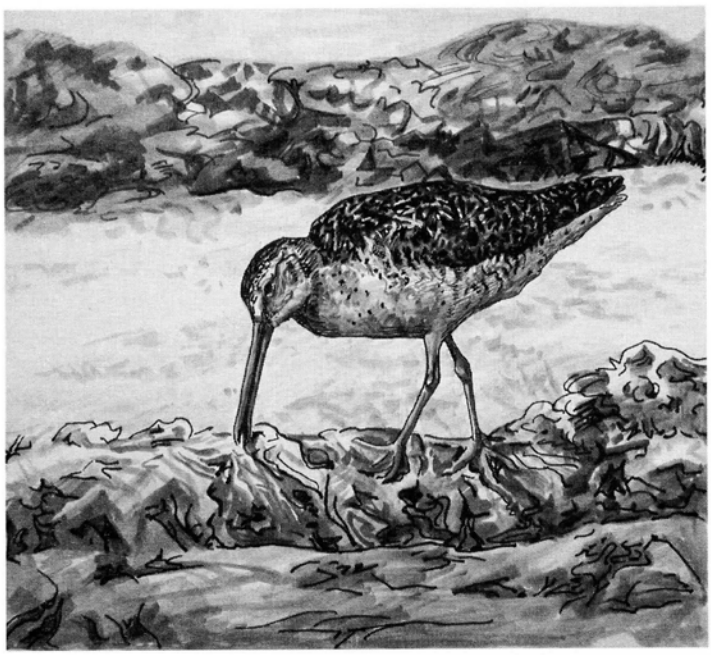
Map by *Andrew Jano*

3. Morgan's Point

Easily accessible at the end of Morgan's Point Road, this spot often has roosting gulls and terns, in addition to a few shorebirds. Uncommon summer waterfowl are found here most years. Curlew Sandpiper and Northern Saw-whet Owl have been recorded here. The private park on the west side of the road can be good for songbird migrants. Please maintain good relations with the owners by respecting the privacy of the campers there.

4. Base of Morgan's Point

At the eastern base of Morgan's Point, County Road 30 makes a big bend to the north. Turn onto the road that



Short-billed Dowitcher by *Betsy Potter*

goes south from here and proceed a short distance to the wide shoulder on the lake side of the road. The views from above the shorebirds, right from the car, can be exceptional. Just before returning to County Road 30, check the near corner of the beach that stretches off to the east.

5. Reebs Bay

A pull-off across from the cemetery provides easy access. Check the shore in both directions. The shoreline close to the road, between the pull-off and the cottages that are to the east, often has productive algae mats. American Oystercatcher has occurred here.

6. Cement Road Pond

This pond is often worth a quick look for herons and shorebirds. Pull over on the narrow shoulder as best you can and watch for fast-moving cars. If early in the morning, Marsh Wren or either cuckoo could be heard. Little Blue Heron and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron have been seen here. Back at the intersection with the lakeshore road, listen for Red-bellied Woodpecker and, in the northeast quadrant, Sedge Wren.

7. Windmill Point

Park at the end of the road next to the wooden fence. Scope the beach to the west, then walk about 200 metres east to the point, looking for shorebirds as you go. The point can have many resting gulls and terns. Check the small rocky islands for half-hidden shorebirds. Be sure to go slightly beyond the point as the next bay can be very good for shorebirds, though inconsistent. Look and listen for Red-headed Woodpecker in the entire area.

8. Stone Mill Road

Park at the end of the road near the sand without blocking access to the cottages on your right. Check the beach in both directions for shorebirds. The small rocky islands often contain herons, waterfowl, gulls, and terns.

9. Buffalo Road

The shoreline and the birds here are very similar to Stone Mill Road. This area is also known as Crescent Beach.

10. Kraft Road

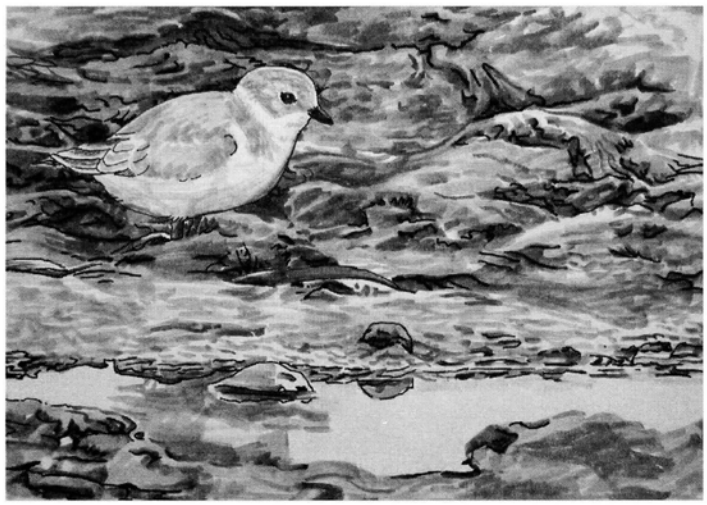
This spot is often worth a look. Red-headed Woodpeckers may be seen as you walk to the beach from your car. Shorebirds hide in the depressions along the rocky weedy shore so look carefully. Continue west to the point, about 200 meters, where there may be gulls, terns, waterfowl, and shorebirds along the shore or on the rocky islands. This point separates Crescent Beach to the west from Waverly Beach to the east. Black-legged Kittiwake and Arctic Tern have been seen here.

11. Erie Beach

This former amusement park has a large woods that can be good for songbird migrants. Shorebirding here is inconsistent but the list of rarities is impressive. Check the beach on both sides of the woods—there are parking spots at the end of Helena Street as well as on the east side of the woods. Red-headed Woodpeckers can sometimes be found. Eared Grebe, Curlew Sandpiper, Long-tailed Jaeger, Laughing Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Sabine's Gull twice, and Least Tern have all occurred here.

12. Other spots

Although I have highlighted my favorite beaches, several other spots can be very interesting. Other access points that may be worth checking are indicated on the map with an X. These include, from west to east, Belleview Beach,



Piping Plover by *Betsy Potter*

Rathfon Point, the west end of Nickel Beach in Port Colborne (just east of the Welland Canal—parking fee until September), Point Abino (no access until September—permission from guard required), Prospect Point Road, and Jaeger Rocks. For those who like to explore and discover their own places to bird, just look for other access points. You never know what reward awaits you. As always, please respect the private property of the landowners.

Conclusion

The Lake Erie shore harbors a great diversity of birds in a beautiful landscape. Your chances of finding a rare bird are very good. Due to my greater experience in the summer, this guide has focused on birding at that season. However, spring and fall can be just as exciting. Simply check out the spots highlighted here or explore some of the other access points indicated on the map. You will not be disappointed.

Acknowledgements

I thank Brendan Klick for reviewing this article and providing many useful suggestions which greatly improved it. Peter Yoerg gave me helpful information on several beaches. I thank Jim Smith for being so welcoming to birders at his banding station and for the informative discussions on banding that we had. Jean Farnan kindly provided maps and information for the city of Port Colborne. I also thank Andrew Jano for the map and Betsy Potter for the artwork that accompany this article. Last but not least, I thank Betsy Potter for joining me on my frequent trips to the Erie shore and for sharing my enthusiasm for this wonderful birding region.

Some Forest Bird Changes

Ron Pittaway

When I moved to Haliburton County 22 years ago, I often heard Whip-poor-wills on warm moonlit evenings in June. I rarely hear Whip-poor-wills now. Early results from the Breeding Bird Atlas confirm this change. What has happened? Whip-poor-wills prefer young woodlands with openings, but Haliburton's forests are filling in and maturing. Forest fires (last big fire was more than 50 years ago) and heavy logging in the past created habitat for Whip-poor-wills, but wildfires and heavy cuts are not acceptable in cottage country today. Keeping things in perspective, today's forests came about after settlement, pine logging and wildfires in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The primeval old growth forests before settlement had different bird populations than today.

Plant succession is a powerful force. As Haliburton's forests mature, trees that need sunlight to establish such as ashes, aspens, basswood, birches, oaks and others will die out and so will their associated birds. As these trees die, they are replaced by shade tolerant trees from the understory, usually Sugar Maple or Balsam Fir, not by a tree of the same species. In time we will see reductions in acorns, beechnuts, cherries, birch seed and more.

Here are more facts about trees in Haliburton, which also apply to many other areas of southern Ontario. The youngest stands of White Birch are 60 years old. This short-lived birch soon will become ecologically extinct, which will impact wintering redpolls. As other trees such as aspens die out, we will see declines in birds such as the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. One of the commonest conifers in Haliburton is the Eastern Hemlock. The youngest hemlock stands are 120 years old. Hemlock is long-lived so some will live another century or more, but hemlock, being adapted to a cool and wet environment, may decline faster with climate warming. Blackburnian and Black-throated Green Warblers and Blue-headed Vireos will decline when hemlock disappears. Many other bird changes are coming too.

I also see forest changes taking place in Toronto's famous ravines. As Eastern Hemlocks (some have died prematurely because of drought) and Eastern White Pines die, they are being replaced by Sugar Maples. Other Toronto trees such as ashes, basswood, beech, birches, cherries, elms, hickories, ironwood, oaks, poplars and willows are giving way to the extremely shade tolerant Sugar Maples. Future Toronto ravine forests will be dominated by a monoculture of maples, which will support far fewer bird species.

Haliburton's and Toronto's forests are losing biodiversity. One remedy would be more controlled fires.

The Value of Point Counts to the Atlas

Mike Cadman

The second atlas project uses data from "point counts" to map relative abundance for each species. A point count is perhaps the simplest form of bird survey in that it involves standing in a designated spot and recording all the birds heard and seen within a designated time period. For the atlas, that time is 5 minutes, and for the atlas, the surveyor records whether each bird is more or less than 100 metres from the point count station. Of course, to do point counts properly, the surveyor must be able to identify birds well by song, because the majority of records, particularly in forested areas, are by song. For this reason, point counts are optional for atlassers. Experienced birders are encouraged to do point counts, and less experienced people are encouraged to build their skills so that they might be able to do point counts by the end of the atlas period (2005).

For the atlas, we estimate that we will need a minimum of about 30,000 strategically placed point counts done across the province. That is a huge number, but after only two years of the five year project, atlassers have already done over 16,000 point counts, so we are well on our way.

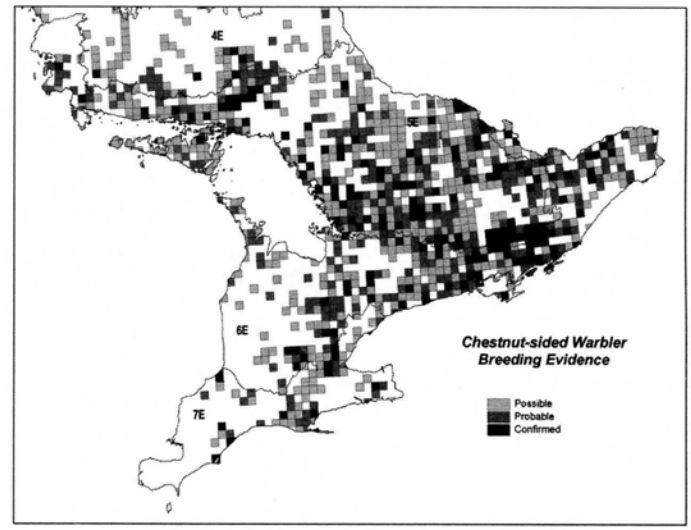
Data from those 16,000 points allow us to produce some preliminary maps. On the accompanying relative abundance maps, the small dots indicate squares in which at least 10 point counts have been done. Data from those squares were used to produce these contour maps. The maps give an early indication of why point counts are a useful addition to the atlas.

Note how on the breeding evidence map for the Chestnut-sided Warbler, the species has been reported in quite a few squares south of the Canadian Shield, and even extends its range to around the Long Point area. The relative abundance map, however, based on point counts, shows quite a different pattern, making it clear that the population of birds in the squares south of the shield is markedly lower than that in squares on the shield.

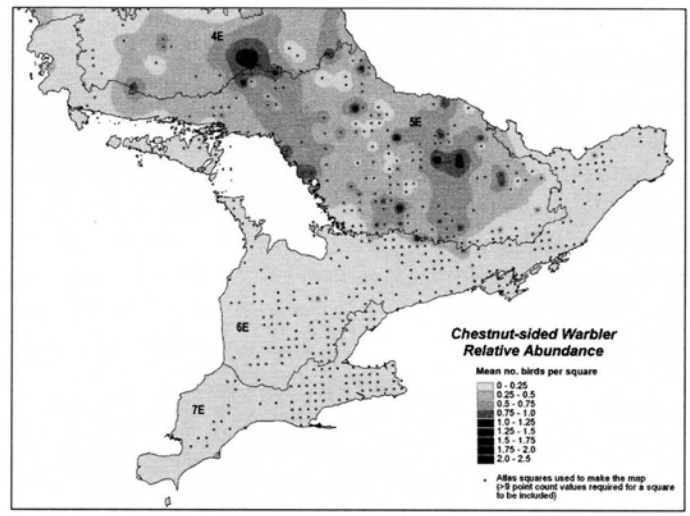
Note on the Savannah Sparrow abundance map, that there are high concentrations of Savannah Sparrows in the Grey County area, but that these are not at all evident from the breeding evidence map.

These are only preliminary maps, in that there are a lot more point counts to be done, and our methods of analyses are being refined. But they suggest that point count data will be an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of Ontario's birds.

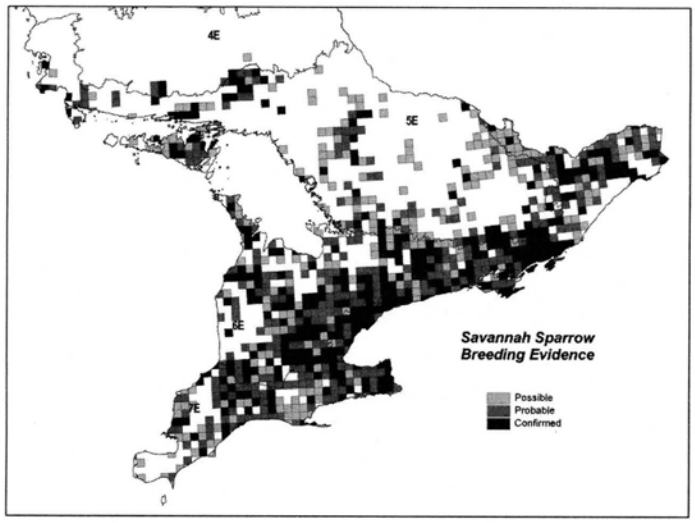
Thanks to all atlassers for making this work possible. For more information on the Atlas, see our website *www.birdsontario.org*, or call toll free 1-866-900-7100.



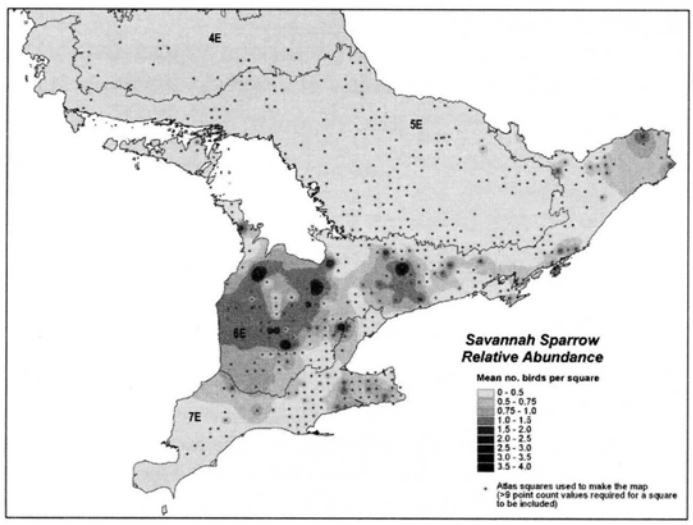
Map 1. Chestnut-sided Warbler Breeding Evidence.
Note that the breeding range of the species extends south of the shield, down to the Long Point area.



Map 2. Chestnut-sided Warbler Relative Abundance.
Point Count data reveal that population densities south of the shield are lower than those on the shield.



Map 3. Savannah Sparrow Breeding Evidence.
Note that records are concentrated south of the shield, but that not a lot of coverage has occurred yet in Huron and Grey Counties.



Map 4. Savannah Sparrow Relative Abundance.
Note the heavy concentration of birds in the Huron/Perth/Grey/Bruce area revealed by the point count data.

OFO Annual Convention
Point Pelee
20 and 21 September 2003

Enjoy a great weekend of fall birding at Point Pelee. Field trips will focus on identification led by expert leaders. On Saturday evening we will come together for a banquet and program at the Roma Club in Leamington. Contact Chris Escott:
E-mail: chris@escott.ca phone: 416-444-8055
See OFO website for more information: *www.ofo.ca*

Rails Retrieve Eggs

Ron Pittaway

Clapper Rails are known to return displaced eggs to the nest by picking them up in their bills. Most Clapper Rail eggs are lost due to high tides and storms.

Kosten (1982) marked and moved one egg from each of 18 Clapper Rail nests a metre away "to approximate the displacement of eggs from the nest due to tidal inundation and storms." 83% (15 of 18) of the moved eggs were returned to the nest within 24 hours. Usually within one hour, rails picked up and returned eggs to the nest. The stage of incubation (early, middle or late) did not affect egg retrieval. Of the three eggs not returned, one was eaten by a predator and two were probably moved by tides. Egg retrieval by Clapper Rails suggests an adaptation to the threats of tides and storms.

One wonders if other species of rails retrieve eggs. It would be especially interesting to know if the closely related King Rail retrieves its eggs since it nests in fresh water marshes that are not subject to tides.

Literature Cited

Kosten, P.A. 1982. Egg Retrieval by Clapper Rails. Journal of Field Ornithology 53(3):274-275.

New Publications

Warblers of the Great Lakes Region & Eastern North America. Chris Earley. 2003. Firefly Books Ltd. 128 pages with over 240 colour photos, index, biography, range maps. $16.95 paperback, $24.95 hardcover.

Sparrows & Finches of the Great Lakes Region and Eastern North America. Chris Earley. 2003 Firefly Books Ltd. 128 pages with over 220 colour photos, biography, index, range maps. $16.95 paperback, $24.95 hardcover.

We are pleased to announce the publication of two field guides by OFO member Chris Earley. These guides are lavishly illustrated with excellent photos by Jim Flynn, Robert McCaw, Brian Small, John Reaume, Jim Richards, Victor W. Fazio lll, Rob and Ann Simpson, A.P. Smith, Mike Danzenbaker, Doug Wechsler and Arthur Morris.

Tree Top Bittern

Jean Iron

American Bittern, 24 metres up in a Sugar Maple. Photo taken through telescope by Jean Iron.

On an overcast 6 May 2003, when the ground and vegetation were wet from the previous night's rain, I was doing the warbler survey for the Toronto Ornithological Club in Brookbanks Ravine, Toronto. At 8:15 a.m., I noticed a large dark object near the top of a tall mature Sugar Maple. Through binoculars it looked more like a ball of feathers than a squirrel's nest, but to be sure it was a bird, I returned home to get my telescope. Through the scope it was an American Bittern, crouching and balancing precariously on thin branches near the top of the maple.

I had never seen an American Bittern in a tree before. During the morning I watched the bird for several hours. At first it looked tired, alternately closing and opening its eyes. A little later it became more alert, moved its head, looked about, turned around and preened, stretching its neck and a wing. When a Blue Jay flew over calling loudly, the bittern quickly stretched up its neck and head into the camouflage pose that you often see in early spring when bitterns think they are hiding among the emergent cattails in a marsh. A Ring-billed Gull flew over and the bittern assumed the same camouflage pose. Neither the Blue Jay nor the gull swooped at the bittern.

The same day at 4:30 p.m., I returned. The bird was still there, swaying and perilously hanging onto thin branches near the tree top as it was blown about by increasingly strong winds. About half an hour later the bird moved down about a metre to a sturdier branch as in the photo.

Why was the American Bittern at the top of a tree in Brookbanks Ravine, in a residential Toronto neighbourhood, far from suitable marsh habitat? During the night of 5-6 May, thunder and lightning storms and very heavy rain started at 10:30 p.m. and continued throughout the night. The bittern was probably migrating at night and was brought down by the storms, landing in the maple. We measured the bittern to be perched 24 metres above the ground.

The next day, I checked for the bittern but it had gone, hopefully arriving safely at a marshy destination.

Many thanks to Ron Pittaway for assistance with this note and for measuring the height of the bittern in the Sugar Maple.

Future OFO Field Trips

June 21 (Saturday) and June 22 (Sunday) Bruce Peninsula.
Leader: ***John Miles.***
On Saturday meet at **7 a.m.** at the Tim Hortons in Hepworth about 12.5 km south of Wiarton on Highway 6. On Sunday meet at **7 a.m.** in the parking lot of the Tobermory airport, west of Highway 6 on Warner Bay Road. Park entrance fees. *Accommodations on the Bruce can be difficult in summer; it is recommended that participants arrange their lodgings early.* The Bruce birds: Brewer's Blackbird, Common Raven, Virginia Rail, Clay-colored Sparrow, Sandhill Crane, Upland Sandpiper, breeding warblers. Also wildflowers, ferns and butterflies.

August 9 (Saturday) Rock Point Provincial Park and Eastern Lake Erie Shore.
Leader: ***Barry Jones***
Meet at **8 a.m.** at entrance to Rock Point Provincial Park near entry kiosk. Park entrance fee. Directions: *From the west on Highway 3,* drive into Dunnville. Where Highway 3 curves left, continue straight, staying along the river. When you reach the bridge that goes right over the river, continue straight ahead onto County Road 3 eastbound. Go through Stromness and turn right onto Rymer Road (about 8 km from the bridge in Dunnville). Take the first left in 1/2 km onto Downy Road. At next intersection turn right. Park entrance comes up shortly on your left. *From the east on Highway 3,* drive into Dunnville and turn left onto Inman Road. Turn right onto the next road, Mumby Road. Follow this to County Road 3 and turn left. Follow directions from bridge in Dunnville above. Shorebirds and early fall migrants.

August 17 (Sunday) Durham Region and Lake Ontario Marshes.
Leader: ***Rayfield Pye.***
Meet at **7:30 a.m.** at the southwest corner of the Pickering GO Train station parking lot. From the east on 401, exit at Liverpool Rd and go south to Bayly St. From the west, exit at Whites Rd and go south to Bayly. Follow Bayly east to the Pickering GO Station located on Bayly St. one block east of Liverpool Rd. Early fall migrants and butterflies.

August 24 (Sunday) Palgrave, Tottenham, Schomberg.
Leader: ***Dave Milsom.***
Meet at **8 a.m.** on Patterson Sideroad just off County Road 50 in Palgrave to visit the Palgrave Conservation Area, Tottenham area sod farms and the Schomberg sewage lagoons. Early fall migrants.

September 7 (Sunday) Presqu'ile Provincial Park.
Leaders: ***Don and Ian Shanahan.***
Meet at **8 a.m.** at Owen Point Trail (formerly Beach 4) parking lot. Park entrance fee. Fall migrants, shorebirds, raptors.

September 13 (Saturday) Hawk Hill, High Park and Area, Toronto
Hosts: ***Don Barnett and the Greater Toronto Raptor Watch.***
Meet at **10 a.m.** in the Grenadier Restaurant parking lot. Use ***only*** the Bloor St. entrance at High Park Avenue.

October 11 (Saturday) Hamilton, Burlington, Stoney Creek and Vicinity.
Leader: ***Kevin McLaughlin.***
Meet at **8:00 a.m.** in Hutch's Restaurant parking lot at Van Wagners Beach in Hamilton. From Niagara on QEW, exit Centennial Parkway, turn left onto North Service Road and follow to Van Wagners Beach Road. Continue to Hutch's Restaurant. From Toronto on QEW, exit Woodward Avenue, turn right at lights, then right at next lights, go under bridge, turn right onto Van Wagners Beach Road, and continue to Hutch's Restaurant. Fall migrants.

October 25 (Saturday) Hawk Cliff and Area, Southwest of London.
Leaders: ***Pete Read and Ian Platt.***
Meet at **9:30 a.m.** From Hwy 401 interchange 177, take Hwy 4 south through west St. Thomas until it becomes Sunset Drive. Continue about 8-10 km to Union. Turn east onto County Road 27, Sparta Line Road. Go east one road, about 3 km, to County Road 22 (Fairview Road). Head south. The second road south is County Road 24, (Dexter Line) and a stop sign. Looking south you will see the sign for Hawk Cliff. Continue south on the dirt road to lake. Park along road allowance. Raptors, waterfowl, gulls, late migrants.

November 30 (Sunday) Niagara River Gulls.
Leaders: ***Ron Tozer and Jean Iron.***
Meet at **9 a.m.** in Niagara-on-the-Lake at Queens Royal Park near the mouth of the Niagara River at Regent and Front Streets. Glaucous, Iceland, Thayer's, Lesser Black-backed and other gulls.

Tiny Marsh Trip Report

Ron Fleming

OFO's first trip to Tiny Marsh on 27 April attracted 30 participants who saw about 60 bird species. It was a beautiful day with perfect lighting for bird observation. In the morning, we hiked the 8 km dike trail that goes out into the middle of this splendid 900 hectare wildlife area in Simcoe County northwest of Barrie.

Highlights included five Sandhill Cranes, several Caspian Terns, numerous Pied-billed Grebes, a late American Tree Sparrow, and a dozen species of ducks featuring Wood Duck, Green-winged and Blue-winged Teals, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck and Redhead. We also saw five American Bitterns as we walked out into the heart of the wetland. Most of our views were of bitterns flying in the distance, but one accommodated us nicely as it flew onto a strip of marsh grass not far away, offering excellent views as it hunted and posed in the bright morning sunlight.

As we turned eastward towards the Osprey nesting platform, we were treated to an interesting social display by three of these handsome fish hawks. A female was sitting on the nest platform, being courted by a male offering a fish he'd caught. Another Osprey, possibly a bird from a previous year, tried to get in on the action. At different times, it was chased away by both adults, but wasn't getting the hint to leave. A bemused Belted Kingfisher sat in the midst of this riveting triangle, curiously eyeing up the unused fish in the adult male Osprey's talons.

Circling back to the parking lot, we added Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Phoebe, Hairy Woodpecker, Barn Swallow and Yellow-rumped Warbler to our list. The group lunched at the picnic shelter by the interpretive centre, watching Tree Swallows crisscross in the sky.

In the afternoon we hiked the shorter woodland trails on the west side of the marsh. Numerous Yellow-rumps were calling and fly-catching along the creek, accompanied by at least six Pine Warblers. We also encountered two butterfly species: Mourning Cloak and Compton's Tortoise-shell. At the westernmost lookout of the marsh we had excellent looks at American Coot, two male Northern Harriers, a circling Red-tailed Hawk, and best of all was a blue morph adult Snow Goose (Blue Goose) in the midst of about 200 Canada Geese.

The trip ended at about 3:30 p.m. with smiles, handshakes and a vow to return to this beautiful birding destination. Sincere thanks to all who participated. I thoroughly enjoyed your company. I look forward to seeing you next year for the second annual OFO trip to Tiny Marsh.

Carden Alvar

Cameron Ranch Saved

Jean Iron and Ron Pittaway

The Ontario Field Ornithologists congratulates Nature Conservancy of Canada on the acquisition of the Cameron Ranch on the Carden Alvar. We thank the Couchiching Conservancy and Toronto Ornithological Club who with OFO were partners with the Nature Conservancy in acquiring the Cameron Ranch. The provincial government through Ontario Parks made a large financial contribution, which secured the purchase.

We thank those birders who contributed generously to this project and who encouraged their local naturalists clubs to make donations. Critical habitat for the endangered Loggerhead Shrike and other declining grassland birds will be preserved in perpetuity. The large 2869 acre Cameron Ranch property will protect the nucleus of the Carden Alvar. It is hoped that adjacent properties, such as the important Wylie Road/Sedge Wren Marsh birding route, also will be secured.

The ownership of the Cameron Ranch is registered in the name of Ontario Parks and is leased back to the Nature Conservancy until 2008. It is destined to become a provincial nature reserve park. A management plan will be developed that will address issues of access and habitat maintenance and restoration. Careful consideration will be given to the management of the Cameron Ranch habitats to preserve and enhance a mosaic of alvar landscapes to ensure that sensitive flora and fauna are maintained. Past disturbances such as cattle ranching and the periodic removal of shrubs kept many parts of the Carden Alvar from reverting to shrubs and trees.

Future management will likely be a combination of cattle grazing, prescribed fires and woody plant removal to maintain habitat for grassland birds and to ensure the survival of rare alvar vegetation.

Fifteen years ago the Carden Alvar was known only to a few naturalists. We are proud that OFO through our field trips and publications helped to recognize the international values of the Carden Alvar and the potential threats to its existence. We committed ourselves to informing others. We wanted them to fall in love with Carden and care about what happened to it. Securing the Cameron Ranch is a dream come true.

What's Inside

Ontbirds

Mark Cranford - Coordinator

Ontbirds with about 1400 subscribers is OFO's successful listserv for reporting and getting bird sightings. ***Ontbirds*** has revolutionized birding in Ontario.

To subscribe, send an e-mail to:

majordomo@hwcn.org

Skip the subject line and in the body of the e-mail, type:

subscribe ontbirds

Skip another line and type:

end

Send the e-mail. That is all it takes!

Questions: contact Mark Cranford

ontbirds@ofo.ca

OFO Website

www.ofo.ca

E-mail: ofo@ofo.ca

Sandra Eadie - Coordinator

Publications Mail Agreement Number 40046348

Return undelivered mail to:

Ontario Field Ornithologists
Box 455 Station R
Toronto ON M4G 4E1

OFO NEWS Editors

Jean Iron, 9 Lichen Place
Toronto ON M3A 1X3
Phone: 416-445-9297
E-mail: jeaniron@sympatico.ca

Technical Editor: Ron Pittaway

Ontario Field Ornithologists
Box 455 Station R
Toronto ON M4G 4E1

ISSN 1200-1589

Printed by Paragon dpi
Toronto