OFO NEWS

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OFO's 25th Anniversary

1982 to 2007

Watch for coming events and register for the big celebration at the OFO Annual Convention at Point Pelee on 13-14 October 2007.

Duck Songs and Calls

Ron Pittaway

Late winter and early spring are an excellent time to hear the distinctive sounds made by displaying ducks. Five of my favourite duck songs are (1) the low froglike purr *crrroooooooo* of male Hooded Mergansers heard by quiet streams and small lakes, (2) the catlike *meow* of male Redheads, which I first heard at Presqu'ile in the 1960s, (3) the soft siskin-like *jeeeee* of male Wood Ducks heard from flooded woods in spring. However, it is the female Wood Duck, not male as stated in some books, that gives the series of loud squealing *whoo-eeek* calls, (4) the chanting *owl-omelet* of Long-tailed Ducks heard commonly on Lake Ontario, which I have also heard at night in late May from migrants flying north over Minden, and (5) the lonely haunting *ah-hoo* cooing of male Common Eiders, which I first heard along the Hudson Bay Coast in 1970. These are only a few of the interesting vocalizations given by ducks. Get out and listen to them.

An interesting fact about duck calls (not songs) is that females of *some* species have much louder *quack*s than the males. For example, female Mallards and American Black Ducks give loud *quacks* or a rapid series of loud *quacks*, whereas males give weak reedy *quacks*. I cannot tell Mallards from Black Ducks by their vocalizations.

Knowing duck songs and calls will help you find rarities. For example, male American Wigeons give a three-parted whistled *whew, whew, whew*. If you hear a single piecing whistled *whee-you* coming from a flock of American Wigeons, look closely for a male Eurasian Wigeon.

Now is an excellent time to hear duck songs and calls before loud singing frogs drown them out.

New Breeding Bird Atlas

Essential Book For Every Birder

Jean Iron and Ron Pittaway

As editors of *OFO News* and birders we place great value on reputable sources of information and a good reference library of the best bird books. For most birders it is hard to decide which books to buy. New bird books are published monthly, but many are not important works and a waste of money. Every so often a book is published that no birder should be without. One such book will be the upcoming *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001-2005*. It will be the essential reference about the breeding birds of Ontario.

Each species account is written by an authority and vetted by reviewers and editors. For example, the sample account of the Pileated Woodpecker on pages 8 and 9 in this issue was written by Brian Naylor, a specialist in forest bird habitats with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Even though Brian is an expert and knows Pileated Woodpeckers, his account was checked by three reviewers who reported to Ron Tozer, the scientific editor of the Pileated account. Then it was given a final check by Mike Cadman, Atlas Coordinator, Don Sutherland of the Natural Heritage Information Centre, and Gregor Beck, Chair of the Atlas Management Board. Few bird books will ever undergo this level of scrutiny before publication.

So you can see that the new Atlas will be the most authoritative reference on the breeding birds of Ontario. To find out how to pre-order a copy at a sizeable discount, read Mike Cadman's note on page 7 in this issue. We guarantee you that the new Atlas will be one of the most reputable bird books ever published in North America.

Gulls of Point Pelee: Record 18 Species in 2006

Alan Wormington

Birders visiting Point Pelee for the first time might be surprised to learn that this area is a great place to see gulls. Most birders come in May, when they want to see warblers and other neotropical spring migrants. But gulls? Of course local birders and seasoned visitors know better, since on a year-round basis Point Pelee ranks as an exceptional location to see and study an almost endless supply of gulls. Be it along the shoreline of Lake Erie, in open fields that dot the landscape, in marshes, or at a selection of small harbours, there is always an abundance of gulls and rare species are often found.

To date a total of 19 gull species has been recorded at Point Pelee. Recently I posted a message to the ID-Frontiers listserv, requesting information on locations that had recorded a high number of gull species. The results were very interesting. Including Point Pelee, on a worldwide basis there are very few locations that have recorded 19 or more gulls. Topping the list is Chicago, Illinois, which has recorded a breath-taking 21 species (Geoffrey A. Williamson, pers. comm.).

Readers will remember the account I wrote describing my *Big Year* at Point Pelee during 2005 (Wormington 2006a). That year I recorded 14 gull species, which is significant since that was the total recorded by all observers combined. But it pales in comparison to what would transpire in 2006. By the end of the year a whopping 18 species would be found, and I was very fortunate to see all 18! The most significant discoveries were made in January, when individual Ivory and Slaty-backed Gulls were found, both new species for Point Pelee. I particularly enjoyed 12 September, a day when I encountered nine gull species including eight at the Tip: Laughing, Franklin's, Little and Sabine's being the species of note.

In the same post to ID-Frontiers I also asked how many species had been found in a single year at one location. From the responses received, it is obvious that no locality anywhere can come close to Point Pelee's 18 species in 2006. To put this number in perspective, just consider that the 1960 edition of Point Pelee's Checklist of Birds included only *seven* species of gulls.

The Point Pelee Birding Area comprises a standard Christmas Bird Count circle, and includes all of Leamington, Wheatley and Wheatley Provincial Park. The following species accounts provide a summary of the fabulous diversity of gulls that can be found at Point Pelee on a year-round basis. Also included are highlights for 2006—the year of the gull!

Laughing Gull

The first record for Point Pelee remains fresh in my memory, since it was Ronald J. Pittaway and I who made the discovery. On 16 May 1972, we were dropped off at Marentette Beach so we could walk south down East Beach and eventually back to the Visitor Centre within Point Pelee National Park (PPNP). We had to wade up to our waist to cross a water channel that had breached the beach at the extreme north boundary of the park. Not many gulls were present, but about half way during our hike an adult Laughing Gull was spotted as it flew along the beach at close range, before landing on the water. We were ecstatic.

Surprisingly, after the first (long overdue) occurrence in 1972, additional records immediately began to accumulate and the species is now recorded annually. Spring records extend from 14 April to 25 June; fall records extend from 19 August to 4 November. The only winter record concerns a bedraggled first winter bird that was found at Wheatley Harbour on 6-7 March 1981 (AW et al.); this bird had undoubtedly overwintered somewhere on Lake Erie. The number of birds now recorded at Point Pelee is about 97, a remarkable total. This is by far the greatest concentration of occurrences for anywhere in Ontario, and probably for the entire Great Lakes.

In 2006 — 9-13 May (one adult) Sanctuary Beach to Tip (Bruce M. Di Labio et al.); 15-17 May (one second summer) Tip (AW, Mike Simms et al.); 18 May (one adult) fields at SW Hillman Marsh (Adam J. Hall, Rosalee A. Hall); and 12 September (one second winter) Tip (AW, Marianne B. Reid).

Laughing Gull in second summer plumage at the Tip of Point Pelee on 17 May 2006. Photo by *Jean Iron*.

Franklin's Gull

O'Reilly et al. (1953: 29) reported nine birds seen on 20 April 1952 (Mathilde Henkel), the first record for Point Pelee. Today the species occurs annually, but usually in small numbers only; dates of occurrence extend from 28 March (in 1988) to 18 December (in 1974).

In 2006 — 27 May (one first summer) Wheatley Harbour (AW); 18-20 August (one juvenile) Onion Fields (AW); 12 September (one first winter) Tip (AW); and 19 November (one adult) Wheatley Harbour (Ian M. Richards).

Little Gull

The first record for Point Pelee was an adult seen on Lake Erie opposite Sanctuary Pond on 25 April 1957 (Robert Henry, Peter J. Hamel, Robert W. Stamp, P. Norman Chesterfield); this observation was described by Hamel (1958). The subsequent increase of Little Gull in Ontario has been well documented. This increase is probably a combination of two factors: an actual increase in the population, and more experienced birders in the field. The species is now regular at Point Pelee during spring, summer and fall, but winter occurrences are few.

In 2006 — For the entire year about 66 birds were recorded. Two very early spring migrants (adults) appeared at Wheatley Harbour on 16 February (AW); about 15-20 birds (all immatures) summered at Point Pelee, a high number; the first fall migrants (adults) were three on 20 July at Seacliff Beach, followed by seven there the following day (AW).

Black-headed Gull

One found at the Tip on 6 May 1960 (PJH, George K. Holland) was the first record for Point Pelee, and at the time was only the seventh for Ontario (Baillie 1963). Sightings at Point Pelee are erratic, and the species does not occur annually; for example, it was not recorded at all during the 5-year period from 1987 to 1991 inclusive. With the exception of a single winter record on 19 January 1981 (AW), occurrences are more-or-less distributed through spring, summer and fall from 19 March to 13 November inclusive. During 2005 for my Point Pelee *Big Year* I spent a tremendous amount of time searching for Black-headed Gull, without success (see Wormington 2006a); so seeing the species in both 2004 and 2006 seems a little curious.

In 2006 — 1 July (one first summer) west side of Tip (AW); and 2 September (one adult) Onion Fields (AW).

Bonaparte's Gull

Perhaps no species is more characteristic of Point Pelee than the Bonaparte's Gull. They seem to be everywhere, and birders are never bored by their presence. Formerly the species was very rare in winter, but now it is regular and sometimes large numbers are present. Non-breeding immatures regularly spend the summer, often by the hundreds. Spring and fall migration periods for adult birds are remarkably prolonged, with extreme dates of 13 February to 21 May (spring) and 28 June to 27 January (fall). Birds are extremely nomadic, seemingly always on the move in search of food; numbers present can vary tremendously from day-to-day. For years I have been intrigued by the early arrival of fall migrating adults at Point Pelee, an event that starts usually around 15 July (see Wormington 2001). By late July often hundreds of adult birds are present, and it is among these concentrations that the rarer species can sometimes be found.

In 2006 — The 2300 first summer birds on 21 June at Leamington Marina (AW) are a record-high count for summer. Three juveniles on 20 July at Seacliff Beach (AJH et al.) tied the earliest arrival for this age class; 1500 were present in the Onion Fields on 18 August (AW), an extremely high count for juveniles.

Mew Gull

There are now six records for Point Pelee, the first in 1983, and all were identified as the subspecies *brachyrhynchus* of western North America. All pertain to spring migrants, recorded on dates from 26 February to 14 May. The only non-adult was a first winter individual that frequented Wheatley Harbour on 9-11 March 1987 (AW).

In 2006 — On 31 March I found and photographed a stunning adult that was feeding in a winter wheat field about a kilometre west of Wheatley Harbour.

Adult Mew Gull west of Wheatley Harbour on 31 March 2006. Photo by *Alan Wormington.*

Ring-billed Gull

It is hard to image that this species was once rare at Point Pelee. Taverner and Swales (1907-08) state that "the Ring-bill had, up to the fall of 1907, escaped our observation." That year from 25 August to 6 September they found the species to be common; several juvenile birds were collected and "all seen seemed to be in the same plumage."

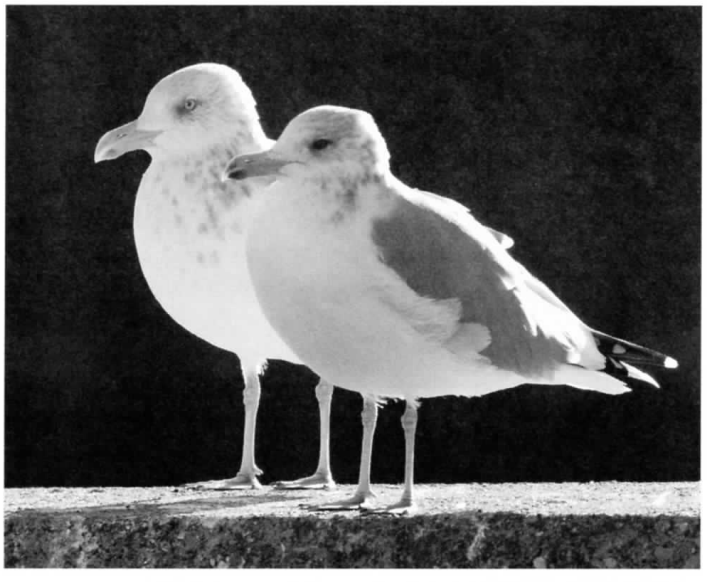
Nesting at Point Pelee has been recorded on only one occasion. In 1983 an estimated 1000 nests with eggs were found at Northeast Beach, but on 28 June the entire colony was destroyed by a storm (Wormington 2006b). During the 1970s numbers irrupted at Point Pelee, and it was not unusual to see the Onion Fields totally covered in gulls. It was stated that a *million* Ring-billed Gulls were present here on 16 July 1978 (James C. Wilson et al.); one could question the accuracy of this number, but it demonstrates the extreme abundance at the time. The species remains abundant, but numbers now do not match those of the 1970s.

In 2006 — At various locations 27,000 birds were tallied on 5 January (AW); on 19 June post breeding adults arrived *en masse*, when 4200 were found from the Onion Fields to Wheatley Harbour (AW); the first two juveniles were on 29 June at Wheatley Harbour (Dean J. Ware).

California Gull

This very rare visitor has been found at Point Pelee on six occasions including the first in 1992: once in spring, once in summer, and four times in fall.

In 2006 — At the Tip on 29 June I was able to study a first summer bird at point blank range as it stood on the sand with other gulls. At first I thought it was a "runt" Herring Gull, but the aquamarine blue-grey legs gave away its identification. Had the bird been any distance away, it would have gone unnoticed. Subsequently an adult bird was found and photographed on 6 October at Wheatley Harbour (Brandon R. Holden, Eric W. Holden).



Adult California Gull (front) at Wheatley Harbour on 6 October 2006. Photo by *Brandon Holden.*

Herring Gull

Taverner and Swales (1907-08) found them on all visits, as late as 22 May and as early as 1 September; the lack of summer records probably indicates a smaller population than today. Now Herring Gulls are always present at Point Pelee, often in great numbers. Large concentrations are attracted to the commercial fishing boats at Wheatley Harbour, where fish remains are often discarded just offshore. Breeding birds are few in number, but individual nests have been found at Pelee Marsh (on muskrat huts), SW Hillman Marsh, on top of the light-station at the entrance to Sturgeon Creek, the outer breakwall of Leamington Marina, and quarry ponds west of Leamington; in 1990 a pair nested at a height of 45 feet in an Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) at SE Woodland Nature Trail.

In 2006 — The only sighting of note was a concentration of 6000 post-breeding birds on 28 August with 4000 in the Onion Fields and 2000 at Wheatley Harbour (AW, Iain Ewing).

Thayer's Gull

A Thayer's Gull at the Tip on 7 May 1972 (Robert Curry, George D. Bryant) probably represents the first record for Point Pelee; this was soon followed by additional sightings. By late spring immature Thayer's Gulls can be almost white in appearance, a result of sun bleaching; such birds are sometimes misidentified as Iceland Gull. Thayer's Gull is not rare at Point Pelee, and at times 2-3 birds can be found per day. Dates of occurrence extend from October 5 to 26 May.

In 2006 — The only interesting sighting was a very early fall migrant (a juvenile) on 6 October at Wheatley Harbour (Kevin A. McLaughlin et al.).

Iceland Gull

It seems a bit surprising that it was not until 1968 when Iceland Gull was included on a Point Pelee checklist of birds; this listing is probably based on the observation of two different birds at the Tip during the period of 9-13 May 1962 (Rowley C. Frith et al.). Iceland Gull has been found at Point Pelee on dates ranging from 12 October to 8 June; a first summer bird that remained at the Tip until 26 June 1978 (Simon C. Gawn et al.) can be categorized as a summering record. On an annual basis, the species is reported less frequently than Thayer's Gull.

In 2006 — Numerous sightings during the winter of 2005-2006 included three birds on 7 January at NW Hillman Marsh (DJW); ten spring migrants included a late second summer bird on 16 May at the Tip (KAM et al.).

Lesser Black-backed Gull

For years I searched for the first Lesser Black-backed Gull at Point Pelee, and finally found one at the Tip on 22 April 1981; the fact that it was a second summer bird indicates that older birds (including adults) were not being overlooked by observers, at least not at Point Pelee. The species has been recorded every year since, and numbers continue to increase on an annual basis. The first bird found summering was in 1987, and now summering birds (immatures) are recorded annually.

In 2006 — About 94 birds were recorded during the year; the highest daily count was 10 birds on 23 September at Wheatley Harbour (BRH). On 29 June three summering birds (first summer plumage) were seen at the Tip (AW).

Slaty-backed Gull

In 2006 — Although I was predicting the appearance of an Ivory Gull, the gull of choice for Dean J. Ware was Slaty-backed Gull. He was determined to find the species, so when he reported one on 22 January at Wheatley Harbour I was quite sceptical. But that's what is was, and another species was added to Point Pelee's list of birds—number 383. This third winter bird remained from 22-26 January and was also seen at nearby Hillman Marsh; despite the dozens of observers searching for the bird on a daily basis, it was reliably seen on only a few occasions. An account describing this occurrence was previously published (Anonymous 2006).

Slaty-backed Gull in third winter plumage at Wheatley Harbour on 22 January 2006. Photo by *Brett Groves*.

Glaucous Gull

Taverner and Swales (1907-08) make no mention of the species. Concerning a Glaucous Gull that Richard M. Saunders saw at the Tip on 28 March 1942, he states "This was a new bird for [George] Stirrett, and a first record, I believe, for the Point" (Saunders 1947: 83-84). But the Stirrett files at PPNP include an earlier observation for 20 May 1939, reported by Richard M. Saunders! There is yet an earlier record, which probably represents the first for Point Pelee, an immature at the Tip on 22 June 1933 (Otto E. Devitt). In recent decades the species has been recorded on a regular basis, but rarely are more the 2-3 birds found per day. Dates of occurrence extend from 11 September (extremely early) to 2 June; there are two or three summer records, including the one in 1933.

In 2006 — Nine spring migrants, recorded from 5 March to 1 May, were perhaps more than usual; there were no other sightings of note.

Great Black-backed Gull

Taverner and Swales (1907-08) do not mention this species. William E. Saunders, a regular visitor to Point Pelee, made a comment that he had never seen Great Black-backed Gull west of Toronto, Lake Ontario, as of 4 March 1931 (Saunders 1932). However, according to the Stirrett files at PPNP, Saunders saw one at Kingsville, just west of Point Pelee, on 26 March 1927. The first record for Point Pelee may be the single bird that Richard M. Saunders observed here on 17 May 1940.

A distinct increase in numbers apparently occurred during the early 1950s. For an area comprising southwest Ontario and southeast Michigan, Kelley et al. (1963: 48) stated that there were 178 reports for the years 1950-1954, but only 13 reports for 1945-1949 inclusive. Today the species is common, and large concentrations (hundreds of birds) are sometimes encountered; every summer it is also relatively common, with varying numbers of non-adults present.

In 2006 — Two immaculate adults, an obvious pair, were at the Tip on 25 April (AW, J. Michael Tate), a very late date for spring migrants. An immaculate adult on 1-2 July at West Beach and the Tip (AW et al.) was a very early fall arrival; by 24 August there were already 60 adults at the Tip (AW).

Sabine's Gull

The first record for Point Pelee was on 14 October 1974, when a juvenile was seen at the Tip (Brian L. Morin, George Howell). Point Pelee now has 40 occurrences involving 41 birds; all were during fall migration (as expected) on dates ranging from 30 August to 4 November inclusive. No adult birds have been recorded; 39 of the 41 birds were specifically reported as juveniles. Surprisingly all observations have been at the Tip, with just one exception: on 22 October 1987, a juvenile bird with Bonaparte's Gulls was following a tractor plowing a field south of Hillman Marsh along Concession Road B (AW).

In 2006 — Early in the season six individuals (all juveniles) were recorded, all flying west to east past the Tip: three on 8 September, two on 12 September, and one on 13 September (AW, KAM et al.). Another juvenile was seen on October 27, flying east to west past the Tip (AW).

Black-legged Kittiwake

The first records for Point Pelee were in 1974; on 29 October a first winter bird was at the Tip (BLM) and later in the season an additional six birds were recorded. The species is not annual at Point Pelee, but is recorded regularly. For fall migration there are now 47 reported sightings, on dates from 31 August (a dead juvenile) to 22 December. The species is extremely rare in spring, with only four records including the first in 1985; dates extend from 3 April to 19 May.

In 2006 — I was very relieved and excited to find one

on 27 October without too much searching—my 18th and final gull species for the year; this first winter bird was flying very close to shore during an east gale, travelling east to west past the Tip. Subsequently two additional first winter birds were recorded, also at the Tip on 30 October (AJH) and 9 November (KAM, BRH).

Ross's Gull

The only gull species recorded at Point Pelee that was *not* found during 2006 is Ross's Gull. There are only two records of this Arctic waif, both found during unexpected times of the year—a first winter on 17-18 May 1999 (Phil Bristow et al.) and an adult on 12 September 2003 (AW, Alfred H. Rider, Paul E. Turnquest, Beverley J. Rider); both were seen at the Tip.

A reported "Ross's' Gull" at Point Pelee on 24 May 1957, was included in a number of older publications, but after review it was rejected in 1983 by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (James 1984). The drawings of this immature bird are so superb there is no question that they portray a Little Gull, rather than a Ross's Gull.

Ivory Gull

In 2006 — 8 January was a remarkable day. In the morning I went to the Tip where I encountered a juvenile Northern Gannet, only the third ever record for Point Pelee. When I returned home I immediately telephoned Adam and Rosalee Hall, since I knew they would be interested in this sighting. But I made the point that almost certainly the bird was long gone, since it flew out of sight far to the south. So instead of searching for the gannet, I suggested "Go find me an Ivory Gull." Well it was only two hours later when there was a knock on my door, and Adam sticks his digital camera in my face and cautiously asks "Is this an Ivory Gull?" The rest is history. The first winter bird, with very limited black markings, remained at Hillman Marsh from 8-11 January then it moved to nearby Wheatley Harbour on 12-13 January. The bird was seen by most of the hundreds of observers that arrived from all directions, including Vermont, West Virginia, Louisiana, Texas, Arizona and Alberta. The discoverers wrote an interesting account on the bird (Hall and Hall 2006) and several newspapers ran stories on this exceptional rarity. This was another new species for Point Pelee —number 382.

Hybrid Gulls

To complete the story on Point Pelee gulls, it is probably worthwhile to list the presumed hybrids that have been recorded here. These include Herring x Great Black-backed Gull, of which there are numerous observations. Herring x Glaucous Gull (Nelson's Gull) has been detected on five occasions. The most unusual hybrid was an apparent Laughing x Ring-billed Gull that I found resting on the ice at NE Hillman Marsh on 18 March 1992. This adult bird was with hundreds of adult Ring-billed Gulls. After continued observation it became apparent that the bird was paired with a Ring-billed Gull, and its behaviour suggested that it was a male. This hybrid type is extremely rare, but has been reported in Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin.

Ivory Gull in first winter plumage at Hillman Marsh on 8 January 2006. Photo by *Rosalee A. Hall.*

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Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001-2005

A glimpse into the Atlas features the Pileated Woodpecker - OFO's Logo Bird

Mike Cadman

Work is proceeding on the new Atlas and things are on track for a September 2007 publication date. The following two page spread is the Pileated Woodpecker account for the new Atlas. The page size was reduced from 9 x12 inches to 8.5 x 11 inches, but otherwise the account is typical of the 288 species accounts (plus accounts of historical breeders) in the book.

The Atlas will have a detailed introduction explaining how to interpret the maps and histograms, but here are a few details that will help you understand the Pileated Woodpecker account on the next two pages.

- The squiggly lines on the southern Ontario maps show the northern edge of the Carolinian Region (also called the Deciduous Forest Region) and the southern edge of the Canadian Shield.
- The area between those two lines is referred to in the text and in the histogram as the Lake Simcoe-Rideau Region.
- These large regions are "ecoregions" and information in the atlas, including the histogram, is summarized using these regions. Summarizing by region shows how the different ecological and land-use characteristics of the regions affect the distribution and abundance of each species.
- The results in the histogram are based on "effort adjusted" data. Because about 22% more effort was put into the second Atlas than the first, it was necessary to factor out the difference in effort between the atlases to allow a valid comparison. The details of this methodology will be in the book.
- In the histogram, an asterisk after the second atlas' percentage value indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the results of the two atlases.
- The maps show the relative abundance of the species across southern Ontario and across the whole province. A more detailed explanation will be in the book.

The Atlas presale has been extended to 31 March to accommodate this mailing of *OFO News*. Advance orders are being taken now, with special time-limited pre-publication discount prices. Ordering the book now will help pay for the printing and determine how many copies to print. Please order right away.

To order advance copies of the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001-2005:*

- Call 1-866-900-7100 or 519-826-2092 (Guelph ON)
- Advance price for atlas participants $67.00 (includes shipping, handling, GST)
- Advance price for general purchasers $79.00 (includes shipping, handling, GST)
- Anticipated post-publication price is $96.00
- **Pre-sale deadline for orders is 31 March 2007**
- Order online www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html

Future OFO Field Trips

Dave Milsom, Trips Coordinator, <milsomdave@hotmail.com> or 905-857-2235

For full trip details **www.ofo.ca/news.htm#upcoming**.

March 17 (Saturday) Long Point Area Leaders: George Pond, Barry Jones, Jim Heslop, Bob Stamp.

April 7-8 (Saturday-Sunday) Gore Bay, Manitoulin Island. Pre-Registration required. Leader: Steve Hall. **TRIP FULL**

April 21 (Saturday) Algonquin Provincial Park. Leader: Ron Tozer.

April 22 (Sunday) Tiny Marsh Leader: Ron Fleming.

April 28 (Saturday) Minesing Swamp Leader: Dave Milsom.

May 5 (Saturday) Rondeau Provincial Park. Leaders: Blake Mann, Maris Apse.

*Note change in directions to Prince Edward Point trip on May 13.

***May 13 (Sunday) Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area. Leader: Terry Sprague.** Meet 7:00 a.m. 1 km beyond the Ducks Dive Charters and Cottages within Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area (look for a Jeep Cherokee with the flashing amber light). From Picton, take County Road 10 (Lake Street at the LCBO) for 8 km to Cherry Valley, turn left at stop sign and follow for 6 km to Milford. At post office, go right on County Road 10 to the Mariner's Museum at South Bay. Go right & follow County Road 13 for 17 km to Prince Edward Point. Spring migrants.

May 26 (Saturday) Opinicon Road Area north of Kingston, & Amherst Island: Leader: Kurt Henninger.

May 27 (Sunday) Leslie Street Spit, Toronto. Leader : John Carley.

June 3 (Sunday) Carden Alvar Leader: Ron Pittaway.

June 3 (Sunday) Ottawa [until Noon] Leader: Bernie Ladouceur.

June 17 (Saturday) St. Clair National Wildlife Area and Point Pelee National Park. Leader: Maris Apse.

June 23 (Saturday) & June 24 (Sunday) Bruce Peninsula. Leaders: Cindy Cartwright and Alf Raab.

Pileated Woodpecker

Grand Pic

Dryocopus pileatus

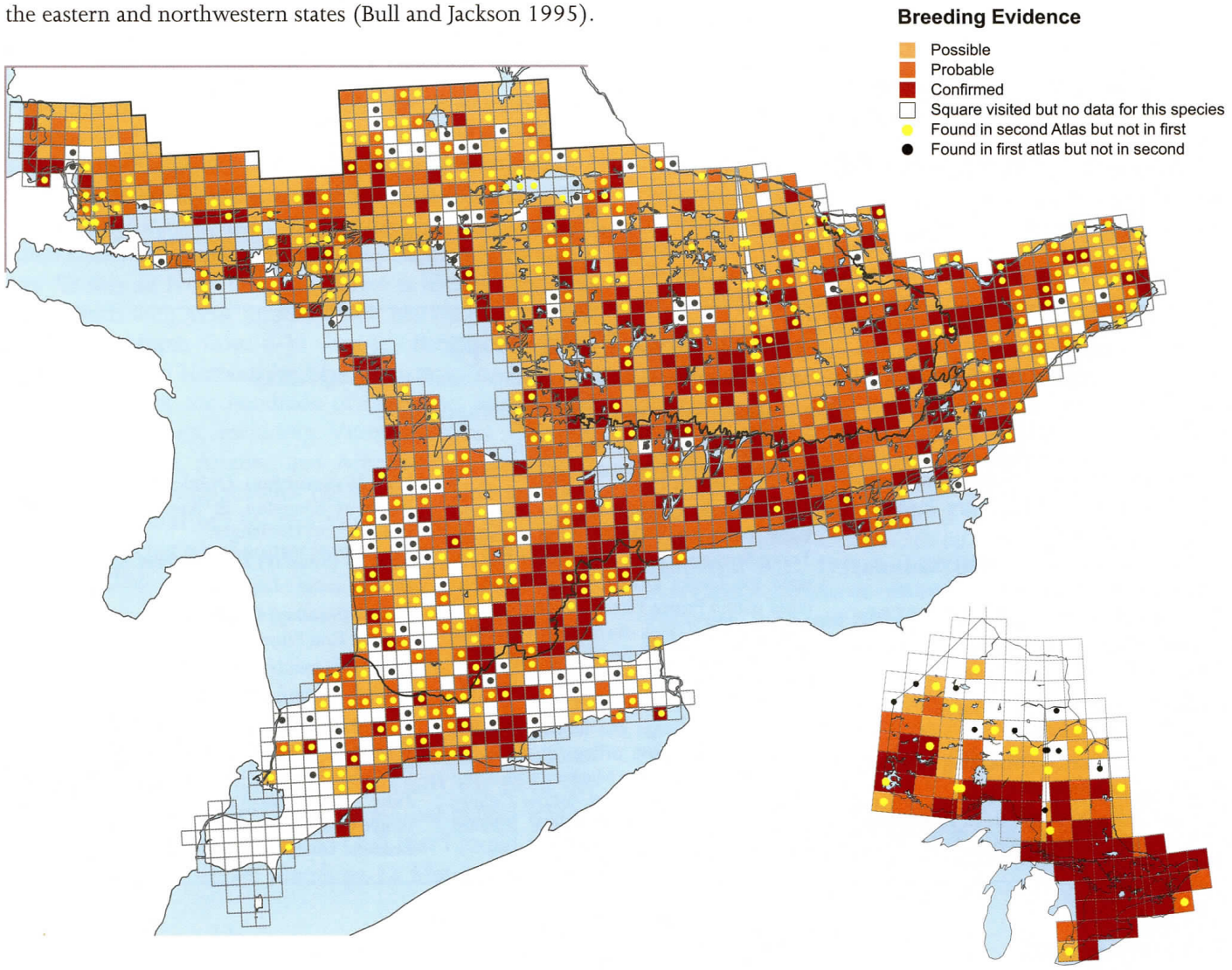
Ann Cook

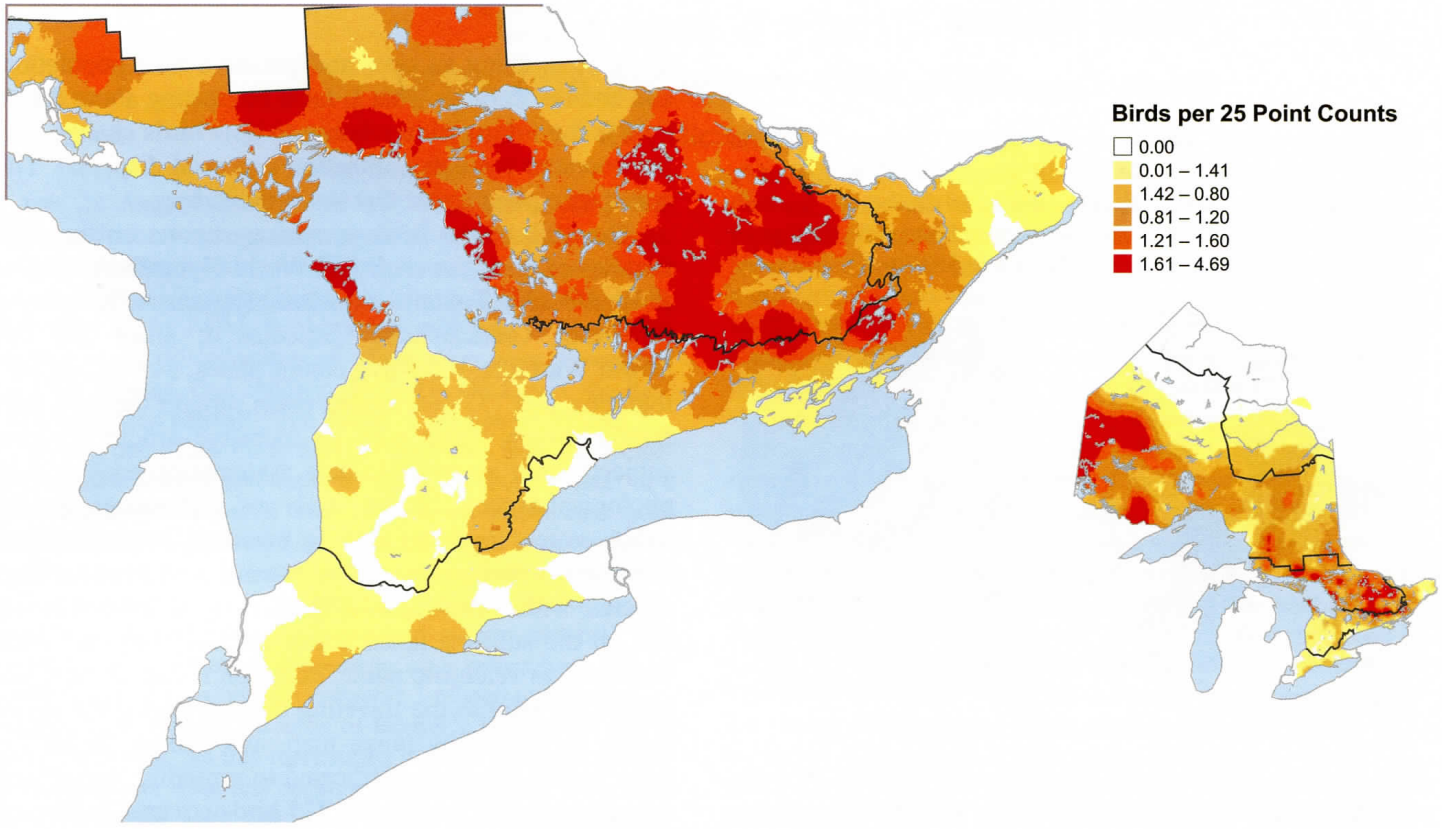
The impressive size, dramatic appearance, and laugh-like call of the Pileated Woodpecker make it the most easily identified and memorable of our woodpeckers. It is a permanent resident across the forested portions of southern and central Canada, from Vancouver Island to Cape Breton Island (although absent from Newfoundland and Labrador), and throughout most of the eastern and northwestern states (Bull and Jackson 1995).

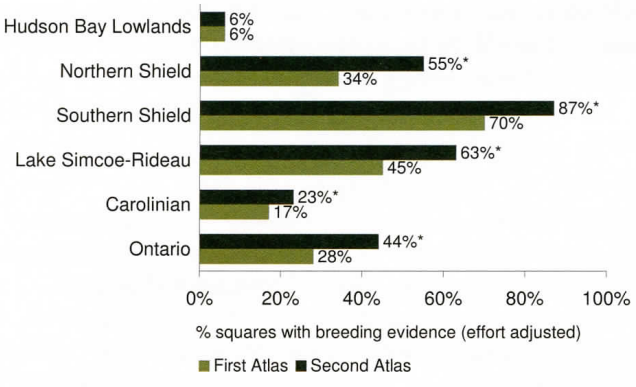
Distribution and population status: The atlas data suggest the Pileated Woodpecker is well distributed throughout the predominantly forested regions of Ontario; it was estimated to occur in 87% of squares in the Southern Shield Region, 63% of squares in the Simcoe-Rideau Region, and 55% of squares in the Northern Shield Region. However, it has a patchy distribution in the Carolinian Region, being largely absent from the Niagara Peninsula, Haldimand Clay Plain, and Chatham-Kent, Essex, and Lambton counties. Distribution is also very sparse within the Hudson Bay Lowlands, where suitable habitat occurs only along large rivers.

Comparison of the two atlases indicates almost a 50% increase in the percentage of squares with breeding evidence in the province as a whole, and a roughly 25% to 60% increase within all regions except the Hudson Bay Lowlands. A range expansion is particularly apparent in the southeast end of the Simcoe-Rideau Region and in southwestern Ontario.

The increase in overall distribution appears to be part of the steady recovery of this species from historical declines resulting from habitat loss and recreational and market hunting noted throughout southern and central Ontario by 1900 (Dance 1994). With maturation of forests and protection from hunting, populations began to recover by the 1940s. The species may still be increasing in Ontario but at a declining rate; BBS data show the annual rate of increase was about 6%







over the past ~40 years but only 3% over the past ~20 years (Downes et al. 2003).

Increases in abundance and distribution since the first atlas may be related to a combination of factors such as increases in the amount of mature forest in the central and eastern portions of the Simcoe-Rideau Region, increases in the proportion of hardwood and mixed forest across parts of the Northern Shield, and the focus on providing habitat for this species during forest management activities on crown land in the Southern Shield and Simcoe-Rideau regions (see Naylor et al. 1996).

Breeding biology: While the Pileated Woodpecker breeds in a wide range of habitats from extensive forest to urban parks, preferred nesting habitat is large patches (>40 ha) of mature and older forest with a mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees (Kirk and Naylor 1996). Nests are usually excavated in large-diameter declining or dead trees. Large declining, dead, and fallen trees are also key components of habitat, providing substrates for the wood-dwelling insects that are the principal food (Kirk and Naylor 1996). The low overall rate of detection (44% of squares surveyed) may partly reflect habitat availability, especially north and south of the shield.

Breeding was confirmed in only 16% of squares with breeding evidence. The low rate of confirmation may have been related to breeding chronology. The Pileated Woodpecker defends its territory with loud drumming and calling and excavates nest cavities in mid-March to mid-May; by the peak of atlas surveying it would be well into incubation (median eggs dates 9 May to 30 May; Peck and James 1983) and considerably less conspicuous. It can also be difficult to locate and confirm the status of nests because they are generally fairly high in trees (typically about 8 to 12 m; Peck and James 1983).

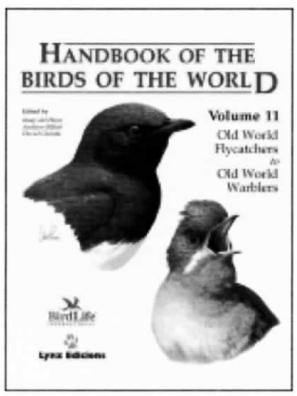
Considering the large size and conspicuous habits of this species, the atlas is likely a fairly accurate depiction of its general distribution within the province. Moreover, since the species is a permanent resident, squares with possible or probable breeding evidence have a high likelihood of being inhabited by breeding birds.

Abundance: For most resident woodpeckers, which begin nesting well before most songbirds, point count data collected during the atlas likely provide an imprecise estimate of abundance and should be viewed cautiously. However, the general patterns shown are likely valid; abundance is highest in areas where there is a large supply of suitable habitat (see above) such as across the central parts of the Southern Shield and Simcoe-Rideau regions and the northwestern portions of the Northern Shield around Quetico and Woodland Caribou Parks. In southwestern Ontario, highest abundance is associated primarily with the wooded portions of the Niagara Escarpment, especially along the Bruce Peninsula. – *Brian Naylor*

Book Review

Geoff Carpentier

Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 11: Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers. 2006. *Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and David Christie.* Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. E-mail: lynx@hbw.com Hardcover 798 pages. $245.00 US CDN (ISBN 84-96553-06-X).



Reprinted with permission Lynx Edicions

My greatest fear has been realized—a book that features extensive chapters on Old World Warblers and Cisticolas. These include many of the most confusing and difficult to identify species of birds in the world. I have studied many of these in my travels throughout Europe, Australia and Africa and look forward to enhancing my knowledge as I study this new tome. For the armchair birder, you may at first feel overwhelmed as you view the plates for these two families. The former is introduced with an 83 page article, supported by 89 photographs and accounts of 270 species. The latter is presented in an introductory article 43 pages long, adorned with 45 spectacular photographs and then detailed information on 145 species. But once you start to read and enjoy the book, your apprehension will be over-ridden by awe as you come to realize the tremendous effort, successful at that, that the authors and editors undertook to ensure that the information was accurate, understandable and readable. The information contained in these two chapters is thorough and comprehensive enough that it is akin to what you would expect if you purchased individual books about each family. And these represent only 2 of the 8 families covered in the book! I found a new understanding of the families and a better feel for how they live, breed and feed.

Let's step back and see what else can be found within these pages. The preface poses a warning about continuing threats to worldwide avian populations from human induced threats, which leads seamlessly into the 36 page introductory article "Ecological Significance of Bird Populations". Shocking statistics, such as 21.5% of avian species are considered "extinction prone" catch one's attention and lead one deeper into the article. The essay reflects the significant work worldwide that BirdLife International is doing to save and preserve bird populations and habitat. Perhaps what is most interesting about the article is the information relating to how birds change their environment through pollination and seed dispersal. This is a unique perspective that is worth reading.

The bulk of the book comprises reports on the eight families of birds covered: Old World Flycatchers, Batises & Wattle-eyes, Fantails, Monarch-flycatchers, Kinglets & Firecrests, Gnatcatchers, Cisticolas & allies and Old World Warblers. Fifty-five colour plates, 343 colour photographs, and 733 distribution maps support the text. Each family review starts with an inclusive article covering subjects such as an up-to-date systematics review, morphological aspects, habitat needs and preferences, general habits, voice, food and feeding, breeding, movements, relationship with humans and status and conservation. Each species, within each family, then receives detailed coverage on the subjects listed above and additional information such as scientific name, common names in four languages (helpful to the traveling birder), taxonomy, distribution supported by range map, and habitat. In all 279 large format pages are dedicated to providing specific information on the families of 725 birds covered in the volume. The book ends with a detailed 85 page bibliography.

With so many successes already, it would be easy for Lynx and BirdLife International to sit back and pump out another volume relying on reputation rather than quality. So, have they become complacent and dropped their standard of care and attention to currency and accuracy of the information? Absolutely not! This book is timely, complete and meets all the high standards set in previous volumes. Feedback from readers is continually incorporated into each new volume. Should you own this book? This book continues a tradition of excellence, which started with Volume 1, so don't miss out, you won't be disappointed.

In closing, Lynx has designed and implemented a new free access Internet Global Index for use by readers to help find information on the first 11 volumes of the 16 volume series. Go to www.hbw.com to use this feature, where you can search by common or scientific names.

BirdLife International has also introduced a new initiative to design and develop 100 Local Language Field Guides over the next 10 years. These will be supported by a donation of their entire artwork library by Lynx Edicions and will be made available to local environmentalists at minimal cost. The spark for this project is best typified by David Attenborough who said "Sadly, people in many parts of the world do not have such guides … Yet conservation depends ultimately upon the support of local people." Imagine how the prospects for the world's birds and biodiversity would be transformed if we could arouse and focus the energies of an entire global generation in the same way.

"Once upon a time..."

OFO's 25th Anniversary 1982-2007

Jim Richards

It was 22 August 1968. In the cold birdroom at the ROM, checking the nest and egg collection files for needed specimens, I was conducting research for a book, *Birds of the Oshawa-Lake Scugog Region, Ontario* (Tozer & Richards, 1974). Not unlike most days at the ROM, the birdroom paid host to several researchers and bird enthusiasts, of whom many were present this day—Dr. Savage, Don Baldwin, Dr. Peck, Ott Devitt, the Rev. Chas. Long, and naturally, Jim Baillie (a permanent fixture).

During one of my many breaks (the fumes from the collection cabinets always gave me a headache), I found myself in a familiar position—across a well-used, journal-strewn desk from Jim. He always welcomed a break and, being a keen backer of the spoken word, we commenced to discuss some of the events and happenings of the past spring and summer. Between frequent incoming telephone calls (he had a great network) and numerous interruptions by students and researchers asking questions (he always had the answers), I related to him the circumstances of finding the nests of Brewer's Blackbirds at Oshawa that spring. As this represented a major range extension, he suggested, in what had become a familiar phrase from him, that "you should write that up". I agreed and we talked about where it should go. This was when an idea was born, perhaps not original, but the idea of a provincial journal must have crossed the minds and lips of Taverner, Saunders and Fleming in the early 1900s and, undoubtedly, it was thought of by the likes of Snyder half a century later.

Jim seldom displayed any emotions other than those associated with joy, pleasure, happiness and concern but, at this moment, he did in fact show signs of frustration—frustration because amateurs like myself really had no local or regular outlet for publishing serious (short) papers. Soon into the conversation, he suggested we carry on over lunch and a cold beer. We were in Jim's favourite tavern, the King Cole Room, enjoying both lunch and conversation and, contrary to popular belief, it was only after we had consumed a few cold ones that the conversation took on real meaning.

Back in the 60s, not unlike today, there were very few choices when it came to a published report. If you had a lengthy or scientific paper, you could publish in the *Canadian Field-Naturalist*. If it was shorter or not too technical, it could be published in the *Ontario Field Biologist*. Notes of sightings, migration dates, etc., **could** be published in the *Ontario Naturalist*. Other than these, your choices were limited. Reports of almost continental importance could be sent to the *Auk*, the *Wilson Bulletin* and other journals but they were 'big league' and no place for a rookie like myself. Most reports and notes subsequently ended up in local naturalists' club newsletters, of no real benefit to birders or researchers outside the general club area.

It was then, on 22 August 1968, in the King Cole Room in downtown Toronto, that Jim and I decided it was time the birding community in Ontario should have their own journal, a publication that would come out at least on a quarterly basis, a publication that would offer space to both amateur and professional, and would carry articles dealing with all aspects of ornithology, regardless of length. This publication would not take away from the existing journals, but would complement them. Most important though, it would serve not only as an outlet for a treasure of works that would normally go unpublished, but it would join together the birdwatcher and the ornithologist, the scientist and the naturalist, and all those possessing an interest in avifauna.

Jim suggested we should begin immediately to initiate just such a journal (then dubbed 'Ontario Birds') and to generate an interest and to raise the necessary funds, we should create a new organization the 'Ontario Ornithological Society'. When I left the ROM that day, my head was swimming with enthusiasm; ideas were percolating, thoughts were mixing with adrenalin; I was on a 'natural high'. Over the next few weeks, I took every opportunity to mention the idea to others. I discussed it with a young man named Barry MacKay, a Park Naturalist at Presqu'ile Provincial Park. Both he and a co-worker, a young lad named Martin Parker, were enthused. I mentioned it to a naturalist at Algonquin, a chap named Russ Rutter, whom I respected very much. He too though it was long overdue. Student naturalists at the park (youngsters at the time) like Ron Tozer, Ron Pittaway, Dan Brunton and others all seemed to be keen on the prospects. However, it was left for me to do something. Needless to say, I was caught up in many endeavours of my own—writing a book, fighting environmental issues, and trying to find time enjoy a bit of wilderness. Ever so slowly time passed and with it, we lost some of the early backers of the scheme, people like Jim Baillie and Russ Rutter. The idea, which may have been before its time, was lost too.

Not unlike most stories which start off on the theme "once upon a time", this story has a happy ending. In 1982 the idea was reborn, only this time to a new and energetic breed of Ontario ornithologists. A group **not** willing to just talk about the idea, but wanting to make it a reality, and a reality it is. Initial planning started in January '82 and an inaugural meeting was held in November at Burlington, Ontario. An enthusiastic group of about 125 people endorsed in principle the formation of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. The group was formed. In the months that passed between then and the spring of 1983, the same few movers and shakers who initiated the formative meeting have put together the first official publication of OFO. It can only get better.

We in Ontario, who have in interest in birds and birders, have reason to be proud of this new organization, and we will take pride in our own (finally!) journal. I am sure all of you will join with me in thanking the dedicated few who have made this all possible. In retrospect, I can only lament the fact that we did not do it in 1968, but I am proud to be associated with those who did in 1982. Thank you Chip Weseloh, Ron Ridout, Bill Crins, Doug McRae and all the others.

Jim Richards wrote **"Once upon a time..."** for the first issue of *Ontario Birds* 1(1):4-5 published in April 1983. Reprinted as part of Ontario Field Ornithologists' 25th Anniversary celebration in 2007.

Little Known Facts About Binoculars

Derek Lyon

Over the years I've used many binoculars of all shapes and sizes. So many, in fact, that people often ask, "What binoculars would you recommend?" How I respond depends on who is asking because the 'best' binocular is different for everyone. In general, I recommend buying the most expensive pair you can. My reasoning is that with optics, better means more expensive. A trades person often invests in the best tools because they know they will be working with these tools all day, and a small problem can only be tolerated for a short time. For birders, binoculars are the tools. Properties of binoculars that deal more with what I call handling or ease of use make the difference between a binocular that is merely satisfactory and one that is great. Items like weight, field of view, focusing, and eye relief can make a big difference for birders. In this article I discuss these often overlooked topics to help birders with their future purchase.

Weight. Heavier binoculars cause more physical fatigue. A small difference in weight (only half a dozen ounces) in a binocular is apparent especially after a few hours of use. The use of a shoulder harness can reduce the weight problem and will make any binocular more comfortable. It takes the weight off your neck and distributes it over your shoulders. I use a harness with every binocular I use. You can purchase one at most stores that sell binoculars. If you cannot find a harness and use only the strap included with the binoculars, I would use a binocular of 25 ounces or less.

Field of View. Through binoculars your view is restricted to a cone described by an angle of anywhere between 8.5 and 5 degrees depending on the binocular. It is generally given in degrees or feet at 1000 yards, i.e. 7.3 degrees or 383 feet at 1000 yards. That means that if you were 1000 yards from a fence running at right angles to your line of sight, you would see 383 feet of fence. To translate that to an angle, divide the feet by 52.5, or to translate a field in degrees to feet at 1000 yards, multiply the angle by 52.5. Keep in mind that some binoculars are marked in metres not feet. I am biased to the largest field of view I can get. Others feel that the impact of field of view is over-rated. My feeling is that if a narrow view prevents you from seeing the bird it does not matter how good the binoculars are.

I would not go lower than 6 degrees. 8.5 is very comfortable. With 8.5 degrees you actually feel as though the binoculars are not even there. Field of view is determined by two factors. Lower power binoculars have inherently wider fields of view than higher powers, that's why I prefer them. Eyepieces can also provide a wider apparent field of view, at the cost of more complexity, extra weight, and other compromises, including higher prices.

Focusing. Manufacturers do not provide information on how their binoculars focus, so you must inspect each binocular personally to see how they perform. Birders spend a lot of time focusing. The focus knob should fall under the first two fingers of both hands, and should move smoothly. If the focusing wheel of the binocular moves too slowly the bird may be gone before you even get a chance to see it. Sometimes the binocular focuses too fast and you have to move back to get the bird in focus, if the bird is still there. A binocular should focus as fast as possible and let you be able to make fine adjustments too.

Depth of field is related to focus but is rarely discussed. It means how much of the view is in focus in front of and behind the bird your focusing on. If the bird moves closer or further away then you might have to re-focus. With a long depth of field you might not have to. As with field of view, lower power binoculars have a greater depth of field than higher power binoculars. Some binoculars have such a small depth of field that focusing is constant and you are always straining to see through them (a recipe for fatigue and discomfort).

Eye Relief. The maximum distance your eye can be from the back of the eyepiece and still see the complete field, given in millimetres. To be comfortable, you need an eye-relief of about 10 mm. Eyeglass wearers need more. Almost all binoculars come with some kind of eyecup that folds down or pops in to allow eyeglass wearers to get as close as possible to the eyepiece. The actual eye-relief needed by any given eyeglass wearer varies but 12-15 mm will allow you to see 70-80% of the field and 20 mm will allow you to see the whole field. When eyepieces are not centered over the pupil or when the eye-relief is too long, the view "blacks out" unpredictably. I look for retractable eyecups that could be set for my eyes and glasses. Until then, err on the short side of the eye-relief, not the long. Keep in mind that doing this will reduce the field of view.

There are other properties that help with image quality like magnification, objective size, coatings, and materials used. I have not focused on these topics as they are commonly discussed elsewhere. Keep in mind that the 'best' binocular is really the best compromise, because all properties are often inter-related.

For more information on optics in general and binoculars in particular, I highly recommend two websites to google: **Better View Desired** and **Optics for Birding** I hope that this article helps to make your future binocular purchases easier.

Sandhill Crane bonanza along north shore of Lake Huron

Erwin Meissner

Wide open spaces, crisp cool air and the resonant trumpeting calls of gathering Sandhill Cranes is now an annual event not well known or seen by many people. Yet, crane gatherings can be viewed along the Trans-Canada Highway 17 corridor and along the north shore of Lake Huron.

Major staging areas are near the Sault, on St. Joseph Island, Rydal Bank, and at Thessalon, Iron Bridge and Dryden Lake areas. Going eastward, still more are on the Massey Flats, the Lee Valley pastures, reaching as far north as Chelmsford and Hamer in Sudbury District.

Crane gatherings serve for feeding, resting and dispersal during migration in spring and fall, usually near secluded roosting areas. Here they find sufficient open areas of pastures on farmland, just ideal for this important stage of migration. In late April, on these meadows they gather on their return trip from their Florida wintering grounds. After abandoning last year's young, individual pairs soon disperse to their remote nesting areas. The abandoned young form small loose bands of wandering nonbreeders or bachelor groups and they can be encountered anywhere during the summer season. In fall, the staging areas again become alive with large family gatherings of young and adults preparing for the long flight south.

It is interesting to note the varied rusty coloured plumage of some adults amongst the feeding flocks, the result of the cranes digging with their bills in ferrous oxide (iron) laden soil, then preening and staining their feathers over time. The young (coats) of this year are easily distinguished from adults by their size, coloration and the lack of a red crown. Also one can recognize the much higher pitched calls of yearlings. Their trachea has not fully developed and it causes them to give high peeping sounds.

Here are fall 2006 high counts near Massey at the Lee Valley pastures:

- 1 August 2006—80 cranes.
- 15 September 2006—about 800 cranes.
- 19 October 2006—less than 100 remained.
- 23 October only 9 remained, soon to depart heading west along the north shore of Lake Huron towards Michigan to link up with others of their own kind, heading south along the great Mississippi River towards their wintering grounds in Florida.

Manitoulin, Island has many suitable staging habitats for large numbers of cranes. The Manitoulin Nature Club organizes annual Sandhill Crane Count Days, which are held at the Spring Bay Important Bird Area on south-central Manitoulin Island in mid October. Some high count numbers and dates from Manitoulin are:

- 16 October 2004—2045 cranes.
- 6-7 October 2006—2606 cranes, a significant increase over the previous high in 2004.

Sandhill Cranes staging at Gore Bay on Manitoulin Island in fall 2006
Photo by *Erwin Meissner.*

- 6 November 2006— 61 cranes were still present on one location on the island.

No exact numbers are available for the north shore, except an estimated 2400 cranes.

Recent literature recognizes six subspecies that differ in size and coloration according to *Terres Encyclopedia of North American Birds*. Three subspecies are migratory and three are sedentary.

The three sedentary southern subspecies have small populations, two of which are threatened with extinction. (1) The Mississippi Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis pulla*) 40-50 birds found only in Jackson County, Mississippi. (2) Cuban Sandhill Crane (*G.c. nesoites*) of western Cuba and the Isle of Pines has a population of about 200. (3) Florida Sandhill Crane (*G.c. pratensis*) has an estimated population of 4000-6000 in Florida and Georgia.

The three migratory northern subspecies are secure and increasing. (1) Lesser Sandhill Crane (*G.c. canadensis*) nests in Siberia, Alaska and northern Canada, wintering in California, Texas, New Mexico and Mexico. (2) The Canadian Sandhill Crane (*G.c. rowani*) nests in central and western Canada, winters in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. (3) The Greater Sandhill Crane (*G.c. tabida*) is the largest subspecies and nests in Manitoba, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Ontario, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Colorado, Wyoming and northern California.

There has been a steady increase in the eastward spread of Greater Sandhill Cranes in Ontario since the 1970s and 1980s. They were found in almost every square around Sudbury and Massey during the second Breeding Bird Atlas. This Great Lakes population winters mostly in southern Georgia and Florida's Paynes and Kissimmee Prairies, mixing there with the smaller resident Florida Sandhills.

Now with heavy snow on the ground in northern Ontario, we hope our Sandhill Cranes are in the warm south. We look forward to seeing them again and hearing their sonorous calls when they return this spring.

Single White Female, Active, Social, 30s, Loves Birds

Audrey Nowicki

Ok so I have your attention! But what is the point? The point is you don't find a lot of people in my demographic bird watching. It is not because the fascination could not be fostered as it was in me, one just has to be exposed to the right resources. There is a perception that birding is for when you have more free time. In your 30s, time is used to work like heck, get promoted, build equity, acquire status, buy real estate and keep connected. Connecting with the singles world also means keeping every feather in strutting condition and being available to attend all potential leks, because you never know when you will get to shake your thing at some hen or cock who might be "the one"!

I come from a home where we had binoculars and we pulled them out when Indigo Buntings were in our tamarack eating the spring buds, but these occasions were rare. Then, at 32, Barry Griffiths invited me on a 12-day trip to Antarctica, watching petrels and albatross soar around the vessel and walking on the land of ice and snow with five species of penguins. I was mesmerized watching the albatross float inches above the endless waves. I sat for long moments on beaches, engaged by the determined and often comical behaviour of penguins on land. It was then I contracted the birding "bug", the one that leads to chronic chink in the neck syndrome. But I soon found out that desire alone was not enough to make bird watching a fulfilling leisure activity. Certain resources were needed.

When I came home, I bought my first pair of binoculars and a field guide to North American birds. Fortunately, I work in nature travel and Barry encouraged me to go to Point Pelee where I met some of Ontario's best naturalist guides. On my first trip to Point Pelee during spring migration in 2003, Jim Coey, Peter Middleton and Pete Read helped me identify unfamiliar birds; this was most of them. That year warblers were dripping from the bushes at eye level. Every time I turned around a *lifer* was sitting there. With experts by my side, finding and identifying birds was easy, but how was a girl to find them on her own?

At Jim Coey's suggestion I subscribed to ONTBIRDS and became part of the electronic network communicating the latest bird sightings across Ontario. Eager and equipped with directions from ONTBIRDS and my binoculars I headed out to Halls Road in Ajax in search of my first Great Gray Owl three winters ago. There on the road where I parked was an extremely cooperative Barred Owl that allowed me to see the identifying bars on its chest and have those dark eyes pierce me with its knowing gaze. Then as the light faded I wandered along a path through the dogwoods where a Great Gray Owl was on the ground. In a whisper, it opened its massive wings and launched its extraordinary bulk to a branch in a bare tree above the path. It sat long enough for me to admire its silhouette against the smoky sky, then it turned, looked at me and was off like a phantom. This rare uplifting and spiritual moment with wildlife will be with me forever and perpetuated my interest in watching birds. That same winter I went with Chris Earley and a group on a crisp night in search of owls. Chris offers birding courses through the University of Guelph's Arboretum. His expertise, enthusiasm and interpretive skills are inspirational.

The appreciation of a bird's beauty and remarkable adaptations draws me to birding. Jean Iron recognized this and encouraged me to come to the Toronto Ornithological Club (TOC) meeting where she was presenting. So I went and subsequently became a member and scheduled the world of birds into my monthly calendar. What I like most about these meetings is the variety of guest lecturers that share an area of their expertise in birding. One month a researcher might discuss field results, while the next month someone who has done painstaking work writing a book on birds might share their journey with us. The TOC also provides me with a venue for getting to know other more experienced birders and to be exposed to various birding and conservation events. Of course there is always time for a pint and a few laughs at the pub before the meetings too.

I found that unless on a nature tour my bird outings were dropping off and I was sliding back down the learning curve of bird identification. While I'm not a lister, being able to identify a Lesser from a Greater Scaup is fulfilling and enjoyable. Going out alone with binoculars and field guide was not working. I wanted to identify more birds, but staying on the bird while looking it up in a book is a slow process and I did not have time or patience. Besides, I am an extrovert, social, and get energy from a group.

Knowing my frustration, Jean had two great suggestions. First she suggested I become a member of the Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO). Secondly she told me if I seriously wanted to invest time and money in birding to sign up for the Royal Ontario Museum's field birding course led by Glenn Coady and Mark Peck on Saturday mornings. I took Jean's advice on both accounts, knowing if I spent money on the ROM course it would make me dedicate the time to getting out there to master those little brown birds. In retrospect, although I was looking forward to my first outing with the ROM group, I was also wondering what the group would be like. I thought they will have to be keen, so keen to pay to get up early eight consecutive Saturdays to meet in a park or on a road to look for birds.

I have done three sessions now of the ROM field course. Mark and Glenn not only lead us goslings about with relentless energy, they also nurture our development with their expertise, resources, and careful site planning, showing us parts of the GTA that *Continued on next page*

OBRC Notes

Margaret Bain, Chair OBRC

The Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) held its fall policy meeting at the Burlington Library on 14 October 2006. One of the main agenda items was revision of the Provincial Review List, the list of species for which the OBRC requests reports. Two species, Ross's Goose and Long-tailed Jaeger, were removed from the Review List for Southern Ontario because of the increased number of reports of both species in recent years. In addition, one species, Red-bellied Woodpecker, was removed from the Review List for Northern Ontario. All changes to the list became effective 1 January 2007. However, OBRC will continue to review reports of these three species prior to 2007.

We discussed re-adding two species to the Southern Review List, Western Kingbird and Varied Thrush, showing apparent declines. They were delisted in 1994. Several OFO members have suggested other species as possible deletions for the South, including Northern Gannet, Piping Plover and Cave Swallow, but after considerable discussion it was decided to keep all of the above species on the Review List for 2007 while research is done to determine their occurrence numbers.

Henslow's Sparrow was also discussed. Although on the Review List since 1992, most birders have not documented their observations of this critically endangered species, so that much useful information has been lost. A plea goes out to OFO members lucky enough to find a Henslow's Sparrow in 2007 to document the sighting as fully as possible.

Doug Woods has been making good progress on the OBRC electronic database, which now has a capture program for data from OBRC Annual Reports already published in *Ontario Birds*. Jean Iron has started inputting data from 1982 working forward to 1989, David Britton will be doing the 1990s, and Ian Richards will be doing the 2000s. This is quite time consuming. We would be very pleased to hear from any other OFO members with computer skills and time to spare who would be interested in helping with this important task.

By no means all rarity reports from 2006 were received by the cut-off date of 31 December, so we urge your submissions as soon as possible. The updated OBRC Review List can be found at www.ofo.ca/obrc/review.htm Again, we encourage OFO members to submit reports on all Review List species they see, even if they were not the finders and even if the rarity was seen by many others. Multiple reports add quality as well as quantity to the final record. Hundreds of birders went to see the Razorbill at the mouth of the Niagara River. The OBRC certainly hopes to receive more than just one or two reports on this great bird. If you saw it, make sure that one of the reports is yours.

Current OBRC members are Margaret Bain (Chair), Glenn Coady, Bill Crins (non-voting Secretary), Jean Iron, Colin Jones, Kevin McLaughlin, Mark Peck (also acting as ROM Liaison), Ian Richards (non-voting Assistant Secretary) and Alan Wormington. The Committee will hold its Annual Meeting at the Royal Ontario Museum on Sunday, 1 April and the 2006 OBRC Report will appear in the August 2007 issue of *Ontario Birds*.

Continued from previous page **Single White Female, Active, Social, 30s, Loves Birds**

I never would have found on my own. I have shared looks through a scope many times more powerful than my binoculars at the iridescent greens, blues and purples of ducks caught in the sunlight and marveled at the spectacle. I have seen lifers on nearly every outing and done the happy dance, but not alone. We have been to Niagara, the Carden Alvar, Point Pelee, Algonquin Park and Manitoulin Island. We have looked for a Little Gull in a sea of Bonaparte's and we have listened to the winnowing chorus of Wilson's Snipe at dusk on the edge of a country road, with the prehistoric rattle of Sandhill Cranes echoing in the distance. On our tours we share rides, rooms, meals and more than a few bottles of wine, and even an invigorating spring moonlight skinny dip. Though we may diverge and chat about other topics of interest it is not long before a flutter of wings brings us back to birds, as we all lift our binoculars to the sky. We have found companionship huddling under umbrellas looking for shrikes, and in the dark tight confines of a tent on a lek waiting for the ultimate courting dance of the Sharp-tailed Grouse—Fred Astaire look out. Our interest to know more about birds, regardless of age, brought us together but it is what we have shared—be it the moment, a book we have read, a Christmas bird count, a different way of listening to the bird songs, worldly wisdom or a laugh at ourselves—that has been so rewarding. I now drive with binoculars in my trunk and hike with them as well. I find comfort in just looking at the bird, knowing it, I can take in its splendour. I get a great sense of pride when my five year old nephew calls me up in a flurry of excited chatter about the Bald Eagle he saw, because I know he has picked this up from me. Still a fledgling myself and with much to master, I now have the resources, the groundwork and the connections to discover the world of ornithology and have a good time doing it.

Photos Wanted For OFO Anniversary

Diane Henderson, OFO Archivist

In celebration of our 25th anniversary and to expand the existing archival photograph collection, we ask members to supply us with photos relating to OFO activities, for example from field trips, excursions, annual conventions and other meetings. Our existing collection is fairly well represented for the period from about 1998 to the present. We especially welcome photos from the 1980s and early 1990s. This is the procedure: please write your name on the back, and identify at least one person (the more the better) as well as the occasion, location and date of the photos. Indicate if you want the photos returned to you. Mail to OFO at Box 455, Station R, Toronto ON M4G 4E1. If you prefer, we also accept scanned photographs by email. Please contact me by email at <*sd.henderson@utoronto.ca*> before emailing scanned photos. Thank you.

OFO News Editors Retiring

Jean Iron and Ron Pittaway

We started *OFO News* in 1994 and will be doing two more issues this year in June and October 2007 before retiring. We are proud that *OFO News* became one of the most popular bird publications in Canada. Fourteen years as editors is a long time. It is time to recruit new editors with new ideas. If you are interested in being the new editor or part of an editorial team, please contact us at <*jeaniron@sympatico.ca*> or any member of the OFO Board of Directors at <*ofo@ofo.ca*>. We will be happy to give the new editor or editors all the information necessary to make a smooth transition. The new editors will be responsible for the February 2008 issue of *OFO News*.

Black Guillemot and Bald Eagle

Ron Pittaway

Over 100 birders saw the Black Guillemot in Massey last fall. It was discovered the 14 November 2006 on the Spanish River by Cameron McGregor. The guillemot was seen regularly until early morning on 21 November, when Erwin Meissner saw an adult Bald Eagle tail chasing and reaching to grab it just as it disappeared from view. Four days later on 25 November, Erwin thought he saw it flying along a remote section of the river. On 4 December I asked Erwin if he was certain of the sighting four days after the eagle chase. He said "in hindsight it was wishful thinking at the time." Erwin said he had a brief distant view of what could have been a male Common Merganser low over the water. So it now seems that the eagle probably caught the guillemot, which was observed regularly between 14 and 21 November 2006.

What's Inside

Ontbirds

Mark Cranford - Coordinator

Ontbirds with about 2000 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:

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

Questions: contact Mark Cranford

ontbirds@ofo.ca

Museum Consultants

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