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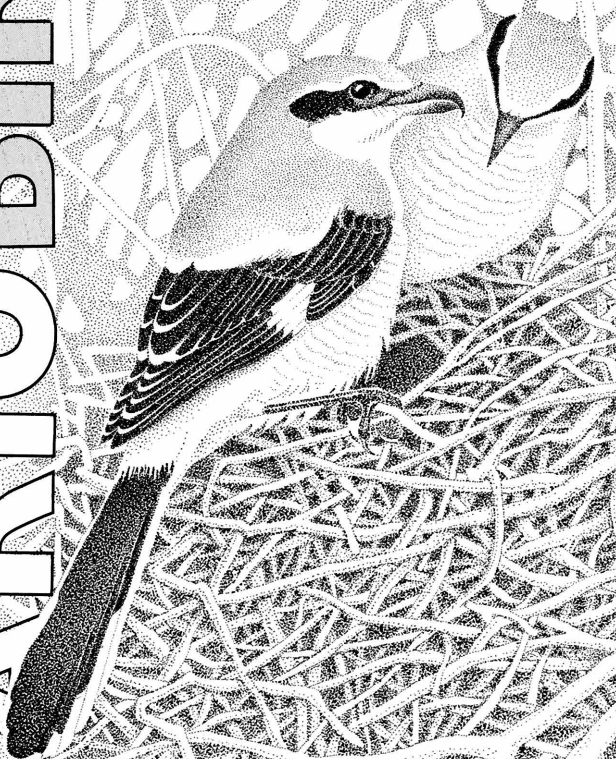

S.L. HOUSE

Ontario Birds

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Material should be double-spaced and type-written if possible.

Editorial Policy

Ontario Birds is the journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Its aim is to provide a vehicle for the documentation of the birds of Ontario. We encourage the submission of full length articles or short notes on the status of bird species in Ontario, significant provincial or county distributional records, tips on bird identification, behavioural observations of birds in Ontario, location guides to significant birdwatching areas in Ontario, book reviews and similar material of interest on Ontario birds. We do not accept submissions dealing with "listing" and we discourage Seasonal Reports of bird sightings as these are covered by *Bird Finding in Canada* and *American Birds,* respectively. Distributional records of species for which the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) requires documentation must be accepted by them before they can be published in *Ontario Birds.*

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Cover Illustration: Northern Shrikes by *Suzanne House*

Editorial

A Distant Call

The charter of The Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson Bay began, in 1670, an era of continuous occupation of northern Ontario by Europeans. But it was not for almost another 300 years that a single road finally passed uninterrupted across this land, and then only on its southern fringes. It could be said that canoes and snowmobiles or snowshoes still constitute the principal modes of ground transportation in most of northern Ontario.

Containing nearly four times the land area, but a mere fraction of the number of people, Ontario north of about the latitude of Sudbury (see *Ontario Birds* 2:13-23) continues to bar entry to its secrets. There are vast areas with no roads and no lakes large enough to land an airplane. Muskeg covering huge regions defies any attempt at transportation, except perhaps when locked in the grip of winter. Extremely cold temperatures daunt all but a few for most of the year, when bird life is scant at best. And when summer comes, and tropical migrants abound for a few weeks, the swarms of biting flies probe the sanity of those few who would venture forth.

The recently completed breeding bird atlas has performed an almost undreamed of feat of enticing government, industry, business and adventurous souls to cooperate in a venture that saw fieldwork in virtually every one of over 100 blocks of land in northern Ontario. The first nests of Little Gull and Greater Scaup were reported. Bohemian Waxwings and Northern Shrikes were finally confirmed as breeders. Snow Buntings and Hoary Redpolls were added to the list of breeding birds. The ranges of many species have been defined with more precision than ever before. We have information that might well have taken another 100 years to gather, had it not been for the organized effort.

But for all we have learned, we are still grossly ignorant of much of the bird life in the north. Consider, for example, that there may be 70,000 or more Black Scoters summering off our northern coast. There is a high probability that most of these are moulting males and that the females are inland incubating eggs and rearing broods. Yet we still do not have a single confirmed breeding or nesting record for Ontario. Connecticut Warblers occur in summer over thousands of square kilometres of this province, but likewise, we have no confirmed nest records.

Do the Ruffs that occur in increasing numbers in Ontario nest somewhere within our borders? What is the real range of species such as Common Redpolls and Gray-cheeked Thrushes that may be present one year and gone the next? It is only in the last

decade that we have confirmed the vital importance of areas of the north coast for the incredible migrations of shorebirds. We have only an inkling of the migratory habits of many other species in the north. There are few detailed studies of birds from the north. A study of Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireos revealed an important instance of interspecific territoriality, yet casual observations suggest that this is not always the case (see article in this issue). Was this a local phenomenon that varies from place to place? We have relatively few submissions of rare species sightings from northern regions, but would there not be many more if there were observers to record them?

Northern Ontario is in many ways a frontier. For those who would venture there, every day can be one of discovery. The devotion of this issue of *Ontario Birds* to articles from this region is a significant attempt to elicit information on the north. The articles, although important, seem but a small step compared to the extent of contributions yet to be made. The forests and muskegs are not silent. They beckon to those who would listen. Let us hope that these articles will stimulate others to study there and to make their observations available in similar fashion.

Ross D. James, Department of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C6

Editor's Note: Due to the overwhelming response to our request for articles and notes dealing with the birdlife of northern Ontario, a considerable portion of the next issue of *Ontario Birds*, Vol. 5 (1), will also be devoted to this fascinating area. I would like to thank all those authors who submitted manuscripts and apologize for the fact that not all the material could appear together in a single issue.

Letters to the Editor

Reviews of *Birds of Ontario*

I was interested to read the reviews of my book entitled *Birds of Ontario* in *Ontario Birds* (Vol. 4:73-79) and believe a few comments are warranted.

Most of the constructive criticisms in both reviews were well called for and I trust that owners will make the necessary corrections to their volumes. Some of these errors were caught before the volumes were released, but too late to stop the presses, which were located in Manitoba. For various personal reasons, it was impossible for me to oversee things there.

I can vouch for the identity of the Lincoln's Sparrow (p. 492). I photographed it through my telescope, which accounts for the shallow depth of focus, but the

photo does show the diagnostic features of the species as detailed on p. 493. I personally like the Purple Sandpiper photo on p. 184; the weather when they show up in the Toronto region seldom allows a clear view in sunny conditions.

Both reviewers take exception to the blanks left for "species not illustrated". We are trying to fill these blanks by inserting prints as they become available and hope that others might consider the blanks a challenge to do likewise. To date, we have filled about twelve, as well as replacing the Hairy Woodpecker with a proper photo. As Geoffrey Carpentier has intimated, Vol. 1 was intended more for those who appreciate birds for their beauty, rather than for the dedicated birdwatcher for whom Vol. 2 was intended. Less than a dozen of the common Ontario birds were not illustrated. We would appreciate slides of these birds to fill in the gaps in our own volumes, and perhaps, make them available for others, if so desired.

Neither reviewer had much to say about the quantitative distribution maps for both the breeding season and the Christmas season. This was the main ornithological contribution of Vol. 2. So far as I am aware, no such quantitative maps have been published for any other major geographic area anywhere. I am aware of their shortcomings but it is still a beginning, and, I believe, an improvement on the mere presence and absence as given in most atlasses.

Carpentier has pointed out that I did not indicate the meaning of a "+" sign on some of the maps. Perhaps you could insert this in your copies on p. 975 of Vol. 2. The "+" sign indicates values below 0.1 in the square, mostly single records in heavily worked areas during the 10-year period mapped.

Bruce Di Labio apparently did not read my introduction on p. x of Vol. 1, where the pattern of migratory sightings was given as south to north in spring, and north to south in fall. In the summer sightings, breeding records were given more attention than details of rarities, which appear to be the main interest of Di Labio. I admit to considerable interest in the pursuit of rarities myself, but one must also admit that rarities are of less importance than populations in the overall scheme of things. If I have failed to list all that came to my attention, it is partly because of this belief and partly due to the fact that the volumes were written over a 6-year period. As a result, more detail was available for the accounts written most recently, as new local lists and new volumes of such sources as *American Birds* became available. I could not rewrite each species account as these new sources became available and hope to live to see publication.

Finally, I will admit that the Ottawa region is not well served in these volumes. Perhaps Di Labio could devote some of his energy to remedying the lack of an up-to-date account of the birds of the Ottawa region along the lines of publications by Kingston ornithologists, or others of similar calibre. In this endeavour, he may discover that the task is very time-

consuming and money-consuming, but not without its satisfactions.

Dr. J. Murray Speirs
Pickering, Ontario

OBRC guidelines "too rigid"

With reference to the "Letters to the Editor" from Dan Brunton and the combination of Dennis Rupert and Alan Wormington (*Ontario Birds* 4:41-42), I am inclined to cast my lot with Mr. Brunton.

Like the latter two, I don't know G.R. White, W.H. Scott or E.G. White either, but I have a hazy idea they were prominent members of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club of long ago. I must also admit I never met Percy A. Taverner but did know J.H. Fleming and W.E. Saunders and include W. Earl Godfrey as a correspondent. Frankly, I'd accept the word of any one of them. I think the fault is in the OBRC's too rigid guidelines rather than Mr. Brunton's interpretation.

One thing about the Rupert-Wormington letter I disagree with is their reference to the "official list" of Ontario birds. Many years ago Lester L. Snyder told me that there is no official Ontario list for, I suppose, the simple reason that my feeling about a certain record may be at variance to Les Snyder's, who was the official compiler in his day. There are many ornithologists who do not accept, unequivocally, the current or any preceding AOU Checklist.

William C. Mansell
Mississauga, Ontario

"Thunderbirds" near Ramore

Concerning your impending northern Ontario issue, I can no longer restrain the wish that serious ornithologists should check the alleged reports of "Thunderbird" (not the car, but the flying fella) for Ontario, as it is supposed to have been seen on different occasions and by various people in 1947 and 1948 near Ramore (which is between Iroquois Falls and Kirkland Lake) and at some other time in the Thunder Bay area. Although it doesn't appear on the A.O.U. checklist, it might be interesting for Ontario bird-watchers to have some independent conclusion about the identity of the birds involved in these specific cases. Does anyone from around Ramore remember anything about such unusual events?

Benoit Crevier
Laval-des-Rapides, Québec

Ontario Birds in 1987

OFO will continue to publish three issues of *Ontario Birds* in 1987. Issues will appear in April, August and December. Deadline for the submission of material for inclusion in *Ontario Birds* Vol. 5 (1) is 28 February 1987. Deadlines for Vol. 5 (2) and (3) are 30 June 1987 and 31 October 1987, respectively. Authors producing manuscripts on personal computers are requested to submit a copy of the floppy disk along with a hard copy of the manuscript to facilitate typesetting. All disks will be returned to the author following typesetting.

Some Aspects of Bird Migration at Caribou Island (Lake Superior), Ontario

by

Alan Wormington, J. Robert Nisbet and Robert G. Finlayson

Published and unpublished data concerning the various aspects of birds migrating across Lake Superior are almost unknown[1]. Due to its small size and extremely isolated nature, Caribou Island is in a strategic location to sample the migrant birdlife crossing the lake. In this paper we present some observational data which pertain to Caribou Island specifically, and the Lake Superior region generally, gathered during our three expeditions to the island.

Prior to our visits, no ornithological observations had ever been conducted on Caribou Island; previous natural history investigations of any description are apparently limited to a botanical survey conducted during the summer of 1976 by Dr. John K. Morton of the University of Waterloo (Roys A. Ellis, Jr., pers. comm., 1979).

Island Description

Caribou Island is in Thunder Bay District, located in east-central Lake Superior at 47° 22′ north latitude, 85° 49′ west longitude (Figure 1). The island is oval shaped, with a north/south axis forming distinct points at each end. It is about 6 km in length and 2.5 km at its widest point. In terms of ornithological significance, Caribou Island might well be described as Ontario's only "offshore" island: Michipicoten Island is 38 km to the north, the Ontario mainland 63 km to the east, and the Michigan mainland 72 km to the south. From Caribou Island these lands are rarely visible.

Although within the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Forest Region of Rowe (1972), Caribou Island appears to be more characteristic of the Boreal Forest Region. Most

[1] One notable exception, however, is the observations made and published in a popular format in *Audubon* magazine by J.P. Perkins (1964–65). For many years, as former Chief Officer of the U.S. Steel Corporation (Pittsburgh Fleet), he recorded the numerous birds which regularly landed on ship while he traversed the Great Lakes, including Lake Superior.

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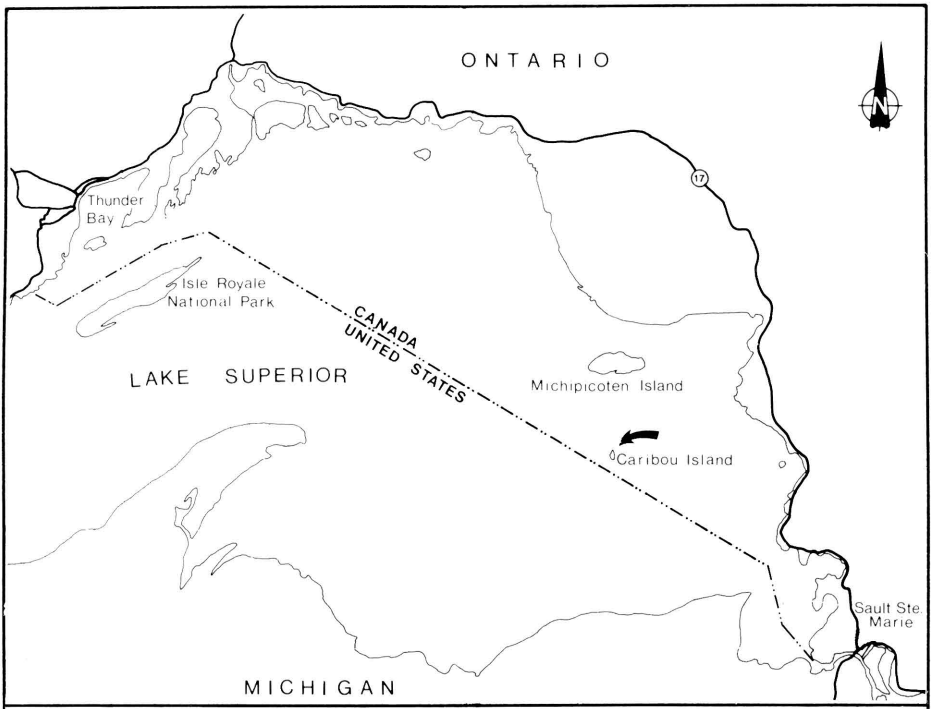

Figure 1: Map of Lake Superior showing location (marked with arrow) of Caribou Island.

of the island consists of low-lying spaghnum bogs interspersed by an intricate system of dry sand ridges. On the higher ground, white spruce (*Picea glauca*) and white birch (*Betula papyrifera*) predominate, while stands of black spruce (*P. mariana*) are widespread in the bogs (Figure 2). Inland pools and large ponds are numerous. The shoreline, however, is quite different, with long, wide stretches of low sand dunes covered in coarse grasses and the occasional mountain ash (*Sorbus* sp.) and white spruce (Figure 3). Generally, the flora is more typical of the south shore of Lake Superior (J.K. Morton, pers. comm., 1979) and lacks the arctic-alpine elements especially characteristic of the north-central shorelines (as described by Given and Soper 1981).

Additional information on Caribou Island, which principally details historical aspects and human history, can be found in an account published by Carter (1979) in *Inland Seas*.

Methods and Observations

A cumulative total of 58 days were spent on Caribou Island by the three authors, comprising 25 days during spring migration and 33 days during the fall. The dates of our three visits were: 18 September to 20 October 1979 (Wormington and Finlayson); 6 to 20 May 1981 (Nisbet); and 23 May to 1 June 1984 (Nisbet).

The 1979 and 1981 expeditions to Caribou Island made base camp on the southwest corner of the island (South Bay), while in 1984 base camp was on the eastern shore. On a regular basis (2–4 times/week) observations of the entire circumference of the island (shoreline, dunes, beach/forest interface, etc.) were made on foot, as this was where migrant birds tended to concentrate. On an irregular basis (less than once/week) the interior forest and bogs were randomly explored; here the concentrations of migrants were much less in evidence. We found that concentrations occurred regularly on the island's south tip, so this area was investigated almost daily; stationary observations of two to four hours duration were sometimes carried out here, particularly when there were heavy movements of either passerines or waterbirds. For short periods of time, on an irregular basis, incidental observations were made on the tiny Caribou Light island lying just offshore from the south tip (Figure 3); also, kills from the lighthouse here were gathered by the lightkeepers for our examination.

Concentration of Migrants

The concentration of migrant landbirds on Caribou Island was found to be much in evidence. As expected, inclement weather generally produced higher counts. Concentrations during the fall (Table 1) were more regular than spring concentrations (Table 2), perhaps reflecting the general lack of adverse weather encountered during the spring visits. A spectacular concentration of birds on 25 September 1979 gave us some indication of the potential of

Figure 2: Typical inland scene on Caribou Island showing a shallow pond and spruce forest. Photo by *Alan Wormington.*

the island; on this day the south end of the island was literally swarming with birdlife, as illustrated by some of the examples we give in Table 1.

We consider the numbers recorded on Caribou Island to be not particularly overwhelming, but do suspect that additional visits could well produce some astonishing counts under the proper conditions. Furthermore, compared to shoreline areas of the mainland, we feel the maxima recorded at Caribou Island to be more or less similar, despite the fact that some of our numbers have been cited by Baxter (1985) as the maxima recorded for various species for the Ontario portion of eastern Lake Superior.

Common Loon Migration

During the fall (1979) visit, substantial numbers of migrating Common Loons[2] were observed on a daily basis. On the two days of maximum counts (62 in one half hour of watching on 2 October and 129 in two hours on 6 October) birds were south of the island, flying in a southeasterly direction. Stormy weather (with associated northerly winds) predominated on these dates.

The spring visits also recorded migrating Common Loons on a daily basis, but in considerably fewer numbers in comparison to fall. Birds approached from a southeast direction, generally veering north upon reaching the island. The maximum recorded was 28 birds on 8 May 1981.

[2] For scientific bird names, refer to 'Ontario Bird Records Committee, Checklist of the Birds of Ontario' in *Ontario Birds* 2:13–23, 1984.

Figure 3: Typical shoreline habitat of Caribou Island. Note tiny Caribou Light island in the background. Photo by *Robert Finlayson.*

Table 1: Selected fall (1979) maxima at Caribou Island. An asterisk (*) indicates a single flock attempting to leave the island via the south tip.

# of Birds	Species	Date	# of Birds	Species	Date
(105)*	American Crow	6 Oct.	(180)	Yellow-rumped Warbler	25 Sept.
(250)	Golden-crowned Kinglet	25 Sept.	(210)	Palm Warbler	25 Sept.
(80)	Gray-cheeked Thrush	25 Sept.	(22)	Blackpoll Warbler	25 Sept.
(40)	Swainson's Thrush	25 Sept.	(45)	Savannah Sparrow	3 Oct.
(50)	Hermit Thrush	25 Sept.	(30)	Lincoln's Sparrow	25 Sept.
(70)	Water Pipit	22 Sept.	(450)*	Rusty Blackbird	2 Oct.

These observations indicate that large numbers of Common Loons regularly pass through the central corridor of eastern Lake Superior, migrating southeast in fall and northwest in spring.

The Presence of Unexpected Diurnal Migrants

Several species were recorded during our visits whose appearance in the middle of Lake Superior was unexpected. Like various species of hawks, these species are normally considered to be diurnal migrants which prefer to avoid crossing large bodies of water and are, as such, more typically observed as shoreline migrants.

Below are listed those species which seemed to be the most unexpected. In addition to these species we recorded several other diurnal migrants, but their appearance was considered less unusual since they are species previously known to us to show little or no hesitation in crossing large bodies of water (*e.g.*, Mourning Dove, Horned Lark, Cedar Waxwing, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, Rusty Blackbird, Common Grackle, Pine Siskin, and Evening Grosbeak, etc.) or they are also regular nocturnal migrants in varying degrees (*e.g.*, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin and Purple Finch, etc.). (We should note here, however, that published data pertaining to which North American bird species are diurnal and/or nocturnal in their migrations is very limited.)

Hawks—see separate discussion below.

Sandhill Crane—Two birds were flying over the south point on 9 May 1981.

Black-backed Woodpecker—Fall (1979): one male was observed on 29 Sept. and probably the same bird 9 Oct.; one female was recorded 13 Oct. Not recorded on the spring visits.

Three-toed Woodpecker—Fall (1979): one bird on 1 Oct. and four birds on 9 Oct.; these and several others thereafter indicate active migration. Spring (1981): one on 11 May.

Blue Jay—Spring (1981): several pairs on territory; migrant flocks of 49 on 9 May and 60 on 20 May; spring (1984): observed regularly with maximum of 13 on 25 May. Fall (1979): a single bird remained throughout the period; this sighting may, in fact, pertain to a (summer and/or winter) resident.

Clark's Nutcracker—see 'Rare and Extralimital Species.'

Table 2: Selected spring (1981 and 1984) maxima at Caribou Island.

1981 # of Birds	Species	Date	1984 # of Birds	Species	Date
(60)	Blue Jay	20 May	(14)	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	31 May
(91)	Yellow-rumped Warbler	19 May	(100)	Swainson's Thrush	31 May
(77)	Palm Warbler	19 May	(40)	Cape May Warbler	29 May
(63)	Chipping Sparrow	9 May	(27)	Common Yellowthroat	31 May
(24)	Lincoln's Sparrow	19 May	(31)	Lincoln's Sparrow	31 May

Black-capped Chickadee—Probable migrants were observed on the fall (1979) visit with one on 30 Sept. and a group of three from 1 to 9 Oct.; two birds were recorded on 24 May 1984.

White-breasted Nuthatch—One bird on 24 Sept. 1979.

Northern Shrike—Spring (1981): one unusually late migrant on 9 May. Fall (1979): first observed on 7 Oct.; several others thereafter.

Eastern Meadowlark—see 'Rare and Extralimital Species.'

Western Meadowlark—One bird on 8 May 1981.

White-winged Crossbill—Spring (1984): seven on 24 May. Fall (1979): two on 26 Sept. and four on 9 Oct.

Several factors are probably responsible for the appearances of the above-listed species. For some, such as Sandhill Crane, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee and White-winged Crossbill, the appearances on Caribou Island are probably the result of rare, random (probably wind and/or weather related) wanderings over the lake. For others, such as Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Eastern and Western Meadowlarks, limited nocturnal migration by the species generally may explain their presence.

The Presence of Hawks

It is well known that many species of *Falconiformes* (vultures, hawks and falcons) prefer to avoid crossing large expanses of water. Although the degree of reluctance varies among species (with Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Harrier, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon and Merlin often showing little or no reluctance), the presence of the following diverse and numerous selection in the middle of Lake Superior seems worthy of note. Of the species listed below, Turkey Vulture and Broad-winged Hawk were the most unexpected.

Turkey Vulture—One was present on 26 May 1984.

Northern Goshawk—A single adult was present 13 Oct. 1979.

Sharp-shinned Hawk—Observed almost daily on all visits. Spring (1981) maximum: 12 on 7 May; spring (1984) maximum: seven on 23 May. Fall (1979) maxima: 20 on 26 Sept., 20 on 30 Sept., 12 on 4 Oct. and 13 on 6 Oct.; almost all birds were adults.

Cooper's Hawk—Single birds were present 9 May 1981 and 26 May 1984.

Red-tailed Hawk—Spring (1981): single immatures on 7 and 12 May and single adults on 8, 12 and 13 May; spring (1984): observed on four days with a

total of five birds. Fall (1979): single immature 8 Oct., same adult 21 Sept. to 6 Oct. and five adults on 13 Oct.

Broad-winged Hawk—Spring (1981): eight on 12 May, one on 14 May and five on 15 May; spring (1984): regularly observed with a maximum of 12 on 26 May.

Rough-legged Hawk—Spring (1981): observed daily, maximum of 12 on 7 May; spring (1984): observed on five days with a maximum of four on 25 May. Fall (1979): first recorded 26 Sept. (one bird), regular thereafter with maxima of nine on 6 Oct. and 12 on 13 Oct.

Bald Eagle—Fall (1979): single immature 13–14 Oct.; on the 13th it attempted to leave the island via the south tip between snow squalls.

Northern Harrier—Spring (1981): individuals observed daily; maximum of three on 11 May. Spring (1984): singles recorded on 26 and 27 May only. Fall (1979): regularly observed to 6 Oct.; maximum of three per day.

Osprey—Spring (1981): one bird 10–11 May. Fall (1979): one bird on 4 Oct. and the same or another on 6 Oct. when it left the island via the south tip.

Peregrine Falcon—see separate discussion below.

Merlin—Spring (1981): observed daily; maximum of five on 7 May; spring (1984): single birds on 23 and 26 May. Fall (1979): a single bird throughout the period; two birds on 6 Oct.

American Kestrel—Spring (1981): maximum of five on 7 May. Fall (1979): observed regularly, maximum of three per day; the last individual was recorded on 13 Oct.

We do not believe the presence of raptors on Caribou Island to be a normal intentional movement of the birds involved, but rather a result of a collection of individual stray birds seeking refuge on the island. During the fall visit, for example, individual Sharp-shinned Hawks were regularly observed coming to shore low over the surrounding waters (and, in one instance, being harassed by a Peregrine Falcon). On the 1981 spring visit, several instances were noted where individual (presumably exhausted) Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks and Northern Harriers, upon nearing the shore and before reaching the safety of the island, were intercepted and harassed by numerous resident Herring Gulls. Why these birds would attempt a lake crossing is unknown, even in clear weather, but it is worth noting that most of the observed Sharp-shinned Hawks on the fall visit were adults rather than immatures, a ratio which is disproportionate to what would be normal for the mainland. It could be theorized that older birds "know" that land eventually lies ahead, whereas birds-of-the-year, having never previously made a southbound migration, would be unfamiliar with the situation and more likely to follow shorelines.

Once at Caribou Island, hawks clearly exhibited a reluctance to leave. On many days during the fall visit, birds "kettled" over the south point and flew a considerable distance south over Lake Superior, only to return several minutes later—probably

not confident in their attempt to leave. (One distinctively-marked adult Red-tailed Hawk, present for a minimum of 15 days, exhibited this behaviour several times.) This behaviour, in conjunction with the apparent lack of suitable prey on the island—we have been unable to confirm if small mammals, reptiles or amphibians (other than Blue-spotted Salamander, *Ambystoma laterale* and 'Boreal' Chorus Frog, *Pseudacris triseriata maculata*) are present—may leave several species in a precarious situation.

Staging and Feeding of Peregrine Falcons

The 1981 spring visit recorded Peregrine Falcons between 6 and 13 May, with one or two birds on several days. A total of four to six different birds was determined to have been present. In 1984, single birds were observed on 23 and 28 May.

On the fall (1979) visit, Peregrine observations were made during the short period from 22 Sept. to 5 Oct. Up to four birds were observed in a day (*i.e.,* 27 and 28 Sept.). A minimum of eight different birds was determined to have been present.

Peregrine Falcons were observed actively hunting for migrant passerines along the beach/forest interface; several distinctly marked individuals remained for several days. The presence of a relatively high density of migrant Peregrine Falcons, on so small an area as Caribou Island, indicates that this site is an important migratory and feeding area for the species (Figure 4).

Figure 4: One of many Peregrine Falcons utilizing Caribou Island as a feeding and staging area. Photo (27 September 1979) by *Alan Wormington.*

Rare and Extralimital Species

Comments below pertaining to the status of species in Thunder Bay District and northern Ontario are primarily derived from Denis (1961), Newsletters of the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club (1962 to 1986), James *et al.* (1976), Baxter (1985), and the unpublished data of one of the authors (Wormington).

Where they apply (*i.e.*, the provincial 'Review List'), our records have been accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). To illustrate the regional status of species, we include additional records known to us; these have not necessarily been reviewed by the OBRC, but we consider them to be valid and include them here for the purposes of this paper.

Barrow's Goldeneye—A single female, in association with four Red-breasted Mergansers on 15 May 1981, is the second of three records for Thunder Bay District and one of very few for northern Ontario.

Harlequin Duck—A single female-plumaged bird, on 11–12 Oct. 1979, is the fourth record for Thunder Bay District and one of only several for northern Ontario.

Marbled Godwit—A single bird was present on 30 May 1984; this species is a rare, but regular, spring migrant on Lake Superior.

Purple Sandpiper—A single bird, in association with Dunlin on 25 May 1984, is unique to Thunder Bay District and one of few spring records for all of Ontario. This bird, along with an individual 14 May 1949 at Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba (Norris-Elye 1950) and another 7 June 1980 in Door County, Wisconsin (*American Birds* 34: 897), are probably the most westerly spring records for the interior of North America.

Long-billed Dowitcher—A single bird, calling as it flew over our camp on 29 Sept. 1979, is possibly the first definite record for Thunder Bay District.

Red-headed Woodpecker—Four singles were recorded as follows: 27 Sept. 1979 (found dead below the lighthouse); 27 Sept. to 1 Oct. 1979; 30 Sept. 1979; and 24–31 May 1984. This species is a regular, uncommon to rare, spring and fall vagrant to the north shore of Lake Superior, but nesting has not been suspected.

Willow Flycatcher—A singing bird, recorded on 20 May 1981, was almost certainly an "over-shooting" spring migrant. The only other records known for northern Ontario are the following: a territorial male 30 km north of Manitouwadge, Thunder Bay District, observed by Bob Gorman and Steve O'Donnell in early June 1979; another male recorded at Neys Provincial Park, Thunder Bay District, by Steve O'Donnell from 19–26 June 1983; and a male at Rainy River, Rainy River District recorded by Michael McEvoy and Joachim W. Floegel on 31 May 1984.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow—Three birds on 12 May 1981, and one on 28 May 1984, represent birds near the northern edge of the species' range in northern Ontario.

Clark's Nutcracker—A single bird on 9 May 1981, first observed as it

approached the south tip of the island from Lake Superior, is only the second record for Ontario (see *Ontario Birds* 3:10–11 for corrections pertaining to other records published for the province).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher—A single bird, observed on 1–3 Oct. 1979, represents the first record for northern Ontario, although there have been three subsequent occurrences.

Townsend's Solitaire—A single bird, recorded on 2 Oct. 1979, represents the first record for Thunder Bay District, although the species has been recorded three times subsequently.

Northern Mockingbird—Two birds were observed daily from 23–29 May 1984; this species is a regular (rarely breeding) vagrant throughout northern Ontario.

Yellow-throated Vireo—One bird, found on 1 June 1984, was near the northern edge of its Ontario range; this individual was likely an "over-shooting" spring migrant, rather than an individual heading towards a breeding area.

Warbling Vireo—Individual birds were recorded on 8 May 1981 and 31 May 1984; like the above species, these birds were just north of the species' normal breeding range.

"Brewster's" Warbler—A single bird, observed on 20 May 1981, is the first northern Ontario record of this hybrid type.

Yellow-breasted Chat—Single birds were located on 25 Sept. 1979 and 17 May 1981; a prior record exists for Thunder Bay District (17 May 1964 in Paipoonge Twp.; observed by Howard Quackenbush) and only one other record for the remainder of northern Ontario (see *Ontario Birds* 2:62).

Indigo Bunting—On 12 Oct. 1979 one was feeding on birdseed placed near our tent; extralimital fall records of this species in northern Ontario have been shown by Wormington (1986) to invariably occur late in the season.

Dickcissel—One was observed at Caribou Light on 27 May 1984; this species is a very rare, but somewhat regular, vagrant to northern Ontario during both spring and fall migrations.

Field Sparrow—Single birds were recorded on 17 May 1981 and 24 May 1984; this species is a very rare, but regular (mostly fall), vagrant to northern Ontario.

Sharp-tailed Sparrow—One bird was located on 24 May 1984; although new to Thunder Bay District, the species was anticipated for the region due to the regular appearances of the prairie nesting subspecies *nelsoni* much farther east, including southern Ontario.

Harris' Sparrow—Observations of four on 25 Sept., three on 26 Sept. and one on 28 Sept. 1979 were thought to involve seven birds. These numbers indicate that Caribou Island lies on the extreme edge of the species' normal fall migration area; immediately east of here the species is considered very rare.

Smith's Longspur—A single female was observed on 9 May 1981 in association with Lapland Longspurs, Horned Larks and Snow Buntings. Although few migrant records exist for

northern Ontario, most are from Lake Superior (spring and fall) indicating probable regular status (Ryff, *in press*).

Eastern Meadowlark—One singing bird was recorded on 20 May 1981; although this species is clearly very rare in Thunder Bay District, its overall status in northern Ontario is not well known.

The above records indicate that vagrant birds are a definite component of the Caribou Island avifauna. In comparison to mainland areas of Lake Superior, the incidence of strays is about equal or perhaps slightly greater, although no detailed comparisons have been made. The high incidence of rare birds on Caribou Island is similar to that which has been documented for other isolated islands in North America such as Brier, Sable and Seal islands, Nova Scotia (McLaren 1981), and for the South Farallon Islands, California (DeSante and Ainley 1980). However, these islands have had a much longer history of bird observation and consequently, data on rarities are more numerous and diverse.

Lighthouse Kills

The kills of nocturnal migrants at Caribou Light occur mainly during the fall migration, when up to 500 birds per night have been recorded (Bert Hopkins, pers. comm., 1979).

During the fall visit two minor kills occurred. On the mornings of 27 Sept. (three individuals of three species) and 29 Sept. (71 individuals of 19 species) dead birds were found below the Light. The three Horned Larks and four Lapland Longspurs recorded on the latter date seemed like unusual casualties to us, since these species are usually considered diurnal migrants. Also on the 29th, a single Scarlet Tanager and a single Le Conte's Sparrow were the only records of these two species obtained during the entire fall visit. On the 1984 spring visit, 56 dead birds representing 23 species were collected on the morning of 26 May; the single Chimney Swift and Lapland Longspur were likewise unexpected (mainly diurnal) migrants.

Permanent Residents

On Caribou Island we recorded the following landbird species which are regular permanent residents on the adjacent mainland: Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Black-backed Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin and Evening Grosbeak. However, most observations of these species probably involved transients, since the numbers of birds we recorded varied considerably between visits. It is therefore difficult to speculate on what species may be permanent residents on Caribou Island until more visits are made, particularly during the winter, but also during the breeding season.

Species that were *not* found on Caribou Island were particularly interesting. Despite extensive, suitable habitat, we did not record Spruce Grouse, Ruffed Grouse, Gray Jay or Boreal Chickadee on any visit. These year-round

residents of the adjacent mainland have clearly been unable to become established on Caribou Island.

Total Species

The three visits to Caribou Island recorded a cumulative total of 192 species. The fall (1979) visit revealed the presence of 133 species (131 observed plus the two lighthouse-killed additions); the 1981 spring visit 137 species (134 observed plus the remains of Short-eared, Long-eared and Snowy Owls); and the 1984 spring visit 126 species.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere appreciation goes to the Ellis family of New London, New Hampshire, for granting us permission to visit the island to conduct our studies.

Transportation to the island for the fall visit was made possible only through the generosity of the following individuals and agencies: Dan and Jim McDonald of Ferclad Fisheries (Mamainse Harbour) and the Canadian Coast Guard (Parry Sound). The spring 1981 expedition was assisted by funds from the Burlington and Ottawa offices of the Canadian Wildlife Service.

While on Caribou Island, lighthouse custodians Bert and Pearl Hopkins made our visits all the more enjoyable and comfortable by graciously assisting us in a great many ways.

Dr. N.G. Escott thoroughly reviewed a draft of the manuscript; his comments and suggestions added considerably toward the finalization of our paper.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Roys A. Ellis, Jr., retired senior pilot for American Airlines, and the one who probably loved and enjoyed Caribou Island more than anybody.

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Thunder Bay's Nesting Merlins

by

N.G. Escott

In Ontario, the nominate subspecies of the Merlin (*Falco c. columbarius*) breeds throughout the Boreal and Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest Regions, although actual documented nesting records are scarce (Peck and James 1983; Oliphant 1985). This species occasionally selects old American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) or Common Raven (*C. corax*) nests near the tops of spruce (*Picea* spp.) and pine (*Pinus* spp.) trees, usually near water (Johnson 1982).

While generally considered to be an uncommon inhabitant of the boreal forest, and associated with uninhabited wilderness areas, the Merlin is both common, and urbanized, in the city of Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay District, Ontario.

Merlins have nested in Thunder Bay (known as the twin cities of Fort William and Port Arthur prior to 1970) for at least four decades. In an address to the Minnesota Ornithological Union in Duluth on 21 May 1949, Fort William's Dr. A.E. Allin (1949) stated: "Pigeon Hawks [Merlins] are often common—one year we located 4 pair; another year a pair occupied a crow's nest in a City park and 4 eggs were laid. In 1944 they were probably again nearby for I could imitate a mouse on a late summer afternoon and bring them to my bedroom window. . . ." Dr. Allin also found a nest in 1962 and parents with young in 1963 and 1964, all in Fort William (*Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Newsletter*, Vols. 16-18;1962-64).

The Merlins that nested in the city occasionally overwintered also. Prior to 1960, single Merlins were recorded on the Christmas Bird Counts of 1942, 1955, and 1959. Since 1960, at least one Merlin has been seen on the Count or during the count period every year except four, and two were counted in 1965, 1973, 1978, and 1985 (*TBFN Newsletter* and *American Birds*, various years).

Nesting Merlins are most easily found in April and May during their noisy courtship, and in July when the young fledge and stay

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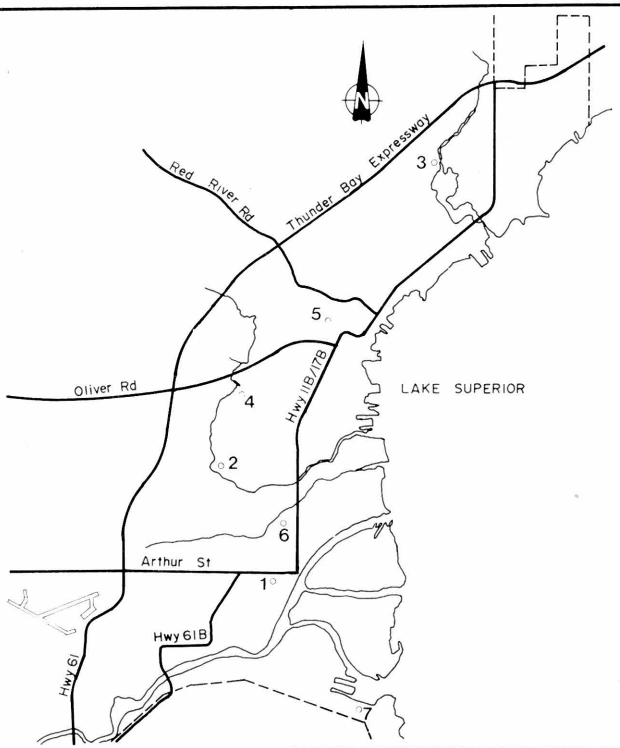

Figure 1: Merlin nesting sites in the city of Thunder Bay, Ontario, in 1986. See text for description of locations.

close to the nest in a noisy family group. In July 1986 we made a brief survey of known and suspected Merlin nesting sites within urban Thunder Bay (that part of the city between Lake Superior and Highway 11/17), and found four definite and three possible nesting territories (Figure 1). These known or suspected breeding locations are discussed below:

1. Vickers Park area. This pair nested at the top of a blue spruce (*Picea pungens*) in a backyard (Figure 2); four fledged young appeared in mid-July. They initially perched on neighbouring houses, but soon moved two blocks to the six-storey high McKellar Hospital, where they would sit on rooftop antennas calling to each other and taking test flights. Three birds were seen on the 27 July survey, two of them on the hospital roof, the third on the nest tree.

2. Confederation College. Courting Merlins were heard in April in front of the College's main entrance, and on 27 July a family group of five birds was present at this same location, huddled together in the rain on branches of a dead birch tree. These birds were remarkably tame, having grown up with students walking below them every day (Figures 3 and 4).

3. Boulevard Lake. A pair of Merlins was seen courting on the south side of the lake on 9 April,

Figure 2: Nest tree of the Vickers Park pair. The Merlins nested near the top of the taller of the two spruce trees in this urban backyard. Photo by *Bill Climie.*

and on 28 July a family group of four was found at the west end of the lake, perched on dead snags and the tops of spruce trees.

4. Lakehead University. Merlins were seen here regularly during the summer of 1986, sometimes carrying food. On our survey, a single bird was seen on 29 July, on the roof of an adjacent apartment building.

5. Mariday Park. Merlins were known to nest in this residential area in 1984 and 1985. Although Merlins were heard calling in mid-July, we did not see any birds here on our late July survey. Two birds, however, were observed here on a spruce tree on 1 August.

6. Dease Park. Merlins nested at this location in 1985. On 27 July we found one Merlin perched on a telephone wire one block from the park.

7. Abitibi Mill. A pair of Merlins was seen in the vicinity of this paper mill on 7 May, and single birds were subsequently observed at this locality on numerous occasions. Although this site was not included in our late July survey, we visited the area on 3 and 4 August and found one immature Merlin on each occasion.

Thunder Bay is not the only North American city in which nesting Merlins have become established. They have been studied extensively in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan since the discovery of the first nest in 1963 (Houston 1981). Since then, their numbers have been steadily increasing, with 16 nesting pairs recorded by 1982 (Oliphant and Haug 1985). Edmonton, Alberta has also supported a breeding population

of Merlins since the 1960s; a 1978 census revealed the presence of 8 pairs (Smith 1978). Both of these populations involve the prairie race of the Merlin (*F. c. richardsonii*). The majority of Merlin breeding records in North America refer to this subspecies (Oliphant 1985).

Why Merlins have been so successful in breeding in the urban environment of Thunder Bay is not fully known, but is likely due, in large part, to prey availability. In Saskatoon, Oliphant and Haug (1985) found that Merlins fed extensively on House Sparows (*Passer domesticus*), a situation which apparently also prevails in Thunder Bay.

The taiga (boreal forest) Merlin, nominate *columbarius*, also nests in the vicinity of smaller towns and settlements in northwestern Ontario, such as Atikokan, Rainy River District (Elder, pers. comm., 1986), Marathon, Thunder Bay District (Escott 1977), and, for the first time in 1986, Silver Islet, Thunder Bay District. In these areas, the population density appears to be lower than in Thunder Bay, and more typical of the densities found in the traditional breeding areas of uninhabited boreal forest.

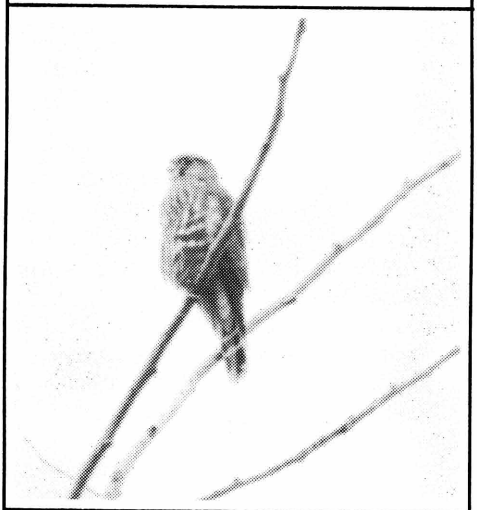

Figure 3: Juvenile Merlin, Confederation College, 3 August 1986. Photo by *Derek Parkinson.*

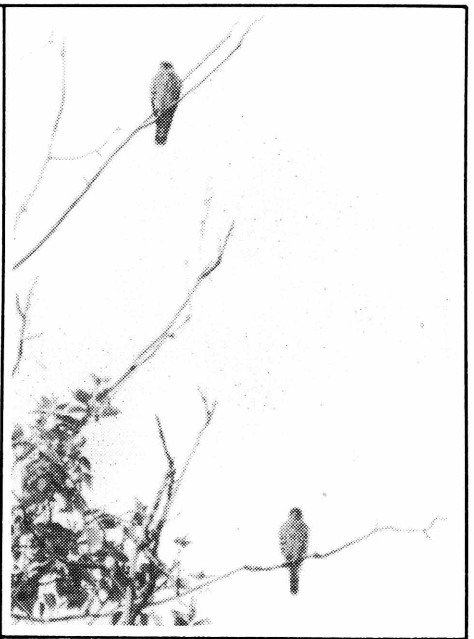

Figure 4: Two juvenile Merlins, Confederation College, 3 August 1986. Photo by *Derek Parkinson.*

In summary, this paper summarizes the history of the Merlin in Thunder Bay, and provides an initial count of breeding pairs which can be used for future comparison. The "citification" of the Merlin in Thunder Bay parallels, and may actually have antedated, a similar phenomenon that has been well documented in Saskatoon and Edmonton.

Acknowledgements
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Are Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos Always Interspecifically Territorial?

by

Ross D. James and Mark K. Peck

After an extensive study of Philadelphia Vireos *(Vireo philadelphicus)* and Red-eyed Vireos *(V. olivaceus)* near Englehart, in Timiskaming District, Ontario, Rice (1978c) presented evidence that the two species used essentially identical habitat and would even occupy the same territorial area in successive years. But, he also provided clear evidence that the two species maintained mutually exclusive territories in any particular year (Rice 1978a). Experimental and observational findings indicated that neither species was at a disadvantage in territorial disputes, so that despite size differences, each could exist adjacent to the other without overlapping territories. However, we made casual

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observations during the summer of 1986 that suggested to us that interspecific territoriality is not always achieved or necessary.

Our observations were made 15 to 25 km south of Gogama in Sudbury District, only slightly south of the latitude of Englehart, but where Red-eyed Vireos were much more numerous than Philadelphia Vireos. In the first instance we heard a Philadelphia Vireo singing near our cook tent in an aspen grove, and on 25 May noted a pair building a nest. The birds gathered nest material right beside our tent and could be heard morning and evening as we were preparing and eating meals. The birds were incubating in early June, and after that time we scarcely ever heard the male sing. The nest was about 18 m high in the crown of an aspen. When the Philadelphia Vireos were incubating, however, we regularly heard Red-eyed Vireos singing in the same aspen grove, well below the Philadelphia Vireo nest. There was only one pair of Philadelphia Vireos detected in this location, but several pairs of Red-eyed Vireos were present.

In the second instance, on 10 June, after completing a transect census, RDJ returned to an aspen grove about 14 km east of our camp to verify the identity of the vireos heard singing on the count. Two Philadelphia Vireos were detected among much more numerous Red-eyed Vireos. For about 10 minutes I followed a bird that was singing continually, high in the aspens, trying to get a look at the bird to confirm that it was a Philadelphia Vireo. As I stood watching and waiting, I noticed a female Red-eyed Vireo fly in with nest material and place it on the beginnings of a nest only about 3 m above the ground and almost directly below the singing bird. I thought immediately that I must have been wrong in my identification by song and that the bird singing above me was a Red-eyed Vireo. But within a few moments a male Red-eyed Vireo flew silently to the nest as the female left. When I eventually saw the bird singing above this nest it was indeed a Philadelphia Vireo. Why then, in either instance, if these two species maintain mutually exclusive territories as found by Rice (1978a), did one of the birds not chase the other from its territory?

In the first instance, although the Philadelphia Vireo may not have responded as strongly to the Red-eyed Vireo during incubation as at other times (Rice 1978b), and the Red-eyed Vireo likewise might not have responded strongly to what seemed to us to be an unusually quiet Philadelphia Vireo, there still appeared to be simultaneous occupation of at least part of the same territory by the two species.

In the second instance, although Red-eyed Vireos are supposed to respond strongly to Philadelphia Vireo song (Rice 1978a,b), the Red-eyed Vireo made no move to chase the apparent intruder from its territory complete with nest.

Although the observations were casual, the situation with Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos in the

Gogama area seemed similar to the vertical separation of vireos noted elsewhere, rather than one of interspecific territoriality. Yellow-throated Vireos *(V. flavifrons)* may occupy the upper parts of forests above Red-eyed Vireos (Hamilton 1962; Williamson 1971; James 1979); Red-eyed Vireos have been noted above White-eyed Vireos *(V. griseus)* (Hoiberg 1954) or Bell's Vireos *(V. bellii)* (Hamilton 1962); Warbling Vireos *(V. gilvus)* may be above Hutton's Vireos *(V. huttoni)* or Solitary Vireos *(V. solitarius)* (Hamilton 1962). There are no obvious habitat differences between the Gogama and Englehart study sites; both had groves of tall aspen (and birch) with an understory of shrubs. If anything, the Englehart site has older and taller aspens than at Gogama.

Does the interspecific territorial response of these species break down where one species is much more numerous than the other? If Red-eyed Vireos are continually concerned with intraspecific competition and the very few Philadelphia Vireos present are largely confined to a stratum of the forest above the Red-eyed Vireos, is there much reason for either species to engage in costly interspecific territorial disputes? At what population densities or in what circumstances are these two species induced to invoke interspecific territoriality? Clearly additional fieldwork is necessary to understand the relationships of these broadly sympatric species.

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Fall Vagrancy of the Indigo Bunting in Northern Ontario

by
Alan Wormington

As a nesting species, the Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) is found throughout southern Ontario, ranging north in northern Ontario to approximately Smooth Rock Falls (Cochrane District), Kenora (Kenora District) and Thunder Bay (Thunder Bay District). Although the Indigo Bunting is a widespread and common nesting species in the south, in northern Ontario it is absent from large areas between the above listed sites (Figure 1), and is very uncommon and local even within much of the specified range. As a fall migrant in southern Ontario, the species is a well-known early migrant, with the majority of birds having departed by late September (see Beardslee and Mitchell 1965:416-417; Sprague and Weir 1984:124). In northern Ontario, most breeding birds probably depart before early September, but actual observations have rarely, if ever, been reported.

As a result of numerous fall field trips to northern Ontario by the author and others, a number of Indigo Bunting observations have been obtained that represent birds that were at, or well beyond, the known breeding range of the species, and were observed on dates which are very late for the species. In this paper, these records are presented along with additional records, principally obtained from other observers who live in northern Ontario. Probable origin and a discussion of these records is also given.

The Records

A total of 20 records involving 20 birds have been assembled which pertain to late fall occurrences of Indigo Buntings in northern Ontario (Table 1). Of seven birds that could be aged and/or sexed, four were immatures, two were immature females and one was an adult male. Birds observed in the field were considered immatures if they showed fairly obvious, buffy wingbars and/or diffused streaking below, while the bird identified as an adult male (in winter plumage) lacked wing bars and streaking below, but showed obvious blue tones on the rump and flight feathers.

The 20 birds were found on dates ranging from 20 September to 24 November, with 19 of these birds first recorded between 20 September and 1 November. It should be noted that for the three birds that stayed after 1 November, and for the single bird first recorded on 11 November, all were at bird feeders and, as such, had probably been artificially induced to linger.

Alan Wormington, R.R. #1, Leamington, Ontario N8H 3V4

Figure 1: Distribution of the 20 late fall occurrences of Indigo Bunting in northern Ontario. The broken line represents the approximate northern limit of the species' breeding range (after Denis 1961; James *et al.* 1976:50; Godfrey 1986:502; and unpublished data).

The 20 birds were found in a variety of locations, but almost all were associated with human-influenced habitats or situations. These include birds found in small towns at weedy or disturbed sites (eight birds), at bird feeders in small towns (seven birds), and on gravel-based campsites in provincial parks (two birds). Only the three remaining individuals were found at totally natural sites (*i.e.*, two on shorelines and one on a small island).

Possible Origin of the Birds

There are several potential sources for the vagrant Indigo Buntings seen in northern Ontario. These are: (1) the birds were "over-shooting" spring migrants and simply remained until discovered, (2) the birds nested at the sites where they were found, (3) the birds' appearances were the result of post-breeding dispersal/wanderings, or (4) the birds were reverse fall migrants and arrived shortly before they were discovered.

Over-shooting spring migrants—This theory can quickly be ruled out as several of the birds recorded were immatures (young-of-the-year). Also, spring records far north of the breeding range (excluding the numerous records for Lake Superior) are possibly limited to the observation of a male bird on 6

May 1986 at Moosonee, Cochrane District (*American Birds* 40:466).
Nesting birds—This theory is unlikely, as most of the vagrants recorded were at, or beyond, the known breeding range. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that singing, territorial birds would be overlooked while, at the same location, silent, fall birds would be found.
Post-breeding dispersal—This theory is more difficult to dismiss and is a possible source of the birds. However, the apparent total lack of Indigo Bunting observations anywhere in northern Ontario between late August (breeding birds within their known range) and the first fall vagrants (late September, this study) are factors which clearly argue against this viewpoint.
Reverse fall migration—It is felt that this is the most probable source of the late fall Indigo Buntings in northern Ontario, namely that the birds are disoriented reverse migrants and arrived from the south shortly before they were discovered.

Analysis and Discussion

In comparing the northern Ontario observations to other areas of the continent, fall observations of vagrant landbirds at three Nova Scotia islands (McLaren 1981)

Table 1: Late fall occurrences of Indigo Bunting in northern Ontario.

Date	Location	#, Age & Sex	Observer(s)
20–21 Sept. 1961	Dorion, Thunder Bay Dist.	one — —	Rita Taylor
26 Sept. 1986	Red Rock, Thunder Bay Dist.	one imm. —	Wormington, William Lamond
1 Oct. 1976	Moose Factory, Cochrane Dist.	one — —	Mark W. Jennings
6 Oct. 1984	Moose Factory, Cochrane Dist.	one imm. —	Mark W. Jennings
7 Oct. 1980	Marathon, Thunder Bay Dist.	one — —	Nicholas G. Escott
11 Oct. 1980	Neys Prov. Park, Thunder Bay Dist.	one imm. —	Wormington
12 Oct. 1979	Caribou Island, Thunder Bay Dist.	one — —	Wormington, Robert G. Finlayson
12 Oct. 1985	East Point, Cochrane Dist.	one — —	R.D. McRae
13 Oct. 1976	Marathon, Thunder Bay Dist.	one — —	Nicholas G. Escott
13 Oct. 1982	Moosonee, Cochrane Dist.	one imm. —	R.D. McRae
13–16 Oct. 1986	Terrace Bay, Thunder Bay Dist.	one — —	Wormington *et al.*
15 Oct. 1973	Winisk, Kenora Dist.	one imm. ♀	Michael Hunter, Sr.; ROM #126213
18 Oct. 1982	Rossport, Thunder Bay Dist.	two — —[1]	Wormington, Mark W. Jennings
19 Oct. 1984	Marie Louise Lake, Thunder Bay Dist.	one adult ♂	Wormington
23 Oct. 1979	Marathon, Thunder Bay Dist.	one — —	Wormington
25 Oct.–3 Nov. 1959[2]	Dorion, Thunder Bay Dist.	one imm. ♀	Rita Taylor
1–6 Nov. 1979	Atikokan, Rainy River Dist.	one — —	David H. Elder, Wormington
28 Oct.–24 Nov. 1978	Marathon, Thunder Bay Dist. (two birds present 11–14 Nov.)	one — —	Nicholas G. Escott

[1] considered as two separate records since birds were not together and likely arrived independantly of each other.
[2] bird captured on last date, successfully kept indoors over the winter and released the following May.

provide excellent comparative data. When discussing the pattern of 'southern species in fall', McLaren lists Indigo Bunting as the fourth commonest fall vagrant to Brier, Sable and Seal islands (with a total of 102 records), after Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) (119 records), Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) (139 records) and Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) (164 records). Through 1984, fall records of vagrant Indigo Buntings on these same three islands (I. McLaren, pers. comm., 1985) now total 177 birds. Remarkably—and very closely paralleling the northern Ontario occurrences—fully 175 of the 177 birds occurred from 21 September to 27 October inclusive, with but one bird recorded before these dates (14 August) and only one after (November 13), both from Sable Island. (Interestingly enough, a bird recorded at St. John's, Newfoundland, on 21–22 October 1982 (Bruce D. Mactavish, pers. comm., 1982), also fits neatly into this pattern of fall vagrancy.)

Looking at where in northern Ontario the records occurred (see Figure 1), it is probably more than coincidence that most of the birds found were in areas known to concentrate migrants (*e.g.,* shoreline areas of Lake Superior and James Bay), indicating that migration by the birds had recently taken place. Furthermore, as shown, the majority of birds occurred in areas influenced by humans. At the time of year when these birds occur, vast areas of northern Ontario are generally not favourable to Indigo Buntings in terms of providing preferred food and cover. However, sites such as weedy, overgrown sections of small towns, for example, located in otherwise extensive tracts of boreal forest, would attract and induce these birds to remain.

The above suggestion can be supported by comparing Indigo Bunting data for Thunder Bay with those from elsewhere on Lake Superior. There are no known late fall occurrences for the area immediately surrounding Thunder Bay (N.G. Escott, pers. comm., 1986), even though the species is an uncommon nester here and there is a long history of bird observation from this locality. In contrast, the shoreline east of Thunder Bay does not support breeding birds, but the records of late fall vagrants are numerous. There is no reason why late fall vagrants would not occur at Thunder Bay, but since the city is large and urbanized, with extensive areas of farms and farming communities surrounding the city, birds would certainly be difficult (and not likely) to be discovered. Lake Superior's north shore to the east of Thunder Bay consists of extensive wilderness tracts with only scattered small towns or tiny pockets of disturbed areas, thereby providing the ideal situation for finding vagrant Indigo Buntings.

The fall occurrence in northern Ontario of birds originating from southern or southwestern areas (and late in the season) is not unique to the Indigo Bunting. The pattern is also known for a number of other species; examples include the many records of Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) and

Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*) (unpublished data), the less frequent occurrences of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*), Dickcissel, Field Sparrow and Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) (see various annual reports of the Ontario Bird Records Committee, 1982 to 1985 inclusive), and the unique records of Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*) (Freeman 1969; Dick and James 1969), Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*) (*American Birds* 32:199), White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) (Wormington, *in press*), Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) (McRae and Hutchison 1983), Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*) (*Ontario Birds* 2:62), Cassin's Sparrow (*Aimophila cassinii*) (*Ontario Birds* 1:13) and Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) (Wormington and Lamond, *in press*). All of the above examples pertain to records of birds which occurred in the short time period from late September to late October.

Summary

The Indigo Bunting is a regular, fall vagrant to northern Ontario (almost certainly as a disoriented reverse migrant), with all 20 known records occurring late in the season. Fall vagrancy north of the breeding range throughout eastern North America is probably widespread, as indicated by the records presented here for northern Ontario and also by the abundant records for Nova Scotia.

The Indigo Bunting is one of many southern or southwestern species known to regularly occur as a vagrant in northern Ontario during fall migration, and in comparison to these other species is one of the most frequent.

Acknowledgements

My appreciation goes to Rita Taylor, Mark Jennings, Nick Escott and R.D. McRae for providing me with their Indigo Bunting observations, and to Ian McLaren for providing Indigo Bunting data for Nova Scotia.

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A Phenology of Ring-billed Gull Activities in Thunder Bay District

by

Vicky H. Johnston

The Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) is a rather common bird in Thunder Bay District, although it occurs in far fewer numbers here than in southern Ontario. Ring-bills have a limited breeding distribution in north-western Ontario. To date, colonies have been located in Lake-of-the-Woods (two colonies containing 6,000 and 100 pairs; B. Termaat, pers. comm.) and along the north shore of Lake Superior (100 pairs on Gravel Island and 5,000 pairs on Granite Island; pers. obs.) There are few documented nesting areas away from these two water bodies (Blokpoel and Tessier 1986).

This paper presents a chronology of Ring-billed Gull activity in and around the Thunder Bay District. Comparisons are made with the phenology of Ring-bills inhabiting the southern regions of the province.

In 1986, Ring-billed Gulls were first sighted in Thunder Bay on 30 March. By 20 April, they were scattered along the north shore of Lake Superior between Thunder Bay and Nipigon. The majority of the population, however, was clumped around the City of Thunder Bay. By the middle of April, courtship behaviour and aggressive displays became apparent. The first attempt at copulation was observed on 22 April.

By the last week of April, large numbers of adults had moved to the breeding colonies. At this time they usually pause at the mouths of rivers running into Lake

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Superior to feed on smelt (*Osmerus mordax*). Movement of Ring-billed Gulls to the colonies is largely dependent on time of ice breakup on the lake and timing of the annual smelt run. Smelt forms a large part of the pre-breeding diet of Lake Superior Ring-bills (Meathrel 1986). Granite Island is the most important colony along the north shore of the lake and research on Ring-bills has been conducted there by the Department of Biology at Lakehead University for the past 15 years. The following breeding chronology comes from personal observations made on Granite Island.

The first clutches are initiated in the first week of May, with the peak of egg-laying occurring in the second week. Severe weather during this period may result in considerable re-nesting during the last half of the month (this probably occurred in May 1986). The number of nests initiated per day declines sharply after the peak nesting period. The egg-laying period is usually completed by late June.

Eggs begin to hatch on Granite Island in the first week of June. Initially, parents feed smelt to the offspring. Insects and grains form the bulk of regurgitate samples as the season progresses. By 1 July, most eggs are hatched and the majority of chicks are near fledging. Adults and juveniles arrive in the City of Thunder Bay in the latter part of July. There does not appear to be a large number of non-breeding adults on the colony or in the city during the breeding season.

Ring-billed Gulls in Thunder Bay begin to moult in the early part of July and are commonly seen in winter plumage by the end of August. Migration from the area is leisurely; although Ring-bill numbers are greatly reduced by October, there was still a small core of birds in the city at the time of writing (3 November 1986). No gulls were located outside of the city at this time. Ring-bills from northern Ontario appear to gather on the shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario before migrating to the eastern seaboard of the United States (J. Ryder, pers. comm.).

There are several interesting comparisons to be made between northern and southern Ontario populations of Ring-billed Gulls. First is the nature of the actual colony sites. Breeding colonies in Lake Superior and Lake-of-the-Woods are relatively pristine, undisturbed habitats (with the exception of slight disturbance caused by two researchers each year at the Granite Island colony). Human activity does not have much influence in these areas. Southern Ontario colonies, on the other hand, are often located near large industrial complexes or other sites of human activity (H. Blokpoel, pers. comm.). It is not clear if these habitat differences produce behavioural differences between gulls from northern and southern colonies.

The breeding timetables of northern and southern Ring-billed Gulls also differ. In general, each phase of the reproductive season (arrival at colony, egg-laying, hatching, fledging) occurs approximately two weeks earlier on Lakes Erie and Ontario than on Lake

Table 1: Date of arrival at breeding colony, clutch initiation, fledging and fall migration for Ring-billed Gulls of Lake Erie/Ontario and Superior

Gull population	Arrival at colony	First date of clutch initiation	Peak of clutch initiation	Peak of fledging	Fall migration	Source
Lakes Erie/ Ontario	mid-February to early March	April 9 April 22	last week of April first week of May	last week of June	October to December	Chardine and Morris (1983); Blokpoel and Tessier (1986)
Lake Superior	mid to late April	May 4 (1986) May 8 (1985)	second to third week of May	first to second week of July	September to October	L. Hauta (pers. comm.) and personal observations

Superior (Table 1). Migration from the Thunder Bay area begins at least one month earlier than in southern Ontario (Table 1). In fact, some southern Ontario Ring-bills forego migration completely (Blokpoel and Tessier 1986).

Post-breeding foraging behaviour differs markedly between northern and southern Ring-bill populations. Insects, grains, earthworms and small fish are the mainstay of post-breeding Lake Superior gulls (Ryder, pers. comm.). Although there is a large dump situated just outside the city limits, Ring-bills rarely frequent it (pers. obs.). By contrast, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario gulls are frequently seen feeding at garbage dumps and other urban food sources (Blokpoel and Tessier 1986).

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to John Chardine for providing data from Gull Island, Lake Ontario, and to Lynn Hauta and John Ryder for Lake Superior data and editorial advice.

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Notes

Little Gull Nesting on the James Bay Lowlands, Ontario

While working on the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Project in 1984, Peter Burke and I had the opportunity to participate in a low-level aerial waterfowl survey in the vicinity of Attawapiskat, Kenora District, Ontario. A Jet Ranger helicopter flew us, along with Ken Abraham of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, along a route from Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories, in James Bay to Moosonee, Cochrane District.

On 15 July 1984, while flying at an altitude of about 50 m, we spotted a group of eight adult Little Gulls (*Larus minutus*) flying low over a small pond, southeast of the Big Willow River, south of Attawapiskat. The pond, which measured approximately 10 m by 25 m, was surrounded generally by dwarf willows (*Salix* spp.) and fairly dense sedges (*Carex* spp.). In the center of the pond, a small "island" was evident, whose main features included sedge cover over two-thirds of its area, and a broad unvegetated mudflat on the remaining part.

Six of the Little Gulls immediately left the area upon our approach. The remaining two adults became very alarmed as we descended. They continually flew tight circles directly below the helicopter, until we were about 20 m above the ground, at which point they retired to an adjacent pond.

During the period of observation (2 minutes), we noted a small nest platform directly below the circling birds. The nest was poorly constructed and consisted of broken sedges, presumably of the same species growing nearby, laid flat on the mud immediately adjacent to the vegetated part of the island. A shallow cup was evident, which had presumably been formed by the body of the incubating adult(s). One unhatched egg and two live young were clearly visible in the nest.

In order not to disturb the birds unduly, we briefly inspected the nest through binoculars, while the helicopter hovered above it.

The egg was generally olive coloured with extensive dark blotching evident overall. The young were quite dark on the back with some lighter colouring, enhancing their cryptic appearance. They appeared to be very young, perhaps only one or two days old, as they were covered in what was assumed to be soft down, and were only slightly larger than the egg. The parents quickly returned to the immediate area of the nest upon our departure, but were not seen to land.

This sighting represents the first known nesting of Little Gulls in northern Ontario. The species first nested in Ontario in 1962 near Oshawa, Durham R.M. (Scott 1963), an occurrence which also

represented the first breeding record for North America. Since then, Little Gulls have been reported nesting in several additional widely scattered southern Ontario localities: Rondeau Provincial Park, Kent County (Kelley 1978), Bassett Island, Lambton County (Godfrey 1986), Cranberry Marsh, Durham R.M. (Tozer and Richards 1974), and North Limestone Island, Parry Sound District (Mills 1981). Elsewhere in Canada the species has nested at Churchill, Manitoba and LaSalle, Quebec (Godfrey 1986).

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A. Geoffrey Carpentier, 964 Weller St., Peterborough, Ontario K9J 4Y2

Little Gull (*left*) and Bonaparte's Gull, Churchill, Manitoba, June 1983. Photo by *R.D. McRae.*

A Melanistic Broad-winged Hawk at Thunder Bay, Ontario

On 7 May 1985, while driving down Highway 61 about 5 km south of Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay District, at about 2000 h, I passed an extremely dark buteo sitting on the top of a 7 m sapling a short distance from the road in an old field that had grown up in aspen (*Populus* sp.) and spruce (*Picea* sp.). The bird was anxiously looking downward in all directions and was obviously hunting. It was the size of a Broad-winged Hawk *(Buteo platypterus).*

I stopped and carefully studied the bird with 7 × 35 binoculars and, later (when it flew to another tree), a 30X spotting scope. The light was excellent since the sun was behind me. The hawk's wings and back were a uniform brown, the neck and head were greyish-brown, and the entire ventral surface from throat to undertail coverts was a dark chocolate-brown. The tail had a narrow white terminal band, above which wide black-and-white bands were visible as the bird perched. The legs were feathered in dark brown to the tarsi, and the feet were yellow. The strongly decurved bill was bluish with a black tip, and the cere was yellow.

When the hawk flew to the other tree, the black-and-white banded tail and the alternate flapping and gliding on stiff horizontal wings were typical of the Broad-winged Hawk. After several minutes on this new perch, the raptor flew again, this time back toward me, across the highway, and disappeared behind the trees on the west side of the road. The undersurface of the wings was paler than the body, but not conspicuously white like a typical bird.

The bird was not seen again, and was presumably a migrant. Although the Broad-winged Hawk is a common breeding species in this area, I had not seen a melanistic individual before, and to my knowledge this is the first record of this phase in Thunder Bay District.

The melanistic Broad-winged Hawk is rarely encountered anywhere; like the dark phase of other raptors, it is believed to occur in the western part of the species' range, which in this case is central Saskatchewan and Alberta. It has never been seen at Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania.

The dark phase of the Broad-winged Hawk was first described by Robert Ridgeway in 1886 (Bailey 1917). Bailey (1917) proposed that it be considered a new subspecies, the Iowa Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo p. iowensis*), a designation which has since been dropped.

At least four specimens of melanistic Broad-winged Hawks exist from Iowa (Burns 1911; Bailey 1917), two from Manitoba (Burns 1911), one from Alberta (Evans, pers. comm.), and one from Missouri (Amadon, pers. comm.). An adult bird was banded in Minnesota in the spring of 1971 (Evans, pers. comm.). There have been, in addition, at least two sight records from Minnesota (Evans,

pers. comm.), two from Iowa (Bailey 1917), one from Illinois (Kleen 1972), one from Colorado (Kingery 1985), three from California (Roberson 1980), four from southern Florida (Robertson 1967; Evans, pers. comm.), and one from Ontario (Wormington, pers. comm.). In California, where the Broad-winged Hawk is scarce in any season, an unusually large proportion are of the dark phase, which supports the theory that melanism is a western trait (Wormington, pers. comm.).

The previous Ontario sighting occurred at Grimsby, Niagara R.M.; David Copeland, Eric Single and Walter Klabunde saw a melanistic bird in a flight of 585 Broad-winged Hawks on 30 April 1978 (Wormington, pers. comm.).

All of the records for which exact dates are available have involved spring and fall migrants, except one of the Florida birds, which was present all winter. One of the Iowa specimens was taken on 30 October 1893, a very late date.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Molly Evans of Duluth, Minnesota, Dr. Stuart Houston of Saskatoon, and Dean Amadon of New York for information on previous records, and to Alan Wormington for comments on the manuscript, as well as background information.

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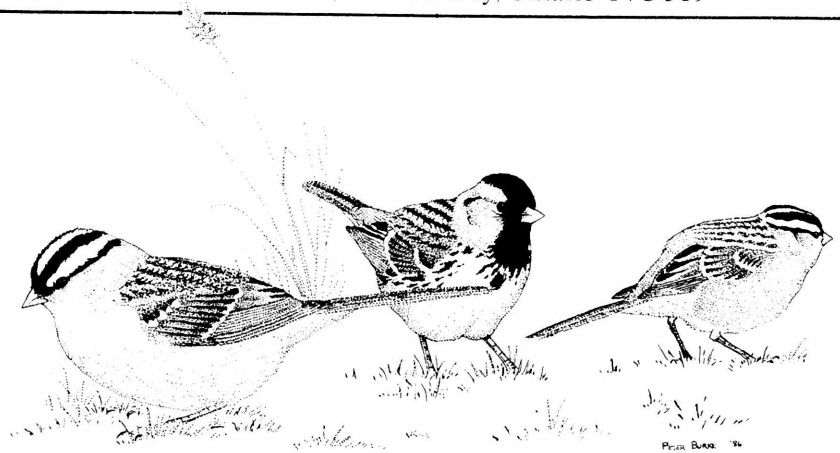

Harris' and White-crowned Sparrows / drawing by *Peter Burke.*

An Unusual Black-billed Magpie Nest Location

While birding north of Rainy River, Rainy River District, on 3 May 1986, with Mary Elder and Nancy Bray, I noticed a Black-billed Magpie *(Pica pica)* in a grove of trees beside River Road, opposite a large microwave tower. A pair of Black-billed Magpies was present in the same area during most of the spring and summer of 1985.

We stopped the car to watch the magpie when a second magpie flew out of an open hay barn in a field beside the road. We walked to the hay barn and NB noticed a collection of sticks under the eave on the east side of the barn, about 5 m from the ground. The pair of magpies remained in the grove of trees and scolded us occasionally. We assumed that the birds had built their nest in the hay barn, an unusual site. Alan Wormington visited the site on 19 May, noted the presence of the magpies and photographed the barn and the nest (Figures 1 and 2).

Black-billed Magpies typically build large oval-shaped nests of

Figure 1: Site of Black-billed Magpie nest, Rainy River, 19 May 1986. Photo by *Alan Wormington.*

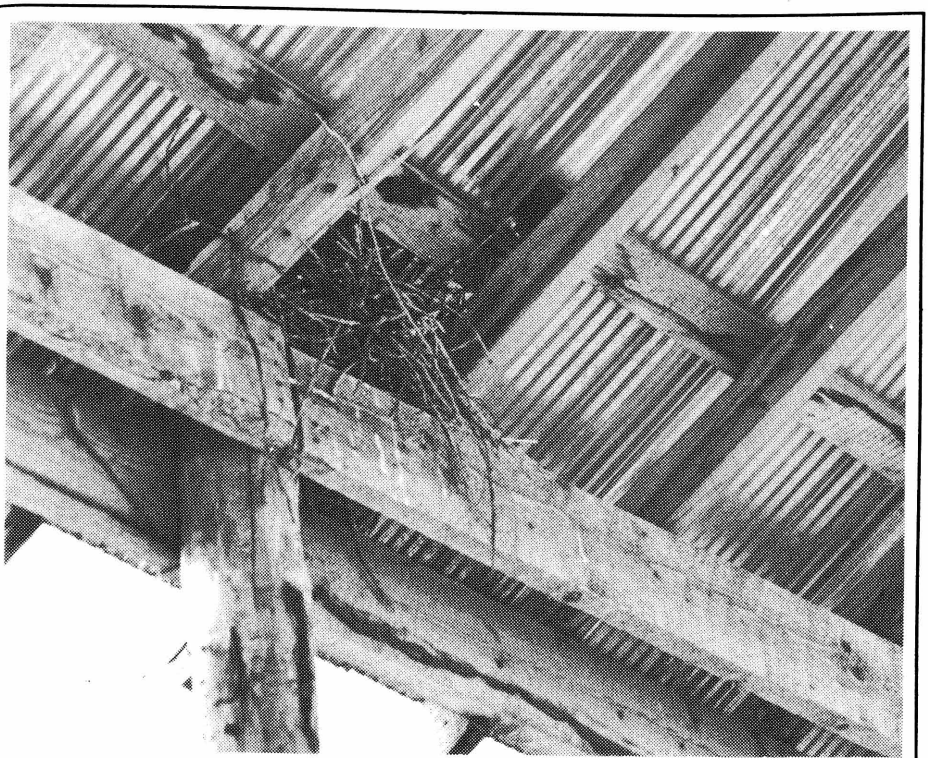

Figure 2: Magpie nest, Rainy River, 19 May 1986. Photo by *Alan Wormington*.

sticks in trees and tall bushes. In the Rainy River area, nests are usually placed in thick clumps of willow (*Salix* spp.). Speirs (1985) notes that the first breeding record for Ontario was obtained on 4 May 1980 by J. Lamey near Rainy River. A review of the literature revealed only one reference to Black-billed Magpies nesting in a site other than a tree. Bent (1946) cites a record of a nest built in a railway trestle.

Acknowledgements

Alan Wormington kindly provided photographs and confirmed the use of the hay barn as a nest site for Black-billed Magpies.

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Solitary Sandpiper Breeding Records in Northwestern Ontario

In their opus on the breeding birds of Ontario, Peck and James (1983) cite only one Solitary Sandpiper *(Tringa solitaria)* nesting record, from Sutton Lake, Kenora District. This paper presents breeding data we obtained during a parasitological study of the Solitary Sandpiper in northwestern Ontario during June 1980.

In search of Solitary Sandpipers, we drove roads north of the Trans-Canada Highway accessible to our non-four wheel drive vehicle. Where possible, birds that were sighted were shot and, within six hours, examined for internal parasites. Notes on reproductive condition were also included on most specimen labels. Specimens were prepared and donated to the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Ottawa.

Ten Solitary Sandpipers were collected, all in northwestern Ontario in the Boreal Forest Region as defined by Rowe (1972). Most birds were found in widely scattered localities north of Savant Lake, Thunder Bay District, and were paired and feeding in borrow pits along roadsides. None was found along lakeshores. Of the ten, five were breeding females (Table 1). The remaining males could not be positively identified as breeders by gonad measurements but might be assumed to be so because of the condition of the females. A male and female collected on 4 June acted as though they were a mated pair. Curiously, two males collected 20 km north of Savant Lake also flew and fed together. Our findings provide some data to substantiate Peck and James' (1983) assertion that "although there are very few records of breeding, the species probably nests in wetland . . . throughout the forested regions of northern Ontario . . ."

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to Steven G. Curtis of the Canadian Wildlife Service who issued our permits to collect in Ontario. The Sigma Xi Scientific Research Society

Table 1: Locality Data and Gonadal Condition of Female Solitary Sandpipers Collected in Northwestern Ontario, 4-14 June 1980.

Field No.	Date Collected	Location	Breeding Evidence
4746	4 June 1980	5 km N Ear Falls, Kenora District	Oviduct huge; 1 fully developed egg in oviduct and 1 moderately sixed yolky egg in ovary.
4750	7 June 1980	20 km N Savant Lake	Oviduct = 3 mm; ruptured follicle in ovary.
4752	8 June 1980	32 km N Savant Lake	Oviduct swollen; 2 ruptured follicles.
4754	13 June 1980	50 km N Geraldton, Thunder Bay District	Oviduct swollen; ruptured follicles present.
4755	14 June 1980	30 km W Geraldton	Oviduct swollen; largest ovum = 2 × 2 mm.

partially funded our Canadian research.

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Dan A. Tallman and Erika J. Tallman, Faculty of Biology, Northern State College, Aberdeen, South Dakota 57401 USA

American Robin Nestling Predation by an American Red Squirrel

On 31 May 1986, I observed the predation of an American Robin *(Turdus migratorius)* nestling by an American Red Squirrel *(Tamiasciurus hudsonicus)* in the Lake Marie-Louise Campground of Sibley Provincial Park, Thunder Bay District.

The squirrel was observed sitting at the base of a pine (*Pinus* sp.) tree with the robin nestling, which was still alive, in its jaws. The squirrel was being attacked by an adult robin, which repeatedly swooped down at the squirrel, pecking it with its bill and scolding it loudly, in an attempt to rescue its offspring. After several minutes a second adult robin arrived to help its mate in attacking the squirrel. This lasted for about ten minutes, after which the squirrel disappeared behind a boulder with the nestling still in its jaws. The parents then ceased their attack but lingered in a nearby tree.

This interesting encounter is not entirely unusual since the American Red Squirrel is known to be much more carnivorous than other tree squirrels and has been known to eat robins as well as other nestling birds (Banfield 1981).

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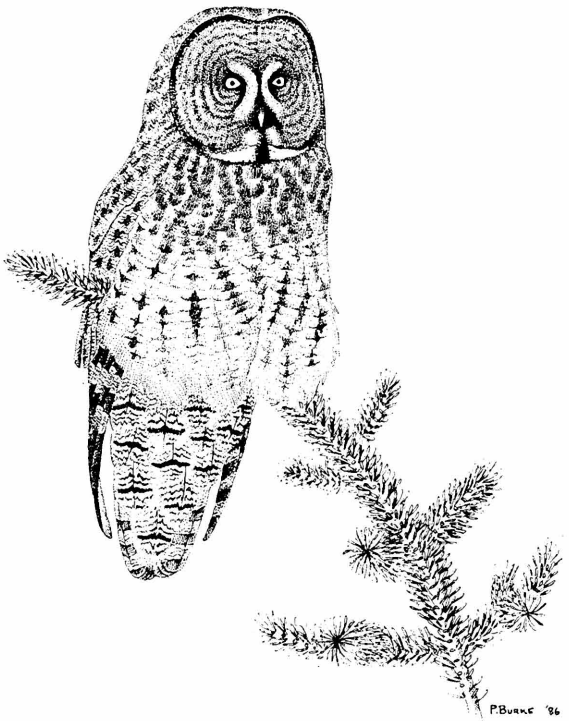
OFO Announcements

Field Trips

22 February 1987, Sunday: Petroglyphs Provincial Park. Leader: Geoff Carpentier (705) 743-8594. Meet at the Park gate at 9:30 AM. From Peterborough take Hwy. 28 north approx. 50 km to Woodview. Turn right on Northey's Bay Rd., go 11 km to Park gate. Good chance for Bald and Golden Eagles, Gray Jays, Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, both Crossbills and Boreal Chickadees. For additional details see site guide in *Ontario Birds* 3(1):29-32 or call Geoff.

7 March 1987, Saturday: Toronto Region Owl Prowl. Leaders: Bruce Wilkinson & Glenn Coady. Meet at the Humber College Arboretum at 11:00 AM. For directions and additional information call Glenn Coady (416) 596-8109.



Great Gray Owl / drawing by *Peter Burke*

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