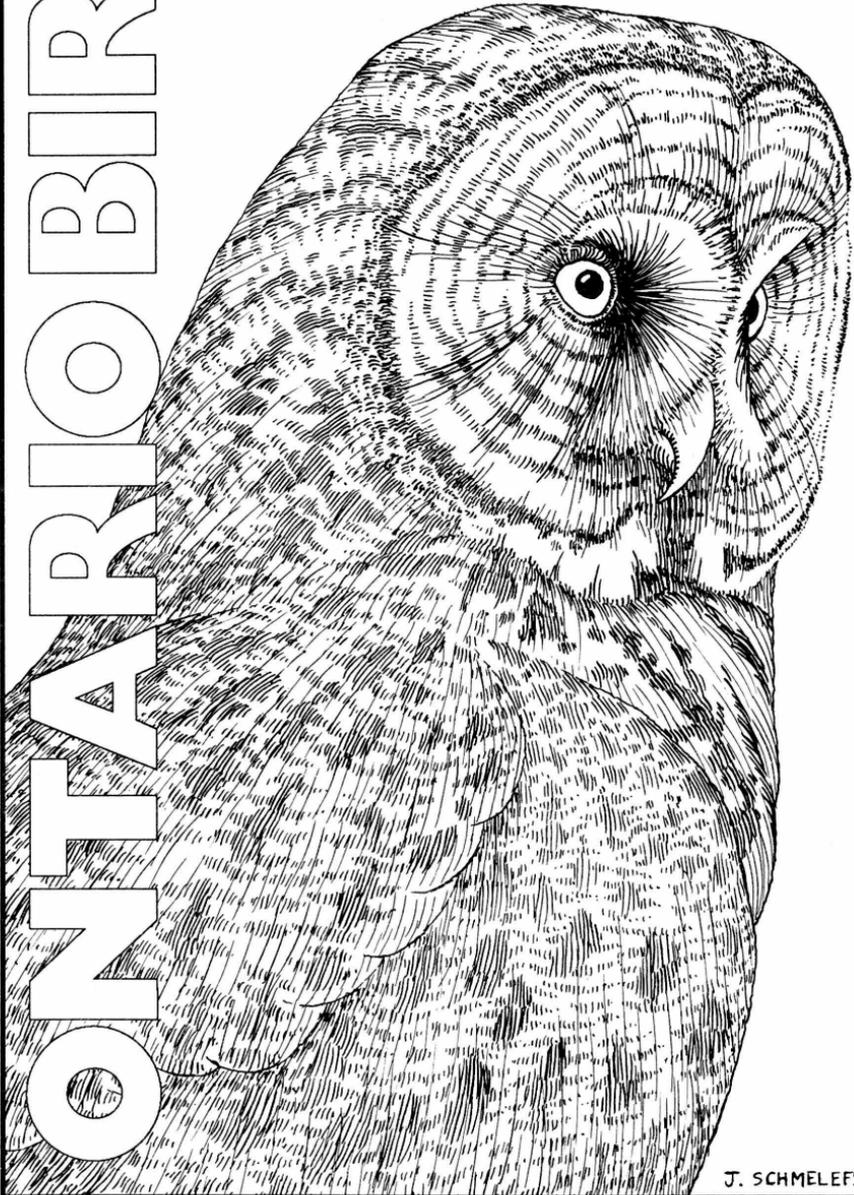


ONTARIO BIRDS

The Journal of the
Ontario Field
Ornithologists

Volume 7 Number 1
April 1989



J. SCHMELEFSKE



Reports of rare birds (those for which the OBRC requires documentation—see supplement to *Ontario Birds* 5[3]) should be sent to:

Secretary, Ontario Bird Records Committee

c/o Ontario Field Ornithologists
Box 1204, Station B
Burlington, Ontario
L7P 3S9

Ontario Birds

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All items submitted for publication should be sent to:

The Editor, Ontario Birds

c/o Ontario Field Ornithologists
Box 1204, Station B
Burlington, Ontario
L7P 3S9

Material should be double-spaced and typewritten if possible.

Publication costs of *Ontario Birds* are partially offset by an annual grant from the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund. OFO gratefully acknowledges this generous support.

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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Letters to the Editor

OBRC policy on review of distinct forms

While correcting galley proofs of a recent issue of *North American Bird Bander*, I was surprised to learn that the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) does not review reports of out-of-range races that can be readily identified in the field. I have long felt that observers should be encouraged to watch for distant races, colour morphs, and other variants, and do not believe that any particular form's current taxonomic status makes its wanderings of any greater or lesser interest. The ranges of Red-breasted and, to a lesser extent, Red-naped Sapsuckers were much better known than that of Clark's Grebe when these forms were recognized as species because observers had long been aware of the differences in the sapsuckers and recorded them in their field notes, whereas few of us were aware of the differences between Western and Clark's Grebes more than a few years before official separation. The changes in Arctic breeding range and population size of Blue Geese were no less interesting when their true nature as a colour morph was realized than they had been when they were believed to be a full species. Careful documentation of all distinct forms is helpful in sorting out the history of changes in ranges and their underlying causes. It may also provide clues as to the origin of more spectacular

rarities. For example, the presence of five Willets "of the western race..." provided evidence in favour of one of the potential sources of origin of Canada's first Mongolian Plover at Presqu'ile Provincial Park, Ontario in 1984 (McRae 1985). Finally, encouraging observers to watch for distinct forms by providing an opportunity for their records to be reviewed if the form encountered is especially rare in Ontario helps encourage observers to make a habit of examining plumages closely.

The example that stimulated my musings involved a junco that Miles (1988) believed to be of the White-winged race of the Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis aikeni*), a highly localized race of the area of Montana, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska centred on the Black Hills, and considered "casual" even as close to there as other parts of Nebraska (Whitney 1968). Norman Criddle reported that his brother Stuart collected one in 1911 (Criddle 1911) in Manitoba, a record repeated in the literature for several years, and there have been several Ontario sight records and one other Manitoba sight record of two birds (Baillie 1965; Braddell 1971), but careful examination of a 1964 Ontario species thought to be of this race proved it to be a Slate-coloured Junco (*J. h. hyemalis*) with an abnormal wing-bar (Baillie 1965), placing the other Ontario and Manitoba records in doubt

(Baillie 1965; M. K. McNicholl's editorial note in Braddell 1971). Thus, although listed by Whitney (1968) as casual in Ontario, this race is not currently recognized a shaving occurred in Canada (Godfrey 1986). A wandering by such a localized race to Maitland River, Ontario would seem highly unlikely and a determination on whether the description (hopefully with measurements) provided by Miles was sufficient to establish the occurrence of this race in Canada might be of more interest than a report of a full species more prone to wandering.

Martin K. McNicholl
Toronto, Ontario

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Sex ratios and CBC data

In the autumn of 1988, I wrote to a majority of the compilers of Ontario Christmas Bird Counts requesting information on gender identification of birds found on 1988 counts. I received data from 19 compilers.

My purpose was to get some idea of differing patterns of winter distribution for males and females. Unfortunately, probably because I failed to focus on a few representative species and because the Christmas Bird Count is already challenging enough, the data I received are too piecemeal to be dealt with meaningfully.

However, without drawing any firm conclusions, the data suggested that for some species sex ratios were not 1:1. More male than female blackbirds were reported, although numbers were low. Sex ratios for ducks varied among counts and among species. Male American Kestrels outnumbered females 58 to 34, and on all eight counts reporting Northern Cardinals, males always outnumbered females (total 183 to 139).

Some academic research has been conducted to study sex ratios in birds. In a field where amateurs contribute so much, however, I feel this is one area that has received relatively little attention from birders. This is probably because the species distinction is the principal foundation of bird identification, and birders are largely concerned with

identification. The species distinction is, to a certain extent, an arbitrary one, however. Within a species there are differences based on race, age and, as I have suggested, gender.

In southern Canada, for example, most wintering Red-winged Blackbirds appear to be male, but the wintering status of females is very difficult to determine since most often it is merely the species and not the sex that is reported. Yet a Redwing is not merely a Redwing. Females differ in plumage, size (42g versus 63g), shape, migration timetables, wintering ranges and, to some extent, diet. Ecologically, the two sexes are quite different birds, doubtless more so than some pairs of closely related species.

I realize that the Christmas Bird Count is already an ambitious undertaking, not in need of complicating factors. The LPBO feeder survey, which already collects gender data, appears to be a more appropriate project for considering the question. Regardless of whether such information is collected systematically or not, I hope birders will keep the potential significance of bird genders in mind when making field observations and reporting birds.

I'd like to thank those compilers who went to the trouble of sending me the requested information.

Alex Mills
Barrie, Ontario

Books on Argentine birds

Regarding Mr. Brewer's review of Narosky and Yzurieta's *Guía para la identificación de las aves de Argentina y Uruguay*, readers may be interested to know about other serious books on the birds of Argentina. For example:

- *Olrog, Claes. 1984. Las aves argentinas: "Una nueva guía de campo".* Administración de Parques Nacionales. Buenos Aires, Argentina.

This is a revision of the dreadful 1959 guide that Mr. Brewer refers to. Although the plates are not much better, it is still a relatively useful guide to the birds of Argentina. It also contains range maps and a brief section of text for each species.

Mr. Brewer commented that he thought that the text in Narosky and Yzurieta's guide should be as detailed as in Hilty and Brown's *Birds of Colombia*. However, one reviewer found the latter book to be so bulky that he cut out the plates and left the text at home. The information that Mr. Brewer would like to have seen is documented in:

- *de la Peña, Martín. 1979. Enciclopedia de las aves argentinas.* 8 vols., Editorial Colmegna S. A., Santa Fe, Argentina.
- *de la Peña, Martín. 1986-88. Guía de aves argentinas.* 5 vols., colour plates, photos, and range maps. (the volumes range from 60-117 pp.)

These volumes cover everything up to and including the Tyrannidae. Another book covers nests and eggs:

- *de la Peña, Martín*. 1987. *Nidos y huevos de aves argentinas*. Santa Fe, Argentina., 262 pp., photos, drawings.

The latter two works are available from Buteo Books. Narosky and Yzurieta's guide may not contain all of this information, but it may be a much more convenient guide to use in the field because of it.

Anthony Lang
Toronto, Ontario

The Long Point dilemma

The Long Point beach, "cuts", and marshes were one of my favourite places to birdwatch in southern Ontario. I no longer go there because I do not wish to be harassed, as other birders have been, by Long Point Company employees.

If the Long Point Company are permitted to retain control of their large holdings there are two ways birders could be allowed to have access to the areas in question if the company were to agree. They are as follows:

1. The Blenheim Solution

The Blenheim town council give permission by letter to bird at the Blenheim sewage lagoons at your own risk. The letter must be presented upon request to town officials or police.

2. The British Solution

A nature preserve issues permits

to birders to allow them to visit an area, and to use viewing blinds that are provided. In this way the number of visits to a restricted area are controlled by the owners.

I think that the Long Point beach, "cuts", and marshes are far too precious an Ontario and a Canadian natural resource to remain in private hands any longer. The Long Point Company acreage should be purchased or, if necessary, expropriated by either the provincial or federal government. Once under public ownership, a long-term plan for the use of the area could be developed. The plan would allow access by the increasing population of southern Ontario to an area now available only to a handful of non-resident hunters.

A few years ago the federal government purchased the privately owned Big Creek Hunting Club on the west side of the Long Point causeway. Thus, there is a local precedent for such an action. Similar changes to those made at Big Creek to facilitate public access and use are hopefully what would be included in plans for a publicly-owned Long Point beach, "cuts", and marshes.

John L. Olmsted
Hamilton, Ontario

The Ontario Great Gray Owl Invasion of 1983–1984: Numbers, Dates, and Distribution

by
Ross D. James

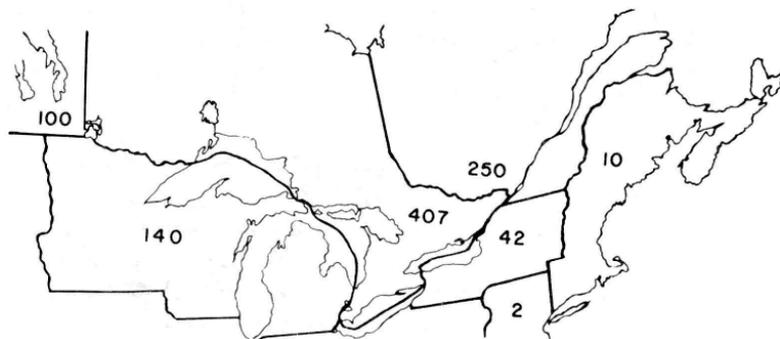
Introduction

During the winter of 1983–1984, northeastern North America experienced a shift in the population of Great Gray Owls (*Strix nebulosa*) that exceeded in numbers any previously-recorded movement in this region (Lehman 1984). From figures published in *American Birds* (incomplete) Ontario seems to have been at the

centre of this remarkable event, that extended from southeastern Manitoba to Maine and south to Wisconsin and New York (Figure 1).

Efforts were made to solicit observations from many parts of the province, and hundreds of people responded, generously forwarding notes and summaries. What follows is an analysis of

Figure 1: Great Gray Owl sightings reported to American Birds regional editors in northeastern North America during the winter season of 1983–1984.



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reports of the numbers of birds, plus where and when they were seen. Other observations will follow in a subsequent paper to be published in the next issue of *Ontario Birds* (vol. 7[2]).

Information about Great Gray Owls was solicited through Peter Whelan's birding column in *The Globe and Mail*, the offices of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and by direct mailings to various observers regularly contributing to *American Birds*. Maps and observation sheets were drawn up and mailed to a number of key compilers or to interested individuals. Data were requested on all aspects of observations made. While I personally felt that, for various reasons, only a small fraction of the potential information was obtained, I am grateful to all those who did participate and sent whatever they could.

It is always difficult to be certain that individual birds were not recorded more than once in different times and places. People who submitted observations from areas of high concentration deleted obvious duplication. But I deleted even a few more. While some people felt that birds were moving about a great deal, substantial numbers of birds were obviously resident in the same area over a period of a month or more, and two were apparently seen for three months in the same general area. Thus, if several observations were made at the same locality, I

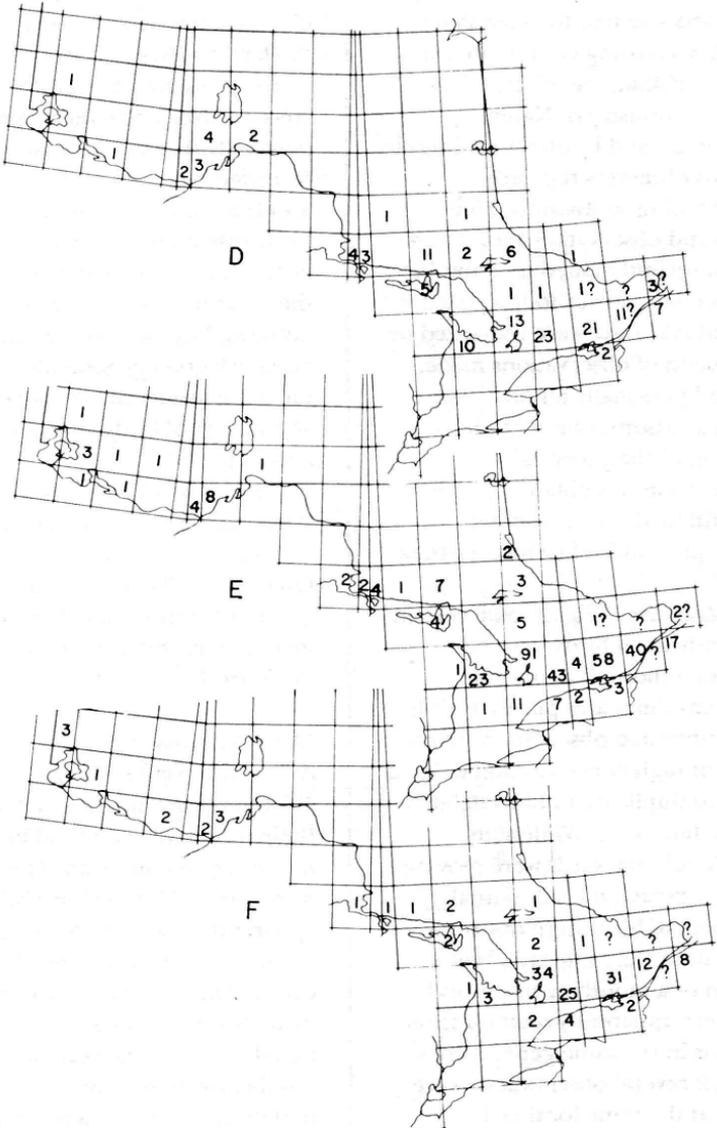
considered that all referred to the same bird, unless there was an absence of nearly a month or more between sightings, assuming that in the intervening periods the same bird may have been moving about locally, and that coverage was not complete enough to be certain that the bird had actually moved on. The final figures, therefore, are conservative. While there is still the possibility that the same owls were recorded more than once, even in widely separated places, it is more likely that there were many birds not seen at all. We can never know the exact numbers involved in this invasion, but the observations provide a good general idea of the timing of events and the relative abundance of birds at various locations.

Unfortunately, after repeated attempts, I have been unable to get a list of observations from the Ottawa area. Therefore, numbers given in Figures 2 and 3 are incomplete, and are somewhat low in Figure 4.

Observations

A few birds were seen in September 1983 in northern Ontario, but these may have been local birds and not part of the invasion. The actual movement of Great Gray Owls apparently began in October, when small numbers were seen all across central Ontario (Figure 2a), many in areas where they are not usually noted. In November still larger numbers were seen in the central part of the province; a build-up had

Figure 2d, e, f: Sightings of Great Gray Owls in Ontario during various periods of the autumn, winter, and spring of 1983–1984. Observations are divided into the standard UTM grid blocks available on topographic maps. d) second half of December 1983, e) January 1984, f) first half of February 1984.



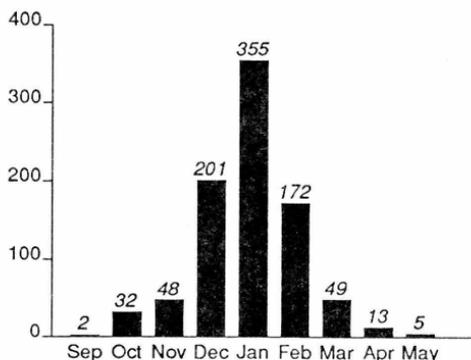
begun near Sudbury and, to a lesser extent, at Sault Ste. Marie; and few birds had appeared as far south as Lake Simcoe (Figure 2b). In early December the concentration was still north of Lake Nipissing (Figure 2c), but by month's end had shifted noticeably south into southern Ontario (Figure 2d). A similar southward shift was noted in Quebec during the same time (Aubry and Yank 1984). Minnesota, just south of western Ontario, was also now experiencing numerous sightings, and there was a slight build-up in the Thunder Bay region.

The movement of owls seemed to have come nearly to a stop by early January 1984; numbers in various parts of Ontario remained about the same throughout the month. Distribution in early and late January was very similar, although a few birds may have shifted slightly farther south. Sightings during the month of January (Figure 2e) show a wide

band of concentration that roughly follows the southern edge of the Canadian Shield in southern Ontario, and a few north of Lake Huron. Apart from a few extra birds about Thunder Bay, there does not seem to have been much of a build-up in the west.

In late January the owls had begun to move out of the south. From the last half of January numbers dropped by 34% in the first half of February (Figure 2f). In the latter half of February (Figure 2g) the drop in numbers was more than 70% from the January total. As birds moved, there was a slight build-up noted about Sudbury, at least in early March (Figure 2h), indicating that the birds were moving north. But, as might be expected, the movement north was not as obvious as the autumn invasion. West of Lake Nipigon there was little evidence of any northward movement, as numbers continued to be small in that part of the province. Small numbers

Figure 3: Numbers of Great Gray Owl sightings in Ontario by month from September 1983 to May 1984 (except Ottawa area).



They then quickly retreated northward in early March, as in 1983–1984.

Although we do not have a clear understanding of what initiates these invasions (Nero 1980), they seem to be driven mainly by a food shortage within the normal range (Nero 1980; Duncan 1987; Hildén and Solonen 1987). A difference in the timing of a crash in the rodent population or a significant change in snow conditions or accumulation might help account for timing differences. However, during the autumn of 1983 the weather was rather mild. Extreme cold conditions with below-normal temperatures and above-average precipitation were not evident until the latter part of December (Weir 1984a, 1984b), by which time the movement of owls was well under way. This indicates that weather factors were probably not of prime consideration to the birds. Unfortunately, we do not have any data on the supply of small rodents that winter within the owls' normal range. However, if the magnitude of the movement is an indication of the degree of food shortage, there must have been a significant shortage of small rodents over an extensive area of the eastern Boreal forest in the autumn and winter of 1983–1984.

By far the most noticeable influx of birds in Ontario would seem to have been from Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury, south to Lake Ontario on or near the Canadian Shield (Figure 4). The evidence

strongly suggests that owls moved out of the north into southern Ontario. In northern Ontario there were probably more birds moving about that were never seen. However, observers in western Ontario felt that there were scarcely any more birds than in a normal winter, and in the Fort Frances area they actually saw far fewer birds in 1983–1984 than, for example, in the winter of 1981–1982 (J. K. Cleavelly, *in litt.*). Meanwhile, immediately south of the western part of Ontario, Minnesota was experiencing a record invasion (Eckert 1984). In southeastern Manitoba, numbers seen were about double the winter normal, but obviously there were larger than normal numbers at a latitude where few birds were seen in Ontario.

However, it must also be noted that in the winter of 1983–1984 most of the owls seen in Manitoba were found northeast of Winnipeg and that at least some of these birds (banded) actually moved north from southeastern Manitoba and northern Minnesota (Nero, *in litt.*). Subsequent telemetry studies in Manitoba (Duncan 1987) have also shown that northward movement in winter can be a normal occurrence. The 1983–1984 movement of owls, therefore, was not just a simple southward invasion. Many of the owls appearing in Minnesota may have moved within the state to the east, where the greatest concentration of sightings were reported (Eckert 1984). There was

no concentration of Great Gray Owls on the north shore of Lake Superior in Minnesota that would suggest a southward movement, as was the case with previous invasions (Eckert 1984). The slight concentration of owls along the north shore of Lake Superior in Ontario, coupled with a decrease in the Fort Frances area, suggest an eastward movement of owls in that part of the province. Perhaps many other birds went northward, as they did in Manitoba, but their movement was not detected.

Definite indication of a southward movement, then, seems to be confined to areas east of Lake Superior. In Quebec there was also an indication of a southern movement of Great Gray Owls (Aubry and Yank 1984). But where did they come from? Great Gray Owls are not known to breed in Quebec in summer (Godfrey 1986). Did the Quebec birds also move east from Ontario? Unfortunately, we have little evidence of how far Great Gray Owls would move under similar circumstances. Although several radio-marked owls have been recorded moving 300 to 400km in winter, and as much as 700km (Duncan 1987), it seems unlikely that all the birds appearing in Quebec moved there from Ontario.

The impression in Quebec was that birds first appeared on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River and then moved westward (as well as southward) toward Montreal. This does not support a

possible movement from Ontario. There is some suggestion that birds in eastern Ontario moved southeastward from a concentration west of Sudbury, down the east side of Georgian Bay. But the magnitude of this movement is not sufficient to account for the Quebec birds. There were still far more sightings in the south than there were west of Sudbury.

It is highly unlikely that the birds appearing in southern Ontario (and Quebec) merely came out of the woods. They almost certainly moved southward. They were undoubtedly funnelled somewhat eastward by Lake Huron and Georgian Bay in Ontario and somewhat westward by the St. Lawrence River in Quebec. Great Gray Owls are probably also widespread in Quebec. The data suggest a resident breeding population in Quebec, but their secretive nature in summer, plus a lack of access to many areas of northern Quebec, has kept us ignorant of their status there. It was only in 1977 that nesting of the Great Gray Owl was confirmed in Ontario (James 1977) and only four subsequent nests have been reported to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme (Peck and James 1983). Most of the birds appearing in southern Ontario probably moved essentially directly southward from northern Ontario or Quebec, as suggested by the pattern of occurrence, although some may well have been deflected

by the Great Lakes. But the situation in eastern and western Ontario was obviously very different.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Peter Whelan for his initiative, encouragement, publicity at the inception, and for his continuing friendly inquiries about when we might expect some published results; Doug McRae for much of the initiative for this project, and with Brian Ratcliff for the initial work in soliciting observations and preparing maps and data sheets; the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources for the support provided from the central office and the many offices throughout the province that compiled and forwarded information; and the World Wildlife Fund (Canada) that supplied a grant to the Ontario Field Ornithologists in support of this project.

It was my intention to provide the names of all individuals that supplied observations of birds, but in the compilations I received many people were not mentioned by name, some were identified only by surname, there were multiple observers of single birds and, as the list of contributors exceeded 450 individuals, it became apparent that this was not practical. Nonetheless, sincere thanks go to all who willingly took part and freely contributed of themselves to enhance this effort. Although not mentioned individually, they can be

pleased to have been a part of a successful effort in the study of these magnificent birds.

Special mention must be made of David Hawke, John Lemon, Doug Sadler, and Ron Weir, whose summaries from areas of highest concentration involved considerable effort. My regrets to all those from Ottawa and surrounding areas who would like to have had their observations considered in this summary, but who submitted observations to a local compiler rather than to a central location. My unsuccessful efforts to include them leave the story less complete than it could have been.

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Observations of Common Raven in Metropolitan Toronto

by
Beth Jefferson

On 22 April 1986, between 0900h
and 0935h in Prince of Wales Park,
Etobicoke, Metropolitan Toronto
(43°36'N, 79°30'W), I saw a
Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) fly
in a seize a Rock Dove (*Columba
livia*) with its feet, take it to the
ground, and proceed to pluck it.
The prey moved for about 30
seconds, but the only distress calls
that I heard were from nearby
American Robins (*Turdus
migratorius*), House Sparrows
(*Passer domesticus*), and European
Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

While I watched the scene from
a distance of 15m, my dog was able
to cautiously stalk the birds,
approaching to within 2m before
the raven flew off, carrying its prey

in its feet, to a Norway Maple (*Acer
platanoides*) about 40m away. Here it
continued plucking the pigeon,
holding it firmly in its claws, while I
was able to watch the procedure
from a distance of 10m beneath the
tree. I left to get a camera before
the incident concluded. When I
returned 10 minutes later, the
raven was, unfortunately, gone, as
was the Rock Dove, except for its
gizzards, feet, feathers, and breast
bone, which remained on the
ground underneath the tree.

Prince of Wales Park is an urban
park located on the shore of Lake
Ontario in west Toronto. Twenty
minutes prior to this attack I had
observed a raven fly into an area
between the houses on the

Beth Jefferson, 41 Lake Shore Drive, Apartment 404, New Toronto, Ontario
M8V 1Z3

northwest side of the park. I did not observe where the raven perched or the condition of the Rock Dove or its position when it was seized.

A few days later, on 28 April, Mike DeLorey and Derek Spindlow (pers. comm.) saw a raven fly this same route that I had originally observed, but it was not in pursuit of anything at this time.

Catching large birds like a Rock Dove appears to be unusual behaviour for a raven. Bent (1946) mentions one incident where a raven invaded a chicken coop to kill a sickly hen. Ravens are normally scavengers but will regularly attack young nestling shorebirds on the tundra or "sick or injured individuals of a species it does not otherwise interfere with" (Goodwin 1976).

Ravens generally inhabit wilder, mountainous country and sea coasts in both Arctic and forested regions of Canada (Godfrey 1986). Although its breeding range in Ontario has recently expanded south of Algonquin-Haliburton and the Bruce Peninsula (Blomme 1987), the raven is of rare occurrence in the southern parts of the province. One raven has been reported regularly in Etobicoke for the past five winters (Figure 1). During the winter of 1985–1986 there were at least eight individual sightings of a raven along the waterfront and it is possible that these all refer to the same bird, as there is no previous history of repeated occurrences of ravens in southern Ontario over a period of

this duration.

During the winter of 1986–1987 a raven was again frequently seen along the western Toronto lakeshore — an area which has many similarities to the raven's normal habitat farther north — numerous spruce trees, open stretches of tundra-like landfill sites, and a large body of water. Several incidents are worth relating as they indicate how the raven could be surviving outside of its usual range.

A raven was seen by Don McClement (pers. comm.) on 20 November 1986 perched above a Rock Dove roost at Eighth Street and Lakeshore Boulevard West. The raven singled out one Rock Dove and swooped after it, which the other Rock Doves "looked on in alarm". M. DeLorey and I watched a raven in active pursuit of another Rock Dove, chasing its quarry quickly in and around city buildings at Lakeshore Boulevard West and Thirtieth Street on 27 January 1987. It often approached to within 30cm of its prey but was not observed to catch anything at this time. A raven was observed again at Eighth Street and Lakeshore Boulevard West by Russ Musgrove (pers. comm.) on 15 February 1987 "harassing the pigeons".

As I watched a raven fly over a roost of Rock Doves on 1 February 1987, I noticed that this was enough to put the flock to flight, scattering them. It has been my experience that American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) do not seem to create this response.



Figure 1: Common Raven, Etobicoke, Metropolitan Toronto, 21 March 1987.
Photo by T. Sabo.

Minutes prior to this I had watched the same raven sparring with the lead bird in a flock of Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*), clashing their large bills over one of several pieces of bread that the raven had swooped in to snatch off the ground on which the geese had been feeding. The rest of the flock was obviously alarmed, too: with necks outstretched, they all rushed over, ready to attack, but the raven departed.

Close to the lake, Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) were then observed chasing this raven. A flock of 10 gulls pursued it in and around apartment buildings and houses for five minutes, often

getting close enough to practically land on its back. The raven escaped by flying inland.

On 25 April 1987 Bruce Wilkinson observed a raven carrying branches to a nest it was constructing on the grounds of the old Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital, a place where a raven has been frequently sighted. Two nests were subsequently discovered, 0.6m apart, under the centre eaves of one of the four-storey-high "cottages" (Figures 2 and 3). The nest on the left (Figure 2) was approximately 40cm in diameter and 30cm deep, made of old leafless branches. The one on the right (Figure 3) was smaller at that

time, but it was the one on which the raven was working, carrying in 40–50cm long green branches about 2cm in diameter. D. Peuramake and D. McClement (pers. comm.) have seen the raven breaking off large branches from the trees on the property from early March to late April.

By the first week of May 1987, I observed that the nest on the right had become as large as the one on the left. Rock Doves were always seen on the roof of this building and many feathers of dead birds remained on the ground. Starlings also perched on the nests when the raven was not present.

By mid-May the nests had been completed, but the raven had disappeared from the area. A second bird was never seen and, presumably, this raven is not mated.

The fall and winter of 1987–1988 again produced numerous sightings of a raven along the Etobicoke waterfront. On one occasion (30 November 1987) I saw it doing cartwheels in the wind above the apartment buildings at Lake Promenade and 34th Street.

No observations have been made of this bird in the summer. However, there are a few sightings that have been made in spring, the latest being 4 June 1986, by the

Figure 2: Common Raven nest under the eaves of Cottage 5, former Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital, Etobicoke, Metropolitan Toronto, 28 April 1987. Photo by Beth Jefferson.



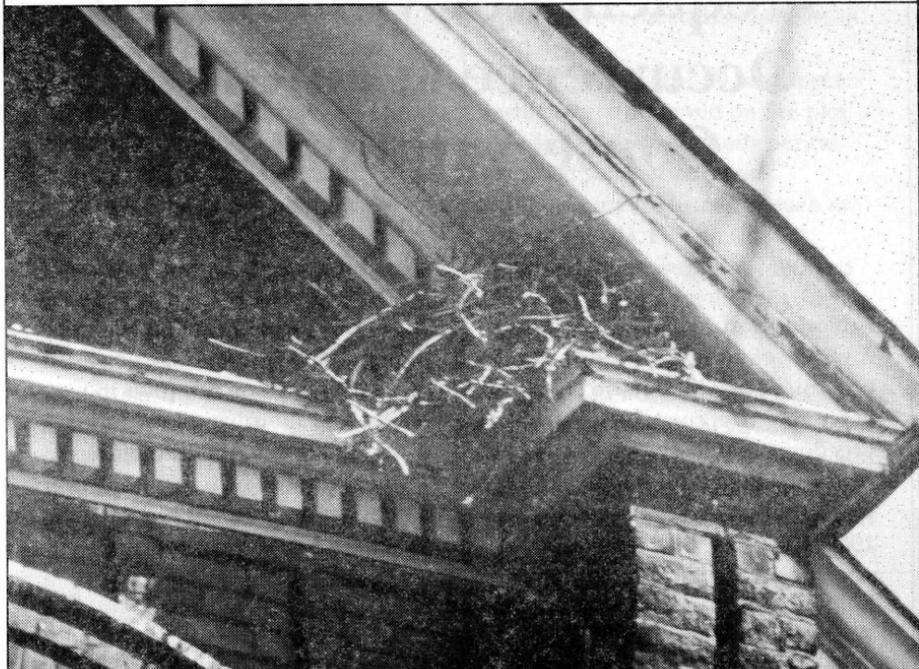
author. On 12 May 1988 several observers saw the raven being chased by small "blackbirds" at Marie Curtis Park West, at which time it looked quite huge and "ratty".

A raven appeared at Burnhamthorpe Avenue and Dixie Road on 12 September 1988, being harassed by a crow (Cora McEvoy, pers. comm.). The next morning the identical behaviour was observed by C. McEvoy and the author 6km south of this location. A crow was preventing the raven from landing in a tree at Marie Curtis Park West by its continual harassment. With its feet dangling,

the raven tried to shake off the crow. During the last two weeks of September 1988 the typical bell-like note of a raven was heard twice in the West Humber Ravine, approximately 16km north of the lake at Islington Avenue and Albion Road (J. O'Donnell and R. Scovell, pers. comm.). Almost daily sightings of a raven have been made at the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital during October and November 1988 (D. McClement, pers. comm.).

Metropolitan Toronto is only 125km south of the usual breeding range of ravens and therefore it is not inconceivable that a wild bird

Figure 3: Common Raven nest under the eaves of Cottage 5, former Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital, Etobicoke, Metropolitan Toronto, 28 April 1987. Photo by Beth Jefferson.



has established residency in the region. Corvids, however, are often kept in captivity. It is interesting to speculate whether this is an escaped bird, as some have suggested, or whether this is a wild raven that has used adaptive behaviour to live successfully as both a predator and a scavenger in an unlikely environment. The general consensus of opinion of all the observers of this "Etobicoke" raven is that its general attitude, its caution, timidity, nesting, and hunting behaviour indicate that it is a wild bird, not an escapee. Furthermore, is the bird's apparent disappearance in the summer due to a lack of birders making observations or indicative of migration or nesting behaviour?

Acknowledgements

I gratefully appreciate the advice of Dr. Jim Rising, Clive E. Goodwin, and Glenn Coady for reviewing this report and providing several helpful comments.

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Frequency of Winter Bird Occurrence at an Urban Conservation Area

by
Kenneth W. Dance

Introduction

A variety of published information on winter birds in Ontario is beginning to accumulate. Freedman and Riley (1980) reviewed changes in wintering species status during the period 1929-1977. The bird population

study published by Campbell and Dagg (1976) included data on wintering birds on five plots in urban and suburban plots. Smith *et al.* (1982) described winter bird communities of urban southern Ontario. Dunn (1986) reported the results of a seven-year bird feeder

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count survey in Ontario. Use of natural winter foods by bird species in an urban park was reported by Dance (1987).

Despite the gradual accumulation of data, detailed information on winter birds assemblages in Canada are still lacking in the literature (Pittaway and Eagles 1980). Particularly absent is site-specific monitoring of winter bird occurrence.

The present paper reports the findings of a study designed to determine the frequency of occurrence of winter bird species during each of six annual census periods at an urban conservation area.

Study area

The study area was a 6.5ha plot within the Mabel Davis Conservation Area, situated in the Town of Newmarket, Regional Municipality of York. A detailed description of habitat is contained in Dance (1984). Upland deciduous forest, shrubby meadow, conifer plantings, floodplain deciduous, and lawn habitats are represented within the plot. Bird feeders were maintained within the plot by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. Other feeders were present in residential yards near the plot.

Methods

Bird surveys were conducted according to the Winter Bird-Population Study method outlined in Kolb (1965). The number of individuals of each species observed

was recorded. Species observed overhead were also noted. A minimum of 10 counts were completed each year. Extreme survey dates were 20 December and 26 February. The study extended over six successive winters, from December 1982 to February 1988.

Occurrence frequencies were calculated annually for each bird species. Frequencies were simply the number of survey dates when the species was observed divided by the number of survey dates. Calculated frequencies were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Results

Table 1 indicates the survey period and number of survey dates during each year of study. The number of species observed each year on the plot and overhead also appears in Table 1.

Table 2 lists the 30 bird species which were observed on the plot during the six-year study period. Annual plot occurrence frequencies are listed for each of these species. Five additional species, which were not observed on the plot in a particular year but were observed overhead, are listed at the bottom of Table 2. Frequencies of occurrence were not calculated for overhead species.

The bottom of Table 2 indicates the total number of bird species recorded on the plot and overhead during each year. The total number of species recorded in a given year ranged from 18 to 26.

Table 1: Survey period and number of species observed, Mabel Davis Conservation Area, Newmarket, 1983–1988

Survey period	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
	29/12/82 to 26/2/83	30/12/83 to 26/2/84	21/12/84 to 17/2/85	20/12/85 to 9/2/86	21/12/86 to 15/2/87	28/12/87 to 21/2/88
No. of survey dates	10	10	16	22	19	16
No. of species observed on plot	13	19	21	15	16	15
No. of species observed overhead	6	4	5	3	4	4

Discussion

It would be expected that the number of plot visits would have some influence on the survey results. During 1986 and 1987, when the greatest sample effort occurred, the total number of species observed was not greater than in all other years. An examination of the species occurrence percentages does not reveal any obvious anomalies which could be attributed to greater sampling effort during these two years. The number of visits each year exceeded eight, the minimum number which Robbins (1981) recommended be carried out in order to achieve an accurate indication of species occurrence during a particular winter.

Annual occurrence frequency ranged from 0 to 100 per cent. Twenty-three species had an occurrence frequency of 0 in one or more years. Only four species were present during all counts conducted in a single year; Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus*

atricapillus) was present during every survey for three years, Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) and White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) were present during all surveys for two years, and Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) had a 100% frequency during one year.

The following four species had occurrence frequencies of greater than 0 and less than 100 per cent each of the six years of study: Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*), Hairy Woodpecker (*P. villosus*), American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), and Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*).

Variability in annual occurrence frequency is highlighted by such species as Mourning Dove, Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*), European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*), Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*), Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*), Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*), and American Goldfinch (*C. tristis*). These species were completely absent on the plot

Table 2: Frequency of winter bird species occurrence, Mabel Davis Conservation Area, Newmarket, 1983-1988

Species observed on study plot	Frequency of occurrence (%)					
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Sharp-shinned Hawk	0	0	0	0	5	0
Cooper's Hawk	0	10	6	23	16	0
Red-tailed Hawk	0	0	6	5	0	0
American Kestrel	0	10	0	0	0	0
Mourning Dove	0	100	69	95	100	38
Eastern Screech-Owl	0	0	0	0	0	6
Great Horned Owl	0	10	13	0	0	0
Downy Woodpecker	40	70	31	68	53	25
Hairy Woodpecker	70	60	31	77	74	81
Pileated Woodpecker	0	20	0	0	0	31
Blue Jay	0	40	25	14	0	13
American Crow	20	30	13	9	47	25
Black-capped Chickadee	100	90	94	100	100	94
Red-breasted Nuthatch	0	0	6	0	0	0
White-breasted Nuthatch	70	80	94	100	100	94
Brown Creeper	0	10	0	0	0	0
Golden-crowned Kinglet	20	0	0	0	0	0
Cedar Waxwing	0	10	19	0	5	0
Northern Shrike	10	0	6	5	0	0
European Starling	20	40	0	0	5	0
Northern Cardinal	10	30	31	59	26	81
American Tree Sparrow	0	20	44	64	0	6
Dark-eyed Junco	10	80	88	95	100	75
Pine Grosbeak	0	0	0	41	0	6
Purple Finch	40	0	63	0	58	0
White-winged Crossbill	0	0	13	0	0	0
Pine Siskin	0	0	13	0	58	25
American Goldfinch	0	10	69	32	21	13
Evening Grosbeak	10	0	13	0	0	0
House Sparrow	10	10	0	0	5	0
Species observed overhead						
Canada Goose	+	+	+			
Mallard	+	+	+	+	+	+
gull sp.	+	+	+		+	+
Rock Dove	+	+	+	+	+	+
Blue Jay					+	
European Starling		+	+		+	
Common Grackle	+					
American Goldfinch	+					
Number of species (including overhead)	19	23	26	18	20	19

some years and were present during 40 per cent or more of the surveys in other years.

On this urban plot there are a small number of winter bird species which can be expected to occur with a degree of regularity. There are other groups of species, such as raptors and winter finches, which occur more sporadically. The raptors and certain winter finches (e.g., American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin) feed over a considerable area (Dunn 1986) and the study plot probably represents only a small portion of their winter feeding range, thus the probability of recording them on a particular count is less than that for a species which may remain on and adjacent to the plot all winter.

Weather is suspected to have influenced the frequency of observation of some species. The winter of 1983 was very mild and snow cover on the ground was minimal. The Mourning Dove is known to be dependent on feeders when overwintering in southern Ontario (Armstrong and Noakes 1983). During the mild winter of 1983 the Mourning Dove was not observed on the plot. During more severe winters (1984, 1986, and 1987) this species occurred during all but one survey. This finding is not unexpected since Dunn *et al.* (undated) have stated that during winters with limited snow cover Mourning Doves eat exposed corn and seed in fields instead of visiting feeders.

Annual variability in population

size may also be expected to have some effect on the probability of observing a species routinely on the plot during a particular year. Winter finch numbers are known to vary dramatically between years. Irruptions can occur when high numbers of birds and poor food crops occur. During the winter of 1985 an irruption of winter finches was documented in Ontario (Mills 1986). During this winter the highest annual frequencies for the following species were recorded on the study plot: Purple Finch, White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*), American Goldfinch, and Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*).

Findings of the present study suggest that the occurrence of many winter bird species in small urban habitat islands will be quite variable. A group of approximately 10 species occurred on the plot with a consistent annual frequency of 20 per cent or greater. Another 20 species visited the site on an infrequent basis. Eleven species were observed on the plot during only one or two years of the six-year study period.

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Intraspecific Aggression and Nest-Site Tenacity by European Starlings

by
A. P. Sandilands

Introduction

Most authors consider the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) to exhibit minimal territorial defence. Bent (1950) reported that starlings frequently construct nests in close proximity to each other with no signs of aggression and that they occasionally nest colonially or semi-colonially. He did, however, cite two instances of aggression during feeding. Feare (1984) concluded that starlings were not territorial and that they frequently nested colonially with much social

interaction. In his study area (located in England) males defended the area within 0.5m of the nest cavity, but early in the egg-laying stage other males within 10m were chased off. The most aggressive behaviours he described were birds staring at each other, stabbing with the bill, or the "fly-up". This latter behaviour involves two birds kicking and stabbing at each other in flight. These aggressive acts usually occur while feeding. Kessel (1950) studied the actions of a polygamous male which was involved with a total of five

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females. The only territorial action this starling displayed during an entire nesting season was to once chase away a group of males standing on a roof near one of his nests.

Aggression

On 19 March 1988, an adult and a juvenile male starling engaged in fierce fighting on my lawn, approximately 7km south of Cambridge, Regional Municipality of Waterloo. Their feet were locked together and there was much jabbing and pecking at each other. Often, one bird had the leg of the other in its mouth and appeared to be attempting to snap it. Most of the time they were lying flat on the grass with one or the other on top, with much wing-flapping and squawking occurring. After at least 15 minutes of fighting, it appeared as though their feet were tangled. They allowed approach to within 2m, but then disengaged themselves and flew to separate trees approximately 20m apart, where they continued to squawk at each other. The same interactions were observed again on 26 and 27 March, but for shorter durations.

With the exception of the encounters documented here, the starlings appeared to co-exist peacefully. Five were seen feeding simultaneously on a single slab of suet without aggression, and six pairs nested in an area of approximately 165m² with no other evidence of territoriality.

Although rarely reported in the

literature, aggression among starlings early in the nesting season may be frequent. On 30 March 1988, Bruce Smith of Cambridge (pers. comm.) reported two starlings lying prostrate on the sidewalk with their feet locked together. In his extensive study of starlings in New York, Kessel (1957) observed similar violent fights. He also reported males wrestling on the ground and pecking at each other savagely. In some cases, the combatants were so oblivious to their surroundings that he was able to pick them up.

Nest-site tenacity

The eaves of a stone woodshed attached to my house near Cambridge contains several holes, some of which have been used by nesting starlings for a number of years. Fly screening was nailed over these holes early in the spring to reduce the number of nest sites.

One hole was approximately 40cm long. The screening covered the hole in the wood, but left a gap of approximately 2cm between the wall of the shed and the screening. The pair of starlings that had planned to use this nest site was successfully evicted for three days. During this period, they often stood on the eaves, looked at the hole in a puzzled fashion, then flew away. On the fourth morning the female landed on the vertical stone wall and forced her way into the cavity. More screening was stuffed into the hold, so that only a 1cm gap was present and the starlings would be

facing the jagged edge of the new screening. This was successful in preventing entry for one day and then the female was once again observed going into the hole. Next, a board was placed under the old fascia, tightening the screening and leaving only a very small gap approximately 1 cm in width and 8 cm long between the stone and the board. This worked for two days and then the female again managed to squeeze in this small opening, although with great difficulty.

By mid-May, young could be heard in the nest and adults started bringing food. Both adults brought food, but the male had extreme difficulty in landing on the stone wall. Usually he eventually gave up, sat on the roof of the shed for a few seconds, then flew away with the food still in his bill. Food carrying by the parents lasted only a week and by 29 May, no adults were present and no young were heard.

This nest appeared to be unsuccessful, as young usually remain in the nest for 21 days (Kessel 1957). The inability of the male to enter the nest cavity and the female's difficulty in doing the same were probably the primary factors contributing to nest failure. Kessel (1957) noted that in their first few days, nestlings ate 50 per cent of their weight in food, and that by age 12 days this food intake increased to 85 per cent of their weight. Brown (1951) observed that the average number of feedings per hour was 10.9. Bent (1950) also

reported an average feeding interval of once every six minutes. It is unlikely that the female I observed was able to maintain the required rate of feeding.

A small nest cavity in the eaves of the northwest corner of the shed was also covered up. The male had constructed a nest in this cavity, which was actually on top of the stone wall in the shed, approximately 5 m from the ground. The screening effectively prevented the starlings from gaining access to the nest through this hole.

On the east side of the shed, there is a 2 m wide doorway with a 30 cm gap between the top of the door and the stone arch. Shortly after the cavity was covered, starlings were noticed flying through this opening into the shed. This pair was intelligent enough to find their nest from a different perspective. The linear external distance between the original nest cavity and the door is 8.5 m around a 90° corner, but the internal distance between the door and the nest is only 6.3 m.

The young in this nest all fledged successfully on 12 June. A dead adult male starling was found in the shed at the base of the nest.

Extreme aggression among nesting starlings is not common, but may be aggravated when the number of nest sites is decreased. The same nest sites may be used for several years, and adults will go to extreme measures to continue nesting in these areas.

Acknowledgements

Typing services were provided by Gore & Storrie Limited.

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Notes

Behavioural Identification of the Wilson's Warbler

Warbler enthusiasts know only too well that many warblers, especially immatures in fall, go unidentified because they restlessly dart about or are barely visible in thick cover. The Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*) is a very active, flitting, and often only briefly glimpsed species whose field marks are frequently not seen well enough to allow positive identification. Immatures also bear a resemblance to immature and female Yellow Warblers (*Dendroica petechia*). Fortunately, Wilson's can be easily identified by its distinctive behavioural actions.

Wilson's almost constantly flicks its wings like a Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) and often flips its tail up and down or from side to side like a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliptila caerulea*). The fidgety, kinglet-like wing flicking is usually the most

noticeable action. Especially when observed skulking in thick shrubbery or seen in poor light, Wilson's is easy to distinguish by its behaviour.

William Brewster (in Bent 1953:630-631) and Wayne R. Petersen (in Farrand 1983:180) described the wing and tail actions of the Wilson's Warbler, but they failed to emphasize how useful these actions are to its identification under typical field conditions of poor light and thick cover. I encourage others to watch for the distinctive wing and tail twitching of the Wilson's Warbler. Once you are familiar with this behaviour, you will be able to identify with ease many more Wilson's which once went unidentified.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Mike Buss, Barb Elliot, Rory MacKay, Ron Tozer, and Dan Strickland for their valuable comments during the preparation of this note.

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First Yellow-headed Blackbird Nest for Thunder Bay District

In the summer of 1988 I found one Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) nest and evidence of a second nest at Mission Island Marsh, Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay District, Ontario. This is the first recorded nest of this species in the Thunder Bay District (Flood 1987; Peck and James 1987).

Mission Island Marsh lies within the city limits of Thunder Bay at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River on Lake Superior (48°23'N 89°13'W). The marsh is approximately 40ha in area. Stands of bur-reed (*Sparganium* sp.), rush (*Scirpus* sp.), and other emergent plants and open pools are frequent in the open part of the marsh with cattails (*Typha* sp.) lining the shores.

As many as three singing male Yellow-headed Blackbirds were seen between 15 May and 18 June 1988 in a small marsh near Chippewa Park, approximately 3km south of Mission Island Marsh. No females were seen here and, despite several visits during the summer, no

evidence of nesting was found.

On 3 July 1988 I saw a female Yellow-headed Blackbird at Mission Island Marsh and, after watching her for several minutes, saw her enter a dense stand of bur-reed (*Sparganium eurycarpum*). The stand was situated approximately 20m from shore in approximately 50cm of water. I waded to the stand and flushed the female blackbird from a nest containing four eggs.

The nest was constructed of coarse grass, lined with finer grasses and feathers, and was interwoven with the stalks of the bur-reed. It was positioned approximately 30cm above the water.

On 9 July the nest contained one newly-hatched young and one egg in the process of hatching. The fate of the two missing eggs is unknown.

On 26 July no adults or young were observed in the area, and the nest had been removed. The stalks supporting the nest had been cut off near the water level, possibly by muskrats (*Ondatra zibethicus*) or by humans. It is not known if the

young birds fledged before the nest was removed.

A second female was seen in the same part of the marsh on 3 and 9 July. It perched with the first female several times, and made occasional forays to another stand of bur-reed. Although I was unable to find a second nest, the behaviour of the second female and the fact that this species almost invariably nests in colonies (Flood 1987) suggests that another nest was present.

Yellow-headed Blackbirds are primarily a prairie-nesting species, but have nested in Ontario and in the Rainy River District since at least 1961 (Baillie 1961) and in the marshes of Lake St. Clair (Essex Co. and Kent Co.) since at least 1965 (Sawyer and Dyer 1968). During the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas period (1981 to 1985) nesting was not confirmed outside these two counties and one district (Flood 1987).

The Thunder Bay nesting is probably a result of birds being displaced from their traditional nesting grounds in the west due to the drought of the spring and summer of 1988. Several other prairie-nesting species, including Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*), Redhead (*A. americana*), Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), and Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*), that do not normally summer at Thunder Bay, were also recorded in the summer of 1988 (N. Escott, pers. comm.).

Whether or not the same birds or their offspring will return to nest at Mission Island Marsh when weather conditions on the prairies return to normal is unknown, but this species does tend to reuse breeding sites (Peck and James 1987). This will present the opportunity to observe an expanding colony from its inception.

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Wilson's Phalarope / R. D. James

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First Record of Dickcissel *Spiza americana* in the Sudbury District

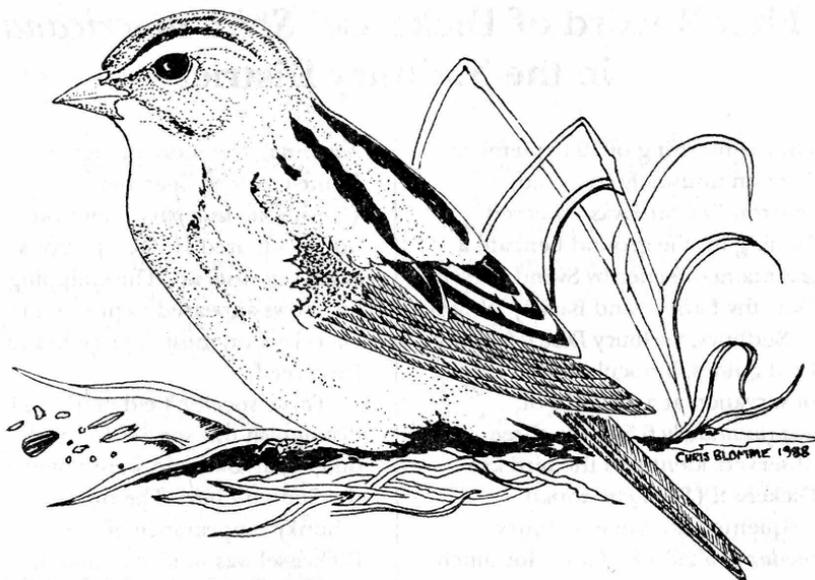
On the morning of 19 September 1988 an unusually coloured, sparrow-like bird was observed feeding on the ground beneath a maintained feeder by Svend Larsen, Dorothy Larsen, and Barney Weight in Sudbury, Sudbury District. Using field guides, binoculars, and careful observation at a distance of approximately 6.5m, the three observers identified the bird as a Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*). It frequented the same Sudbury feeder (46°29'N 81°00'W) for much of the next day and was observed and confirmed by several other members of the Sudbury Ornithological Society in the evening. On 21 September the bird was observed at 0730h for 15 minutes by the author and photographed on a return visit at 1630h. The bird was seen by the author again on 22 and 23 September. It was last observed on the evening of the 23 September by S. Larsen.

During the period when the Dickcissel was present it was observed feeding on mixed seed on the ground below the feeder and would not take seed from the covered feeder. It would frequently reappear with other sparrows when fresh seed was laid out at different periods of the day. It fed in association with smaller, immature Chipping Sparrows (*Spizella*

passerina), the more elongate White-crowned Sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), and two dingy-coloured House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). The Chipping Sparrows appeared to precede the Dickcissel on most approaches to fresh seed.

Three specific field marks help distinguish this species from all other sparrows, and were noted in the Sudbury bird. The overall "chunky" appearance of the Dickcissel was similar to that of a House Sparrow. However, the presence of a distinctive yellow wash on the chest separated the Dickcissel from this species. Secondly, two black but indistinct malar streaks ran down the sides of the throat area. Finally, the shoulder patch of the wing was a rusty red. This is usually a prominent field mark, however this shoulder patch was periodically concealed by overlapping feathers during rest periods. Other features noted in the Sudbury bird were grey cheeks and grey, lightly-streaked crown, white throat, and distinctively streaked back.

James *et al.* (1976) indicate that the Dickcissel is generally considered to be of sporadic occurrence in Ontario. The majority of records are concentrated in southwestern Ontario, particularly in counties



Dickcissel / drawing by *Chris Blomme*

bordering the north shore of Lake Erie (Godfrey 1986; Eagles 1987). Weir (1987a) reported that there were usually two records per autumn for this species in Ontario in recent years. Recent summer records of Dickcissel appear to be even more scarce, with no records for 1987 (Weir 1987b) and one record for 1986, that of a male at Inverary, near Kingston, Frontenac Co. (Weir 1986).

Northern Ontario records of Dickcissel are fewer, with records cited from Fort Albany, Cochrane District (Goodwin 1982), Marathon, Thunder Bay District (Goodwin 1980a; Speirs 1985), Batchawana Point, Lake Superior, Algoma District (Goodwin 1980b), and Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay District (James *et al.* 1976). In

Manitoulin District (situated due west of Sudbury District) there are two records of male Dickcissels, both seen in May (Nicholson 1981).

This sighting constitutes the first known record of the Dickcissel in Sudbury District.

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Western Kingbird Nesting in Rainy River District

The Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) is a rare spring and fall visitor to southern Ontario. Breeding across much of western Canada and the United States, and as far east as the mid-western states, it is considered a rare nester in Michigan and eastern Manitoba (Bent 1942).

Only recently has the Western Kingbird been confirmed as a breeding species in Ontario. Peck and James (1987) and Speirs (1985) report a nest containing three eggs (supported by photographic evidence [ROM PR 349 & 350]) found in Kent County on 26 June 1943 by C. J. MacFayden. However, no description of the parents is available, and the photographs of the nest and eggs are not diagnostic.

On 9 June 1987, D. H. Elder and T. J. Nash reported finding an active nest, containing at least two young, in Worthington Township,

Rainy River District (Weir 1987). This record was accepted as the first confirmed nesting of the species in Ontario.

Additional Ontario sightings of summering or potentially breeding birds include: (1) three birds found in Rainy River District, 6-14 July 1983, by B. Jones, L. Fazio, J. Heslop, and D. H. Elder, with two of the birds identified as females and one as a male, and (2) a Western Kingbird found in suitable nesting habitat by W. Crins and R. Ridout on 26 May 1981 in Rainy River District, 20km south of the above sighting. No evidence of breeding was noted in either case (Carpentier 1987).

On 3 June 1988, G. Carpentier, R. Smith, B. Charlton, and N. Barrett discovered a pair of adult Western Kingbirds in Worthington Township, Rainy River District. On 4 June Carpentier discovered a Western Kingbird nest located about 6m up in a large Manitoba

Maple (*Acer negundo*).

The nest was constructed of coarse grasses and fine twigs, loosely woven into a "messy" elongate structure, and situated near the confluence of a major vertical branch and the main trunk of the tree. Considerable foreign matter, of paper-like quality, was woven into the structure of the nest in the median section. The nest was generally untidy, and several strands of grass dangled from its base. It appeared that the lowest portions of the nest were well weathered, and it seemed that the nest was actually constructed on top of a previous one, although this was never confirmed.

At no time were the adults seen to incubate, but actions by one of the pair implied that the nest was still under construction, although obviously in the late stages. A kingbird observed on the nest on 4 June appeared to be shaping the cup of the nest with its body. Neither adult was seen carrying nest material to the site during the observations. The adults frequently emitted soft alarm calls while the observers were present.

The contents of the nest were not checked so as to reduce disturbance and the possibility of an abandonment. During the course of the observation period (3–6 June 1988), the adults were noted attending the nest for two brief periods, but they generally remained in the immediate vicinity of the nest and nest site for 15 to 20

minutes at a time.

The nest site and basic construction were consistent with descriptions contained in Harrison (1978) with respect to location on the tree, height above the ground, the presence of paper materials and grasses in its construction, and its loosely woven, untidy appearance.

It is the opinion of the observers that this constitutes the second confirmed nesting of the Western Kingbird in Ontario.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Liza Vandermeer for reviewing the original manuscript and making useful amendments.

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Short-eared Owl and Red-tailed Hawk Attempt to Rob Northern Harrier

On 19 March 1989 at 1715h we saw three raptors circling over open fields about 1km south of Hagersville, Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk, Ontario. The two highest were an adult male Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) and a Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*).

As we watched, the owl twice closed on the rising harrier and dived at it. The harrier was carrying a mouse and several strands of grass in its left foot but did not relinquish this prey. As this happened, a small adult Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) flapped and circled below the two higher birds but gained altitude steadily.

After about two minutes, the Short-eared Owl left and the Red-tailed Hawk began flying with steady wingbeats towards the harrier. The harrier flew quickly to the northwest for about 0.5km with the Red-tailed Hawk pursuing, but not gaining distance. Within 30 seconds, the Red-tailed Hawk broke off the chase and glided back to the southeast.

The harrier glided down, perched on the ground at the edge of an ice-covered quarry, and looked about, all the while holding the mouse.

Piracy is common among raptors (Palmer 1988:298), with Northern Harriers frequently involved as the attackers (Watson 1977:93). Palmer

(1988:128) notes that the Red-tailed Hawks occasionally rob other species such as Northern Harriers. Bildstein (1987) observes that harriers are more frequently robbed by Rough-legged Hawks (*Buteo lagopus*) to the extent that they often do not hunt in areas frequented by that species.

Usually, Short-eared Owls are the victims of piracy by Northern Harriers (Berger 1958; Clark 1975; Watson 1977) but, on occasion, they have been reported robbing prey of Northern Harriers (Palmer 1988:298).

Bent (1937) notes the only other case of a Northern Harrier being involved in a three-species act of piracy. A Northern Harrier carrying a mouse was pursued closely by three American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*); it dropped the mouse. The leading crow snatched it up, only to be chased by a Crested Caracara (*Polyborus plancus*). The crow dropped the dead mouse, which landed so close to the observer that the caracara perched nearby, reluctant to retrieve it.

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Book Reviews

Nothing Gold Can Stay; The Wildlife of Upper Canada. By W. Fraser Sandercombe. The Boston Mills Press, Erin, Ontario. 188pp. (\$19.95)

A while ago I was reading the diary of Elizabeth Simcoe, wife of Ontario's first Lieutenant-Governor (1792-1796), and was fascinated by the numerous, interesting natural history references. I thought it would be interesting to go through her diary and other similar sources and try to compose a picture of what the landscape of Upper Canada looked like, before development so fundamentally changed it. Accordingly, I was delighted soon after to hear that a new book, *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, had precisely that as its purpose. To quote from the introduction, it "is about how the land was when the settlers arrived, how they used it and abused it, added to it, took away from it". Sounds great, eh? Unfortunately, the book falls considerably short of the mark.

It is sub-divided into a variety of thematic chapters such as birds, hunting, fish and fishing, etc. Many

are given evocative and/or poetic titles ("None Gets Out Alive" for the chapter on squirrels and hares; "Trophy Meat" for the chapter on ungulates, etc.). In each the author selects passages from a variety of well-known pioneer writers and observers, including Catharine Parr Traill, Phillip H. Goss (who wrote about *Lower Canada*, by the way), Henry Scadding, Suzanna Moodie, etc. With each subject area there is an editorial by the author, summarizing the situation or expounding his views on the matter. Many beautifully executed pen and ink sketches of the animals and situations discussed are distributed through the text.

It is, ironically, the graphic and artistic success of *Nothing Gold Can Stay* — and it is a truly beautifully illustrated and crafted package — that points towards its major failing. Not nearly enough attention was paid to what went *into* this pretty

package. The relatively few bits of hard fact kind of rattle around in an attractive but rather empty space. Here are a few general examples of the problems with this book.

First, relatively few sources are used and those tend to be the famous Rice Lake naturalists (the Traills, Moodies, Jamesons, etc.) or Toronto area correspondents. Where are the eastern Ontario people (E. Billings, W. P. Lett, W. Goldie, for example) and why so few from W. Pope of southwestern Ontario? Very few newspaper references are apparent and *not one* citation of the many important articles and papers in early journals such as the *Canadian Naturalist and Geologist* (1856 and on) or the *Canadian Journal* (1852 and on) could be found, let alone any of John Richardson's observations in Upper Canada in the 1820s published in *Fauna Boreali — Americana* in 1831. Surely these are at least as important as the subjective opinions of untrained settlers? After all, the author wants to find out what the natural landscape was like, not just what settlers thought it was like.

Secondly, while the author's passion for the natural world and its creatures is clearly and sincerely expressed in his editorials and his lovely and, at times, haunting sketches, his grasp of the larger natural history picture (past and present) seems less secure. His statements that the Common Loon

will become extirpated in Ontario because of industrial pollution, that Northern Bobwhite were once numerous over most of Upper Canada, that the Fisher is extinct in southern Ontario, and that the only breeding Bald Eagles in (southern?) Ontario "may be a few up on the Bruce Peninsula" shakes one's confidence in the factual foundation of the book.

Thirdly, I really get steamed when I see someone referring to the natural environment as "the ecology", as author Sandercombe does on page 10. It's a pet peeve, I acknowledge, but such a fundamental misunderstanding of such a basic term would surely bother someone reading a book discussing "the physics" or "the medicine" [sic].

In a nutshell, this book is visually magnificent but is disappointing as a source of solid, dependable information on the early landscape of southern Ontario. The passion and conviction of the author's editorials are not sufficient to balance the factual errors, misunderstandings, and omissions. So it is that a fine concept remains unfulfilled.

If you like artistic, impressionistic sketches of the natural world and natural creatures, you will enjoy the visual feast offered by *Nothing Gold Can Stay*. The factual offering is rather meagre, however, and will leave those expecting a hearty feed of facts with grumbling innards.

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The Tanagers; Natural History, Distribution and Identification. By Morton L. Isler and Phyllis R. Isler. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D. C. 404pp, 32 colour plates.

Alas for the unfortunate Ontario Field Ornithologists! Poor, impoverished, deprived souls, they operate in an almost tanager-less environment. No wave of spring warblers can really compensate them for the fact that, at the very most, they have to make do with three species of one genus. But out there, south of them, the other 239 species of the most varied, fascinating, and colourful group of birds in the world awaits anybody with the time, finance, and determination to seek them out. The present book can only intensify the resolve of any red-blooded birdwatcher to do just that.

The first problem confronting any author writing about tanagers is to decide what, in fact, is a tanager. There exists a whole crowd of anomalous, puzzling species, ranging from the unique thrasher-like Thrush-Tanager to the mysterious Pardusco, an enigmatic little bird resembling a scruffy fall Common Yellowthroat, found only in a few upland woodlots in central Peru. In fact, about 20 years ago R. W. Storer wrote an excellent little review entitled "What is a Tanager?", coming to the conclusion, as I recollect, that it was not an easy question. Fortunately, in recent years, biochemistry has resolved a lot of these taxonomic problems. The present authors take

a broad viewpoint, and the book covers not only the conventional tanagers, ant-tanagers, shrike-tanagers, bush-tanagers, hemispinguses, chlorophonias, and euphonias, but also the Swallow-tanager, flower-piercers, dacnises, and honeycreepers. The bizarre Giant Conebill is included, but all the other conebills and the Bananaquit are not.

Apart from a brief but informative essay on the nature of tanagers, the book is almost entirely taken up with individual species accounts. These consist of notes on geographic and elevational range, habitat and behaviour, vocalizations, a range map, and a list of literature sources (an 18-page bibliography is given at the end). In some cases, such as the polytypic Stripe-headed Tanager, different subspecies groups are dealt with separately. No detailed plumage descriptions are given; instead, the plates are allowed to speak for themselves. Some of the larger genera, such as *Euphonia* and *Tangara*, are the subjects of brief essays located before the species accounts.

The authors have not attempted to generate new information; instead, they have collected, very comprehensively as far as I can see, just about everything worthwhile that has been written about

tanagers, and then presented it in an ordered, accessible, and readable fashion. This is of itself valuable; but especially worthwhile is the fact that they have gathered a large amount of hitherto unpublished observations from the note-books of some of the great virtuosi of present-day Neotropical field ornithology. By itself this justifies the book.

All the 242 species are illustrated in colour, and in many cases several races are depicted if they are sufficiently different to warrant it. The quality of the colour plates is adequate, but certainly not outstanding; for somebody who has been spoiled by the incomparable artistry of a Guy Tudor, they are a little disappointing. Nevertheless they are workmanlike, generally accurate, and entirely usable.

The book is, as far as I can see, pretty well free of trivial errors. The only obvious omission is the Black-throated Euphonia, a very dubious species known from one specimen only of obscure provenance, which is in any case probably a hybrid. The references at the back of the book go up to 1985, and the Green-capped Tanager, just described in the *Wilson Bulletin* in that year, was obviously added at the last minute to the colour plates.

A point which cannot fail to strike any reader is how little is known about many of the species. For example, it appears that the nests and eggs of almost 100 of the 242 species dealt with in the book

have never been described. These are not all obscure species found only in remote places, but include birds such as the Hooded Mountain-tanager, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, and Fulvous-headed Tanager, which are perfectly common in their ranges. Equal gaps occur in basic knowledge of behaviour and habits of a large number of species, an unbearable challenge which should send any birdwatchers worth their salt scurrying off to see their Bank Managers to borrow the price of an airplane ticket to Lima. If the Islers' excellent book stimulates tanager-deficient Ontarians to wing their way southwards, it will have served a good purpose; but in any case I recommend it as an enjoyable, valuable, and comprehensive account of a fascinating group of birds, and a worthwhile addition to the literature of Neotropical ornithology.

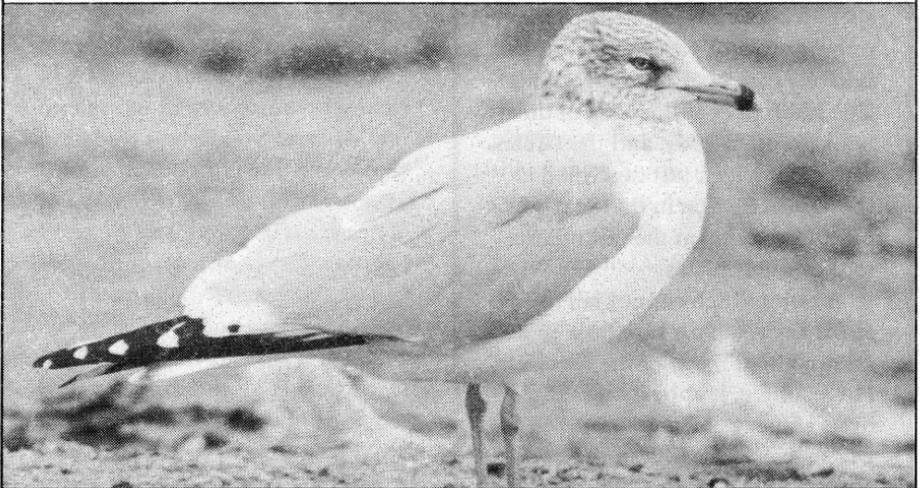
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Colonial waterbirds nesting in Canadian Lake Huron in 1980. By D. V. Weseloh, P. Mineau, S. M. Teeple, H. Blokpoel, and B. Ratcliff. 1986. Canadian Wildlife Service Progress Note No. 165. 28pp. Free.

This report summarizes data on the nesting populations of colonial waterbirds in the Canadian part of Lake Huron, including Georgian Bay and the North Channel. The species included in this study are Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*), Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*), and Common Tern (*S. hirundo*). The methodology employed during the survey is well outlined, so that direct comparisons of nesting populations at these sites (427 of them!) will be facilitated in the future. Several

maps and tables summarize the locations and numbers of these species in Lake Huron. Where data on former breeding populations were available, changes are noted. Only Common Tern has decreased in numbers on its historical colonies in the study area. This report also provides interesting notes on habitat preferences and on patterns of co-occurrence of these species in the breeding colonies in Lake Huron. It also documents the first nesting record of Black-crowned Night-Heron in Manitoulin District (now known from several sites in the District — see *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario*).

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Ring-billed Gull / photo by R. D. McRae

Ontario Field Ornithologists

Ontario Field Ornithologists is an organization dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It was formed to unify the ever-growing numbers of field ornithologists (birders/birdwatchers) across the province and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among its members. The Ontario Field Ornithologists officially oversees the activities of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC), publishes a newsletter and a journal, *Ontario Birds*, hosts field trips throughout Ontario and holds a Spring Field Meeting and an Annual General Meeting in the autumn.

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