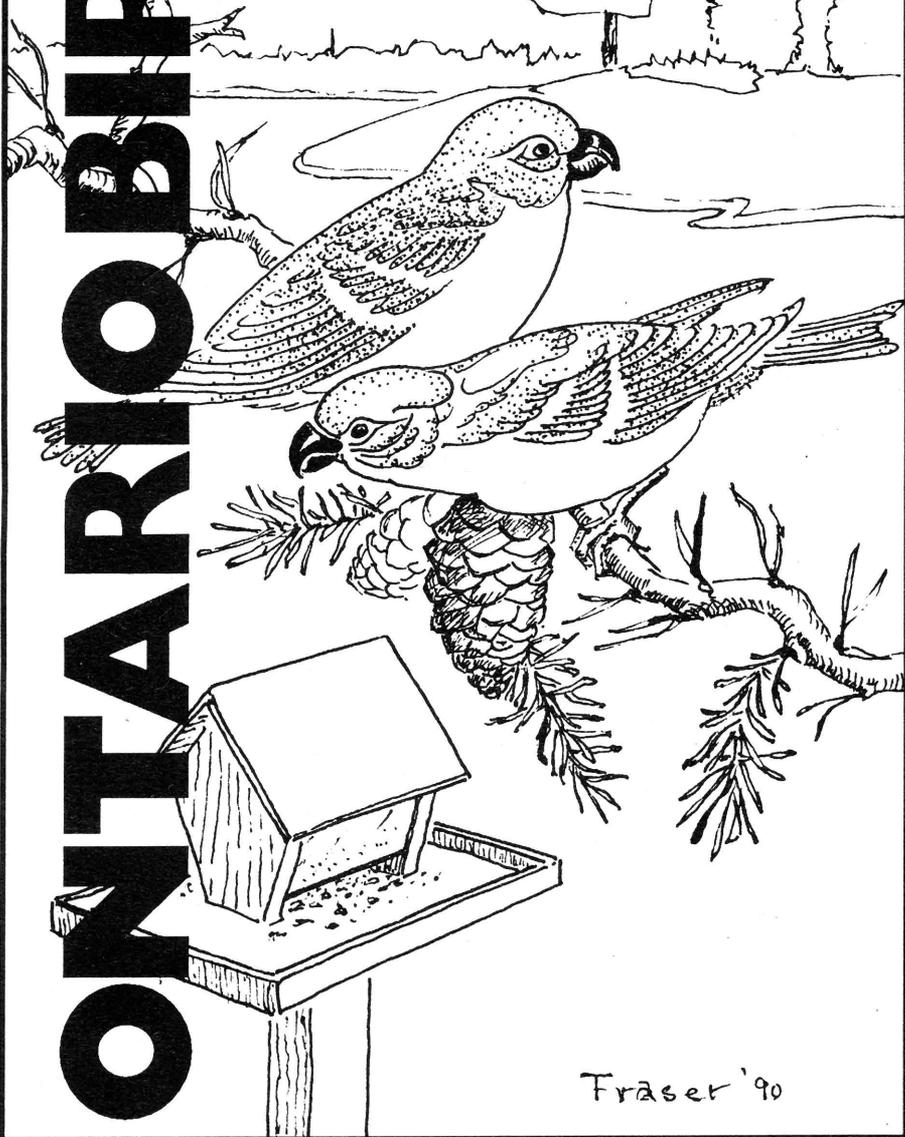


# ONTARIO BIRDS

The Journal of the  
Ontario Field  
Ornithologists

Volume 7 Number 3  
December 1989



Fraser '90



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**

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Box 1204, Station B  
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## Ontario Birds

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## 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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## In Memoriam Doris Huestis Speirs 1894 - 1989

Doris Huestis Speirs, besides being a naturalist and a nature-writer, was a painter, a poet, a translator and an editor. Nevertheless, she still found time to be a supremely congenial socializer. Her friendship was unfailing and her enthusiasm infectious. Her generous assistance to all manner of artistic, scientific and academic aspirants was legendary.

Doris started her artistic career as a painter. As a young woman she became acquainted with a number of members of the Group of Seven, particularly Lawren Harris, with whom she formed a lifelong friendship. She often went out sketching with Group members, and her style, while remaining essentially her own, came to have a distinct Group of Seven flavour.

Doris' deep and abiding interest in nature began in her pre-teen years, but it was on first seeing a flock of Evening Grosbeaks, in her early twenties, that she first began to take a serious interest in birds — an interest which stayed with her with unabated warmth to the end of her days.

In 1916, at the age of 22, Doris married the Eaton's executive and poet W. Gordon Mills, and became the mother of two daughters, Barbara and Iris. A collection of Mills' poems, entitled *Timberline*



Doris Huestis Speirs 1894 - 1989

*and Other Poems*, was edited by Doris Speirs, and published in 1985. This union was dissolved in the spring of 1939. In the fall of that year, Doris married J. Murray Speirs, the now renowned ornithologist and author of *Birds of Ontario*. Their common love of nature, Murray's ornithological expertise, and Doris' ever deepening fascination with the world of birds combined to induce her to undertake a systematic study of her favourite species, the Evening Grosbeak. The results of her research are recorded in A.C. Bent's *Life Histories of North*

*American Cardinals, Grosbeaks and Finches.*

Two woman friends were especially important in her life because of their great gifts in interpreting nature and in communicating their observations and insights to others.

The first of these was the eminent Swedish-born Canadian nature writer Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, whose knowledgeable and beautifully written books on nature in general and birds in particular have found a wide and appreciative readership among literate nature lovers. Although Louise Lawrence lived in a rural retreat north of North Bay, there was constant communication between the two friends, and Doris often regaled the members of her ornithological club with readings of Louise Lawrence's delightful, nature-filled letters.

The other special friend was Margaret Morse Nice, an enthusiastic and indefatigable American naturalist, whose most important contribution to ornithology was *Studies in the Life History of the Song Sparrow*, published in two volumes. Doris met this dedicated woman in 1938 and a lifelong friendship was formed. In 1952, in collaboration with Margaret Marsh and Olive Barfoot, Doris founded the Margaret Nice Ornithological Club (MNO), for women only, in honour of Mrs. Nice.

The 12 charter members of the

club came together at monthly meetings to pool their observations of bird life in the Toronto area. These meetings normally followed a daylong birding expedition. Doris herself was an especially careful recorder and minute observer of birds. She and Murray kept a well-stocked and well-frequented feeding station at their lovely rustic place at Cobble Hill, Pickering.

In 1979 the MNO sponsored the publishing of Margaret Nice's autobiography, *Research is a Passion with Me*. Doris Speirs was the instigator, the editor and the moving spirit behind this publication.

The club also contributed to the Dorcas Bay Nature Preserve (Federation of Ontario Naturalists) in the Bruce Peninsula, and was influential in the preserving of the Cranberry Marsh (Whitby), now part of the Lynde Shores Conservation Area.

Doris Speirs was a notable patron of the arts. She donated a number of important paintings and sketches by members of the Group of Seven and others to the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto and to the McMichael Gallery in Kleinburg. She was also a knowledgeable amateur of music and drama, was widely read in natural history and English literature, and was an accomplished reader of verse.

Doris Speirs was a personality larger than life. A handsome woman with sparkling blue eyes and

an engaging smile, she looked and sounded like a duchess and usually dressed the part. Indeed, she once arrived at a winter woodland outing of the MNOC in a platinum mink jacket, violet suede gloves and a Lily Daché hat. Only Doris could have carried this off — and she did, with panache. On another occasion, she fell down a steep wooded slope near her home at Cobble Hill and sustained a badly dislocated shoulder, but she was alright, she said, because “the chickadees came and ministered to me”.

Everybody has a whimsical Doris story — the whimsicalities were part and parcel of her *joie de vivre*, which also manifested itself in her quick affection for all men and women of good will and in her generous recognition of their talents. It

manifested itself too, of course, in her abounding love of nature.

She died in the night of the 24th of October, 1989, and was buried on the morning of the 27th, which would have been her ninety-fifth birthday. It was a surprisingly golden morning, and a late robin, perched high over her grave, sang a full-throated summer song which seemed to her assembled friends a most appropriate requiem. Thinking fondly of Doris at this moment of farewell, we could almost hear her intoning those lines of Landor she used to like:

*Nature I loved and, next to nature, art:  
I warmed both hands before the fire of  
life;  
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.*

Naomi Le Vay  
Toronto, Ontario

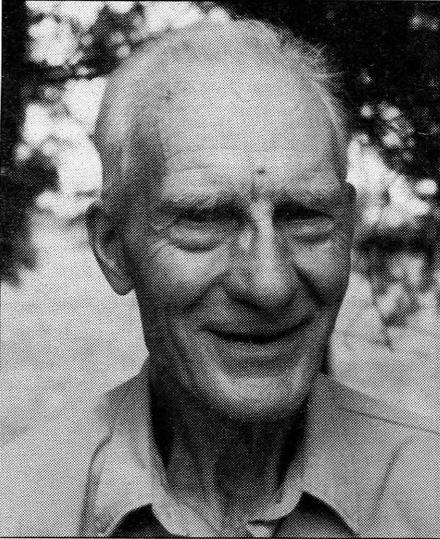
## In Memoriam Wilfred Botham 1908 - 1989

The Ontario Field Ornithologists lost one of its esteemed members and the Ontario naturalist community lost one of its most beloved practitioners when Wilf Botham passed away late last fall.

Young and old naturalists from around the province will remember Wilf for his keen love of nature and his willingness to pass on everything he knew to any interested observer. Perhaps one of the top field botanists in

southwestern Ontario, Wilf was for the most part self-taught, studying birds, plants, mushrooms and mosses.

Wilfred was motivated by a fundamental love of nature, beholding the environment with curiosity, respect and love. He was inspired by the 19th century naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton, whom he quoted to me often. It was Thompson's writing which prompted Wilfred's study of plants



Wilfred Botham 1908 - 1989

in 1938 on his farm in Gosfield North, and which ultimately led to his donation of over 2500 plants from his personal collection of Essex County vegetation to the National Museum of Canada in Ottawa.

A Pelee Island native, Wilf spent

his youth in Manitoba before moving back to Ontario in the late 1930s. Wilfred was tremendously active in conservation and environmental issues as a whole. He was a founding member of the Sun Parlour Naturalist Club and Essex County Field Naturalists Club. He was also a member of the Ontario Field Botanists, Canadian Nature Federation, Friends of Point Pelee and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. Wilfred is survived by his wife Anna Marie and his daughter Lynn Imeson of Cottam; a sister Beth and brothers John and Edward.

On a personal note, I will miss Wilfred dearly. He taught me so much, was always more than willing to answer my myriad of questions, and generally treated me like a son. A very dear friend will be sadly missed.

Lynn H. Vernon  
West Bloomfield, Michigan

## Letters to the Editor

### Harassment of owls on Amherst Island

Amherst Island is well known to birders as an "owl haven" in wintertime. With access to the island simple, and adequate roosting sites limited, the owls are easy to find. This gives many people the opportunity to observe and photograph them close at hand. Better communication with such

agencies as the North American Rare Bird Alert has enabled birders and photographers from all over Canada and the U.S.A. to visit Amherst. However, this same "owl haven", known and beloved by all, is becoming somewhat threatened by the lack of respect for nature shown by these same people who frequent the area. Branches strewn on the ground and trees showing

signs of having been climbed are not hard to find. One photographer/birder was recently caught perched halfway up a tree in which a Boreal Owl was roosting and was promptly removed from the tree.

The intent of this letter is not to imply that all visitors to Amherst are irresponsible, nor are these activities restricted to the Amherst area exclusively. Birds being flushed from perches and branches snapped off for better angles are all common occurrences.

The Boreal Owl is the recipient of most of this abuse and unless birders and photographers voice their displeasure at this lack of respect for the habitat of wildlife, it appears the occurrences will remain unreported in the future. Innocent photographers and birders also risk being painted with the same brush as these unscrupulous "pros" who must have the photograph or view at any cost. It is a situation that has been too long ignored.

A common philosophy must be reached amongst birders and photographers alike if beauty, tranquillity and, most importantly, wildlife habitat is to be preserved. Common sense must dictate actions. These public areas are for the enjoyment of all, thus acts of destruction and harassment only serve to harm ourselves in the long run.

Bruce M. Di Labio  
Ottawa, Ontario

### **Birding ethics**

*Ontario Birds* often publishes articles on rare birds. The recent OBRC report was, of course, essentially a list of rare birds. Unfortunately, if we birders do not improve our behaviour the only viewer of a rare bird will be its discoverer.

The recent sighting of the Broad-billed Hummingbird is a good example of the worst impacts of "twitching". The poor bird seemed to be heaven-sent to perk up a slow weekend; it was extraordinarily rare and it was reliable. Unfortunately, the bird and the property owners became so harassed by the crowds that the "event" was closed.

What did we do wrong? We didn't respect either the bird's or the property owner's rights to food, shelter and privacy.

Perhaps the hot lines should consider assisting property owners in similar situations. They could help to organize a system of volunteers to marshall car parking, demarcate appropriate viewing distances, and control over-zealous photographers. We are, presumably, civilized adults. As such, we should not need to be told where to stand. But when we behave as a crowd of impatient preschoolers we should be treated as such.

Victoria Carley  
Toronto, Ontario

### Further notes on Pine Grosbeaks at feeders

Ron Pittaway's note on Pine Grosbeaks at feeders (*Ontario Birds* 7:65) sent me searching through my computer records and notes to see whether or not 1985 was the first big year in southern Ontario for such visits. Briefly, the answer is "no", if Deep River is included in that geographical region.

Table 1 shows a summary of my records for Pine Grosbeaks at my feeder.

There appears to be little correlation between the number of birds present in the area and the number visiting my feeder. It is also interesting that, although Pine Grosbeaks began arriving as early as

15 October, the earliest visit to my feeder was 20 January, lending support to Pittaway's suggestion that a shortage of natural food is a factor.

A better illustration of that can be seen from my 1986 records. The preceding summer had seen a particularly heavy production of crab apples that attracted more Bohemian Waxwings than usual and sustained at least one American Robin throughout the winter. Within a week of their first appearance (23 October 1986), there were two Pine Grosbeaks feeding on my crab apples, with infrequent visits thereafter until 13 January 1987, when 10 to 15 began feeding there almost daily for the

*Table 1:* Summary of records for Pine Grosbeaks at feeder, Deep River, Renfrew County

Winter*	Deep River area		At feeder		
	No. of records	No. of birds	No. of records	Date(s)	No. of birds/visit
1970	41	200	—		
1971	—	—	—		
1972	50	300	—		
1973	47	80	1	2 Mar.	2
1974	22	100	1	2 Feb.	3
1975	33	150	1	2 Mar.	1
1976	55	380	12	22 Feb.—19 Mar.	2 to 15
1977	32	140	—		
1978	41	400	6	20 Jan.—12 Mar.	1 to 10
1979	26	270	1	4 Feb.	1
1980	1	2	—		
1982	14	134	10	30 Jan.—18 Mar.	1 to 15
1983	—	—	—		

\* Centred on January of year shown (15 Oct. to 15 April).

next month, then less frequently, but in larger numbers (up to 30), for another month. In that time, my notes mention visits to the feeder only four times, the first on 31 January (two birds), but it is

certainly possible there were other visits that went unrecorded.

Bill Walker  
Deep River, Ontario

## Are Pine Grosbeaks Increasing at Bird Feeders in Ontario?

by  
Erica H. Dunn

A suggestion has been made that Pine Grosbeaks (*Pinicola enucleator*) may now be using bird feeders to a greater degree than in the past (Pittaway 1989). Most of the supporting observations, however, were from a restricted area between Lake Simcoe and Algonquin Park. Here I look at the entire province, for the period 1976-88, using data from Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) and the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey (OBFS). These resources allow us to say whether Pine Grosbeaks are now attending feeders in greater numbers relative to their abundance in the wild (as measured by CBCs), as well as to comment on the hypotheses proposed by Pittaway to explain his observations.

### Methods

OBFS counts were obtained from the organizing body, the Long Point Bird Observatory. Each year, 400-500 people across the province tallied the birds observed at their feeders during a one to two day period, every second week from November to April. Observers recorded the peak count of each species seen in the observation period. For further details, see Dunn (1986).

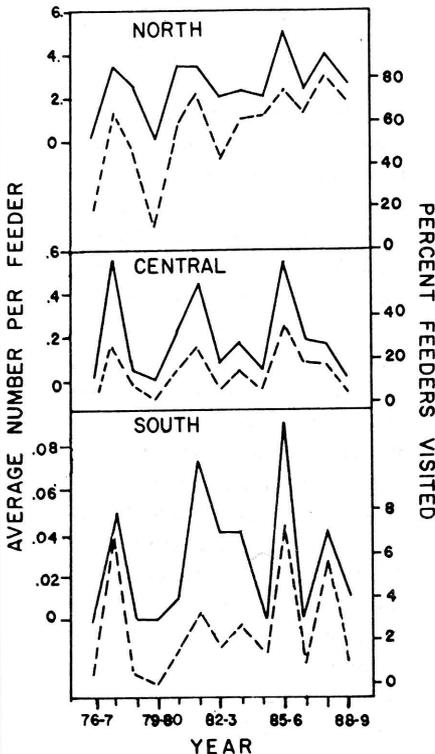
OBFS counts and CBCs were divided into three regions: Southern Ontario extended roughly to a line through Lake Simcoe to Belleville, including the Bruce Peninsula, Barrie and Peterborough. Central Ontario was defined as the area between the South and a line north of Parry Sound that passes through

Erica H. Dunn, 30 Davidson Road, Aurora, Ontario L4G 2B1

Algonquin Park and east to Petawawa. Northern Ontario was defined as the area north of the Parry Sound-Petawawa line (see Dunn 1986).

In analyses comparing feeder

*Figure 1:* Ontario Bird Feeder Survey results for Pine Grosbeak. Solid lines show the average number per feeder for the year (November through March), while the percent of all feeders visited on at least one of the ten count periods is shown by dashed lines.



counts with CBCs, OBFS data were taken from the fourth count period only, which is the one corresponding most closely in date to CBCs. The proportion of all OBFS counts and CBCs from the province that were conducted in each of these regions was very similar for both types of counts (Dunn 1986).

To determine whether a high proportion of Pine Grosbeak populations attended feeders at high population levels, multiple regressions were conducted of OBFS counts (average birds per feeder) on CBC (average birds per party hour) and CBC2 for each region and for the province as a whole. If CBC2 dropped out of an equation, the relationship between the two counts was constant, while if CBC2 remained, either increasing or decreasing proportions of birds visited feeders at higher population densities.

### Results and Discussion

Although the Pine Grosbeak is rare at feeders in Southern Ontario, it is quite common in the North (Figure 1). It is the sixth most abundant feeder species there, averaging 2.5 birds per feeder throughout the winter, and 4.9 birds at the 51% of the feeders which are visited by the species at all. Pine Grosbeaks drop off dramatically at feeders in Central Ontario, where Pittaway's observations were made, and are even less common in the south.

Numbers of Pine Grosbeaks at feeders vary markedly from year to year, as expected of an irruptive cardueline finch, in parallel throughout the province (Figure 1). There were no significant trends with year, despite the apparent increase in the north. Although 1985-86 was a high year for Pine Grosbeaks at Ontario feeders, it was not as unusual as suggested by Pittaway (1989), since similar numbers had occurred before.

These data suggest no change in feeder use over time, but to be certain, we have to compare feeder counts to populations in general. Even though feeder visitation has remained steady, a general decline in Pine Grosbeak populations would show that feeder visitation with respect to numbers in the wild had indeed increased. This was checked by looking for trends in Ontario CBCs, the only available index of total population size for the winter season. No significant trends were found in CBCs over the period 1976-88. I conclude that feeder use relative to population size has also remained steady.

Perhaps Pine Grosbeaks come to feeders in higher proportions when

there are large numbers in an area, such that we see relatively higher visitation rates in Central and Southern Ontario during invasion years (Pittaway 1989). Regression analysis of OBFS against CBCs, however, showed a straight line relationship within each region. This means that fluctuations in CBCs were paralleled by changes in feeder counts, and that a constant proportion of birds came to feeders at all population densities.

On the other hand, ratios of OBFS to CBC numbers indicated that a much higher proportion of birds in the north visited feeders relative to population size than did so further south (Table 1). A regression of OBFS on CBCs for the province as a whole indeed showed that more birds visited feeders at high population levels, contrary to the result discussed previously for each region. At least in part, this may be an artifact of the data. CBCs are conducted under increasingly severe winter conditions as one goes north. More of the birds tallied on CBCs there may actually have been counted at feeders, making the two count types less independent than further south. Currently we are

*Table 1:* Average OBFS abundance (fourth count, birds/feeder) and CBCs (birds/party hour) for Pine Grosbeak, 1976-77 through 1987-88 (1984-85 missing).

	North	Ontario Central	South
OBFS	2.5	0.2	0.03
CBC	2.0	0.9	0.4
Ratio (OBFS/CBC)	1.3	0.2	0.08

**Table 2:** Ten-year average OBFS figures for Pine Grosbeak and possible competitors at feeders. Abundance (A), percent of feeders visited at least once in season (%) and regional rank in abundance at feeders (R).

	North			Ontario Central			South		
	A	%	R	A	%	R	A	%	R
Pine Grosbeak	2.5	51	6	0.2	14	19	0.03	3	21
Evening Grosbeak	12.2	88	1	13.4	89	1	3.3	46	5

unable to separate individuals counted during CBCs at feeders and away from feeders, so this possibility cannot be checked.

If we assume that there is at least some tendency for Pine Grosbeaks to attend feeders more often in the north than elsewhere, what could be the reason? One suggestion is that Pine Grosbeaks in the south may have arrived from remote regions where feeders are scarce, so have not learned to use them (Pittaway 1989). I can't address this possibility without banding data, but the fact that Pine Grosbeaks are so common at feeders in Northern Ontario suggests that many of the birds further south are indeed familiar with feeders.

Another suggestion made by Pittaway (1989) is that Pine Grosbeaks may avoid feeders in Southern Ontario and New York because of the large numbers there of more aggressive species such as Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) and Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*). Both these species, however, were more abundant at

feeders in Northern and Central Ontario than in the south (Table 2). There was a negative correlation ( $P=0.033$ ) between Pine and Evening Grosbeak numbers at feeders in the north (and no correlation elsewhere), but the same correlation was found for CBCs. In other words, Pine Grosbeaks were more abundant in the north when Evening Grosbeaks were not, but any possible causal relationship took effect at the population level, and not at feeders.

If a higher proportion of Pine Grosbeaks really does visit feeders in the north than further south, the cause is most likely to be climatic. This would be consistent with the low visitation rates reported in New York, and high rates in Minnesota (Pittaway 1989).

### Acknowledgements

Thanks are extended to the (literally) thousands of OBFS and CBC participants who generated the data used in this analysis. Your efforts are really appreciated.

**Author's note**

This paper is only one example of how the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey can be used, and the data are available to anyone for analysis. In 1987-88, the survey was expanded continent-wide under the name Project FeederWatch. Over 7,500 now report from all parts of North America, and the data allow us to examine questions

about birds at feeders on a much larger scale. For further information on these surveys, or to take part, contact the author.

**Literature cited**

- Dunn, E.H.* 1986. Feeder counts and winter bird population trends. *American Birds* 40:61-66.
- Pittaway, R.* 1989. Pine Grosbeaks using bird feeders. *Ontario Birds* 7:65-67.

# Bird Observations on Fighting Island, Detroit River, Spring 1988

by

Martin K. McNicholl

**Introduction**

Fighting Island lies in the Detroit River, south of Windsor, Essex County, Ontario, extending from north of La Salle to south of River Canard (Byers 1980: entry 86). As the border between the U.S.A. and Canada lies in the river immediately to the west of the island (Figure 1), it is of interest to naturalists as one of the westernmost points of land in extreme southern Ontario.

Although data on birds have been collected for many years at Point Pelee and more recently at Holiday Beach and Pelee Island, relatively few details have been

published for other parts of Essex County except in brief notes and in wider regional works by A.H. Kelley. Her most recent compilation of records for the provincial and state counties surrounding the Detroit River is now over a decade old (Kelley 1978), although she publishes occasional updates (Kelley 1983). An updated compilation of data on birds in Essex County would be desirable, especially in light of the high degree of change that has taken place in bird populations in the region surrounding the western end of Lake Erie (Kelley 1972; Mayfield 1988-1989).

Martin K. McNicholl, 218 First Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M4M 1X4

Fighting Island is the site of one of several Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) colonies used by the Canadian Wildlife Service to monitor levels of various contaminants in the Great Lakes (Ellenton *et al.* 1985; Struger *et al.* 1985). In 1988, I visited the island on 27 April and once or twice daily from 29 April to 25 May inclusive while conducting contract research for the Canadian Wildlife Service as part of their ongoing studies. These daily visits allowed me to document patterns of use of the southern end of the island by all bird species for approximately one month in late spring. I hope that such a record will be of use to others in compiling an updated account of the birds of Essex County and also encourage others who visit a prescribed area on a regular basis to keep a record of daily bird observations.

As access to the island is controlled strictly by the owners, who visited the southern end only rarely during the period of my study, disturbance was restricted to my presence and off-island boat traffic. The Herring Gull colony occupied dikes along the eastern and western shores of the island, with a few nests on the southern dike. These three dikes surrounded a lagoon, which dominated the southern part of the island. Habitat on this portion of the island consisted of the edge of the lagoon, heaps of rocks forming the dikes, grass and other low vegetation (mostly clover), three stands of

redgrass (*Phragmites australis*), at the southeast and southwest corners of the lagoon and along one portion of the south shore, a row of trees (mostly willows, *Salix* sp.) along the south dike, a row of trees (mostly honey locust, *Gleditsia triacanthos*) on the west dike, and a few other scattered trees of these two species. Thus, this portion of the island is unsuitable for regular use by woodland bird species and others that prefer extensive cover, and many species common on the nearby mainland were not observed on the island. Three small islets off the south shore were also visited frequently. In the following account, "south channel" refers to the channel between these islets and the southern shore of Fighting Island.

A detailed analysis of the 64 species in the following annotated list would be premature without data from further north on the island, data from other times of the year and/or data from additional years. However, I checked the status of each species seen in the region generally in Kelley (1978) and compared dates seen with spring migration dates for Point Pelee given by Stirrett (1960, 1973) and for two more recent years (1982 and 1983) as summarized in annual bird reports for the Point Pelee area (Wormington 1982; Runtz 1983). These comparisons place my observations in perspective with knowledge of birds in the area generally. Migrants in spring would

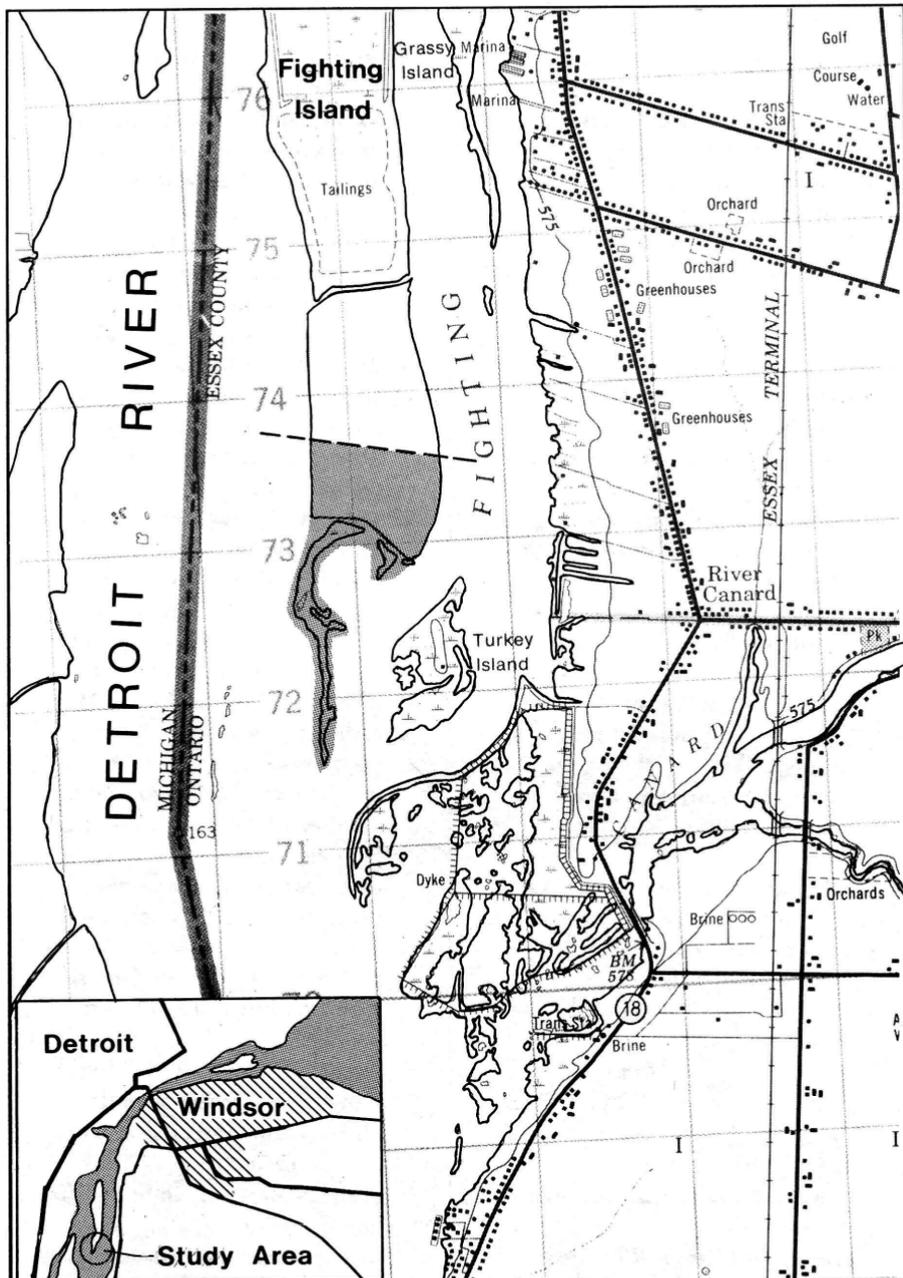


Figure 1: Fighting Island, Detroit River, Essex County, Ontario. Study area south of dashed line. Inset shows relation to Windsor. Map drawn by Michael Slaven.

be expected to arrive about the same time or a few days later than those at Point Pelee. Unless indicated otherwise, dates of occurrence and numbers seen on Fighting Island in 1988 conform to those that would be expected according to the sources mentioned above.

### Species Accounts

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) -

One was observed on the river just offshore from the west dike on 1 May.

Double-crested Cormorant

(*Phalacrocorax auritus*) - Single birds were observed off the west dike on 6 May, off the eastern shore on 24 May and overhead on 8 and 14 May. Two flew over on 17 May and a raft of one adult and 17 subadults was off the south end of the island later on 8 May. Although Kelley (1978) indicated a recent decline of this species in the region with a "slight indication" of a more recent increase, it has since increased substantially throughout much of the Great Lakes (Ludwig 1984; Price and Weseloh 1986).

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) -

One was seen overhead on 7 and 21 May and two on 8 and 13 May. This heron was seen virtually daily on nearby areas of the mainland.

Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*) -

One was seen over the lagoon on 19 and 21 May. Although

seen only twice on the island, one frequently foraged in a bay visible from the island and one or two could predictably be seen in a marshy area by River Canard.

Black-crowned Night-Heron

(*Nycticorax nycticorax*) - One flew over the offshore islets and then the island on 10 May, four over the island on 16 May and one on 20 May. This species is known to breed on Stony Island, also situated in the Detroit River (Kelley 1978).

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) - Twelve

were in the bay south of the island on 30 April, six off the east shore on 16 May, ten near there on 17 May and two there on 22 May. I also saw six off nearby Turkey Island on 3 May. Although these were the only occasions when I saw swans away from the mainland shore, I did see them virtually daily on the river close to shore and suspect that a careful search would confirm nesting in this atlas square, where they are shown as possible nesters in the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (Lumsden 1987a).

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) -

Canada Geese were seen daily on the island and at least four pairs were known to raise goslings. Breeding in Southern Ontario was once unusual (Speirs 1985) and considered to involve only injured or semi-domesticated individuals (Baillie

and Harrington 1936). Although now abundant in the region (Kelley 1978), there were still no nesting records in the Ontario Nest Records Scheme for Essex County when Peck and James (1983) prepared their nonpasserine volume on breeding birds in Ontario. Nests have been reported since (Peck and James 1987) and breeding was confirmed in all three atlas squares bordering the Detroit River (Lumsden 1987b). The first young were noted on 8 May, when two pairs were each seen with four downy goslings. Three broods had crêched together with at least 12 goslings on 9 May and 12 to 15 goslings on 18

May. Later brood counts of five, six, seven and eight goslings may have involved additional pairs and/or mixed broods, as all the geese wandered widely once the young hatched.

Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) - A pair plus one male seen with a male Blue-winged Teal and a pair of Gadwall on the lagoon on 22 May and another independent male there the same day were my only observations. Although this date is a bit later than indicated for spring migration of this species by Kelley (1978), Stürrett (1960, 1973) reported spring records at Point Pelee to 1 June, and Wormington (1982) reported



Semipalmated Plover. Photo by R. D. McRae.

two there as late as 20 May in 1982.

American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) - Two pairs on the lagoon on 30 April were the only American Black Ducks seen. Although considered common in the region by Kelley (1978), this species has declined sharply in the area generally (Mayfield 1988-1989), with the decline in Ontario most marked in the westernmost parts of the extreme south (Dennis *et al.* 1984).

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) - Mallards were seen on the island daily, with one to three pairs seen most days. Groups of males ranged from two to eight, often accompanied by one or two additional pairs. Two nests were found: one contained seven eggs on 3 and 7 May, but only two eggs on 8 May and none on 16 May. The second nest contained six eggs on 7 May, only five on 10 May and none on 17 May. Both nests were in the vicinity of Herring Gull nests and discovered by the flushing of the female, presumably revealing the location of the nest to the gulls as well as me. An egg was found on the ground with no nest structure when a female flushed on 21 May, and the next day a hen flushed from the same spot. No egg was present, but a large fox snake (*Elaphe vulpina*) with an egg-shaped lump in its throat was less than one metre

away. A group of 11 ducklings was seen on the lagoon with no adults nearby on 11 May and again on 17 May, but on the latter date they were joined by a female. Another female performed a broken-wing display in front of me on 22 May, after which I found at least six newly-hatched ducklings in nearby clover. A female with 14 very large ducklings on 25 May may have been involved in cr ching. All these nesting dates are well within the range documented for Ontario (Peck and James 1983) of 2 April to 20 July. Mallards now breed commonly in the region, having eclipsed the American Black Duck in the 1960s (Speirs 1985) and are increasingly outnumbering the latter (Dennis *et al.* 1984; Mayfield 1988-1989).

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) - One male seen with two male American Wigeon and a Gadwall on 20 May was the first noted for the island. In addition to the male seen with Green-winged Teal and Gadwall on 22 May mentioned above, two more males were seen on the lagoon the same day. One male was also seen on 23 May. No females were observed.

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) - The only shovelers seen were a pair on the lagoon on 30 April.  
Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) - No Gadwalls were seen on the island

in April, but a pair was present on the lagoon on 1 May and at least one bird every day thereafter, a pair every day except 20 May. Two pairs were present on 10, 14, 18 and 21 May, two pairs plus another male on 24 May and four pairs on 16 May. Single males were seen with the (presumably usual) pair on six dates and a single female with the pair on 13 May. As indicated in some of the species accounts above, Gadwall often associated with other dabbling ducks. Like them, Gadwall usually frequented the lagoon, but unlike any other dabblers were also sometimes seen in the river or the south channel. Kelley (1978) regarded this species as "regular" through May in the area, but some of the dates on which I saw them are later than the latest spring records given for Point Pelee in 1982 and 1983 by Wormington (1982) and Runtz (1983). Although not shown as nesting in Essex County by Peck and James (1983), breeding evidence has since been obtained for the county (Peck and James 1987), including confirmed breeding along the Detroit River (Sandilands 1987). Some of my observations may thus have involved breeding birds. In light of increasing populations in eastern North America generally (Henny and Holgersen 1974) and Ontario specifically (Curry,

in press), nesting may be expected to become more frequent.

American Wigeon (*Anas americana*)

- The two males seen on the lagoon with Blue-winged Teal and Gadwall on 20 May were the only wigeon seen on the island. This date is one day earlier than the last spring migration date for 1982 recorded by Wormington (1982) at Point Pelee, though Stirrett recorded as many as 50 there on 21 May and six on 1 June.

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) -

Lesser Scaup were seen daily from 27 April to 8 May in numbers ranging from one male (4 May) to five males and three females, except that about 30 were present on 30 April. The latter group was seen in the channel in the morning and on the lagoon in the afternoon, and other sightings of this species were about equally divided between the lagoon and the river. None was seen on 9 May, but 18 were on the lagoon on 10 May and four on 11 May. From 12 to 16 May, only one male was present on two days, but eight males and two females appeared on 17 May, with only one male there the next day. Three males in the channel on 20 May were the last seen. Latest spring migrants at Point Pelee in both 1982 and 1983 (Wormington 1982; Runtz 1983) were on 16 May, though

Stirrett (1973) reported as many as 100 there as late as 20 May, and six as late as 10 June. Of three diving duck species wintering on the Detroit River, this was the main species that was examined for the presence of organochlorine contaminants (Smith *et al.* 1985).

Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) - The only goldeneye I saw at the island was a male with two Buffleheads in the river just off the southwest corner of the island on 2 May.

Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*) - A pair and four additional females were in the channel in the morning of 30 April and on the lagoon that afternoon. My only other observations of this species were the pair with the goldeneye on the river on 2 May and a pair on the lagoon on 13 May.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) - A pair was seen on the river off the south end of the island on 30 April and a male was there on 3 May. A male was with five females off the west dike on 6 May. The last observation was of a female on 12 May, the only merganser seen on the lagoon.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) - The only Ruddy Ducks seen were a male on the lagoon on 2 May and a female in the channel on 6 May.

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) - Although this species

suffered a major decline in the region in the late 1970s (Kelley 1983), I saw and heard more in the general vicinity of Windsor in the month that I was there than I have noted in the last five or six years elsewhere in southern Ontario. Nevertheless, the lack of cover on the southern part of Fighting Island made a female that I flushed there on 10 May very surprising.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) - One on the shore of the lagoon on 18 May, one on the shore of the channel on 19 May and three at the edge of the lagoon on 23 May were the only observations.

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) - Three to four pairs were seen daily in predictable sites, where they routinely performed "broken-wing" distraction displays, suggesting they were nesting, as would be expected (Kelley 1978; Peck and James 1983).

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) - One Greater Yellowlegs was on the lagoon on the morning of 30 April and two were there later the same day. One was with a group of shorebirds that appeared on the afternoon of 3 May, most of which were absent that morning (see Solitary Sandpiper). One was also on the lagoon on 5 and 14 May.

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) - This species was seen on most

days from 29 April to 15 May, usually one or two on the lagoon. Three to four were there on 2 May and four were present all day on 3 May, with an additional two in the group of shorebirds that appeared on the lagoon that afternoon. One on the south shore on 8 May and one on the west dike the same day were the only yellowlegs seen away from the lagoon.

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*)

- The only Solitary Sandpiper seen was in a group of shorebirds that appeared on the lagoon on the afternoon of 3 May, also including three Pectoral Sandpipers, one Greater Yellowlegs, two Lesser Yellowlegs, one Spotted Sandpiper and one Wilson's Phalarope.

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*)

- One to four Spotted Sandpipers were seen daily at the edge of the lagoon except on 7 May. I suspect that this species nests on the island, especially as I saw two in a territorial dispute on 6 May, but my visits were before most nesting in the province (Peck and James 1983), although within the range of earliest nesting dates. Sixteen on 22 May constituted the only flock seen.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) - The first turnstone seen was on the lagoon on 14 May, after which one to eight birds were seen on seven other

days to 25 May.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) - The only Sanderling seen was on the lagoon on 24 May.

Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) - One on the lagoon on 24 May and five there the next day were my only observations of this species.

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)

- One on 4 May matched the earliest record given for the region by Kelley (1978). Three on 23 May were the last observed, coinciding with the last spring date at Point Pelee for both 1982 and 1983 given by Wormington and Runtz, although later spring dates for Point Pelee are given by Stirrett (1973) and for the region as a whole by Kelley (1978). One was also seen on 8 and 14 May, two on 6 May and three on 18 and 19 May.

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)

- One to three Pectoral Sandpipers were seen on seven dates from 27 April (1) through 14 May (3), all on the lagoon except for three on the westernmost islet on 2 May and two flying over the south dike on 4 May.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) - Eight on the lagoon on 24 May, two there on the morning of 25 May and ten there that afternoon were the only Dunlins seen on the island.

Short-billed Dowitcher

(*Limnodromus griseus*) - One on a



Female Wilson's Phalarope. Photo by R. D. McRae.

sandbar attached to the middle offshore islets on 9 May matched Stürrett's (1973) earliest spring date for Point Pelee, although there were earlier records for Point Pelee for both 1982 (3 May) and 1983 (6 May) listed by Wormington and Runtz, respectively.

Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) - A female was on the lagoon on 3 May with the group of shorebirds listed under Solitary Sandpiper. Although Stürrett did not list this species among spring migrants at Point Pelee in his 1960 report, he later reported one there on 11 May 1967 (Stürrett 1973) and Kelley (1978) reported that it has become a regular migrant since

1964.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) - A female was on the lagoon on 24 May with eight Dunlins and a Semipalmated Sandpiper. Although Kelley (1978) regarded this species as rare in spring, and Stürrett (1973) listed no spring records for Point Pelee, there are several spring records in recent years elsewhere in southern Ontario, including a 1978 observation by A. Wormington at Essex, Essex County (Speirs 1985).

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) - Although considered an abundant permanent resident in the region by Kelley (1978) and reported by Mayfield (1988-1989) to now outnumber

Herring Gulls at the western end of Lake Erie, this species was virtually absent at the southern end of Fighting Island. My only records there were of a sick-looking bird seen on the westernmost offshore islet on 9 May and a dead gull found on the edge of the lagoon on 25 May. This absence was very striking, as I noted this gull frequently in nearby areas, and is especially noteworthy in view of the fact that a colony of more than 20000 pairs breeds farther north on the island (D.V. Weseloh, pers. comm., 1989).

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) - As mentioned above, Fighting Island hosts one of several Herring Gull colonies visited annually by the Canadian Wildlife Service for biomonitoring purposes (Ellenton *et al.* 1985; Struger *et al.* 1985). During my period of study, I observed 154 nests, at least 118 of which were known to be active. Details have been reported elsewhere (McNicholl 1988).

Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) - Two seen flying over Fighting Island on 25 May constituted my only observation there.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) - A flock of about ten Common Terns flying around the south shore on 30 April, including one carrying a piece of grass, were the first I saw at the island, but they were seen on all but two

days thereafter, and I was rarely out of sight of at least one. Common Terns nest on Fighting Island (Weseloh *et al.* 1989), but had not begun to do so on 25 May, a date later than other colonies with which I am familiar in southern Ontario, but earlier than half the egg dates reported by Peck and James (1983) for the province as a whole.

Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) - One in winter plumage with Common Terns off the south dike on 11 May was the only Forster's Tern I saw at Fighting Island. Although now locally common in the region, with indications of possible breeding along the Detroit River (McNicholl 1987), its confirmed nesting areas in Ontario are all somewhat further east, especially around Lake St. Clair.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) - I saw Black Terns five times: one on each of 6, 10, 20 and 22 May and five on 14 May. These were observed over the lagoon, south shore and west dike.

Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) - Although a common permanent resident in the region, the sparsity of trees on the southern portion of the island is not conducive to their regular occurrence there. One apparently feeding on the ground at the corner of the southern and western dikes on

13 May was the only dove I saw actually on the island. I also saw one fly over the island on each of 16, 17, 18 and 22 May, and three on 25 May.

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) -

One crossing from the mainland to the east side of the island on 8 May was the only swift I saw over the island itself, although I often saw them nearby.

Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) -

Although this common summer resident was often seen in nearby areas, a male over the lagoon on 30 April was my only record for the island.

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) -

Flickers were observed in the grass along the south dike (never in trees) on 2, 6, 7, 11, 14 and 20 May. All observations were of single birds except on 6 May, when two were seen there and another two on the east dike. The sparsity of trees likely precluded more regular occurrence on the island.

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus*

*tyrannus*) - My only observations of a flycatcher on the island consisted of one Eastern Kingbird on 17 and 20 May and two on 25 May, all in trees along the south dike.

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) -

Martins were seen only twice at the island: both a male and a female on 20 May and a male the next day, all over the south channel.

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) -

The first Tree Swallows seen were about 40 hawking insects over the south channel along with six Bank Swallows and four Barn Swallows on 30 April. Thereafter, Tree Swallows were seen almost daily, missing only on 4, 12 and 13 May. Usually one to ten could be seen or heard at almost any time I was on the island. On foggy or misty days, large numbers concentrated over the south channel and along the south dike. On the morning of 17 May, I noted large numbers feeding there with large numbers of Bank and Barn Swallows and two Northern Rough-winged Swallows. That afternoon I counted about 50 swallows perched in the branches of a dead tree anchored in the channel. These were mostly Tree and Barn Swallows, but also included 15 Bank Swallows and one Cliff Swallow. About 500 additional swallows were feeding over the channel, with Tree and Bank Swallows predominating, but also many Barn Swallows. Swallows were back to normal small numbers on the 18th, but on the 19th, between 400 and 500 were feeding along the south channel and perching in the dead tree again, and large numbers were there again on 20 May. Tree, Bank and Barn Swallows were the predominant species again on both days, but three Cliff Swallows were noted

on the 20th. A smaller group of 60 Tree, 20 Bank and 30 Barn Swallows were present on 25 May.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) - The two seen in the large concentration of swallows on 17 May mentioned under Tree Swallow constituted my only observations.

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) - The six seen on 30 April mentioned under Tree Swallow were the first I noted on the island. They were seen on 16 days thereafter, usually between one and five birds at a time, but in larger concentrations on 17, 19, 20 and

25 May as described under Tree Swallow.

Cliff Swallow (*Hirundo pyrrhonota*) - In addition to the single bird in the mixed group on 17 May and the three on 20 May mentioned in the Tree Swallow account, one was seen over the south dike on 2 May, a day before the earliest record listed by Stirrett (1960) for Point Pelee, but well after more recent April records there (Stirrett 1973; Wormington 1982; Runtz 1983).

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) - The four seen with Tree and Bank Swallows on 30 April were the first I saw on the island, but



Adult Forster's Tern. Photo by R. D. McRae.

this species was seen on most days (18 of 25) that I visited the island in May. Usually, only one to three birds were seen at a time, but larger numbers were present on 17, 19, 20 and 25 May.

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) - Little habitat suitable for this "common summer resident" was available in the study area, but two were in a patch of old (previous year's) *Phragmites* on 27 April, presumably en route to better cover.

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) - Starlings were seen feeding along the dikes on ten dates from 30 April to 16 May and on 25 May. Usually only two to four were present, but a group of about 30 were seen on 30 April, 15 on 11 May and ten on 16 May.

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) - A singing male in the willows on the south dike and another in the *Phragmites* patch at the southeast corner of the lagoon on 7 May suggested that this species may nest on the island, but no others were seen except one male at the southwestern corner on 21 May.

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) - The only other warblers seen on the island were a male yellowthroat on the south dike on 9 May and another male in the *Phragmites* patch in the southwestern corner of the lagoon on 22 May.

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) -

One at the southeastern corner of the island was my only record. Most of the habitat on the southern part of the island seemed too open for this species.

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) - The grassy nature of much of the study area appeared suitable for this sparrow, and one or two were seen on seven days from 30 April to 9 May, including one singing on 5 and 6 May. However, only one bird was observed after this date, singing on the westernmost offshore islet on 16 May, possibly because the grass never became very dense.

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) - Song Sparrows almost certainly nested on the island, as five to six were observed singing on 27 April and two to six were seen and heard daily until 23 May, though oddly missed on 24 and 25 May. Thick patches of clover close to honey locust trees and *Phragmites* stands were frequented by this species.

Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*) - Two sparrows observed north of the Herring Gull nesting area on 30 April appeared to be Swamp Sparrows, but my view of them was not adequate to confirm their identity. Twenty were seen in the *Phragmites* patch of the southeastern corner of the lagoon about 20 minutes later,

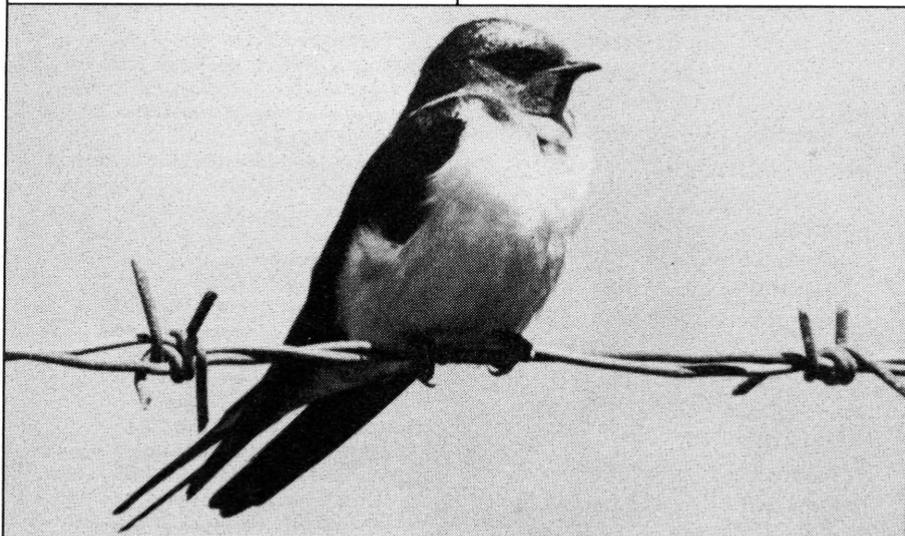
and 10 to 15 were still there on 1 May, but none thereafter.

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) - A female on the south dike on 17 May was the only Bobolink seen on the island.

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) - As expected, this species was seen on the island daily. On our first visit on 27 April, a flock of 50 to 60 males inhabited the row of willows on the south dike, but a few independent singing males elsewhere appeared to be establishing territories. On 29 April, the flock contained about 20 males, but a pair was also seen. Several pairs were conspicuously defending territories on 30 April and at least a dozen pairs were seen thereafter at regular sites that suggested they nested. In

addition to these apparently territorial birds, ten to 20 males remained in the flock on 1 and 2 May. On 3 May, the flock consisted of two groups, one of four females and 15 males, the other of 36 males. On 4 May, the flock consisted of 18 males and four females, increasing to 28 males and 18 females on 6 May. On 7 and 8 May, 20 males and 15 females were still in the flock. There was no indication of the flock on 9 May, but 15 males were there on 10 May, the last date on which the south dike flock was apparent. About ten to 15 males on 25 May in the dead tree used by the swallows in the channel was the only other concentration of blackbirds seen.

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) - Grackles were seen on



Barn Swallow. Photo by R. D. McRae.

the island daily from 30 April to 8 May, sometimes singly, but usually in groups of three to ten. One was also present on 10 May, two on 17 May, and one on 20 May.

American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) - Goldfinches were not seen on the island regularly, but one male was seen flying over on each of 1, 14, 18, 20 and 21 May, and four were in the honey locusts on the west dike on 22 May.

### Concluding Remarks

Although data from daily observations for one month of one year are insufficient to allow meaningful conclusions, the number of species seen only once or twice in inappropriate or marginal habitat suggests that many birds may rest or feed on the island temporarily during migration, while some that do not nest there (e.g., the swallows, flickers, starlings and grackles) may feed there quite frequently. As is typical of small islands, the breeding avifauna was sparse compared to mainland populations. Breeding was confirmed for four species (Canada Goose, Mallard, Herring Gull and Common Tern) and suspected for six others (Gadwall, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrow and Red-winged Blackbird).

Additional observations in other months and other years would be of interest and would undoubtedly

add to the list of birds that at least occasionally visit the island.

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Dunlin. Photo by R.D. McRae.

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## Notes

### Marsh Nesting by Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) in the Toronto Area

During 1988 and 1989, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority conducted a survey of colonial nesting birds in the Toronto area. Marsh nesting by Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) was observed during both years of the survey. In 1988, one pair of Common Terns was observed nesting in a wetland on the shores of Lake Ontario. In 1989, four pairs were observed nesting at the same site.

Common Terns ordinarily nest on sand, gravel and pebble

beaches, sand dunes, and on islands (Cramp *et al.* 1974). Marsh nesting in Common Terns is rare and is often an indication of a shortage of more typical nesting habitat (Nickell 1966). In a study on Long Island, New York, in the 1970s, a large number of Common Terns were observed nesting in marsh habitat. The number of pairs engaged in marsh nesting usually represented a small proportion of the total number of birds nesting on Long Island (Buckley and Buckley 1980). The authors concluded that Common terns

appear to move their nest sites from marsh to beach and back depending on variations in habitat quality and availability (Buckley and Buckley 1980).

During both years of the colonial nesting bird survey, Common Terns were observed nesting in Hydro Park. This wetland is a small, 20 ha shoreline marsh on Lake Ontario adjacent to Frenchman's Bay in the Town of Pickering, Regional Municipality of Durham. The dominant vegetation communities consist of cattails (*Typha* spp.), grasses (*Gramineae* spp.) and sedges (*Cyperaceae* spp.) (Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority 1982). The wetland surrounds an unnamed creek which flows into Frenchman's Bay. The east side of the marsh is bordered by parkland owned and managed by Ontario Hydro.

Common Terns nested in association with Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*) in Hydro Park. The Black Terns nested in three distinct colonies on floating mats of emergent vegetation and mud flats. In 1988, one pair of Common Terns nested on an isolated mat of floating vegetation. The nest was an elaborate construction of dead cattails, much larger than Common Tern nests observed in non-marsh habitat elsewhere in the Toronto area. The nest occupied the entire surface area of vegetation visible above the water's surface. In 1989, the Common Tern colony (four pairs) was located on a sparsely

vegetated mud flat adjacent to a large area vegetated with cattails. Water depth at the colony site was approximately 0.5 m. Nests at this site were slight scrapes or depression in the substrate lined with small pieces of aquatic vegetation.

Numbers of Common Terns over much of the lower Great Lakes have declined recently (Courtney and Blokpoel 1983). Among the factors which limit population size and reproductive success of this species, the most common are displacement by gulls, human disturbance, predation and flooding. Gulls and human disturbance have forced terns to nest in marginal habitat on the mainland or in marshes, where they are more vulnerable to predators and flooding (Nisbet 1978).

Competition for suitable nesting habitat with increasing numbers of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) is having an adverse affect on Common Terns on the Eastern Headland (Leslie Street Spit), Metropolitan Toronto, and elsewhere on the Great Lakes (H. Blokpoel, pers. comm., 1989). Gulls and terns have similar nesting habitat requirements. When the Common Terns return to Lake Ontario colonies in late April, traditional nesting sites are already occupied by Ring-billed Gulls, forcing the smaller, less aggressive terns to search for new, less optimal nesting habitat (Blokpoel and Haymes 1978).

Common Terns in the Toronto area are also experiencing intense pressure from human activities, particularly from the loss of nesting habitat due to development, and from disturbance associated with recreational use of remaining area (Courtney and Blokpoel 1983).

Availability of nesting habitat is also affected by water levels. Terns on the Great Lakes have a tendency to change sites due to annual fluctuations in the water levels of the lakes. Many of the sites occupied by terns are simple, barren gravel shoals, close to water. When the water level rises, these sites are rendered useless for nesting terns.

Common Terns were first reported nesting in the Toronto area at the Toronto Island Airport in 1961 (Unpublished data, Ontario Nest Records Scheme, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto).

Common Terns began nesting on the Eastern Headland around 1971. This colony grew quickly and by 1977 was one of the largest on the Great Lakes, numbering approximately 1500 pairs (Blokpoel and Haymes 1978). Unfortunately, since 1980, the number of Common Terns nesting on the Eastern Headland has steadily decreased to 110 pairs in 1989 (Connell and Norman 1989).

The recent occurrence of marsh nesting by Common Terns in the Toronto area is noteworthy.

Although marshes represent less optimal nesting habitat for this species, it may be all that Toronto has left to offer. The number of pairs nesting at the Eastern Headland colony has decreased dramatically over the last ten years. Perhaps the colony at Hydro Park will provide a suitable alternative site for birds displaced from the headland.

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## Unusual Feeding Behaviour of the Great Blue Heron

Naturalists in Ontario most frequently observe Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) at the edges of lakes, ponds and marshes. Here they hunt their most common prey of fishes (Bent 1926:108) and sometimes frogs and tadpoles. usually they stalk to within striking distance, or wait quietly for the prey to swim nearby, and then lunge at it with head and neck, grasping it in their bill. Occasionally, however, herons come upon their food in other ways. This note recounts two such instances.

The first instance occurred on 13 August 1987 on Lake Miskokway, a medium-sized lake in the District of Parry Sound. Here I observed a Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) flying across the lake, and, in the same general direction but apparently not in pursuit of it, a Great Blue Heron. As the tern flew, it dropped what appeared to be a fish into the water. It made no effort to retrieve it, but as soon as the heron saw this it banked sharply, landed on the water, and seized the food. It sat duck-like on the water, which was quite deep, for several seconds before easily leaving the water with a few flaps of its wings. Bent (1926:110) cited six other instances of Great Blue herons landing on the water in a similar manner, but none concerns a case of opportunistic food-gathering

directly from the water.

A second observation of unusual foraging behaviour by a Great Blue Heron was made by the author on 25 September 1987 at Windermere Basin, Hamilton, Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth. While I was watching birds here, I noticed a hatch year Great Blue Heron picking at something on the open mudflat. Turning my telescope on it, I realized the object was a dead, completely mud-covered shorebird, which, judging by its size and build, was probably a Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*). Several times the heron picked up the shorebird and attempted to swallow it. Each time it failed to swallow it, it dropped the bird, poked at it on the ground, shook it a bit, and then picked it up again. Finally, on perhaps the fourth or fifth try, it managed to get the bird down its throat. Five minutes later, when I left, the shorebird was still visible as a very large lump in the heron's esophagus. The heron did not appear to be in any discomfort.

While Audubon (as cited by Bent 1926:109) noted that the Great Blue Heron "destroys a great number of young marsh-hens, rails and other birds", the circumstances of my observation suggest that it is unlikely this heron killed the shorebird itself. For one, I had

been at this location for about 20 minutes before the heron caught my attention. If the heron had killed the bird during this time, I am sure I would have noticed the commotion. Secondly, the shorebird was extremely filthy, suggesting that it had been dead for some time. Thus the young heron either somehow managed to kill the yellowlegs on the open mudflat before my arrival, or it was feeding on carrion, which seems more likely. If the latter is true, the

observed feeding behaviour would seem to be very unusual, as neither Bent (1926) nor Palmer (1962) make mention of Great Blue Herons eating carrion.

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## Burdock as a Hazard to Golden-crowned Kinglets and Other Small Birds

At the edges of fields and in woodland openings, one can often find the common burdock (*Arctium minus*) growing. The sticky seed heads of this plant, while merely a nuisance to humans and other animals, can pose a daily hazard to small birds. In fact, in a wooded area known as Resources Road Ravine in Metropolitan Toronto, Ontario in early May of 1989, I found a female Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*) that died due to entrapment in the old seed heads of a common burdock plant (Figure 1).

A number of species have been reported caught in this way, but it is certainly not a common event. Besides Golden-crowned Kinglet, the list includes Solitary Vireo

(*Vireo solitarius*), American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*), Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*) and Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*) (various authors as cited by Taylor and Cameron 1985; see also Di Labio 1986). The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the smallest of these birds, but is not likely to be attracted to the rather insignificant flowers of the burdock, and not at all to the much stickier mature seed heads. Thus, in light of its very small size, insectivorous habit, and the fact that it often forages quite low, the Golden-crowned Kinglet would

seem to be most at risk from burdock. Correspondingly, it is the species most often reported in the literature as being caught. Indeed, Needham (1909) found "scores of them" sticking to burdocks one autumn in a partly wooded pasture near Lake Forest, Illinois. Other reports of this species being caught by burdock include Tozer and Richards (1974) near Bowmanville, Regional Municipality of Durham, in the fall of 1937, Humphreys (1975) near Waterloo, Regional Municipality of Waterloo, in late September 1974, Bowdish (1906) near Rochester, New York in 1888 and Dan Brunton (pers. comm.) near Oshawa, Regional Municipality of Durham, on 18 May 1975, although the condition of the bird indicated that it had been caught the previous fall or winter.

At the time I discovered my

specimen, I assumed that it had been caught that spring, as the body was in reasonably good shape. If this is the case it is rather unusual, as all the other reports of kinglets caught on burdock are from the fall. Two factors may be responsible for the preponderance of fall records. As hatch year birds make up a significant proportion of migrating fall Golden-crowned Kinglets, age and experience of the migrating birds may be a factor in their susceptibility. Needham (1909) noted that most of the birds he found trapped were young birds. Secondly, Dan Brunton (pers. comm.) suggests that Golden-crowned Kinglets feed lower down in the fall than in the spring, and are thus more likely to come into contact with burdock. In view of the hazard which burdock poses to small birds, naturalists should check



*Figure 1:* Female Golden-crowned Kinglet caught on common burdock plant, early May 1989, Metropolitan Toronto.

burdock clumps for possible further occurrences of such trapping.

### Acknowledgements

I thank my friend Michael Runtz for providing me with the references that allowed me to start my research into this topic.

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## Observation of a Bald Eagle Predation of Double-crested Cormorants

On 9 September 1989, Bill Smith and I were observing shorebirds and waterfowl at the Tollgate Ponds on Hamilton Harbour, Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth. The Tollgate Ponds are home to a large Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) and Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) colony. A stand of eastern cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*) on the west shore of the pond provides nesting habitat for this colony. I was scanning the shore with my telescope when I spotted a large, dark raptor on the berm just to the north of the cottonwoods. At first, we thought that it might be a Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) because of the uniform darkness of the bird, but as it moved around, and occasionally flapped its wings,

we could see extensive white feathering on the underwing linings and axillaries. We decided that it must be a first year Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) because of the dark belly and breast. The area that the eagle occupied is a favourite sunning and preening area for the cormorants, who had retreated *en masse* to the safety of the water. For a period of perhaps ten minutes the eagle patrolled the berm and shoreline and then flew a short distance and landed on a lower branch of one of the cottonwoods.

It is quite common, even after nesting season, to see cormorants perching on or near the nests in the cottonwoods, and as luck, or perhaps design, would have it, the eagle perched a few metres below two cormorants in the same tree.

The two cormorants appeared quite indifferent to the eagle, and for a few minutes the eagle paid them no heed. Then, without warning, the eagle took off and flew straight at the cormorants, crashing into them. Sticks, branches and nesting material fell to the ground as the eagle disappeared behind the tree. At this point I was more than a little alarmed, and expressed concern that the eagle may be sick or injured. Perhaps 30 seconds later, an injured cormorant flopped toward the shore in a desperate attempt to gain the safety of the water. The eagle flew out of the shadows and caught the cormorant at the water's edge. Neither Bill nor I had a chance to determine whether the cormorant was an adult or a juvenile, but clutching this large bird with one talon, the eagle dragged the cormorant into the shadow of the cottonwoods and with hackles raised, mantled his prey victoriously.

After a minute or so of

mantling, the eagle concentrated on the head and neck area of the cormorant, ate for a short time and then mantled the prey again. The eagle then dragged his prey back among the trees and out of sight. A few minutes later, Kevin McLaughlin and Rob Dobos happened along and we informed them of our sighting. We watched this area for a further 30 minutes but the eagle never reappeared.

Rob is a wildlife biologist and commented that he had never heard of this behaviour attributed to Bald Eagles. On 11 September 1989 Dr. Richard Knapton was the guest speaker at the Hamilton Naturalists' Club meeting. Dr. Knapton's topic was cormorants, and he mentioned to the audience that during his time spent surveying Double-crested Cormorants on Lake Winnipegosis, Manitoba, he had observed adult Bald Eagles preying on cormorant nestlings, but has not seen a fully grown cormorant attacked.

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## A Previously Unreported Breeding Colony of Common Terns

In recent years, Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) nesting on the lower Great Lakes have deserted some colonies and their total numbers have declined (Courtney and Blokpoel 1983; Smith *et al.* 1984). This notes describes a small, previously unreported breeding

colony of Common Terns in central Ontario which has apparently persisted for several decades. This ternery survives despite being located on a busy cottaging and fishing lake. Reasons for the survival of the colony are discussed.

In mid-May 1988, Rick Salmon (pers. comm.) of the Minden District Office of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) reported sighting terns at Head Lake along Highway 503 west of Norland in northern Victoria County. On several occasions in late May and June 1988, Ron Tozer, Doug Tozer and the author visited Head Lake. From shore we observed up to ten Common Terns fishing over the lake or resting on small rocky islands. Their presence in June suggested breeding. Along with Mike Turner, I did a follow-up survey by motor boat on 3 July 1988. We found 16 adult Common Terns and five nearly full-grown young scattered among four small islands in Digby Township in the northern part of the lake. The site was surveyed again by boat on 18 June 1989 by Mike Turner, Elizabeth Turner and the author. We located 25 adult terns and nine nests containing a total of 19 eggs (many pipping). Also found were three newly-hatched chicks hiding in low vegetation. Nests were shallow depressions thinly lined with grasses. Three terns were still present on 26 August 1989, indicating the importance of the lake to the terns throughout the summer.

According to a local resident, Aubrey Gostlin (pers. comm.), terns have nested at Head Lake for more than 40 years. Common Terns were apparently overlooked at Head Lake during the Ontario

Breeding Bird Atlas Project (Cadman *et. al.* 1987).

Surprisingly, this ternery has persisted despite the presence of over 400 cottages on Head Lake and its popularity for boating (Aubrey Gostlin, pers. comm.). This is in sharp contrast to the tern colony at Sparrow Lake, District Municipality of Muskoka, which has experienced considerable disturbance by people (Strebig 1988). Unlike the nesting island in Sparrow Lake, the nesting islands at Head Lake are not favourite landing places for fishermen and picnickers. The islands are small, with grasses, sedges, shrubs and a few small trees. They are surrounded by numerous hazardous reefs, so consequently power boaters avoid them. As well, there are many larger, well-treed islands in other parts of the lake which attract campers, fishermen and swimmers. By contrast, the small tern nesting islands are undesirable for people (pers. obs.).

Another important factor affecting the survival of the terns is the unusual nature of the lake itself. Head Lake lies at the contact zone between Precambrian (60%) and Ordovician (40%) bedrock (Ruggles and Bennett 1969). The lake is large and extremely shallow, with an area of 918.6ha and a mean depth of 3.5m (Ruggles and Bennett 1969). This nutrient-rich, warmwater lake supports an abundance of small yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*) and golden shiners

(*Notemigonus crysoleucas*) (Rick Salmon, pers. comm.). Therefore, the rare combination of safe nesting islands and abundant small fish makes Head Lake suitable for Common Terns and sets it apart from the thousands of nutrient-poor, deep, coldwater lakes on the southern part of the Canadian Shield which generally have no terns.

Since the terns are currently not threatened by human activities, the need to post the islands is not critical at this time. The nesting islands are owned by the Crown (Dave Johnson, OMNR, pers. comm.), so legal protection from human disturbance could be implemented if warranted.

#### Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Jim Barker, Mike Buss, Stan Fleming, Aubrey Gostlin,

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## Book Reviews

*The Birds of South America: Volume I. The Oscine Passerines.* 1989. by *Robert S. Ridgely and Guy Tudor.* University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. 516 pp. + xvi; 31 colour plates by Guy Tudor.

Several times in recent years this reviewer has used these columns to lament the dearth of good books on South American birds, a gaping hole in the ornithological literature which, little by little, is being plugged. When he heard that a four-volume work, written by Ridgely, one of the outstanding field ornithologists of the area, and

with pictures by Tudor, surely the best field-guide illustrator in the world today, was shortly to be published, he anticipated that this would be the ultimate book on the subject, rendering all subsequent efforts superfluous. Does the first volume in the series justify these hopes?

The answer, I think, is very

nearly, but not quite; not quite, but very nearly. But before going any further, I should clearly state that Volume I is a glorious book, vastly superior to its only predecessor, Meyer de Schauensee's *Guide to the Birds of South America*.

The plan of the book is fairly conventional. After some explanatory pages, there are two small but useful sections on habitats and biogeography (the latter with a number of maps), a couple of pages on migration, and a very sobering chapter on conservation (sobering, because it lists no less than 47 species whose status the authors believe to be a matter of concern; and those 47 are drawn only from the families dealt with in this one volume).

The bulk of the volume, 450 pages, is devoted to individual species accounts, preceded by the colour plates. Given the necessity of economy of space, the treatments of each species are reasonably comprehensive, consisting of notes on identification, similar species, habitat and behaviour, and range; a workmanlike map is given for each species. Nesting habits are not dealt with. Families and genera are each provided with some general notes prior to the species accounts.

The plates, 31 in this volume, with up to two dozen individual birds on each, are superb. If I had to pick out the best I would plump for number 10, Flower-piercers and Andean Conebills, but all 31 are excellent. Ironically, it is here that the book disappoints, because even

now only two-thirds of the species are illustrated. The authors themselves appreciated this deficiency, explaining in the preface that the huge diversity of species in South America precluded complete illustration; but it does nevertheless remain a disappointment. Accepting that some species are going to be omitted, the actual choice of species to be included was thoughtfully done, concentrating on those which were not elsewhere illustrated, or were of widespread distribution, with at least one member of each genus shown. Consequently, many species from southern South America were illustrated, often, I suspect, for the first time. I would criticise the decision to include some North American migrants; I myself would cheerfully have traded the pictures of several familiar warblers for, say, some the endemic *Myioborus* redstarts of Colombia and Venezuela, which are illustrated either very poorly or not at all in existing guides. A minor suggested improvement in the plate section would be to have text page number references for all species, not just some.

A conscious decision was clearly taken not to issue the various volumes in taxonomic order; in fact Volume I covers such families as Jays, Swallows, Thrushes, Wrens, Warblers, Tanagers and Finches. I am sure that this was a very canny decision, since there are included in the first volume some of the world's most gorgeous birds, and many wavering purchasers will be

irrevocably seduced by the colour plates of these. Having thus been hooked, they will have no choice but to go on and purchase Volume II, which will deal with some of those Neotropical families of archetypically "small brown jobs", whose identification really sorts the men from the boys — the Woodcreepers, Ant-birds, Spinetails and of course, the Tyrant Flycatchers.

Although there are no clearly defined and universally accepted names for South American birds in the languages of the continent, I feel that it would still have been a useful exercise to have included the more widely used names in Spanish and Portuguese, even though I do accept that a recent effort to produce a harmonised set of names in English of Holarctic species has satisfied neither British nor North American ornithologists.

As far as I can see, Volume I is remarkably free of error. The generic name of the North American shrikes is *Lanius*, not *Lanio*; and one might quibble over the fine detail of a couple of the range maps, but the fact that I pick up on such trivia serves to illustrate the overall high standard of accuracy.

My major criticism is directed at neither the author nor the illustrator but at the publisher. The book is expensive, and the whole set will be more so; consequently a less opulent style of production would have been appropriate. More especially, had a paperback

alternative been offered, as it was by the Princeton University Press for the Colombian guide, the whole set would have been much more affordable. In the species accounts, the left-hand margin is two and a half inches wide to accommodate the maps which are, however, only one or two per page, while in the remainder of the book this margin is left totally blank. Had this space been used more economically, the book could have been shortened by at least 50 pages, with a corresponding reduction in price (or the inclusion of extra colour plates).

Nevertheless, my criticisms of the work are all really very minor. If the subsequent three volumes maintain the high quality of the first, *The Birds of South America* will remain the standard work for many years. By virtue of its size and scope, it will not eliminate the crying need for good field-guides of the individual countries south of Colombia (the few that exist are distinctly sub-standard, although a couple of good ones are reputedly in preparation). Until that happens, I suspect that a lot of bird watchers will make themselves special four-slot shoulder bags to take this work into the field. Certainly no serious student of Neotropical birds could possibly contemplate being without this book, even though he or she might well need an understanding bank manager to obtain the complete set.

***Checklist of the Birds of the Leslie Street Spit.*** 1989. compiled by *J. Carley, H. Elliot* and *V. Higgins*. Available from Friends of the Spit, P.O. Box 467, Station J, Toronto, Ontario M4J 4Z2. 12 pp. Free.

The Leslie Street Spit is a man-made peninsula approximately 5km in length, which extends out into Lake Ontario from the base of Leslie Street, Metropolitan Toronto. Although construction began in 1959, and is ongoing, the spit first began to take its present shape in the mid-1970s. Due to its lakefront location and diversity of habitats, the area quickly became recognized as one of the premier birding spots in the Toronto region.

This checklist takes the form of a pocket-sized card designed for use in the field. Species are listed in taxonomic order and four blank columns are provided after the birds' names to record sightings.

The occurrence of 284 species is documented, a total which is all the more impressive when one considers that the vast majority were observed in the past decade. Some of the more notable records include: Northern Gannet, Yellow-

crowned Night-Heron, Eurasian Wigeon, Sandhill Crane, Piping Plover, American Avocet, California Gull (first nest record for Ontario), Western Kingbird, Black-billed Magpie, Dickcissel, Lark Bunting and Lesser Goldfinch.

Notations are provided indicating species that have bred and/or been recorded on a Christmas Bird Count. Although no frequency or abundance status is given, species for which there are very few records are highlighted and further documentation of these birds is requested.

The inside back cover contains a series of annotations regarding various "spit specialties". Among these are short accounts of the phenomenal growth of the headland's Black-crowned Night-Heron and Ring-billed Gull colonies and the coincident decline of its nesting populations of Caspian Terns and Common Terns.

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# 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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