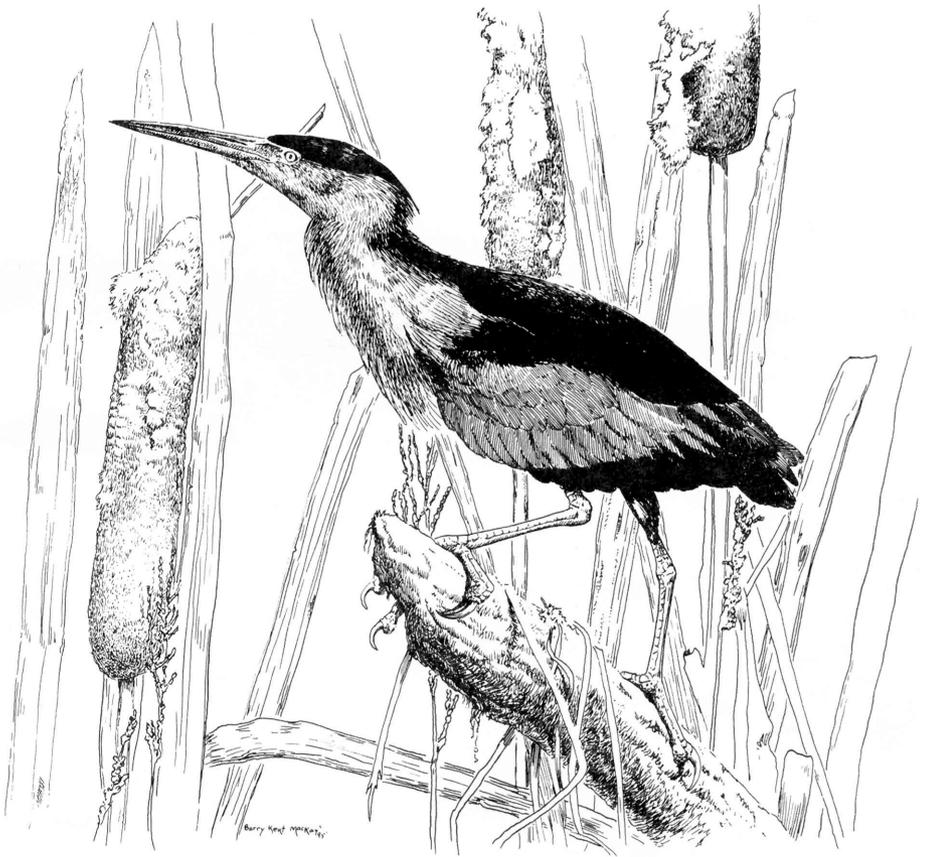


ONTARIO BIRDS



The Journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists
Volume 14 Number 1 April 1996

Ontario Field Ornithologists

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Ontario Birds

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The aim of *Ontario Birds* is to provide a vehicle for documentation of the birds of Ontario. We encourage the submission of full length articles and short notes on the status, distribution, identification, and behaviour of birds in Ontario, as well as location guides to significant Ontario birdwatching areas, book reviews, and similar material of interest on Ontario birds.

If possible, material submitted for publication should be double-spaced and typewritten. All submissions are subject to review and editing. Please submit items for publication to the Editors at the address noted above.

Table of Contents

Letters to the Editors	1
Articles	
The Yellow-throated Warbler: Soon to Breed in Ontario? <i>Brendon Larson</i>	3
Bird Observations from Trodely Island, James Bay, N.W.T. <i>Y.R. Tymstra</i>	10
First Record of the Asiatic Marbled Murrelet in Ontario <i>Bruce M. Di Labio</i>	15
Notes	
Great Black-backed Gull Nesting in Hamilton Harbour <i>Kevin A. McLaughlin</i>	23
An Unusual Nesting of the American Robin <i>P. Allen Woodliffe</i>	24
Recognizable Forms	
Cory's Least Bittern <i>Ron Pittaway and Peter Burke</i>	26
Photo Quiz	41
<i>Bob Curry</i>	

Cover Illustration: Male Cory's Least Bittern
by *Barry Kent MacKay*

Letters to the Editors

Gyrfalcons and Snowy Owls

Further to Don Shanahan's original note (*Ontario Birds* 12: 80-81), and Jim Forrest's letter (*Ontario Birds* 13: 45), I would like to add an additional report of interaction between these two species. For the past several winters, both these species have been regular in the city of Thunder Bay.

At about 1500 h on 9 February 1992, I saw an adult female Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*) take two dives at a Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) that was roosting on a snow pile in a field. The Gyr Falcon then flew away. The owl didn't seem to react, except to duck down a bit. On 29 February 1992, at the same place close to dusk, I saw two different Gyrfalcons, an adult male and a juvenile, harassing a Snowy Owl, probably the same one. The falcons took turns buzzing the owl, veering up just before making physical contact. Each time a falcon came close, the owl jumped up into the air and flipped over, talons up, landing back on its feet. About 20 passes occurred before the falcons tired and left. I heard a few squawks during the attacks, but I'm not sure who made them. I saw the same owl get buzzed a few times by a male Gyr Falcon close to dusk on 10 March 1992; again the owl jumped up into the air with each pass.

Since several individuals of both species spent the entire winter in Thunder Bay without disappearing, these encounters were probably not particularly traumatic to either one. Perhaps

they have a mutual dislike for each other since they are competing for the same food source, Rock Doves (*Columba livia*)!

Nick Escott
Thunder Bay, Ontario

Raptor Watching at Work

As I was sitting at my desk in the early afternoon of 28 August 1995, my fourth floor window looking out over Yonge Street just north of Davisville in the middle of Toronto, I caught a glimpse of rufous feathers as a bird flew into a large tree behind Speedy Muffler. Intrigued, I watched to see if I could tell what it was.

After about two minutes, out flew an adult male American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) with something in its claws! The kestrel flew slowly across several flat-roofed shops and landed in the steel frame of a small billboard out of my view. Moments later it appeared again, prey still in its grasp, and flew a bit aimlessly and with obvious difficulty in wide descending spiralling loops, apparently having trouble maintaining altitude with the additional weight of its prey. As it descended towards the busy traffic of Yonge Street, the kestrel must have realized it was heading for a confrontation with a bus, so it dropped its lunch. At this point, I could see the prey species was a small dull brown passerine, probably a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), as it took flight immediately and darted into a convenient hole in a store-front sign. The kestrel flew off, evidently

having been unable to hold it down long enough to kill it.

I knew the menu of a kestrel included small birds but was interested to see that it will take a small bird out of a tree, in accipiter fashion. However, this kestrel evidently had trouble both carrying and dispatching its prey, suggesting the House Sparrow was a bit too much for the American Kestrel to handle!

Chris Escott
Toronto, Ontario

Editors' Note:

Invertebrates usually constitute the primary prey of American Kestrels in summer, but vertebrates (mainly small mammals, but also birds) are also frequently taken (Palmer 1988, Tozer 1992). Male kestrels have been recorded preying on birds more often than females (Mills 1976), and House Sparrows are regularly caught by kestrels in both rural and urban areas (Palmer 1988).

Male American Kestrels regularly transport prey such as meadow voles which typically weigh 35 to 37 grams on average (Banfield 1974), and have been recorded successfully carrying prey weighing up to 89 grams with difficulty (Palmer 1988). Since the average weight of House Sparrows is about 27 grams (Terres 1982), the male kestrel seen by Chris Escott should have been able to

carry one easily. However, the House Sparrow was still alive (and probably struggling), which may have made it much more difficult for the kestrel to grasp and transport.

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Articles

The Yellow-throated Warbler: Soon to Breed in Ontario?

by

Brendon Larson

The Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica* L.) is a southern warbler associated with bald cypress and sycamore swamps and pine woodlands. Over the past few decades, this warbler has extended its breeding range northward within the United States (Robbins et al. 1986). Extralimital colonizations were generally preceded by an increasing number of spring migrants, and eventually by the presence of solitary singing males in the breeding season. Increases in the number of spring "overshoot" migrant Yellow-throated Warblers recorded in Ontario and two recent breeding season records conform to this pattern and suggest that this species may soon nest in Ontario. This article will provide evidence for this possibility by summarizing recent trends in observations of this species in Ontario and adjacent areas of eastern North America.

Although four subspecies of Yellow-throated Warbler have been described, only two have been reported from Ontario: the yellow-lore *D. d. dominica* which typically breeds in pine lands east of the Appalachians, and the white-lore *D. d. albilora* (called the Sycamore Warbler because of its association with Sycamore trees), which is found farther west. The

area referred to as the "lores" in these subspecies is actually above the lores and should be called the supraloral area (Dunn 1993; J.L. Dunn, pers. comm.). Jaramillo (1993) suggested that white-lore Yellow-throated Warblers may be either subspecies, and that only yellow-lore strays can be subspecifically identified. However, *albilora* may have a pale yellow supraloral area (J.L. Dunn, pers. comm.), so the subspecies can be quite difficult to distinguish. Details regarding variations in supraloral colour and other characters which may be useful for distinguishing the four subspecies are discussed elsewhere (Parkes 1953; Baird 1958; Ficken et al. 1968; Dunn 1993). If Yellow-throated Warblers are found breeding in Ontario they will most likely be the *albilora* subspecies, since this subspecies constitutes most Ontario records.

The Yellow-throated Warbler was first recorded in Ontario near Niagara Falls, on 20 May 1943 (Sheppard 1994). Prior to 1970, there were only two other Ontario records, but since then, there has been a gradual increase in the annual number of spring records (Figure 1). This may reflect an increase in the number of birders and/or an improvement in birding

skills. However, it is extremely difficult to quantify these observer effects, in order to determine whether Yellow-throated Warbler numbers are actually increasing. Despite this difficulty, records of the species in southern Ontario have increased to the point that it was recently delisted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (Bain 1994).

The Yellow-throated Warbler is one of the first warblers to return in the spring, so it begins breeding relatively early. In Michigan, territorial pairs arrive by mid to late April, and breeding extends into early June (Evers 1991). Yellow-throated Warblers may be done nesting by mid-June in Pennsylvania (Ickes 1992). In Ohio, one pair was observed visiting a nest on 6 June, but another male was found singing in early July, with its young likely fledging in late July (Baird 1984).

Until 1993, there were no breeding season records of Yellow-throated Warbler in Ontario (e.g., Cadman et al. 1987, and Austen et al. 1994, do not discuss the Yellow-throated Warbler). Ontario's first breeding season record was on 23 June 1993, when Dawn Brenner and Peter Burke observed a singing male on a Breeding Bird Survey plot near Gravelly Bay on Long Point (Figure 2). The bird was heard over a three hour period on this day, but was not detected a couple of days later. On 7 June 1994, the author found a singing male along the Thames River northwest of Byron. It remained for a couple of days (P. Read, pers. comm.) and

was likely a territorial bird (R. Ridout, pers. comm.).

The increasing number of Ontario sightings of the Yellow-throated Warbler and the more recent June singing records parallel documented expansions of this species in nearby American states over the past few decades. The Yellow-throated Warbler has expanded its range northward in Pennsylvania (Ickes 1992), West Virginia (Smith 1978), and Ohio (Peterjohn 1989) and into New York (Baird 1984, Carroll 1988) and Michigan (Evers 1991, 1994). An increasing population trend was also recorded during the first 15 years of the Breeding Bird Survey (Robbins et al. 1986). Populations in Illinois (Kendeigh 1982) and northern Indiana (Mumford and Keller 1984) are also increasing.

Historical population trends in Michigan and Ohio are congruent. Yellow-throated Warblers nested regularly in southern Michigan and throughout Ohio in the late 1800s, but became very rare and were essentially extirpated from this region (except southeastern Ohio) for the first few decades of this century (Peterjohn 1989; Evers 1991, 1994). This decline may have been the result of habitat loss (Evers 1991, 1994; but see Brewer et al. 1991). By the mid-1920s, nesting records began a slow northward march in Ohio, into the Alleghany Plateau after 1940, and reaching southwestern Ohio in the 1950s and the centre of the state in the 1960s. Spring migrants were not regular in northern Ohio until the 1970s and summering pairs (which

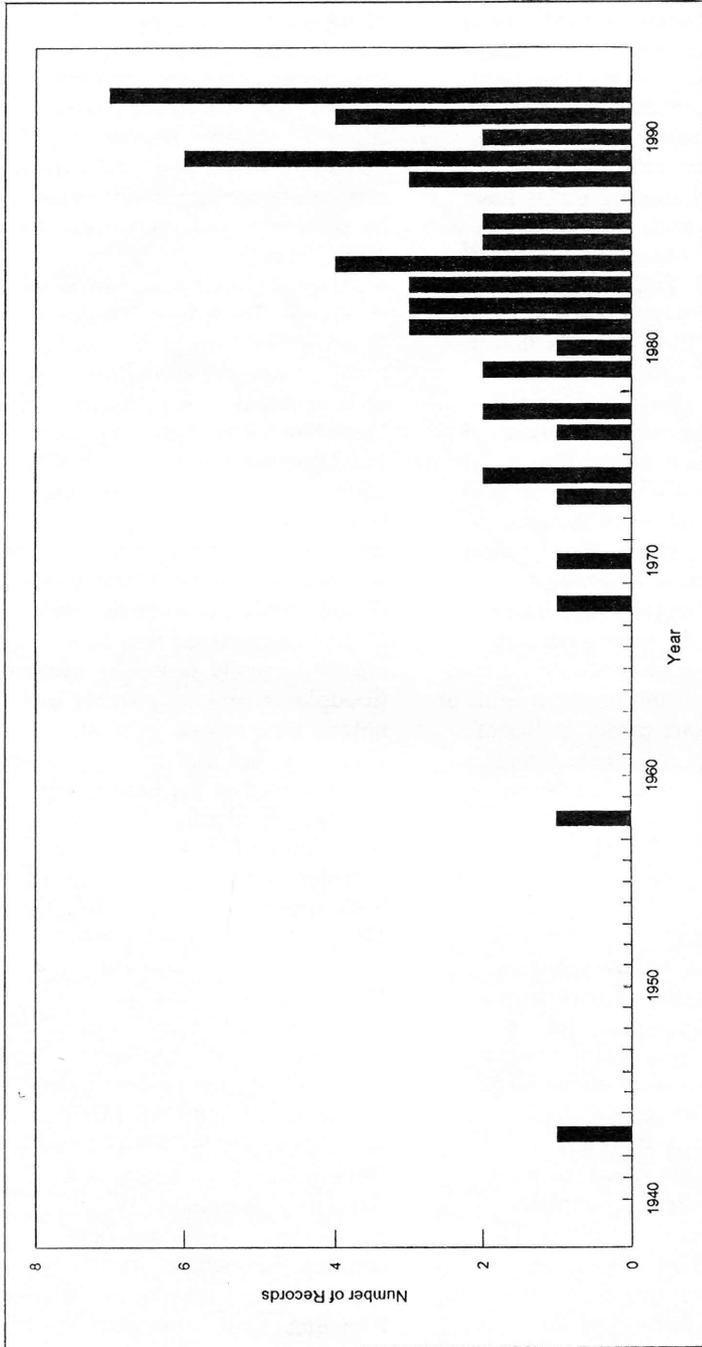


Figure 1: Number of spring records of Yellow-throated Warbler in Ontario, 1943-1992 (n = 52), based on annual Ontario Bird Records Committee Reports for 1982-1993 (Bain 1992-1994; Coady 1988; Coady and Wormington 1989; Curry 1991; James 1983, 1984; Wormington 1985-1987; Wormington and Curry 1990).

are still accidental to locally rare) only occurred after 1975 (Peterjohn 1989). Similarly, there were only two spring records between 1906 and 1969 in Michigan; but since then, Michigan numbers have increased and singing males have been present each year (Evers 1991, 1994). There are apparently no records of Yellow-throated Warbler in Ontario from the 1800s, but the possibility remains that they once nested in southern Ontario, and are only now recolonizing.

Yellow-throated Warblers often breed near water, like Prothonotary Warblers. They also confine themselves to the tops of tall trees (e.g., Evers 1994), where they often nest at heights of up to 20 metres (Mengel 1965, Baird 1984). If not for their loud and persistent song, they would be easy to overlook. At the northern limit of their contiguous range, in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania, they prefer to breed in bottomland forests with large sycamores (Graber et al. 1983, Mumford and Keller 1984, Peterjohn 1989, Ickes 1992). Illinois bottomland forests with the most sycamores tended to have the most Yellow-throated Warblers, but the correlation was not statistically significant. In addition, the floodplains of small upland streams well above large bottomlands sometimes had Yellow-throated Warblers, but the highest breeding densities were recorded in virgin floodplain forests (Graber et al. 1983). The only breeding population in Michigan (*albilora*) is found in the southwestern portion of the state,

along the Galien River. In this mature floodplain, emergent sycamores dominate the upper canopy, above a lower closed canopy of mature basswood, red and silver maple, ash and American elm, and a shrub layer dominated by spicebush and dogwoods (Evers 1991, 1994).

Despite their association with sycamore floodplains, Yellow-throated Warblers of the white-colored subspecies sometimes nest in pine woodlands (e.g., Mengel 1965, Peterjohn 1989, Baumgartner and Baumgartner 1992, Ickes 1992). In Ohio, one of the first breeding records was in a plantation of white, red and Scots pines, which was surrounded by mixed forest (Baird 1984). As early as 1965, Mengel recognized that *D. d. albilora* usually nested in sycamore floodplains, and only rarely in upland pine forests in western Kentucky, but that this preference was reversed in the eastern part of the state. Evidently, the two subspecies of Yellow-throated Warbler may be quite similar in both appearance (e.g., Jaramillo 1993) and habitat selection.

Evers (1994) considers the Michigan population an extralimital colonization of optimal breeding habitat - the largest, least disturbed sycamore-dominated floodplain in southern Michigan. Since there are no areas in southern Ontario where sycamore is a floodplain dominant (W. Bakowsky, M. Oldham, pers. comm.), this optimal habitat is apparently not present in Ontario. Breeding Yellow-throated Warblers

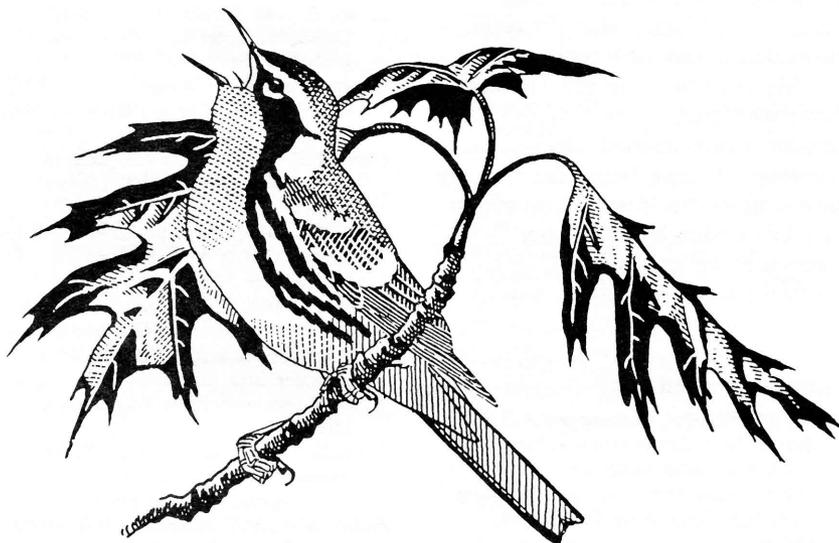


Figure 2: Male Yellow-throated Warbler at Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* on 23 June 1993. Drawing by *Peter Burke*.

in Ontario could, however, occur in either suboptimal swamps with scattered sycamores, along floodplains, or possibly in pine woodlands.

Neither the Long Point nor the Byron singing males were in particularly suitable habitat. At Long Point, the bird was located in a white pine-cedar ridge in a low interdunal plot, but it showed no particular affinity for pine (P. Burke, pers. comm.). The Byron bird was singing mainly from a white pine in a closed-canopy coniferous woodland dominated by hemlock, on a slope of the Thames River valley. Although there is apparently no optimal breeding habitat for Yellow-throated Warblers in Ontario, they seem to

be at least exploring the possibility of breeding here anyway. Ontario birders are advised to visit rich floodplains and Carolinian swamps with sycamore in the breeding season, and also to keep their eyes and ears attuned elsewhere, for additional breeding season records of this species. It is certainly the most likely southern warbler yet to breed in Ontario, and it may be only a matter of time before it does so.

Acknowledgements

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My studies along the Thames River were part of the City of London subwatershed life science inventory studies, being carried out on behalf of the Corporation of the City of London by the Upper Thames River and Kettle Creek Conservation Authorities.

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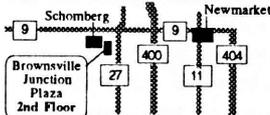
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Bird Observations from Trodely Island, James Bay, N.W.T.

by
Y.R. Tymstra

Introduction

Seventy-seven bird species were observed by the author and Darrell Parsons during a survey of Trodely Island, Northwest Territories from 19 to 29 June 1993. Trodely Island is situated in lower James Bay ($52^{\circ} 15' N$, $79^{\circ} 25' W$), approximately 135 km northeast of Moosonee, Ontario, and 20 km north of Charlton Island (its closest neighbour). (Editors' Note: Although officially part of Northwest Territories, the James Bay islands are closely associated geographically and ornithologically with nearby mainland Ontario -- and hence of particular interest to the province's birders.)

The expedition was undertaken as part of the James Bay Islands Avifaunal Survey, a long-term series of investigations designed to discover more about the breeding distribution and migratory movements of birds in and around the islands of James Bay. This ornithological survey is believed to be the first ever done on Trodely Island. Indeed, other than Akimiski Island, few of the islands in James Bay have been explored to any extent, with the notable exception of the work of Manning (1981) on the Twin Islands. Other explorations included brief island visits by some of the Carnegie Museum Expeditions (Todd 1963),

and short expeditions by Lewis and Peters (1941), Smith (1943), and Manning and Coates (1952). Many islands still remain totally unexplored ornithologically.

Description

Trodely Island is a roughly rectangular island measuring approximately 8 km long and 3 km wide. It is essentially an immense drift of sand, rising some 50 m above sea level. Sand cliffs ascend steeply from the beach on the south side while the north shore rises in a series of gentle terraces to a relatively flat interior plateau. The plateau is a dry, windswept plain, with patches of bare sand and a scant ground cover of lichens and low-lying shrubs such as Dwarf Birch (*Betula glandulosa*), Ground Juniper (*Juniperus communis*), and Black Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*). White Spruces (*Picea glauca*), up to 5 m high, dot the barrens. Except for a few Dark-eyed Juncos, and White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows, the interior was largely devoid of birdlife. Much richer was the dense, continuous band of taller White Spruces (growing to 20 m) that girds the island perimeter, widening to more extensive forests with lush moss-and-lichen carpets at the eastern and western ends of the island.

A cluster of small lakes is

positioned roughly in the centre of the island. The largest of these is about 300 m in diameter, and is flanked by a small tamarack bog. There are two smaller ponds near the west end of the island, around which were suitable nest trees for cavity-nesting ducks.

On the east side, there is a series of parallel wooded beach ridges, old shorelines presumably cast up by isostatic rebound. A small, interdunal "wet meadow" (measuring approximately 25 x 300 m) flanks the eastern shoreline. It was the only fresh water east of the central lakes, and as such, attracted a wide variety of passerines. This wet meadow contains various willows and sedges, and is bordered by a grassy dune to seaward and a row of spruces to landward.

Weather was mostly fine and sunny throughout the period with only one day of light rain and occasional periods of morning fog. Daytime high temperatures varied from 7° to 25° C, and from 1° to 12° C at night. When we arrived, there were still some remnant snowdrifts and sea-ice but these had all melted a week later. We often observed weather systems passing along the mainland while the bay itself remained clear and sunny. Prevailing winds were from the southwest.

Survey Methods

We sampled each of the island's major habitats, spending from 10 to 14 hours per day. Daily walks ranged from 6 to 17 km and consisted of several cross-island transects and coastal walks, as well

as stationary surveys from points of land, monitoring movements of birds and marine mammals on the bay. Point Counts and Line Transects were attempted but we found the more productive habitats too small and disjunct to establish consistent census areas; we depended mainly on direct counting.

Our efforts were concentrated on the eastern half of the island but we walked the length of the island once. The last three days were spent waiting for an overdue aircraft which restricted us to short forays from camp.

Noteworthy Observations

A review of the ornithological literature for James Bay indicated several unusual and/or previously unpublished sightings made during our Trodely Island survey:

Common Eider: Up to twenty were seen daily, including one group of 18 males on 26 June. A female with five young not more than a few days old was seen swimming off the east shore on 28 June. This may be the earliest breeding record for James Bay and one of the more southern. On Gasket Shoal, 60 km WNW of Trodely Island, Manning and Coates (1952) found 200 nests; there, the first young appeared on 10 July. Other southern James Bay reports include nine flightless young on 27 September 1940 on Strutton Islands (Lewis and Peters 1941), and possible breeding on Charlton Island (Smith 1943).

Bufflehead: A male was spotted along the south shore on 19 June and a female was seen on 22 June

on one of the western ponds, where suitable nest trees exist. This appears to be the first published record for the James Bay islands, although it is regular on the neighbouring mainland (Wilson and McRae 1993).

Olive-sided Flycatcher: A single adult was seen flycatching from a 3 m spruce at the wet meadow on 23 June. This is the first published sighting for the James Bay islands, but it was not unexpected as this species is a confirmed breeder on the nearby mainland (Cadman et al. 1987).

Gray Catbird: A male was heard singing daily at the wet meadow throughout the survey period. We found it with a second bird, presumably a female, on 23 June, and the pair was subsequently seen together on several occasions. This species is rare but annual in the James Bay region, and there is one previous breeding record near North Point, Ontario (Wilson and McRae 1993). Manning (1981) observed two catbirds on North Twin Island on 5 June 1973.

Brown Thrasher: One bird was seen in the thickets surrounding the wet meadow from 19 to 21 June, and presumably the same individual was observed about a kilometre west of there on 20 June. It was not heard singing. While rare this far north, this species occurs annually in the Hudson Bay Lowland (Wilson and McRae 1993). Manning (1981) recorded this species on North Twin Island.

Bohemian Waxwing: A flock of four was observed on 22 June in small spruces near the west point.

Seven birds frequented the woodlands near the eastern shore, 26 to 28 June. The only other published record for the James Bay islands was a partially feathered skeleton found near North Twin Island on 22 July 1973 (Manning 1981).

Cape May Warbler: A singing male was observed at the wet meadow on 21 June, and breeding was confirmed when a female carrying food was seen nearby on 23 June. This is apparently the first documented record for the James Bay islands, but it is regular on the mainland (Wilson and McRae 1993).

Black-throated Green Warbler: A male was seen at the wet meadow on 21 June. This is the first published record for the James Bay islands, but is not unexpected as this species is a confirmed breeder on the nearby Ontario mainland coast (Cadman et al. 1987). This may also be the first documented record for the Northwest Territories, east of the Mackenzie River (R.D. McRae, pers. comm.).

Species List

The seventy-seven species recorded during our ten day survey are listed below, with the order and common names following the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list (1983) and its supplements. Breeding status is based on criteria described for the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of the Northwest Territories* (Cadman 1988). Ten species were "confirmed" as breeders (marked "*" below), twenty-five

species were found to be "probable" breeders (marked "+"), and seven more were "possible" breeders (marked "#").

Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of days (out of a total of ten) that a species was recorded, followed by the maximum one day count of individuals for that species (i.e., number of days / daily maximum).

Red-throated Loon:	(3 / 2)
Common Loon:	+ (10 / 17)
Canada Goose:	(9 / 400)
Green-winged Teal:	(1 / 1)
American Black Duck:	(9 / 120)
Mallard:	+ (7 / 6)
Northern Pintail:	+ (5 / 3)
Greater Scaup:	+ (5 / 23)
Lesser Scaup:	(1 / 1)
Common Eider:	* (10 / 20)
Oldsquaw:	(9 / 4)
Black Scoter:	(10 / 150)
Surf Scoter:	(10 / 45)
White-winged Scoter:	(10 / 200)
Common Goldeneye:	(10 / 450)
Bufflehead:	+ (2 / 1)
Hooded Merganser:	(1 / 1)
Common Merganser:	(7 / 2)
Red-breasted Merganser:	(10 / 8)
Osprey:	(2 / 1)
Bald Eagle:	(1 / 1)
Northern Harrier:	(1 / 1)
Rough-legged Hawk:	(1 / 1)
Merlin:	+ (8 / 2)
Willow Ptarmigan:	+ (1 / 2)
Semipalmated Plover:	(1 / 1)
Killdeer:	(3 / 3)
Greater Yellowlegs:	(2 / 1)
Lesser Yellowlegs:	(1 / 1)
Spotted Sandpiper:	# (1 / 4)
Whimbrel:	(2 / 2)
Common Snipe:	(1 / 1)
Ring-billed Gull:	(3 / 1)
Herring Gull:	(10 / 44)
Arctic Tern:	(10 / 145)
Black Guillemot:	(10 / 5)
Northern Hawk Owl:	(1 / 1)
Common Nighthawk:	(2 / 1)

Northern Flicker:	* (8 / 5)
Olive-sided Flycatcher:	(1 / 1)
Alder Flycatcher:	+ (3 / 3)
Tree Swallow:	(1 / 1)
Gray Jay:	* (6 / 5)
American Crow:	+ (4 / 4)
Common Raven:	* (10 / 3)
Boreal Chickadee:	* (8 / 6)
Red-breasted Nuthatch:	+ (2 / 2)
Winter Wren:	+ (8 / 4)
Ruby-crowned Kinglet:	+ (10 / 30)
Swainson's Thrush:	(1 / 1)
Hermit Thrush:	+ (9 / 3)
American Robin:	* (10 / 8)
Gray Catbird:	+ (10 / 2)
Brown Thrasher:	(3 / 1)
American Pipit:	# (3 / 2)
Bohemian Waxwing:	# (4 / 7)
Cedar Waxwing:	+ (8 / 13)
Tennessee Warbler:	+ (2 / 2)
Orange-crowned Warbler:	+ (4 / 2)
Yellow Warbler:	* (4 / 2)
Cape May Warbler:	* (2 / 1)
Yellow-rumped Warbler:	+ (9 / 15)
Black-throated Green Warbler:	(1 / 1)
Wilson's Warbler:	+ (2 / 2)
Chipping Sparrow:	+ (4 / 2)
Savannah Sparrow:	+ (10 / 20)
Sharp-tailed Sparrow:	(2 / 1)
Fox Sparrow:	* (10 / 10)
Song Sparrow:	# (2 / 1)
Lincoln's Sparrow:	+ (4 / 5)
Swamp Sparrow:	# (2 / 1)
White-throated Sparrow:	+ (10 / 25)
White-crowned Sparrow:	+ (7 / 12)
Dark-eyed Junco:	* (10 / 16)
White-winged Crossbill:	+ (10 / 325)
Common Redpoll:	# (7 / 25)
Pine Siskin:	# (2 / 4)

Additional notes were taken on the butterflies, molluscs, and marine mammals, listed below:

Molluscs:

Green Sea Urchin	<i>Strongylocentrotus droebachiensis</i>
Small White Mussel	<i>Macoma baltica</i>
Blue Mussel	<i>Mytilus sedulus</i>
Iceland Scallop	<i>Chlamys islandica</i>
Arctic Rock Borer	<i>Hiatella arctica</i>
Iceland Cockle	<i>Clinocardium cileatum</i>

Butterflies:

- Old World Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*
 Tiger Swallowtail *Papilio glaucus*
 Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus centaureae*
 Arctic Blue *Plebeius aquilo*
 Jutta Arctic *Oeneis jutta*

Marine Mammals:

- Ringed Seal *Pusa hispida*
 Bearded Seal *Erignathus barbatus*
 Beluga Whale *Delphinapterus leucas*

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First Record of the Asiatic Marbled Murrelet in Ontario

by

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By 11 October 1993, mustering enthusiasm for my weekly trip to the Moses-Saunders Power Dam at Cornwall, Ontario (Figure 1) was becoming a laborious task. The fall season had been particularly uneventful and I didn't expect this excursion to be much different. To my surprise, however, this trip would soon offer one of those rare birding moments that are indelibly etched upon the memory.

Chris Traynor and I planned to bird the New York side of the St. Lawrence River between Ogdensburg and the Moses-Saunders Power Dam. We crossed at Prescott, Ontario and worked our way along Highway 37 to the dam. We arrived at the observation deck of the dam at 1030 h. The weather was unsettled and strong winds from the west made the headpond waters choppy and difficult to view. Our initial scanning of the headpond netted a number of waterbirds including 1 Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*), 4 Common Loons (*Gavia immer*), and 8 Red-necked Grebes (*Podiceps grisegena*). However, what soon caught my attention was a small, loon-like bird in the middle of the headpond. On observing it dive and resurface, I realized it was a small alcid. Determining its identification, though, was extremely difficult due to the distance and changing light

conditions. After about an hour of observation, we attempted to view the bird from the Canadian side of the power dam, hoping this location would offer a better vantage point. This required going back through Customs into Cornwall and searching the headpond from the dyke. What seemed like a good idea at the time turned out to be a mistake; we couldn't find it at all.

With precious time running out we raced back to the American side of the dam. To our relief, I located the bird within seconds, but we remained puzzled as to its identification. By 1530 h we realized that the only way it could be identified was from a boat. I telephoned Lee Harper who lived upriver from the power dam and owned a boat. He agreed to meet us at the marina close by. With weather conditions improving, we headed for the power dam and quickly found the alcid. We then knew without hesitation that it was not an east coast alcid. As we moved closer, it became apparent that it was a Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)! The bird being skittish, we photographed it immediately (Figure 2). A full province and statewide bird alert was called.

The following day, in the teeming rain, numerous birders checked the headpond but were unable to locate the bird. A week's

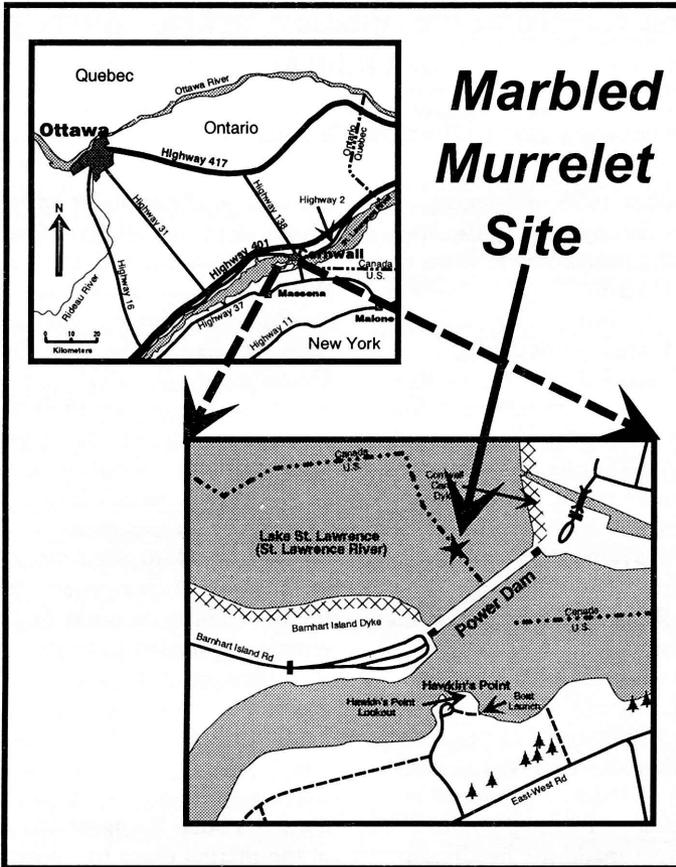


Figure 1: Location of Moses-Saunders Power Dam, Cornwall, Ontario.

worth of searching by birders proved fruitless as well. It was not until 15 October, that I was able to make another trip to the dam and, at 1400 h, located the murrelet again, in approximately the same location.

During the observation period, the murrelet appeared to be in good condition, frequently diving and surfacing with small fish. It was last observed on 30 October. Though we never observed it in flight, during preening sessions it would

exercise its wings by sitting on the water, flapping and exposing all of its primaries and secondaries. Eventually, over 300 birders observed the Marbled Murrelet at the Moses-Saunders Power Dam.

Description and Identification

The bird was a small, dove-sized diving bird with a short, dark, pointed bill and two-toned plumage - dark above and light below (Figures 2 and 3). The thick neck

and stubby, barely noticeable tail gave it a compact appearance. The bird was also relatively large-headed. Two other features stood out: a distinct white broken eye-ring or arcs that gave the bird a large-eyed appearance, and an upheld bill like that of a Red-throated Loon.

The top of the head, the nape, and the back were primarily dark brownish-grey. This colour was uniform except for two indistinct pale smudges on either side of the nape (posterior to, and in line with, the cheeks), and white on the scapulars that created two roughly horizontal bars on the back. The dark brownish-grey also extended forward as a "spur" from the shoulders towards the breast. The sides and flanks were primarily dark grey mottled with white, becoming lighter towards the breast and undertail coverts. The chin, throat, anterior sides of the neck, most of the breast, and undertail coverts were white. Under close observation on 11 October, when first discovered, subtle mottling was visible on the throat, neck, and breast but, by 30 October, when the bird was last observed, it was apparent the bird was molting and its plumage was a more clearly defined and uniform brownish-grey above and white below.

The dark brownish-grey on the head extended down to a distinct line that extended from the lores to just below the eye and then down the posterior sides of the neck. Just above the gape, the line between the dark brownish-grey and white blended and appeared dusky.

Distinct white eye-arcs encircled each eye unevenly, extending as a tiny "tear" at the posterior edge. Sibley (1993) also provides a description and field sketches of this bird.

The bird was clearly an auklet or murrelet based on its small size, compact shape, slender bill, two-toned plumage, and diving habits. The narrow, pointed bill and the white scapular lines eliminated all species except Marbled and Kittlitz's (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) Murrelets in basic (winter) plumage. The less extensive white on the head and the relatively longer bill clearly identified this bird as a basic-plumaged Marbled Murrelet (cf. Harrison 1983, Scott 1987, Peterson 1990).

The two subspecies (races) of Marbled Murrelet - the nominate North American race, *B.m. marmoratus*, and the east Asian race, *B.m. perdix* or "Long-billed" Murrelet - differ in overall size, bill length, and several plumage characters. The Asian race averages 5 percent larger in wing, tarsus, and tail measurements, and has a 25 percent longer bill on average (Sealy et al. 1982); these features were not useful for a subspecific identification of the Cornwall bird. However, it was possible to identify the race of the Cornwall Marbled Murrelet on the basis of plumage characters. I checked numerous field guides, but it was *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan* (Sonobe 1982) that pointed me to the Asiatic subspecies.

The presence of distinct white



Figure 2: Asiatic Marbled Murrelet at Cornwall, Ontario, on 11 October 1993. Photo by *Lee Harper*.

eye-arcs and the associated large-eyed appearance of the Cornwall bird are unique to the Asian race, *perdix* (Harrison 1983, Sealy et al. 1991). Basic-plumaged *perdix* also lacks the nearly complete white collar that extends almost around the neck of *marmoratus* individuals. The Cornwall bird had only two indistinct pale smudges on either side of the nape. The nominate race shows a more substantial black margin below the eye as well; this is noticeably different from the thin black line that curves just under the eye in the Cornwall murrelet and in other *perdix* individuals.

Sibley (1993) suggested some other distinctions between the two subspecies in basic plumage. He found a clear difference in loreal pattern in two specimens in the collection of the California Academy of Sciences - "*perdix* being entirely dark above the gape, while *marmoratus* shows a broad pale stripe above the gape" (page 276), but found that the Cornwall bird approached the *marmoratus* specimen in this character and, therefore, he suggested further study of this feature. We examined several specimens in the Canadian Museum of Nature and found that the lores of basic-plumaged

marmoratus varied from white to dark brown. Consequently, this trait is not consistently useful for subspecific identification. The black "spur" extending forward from the shoulder area is longer and thinner on the *B.m. marmoratus* in Sibley's sketch. However, this does not appear to be a consistent difference, as shown in the photograph in Farrand (1983), for example.

In summary, the pattern of dark brown and white on the face, neck, and scapulars enabled identification of the Cornwall bird as a basic-plumaged Marbled Murrelet. Finer details of neck

pattern, the presence of prominent white eye-arcs, and the thinner black line below the eye distinguished this bird as the Asian race - *B.m. perdix*.

Distribution and Extralimital Records of the Asiatic Marbled Murrelet

The first confirmed record of *perdix* for Canada occurred nearby, just north of the St. Lawrence River near Montreal (See Table 1). The Cornwall bird though, is the first record of a Marbled Murrelet, of either race, in Ontario (Bain 1994) and New York State (Andrle 1995),

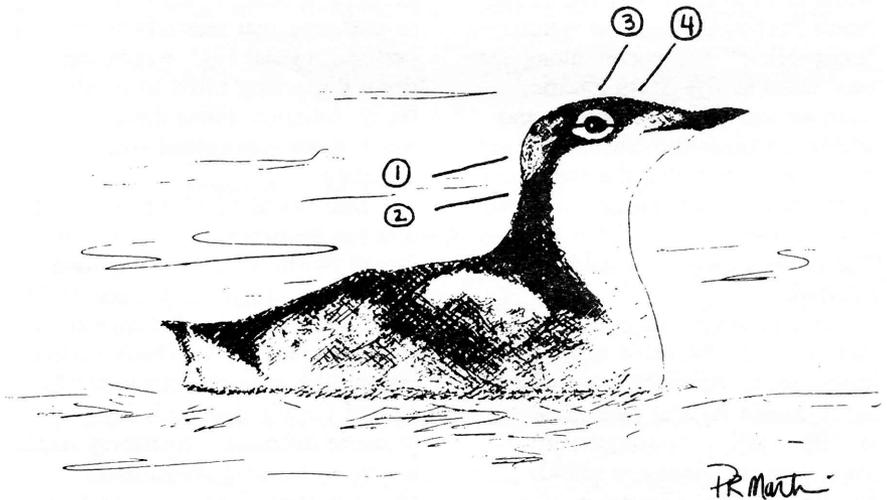


Figure 3: Asiatic Marbled Murrelet. Note: (1) white smudges on back of head; (2) no neck collar; (3) prominent white eye arcs (broken eye-ringing) - large-eyed appearance; (4) thin black border on lower white eye arc. Drawing by Paul Martin.

and the second confirmed record of the Asiatic race in Canada (Table 1 in Sealy et al. 1991). Since the Cornwall discovery, an Asiatic Marbled Murrelet was found at Mullet Key, Florida, on 4 December 1993, a second bird on Cedar Key, Florida, from 16 - 29 March 1994 (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), a third bird at Huntington Beach State Beach Park, South Carolina, on 19 November 1994 (Davis 1995), a fourth off St. Petersburg, Florida, on 28 November 1994 (Wamer and Pranty 1995), and a fifth thought to be the same individual as the South Carolina bird at Jordan Lake, North Carolina, from 9 - 11 December 1994 (Davis 1995).

The Marbled Murrelet nests along both temperate coasts of the North Pacific Ocean - the Asiatic "Long-billed" subspecies along the west coast of the North Pacific, from eastern Russia to Korea and northern China; the North American race along the east coast from the northern Bering Sea south to California (Sealy et al. 1982). The nesting ranges probably do not overlap.

Interestingly, all confirmed records of the Marbled Murrelet in inland North America are of the more distant Asiatic race (Sealy et al. 1982, 1991). Subsequent to these papers, Dinsmore (1993) reported on the occurrence of a Marbled Murrelet in Iowa on 12 December 1991. This may have been an individual of the North American race. Dinsmore (1993) described the white extending "posteriorly around the midneck,

forming an almost complete white collar" - characteristic of *B.m. marmoratus* (unlike the two pale patches on the nape typical of *perdix*). In addition, there was no mention of distinct white eye-arcs, which stood out on the Cornwall bird. Nevertheless, the author suggested the Iowa bird was of the Asiatic race based solely on the apparently long bill. Sealy et al. (1991) summarized all extralimital records of Marbled Murrelets in North America (see Table 1). The Cornwall record fits into the pattern of late summer and autumn occurrences of the other *perdix* North American inland records. This timing coincides with the premolt or postmolt dispersal of these birds from their breeding grounds, leading Sealy et al. (1991) to postulate that westerly storms, or perhaps regular high winds, carry these dispersing birds to northern North America. From there, they move south into inland North America.

Sealy et al. (1991) also found that the occurrence of *perdix* in inland North America coincided with the irregular occurrence of El Niño - southern oscillation events in the South Pacific. These events create high pressure in the south-central Pacific that push low pressure air north which may result in strong weather movements across eastern Asia and into North America (Philander 1983). El Niño winds were also felt during 1992-1993 in the South Pacific; the occurrence of the Cornwall Murrelet may have been associated with the resulting weather patterns.

Table 1:
North American records of vagrant Marbled Murrelet, and the attributable races. Updated from Sealy et al. 1991.

	DATE	LOCATION	AGE/SEX	PLUMAGE
1. <i>B.m. perdix</i>	11 Nov. '79	Montreal, PQ	AHY* male	nearly complete basic plumage
2. "	9 Aug. '81	Mono Lake, CA	AHY male	complete alternate plumage
3. "	1 Dec. '81	Lake Lemon, IN	AHY unsexed	basic plumage (body molt incomplete)
4. "	22 Aug. '82	Aspen, CO	AHY male	alternate plumage (probably yearling)
5. "	17 Sept. '82	Middleboro, MA	AHY female	mostly alternate plumage, light body/early wing molt
6. "	29 Jul. '83	Mono Lake, CA	AHY unsexed	alternate plumage
7. "	2 Aug. '83	Mono Lake, CA	AHY male	alternate plumage (no molt)
8. "	6 Aug. '83	Mono Lake, CA	AHY unsexed	alternate plumage
9. "	27 Aug. '83	Denali Nat. Pk. AK	AHY unsexed	alternate plumage
10. "	27 Dec '86	Honeymoon Is., FL	AHY female	basic plumage, almost complete
11. "	11-30 Oct. '93	St. Lawrence R. Cornwall (ON/NY)	AHY unsexed	basic plumage, limited body molt
12. "	4 Dec. '93	Mullet Key, FL	unknown	unknown
13. "	16-28 Mar. '94	Cedar Key, FL	unknown	unknown
14. "	19 Nov. '94	Huntington Beach State Park, SC	unknown	unknown
15. "	28 Nov. '94	off St. Petersburg, FL	unknown	unknown
16. "	9-11 Dec. '94	Jordan Lake, NC	unknown	unknown
17. Probably <i>B.m. perdix</i>	2 Dec. '84	Long Beach, IN	unknown	presumably basic plumage
18. "	15 Jul. '89	Little Codroy R., NF	AHY unsexed	alternate plumage
19. "	22 Oct. '89	Cypress Lake, SK	unknown	unknown
20. probably <i>B.m. marmoratus</i> (see text)	12 Dec. '91	Marion Co. IA	unknown	basic plumage

*AHY = after hatch year

Recent work on the taxonomy of Marbled and Kittlitz's Murrelets (Friesen et al. 1994; V. Friesen, unpublished data) examined mitochondrial DNA, and revealed that the North American Marbled Murrelet is more closely related to the Kittlitz's Murrelet than to the Asiatic Marbled Murrelet. Some authorities have thus recognized the Asiatic race as a distinct species (e.g. Bourne 1994). Therefore, if you are fortunate enough to discover a "Marbled-type" Murrelet inland, be sure to take careful notes. It may well be a new species!

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Notes

Great Black-backed Gull Nesting in Hamilton Harbour

by

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The Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) is a species which is slowly increasing its range on the Great Lakes. Recent expansion has been detailed on Lake Huron, on both the Ontario and Michigan sides (Ewins et al. 1992). Peck and James (1994) summarize 32 breeding records for Ontario, involving nine provincial regions, with new nest sites in the past decade in the following Counties / Regional Municipalities / Districts: Bruce (1988-9), Durham (1981), Haldimand-Norfolk (1991), Manitoulin (1991), Prince Edward (1986), and Stormont (1988).

The purpose of this note is to document the first nesting of the Great Black-backed Gull for Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Municipality.

Hamilton Harbour is located at the extreme western end of Lake Ontario. Two small man-made islands are located in the northeast corner of the harbour. They are known locally as the Hydro Islands, and are also referred to as Neare and Farre Islands. Both are significant sites for nesting colonial waterbirds (Dobos et al. 1988).

On 16 April 1995, along with Christine Bishop, Bob Curry and Bill Lamond, I was observing waterfowl from the end of Allview

Avenue in Burlington, overlooking Hamilton Harbour. The birds were in the water around Farre Island, which was home to a colony of Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*). During this observation, we noted the presence of several adult Great Black-backed Gulls on Neare Island, which, like Farre Island, is made up predominantly of large rocks, cobble, and gravel, and is equally suited to breeding waterbirds. We speculated, as others have in the past, on the overdue first nesting of the species in the Hamilton area.

On 4 June 1995, viewing from the edge of Eastport Drive, I was intrigued to find two pairs of adult Great Black-backed Gulls on Neare Island, one of the pairs engaged in nuptial display (i.e. upward bill pointing).

Returning to the site on 10 June 1995, I found only one pair of adults, which was located on the central part of the island. While viewing the birds, I was surprised when suddenly a downy chick popped up from between the rocks, and waddled over to one adult,

begging food. No feeding took place at this time. However, I returned later and observed an adult carrying in and feeding the chick what appeared to be the remains of a European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

The adults were seen by several observers during the following weeks, attending to the chick, which eventually fledged. I last observed the juvenile on 29 July, as it flew about the island with the adults.

This successful nesting of the Great Black-backed Gull represents the first breeding record for Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Municipality. Observers are encouraged to continue to watch for future nesting involving this species, particularly in suitable southwestern sites on the north shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie.

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An Unusual Nesting of the American Robin

by

P. Allen Woodliffe

The American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is one of the most common and widespread breeding birds in Ontario. Indeed, during the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project it was found in 86 per cent of the 137 blocks in the province, including 98 per cent of the 1824 atlas squares of southern Ontario. It was confirmed in 89 per cent of these atlas squares. Of the regular southern Ontario breeding birds, only the European Starling (*Sturnus*

vulgaris), at 90 per cent, had a greater rate of confirmed breeding (Cadman et al. 1987).

On 15 April 1989, I was birding from my car at the south end of Lakeshore Road, in Rondeau Provincial Park. I noted some movement at the base of a small tree near the road, and identified the source of the movement to be an American Robin. At first, I believed it to be gathering nesting material, until I realized that it was

twisting and turning in the grasses and leaves as if it were shaping a nest. When it briefly flew away after a few minutes, I approached the spot and saw, at the base of a small black oak tree (*Quercus velutina*), a partially constructed nest. It already had balls of fresh mud, and quite a few grasses pressed into place. Because of the nest's proximity to the roadway and parking lot, I did not expect this nest to be successful.

On 22 April, I again visited the site, at 0930 h. No adult robins were present in the immediate vicinity and I was surprised to see two eggs in the nest. By 1330 h, when I had returned to the area, I saw an adult female on the nest. I photographed the bird and nest quickly from my car before another car passing by caused the bird to flush from the nest. I again examined the contents and this time noted three eggs.

When I next visited the area, on 29 April, the nest was empty, and there had been some disturbance to the grasses and leaves immediately adjacent to the nest, although not obviously to the nest structure itself. However, the eggs were gone. Given the high numbers of raccoons in the park, and the proximity of the nest to a fairly busy roadway and parking lot thus exposing it to vehicles, people and pets, it was not surprising that this ground-nesting attempt was unsuccessful.

The Royal Ontario Museum has accumulated, up to the end of the 1994 season, more than 105,000 nest record cards of Ontario breeding birds under the Ontario Nest Records Scheme (Peck 1995). As of 1987, a total of 6358 nest cards were on file for the American Robin. A wide variety of nest sites have been recorded, most often in trees, shrubs and vines or fallen trees and roots. Man-made structures are also popular choices for nest sites. However, only three of those records (0.048 per cent) were nests built right on the ground (Peck and James 1987). Bent (1949) and Harrison (1975) also state that the American Robin only rarely nests on the ground. This note documents one of those extremely rare occasions.

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Recognizable Forms

Cory's Least Bittern

by

Ron Pittaway and Peter Burke

Introduction

The secretive Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) is the smallest heron in the world, barely bigger than a meadowlark! In southern Ontario, it is a "rare to locally common summer resident" from early May to mid-September (James 1991), mainly south of the Canadian Shield. Least Bitterns in Ontario prefer extensive cattail (*Typha*) marshes with scattered areas of open water. They are most numerous where the ratio of emergent vegetation cover to open water is one to one, known as the 50:50 or "hemi-marsh" stage (Gibbs et al. 1992). Peak activity periods are dawn and dusk. The male's song (often heard at night) is a series of five or six low cuckoo-like notes *coo-coo-coo-coo-coo* repeated at regular intervals. A cackling *ca-ca-ca-ca* is heard at all times of the year. This latter call could be confused with a King Rail (*Rallus elegans*) (Jon Dunn, pers. comm.).

A very rare colour morph, known as the Cory's Least Bittern, was formerly thought to be a distinct species. In Cory's, the buffs and whites of typical birds are a rich chestnut to chocolate. See the cover illustration by Barry Kent MacKay and Figures 1 to 3. Cory's Least Bitterns are also illustrated in Chapman (1896), Pough (1951) and

Peterson (1980). Cory's Least Bittern is of great interest to Ontario birders because more than 50 per cent of the records are from Ontario, mainly Toronto. In this article, we review the taxonomy, morph genetics, plumages and molts, description, field identification, history and distribution of the Cory's Least Bittern in Ontario.

Taxonomy

The Least Bittern comprises five fairly similar subspecies (races) in North and South America. The American Ornithologists' Union Check-list (AOU 1957) and Palmer (1962) list two subspecies north of Mexico: nominate *I. e. exilis* in the East and *I. e. hesperis* in the West. Recent studies do not support the recognition of *hesperis* (Gibbs et al. 1992). We follow the latter here. The subspecies found in Ontario is nominate *exilis* (James 1991). Hancock and Kushlan (1984) give brief descriptions and ranges of the other four subspecies : *erythromelas*, *peruvianus*, *bogotensis* and *pullus*.

The type specimen of Cory's Least Bittern was taken in 1885 near Lake Okeechobee, Florida and was described as a new species, *Ardetta neoxena* (Cory 1886). Cory did not give it an English name. Unofficially, it was called Cory's

Bittern by Scott (1892), McIlwraith (1894) and a few later authors. The AOU Check-list (AOU 1895) accepted *Ardetta neoxena* as a full species and officially named it Cory's Least Bittern. The AOU named it after Charles Barney Cory (1857-1921), an American ornithologist best known for the shearwater whose name also commemorates him (Terres 1982, Choate 1985).

The scientific name changed several times from *Ardetta neoxena* to *Botaurus neoxenus*, back to *Ardetta neoxena*, then to *Ixobrychus neoxenus*, and finally to *Ixobrychus neoxena* (Cory 1886, AOU 1895, Chapman 1896, AOU 1931).

Chapman (1896) considered Cory's a distinct species based on 10 of the 14 known specimens at the time. Comparing typical Least and Cory's, Chapman said, "This comparison shows such a striking difference between these two birds, that to give further reasons for regarding them as specifically distinct seems much like proving an axiom." Also, O.E. Baynard reported that both nesting adults were always dark, evidence supporting Cory's as a distinct species (Bent 1926, Bent and Copeland 1927).

Not long after its discovery, Scott (1892) suggested that Cory's Bittern might prove to be a colour morph of the Least Bittern. Bent (1926) stated that "It now seems to be generally conceded that the dark form...is not a distinct species, but a case of melanism or erythrism." Cory's was removed as a species

and placed on the Hypothetical List in the Eighteenth Supplement to the AOU Check-list in 1923 and in the fourth edition of the Check-list in 1931, because it was considered a colour morph of the Least Bittern (AOU 1923, 1931). Although Taverner (1934) still listed Cory's as a full species, interest in Cory's waned because it was a colour morph and it had all but disappeared by that time.

Interestingly, there is no mention of Cory's in the last two AOU Check-lists (AOU 1957, 1983). Cory's Least Bittern has gone from a full species to a colour morph having no taxonomic standing!

Morph Genetics

There is no information in the literature on the genetics of the Cory's Least Bittern. Therefore, we can only speculate about the possible genetic basis of this morph and why it is so rare. Cory's Least Bitterns seen today probably result from a rare recessive allele in the population of typical birds. The recessive trait (Cory's) is masked when paired with the dominant trait (typical). It appears only when two of the recessive traits are paired by chance. Thus, Least Bitterns inheriting two copies (one from each parent) of the recessive allele (homozygous) would express the Cory's colour morph. In birds, many morphological traits are controlled by more than one gene and intermediates are common; for example, the colour morphs of some buteo hawks. The lack of intermediate morphs between typical and Cory's Least Bittern

suggests a single gene having two alleles for colour: dominant (typical) and recessive (Cory's).

Many Cory's specimens show traces of albinism and melanism, which suggest inbreeding. O.E. Baynard reported in Bent (1926) that Cory's always paired with Cory's and never with typical birds. This seems unlikely, but if true, suggests a strong positive assortative mating (like with like) within the morphs. A male and a female collected at Ashbridge's Bay, Toronto on 12 July 1900 is also suggestive of assortative mating (Table 1). Cory's Least Bittern may be an older form that is now at a selective disadvantage and has been replaced by the typical morph. The most likely explanation is that Ashbridge's Bay and Lake Okeechobee were the only places known where random processes allowed the Cory's morph to become temporarily established, because of chance colonization by a few individuals with the trait.

The almost complete disappearance of the Cory's Least Bittern and the destruction of Ashbridge's Bay marsh are important losses of genetic diversity and habitat to the Least Bittern.

Plumages, Molts, Ages and Sexes

Least Bitterns molt twice a year. Juvenals (juveniles) undergo a partial molt in fall to first basic (first winter) plumage. Male and female first basic plumages (not seen in Ontario) resemble the juvenal, but the back feathers have few or no buff tips. First basic and

definitive basic (adult winter) birds molt much of their body plumage in late winter and early spring into alternate (breeding) plumage. First alternate and definitive alternate plumages are very similar. The crown and back have a distinct gloss. Breeding males in high alternate plumage have bright reddish-pink or carmine-pink at the base of the lower mandible (Jon Dunn, pers. comm.). Alternate birds have a complete molt from July to September to definitive basic plumage. Definitive basic differs from alternate in both sexes in not having a strong greenish gloss to the upperparts. Male, female and juvenile Least Bitterns are distinguishable in the field. See the illustrations of typical adult male and adult female Least Bitterns on Plate 8 in Godfrey (1986) and male, female and juvenile on page 49 in Scott (1987). For more information on the molts and plumages of the Least Bittern, see Bent (1926), Roberts (1955), Palmer (1962), Oberholser (1974), Cramp (1977) and Gibbs et al. (1992).

Description

See Figures 1 to 3. Cory's Least Bittern is a combination erythristic (reddish) and melanistic (blackish) morph (Bent 1926, Cramp 1977). In Cory's Least Bitterns, most of the buff and white areas of typical birds are a rich chestnut. Some pale areas on typical birds (outer scapulars, wing tips and undertail coverts) are replaced by black (not chestnut) in Cory's (Chapman 1896). A few birds show more melanism. Most individuals have



Figure 1: Male Cory's Least Bitterns (two left), male Least Bitterns (middle and top right), female Cory's Least Bittern (bottom right). Drawing by *Peter Burke*.

some (usually slight) albinistic plumage, especially on the abdomen and thighs (Chapman 1896, Taverner 1934). The plumage of some individuals is a combination of erythristic, melanistic and albinistic markings! See the discussion in Chapman (1896); he provides a detailed comparison of typical and Cory's Least Bitterns.

Bill Colour: In typical Least Bitterns the bill is mostly yellow with a dark ridge, but in Cory's, the bill is mostly blackish brown. Information on bill colour is based on specimen labels in the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the description of the recent specimen described in Teixeira and Alvarenga (1985).

Adults: Adult males are chestnut with contrasting black upperparts. The crown, hindneck, back and tail are black, with a greenish gloss in breeding plumage. The throat is a dark buff to chestnut, the foreneck is chestnut, the belly and flanks are chestnut or mixed with black, and the undertail coverts are black. The upper wing coverts are dark chestnut (not buff) and the wing linings are similar but paler. Adult females are similar to males but the crown is slightly duller and the back is a flat blackish brown. The undertail coverts are black in both sexes. Cory's also lacks the contrasting buffy wing patches (dark chestnut in Cory's) and the whitish lines (black in Cory's) on the outer scapulars of typical birds, giving it a more uniformly dark appearance to the upperparts at rest

and in flight. There is less difference between the sexes in Cory's than in typical birds.

Juveniles: See Figure 2.

Juvenile males and females show the pattern of the adults but they are paler and more uniform in coloration. They lack the contrasting black areas, and the back and scapular feathers have buffy tips. The undertail coverts are blackish brown in the juveniles.

Nestlings: See Figure 3. Based on the colour of the down still attached to juveniles in the ROM, the downy nestling plumage is a dark buff in Cory's as opposed to a creamy buff in typical birds. In a large quantity, this would make the downy young darker than normal (Ross James, *in litt.*). James also notes, "I would expect the downy plumage to be darker in Cory's. This is what happens in the colour morphs of the Reddish Egret and Snow Goose." The nestling Cory's in Figure 3 is based on the above information. The statement in Bent (1926) that the downies are "coal black" like young rails may be a slight exaggeration.

Eggs: Even the eggs of Cory's are apparently darker than those of typical birds (Palmer 1962). The one egg labelled a Cory's in the ROM, collected by George Pearce on 15 June 1898 at Ashbridge's Bay, is slightly but distinctly darker than most Least Bittern eggs (Fleming 1901). This is the only Cory's egg known. Given the darkness of the birds at all ages, it is reasonable to expect the eggs to be darker as the same pigments may be involved. Note that the Cory's

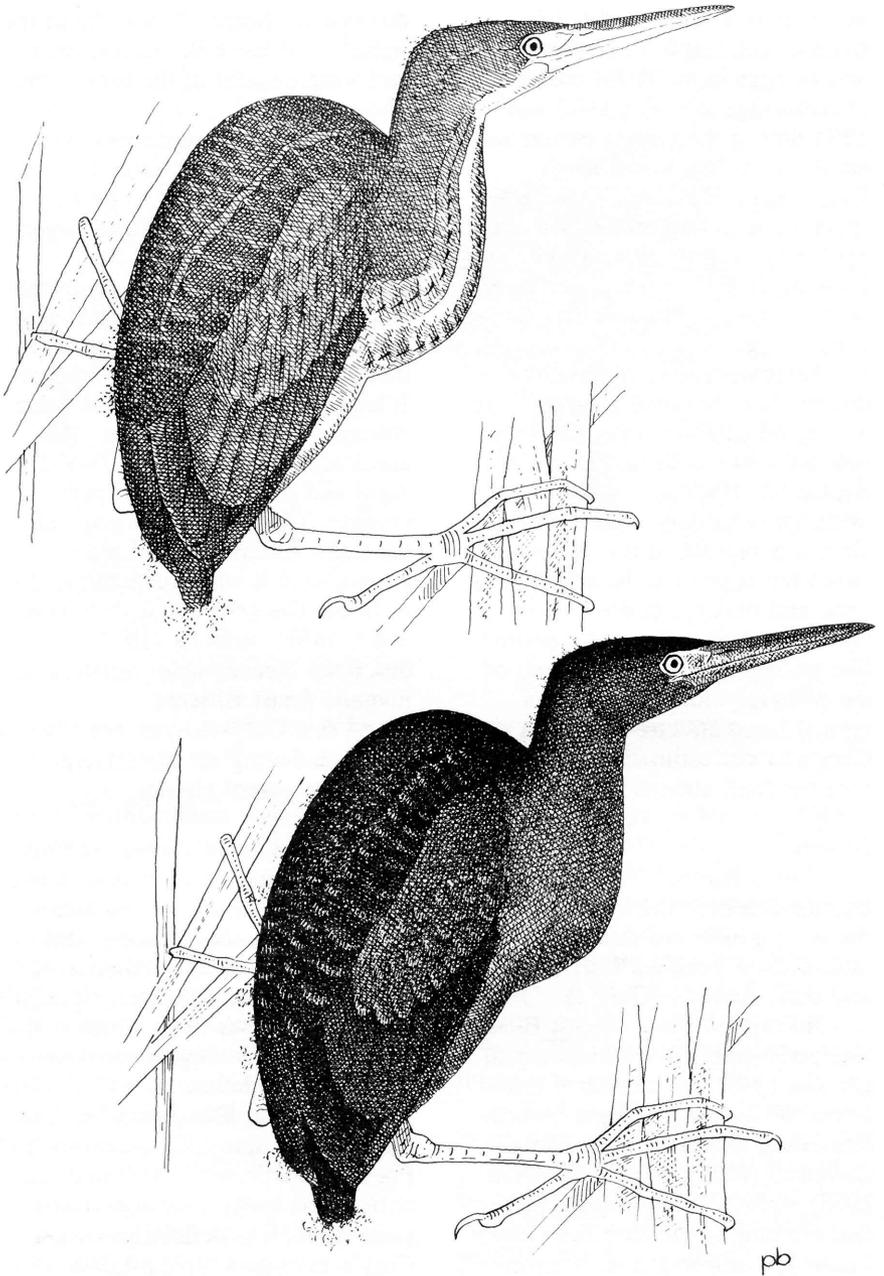


Figure 2: Juvenile Least Bittern (top), juvenile Cory's Least Bittern (bottom).
Drawing by *Peter Burke*.

egg is only a shade darker than normal (noticeable in a series). Two sets of eggs in the ROM collected at Ashbridge's Bay in 1890 and 1891 during the Cory's period are similar in colour to the single Cory's egg. However, Ross James (pers. comm.) cautions that these eggs may be from typical birds and Fleming (1901) reported seeing a set from typical birds as dark as the Cory's egg.

Intermediates: A possible intermediate between a typical and a Cory's Least Bittern in the ROM (#67405) was collected in early September 1905 near Guelph, Wellington County. It is listed as a Cory's in one ROM file. It was not sexed but appears to be a male. The neck and underparts are a cinnamon buff, not a rich chestnut like a Cory's; however, the rest of the plumage closely matches a typical Least Bittern. It is not a Cory's in our estimation. This bird may be dyed, stained with iron, or a richly coloured typical Least Bittern.

Cory's number 20 in Table 1 is like the others in the ROM, except the wing panels are somewhat intermediate between buff (typical) and dark chestnut (Cory's).

An injured Cory's Least Bittern was photographed and released in Ohio in 1949. See number 9 below under the heading of sight records. Regarding this latter bird, Craig Campbell (*in litt.* to R.T. Peterson 1983) wrote "While I quite agree that the bird in question is a Cory's, I note by comparison with some paintings of adult males of this entity that there are a few slight

differences. Some of these lie in the lightness of the bill, cheeks, neck and wing patches of the bird in the photograph."

A road-killed bird from the causeway at Long Point in 1981 was originally thought to be a Cory's Least Bittern. When Roger Tory Peterson examined the specimen in 1982, there was debate whether it was a Cory's or a richly marked typical Least Bittern. Some thought it might be an intermediate. It later proved to be a typical Least Bittern in juvenile plumage. The specimen is now missing (David Agro and Jon McCracken, pers. comm.). The juvenile plumage of the Least Bittern was not well-known until it was illustrated in the National Geographic Guide (Scott 1983, 1987). Roberts (1955) describes considerable variation in juvenile Least Bitterns.

A few Cory's show extensive white feathering on the underparts. These are partial albinos, not intermediates.

In summary, Chapman (1896) found no evidence of intermediates between Cory's and typical Least Bitterns. Since then, there is still little evidence of the existence of any truly intermediate plumages. It appears that both Cory's and typical Least Bitterns show some individual variation.

Note: The illustration labelled an "ad dark morph" (number 4 on Plate 30) in Cramp (1977) does not correspond to the description in the same book. It is definitely not a Cory's or even a typical Least Bittern.

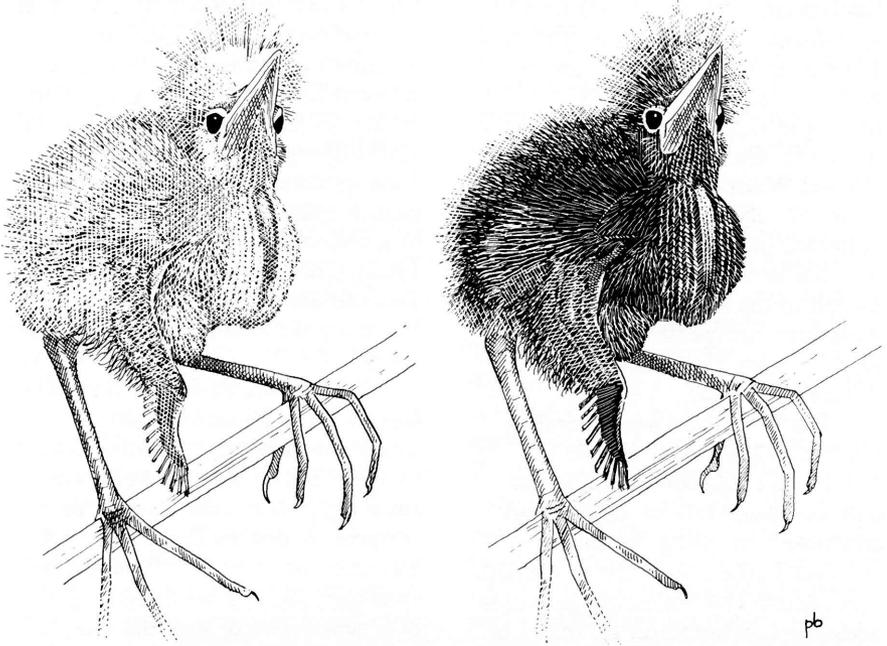


Figure 3: Nestling Least Bittern (left), nestling Cory's Least Bittern (right).
Drawing by *Peter Burke*.

Field Identification

Cory's is much darker than a typical Least Bittern. See Figures 1 to 3. Adults are black (males) or blackish (females) above and a rich chestnut below. At rest and in flight, they lack the contrasting buff wing patches and whitish lines on the outer scapulars of typical birds. In flight, adult Cory's is almost uniformly blackish above and chestnut below, appearing very dark. A Cory's skulking in a marsh is almost like a blackbird at times. Juveniles are also very dark, but more uniform in coloration.

Caution: See Figure 1. Observers who are not familiar with the

juvenile plumage of typical Least Bitterns might confuse it with a Cory's. Typical juveniles are drabber and more uniform than adults with less contrasting shoulder patches. See the photograph of a juvenile Least Bittern on page 5 in Wormington (1985). This photograph shows why it could be confused with a Cory's Least Bittern. However, Cory's is a much darker bird at all ages and the moment you see one there should be no doubt about its identity! Also, novices might confuse the dark juvenile Virginia Rail or even a Green Heron as a Cory's Least Bittern.

Distribution

Specimens: Palmer (1962) lists 31 specimens taken between 1885 and 1914 as follows: Ontario (16, *see additions below*), Florida (7), Michigan (2), Illinois (2), New York (1), Ohio (1), Massachusetts (1) and Wisconsin (1). There is a relatively recent specimen collected in Brazil on 13 May 1967. It is the first record of the Cory's morph in the range of the South American subspecies *I.e. erythromelas* (Teixeira and Alvarenga 1985).

The first nests were found in Florida in 1890 and Ontario in 1898. Lake Okeechobee, Florida and Toronto, Ontario are the only confirmed breeding locations.

See Table 1 for a list of Ontario specimens. The following provides additional information on many of the specimens listed in Table 1. Palmer (1962) cites 16 specimens from Ontario, but there are at least six others discussed below. McIlwraith (1894) mentions the discovery of the first Ontario specimen on 18 May 1890 at Ashbridge's Bay, Toronto. This specimen is now missing from the Royal Ontario Museum (Ross James, pers. comm.). Fleming (1902) reports 16 specimens from Toronto, perhaps the same 16 reported above by Palmer (1962). Currently in the Royal Ontario Museum, there are 13 specimens (another is missing) and one egg from Ontario. All the Toronto specimens listed in Table 1 and the egg are from the former Ashbridge's Bay marsh, Toronto.

The only specimen not from

Toronto in the ROM was shot by Dayton Murphy about June 1895 at the east end of West Lake near Wellington (Hallowell) in Prince Edward County (Fleming, undated; Baillie 1935 letter in ROM; Snyder 1941; Sprague and Weir 1984). Two specimens from Toronto are in British museums and one was sold to a collector in Maine (Fleming 1902). Three specimens from Toronto are in the American Museum of Natural History (ROM files).

In addition, there is a female Cory's Least Bittern in the Canadian Museum of Nature taken by C.H. Young at Point Pelee on 5 June 1913 (Michel Gosselin, pers. comm.). About the Pelee bird, P.A. Taverner wrote to J.H. Fleming on 2 October 1935, "I was paddling the boat when Young shot the Cory's Bittern. It got up at ordinary range about as other Least Bitterns did and I told him to shoot quickly. One could not say that it was particularly wild or tame" (ROM files). The Point Pelee and Prince Edward County specimens taken in June suggest breeding at these locations.

A note in the manuscript files of the Canadian Museum of Nature from J.H. Fleming dated 27 November 1935 mentions a specimen from Toronto owned by the University of Toronto Schools (UTS). Jim Baillie repeatedly tried to get this specimen for the ROM, but was unsuccessful (Alex Cringan, pers. comm.). About the UTS specimen, John A. Livingston wrote, "This was a mounted Cory's - old and badly eroded - that

teetered in an ancient glass case in the high school I attended. This was a significant bird, and it deserved more appropriate quarters; in the course of time James Baillie, of the Royal Ontario Museum, persuaded my biology teacher to donate it to the R.O.M.'s distinguished collection. Regrettably, our headmaster learned of the arrangement and immediately vetoed it. After all these years, I have no idea where that rare specimen eventually came to rest; perhaps it has served to inspire subsequent generations of schoolboys' (Landsdowne and Livingston 1968). This specimen was missing when we checked the mounted specimens at the UTS on 26 March 1996.

Possible additional specimens from Toronto not included in Table 1 are listed in ROM files: In 1925, George Pearce told Jim Baillie that he sent specimens of Cory's Least Bitterns to the South Kensington Museum in England; one to Walter Rothschild in New York City; one to William Brewster in Boston; one to Barnes in Tiffin, Ohio; one to William Owen (Toronto?), one he still owned at the time; and there was one in a case at 51 Jackman Ave., Toronto. The Barnes and Brewster specimens are possible additions to Table 1. A few more Cory's Least Bitterns may exist in private collections or museums.

There are parts of two wings in the ROM files from a bird claimed to be a Cory's that was found crushed and rotting on the causeway at Long Point on 4 September 1955. However, the

buffy wing coverts and rest of the wings match a typical Least Bittern. Specimen number 67405 in the ROM is listed as a Cory's in one museum file, but is not one in our opinion. See the discussion above under the heading of intermediates.

Cory's Least Bitterns were prized by early collectors. A newspaper story in the *Toronto Telegram* of 31 July or 1 August 1913 tells the story of a boy who sold a Cory's Least Bittern to a Toronto taxidermist for 25 cents. After mounting it, the taxidermist sold the Cory's to merchant millionaire and bird collector Walter N. Rothschild of New York City for 100 dollars. This would be more than 2000 dollars today! George Pearce, who collected many Least Bitterns at Ashbridge's Bay, was said to have destroyed many normally coloured Least Bitterns to hide the fact that Cory's was a colour morph, thus helping to maintain an inflated price (Ross James, per ROM files). Jim Baillie told Gerry Bennett (pers. comm.) that George Pearce, known as the Hermit of the Humber, collected typical Least Bitterns, dyed them red, and sold some as Cory's to unsuspecting collectors. One of these dyed birds apparently surfaced in the 1950s. Earl Godfrey (pers. comm.), Curator Emeritus of birds at the Canadian Museum of Nature, was sent a specimen of a "Cory's Least Bittern" to examine. Godfrey determined that it was not a Cory's, but a typical Least Bittern dyed to look like one!

The total number of Cory's Least Bitterns collected in Ontario

is at least 22, of which 20 are from Toronto, plus one from Point Pelee and one from Prince Edward County. Adding the 15 specimens from the United States (Palmer 1962) and the one from Brazil (Teixeira and Alvarenga 1985), the total number from all locations is at least 38!

Sight Records: There are numerous sight records including recent ones for Ontario and elsewhere. (1) Paul Harrington saw one about 1921 in Toronto (ROM files). (2) A. C. Bent and M. Copeland saw a Cory's on 7 April 1925 in Pinellas County, Florida (Bent and Copeland 1927). (3) One was seen 1 August 1927 at Ashbridge's Bay, Toronto (ROM files). (4) One was seen by Peggy Mitchell on 6 July 1932 at Erindale (ROM files). (5) George Pearce told Jim Baillie of the ROM that he found Cory's breeding in 1923 at Port Rowan on Lake Erie, Norfolk County (ROM files). (6) One was seen by Alex Lucas on 2 August 1939 along the Otonabee River at Rice Lake, Peterborough County. It was described to Jim Baillie as "chocolate coloured all over" (ROM files). (7) James Savage observed a Cory's Least Bittern at Long Point, Norfolk County on 16 September 1928 (Snyder and Logier 1931). (8) George North and William Campbell saw a Cory's in Hamilton on 10 August 1941 (ROM files; Bob Curry *in litt.*). (9) Roger Tory Peterson (*in litt.* to Craig Campbell 1982, 1983) was given a colour photograph of a Cory's Least Bittern taken in Ohio in 1949. The date stamped on the

photograph is 3 October 1949. This bird flew into a building at Youngstown in the autumn of 1949 and was photographed by Frank F. Ferris who apparently gave the photograph to Peterson. This Cory's was later released (Duane Ferris, pers. comm.). (10) W.C. Mansell saw a Cory's on 21 May 1950 at the third Humber River marsh, Toronto. (11) Gerry Bennett (pers. comm.) saw a Cory's near Hamilton in the 1950s. (12) Don Sutherland (pers. comm.) and Nick Godfrey flushed a Cory's Least Bittern in May 1973 at Hanlan's Point on the Toronto Islands, not far from the former stronghold at Ashbridge's Bay. (13) The most recent Ontario report is from Craig Campbell (pers. comm.) and Dave Perrin who attracted a Cory's to the taped call of a Least Bittern in Prince Edward County in July 1981. The behaviour noted in the last sighting is further evidence that Cory's is indeed a colour morph, rather than a distinct species. There are no doubt other sight records that we missed.

Ashbridge's Bay

Toronto's Ashbridge's Bay marsh was the world's centre of abundance of the Cory's Least Bittern. More specimens of Cory's were taken at Ashbridge's Bay (between 1890-1900) than anywhere else in the world, and it was recorded breeding there in 1898 (Ames 1901; Fleming 1901, 1906, undated). Ashbridge's Bay and the Lake Okeechobee region of Florida were the only confirmed breeding locations of Cory's Least

Table 1: Cory's Least Bittern - Ontario Specimens

*Age\Sex	Date	Location	Collection
1. adult male	18 May 1890	Toronto	ROM**
2. adult female	20 May 1893	Toronto	BM
3. adult male	26 May 1894	Toronto	ROM
4. adult female	16 July 1894	Toronto	AMNH
5. adult male	16 Aug. 1894	Toronto	ROM
6. juvenile male	17 Aug. 1894	Toronto	ROM
7. juvenile male	24 Aug. 1894	Toronto	ROM
8. adult male	about 1895	Toronto	UTS**
9. adult male	17 Aug. 1896	Toronto	AMNH
10. adult male	14 May 1897	Toronto	AMNH
11. adult female	30 June 1897	Toronto	ROM
12. adult male	8 June 1898	Toronto	Private USA
13. adult female	15 June 1898	Toronto	ROM
14. juvenile male	3 Aug. 1898	Toronto	ROM
15. adult male	7 Aug. 1899	Toronto	ROM
16. juvenile male	14 Aug. 1899	Toronto	ROM
17. adult male	8 Sept. 1899	Toronto	BM
18. adult male	21 Sept. 1899	Toronto	ROM
19. adult male	12 July 1900	Toronto	ROM
20. adult female	12 July 1900	Toronto	ROM
21. adult female	? June 1895	Prince Ed. Co.	ROM
22. adult female	5 June 1913	Point Pelee	CMN

AMNH - American Museum of Natural History

BM - British Museum

CMN - Canadian Museum of Nature

ROM - Royal Ontario Museum

UTS - University of Toronto Schools

* - Some "adults" are likely in first alternate or definitive basic plumage

** - Specimen missing

Total Specimens: World 38 (Ontario 22, United States 15, Brazil 1)

Sources: ROM Collection, Ross James, pers. comm.;
 CMN Collection, Michel Gosselin, pers. comm.;
 Chapman (1896); Fleming (1902); Palmer (1962);
 Teixeira and Alvaarenga (1985).

Bittern, but it undoubtedly bred elsewhere.

Early ornithologists regarded Ashbridge's Bay marsh as one of the finest marshes in Canada. The marsh covered some 560 hectares (1385 acres). We are indebted to George Fairfield (in prep.) for permission to quote from his upcoming book on Ashbridge's Bay, to be published by the Toronto Ornithological Club: "The marsh was formed at the delta of the Don River. It was enclosed on the south side and separated from Lake Ontario by a long peninsula of sand which continued on to form what is now Toronto Islands. The present Toronto shoreline in this area follows roughly the south edge of this peninsula. The peninsula was formed by the deposition of material eroded from the Scarborough Bluffs and carried westwards by lake currents."

Ashbridge's marsh was described by Hubert Brown in 1894 (Fleming 1894, Fleming undated). "The marshy location to which the birds resort, and where all the seven were taken, is only half a mile square, protected from the seas of Lake Ontario by a narrow sand-bar a few yards in width, and is situated immediately adjacent to the city of Toronto. A great deal of shooting is practiced there at all seasons, so that the bird, though of retiring habits, could scarcely have chosen a more frequented piece of marsh."

Ashbridge's Bay marsh is gone now, the result of early filling to develop a harbour and later a sewage treatment plant for Toronto. The marsh was mostly destroyed

when Taverner published *Birds of Canada* in 1934. Remnants of the marsh existed into the 1960s.

Regardless, the collecting pressure in one decade (1890-1900) virtually eliminated the Cory's Least Bittern from Ashbridge's Bay long before the marsh itself had disappeared.

Summary

The Cory's Least Bittern is a very rare colour morph of the Least Bittern. In Cory's, the buff and white areas of the typical form are replaced by chestnut to chocolate. Ashbridge's Bay marsh (now gone) in Toronto was the former stronghold of the Cory's Least Bittern in the world. Most of the known specimens from throughout its range date from 1885 to 1914, with a more recent specimen from Brazil in 1967. The total number of known specimens is 38 of which 22 are from Ontario. There were Ontario sightings in 1973 and 1981.

If our ideas about the genetics are correct (homozygous recessive), it is likely that Cory's Least Bitterns will turn up from time to time. Landsdowne and Livingston (1968) said, "The mysterious chestnut bird should still be watched for, wherever there are least bitterns. Some may remain at Lake Okeechobee, Florida, or in the Long Point marshes of Lake Erie." The Ontario Bird Records Committee is interested in recent reports of Cory's Least Bittern.

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Photo Quiz

by
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The mystery bird, this time, is a member of the Emberizinae or sparrow-longspur subfamily, judging from the stocky, compact size and thick, triangular bill. This does not narrow it down terribly as many species of sparrows resemble the subject in possessing fairly complicated crown and face patterns combined with breast and flank streakings. Furthermore, we are not permitted a view of the entire bird which would have aided us in eliminating several genera of sparrows based on overall shapes and folded wing and tail proportions.

But let's look at what we can see. It is a rather thick or "chesty" bird. Most noticeable is the discrete rounded patch of vague dark streaks or spots or even blotches of black in the centre of the upper breast. Notice that, although there are bold distinctive blackish streaks on the sides of the breast which seem to extend to the flanks, these are separate from the breast patch. The crown is not particularly unique in pattern, being dark with a light median streak, and there is a light supercilium. More distinctive is the light auricular (ear) patch which is boldly framed in black.

This "busy" head is continued below the lower edge of the ear-coverts (moustachial stripe) by a bold light submoustachial stripe and a rather broad black malar stripe.

Now, let's eliminate some groups of sparrows. For instance, some of the *Ammodramus* or grassland sparrows, such as Henslow's and Baird's, to name just two, have fairly similar head and breast patterns although the streaks are finer, more discrete and extend onto the sides of the breast. These birds have proportionately bigger heads and bigger bills and "flat-headed" profiles, and are not so plump as our bird. Vesper Sparrow has a fine but distinctive eye-ring, the auriculars are not so boldly etched in black, and it has dark, relatively fine streaking right across the upper breast extending farther down the breast and contiguous with the flank streaking. Similarly, both Song and Savannah Sparrows have streaked breasts, but the streaks extend farther down the breast and coalesce into a central spot in the former, while the streaks extend onto the sides of the breast and flanks in the latter. Although both these species have dark ear-coverts, they are not quite so boldly outlined in black.

One *Zonotrichia* sparrow, Harris's, can have a breast patch which in winter plumage resembles this. A sketch in my notebook of such a bird near Woodstock in January 1988 displays a patch of black on the upper breast, but it is more solid black and not as extensive or rounded. Moreover,

there is no well defined auricular patch, and although there is a black malar stripe, there is no bold, light submoustachial stripe. Finally, the bill is a distinctive light flesh colour.

In summary, all these birds with head patterns resembling the subject have relatively fine discrete streaks on the centre and sides of the breast and, conversely, the one bird with an upper breast patch has a much simpler head pattern.

Three of the longspurs, however, are characterized by blackish breast patches of varying extent and intensity. Our bird is clearly not sufficiently boldly marked to be a male in alternate plumage. In a basic-plumaged Chestnut-collared male, the black extends farther down the breast and the lower half of the face and throat are plain and unmarked, quite unlike our bird. Females have dull buff underparts with light streaking and, again, a plain face. McCown's basic male or alternate female has a breast patch similar to the photo bird but it is a different shape, being cut straight across and extending to the sides of the breast and sharply demarcated from a plain light throat. Again, McCown's does not have such a boldly demarcated submoustachial stripe and auricular patch. Moreover, they do not have bold streaking on the sides of the breast.

To avoid further repetition, our bird is a **Lapland Longspur**. It would seem to be a basic-plumaged male but there is the possibility of alternate (breeding) female. There is at least a partial white streak

posterior to the auricular patch and joining up with the whitish supercilium. It is impossible to determine whether the nape, which seems to contrast with the head and back, is plain or streaked. If plain, then the bird is likely a male. Of interest is that alternate plumage is attained partly by a prealternate molt, but mostly through feather wear.

(Editors' Note: Relying solely on what could be determined from the photograph, Bob undertook his analysis without knowing where or when the picture was taken. In actual fact, this female Lapland Longspur in alternate plumage was photographed by Doug McRae in June 1983 at Churchill, Manitoba.)

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PUBLICATION NOTICES

A Life With Birds: Percy A. Taverner, Canadian Ornithologist, 1875-1947. By John Cranmer-Byng. Special Issue of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, Volume 110, Number 1, January-March 1996. Will be available from the Business Manager, *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, Box 35069, Westgate P.O., Ontario K1Z 1A2 at a cost of \$25 (hardcover) or \$10 (softcover), plus \$2.50 postage and handling.

From 1911 to 1942, Percy Taverner was Ornithologist at The National Museum of Natural Sciences in Ottawa, now called The Canadian Museum of Nature. He laid the foundations of scientific ornithology in Canada by building up the necessary collections of birds at the museum, and studying their distribution, working through a network of people who collected specimens and gathered ornithological information from across the country. He was a leading advocate of the need for conservation and wild bird protection, and played a major role, through his research and recommendations, in the creation of a National Park at Point Pelee and bird sanctuaries along the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and at Percé Rock and Bonaventure Island off the south coast of the Gaspé Peninsula.

Perhaps Taverner's most far-reaching contribution was as an educator of public thought. His wide knowledge was passed to the public in his books, *Birds of Eastern Canada* (1919), *Birds of Western Canada* (1926) and *Birds of Canada* (1934). He presented scientific information about his birds in their many plumages and habitats, and at the same time conveyed to the reader his own sense of appreciation of the birds he was describing. In this way he helped to make the study of birds and their habitats popular recreation. He was an active council member of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club and an influential Associate Editor and frequent contributor to *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*.

Throughout his life and career, his consistent devotion to the study of birds and their behaviour, his achievements and difficulties at the National Museum, his bird expeditions to different parts of Canada, and his family life, show a warm-hearted person with a sense of humour who was a tireless writer of letters to his many friends and colleagues.

Ontario Nest Records Scheme: Twenty-seventh Report (1956-1995). 1996. By *George K. Peck*. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C6. No charge.

This report summarizes nest record card data through 1995, the fortieth year of operation for the Ontario Nest Records Scheme. The current Ontario breeding bird list totals 292 species, 282 of which are represented on 107,327 nest cards in this program. The report tabulates the number of nesting records for each species in the database, and lists 45 regional records of first reported nestings by species in 1995. Nest record highlights in 1995 included: 12 Great Egret nests on Nottawasaga Island, Georgian Bay (Simcoe); four Peregrine Falcon nests, from Manitoulin, Hamilton-Wentworth, Toronto, and Thunder Bay District; a Piping Plover nest from Lake of the Woods (Rainy River District); and 16 Cerulean Warbler nests from Frontenac County.

The Dragonflies and Damselflies of Algonquin Park. 1996. By *Matt Holder*. Illustrated by *Peter Burke* and *Andrea Kingsley*. The Friends of Algonquin Park, Box 248, Whitney, Ontario K0J 2M0. About \$3.00.

The latest addition to Algonquin Park's technical bulletin series will be released this summer, and is expected to be of great interest to the many Ontario birders who are active in the identification and study of dragonflies and damselflies. Introductory sections describe these fascinating insects, outline their basic life history (with drawings by Andrea Kingsley), and explain where they occur in Algonquin Park. The 36 species most commonly seen by Park visitors are then featured in accounts which include a written description of the species, its relative status in Algonquin Park, the time of year when adults occur, its breeding habitat, and a colour illustration (by Peter Burke or Andrea Kingsley) of one or both sexes. Finally, there is a list of the 85 species of dragonflies and damselflies which have been recorded to date in Algonquin Park.

The author expects that most of the dragonflies and damselflies commonly encountered in the Park should be identifiable using this guide. Given the lack of a popular guide to the identification of these insects, and this volume's applicability well beyond Algonquin Park, Ontario "odonate enthusiasts" should welcome this authoritative and inexpensive publication.