ONTARIO BIRDS

VOLUME 33 NUMBER 2
AUGUST 2015

JOURNAL OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

ONTARIO BIRDS

VOLUME 33 NUMBER 2
AUGUST 2015
PAGES 49 — 112

Cover Illustration: Snowy Owl *by Barry Kent MacKay*

ISSN 0822-3890
Publications Mail Agreement No. 40046348

Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2014

Mike V.A. Burrell and Barbara N. Charlton

Introduction

This is the 33rd annual report of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. The OBRC reviews rare bird reports in Ontario based on documentation that has been submitted by the birding community and would cease to function without this effort and support. Species and subspecies evaluations are based on the Review Lists for Ontario, which can be found on the OFO website (www.ofo.ca). Any new species, subspecies, or first breeding records for Ontario are also reviewed. This report deals with the review of 187 records by the OBRC in 2014 of which 80% were accepted. All reports reviewed by the 2014 Committee will be added to the permanent file kept at the Royal Ontario Museum.

The members of the 2014 Committee were Brandon R. Holden (chair), Mike V.A. Burrell (non-voting secretary), Barbara N. Charlton (non-voting assistant to the secretary), Ross W. Wood, William J. Crins, Peter S. Burke, Mark Gawn, Ron Ridout and Bruce M. Di Labio (Figure 1). Mark K. Peck acted as Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) liaison for the OBRC.

Changes to the Checklist of Ontario Birds

No new species were added to the Ontario list, leaving the total at 490 species.

Changes to the Review Lists

This report is the first to utilize three review zones (Lowlands, Central and South). See Holden (2014) for more details on this change. Visit the OFO website (www.ofo.ca) or contact the secretary (obrc@ofo.ca) directly for the full review lists.

Figure 1: Ontario Bird Records Committee for 2014. Left to right (standing): Ron Ridout, Bruce M. Di Labio, Brandon R. Holden, Mark Gawn, William J. Crins. Left to right (sitting) Mike V.A. Burrell, Ross W. Wood, Barbara N. Charlton. *Photo: Mark K. Peck.*

Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*) is added to the Lowlands Review List following acceptance of the first record for the region, bringing the total number of species recorded in this review zone to 322.

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) and Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) are added to the Central Review List following acceptance of the first records for the region bringing the total number of species recorded in this review zone to 380.

Beginning in 2015, reports of Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) in the South Review Zone are no longer requested, based on more than twenty records occurring in the previous five years. Reports prior to 2015 are still requested for review. No new species were recorded in the South Review Zone, leaving the total species for this review zone at 480.

No changes were made to the Subspecies Review List or the list of species known to have bred, although the Eurasian Collared-Doves in Essex did construct a nest. Therefore, the total number of breeding species remains 292.

Listing of Records

For accepted records and records for which the identification was accepted but the origin is questionable, the following information is provided where known: year of occurrence, number of birds, the plumage and sex of each individual, dates of occurrence, location, names of contributors and OBRC file

number. All contributors who have provided reports are listed; if a contributor is also a finder of the bird(s), their name is underlined. Additional finders of the bird(s) are also listed where known, even if they did not provide any documentation for review. Place names in italics refer to the county, regional municipality or district in Ontario. For accepted records, the total number of records (including 2014 reports) is indicated in parentheses after the species name. Common and scientific names, as well as taxonomy, follow the seventh edition of the Check-list of North American Birds published by the American Ornithologists' Union (1998), along with its annual supplements published in *The Auk: Ornithological Advances*, up to the 55th supplement (Chesser *et al.* 2014) inclusive.

Plumage terminology follows that of Humphrey and Parkes (1959). For a detailed explanation of plumage and molt terminology, see Pittaway (2000).

All records that were not accepted due either to insufficient evidence or questionable origin have been listed separately. Contributors of all "not accepted" records are notified in writing by the Committee. Reasons for the decision are explained, using information provided by voting members on their voting slips. Any "not accepted" record can be reconsidered by the OBRC if new or additional documentation is provided.

All documentation provided to the OBRC is permanently archived at the ROM. Researchers and other interested parties are welcome to examine any of this material evidence, by appointment. Please contact Mark Peck in writing at Department of Natural History, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2C6; or, alternatively, by email at markp@rom.on.ca or by telephone at 416-586-5523. Over the past several years, volunteers have been working on digitizing all of the documentation — if you would like to request digital copies or provide assistance with scanning please contact the secretary (obrc@ofo.ca).

Acknowledgements

The OBRC appreciates the efforts of 215 observers who took the time to submit documentation of rare birds for consideration by the 2014 Committee. We also thank the following people who assisted the Committee in the acquisition of additional data and other material evidence that supplemented the information submitted directly by observers and Committee members, or by providing expert opinions on material evidence submitted to the Committee: Chris Benesh, Nick Block, Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Paul E. Conover, Robert L. Curry, Frank Fogarty, Michel Gosselin, Jon S. Greenlaw, Cin-Ty A. Lee, Alvaro P. Jaramillo, Andrew W. Kratter, Ed Kwater, Tony Leukering, Stuart A. Mackenzie, Ronald J. Pittaway, Brian D. Ratcliff, Michael L.P. Retter, Christopher J. Rimmer, Peter Pyle, Jeff H. Skevington, Scott A. Taylor, Joshua D. Vandermeulen and Kerrie Wilcox.

ACCEPTED RECORDS

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* Central and Lowlands only (13)

2014 – one, first basic, 13 July-4 August, Paskwachi Point, *Cochrane* (Timothy B. Lucas, Mark K. Peck, R. Doug McRae; 2014-158) – photos on file.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Central and Lowlands only (72)

2014 – one, definitive alternate male, 12 May, Dinorwic Lake, *Kenora* (Ellen M. Riggins; 2014-043) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate male, 1 June, South Porcupine, *Cochrane* (Josh Janvrin, also found by Beth Janvrin; 2014-067) – photos on file.

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* Central and Lowlands only (4)

2014 – one, definitive alternate male, 16 May, White River, *Algoma* (Alan Wormington; 2014-050) – photo on file.

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica* Central only after 2014 (65)

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 17 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Timothy B. Lucas, Chris T. Heffernan, found by Jean Iron; 2014-132).

– one, definitive prebasic molt, 15-18 October, Oshawa, *Durham* (Elias J. Takacs, found by Daniel S. Kaczynski; 2014-155) – photos on file.

– one, juvenal, 15-23 October, Barrie, *Simcoe* (David E. Szmyr, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, Amanda C. Guercio, Martha L. Miller, Andrew E. Keaveney, Barbara N. Charlton, J. Brett Fried; 2014-134) – photos on file.

– one, definitive prebasic molt, 19-22 October, Barrie, *Simcoe* (Amanda C. Guercio, Barbara N. Charlton, David I. Pryor, David E. Szmyr, J. Brett Fried, also found by Nigel J. Shaw; 2014-135) – photos on file.

– one, definitive prebasic molt, 20-22 October, Barrie, *Simcoe* (Barbara N. Charlton, J. Brett Fried, Andrew E. Keaveney; 2014-137).

– one, definitive prebasic molt, 20-24 October, Barrie, *Simcoe* (Barbara N. Charlton, J. Brett Fried, Andrew E. Keaveney; 2014-136) – photo on file.

– one, juvenal, 26 October, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Jeremy L. Hatt, Jeremy M. Bensette, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, found by Alan Wormington; 2014-174) – photo on file.

– one, definitive prebasic molt, 9-10 November, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Kenneth G.D. Burrell, found by Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2014-173).

2002 – one, definitive basic, 2 February, Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma* (Scott Terry, Brad Murphy; 2014-131).

It is hard to know whether the species is truly increasing in southern Ontario or observers are more efficient at finding and identifying the species. The upswing in records over the last decade is highlighted by the removal of this species from the southern Ontario review list. The presence of a minimum of four birds in Simcoe represents a high count for southern Ontario.

Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis* (45)

2014 – one, alternate, 29-30 April, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Joshua R. Bouman, Kenneth G.D. Burrell; 2014-026) – photos on file.

– one, alternate, 20 May, Long Point (Hastings Drive), *Norfolk* (Denis Lepage, Joseph Gabriel; 2014-021) – photos on file.

– one, alternate, 17 June-4 July, Fort Frances, *Rainy River* (Andrew D.J. Chepil, John E. van den Broeck, Michael S. Dawber, also found by Janet L. Fedoruk; 2014-068) – photos on file.

– one, basic, 19 October, Bluff Island, *Rainy River* (Kurt G. Engrstrom, also found by Cade W. Roberts; 2014-127).

2013 – one, alternate, 9 May, Cochenour, *Kenora* (David S. New; 2014-122) – photos on file.

– one, alternate, 16 May, Thunder Bay (Mission Island), *Thunder Bay* (Geoffrey T. Gooding; 2014-074).

Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* (9)

2014 – one, 13 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Brandon R. Holden, also found by Kenneth G.D. Burrell; 2014-040) – photos on file.

– one, alternate, 15-20 May, Rondeau Provincial Park (15 May), Erieau (17 May), Port Alma (20 May), *Chatham-Kent* (Reuven D. Martin, Chris T. Heffernan, Ross W. Wood; 2014-049) – photos on file.

– one, juvenal, 30 September-1 October, Kettle Point, *Lambton* (Alfred H. Rider, Deryl D. Nethercott; 2014-177) – photo on file.

With eight of the nine provincial records occurring since 2011, this species continues a remarkable northward expansion. The *Lambton* record becomes the first Ontario record for Lake Huron.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (12)

2014 – one, definitive basic, 9 November, Wolfe Island, *Frontenac* (Mark D. Read; 2014-133).

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis* Central and Lowlands only (3)

2014 – one, male, 8 July, Pinewood, *Rainy River* (Darlene J.M. Salter; 2014-172).

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Central and Lowlands only (16)

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 22 May-21 June, Thunder Bay (22-26 May and 1-3 June), Lappe (31 May), Mary Harbour (21 June), *Thunder Bay* (Mary Ellen Adderley, Nicholas G. Escott, found by Dan N. Bascello; 2014-101) – photos on file.

– one, first basic, 26 August-19 October, Thunder Bay (26 August-11 September) and Murillo (12 September-19 October), *Thunder Bay* (Gary E. Marmounier, Bill Greaves, Glenn C. Stronks, Mary Ellen Adderley, Jeffrey N. Robinson; 2014-102) – photos on file.

Figure 2: Neotropic Cormorant at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* on 13 May 2014. *Photo: Brandon R. Holden.*

Figure 3: Great Egret at Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* on 3 September 2014. *Photo: Jeffrey N. Robinson.*

Little Blue Heron ***Egretta caerulea*** **(78)**

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 1 May, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Robert H. Curry, also found by Glenda J. Slessor; 2014-167).

This is the first record since 2012, making 2013 only the second year (after 1997) in which this species has not been documented in Ontario since the Committee began.

Tricolored Heron ***Egretta tricolor*** **(38)**

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 18 May, Wye Marsh, *Simcoe* (Catherine Lewis; 2014-060) – photos on file.

While this species has been nearly annual in the past, this is the first provincial record since 2006; marking the longest drought of records (almost eight years) since the OBRC began. Previously, the longest stretch without a record was just under three years from 1989 to 1992. This decline in occurrences in Ontario may be partially attributable to a moderate long-term decline through the species' southeastern USA range (Sauer *et al.* 2014).

Green Heron ***Butorides virescens*** **Central and Lowlands only (11)**

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 26 May, Thunder Bay (Mission Island), *Thunder Bay* (A. Gregg Kendall; 2014-081) – photo on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 29 May, Cloud Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Allan G. Harris; 2014-170).

– one, first alternate, 12-23 July, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (David S. New, Darlene J.M. Salter, Angela E. M. Massey; 2014-025) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 17 August, McGinnis Creek, *Rainy River* (David S. New; 2014-097) – photos on file.

With four records, 2014 was a banner year for this species; no more than one record had been previously recorded in a single year. However, it is unknown whether the increase in records corresponds to an increase in the species population.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron ***Nyctanassa violacea*** **(46)**

2014 – one, juvenal, 9 August-14 October, Etobicoke (Colonel Sam Smith Park), *Toronto* (Lech Jedral, David I. Pryor, Chris T. Heffernan, Dan J. MacNeal, Randy Barba, Stephen Smith, Reuven D. Martin, Jeremy L. Hatt, Sandra C. Hawkins, Bob Hawkins, Luc S. Fazio; 2014-087) – photos on file.

This individual was observed by hundreds of people over its extended stay.

White Ibis ***Eudocimus albus*** **(8)**

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 6 June, Bullock's Corners, *Hamilton* (Darlene Bourdeau, also found by David Clark; 2014-112).

– one, juvenal, 24 August-16 September, Napanee, *Lennox and Addington* (24, 26 August), Oshawa, *Durham* (11 September), Wheatley Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (14-16 September) (Mike V.A. Burrell, Elias J. Takacs, Chris T. Heffernan, David I. Pryor, Jeremy L. Hatt, Robert H. Curry, Kory J. Renaud, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, found by Robert C. Lane; 2014-100) – photos on file.

Figure 4: Juvenal Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (right) with juvenal Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticora* (left) at Etobicoke, *Toronto* on 17 August 2014. *Photo: Randy Barba.*

– one, definitive basic, 24-26 September, Ridgeway, *Niagara* (24 September) and Mississauga (Rattray Marsh), *Peel* (26 September) (Dustin M. DeLange, Wayne E. Renaud, also found by Jay Sibbald, Chris Riou, Mike Gardener, Josh Gardener; 2014-117).

2014 was an exceptional year for this species in southern Ontario. Similar to previous records, none of the birds in 2014 lingered long at any one site. However, the juvenal bird at *Lennox and Addington, Durham* and *Chatham-Kent* was fairly cooperative as it was documented at widely separated locations by many different observers.

Given the rarity of the species and the fact that there was no large scale irruption into the northeast in fall 2014, as well as the fact that none of the records overlapped, the Committee decided that it would undertake a conservative approach, and combine the fall sightings into two records.

Figure 5: Juvenal White Ibis at Napanee, *Lennox and Addington* on 26 August 2014. *Photo: Elias J. Takacs.*

Glossy Ibis ***Plegadis falcinellus*** **(67)**

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 28 April-1 May, Goderich, *Huron* (Bonnie Fera, Deb Johnston, Doug Pedwell; 2014-017) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 2 May, Milton, *Halton* (Garth V. Riley, David I. Pryor, Leonard P. Manning; 2014-029) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 20 July, Demorestville, *Prince Edward* (Tom M. Wheatley; 2014-086) – photos on file.

– one, definitive basic, 3 September, Hamilton, *Hamilton* (Kevin A. McLaughlin, Barbara N. Charlton; 2014-104) – photo on file.

White-faced Ibis ***Plegadis chihi*** **(16)**

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 28 April-1 May, Goderich, *Huron* (Bonnie Fera, Deb Johnston, Doug Pedwell; 2014-018) – photos on file.

This bird spent time with a Glossy Ibis (record 2014-017) allowing for excellent comparisons between these difficult to separate species.

Ibis species *Plegadis* spp. (67)

2014 – one, 24 April, Long Point Provincial Park, *Norfolk* (Matthew Danihel; 2014-160).

– one, first basic, 18 June, Point Anne, *Hastings* (Kenzo Dozono; 2014-149) – photo on file.

– four, 19 August, Long Point (Old Cut), *Norfolk* (G.E."Ted" Maddeford, also found by Pip Gullett, Heather McBrien; 2014-141).

– one, 5 September, Ancaster, *Hamilton* (Robert G. Porter; 2014-187) – photos on file.

Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis* (50)

2014 – two, first basic, 11 May, Simcoe, *Norfolk* (Lynda M. Kosalle; 2014-075) – photos on file.

– one, first basic, 13-14 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (R. Douglas McRae, Barbara N. Charlton, Brandon R. Holden, Joshua R. Bouman; 2014-041) – photos on file.

– one, first basic, 14 May, Wheatley, *Chatham-Kent* (Brandon R. Holden, also found by Barbara N. Charlton; 2014-047) – photo on file.

– one, definitive basic, 14 May, Long Point (Breakwater), *Norfolk* (Avery L. Bartels; 2014-140).

– one, definitive basic, 19 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (James C. Biggar, also found by Jonathan M. Lea; 2014-146).

– one, definitive basic, 24 May, Erie View, *Norfolk* (Ron Ridout; 2014-152).

With six records, 2014 is the best year yet for this species in the province. The two birds together in Norfolk represent a rare occurrence involving perched birds and may be the first record of two individuals within the same photograph. In addition to the records listed here, 2014 also saw the first provincial record and first provincial nesting record for Manitoba (Artuso and Koes *in press*), further establishing 2014 as a remarkable year for this species at the northern edge of its range.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni* (64)

2014 – one, juvenal, light morph, 4 October, Port Elgin, *Bruce* (unknown finder; 2014-156) – photo on file.

– one, definitive basic, light morph, 22 October, Wheatley, *Chatham-Kent* (Paul D. Pratt, also found by Caroline Staddon; 2014-185).

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana* Central and Lowlands only (76)

2014 – one, definitive alternate male, 24 May, Gull Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Robert F. Foster; 2014-176) – photos on file.

Willet *Tringa semipalmata* Central and Lowlands only (20)

2014 – one, alternate, 22 May, Fort Frances, *Rainy River* (Michael S. Dawber; 2014-062) – photo on file.

Figure 6: Mississippi Kites at Simcoe, *Norfolk* on 11 May 2014. *Photo: Lynda M. Kosalle.*

Figure 7: Mew Gull (*brachyrhynchus*) at Pass Lake, *Thunder Bay* on 13 May 2014. *Photo: Gregory N. Stroud.*

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* (31)

1996 – one, definitive alternate, male, 26 May, Casselman, *Prescott and Russell* (Peter Browne, Paul B. Jones; 2014-138).

This record was previously reviewed by the Ottawa Field Naturalists Club rare birds committee; however, documentation was not forwarded to the OBRC until 2014.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* Central and Lowlands only (3)

2014 – one, alternate, 23 July, Longridge Point, *Cochrane* (Ross W. Wood, Ryan Burrell; 2014-183).

This is the first record for the Hudson Bay Lowlands and only the third outside of southern Ontario.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* Central and Lowlands only (8)

2014 – one, juvenal, 2-9 August, Northbluff Point, *Cochrane* (Barbara N. Charlton, Christian A. Friis; 2014-119).

This is the earliest record on file for the Lowlands and may represent a record early fall migration date for the province.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* Central only (1)

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 19 May, New Liskeard, *Timiskaming* (Michael J. Werner, also found by Christopher A. Sukha; 2014-115) – photos on file.

An uncommon migrant throughout southern Ontario and known to nest sporadically in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, there are few known records from the Central Review Zone. As such, the 19 May record becomes the first record reviewed and accepted for the newly created Central Review Zone.

Mew Gull *Larus canus* (29)

2014 – one, *brachyrhynchus*, definitive alternate, 13 May, Pass Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Gregory N. Stroud; 2014-046) – photos on file.

This represents the first record outside of southern Ontario and, therefore, the first record for *Thunder Bay* and the Central Review Zone.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* Central and Lowlands only (18)

2014 – one, second basic, 30 May-4 June, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Jan Luit; 2014-085) – photo on file.

– one, third basic, 19 September, McCool, *Timiskaming* (Michael J. Werner; 2014-121) – photos on file.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (21)

2014 – one, definitive basic, 28 May, Clear Lake, *Peterborough* (Lew Knighton; 2014-065) – photos on file.

– one, definitive prebasic molt, 24 July-11 September, Gilchrist, *Simcoe* (Theresa L. Theakston; 2014-078) – photos on file.

– one, basic, 2 December, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Peter B. Hogenbirk, A. Geoffrey Carpentier; 2014-161).

– one, basic, 20 December, Erbsville, *Waterloo* (Mike V.A. Burrell, also found by Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Erica P. Barkley, Douglas J.A. Burrell; 2014-164).

2014/15 – two (but only one on 24 August), definitive basic, male and female, 24 August-14 May (at least), Leamington, *Essex* (Jeremy M. Bensette, Kory J. Renaud, Leonard P. Manning, Chris T. Heffernan, Kyle E. Holloway, Karl R. Overman, David I. Pryor, Kenneth G.D. Burrell, also found by Michelle L. Valliant; 2014-083) – photos on file.

Prior to 2014, the most records for this species in a single year was three in 2003, so the five in 2014 is exceptional for a species that has been slow to move northward into the province. This trend may speed up following the *Essex* birds constructing the first documented nest of this species, although there is no evidence yet produced to suggest they have actually laid eggs or raised young. It is quite possible that the two *Essex* birds were present since 2013 when two birds were seen nearby on 27 September 2013 (Holden 2014). The two *Essex* birds were still present at the time of writing this report (May 2015).

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* (43)

2014 – one, definitive basic, 12 July, Nolalu, *Thunder Bay* (Murray MacDonald, also found by Rose MacDonald; 2014-107) – photos on file.

2013 – one, definitive basic, 3-9 May, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Christina J. Nielsen; 2014-148) – photos on file.

Chuck-will's-widow *Antrostomus carolinensis* (31)

2014 – one, male, 17 May, Shirleys Bay, *Ottawa* (Jake Walker; 2014-147) – audio recording on file.

– one, male, 19 May-29 June, South Bay, *Prince Edward* (Luke H. Berg, Mike V.A. Burrell, Leonard P. Manning, David I. Pryor, Nathan G. Miller, Chris T. Heffernan, found by Michael W.P. Runtz, Geof H. Burbidge; 2014-057) – audio recordings on file.

– one, male, 27-28 May, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (Janice J. Chard, Sue Poland; 2014-153) – audio recording on file.

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus* (30)

2013 – one, definitive basic male, 1-4 September, *Durham*, Grey (Edna Pratt, Wallace Pratt; 2014-184) – photos on file.

– one, first basic male, mid-October-mid-November, Charlton, *Timiskaming* (Mark W. Milton, Serge M. Gendron, found by Joanne Gajda; 2014-099) – photos on file.

Gray Flycatcher *Empidonax wrightii* (4)

2014 – one, definitive basic, 29-30 September, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (Dayna L. LeClair, Chris Wagnar, Stuart A. Mackenzie, also found by Nancy Raginski, Shawn Sullivan, Emma Cushnie, Flor Hernedez, Angela Caguazango; 2014-116) – photos on file.

This bird was captured, banded, and expertly documented leaving no doubt as to the identity of this rare western *Empidonax* flycatcher.

Figure 8: Gray Flycatcher at Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* on 29 September 2014. *Photo: Dayna L. Leclair.*

Say's Phoebe ***Sayornis saya*** **(16)**

2014 – one, definitive basic, 18 May, Terrace Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington; 2014-051) – photos on file.

Ash-throated Flycatcher ***Myiarchus cinerascens*** **(12)**

2014 – one, 23-24 August, Long Point (Breakwater), *Norfolk* (Timothy B. Lucas, Abbi MacDonald, also found by Joe Krawiec; 2014-123) – photos on file.

– one, basic, 18 November, Barrie, *Simcoe* (Darlene M. Deemert; 2014-139) – photos on file.

The *Norfolk* bird is the earliest fall migrant ever recorded in Ontario by almost a month; the previous earliest was 22 September 1998 (Dobos 1999). The *Simcoe* bird becomes the first Ontario record away from the Great Lakes.

Figure 9: Ash-throated Flycatcher at Long Point (Breakwater), *Norfolk* on 24 August 2014.
Photo: Timothy B. Lucas.

Figure 10: Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* on 11 May 2014.
Photo: Brandon R. Holden.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher ***Tyrannus forficatus*** **(71)**

2014 – one, definitive alternate male, 9-11 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Brandon R. Holden, Joshua R. Bouman, Ken Behrens, Bruce M. Di Labio, Ben F. Di Labio, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, Jeremy L. Hatt, unknown finder; 2014-033) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 17 June, Kingston, *Frontenac* (Amy Pearson; 2014-111).

– one, definitive alternate female, 28 June, Amherst Island, *Lennox and Addington* (Henrique J. Pacheco, also found by Deborah J.A. Pacheco; 2014-022) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate male, 13 July, Cape Chin, *Bruce* (Richard P. Skevington, also found by Sharron Skevington; 2014-069).

– one, basic, 15 September, Amherst Island, *Lennox and Addington* (Lynn K. Fleming; 2014-125) – photos on file.

– one, definitive prebasic female, 22-23 October, Gordon Lake, *Algoma* (T. Mark Oliver, also found by Wanda M. Oliver; 2014-128) – photos on file.

– one, first basic, 1 November, Ottawa (Innis Point), *Ottawa* (Frédéric Bédard, found by Caillie Monrad; 2014-129) – photos on file.

It is possible that the *Frontenac* and two *Lennox and Addington* records all pertain to the same individual. Due to the time and distance between sightings, the relatively heavily birded area, and the conspicuous nature of the species involved, the Committee felt the records were best treated separately.

The total of seven records in 2014 is the highest number of records accepted in a single year to date.

Loggerhead Shrike ***Lanius ludovicianus*** **Central and Lowlands only (12)**

2013 – one, definitive alternate, 26 May, Rossport, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington; 2014-157) – photo on file.

Bell's Vireo ***Vireo bellii*** **(18)**

2014 – one, *bellii*, basic, 26 April, London, *Middlesex* (William G. Lindley; 2014-010).

– one, *bellii,* definitive basic male, 10-11 May, Long Point Provincial Park, *Norfolk* (Jarmo V. Jalava, David I. Pryor, Chris Geraghty; 2014-036) – photos on file.

– one, *bellii*, first basic male, 15-20 May, Long Point (Breakwater), *Norfolk* (Avery L. Bartels, also found by Ariel Lenske; 2014-070) – photos on file.

– one, *bellii*, definitive basic male, 18 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Michael J. Nelson, Tom Mast, found by Thomas J. Preney; 2014-055) – photos on file.

It was an unprecedented year in Ontario with four Bell's Vireo records. The *Middlesex* record becomes the first away from the Great Lakes.

Fish Crow ***Corvus ossifragus*** **(33)**

2014 – one, basic, 3 April, Guelph, *Wellington* (Mark H. Dorriesfield; 2014-003).

– one, basic, 20 April, Hamilton (Bayfront Park), *Hamilton* (Leonard P. Manning; 2014-013).

– one, basic, 18 May, Toronto (Tommy Thompson Park), *Toronto* (Henrique J. Pacheco, also found by Deborah J.A. Pacheco, Jean Iron; 2014-054).

– one, basic, 1 December, Fort Erie, *Niagara* (Mark J. Patry, also found by Richard Collins, Hedrik Wachelka, Robert Vaillancourt; 2014-169).

This species continues its spread into Ontario through the Niagara Peninsula and the west end of Lake Ontario. The records listed above are only a portion of the reports of this species in 2014; as many Ontario birders have not submitted documentation. The Committee urges everyone who observes this species to take time to properly document their observations (particularly with audio recordings using phones) to ensure we have a complete history of this invasion. Despite this recent string of records, the Committee cautions that this is still a very rare species and identification is far from straight-forward, especially in spring and summer when American Crows can give a wide range of unfamiliar calls.

Violet-green Swallow ***Tachycineta thalassina*** **(3)**

2014 – one, definitive basic, 21 August, Long Point (Old Cut), *Norfolk* (Stuart A. Mackenzie; 2014-098).

This becomes just the third provincial record and the second for southern Ontario, following closely on the heels of a bird at *Ottawa* in spring 2013 (Holden 2014).

Figure 11: Carolina Chickadee at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* on 13 May 2013. *Photo: Brandon R. Holden.*

Carolina Chickadee ***Poecile carolinensis*** **(2)**

2013 – one, first basic, 12-15 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Hayden J. Bildy, Brandon R. Holden, David M. Bell, also found by R. Gordon Payne; 2014-088) – photos on file.

This is just the second provincial record of this species, with the first, a bird at Long Point, *Norfolk* on 18 May 1983 (James 1984). This bird was first photographed on 12 May, but it was not until the next day that observers identified it as a probable Carolina Chickadee and began documenting it extensively with photographs. The photographs showed a chickadee that ticked all the boxes for identification and was reviewed by experts familiar with the species and hybrids. The Committee felt the evidence was sufficient to eliminate the possibility of a hybrid. Given the species' close proximity to Ontario, south of Lake Erie (*i.e.* straight line distance from Findlay, Ohio, where the species is regular, to Ontario border of less than 100 km; eBird 2015) and its northward expansion (Taylor *et al.* 2014), it should be watched for, particularly in spring at Lake Erie migrant traps. See Holden and Bell (in press) for more information on this outstanding record.

Figure 12: Northern Wheatear at Navan, *Ottawa* on 21 September 2014. *Photo: Ken D. Ball.*

Figure 13: Smith's Longspur at Elmdale, *Essex* on 29 April 2014. *Photo: Kory J. Renaud.*

Northern Wheatear ***Oenanthe oenanthe*** **(37)**

2014 – one, *leucorhoa*, first basic male, 20-22 September, Navan, *Ottawa* (Mike V.A. Burrell, Clifford F. Rostek, Chris T. Heffernan, Tom Devecseri, Gary Milks, Ken D. Ball, Bruce M. Di Labio, found by Richard Killeen, Ken Kittley; 2014-113) – photos, video on file.

This is the first record since 16 October 2010, when another individual was also observed in *Ottawa* (Wormington and Cranford 2011). Through the use of light level data loggers, Bairlein *et al.* (2012) recently confirmed that Northern Wheatears breeding in the eastern Canadian Arctic migrate eastward, across the Atlantic Ocean before moving south to winter in Africa; given this fact, it is perhaps not surprising that most Ontario records come from southeastern Ontario.

Townsend's Solitaire ***Myadestes townsendi*** **(82)**

2014 – one, first basic, 10 October, Port Stanley (Hawk Cliff), *Elgin* (Christopher T. Burris, Michel Poissant; 2014-130) – photos on file.

– one, basic, 19 October, Aylmer, *Elgin* (Mike Cowlard, also found by Nancy Douglas; 2014-180).

– one, definitive basic, 16-29 November, East Lake, *Prince Edward* (Mark D. Read, James R. Barber, found by Paul Kenny; 2014-145) – photos on file.

– one, definitive basic, 23 November-7 December, Bailieboro, *Peterborough/ Northumberland* (Luke H. Berg, found by Iain Rayner; 2014-142) – photos on file.

Smith's Longspur ***Calcarius pictus*** **Central and South only (5)**

2014 – seven, alternate males (6+) and female, 29 April-7 May, Elmdale, *Essex* (Kory J. Renaud, Ronald G. Tozer, J. Michael Tate, Paul D. Pratt, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, Mark S. Field, Dan J. MacNeal, James R. Barber, Chris T. Heffernan, Nicole Richardson, Tim R. Arthur, Garth V. Riley, found by Jerry S. Ball; 2014-027) – photos, video on file.

In the last few years, birders in Ohio and Michigan have been successful at finding spring migrant Smith's Longspurs by identifying and searching suitable habitat (Brumfield and Whan 2012). It is entirely possible that, with a similar effort in extreme southwestern Ontario, this species may be found to be a rare but regular migrant, as well.

Kirtland's Warbler ***Setophaga kirtlandii*** **(64)**

2014 – one, first alternate male, 9 May, Long Point Provincial Park, *Norfolk* (Timothy B. Lucas, Chris Geraghty; 2014-035) – photo on file.

– one, first alternate female, 19 May, Port Rowan, *Norfolk* (Lou LeBlanc, also found by Cindy LeBlanc; 2014-059) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate male, 27 May-15 June, Starr Island, *Muskoka* (Thomas Jackman, also found by Lisa Hendrickson; 2014-020) – photos, audio on file.

– one, first alternate male, 28 May, Toronto Islands, *Toronto* (Gavin C. Platt, David D. Beadle, Lisa Paemurd, found by Jeff Harrison; 2014-063) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate male, 15 June, Rohallion, *Kawartha Lakes* (Robert H. Curry, John R. Carley; 2014-166) – photos on file.

Amazingly, none of the five 2014 records came from Point Pelee, where most of the previous 59 records have originated.

"Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata auduboni* (15)

2014 – one, definitive alternate male, 28 April, London, *Middlesex* (Tim R. Arthur; 2014-016) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate female, 30 April-8 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Mike V.A. Burrell, Karl R. Overman, found by Lev A. Frid, Murray A. Shields; 2014-064) – photos on file.

Green-tailed Towhee *Pipilo chlorurus* (8)

2014 – one, basic, 22 November, Whites, *Elgin* (Pat Hartwell-McLean; 2014-151) – photos on file.

Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla* Central and Lowlands only (22)

2013 – one, alternate, 2 May, Neebing, *Thunder Bay* (Zachary B. Marchuk; 2014-034) – photos on file.

Lark Bunting *Calamospiza melanocorys* (31)

2014 – one, alternate female, 16 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Reuven D. Martin; 2014-082).

– one, first alternate male, 19 June-9 July, Amherst Island, *Lennox and Addington* (Mike V.A. Burrell, Chris T. Heffernan, David I. Pryor, Donald A. Sutherland, Elias J. Takacs, James R. Barber, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, Luke H. Berg, Mark D. Read, Paul O'Toole, Tom Devecseri, Tom M. Wheatley, Leonard P. Manning, Kyle E. Holloway, found by Sherri Jensen; 2014-019) – photos, video on file.

The *Lennox and Addington* bird delighted hundreds of birders over its prolonged stay which was eclipsed only by the bird at Prince Edward Point, *Prince Edward* on 15 May-10 June 1995 (Dobos 1996).

Henslow's Sparrow *Ammodramus henslowii* (37)

2014 – one, definitive alternate, 17-18 April, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Chris R. Gaffan, Jeremy L. Hatt, Mike V.A. Burrell, Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2014-007) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 4 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Dwayne D. Murphy, Dan J. MacNeal, Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2014-030) – photos on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 4 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (James R. Barber, unknown finder; 2014-031) – photo on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 11 May, Port Glasgow, *Elgin* (Stanley Caveney; 2014-039) – photos on file.

Figure 14: Lark Bunting at Amherst Island, *Lennox and Addington* on 23 June 2014. *Photo: Joshua D. Vandermeulen.*

Figure 15: Henslow's Sparrow at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* on 18 April 2014. *Photo: Mike V.A. Burrell.*

– one, definitive alternate, 17 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen, also found by Dominic A. Cormier, Kory J. Renaud, Jeremy M. Bensette; 2014-056) – photos on file.
– one, definitive alternate male, 25 June-14 July, Caledon, *Peel* (Matthew D. Ross, D.M. Lavigne, found by Neil P. Morris; 2014-023) – photos, audio on file.

2013 – one, basic, 23 September, Sarnia, *Lambton* (Eric B. Marcum; 2014-105) – photos on file.

2002 – one, basic, 17 September, Amherst Island, *Lennox and Addington* (Michael Jaques, also found by Joyce Jaques; 2014-126).

Summer Tanager ***Piranga rubra*** **Central and Lowlands only (19)**

2014 – one, first alternate male, 21-29 May, Johnsons Landing, *Thunder Bay* (Aarre A. Ertolahti; 2014-061) – photos on file.

Western Tanager ***Piranga ludoviciana*** **(44)**

2012 – one, basic female, 4 November, Dundas, *Hamilton* (Cheryl E. Edgecombe, also found by Rob Z. Dobos; 2014-168).

Blue Grosbeak ***Passerina caerulea*** **(97)**

2014 – one, definitive basic female, 18-21 April, Mount Pleasant, *Perth* (Rita C. Christie, Leonard P. Manning, David I. Pryor, Mike V.A. Burrell, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, also found by Ron M. Christie; 2014-008) – photos on file.
– one, basic female, 8 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Mike V.A. Burrell, Brandon R. Holden also found by Eric W. Holden, Kenneth G.D. Burrell, James G. Burrell, G. Carol Gregory; 2014-032) – photos on file.

2009 – one, basic female, 28 April, Long Point (Breakwater), *Norfolk* (Alexandre Anctil, also found by Hilde M. Johansen; 2014-108) – photo on file.

1975 – one, first basic male, 24 May, Long Point (Breakwater), *Norfolk* (Michael J. Porter, Isabel Smaller, David J.T. Hussell, also found by Alex Steele, A. Vinson; 2014-124) – photo on file.

Lazuli Bunting ***Passerina amoena*** **(11)**

2014 – one, alternate male, 18 May, Dorion, *Thunder Bay* (Susan J. Fagan, also found by Bruce Fagan; 2014-053) – photo on file.
– one, alternate male, 18 May, Shuniah, *Thunder Bay* (Reid S. Mason; 2014-182) – photo on file.
– one, alternate male, 29-30 May, Rossport, *Thunder Bay* (H. Gordon Smith, also found by Joan Smith; 2014-084) – photo on file.

Painted Bunting ***Passerina ciris*** **(38)**

2014 – one, definitive alternate male, 23 April, Rockland, *Ottawa* (Carine Menard; 2014-012).
– one, definitive alternate male, 26-27 April, Huntsville, *Muskoka* (Lianne M. Atwood, Leonard P. Manning, David I. Pryor, Janice Hardy, T. Rick Stronks,

Chris T. Heffernan, also found by Ken R. Atwood, Ryan B. Atwood, Ryley K. Atwood; 2014-009) – photos on file.

– one, first alternate male, 27 May, Long Point (Breakwater), *Norfolk* (Andy Robinson, Joe Krawiec; 2014-076) – photo on file.

2012 – one, definitive basic male, 21-28 October, Toronto, *Toronto* (Michel D'Angelo; 2014-002) – photos on file.

Dickcissel *Spiza americana* Central and Lowlands only (29)

2014 – one, definitive alternate male, 13-15 May, Johnsons Landing, *Thunder Bay* (Aarre A. Ertolahti; 2014-044) – photo on file.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* (8)

2014 – one, definitive basic male, 26-28 November, North Bay, *Nipissing* (Renee J. Levesque, David E. Szmyr, Sandra L. Horvath, found by Vic Rizzo; 2014-144) – photos on file.

The timing of this record fits with an influx of Brambling in mid-November in North America with other sightings in Wyoming, California, Washington, and British Columbia (eBird 2015).

Figure 16: Brambling at North Bay, *Nipissing* on 26 November 2014. *Photo: Renee J. Levesque.*

Figure 17: "Hornemann's" Hoary Redpoll at Bala, *Muskoka* on 11 March 2009. *Photo: Eleanor Kee Wellman.*

Figure 18: Eurasian Tree Sparrow at Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Niagara* on 28 November 2014.
Photo: Sandra L. Horvath.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch *Leucosticte tephrocotis* (23)

2014/15 – one, *tephrocotis*, first basic female, 30 November-13 March, Gun Lake, *Kenora* (Alex Rheault, Pat Rheault; 2014-159) – photo on file.

2013/14 – one, *tephrocotis*, first basic female, 11 December-24 January, Kakabeka Falls, *Thunder Bay* (Cece Girard; 2014-071) – photos on file.

Ontario records of the *tephrocotis* subspecies outnumber *littoralis* records approximately 3:1

"Hornemann's" Hoary Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni hornemanni* (10)

2014 – one, first basic, 10 December, Bronte, *Halton* (Mark W. Jennings; 2014-179) – photos on file.

2013 – one, first basic, 14 January, Hilliardton, *Timiskaming* (Peter S. Burke, also found by Bruce Murphy, Jay Van der Gaast; 2014-175) – photos on file.

2009 – one, definitive basic male, 10-13 March, Bala, *Muskoka* (Eleanor Kee Wellman; 2014-150) – photos on file.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (8)

2014 – one, definitive basic, 22 March, Pickering, *Durham* (John Booth; 2014-058) – photo on file.

– two, definitive basic, 18 May, Terrace Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington; 2014-052) – photos on file.

– one, definitive basic, 19 May, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (Dayna L. LeClair, also found by Richard Dobbins, Mick J. Townsend; 2014-077) – photos on file.

2014/15 – one, definitive basic, 24 November-7 January, Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Niagara* (Craig Corcoran, Christopher J. Escott, Luc S. Fazio, Sandra L. Horvath, Kayo J. Roy, Bruce M. Di Labio, Ben F. Di Labio, Marcie L. Jacklin, found by Brianne Corcoran; 2014-143) – photos on file.

2014 was nothing short of exceptional for this species! The total number of records was doubled and the *Thunder Bay* record becomes the first outside of southern Ontario, as well as the first of multiple birds. Extralimital records were also recorded in 2014 for Manitoba, Minnesota, Michigan and New Jersey (eBird 2015).

Figure 19: Painted Bunting at Oakville, *Halton* showing damaged bill and abnormal (yellow-orange) breast colour on 19 December 2014. *Photo: Sue Barth.*

Figure 20: Specimen tray of adult male Painted Buntings at the ROM; the five specimens showing yellow-orange underparts in the top-left are noted as being held in captivity before death. *Photo: Barbara N. Charlton.*

Not Accepted Records: Identification Accepted, Origin Questionable

Birds in this category are considered by the OBRC to be correctly identified but their origin is questionable. Over time, some instances involve birds that have a high certainty of previous captive origin, whereas some records placed in this category have caused considerable debate among past voting members. If new evidence suggesting wild origin becomes available, such reports may be reconsidered by the OBRC.

2014/15 – Painted Bunting, one, definitive basic male, 14 December-19 February, Oakville, *Halton* (Heather E. Burrow, Leonard P. Manning, Mike D. Williamson, James Watt, Sue Barth, Luc S. Fazio, Michael J. Hatton, Mike A. Veltri, Frank G. Horvath, Sandra L. Horvath, found by Heather E. Burrow; 2014-154) – photos, videos on file.

Occurrences of this species are normally accepted as naturally occurring, as the vagrancy pattern in North America is well known (Mlodinow and Hamilton 2005). However, this particular record caused considerable debate. Of particular concern was the damaged bill when the bird first appeared, a condition associated with birds kept in cages. In addition, the breast colour was quite yellow-orange, rather than red, indicating dietary stress; an internet search revealed that about 1% of wild birds show orange-red underparts but none approaching this colouration; in addition, all specimens with this plumage anomaly on file at the ROM were labelled as captive birds.

– European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), one, basic, early-February-18 March, Smooth Rock Falls, *Cochrane* (Bobbie Hebert, found by Paul Hebert, Bobbie Hebert; 2014-096) – photos on file.

Not Accepted Records: Insufficient Evidence

The documentation received for the following reports generally was found not to be detailed enough to eliminate similar species unequivocally or simply lacking enough detail to properly describe the individual. In many cases, OBRC members felt that the species being described was likely correctly identified by the observer. However, the report received for voting was simply too limited for acceptance. These circumstances sometimes arise from unavoidable situations such as poor viewing conditions or brevity of observation.

2014

– Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), one, 24 May, Presqu'ile Provincial Park, *Northumberland* (2014-011).

– Pacific Loon, one, 1 March, Toronto (Tommy Thompson Park), *Toronto* (2014-001).

– Little Blue Heron, one, 20 May, Stouffville, *York* (2014-089).

– Mississippi Kite, one, 11-21 July, Mount Pleasant, *Lennox and Addington* and Kingston, *Frontenac* (2014-095).

– Mississippi Kite, one, 24 August, Windfall, *Essex* (2014-114) – photos on file.

– Mew Gull, one, 29 March, Queenston, *Niagara* (2014-006).

- Mew Gull, one, 30 March, Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Niagara* (2014-005) – photo on file.
- California Gull (*Larus californicus*), one, 30 March, Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Niagara* (2014-004) – photo on file.
- Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), twelve, 15-18 May, Kettle Point, *Lambton* (2014-048) – photos on file.
- Arctic Tern, one, 26 May, Britannia, *Ottawa* (2014-094) – photo on file.
- Arctic Tern, one, 31 August, Pinery Provincial Park, *Lambton* (2014-103).
- Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*), two, 5 August, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (2014-092).
- Eurasian Collared-Dove, one, 29 May-2 June, Moonbeam, *Cochrane* (2014-024) – photos on file.
- Eurasian Collared-Dove, one, 18 August, Etobicoke (Colonel Sam Smith Park), *Toronto* (2014-091).
- Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*), two, 13 July, Toronto (High Park), *Toronto* (2014-178).
- Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*), one, 17 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (2014-066) – photo on file.
- Bell's Vireo, one, 10 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (2014-093).
- Bell's Vireo, one, 10 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (2014-171).
- Black-whiskered Vireo (*Vireo altiloquus*), one, 10 May, Windham Centre, *Norfolk* (2014-038) – photos on file.
- Fish Crow, one, 19 April, Toronto Islands, *Toronto* (2014-028).
- Fish Crow, two, 26 April, Toronto (Tommy Thompson Park), *Toronto* (2014-014).
- Fish Crow, one, 1-18 July, Gorrie, *Huron* (2014-090).
- Fish Crow, one, 20 September, Chippawa, *Niagara* (2014-120) – photos on file.
- Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), one, 18 December, Woodbridge, *York* (2014-163).
- Mountain Bluebird, one, 11 May, Burlington, *Halton* (2014-037).
- Townsend's Solitaire, one, 29 December, Newmarket, *York* (2014-165).
- Bicknell's Thrush (*Catharus bicknelli*), one, 31 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (2014-181) – photos on file.
- "Black-backed" White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba lugens*), one, 7 May, Puslinch, *Wellington* (2014-080) – photos on file.
- Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculates*), one, 18 April, Etobicoke (Colonel Sam Smith Park), *Toronto* (2014-015).
- Henslow's Sparrow, one, 14 September, Sarnia, *Lambton* (2014-106) – photo on file.
- Blue Grosbeak, one, 11-16 May, Schreiber, *Thunder Bay* (2014-186).
- Blue Grosbeak, one, 12 May, Brookville, *Halton* (2014-045).
- Lazuli Bunting, one, 13 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (2014-042) – photos on file.

2013 – Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*), thirteen, 2-5 May, Neebing, *Thunder Bay* (2014-073).
– Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondii*), one, 10 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (2014-079) – photos on file.
2012 – Bicknell's Thrush, one, 10 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (2014-162) – photos on file.

Corrections/Updates to Previous OBRC Reports

2013 report (*Ontario Birds* 32: 54-81)

Under Smew (2012) change "(Ron Ridout, Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2012-024)" to "(Ron Ridout, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, Stuart A. Mackenzie; 2012-024)".

Under Kirtland's Warbler change "(Eric W. Holden, Brandon R. Holden; 2013-026)" to "(Eric W. Holden, Brandon R. Holden, Jeremy L. Hatt; 2013-026).

Under Kirtland's Warbler change "(Barbara N. Charlton, David M. Bell, Brandon R. Holden; 2013-028)" to "(Barbara N. Charlton, David M. Bell, Brandon R. Holden, Jeremy L. Hatt; 2013-028)".

Under Blue Grosbeak change "(Paul D. Pratt, found by Tom Preney; 2013-042)" to "(Paul D. Pratt, Jeremy L. Hatt, found by Tom Preney; 2013-042)".

Under Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch change the year of the Red Lake sighting from 2013 to 2012.

Under Mute Swan, change the number of accepted records to 11.

Under Brown Pelican, change the number of accepted records to 11.

Under Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, change "(Maureen McEwan, Dan Bone, also found by Lloyd McEwan; 2013-057)" to "(Maureen McEwan, also found by Lloyd McEwan; 2013-057)".

Under Swallow-tailed Kite, change "29 April and 2-3 May, Chatham, *Chatham-Kent* (Apr 29), and Port Alma, *Chatham-Kent* to Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (4 May)" to "29 April-4 May, Chatham, *Chatham-Kent* (29 April), and Port Alma, *Chatham-Kent* to Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (4 May)".

Under Piping Plover, change "(John Brett, Denby Sadler, Adam Timpf; 2013-112)" to "(Denby Sadler, Adam Timpf, found by Stuart A. Mackenzie; 2013-112)".

Under Piping Plover, add the following entries:

2013 – our, definitive alternate male and female, 2 juvenals, summer, Sauble Beach, *Bruce*, (Joanne Redwood, unknown finder; 2013-116) – photos on file.
– six, definitive alternate male and female, 4 juvenals, summer, Sauble Beach, *Bruce* (Joanne Redwood, unknown finder; 2013-117) – photos on file.

2012 – six, definitive alternate male and female, 4 juvenal, summer 2012, Sauble Beach, *Bruce* (Joanne Redwood, unknown finder; 2013-113) – photos on file.
– two, definitive alternate male and female, summer 2012, Sauble Beach, *Bruce* (Joanne Redwood, unknown finder; 2013-114) – photos on file.
– three, definitive alternate male and female, plus unknown sex, summer 2012, Wasaga Beach, *Simcoe* (Jeremy L. Hatt, unknown finder; 2013-115) – photos on file.

Under Piping Plover, change the number of accepted records to 89.

Under Elegant Tern, change "21-22 and 24 November" to "20-24 November".

Under Black-throated Gray Warbler, change "(Doug Zavitz, Chris Leys, also found by Sharie Zavitz, Jennifer Zavitz; 2013-152)" to "(Doug Zavitz, also found by Sharie Zavitz, Jennifer Zavitz; 2013-152)".

Under Common Eider, change last date to 23 December.

Under Swainson's Hawk, change the number of accepted records to 62.

1995 report (*Ontario Birds* 32: 54-81)
Under Tufted Duck, change the last date of the *Lambton* record to 30 January.

Literature Cited

Artuso, C. and **R. Koes**. In press. Exceptional Manitoba Bird Records of 2014. Blue Jay.

American Ornithologists' Union. 1998. Check-list of North American Birds. Seventh Edition. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C. 829pp.

Bairlein, F., **D.R. Norris**, **R. Nagel**, **M. Bulte**, **C.C. Voigt**, **J. W. Fox**, **D.J.T. Hussell** and **H. Schmaljohann**. 2012. Cross-hemisphere migration of a 25 g songbird. Biology Letters 8:505–507.

Brumfield, J. and **B. Wham.** 2012. Finding and Identifying Smith's Longspur in Ohio. *In* NorthNW|Lake Erie Birding. Edited by Jen Brumfield. Accessed 25 April 2015. https://northnw.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/smithslongspur1.pdf

Chesser, R.T., **R.C. Banks**, **C. Cicero**, **J.L. Dunn**, **A.W. Kratter**, **I.J. Lovette, A.G. Navarro-Siguenza**, **P.C. Rasmussen**, **J.V. Remsen Jr.**, **J.D. Rising**, **D.F. Stotz** and **K. Winker**. 2014. Fifty-fifth Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds. Auk 131: CSi-CSxv.

Dobos, R.Z. 1996. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1995. Ontario Birds 14:50-71.

Dobos, R.Z. 1999. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1998. Ontario Birds 17:62-83.

eBird. 2015. eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Ithaca, New York. Available: http://www.ebird.ca. (Accessed: April 21, 2015).

James, R.D. 1984. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1983. Ontario Birds 2:53-65.

Holden, B.R. 2014. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2013. Ontario Birds 32:54-81.

Holden, B.R. and **D.M. Bell**. In press. Carolina Chickadee: second record for Ontario and Canada. Ontario Birds.

Humphrey, P.S. and **K.C. Parkes**. 1959. An approach to the study of molts and plumages. Auk 76:1-31.

Mlodinow, S.G. and **R.A. Hamilton**. 2005. Vagrancy of Painted Buntings (*Passerina ciris*) in the United States, Canada, and Bermuda. North American Birds 59:172-183.

Pittaway, R. 2000. Plumage and molt terminology. Ontario Birds 18:27-43.

Sauer, J.R., **J.E. Hines**, **J.E. Fallon**, **K.L. Pardieck**, **D.J. Ziolkowski, Jr**. and **W.A. Link**. 2014. The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966 - 2013. Version 01.30.2015 USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD.

Taylor, S.A., **T.A. White**, **W.M. Hochachka**, **V. Ferretti**, **R.L. Curry** and **I. Lovette**. 2014. Climate-Mediated Movement of an Avian Hybrid Zone. Current Biology 24:671-676.

Wormington, A. and **M.H. Cranford**. 2011. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2010. Ontario Birds 29:106-148.

Mike V.A. Burrell
2582 Washburn Road
Inverary, Ontario K0H 1X0
E-mail: mike.burrell.on@gmail.com

Barbara N. Charlton
1156 5th Conc. Rd. West
R.R. # 2 Waterdown, Ontario L0R 2H2

Double-crested Cormorants at Port Weller, St. Catharines, Niagara, Ontario

Kayo J. Roy

Introduction

The Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*, henceforth cormorant) is a member of the cormorant family of waterbirds (*Phalacrocoracidae*). It occurs along the east and west coasts of North America as well as at many inland lakes especially in the prairie region. In the last 40-50 years, its numbers have increased greatly and its range has spread across much of North America in the area south of the Boreal Forest. It is commonly found throughout the Great Lakes and in many inland waterways such as the Welland Canal at Port Weller in St. Catharines, Ontario. The purpose of this paper is to report on the occurrence, breeding and, especially, the overwintering of cormorants in the Welland Canal section of Port Weller.

Figure 1. Double-crested Cormorants in trees on the west side of the Welland Canal, Port Weller, 6 May 2010. *Photo: Kayo J. Roy.*

Figure 2. Adult Double-crested Cormorant, 18 February 2010. *Photo: Kayo J. Roy.*

Description

Cormorants are a large, heavy-bodied, colonial waterbird that seeks water bodies large enough to support their diet that consists mostly of fish. In addition, they need perching areas for the considerable amount of time they spend at rest each day. Most often they form breeding colonies in clusters of trees in or near water allowing them, after fishing, to go to high spacious branches to dry their wings and digest their meal (Hatch and Weseloh 1999). The approximately 15-20 m tall trees that line the Port Weller west pier of the Welland Canal entrance from Lake Ontario are perfectly suited to house a nesting colony for this abundant species (Figure 1). Cormorants are also ground nesters and, in many colonies, their nests can be found both in trees and on the ground. They are often observed on shoreline rocks holding their wings

From the 1950s through to the early 1970s, cormorants were virtually extirpated by DDT-induced eggshell thinning.

out to dry. The cormorant is a glossy, scaly-looking, black bird with a small head and long neck. Prominently seen is the bird's yellow-orange gular pouch. The long thin hooked bill is grayish and the eyes are a distinct aqua colour (Figure 2)

General History

In the Great Lakes, between the 1910s-1950s, cormorant populations showed a 40 year colonization period. During the 1950s-1970s, there was a 30 year decline and in the 1970s-2000s, a substantial 30 year resurgence occurred (Weseloh *et al.* 1995, Hebert *et al.* 2005). From the 1950s through to the early 1970s, cormorants were virtually extirpated by DDT-induced eggshell thinning (Weseloh *et al.* 1983, 1995). Butcher and Niven (2007) state that in North America the cormorant has undergone a large and statistically significant increase over the last 40 years, a 2200% increase equating to a 120% increase per decade. Today this species has rebounded to their present abundant status due to reduced human persecution, decreased use of pesticides over the past few decades and to increased forage fish populations (Weseloh *et al.* 1995). The maltreatment cormorants have received from some fishermen has been disputed for many years. Research that challenged fishermen's complaints that cormorants consumed the fish species the fishermen were coveting was reported as early as 1946 (Baillie 1946). An overabundance of cormorants may effect fish and wildlife populations by impacting vegetation (Hebert *et al.* 2005) and possibly degrading fisheries by consuming too many forage and sport fish (Lantry *et al.* 2002, Weseloh *et al.* 2002, Rudstam *et al.* 2004).

Two distinguished Canadian ornithological elder statesmen describe the status of the cormorant in Ontario in the late 1800s: Montague Chamberlain (1887) states that the species is "an abundant bird in the Maritime Provinces and Labrador, and that it occurs rather sparingly as a migrant on the Great Lakes." The eminent Thomas McIlwraith (1894) merely mentions that "the species is seen in southern Ontario." Three prominent local ornithologists describe the distribution and status of cormorants in Niagara from the 1930s to the 1960s as follows: Sheppard (1970) states that the species is "a somewhat uncommon migrant through the Frontier area, appearing only at rather wide intervals, but there are a number of both spring and autumn records of solitary birds of this species seen on the Niagara River." Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) identify the species as an "uncommon transient visitor, and a very rare winter visitor, that are observed regularly, though not in large numbers, during migration. Usually single individuals are observed chiefly on the Niagara River, Buffalo Harbour, and on Lakes Erie and Ontario."

Figure 3. Adult Double-crested Cormorant in alternate (breeding) plumage, 6 May 2010. As the name implies, breeding adults develop a small double crest of stringy black feathers or plumes (white on birds on the Pacific Coast and western North America) at the top of and on each side of the head. The bird often swims low in the water with only its neck and head visible. When feeding, it dives from the water surface and swims underwater, propelled by its feet as it chases its prey. The bird's legs and webbed feet are black. *Photo: Kayo J. Roy.*

Occurrence in Niagara and the Port Weller Area

The first reported sighting in Niagara was of 10 or more individuals observed by William L. Putman on 30 April 1936 off Jordan Harbour, Ontario (Sheppard 1970). The second sighting, six years later on 19 July 1942, was Harold Mitchell's observation of a lone cormorant at Sherkston, Ontario (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). The third record was of a deceased body of a cormorant found and collected from the Niagara River below the Horseshoe Falls on 14 December 1948 by Conservation Officer A. R. Muma (Sheppard 1970). These three are the earliest known documented sightings authenticating the presence of cormorants in Ontario's Niagara Region. The first known Port Weller observation was on 30 September 1984 when two birds were observed off the Port Weller east pier (John Black pers. comm.).

A short distance away from Port Weller during the 30 year period 1950-1980, the Buffalo Ornithological Society Noteworthy Records (DiTommaso and Suggs 2015) identified 32 single bird sightings and three multiple sightings of two or three cormorants in the Ontario portion of their study area between Niagara-on-the-Lake and Morgan's Point. Single sightings of cormorants continued into the mid-1980s after which the species numbers began to increase rapidly. In the Niagara River gorge and particularly above Niagara Falls, eight birds were seen on 30 December 1984 (Willie D'Anna, Betsy Potter pers. comm.), 10 birds were there on 27 August 1986 (Willie D'Anna, Betsy Potter pers. comm.), 20 birds there on 30 September 1987 (David Freeland pers. comm.), up to 60 birds there in May – October 1989 (Michael Galas, Willie D'Anna, Betsy Potter pers. comm.), up to 149 birds there in July – September 1990 (William W. Watson pers. comm.), up to 386 birds there in July – October 1991 (William W. Watson pers. comm.), and up to 824 birds there in June – September 1992 (William W. Watson, Donald C. Roberson pers. comm.). Cormorant numbers continued their dramatic increase in adjacent Norfolk County with 6,500 birds found at Rock Point Provincial Park on 21 September 2002 (Willie D'Anna, Betsy Potter pers. comm.), increasing to an incredible 17,100 birds there on 9 September 2014 (William W. Watson pers. comm.). In Niagara, cormorants begin to arrive in late March, and most have left the region by early November (Curry 2006). A few birds, however, over-winter here (Black and Roy 2010). A record early occurrence of 50 plus cormorants found at Port Weller on 8 May 1993 was surprising for this 1993 date (John Black pers. comm.).

Figure 4. Double-crested Cormorant on nest, 14 April 2013.
Photo: Sam Barone

Figure 5. East and west piers of the Welland Canal exiting into Lake Ontario at Port Weller, St. Catharines. The red arrows pinpoint the areas on the west pier where cormorants are nesting, or attempted to nest. The green arrow identifies the location of the Canadian Coast Guard Station.
Aerial photo: David Walker, 8 July 2009.

Nesting at Port Weller

The bulky nest of the cormorant is built typically by the female and is comprised mostly of sticks and other materials the male brings to her (Figure 4). Most often the nest is constructed on any level area, or crotch, in trees that are near water however, they can also build their nests on the ground under suitable conditions.

Cormorants nested or attempted to nest in nine years between 2003 and 2014 at Port Weller (Figure 5). In May of 2003, they made their first known attempt to roost and nest on the west pier at Port Weller in trees that line the Welland Canal from the Canadian Coast Guard Station north to the tip. Three nests were built but they were soon abandoned. In the spring of 2004, four nests were constructed there again but were aborted quickly when the coast guard personnel installed bangers to discourage the birds from the trees. Regardless, some 600 birds remained in the area for the rest of the summer. In May 2005, the cormorants moved a bit south, away from the Coast Guard Station, where 650-700 birds settled in to a line of trees on the west pier near an old water outlet. In early July, five nests were built there; however, by late July, only three contained young (Black and Roy 2010). In succeeding years, substantial numbers of cormorants arrived at Port Weller establishing summer residence along the west pier. By May 2007, the number of cormorants continued to increase and nesting was in full swing. During May 2008, a record number of 800-850 cormorants settled into the area and on 19 June 2008, 111 cormorant nests were counted along the west pier (John Black pers. comm.).

In 2009, for some unknown reason, fewer cormorants were found than in the previous three or four years and the nesting colony was somewhat diminished (Figure 6). In 2010, 2012 and 2014, numbers of nesting cormorants began to once again flourish and nesting resumed in larger numbers (John Black, Kayo Roy pers. comm.).

It is well known that accumulated fecal matter can have a significant effect on vegetation at cormorant breeding and roost sites (Herbert *et al.* 2005). Cormorant guano is acidic and can change soil chemistry, killing ground vegetation (Figure 7) and irreversibly

damaging nest trees in less than three years (Sullivan *et al.* 2006). Further, occupying similar habitat for nesting may affect other colonial waterbirds such as gulls, terns, egrets and herons (Sullivan *et al.* 2006). A close-by example is the Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) colony on the Weseloh Rocks in the Niagara River. Since the cormorants have taken over the top tier of the few trees that are on these three small islands that lie close to the crest of the Horseshoe Falls, they may seriously jeopardize the success there of the nesting Black-crowned Night-Herons. This clearly was the case on islands in the Dundas Marsh and Hamilton Harbour where the cormorant guano killed trees and displaced the nesting Black-crowned Night-Herons (Curry 2006).

Figure 6. Double-crested Cormorants at Port Weller, 6 May 2009.
Photo: Kayo J. Roy.

Over-wintering at Port Weller

Given the recent dramatic population increase of cormorants at Port Weller and with the milder winters over the past decade, it is hardly surprising that this species now over-winters along the Welland Canal, albeit in relatively small numbers. The Christmas Bird Counts are an excellent source of information on birds remaining in the area early in the winter. The west pier, where the Welland Canal exits into Lake Ontario, lies in the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count (SCCBC) and the east pier of the canal, forms part of the Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count (NFC BC). Over the 30 year period 1984-2014, 855 cormorants were observed in the SCCBC. Of these, 699 were observed at Port Weller with 107 individuals found there on 16 December 2012 (Robert Z.

Figure 7. Damage to west side trees from cormorant guano, Welland Canal, Port Weller, 6 August 2008. *Photo: Kayo J. Roy.*

Dobos pers. comm.), (Potter *et al.* 2013). A solitary bird that was found along the west pier during the SCCBC on 16 December 1984 (Drennan 1985) would appear to be the very first cormorant to ever attempt to over-winter at Port Weller. This count is always conducted in mid-December of each year. The NFCBC commenced in 1966 and takes place every year in the fourth week of December almost always between Christmas Day and New Year's Day. From 1966 to 1988, in these first 23 counts, no cormorants were observed. Two individuals observed on the east pier on 23 December 1989 (LeBaron 1991) were the first birds of this species ever located on a NFCBC and over the 26 year period 1989-2014, 734 cormorants were recorded. Of these, 558 were observed at Port Weller with a high of 92 birds found there on 27 December 2008 (Pickles and Laar 2009).

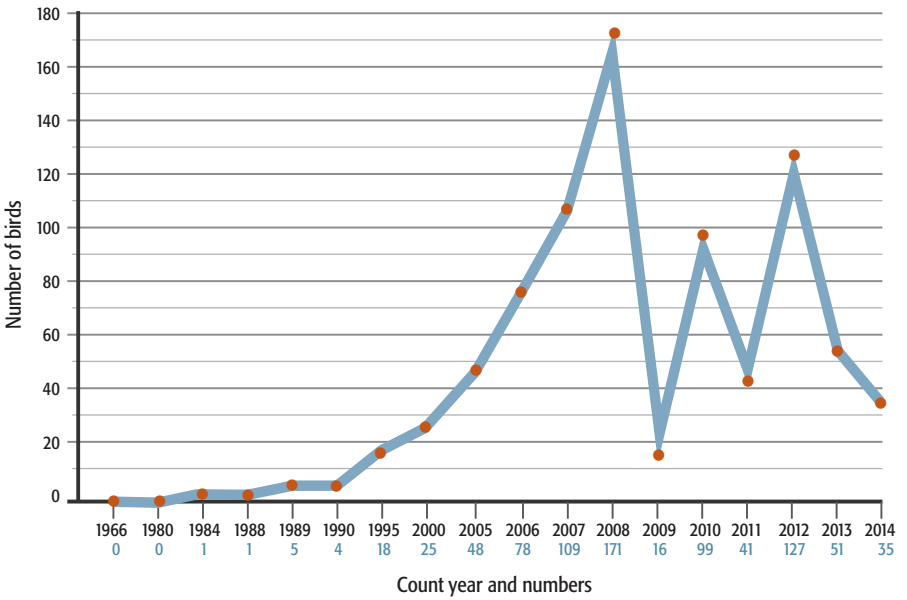
The combined St. Catharines and Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Counts through the years 1966 to 2014 reported a total of 1257 cormorants attempting to over-winter at Port Weller's east and west piers. In the 18 years 1966 to 1983, no cormorants were recorded there until 1984 when one bird was observed, and only six others being recorded in the five years 1985-1989. Incredibly, in the next 25 years 1990 to 2014, 1250 cormorants were observed compared to only seven birds recorded there in the previous 24 year period 1966 to 1989 (Figure 8).

This is an 1800% increase and demonstrates the explosive growth the cormorant has experienced at Port Weller over the last 25 years. As well, it more or

less mirrors the results Butcher and Niven (2007) describe above of cormorant data from all of the combined North American Christmas Bird Counts, albeit over a 40 year period. The record high number of 171 cormorants attempting to over-winter during 2008-2009 was followed by a sharp decline in numbers for the Christmas Bird Counts of 2009-2010. It is believed that this decline was the result of colder December temperatures that froze over a good portion of the Welland Canal and forced most of the lingering cormorants to move to open water areas like Lake Ontario and the Niagara River. The count dates for the SCCBC and the NFCBC are separated every year by only 10-12 days. Given the two counts at Port Weller are directly adjacent to one another, and with the proximity of the two count dates being so close to one another, some duplication in the counting of bird numbers might have occurred.

The numbers from these two Christmas Bird Counts that identify a total of 1257 cormorants attempting to over-winter at Port Weller's east and west piers is not sufficient proof alone to confirm that any of these cormorants have unquestionably over-wintered there. More substantive evidence is required to authenticate their presence throughout a longer winter period and over a number of years. Local birders start every New Year's Day by birding the Niagara River and at some point during the day, in most cases, they check out Port Weller. Many local birders have observed wintering cormorants at Port Weller on various dates in January, February and March during the years 1984 to 2015.

Figure 8. The combined number of Double-crested Cormorants recorded at Port Weller. Data from the 1966-2014 St. Catharines and Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Counts.



High numbers recorded were: 26 on 01 January 2006 (Kayo Roy pers. comm.), 22 on 04 January 2005 (Jean Farnan and Blayne Farnan pers. comm.), 20 on 10 February 2012 (Frank Pinilla pers. comm.), 50 plus on 23 February 2013 (Marcie Jacklin pers. comm.), 22 on 25 February 2006 (DiTommaso and Suggs 2015), 18 on 5 March 2006 (Kayo Roy pers. comm.) and 9 on 11 March 1996 (DiTommaso and Suggs 2015). Given that early migrant cormorants do not begin to arrive at Port Weller until late March, these observations of 10, 23 and 25 February and 5 and 11 March would more than likely be those of over-wintering birds.

Another excellent source of over-wintering data is the cormorant totals from the Mid-Winter Waterfowl Inventory (MWWI) that is conducted on the second week-end of January (dates vary from 5-14 January) of each year. Cormorants have been seen every January at Port Weller in 24 of 32 survey years from 1984 to 2015 (none from 1984 to 1989). Commencing in 1990, when three birds were observed, a total of 392 individuals has been recorded up to 2015 on this near mid-month survey. High numbers noted were 49 in 2012, 48 in 2007 and 45 in each of 2003 and 2013 (John Black, unpublished MWWI data).

Over-wintering would not have occurred every winter between 1984-1985 and 2014-2015, especially in the early years, and clearly not in those harsh winter years when the canal was frozen over. The data from two winter periods stand out and support over-wintering having occurred for cormorants at Port Weller. The first is the winter months of 2005-2006, where 48 cormorants were observed on the two 2005 December Christmas counts (Pickles and Laar 2006, Potter and Smith 2006), 26 on 01 January 2006, (Kayo Roy pers. comm.), 13 on 8 January (John Black, unpublished MWWI data), 22 on 25 February 2006 (DiTommaso and Suggs 2015) and 18 on 05 March 2006 (Kayo Roy pers. comm.). The second is the winter months of 2012-2013, where 127 cormorants were recorded on the two 2012 December Christmas counts (Pickles and Laar 2013, Potter *et al.* 2013), 45 on 13 January 2013 (John Black, unpublished MWWI data), 30 on 27 January 2013 (Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock pers. comm.), 10 on 18 February 2013 (Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock pers. comm.), 50 plus on 23 February 2013 (Marcie Jacklin pers. comm.), and 11 on 18 March 2013 (Brian Ahara, Kayo Roy pers. comm.). While there is no doubt that cormorants over-wintered in other years, with the sightings data that were available, I can only state as a true fact that the cormorants over-wintered in only these two winter years at Port Weller. The collective sightings data support the presence of Double-crested Cormorants over-wintering at Port Weller to at least the month of January during the winter periods of 1995-1996, 2002-2003, 2006-2007, 2011-2012 and 2013-2014.

Management, Population and Lifespan

In Canada, cormorants are not protected under the federal Migratory Bird Convention Act (*i.e.* the migratory bird treaty with the USA). Cormorants are protected by acts of the provincial legislatures, which also have responsibility for managing the species (Wires 2014). In Ontario,

provincial agencies have managed cormorants because of concerns about negative ecological impacts to specific habitats or other species (Wires 2014, 2015). The current population of cormorants in North America is estimated at two million birds (Hebert *et al.* 2005, USFWS 2006). Its population trend appears to be increasing and does not approach the threshold for Vulnerable; accordingly it is evaluated as Least Concern (Birdlife International 2015). A species is Vulnerable when the best available evidence indicates that it meets any of the criteria for Vulnerable, and it is therefore considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild (to view or download the Red List Criteria see: IUCN Red List Criteria: http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/categories-and-criteria/ 2001-categories-criteria). The bird's average lifespan is unknown but presumably similar to other related species. An age of 17-18 years is not exceptional for this species (Gaston *et al.* 2008). The oldest known cormorant was more than 22 years old, banded in Ontario in 1984 and found in Louisiana, USA in 2006 (Hatch and Weseloh 1999).

Today, in June 2015, the status and abundance of the Double-crested Cormorant at Port Weller can be summarized as being an abundant summer resident, that breeds along the tree-lined west pier near the north end of the Welland Canal, and is a fairly uncommon winter resident.

Acknowledgements

I thank Brian Ahara, the late Gordon Bellerby, John Black, Drew Campbell, Rob Dobos, Blayne Farnan, Jean Farnan, Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock, Marcie Jacklin, Dan Salisbury, the late Alan J. Smith and the late Bill Watson for their cormorant sighting records, David Suggs for providing me with the BOS Noteworthy Records database on Niagara cormorant observations, Judie Shore for the Christmas Bird Counts graph, Sam Barone for the excellent nesting cormorant image and David Walker for the superb aerial photograph of the Welland Canal and Port Weller area. I am indebted to Cynthia Pekarik for reviewing an earlier draft of this article and for her most helpful comments.

Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of a good friend, William Worden Watson, a Buffalo, New York area birder who passed away on 18 March 2015. Over many years, Bill devoted a great deal of his birding time documenting the presence of cormorants and egrets on the Niagara River and the Lake Erie shoreline of Ontario. He extensively submitted significant sighting and numbers reports to the Buffalo Ornithological Society (BOS) and to the Canadian Wildlife Service on all of his observations. Bill was particularly passionate about Double-crested Cormorants and in all of his reports he never failed to refer to them as anything other than "beautiful Double-crested Cormorants."

Juvenal at Port Weller, 18 April 2013. *Photo: Kayo Roy.*

Literature Cited

Baillie, J.L. 1946. Cormorant in Ontario. *In* Birdland, No. 732, Toronto Telegram, March 11.

Beardslee, C.S. and **H.D. Mitchell.** 1965. Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region: An annotated check-list. Bulletin of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences 22:1-478. Buffalo, New York.

Birdlife International. 2015. Species fact-sheet: *Phalacrocorax auritus*. Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 17/05/2015.

Black, J.E. and **K.J. Roy**. 2010. Niagara Birds: a compendium of articles and species accounts of the birds of the Niagara Region of Ontario. Brock University Printing and Digital Services, St. Catharines, Ontario.

Butcher, G.S. and **D.K. Niven**, 2007. Combining data from the Christmas bird count and the breeding bird survey to determine the continental status and trends of North American birds. National Audubon Society. New York, NY. http://www.audubon .org/ bird/stateofthebirds/CBID/report.php.

Chamberlain, M. 1887. A Catalogue of Canadian Birds, with Notes on the Distribution of the Species. J. & A. McMillan, St. John, New Brunswick.

Curry, R. 2006. Birds of Hamilton and surrounding areas. Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Hamilton, Ontario.

DiTommaso, D. and **D.F. Suggs**. 2015. BOS Noteworthy Records Database, 1964-2014. A database of records compiled by the Buffalo Ornithological Society, Buffalo.

Drennan, S.R. 1985. The eighty-fifth Christmas Bird Count. American Birds 39(4):447. National Audubon Society, New York.

Gaston, A.J., **D. Brewer, A.W. Diamond**, **E.J. Woodsworth** and **B.T. Collins**. 2008. Canadian Atlas of Bird Banding, Volume 2: Seabirds, 1921-1995. Canadian Wildlife Service Special Publication. Available from Environment Canada.

Hatch, J.J. and **D.V. Weseloh**. 1999. Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus).* In: the Birds of North America, No. 441 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds). The Birds of North America Online, Ithaca, New York.

Hebert, C.E., **J. Duffe**, **D.V.C. Weseloh, E.M.T. Senese** and **G.D. Haffner.** 2005. Unique island habitats may be threatened by double-crested cormorants. Journal of Wildlife Management 69(1):68-76.

Lantry, B.F., **T.H. Eckert**, **C.P. Schneider**, and **J.R. Chrisman**. 2002. The relationship between smallmouth bass and double-crested cormorants in the eastern basin of Lake Ontario. Journal of Great Lakes Research 28:193-201.

LeBaron, G.S. 1991. The 90th Christmas Bird Count. American Birds 44(4):567.

McIlwraith, T. 1894. The Birds of Ontario (2nd ed.). William Briggs, Toronto.

Pickles, M.L. and **W.J. Laar**. 2013. The Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count. Niagara Falls Nature Club, Nature Niagara News 302:6-7.

Pickles, M.L. and **W.J. Laar**. 2009. The Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count. Niagara Falls Nature Club, Nature Niagara News 287:5.

Pickles, M.L. and **W.J. Laar**. 2006. The Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count. Niagara Falls Nature Club, Nature Niagara News 273:6.

Potter, J.W. and **K. Smith**. 2006. The St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count. The Peninsula Field Naturalists, Peninsula Naturalist 209:4-5.

Potter, J.W. 2009. The St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count. The Peninsula Field Naturalists, Peninsula Naturalist 220:6-7.

Potter, J.W., **M. Potter** and **K. Smith**. 2013. The St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count. The Peninsula Field Naturalists, Peninsula Naturalist 232:2-3.

Rudstam, L.G., **A.J. VanDeValk, C.M. Adams, J.T.H. Coleman, J.L. Forney** and **M.E. Richman**. 2004. Cormorant predation and the population dynamics of walleye and yellow perch in Oneida Lake. Ecological Applications 14:149-163.

Sheppard, R.W. 1970. Birdlife of Canada's Niagara Frontier, Special Publication No. 3. Niagara Falls Nature Club, Niagara Falls, Ontario.

Sullivan, K.L., **P.D. Curtis**, **R.B. Chipman** and **R.D. McCullough.** 2006. The Double-crested Cormorant, Issues and management. Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2006. Final environmental assessment released on Ohio double-crested cormorant damage management control. Region 3 Midwest.

Weseloh, D.V., **P.J. Ewins**, **J. Struger**, **P. Mineau**, **C.A. Bishop**, **S. Postupalsky** and **J.P. Ludwig**. 1995. Double-crested Cormorants of the Great Lakes: changes in population size, breeding distribution and reproductive output between 1913 and 1991. Colonial Waterbirds 18 (Special publication 1):48-59.

Weseloh, D.V.C., **C. Pekarik**, **T. Havelka**, **G. Barrett** and **J. Reid**. 2002. Population trends and colony locations of double-crested cormorants in the Canadian Great Lakes and immediately adjacent areas, 1990-2000: A manager's guide. Journal of Great Lakes Research 28(2):125-144.

Weseloh, D.V., **S.M. Teeple** and **M. Gilbertson**. 1983. Double-crested Cormorants of the Great Lakes: Egg-laying parameters, reproductive failure, and contaminant residues in eggs, Lake Huron, 1972-1973. Canadian Journal of Zoology 61:427-436.

Wires, L.R. 2014. The Double-crested Cormorant: plight of a feathered pariah. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.

Wires, L. R. 2015. Migratory bird protection, a crack in the armor: the case of the Double-crested Cormorant. Avian Conservation and Ecology 10(1): 8.http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ACE-00761-100108

Kayo J. Roy
13 Kinsman Court
Fonthill, Ontario L0S 1E3
E-mail: kayoroy@niagara.com

Distribution and numbers of Snowy Owls on Amherst Island, Ontario, during an irruption year

Paul R. Martin

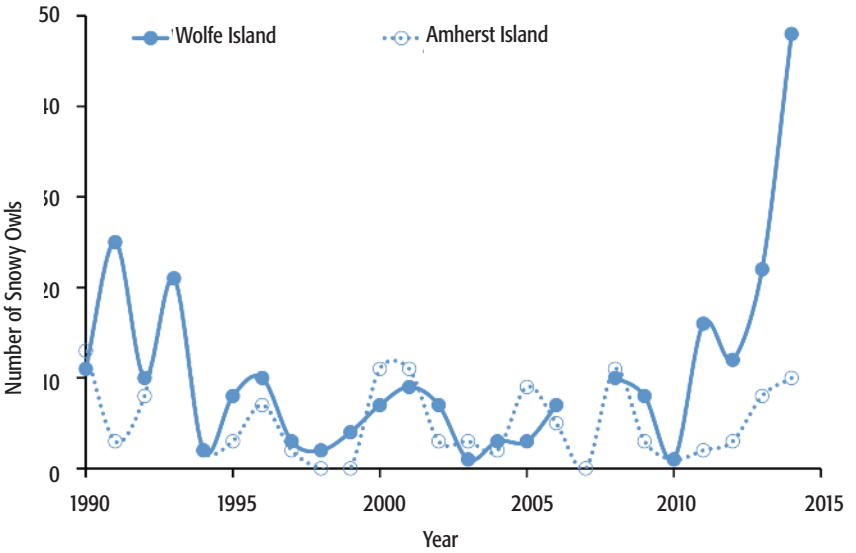
Figure 1. A Snowy Owl (thought to be an adult male based on plumage) perched along Lower 40 Foot Road, Amherst Island, on 10 March 2015. *Photo: Paul R. Martin.*

Introduction

Snowy Owls (*Bubo scandiacus*) (Fig. 1) are regular visitors to Ontario in winter, but their numbers fluctuate from year to year (Godfrey 1986, Parmalee 1992). For example, on Kingston and Amherst Island Christmas Bird Counts, the number of Snowy Owls has fluctuated between zero and 21 (Amherst Island) and between one and 48 (Wolfe Island, Kingston) over the last 24 years (Fig. 2). Historically, winter irruptions of Snowy Owls were thought to be caused by low food abundance in the north — particularly lemmings at a low point in their population cycles (Parmalee 1992). More recently, however, evidence suggests that years of high reproductive success may also cause larger numbers of owls to move south in winter, as was thought to be the case in the irruption winters of 2013-14 and 2014-15 (Leonard 2015). Heavy snowfall and cold winter temperatures on the breeding grounds or the scarcity of other prey (*e.g.*, ptarmigan, ducks) could also contribute to winter irruptions; however, the importance of these other factors remains poorly understood (Parmalee 1992, Potapov and Sale 2012).

Amherst and Wolfe islands in the Kingston region have hosted some of the largest concentrations of wintering Snowy Owls in North America, in addition to a diversity of other wintering raptors (Quillium 1965, Weir 1973, 2008, Bell *et al.* 1979). From 1959 to 2007, Kingston (including Wolfe Island) or

Figure 2. The number of Snowy Owls recorded on Christmas Bird Counts from 1990 to 2014 for the Kingston region (including Wolfe Island) and Amherst Island. Data are from National Audubon Society (2010), supplemented with data from Weir (2008) for years missing from the Audubon data set.



Amherst Island have had the highest Christmas Bird Counts for Snowy Owl in North America in 16 different years (Weir 2008). Densities of Snowy Owls on these islands vary with broader, regional irruptions, and also with the densities of rodents on the islands (particularly Meadow Voles, *Microtus pensylvanicus*) that fluctuate from year to year (Phelan 1976, Phelan and Robertson 1978, Bell *et al.* 1979). The large numbers of wintering Snowy Owls on these islands, particularly during irruption years coincident with large rodent numbers, has lead to studies of their distribution, ecology and behaviour on Wolfe Island (Quillium 1965, Weir 1973), and, in part, to broader studies of raptor-prey interactions on Amherst Island (Phelan 1976, Phelan and Robertson 1978).

Here I describe the distribution and numbers of Snowy Owls on Amherst Island during the irruption winter and spring of 2015 (January to April), with additional information on their spacing, interactions and perch use. The goal of this study was to provide systematic survey data on Snowy Owl distributions on Amherst Island prior to wind power development. While I focused on Snowy Owls for surveys and only discuss this species here, I also recorded the location and number of all other raptors observed during each survey.

Methods

I surveyed all passable roads (Fig. 3; except Kerr Point Road where suitable habitat was lacking) three times during January 2015, and about once a week from 10 March to 14 April 2015. I began surveys on the west or east side of the island, alternating between surveys. I recorded the location of each Snowy Owl on printed satellite maps (Google maps), and then estimated the GPS position of each individual using Google maps online (https://www. google. ca/maps/). I also recorded the time, perch (if not in flight) and height above ground of each individual. I carefully searched the island during surveys, and sporadically surveyed ice during January and early March. After locating an owl on the ice on 17 March, I systematically surveyed ice through to 14 April. I recorded the details of each owl when first located, and discarded any later observations of the same bird on the same day to ensure that observations were independent. I identified individual owls by their plumage colouration and general location on the island. Overall, each survey took, on average, 7.0 hours to complete and covered 80.8 km. All surveys except for one began with the arrival of the first ferry (06:50 or shortly after, at first light, in January), and all surveys were completed by 15:30. Surveys were conducted using 10x50 Leica binoculars and a 20-60x Swarovski HD spotting scope.

Figure 3. The route, in red, for each survey. Surveys began with either the east or west side of the island (alternating between surveys) and covered the entire route.

Ageing and Sexing

I estimated age and sex of each owl following Josephson (1980), supplemented with additional photographs in Parmelee (1992). Briefly, adult males were identified by mostly white plumage with little barring and mottling and a white crissum (*e.g.*, Fig. 1). First-year males were separated from adult males by more extensive barring and mottling throughout. First-year males were separated from females by having thinner ventral bars (*e.g.*, Fig. 4). Adult females also typically have less extensive mottling on the remiges and wing coverts than first-year males or females. Adult females were separated from first-year females by having white covering greater than 50% of the back of the head. First-year females were typically heavily barred with dark brown or black, with some individuals showing extensive black barring. Despite differences in plumage colouration, overlap occurs between age and sex classes that undoubtedly led to errors in my estimations (see Josephson 1980 and a discussion of the complexity of Snowy Owl colouration by Bortolotti and Stoffel 2012).

Results

A total of 156 Snowy Owls was observed over the course of the surveys (Fig. 5), with an estimated 12 owls wintering in January on the island. Larger numbers of owls were recorded in March and April, with maximum daily totals of 23 on 24 March and 44 on 6 April (Fig. 6).

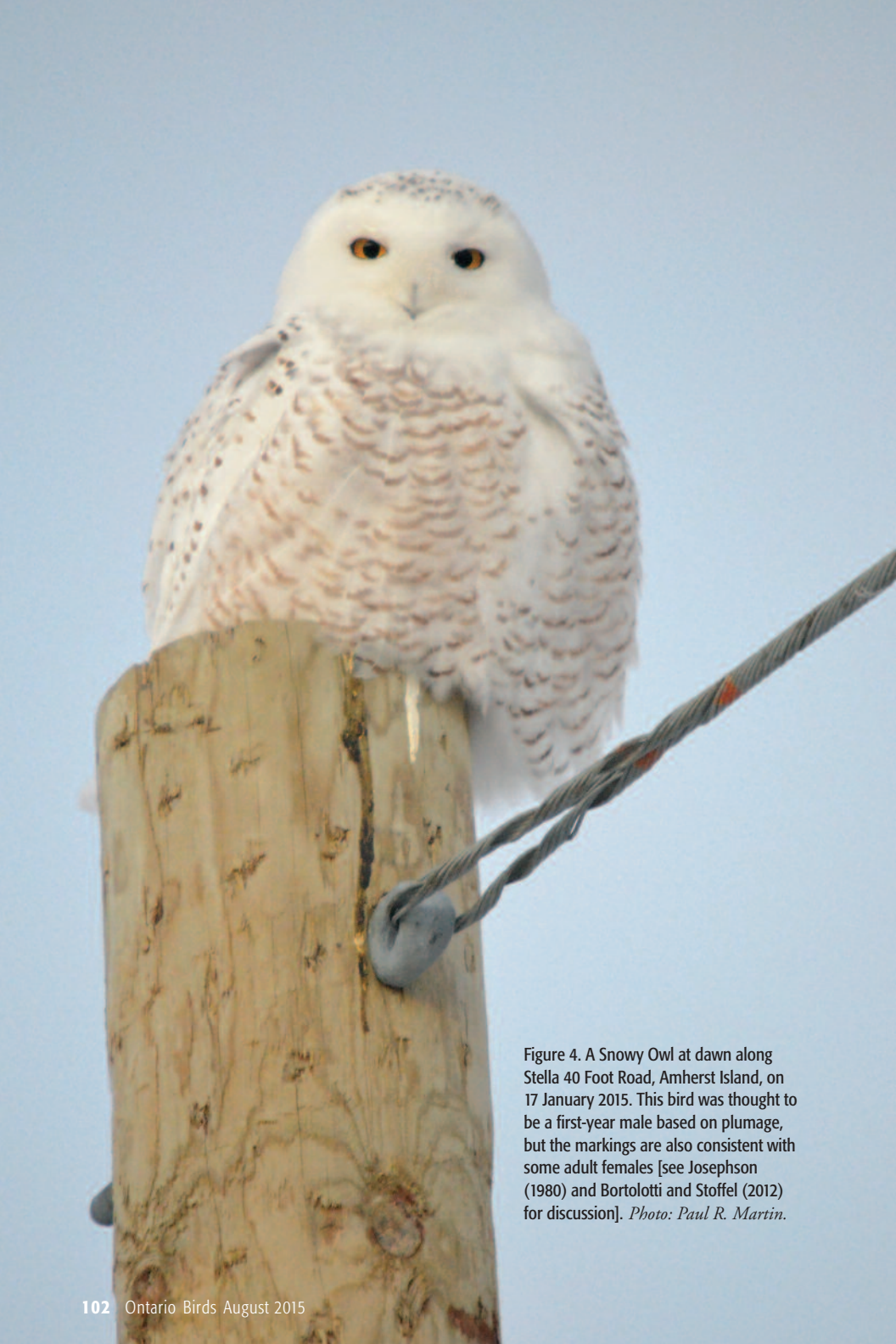


Figure 4. A Snowy Owl at dawn along Stella 40 Foot Road, Amherst Island, on 17 January 2015. This bird was thought to be a first-year male based on plumage, but the markings are also consistent with some adult females [see Josephson (1980) and Bortolotti and Stoffel (2012) for discussion]. *Photo: Paul R. Martin.*

Figure 5. Distribution of the 156 Snowy Owls recorded on Amherst Island during all surveys, 2015. Blue symbols represent females, red symbols represent males; circles represent adults, crosses represent first-year birds. Note the predominance of sightings on the eastern half of the island.

Distribution on the Island

Snowy Owls were not distributed evenly across the island. On the island itself, the majority of individuals was observed near the center of the island (Figs. 5, 7-9). No owls were observed on the west side of the island (west of Amherst Bay; Fig. 5), despite intensive searches of this area (Fig. 3). On the island, owls occupied open fields with few trees; however, many areas of open fields had few or no owls. No owls were observed on the ice in January (Fig. 7); however, large numbers congregated off the southeast shore of the island in late March (Fig. 8) and off the south and southeast shores in early April (Fig. 9). Females were more likely to occur on the ice (Figs. 5, 8, 9), particularly farther out on the ice in March (Fig. 8). In total, 50 of the 63 owls observed on the ice were females, compared with 49 of the 93 owls observed on the island (Chi-squared test, Chi-squared = 10.4, df = 1, P = 0.001).

Interactions and Spacing

Snowy Owls often occurred in clusters of individuals, with 6-13 individuals visible from one location on several occasions. Despite this broader clustering, individual Snowy Owls rarely occurred within 200m of each other, but instead appeared to be spaced out at somewhat regular intervals. Many of the owls observed in winter appeared to remain in the same general location on the island throughout January (Fig. 7), suggesting that some of these birds held winter territories. For example, an extremely dark first-year female was observed on 3rd Concession opposite the Big Marsh on every survey in January, often occupying the same perch.

While owls were typically spaced out, they occasionally came into close proximity. One fight between owls was observed on 17 January, when an adult male displaced a first-year female. On two occasions, owls replaced each other on the same perch within hours, suggesting an interaction: an adult female replaced a first-year female on the same

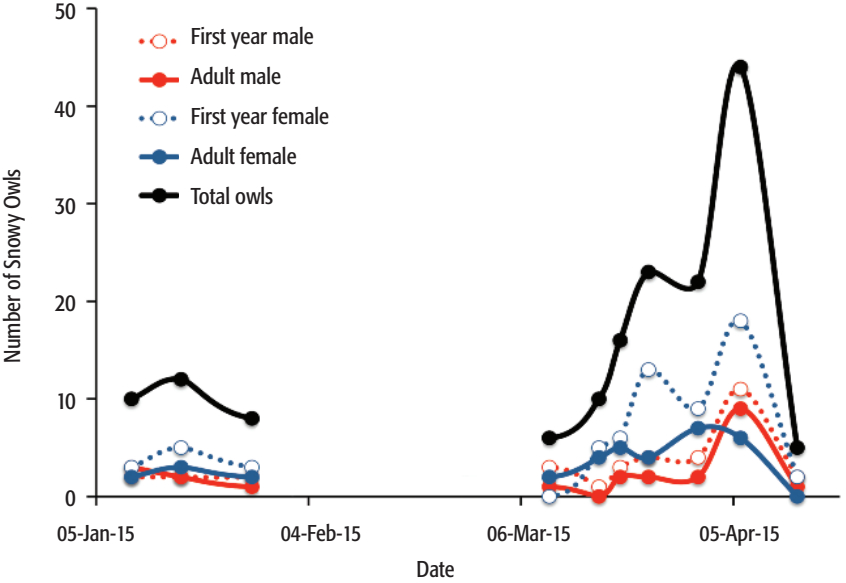


Figure 6. Numbers of Snowy Owls recorded during surveys on Amherst Island. Numbers reflect total number and numbers of each age and sex class.

perch on 17 January, while an adult male replaced a first-year male on the same perch on 6 April. A unique observation was made on 6 April, when a first-year male and first-year female were observed sitting on the ice of Amherst Bay 10-15 cm apart, preening. These two owls showed no aggressive behaviours toward each other during several minutes of observation, despite occurring much closer to each other than any other owls that I observed during my surveys.

I observed few interactions between Snowy Owls and other animals. One first-year male Snowy Owl was dive-bombed by an adult Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), on 6 April, while a first-year female was flushed by a domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*) on 24 March. I did not observe any aggressive interactions between Rough-legged Hawks (*Buteo lagopus*) and Snowy Owls, despite previous observations of aggressive interactions on Wolfe Island (Weir 1973) and an abundance of Rough-legged Hawks on Amherst Island in 2015 (high count of 50 on 6 April 2015).

Perch Use and Activity

Snowy Owls were most active in the early morning, with activity declining within an hour of sunrise. Owls appeared to remain active longer into the day on darker, overcast days. During the day, owls frequently sat on the same perch for many hours. For example, one bird was observed sitting on the same branch of the same tree over six hours after the first

Figure 7. Distribution of Snowy Owls on Amherst Island during three surveys in January, 2015. An estimated 12 owls wintered on the island.

Blue symbols represent females
Red symbols represent males
Circles represent adults
Crosses represent first-year birds

Figure 8. Distribution of Snowy Owls on Amherst Island during 5 surveys in March, 2015. A high count of 23 owls was observed on 24 March. Note the distribution of almost exclusively female Snowy Owls on the ice south of the island.

Figure 9. Distribution of Snowy Owls on Amherst Island during 2 surveys on 6 and 14 April, 2015. A high count of 44 owls was observed on 6 April; only 5 birds were observed on 14 April. The latest Snowy Owl on Amherst Island was observed on 30 April, 2015 (Read 2015). On 6 April, ice had melted along most of the southern point (Emeric or Long Point), with a string of birds lining the ice edges in both Amherst Bay (13 birds) and off the south end of Stella 40 Foot Road (8 birds). By 14 April, most ice was gone, with the exception of soft ice remaining in Wemps and Amherst bays.

observation. Across all observations, Snowy Owls were more likely to sit on the ground later in the day (Fig. 10; including birds perched on ice: Binomial Generalized Linear Model, slope = -0.498, SE = 0.09, z = -5.3, P < 0.0001; excluding birds perched on the ice: Binomial Generalized Linear Model, slope = -0.393, SE = 0.12, z = -3.3, P = 0.001). Ground perches were commonly next to a rock or mound, but also occurred in depressions, in the middle of open fields and against hedge rows. I only observed active hunting (*i.e.,* owls moving around, apparently actively searching for prey, and periodically dropping to the ground with extended legs) in the early mornings, and I could not identify any prey caught by the owls.

On the island itself, Snowy Owls were most often seen perched at the tops of trees, on fence posts and on the ground (Fig. 11). Birds were less commonly observed flying, and perched on telephone poles and Osprey nest platforms. Fewer than three individuals were observed perched on fallen trees, fence gates, hay trailers, hay bales, light poles, brush piles and livestock sheds, although some individuals appeared to use these perches regularly. On 14 April, two of the five Snowy Owls were perched beside small amounts of lingering snow, with most of the snow melted away (see similar observations in Quillium 1965, Weir 1973 and Potapov and Sale 2012).

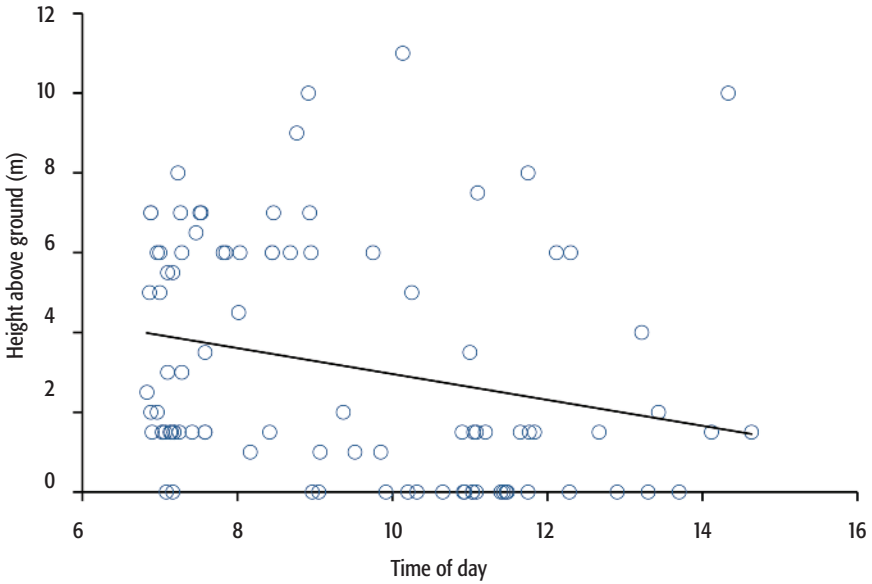


Figure 10. The height above the ground of Snowy Owls as a function of time of day, excluding owls perched on ice. Snowy Owls actively hunted in the early mornings, but were more likely to sit on the ground later in the day (Binomial Generalized Linear Model, P = 0.001).

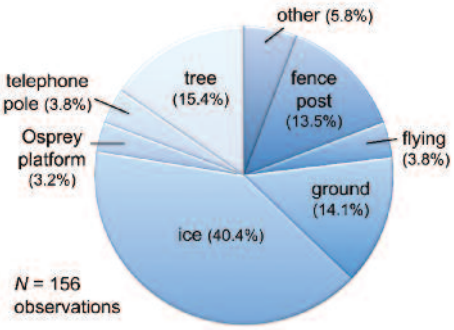


Figure 11. The frequency of use of different perches by Snowy Owls during surveys on Amherst Island. Birds found in flight are also included in the graph. Perches used by three or fewer Snowy Owls are lumped within "other."

From late March to early April, owls began perching on the ice in large numbers, and ice became the most important perch overall (Fig. 11). Many of these birds sat beside or on small mounds of snow or ice that had formed on the ice surface, often at the edge of open water. The occurrence of owls on the ice coincided with a regular observation of coyotes (*Canis latrans*) on the ice, and the presence of ducks in the leads of open water. Several duck carcasses (one scaup, *Aythya* spp., one adult male Common Merganser, *Mergus merganser*, and two unidentified ducks) were evident on the ice, but Snowy Owls were never observed hunting or feeding. The peak number of Snowy Owls on 6 April coincided with the edge of the ice reaching the southeast shore of the island and outer reaches of Amherst Bay (Fig. 9). At this time, large numbers of Snowy Owls lined the edges of the ice, while others were present at the edges of leads in the ice to the east, and on expanses of ice without water to the east (in addition to birds on the island itself; Fig. 9). On the same day, no owls were observed on the ice to the west or north of the island, despite leads in the ice and the presence of ducks (Fig. 9).

Discussion

The numbers of Snowy Owls using Amherst Island, and adjacent offshore ice, varied through the winter and spring, peaking at 44 Snowy Owls on 6 April (Fig. 6). These numbers likely represent underestimates because sections of the island (*e.g.*, Long Point Bay, Emeric Point) were not visible from the survey route (Fig. 3), and owls on the ground were not always visible from roads. Similar spring peaks in Snowy Owl numbers were noted during other irruption years, for example, high counts of 30 owls on 31 March 1961, Wolfe Island, 55 owls on 14 March 1965, Wolfe Island (Quillium 1965), 87 owls on 13 February 1972, Wolfe Island (Weir 1973) and 21 owls on 4 and 17 March 1979, Amherst Island (Bell *et al.* 1979). The large numbers of owls in March and April illustrate the importance of Amherst Island as a migratory stopover site for Snowy Owls in some years.

Snowy Owls observed on Amherst Island represented both sexes and age classes, with more probable first year females than any other group (Fig. 6). The makeup of owls during this irruption year differed from the irruptions of

1964-65 and 1971-72, when most birds were believed to be adults (Quillium 1965, Weir 1973).

Distribution

Most Snowy Owls observed during surveys occurred in the centre and east sides of the island (Fig. 5) despite apparently suitable open habitat elsewhere. The areas on the island preferentially used by the owls in 2015 were similar to areas occupied by owls in previous irruption years (R. Weir, pers. comm.), and also coincided with the best areas to find Snowy Owls historically, including during non-invasion years (B.M. Di Labio, pers. comm., P.R. Martin, pers. obs.). Presumably, the areas preferentially used by the owls host the highest densities of prey in the optimal habitat for wintering and migrant Snowy Owls. Previous work on Snowy Owls on Wolfe and Amherst islands suggested that Snowy Owls on the islands are feeding primarily on Meadow Voles (Quillium 1965, Weir 1973, Phelan 1976, Phelan and Robertson 1978).

On the ice just off the island, most owls were found off the south and southeast shore; I found no birds off the north or west shores, west of Sand Bay (Fig. 5). In previous years, Snowy Owls have been regularly observed using the ice either along the south shore, or sometimes along the north shore, of the island (R. Weir, pers. comm.). The areas of ice occupied by the owls in 2015 were some of the first to develop open leads of water in the spring, but similar leads were present in April off the north and west shores without owls present. The ice off the south and southeast shores may have been preferred by Snowy Owls because these areas had larger densities of prey (*e.g.,* ducks or dispersing voles), were more open and safer for roosting, or were the first near-shore expanses of ice encountered as owls moved north across the lake.

Spacing, Activity, and Perch Use

Snowy Owls were usually separated from other owls by 200m or more, but broadly clustered in their distributions on Amherst Island, with up to 13 owls visible from one location at one time. The high degree of spacing of owls differed from observations from western North America, where Snowy Owls have been documented using diurnal communal roosts in very close proximity (*e.g.*, Holt and Zetterberg 2008).

Apparent site fidelity, one physical fight, and turnovers of the same perch over short periods of time suggested that wintering owls on the island were territorial, and that territory boundaries were sometimes contested. Similar territorial behaviour has been documented in several areas of the Snowy Owl's wintering range (*e.g.*, Evans 1980, Parmalee 1992), including Wolfe Island (see Quillium 1965, Weir 1973). On only one occasion, I witnessed two individuals in very close proximity without fighting. Given the spacing of all of the other owls observed, the close proximity of the two owls (sitting 10-15 cm apart, see above) seems remarkable and suggests that these owls had formed some sort of relationship (*e.g.*, were siblings or were paired for later breeding). Courtship behaviour and close associations between male and

female Snowy Owls have been reported from several locations on the wintering grounds (Boxall and Lein 1982a; including observations from Wolfe Island in March 1972, Weir 1973), suggesting that the initial stages of pairing may occasionally begin on the wintering grounds (Boxall and Lein 1982a, Parmalee 1992).

Most of my observations of Snowy Owls involved birds sitting. The only actively hunting birds that I observed were hunting early in the morning, within an hour of dawn. These observations are consistent with previous work from Wolfe Island and Alberta, where most diurnal hunting occurred at dawn and dusk (Weir 1973, Boxall and Lein 1989; I did not survey for owls after 15:30, so I have no data on dusk activity levels). I suspect that birds also hunted at night, as has been suggested from other studies of wintering Snowy Owls (Boxall and Lein 1989); however, I did not survey or observe Snowy Owls at night.

Snowy Owls often shifted to ground perches later in the mornings, particularly in the spring (Fig. 10). Similar shifts and patterns of perch use were noted by Quillium (1965) in her surveys of Snowy Owls on Wolfe Island in winter (see also patterns in Boxall and Lein 1989). Quillium (1965) also found that Snowy Owls were more likely to use ground perches on sunny days or on days with high winds, although Weir (1973) did not find similar trends. My observations of Snowy Owl roost sites were consistent with the observations of Quillium (1965), although I lacked enough data to test these ideas formally.

Use of Ice During Migration

During migration in late March and early April, large numbers of Snowy Owls — particularly females — used the ice off the south and southeast shores of Amherst Island (Figs. 8, 9). Congregations of up to 11 and 14 Snowy Owls were also reported from Lac Deschênes on the Ottawa River in early April, 2014 and 2015, respectively (B.M. Di Labio, pers. comm.), suggesting that Snowy Owls may use ice during spring migration in the Ottawa region as well. Previous observations on Wolfe Island also noted the use of ice by Snowy Owls during spring migration, with 10 observed perched "on pressure ridges on the ice at Reed Bay" on 21 March 1961 (Quillium 1965), and an influx of owls using the ice off the south shore of Wolfe Island in March 1972 (Weir 1973). Similar to this study, Snowy Owls were not noted on the ice in the winter irruption of 1971-1972 prior to March (Weir 1973).

I do not know why Snowy Owls used ice in such numbers in March and April, but several reasons are possible. (1) Ice may help owls to keep cool as temperatures rise in the spring. Some owls on the island in April were panting heavily and ruffling feathers, apparently trying to keep cool during periods of warm temperatures. A study of thermoregulation in Snowy Owls found their thermal conductance to be among the lowest recorded for any animal (Gessaman 1972), presenting a greater challenge for reducing heat loads as temperatures warm. (2) Ice may offer safer roosting sites, providing owls with greater visibility to spot potential predators. Ice roosting may also

reduce the likelihood of mobbing by other birds, such as corvids, that become more aggressive in spring and defend territories on land. The ice also provided a cryptic background when snow was melting on the island, potentially further protecting owls against predation and mobbing (although snow cover was extensive in late March when the owls began to use the ice). (3) The ice may have provided important hunting opportunities during the spring, particularly with ducks occupying narrows leads that formed in the ice in late March. Larger females are more likely to take larger prey (*e.g.*, Boxall and Lein 1982b), and their dominance on the ice is consistent with hunting ducks in the leads. Similarly, the increase in coyotes on the ice during this time suggested a shared response to prey. Previous observations of Snowy Owls during years of high vole densities also found voles dispersing onto the ice off the north shore, with Snowy Owls picking them off as they scurried over the ice (R. Weir, pers. comm.). I did not observe voles dispersing over the ice in 2015; however, I did not survey the ice at dusk or at night when the voles might have been more active. Similar opportunities for hunting ducks or voles were not obvious at Lac Deschênes on the Ottawa River despite the congregation of Snowy Owls on the ice in April 2014 and 2015 (B.M. Di Labio, pers. comm.), suggesting that the use of ice during spring migration is not exclusively tied to prey.

Regardless of the reasons, ice appeared to be an important resource for migrating Snowy Owls off the south shore of Amherst Island in 2015. Owls were present as far as I could see out on the ice, and more Snowy Owls may have roosted further out on the lake beyond my view. As the ice melted, larger numbers of Snowy Owls occurred off the island. These numbers peaked on 6 April, when the edges of the ice on Lake Ontario reached the south shores of the island, including Amherst Bay. Many of the birds visible on the ice on 6 April may have been using the ice further out in the lake earlier in the spring; surveys of offshore ice are necessary to know the full extent of Snowy Owl numbers in eastern Lake Ontario at this time.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Chip Weseloh for encouraging this article and to Bruce Di Labio and Ron Weir for providing additional information on Snowy Owl distributions and habitat use. Christmas Bird Count data were provided by National Audubon Society through the generous efforts of Bird Studies Canada and volunteers, especially the Kingston Field Naturalists. Background satellite map data and imagery shown in the Figures are courtesy of Google, Cnes/Spot Image, DigitalGlobe, Landsat, and USDA Farm Service Agency.

Literature Cited

Bell, G.P., **F.J.S. Phelan** and **R.C.P. Wypkema**. 1979. The owl invasion of Amherst Island, Ontario, January-April 1979. American Birds 33:245-246.

Bortolotti, G.R. and **M. Stoffel**. 2012. The coloration of Snowy Owls is not so black and white. Pages 22-25 in E. Potapov, and R. Sale. The Snowy Owl. T. & A.D. Poyser, London, UK.

Boxall, P.C. and **M.R. Lein**. 1982a. Possible courtship behavior of Snowy Owls in winter. Wilson Bulletin 94:79-81.

Boxall, P.C. and **M.R. Lein**. 1982b. Feeding ecology of Snowy Owls (*Nyctea scandiaca*) wintering in southern Alberta. Arctic 35:282-290.

Boxall, P.C. and **M.R. Lein**. 1989. Time budgets and activity of wintering Snowy Owls. Journal of Field Ornithology 60:20-29.

Evans, D.L. 1980. Vocalizations and territorial behavior of wintering Snowy Owls. American Birds 34:748-749.

Gessaman, J.A. 1972. Bioenergetics of the Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*). Arctic and Alpine Research 4:223-238.

Godfrey, W.E. 1986. The birds of Canada, revised edition. National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa, Canada.

Holt, D.W. and **S.A. Zetterberg**. 2008. The 2005 to 2006 Snowy Owl irruption migration to western Montana. Northwestern Naturalist 89:145-151.

Josephson, B. 1980. Aging and sexing Snowy Owls. Journal of Field Ornithology 51:149-160.

Leonard, P. 2015. A Snowy Owl sequel? The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds Blog [Online]. Available at http://blog.allaboutbirds.org/2015/01/16/a-snowy-owl-sequel/ [accessed June 2015].

National Audubon Society. 2010. The Christmas Bird Count historical results [Online]. Available at http://www.christmasbirdcount.org [accessed April 2015].

Parmelee, D.F. 1992. Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus)*, The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/010.

Phelan, F.J.S. 1976. The response of avian predators to population cycles of small mammals (especially *Microtus*) on Amherst and Wolfe Islands, near Kingston, Ontario (Canada). MSc. thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

Phelan, F.J.S. and **R.J. Robertson**. 1978. Predatory responses of a raptor guild to changes in prey density. Canadian Journal of Zoology 56:2565-2572.

Potapov, E. and **R. Sale**. 2012. The Snowy Owl. T. & A.D. Poyser, London, UK.

Read, M. 2015. Kingston Region birds for the spring season: 1 March - 31 May 2015. The Blue Bill 62:54-61.

Quilliam, H.R. 1965. Winter study of Snowy Owls on Wolfe Island 1965. Ontario Field-Biologist 19:1-8.

Weir, R.D. 1973. Snowy Owl invasion on Wolfe Island, winter 1971-72. Ontario Field-Biologist 27:3-17.

Weir, R.D. 2008. Birds of the Kingston region. 2nd edition. Kingston Field Naturalists, Kingston, Ontario.

Paul R. Martin
Department of Biology
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6
E-mail: pm45@queensu.ca

Correction from Volume 33(1) (April 2015)

47 column 1, line 9: Change "The record high count for Ontario (148 individuals) occurred on 26 October 2010 at Fifty Point Conservation Area" to "The record high count for Ontario (148 individuals) occurred on 26 October 2012 at Fifty Point Conservation Area"

47-48 column 2, 2nd line from the bottom: Change "Outside of the 'traditional' late fall window are three spring records of single birds (*fide* Wormington)," to "Outside of the 'traditional' late fall window are two spring records of single birds (eBird, 2015),"

Ontario Field Ornithologists

President: Lynne Freeman
president@ofo.ca

Ontario Field Ornithologists is an organization dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It formed in 1982 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 (*OFO News*) and a journal (*Ontario Birds*); operates a bird sightings listserv (ONTBIRDS), coordinated by Mark Cranford; hosts field trips throughout Ontario; and holds an Annual Convention and Banquet in the autumn. Current information on all of its activities is on the OFO website (www.ofo.ca), coordinated by Doug Woods. Comments or questions can be directed to OFO by e-mail (ofo@ofo.ca).

All persons interested in bird study, regardless of their level of expertise, are invited to become members of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Membership rates can be obtained from the address below. All members receive *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News*.

Please send membership enquiries to:
Ontario Field Ornithologists, PO Box 116,
Station F, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2L4.

Printing: DTP Inc., Richmond Hill, Ontario

Ontario Birds

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.

Submit material for publication by e-mail attachment (or CD or DVD) to either:
chip.weseloh@ec.gc.ca
glenn_coady@hotmail.com
chris.risley@ontario.ca

Please follow the style of this issue of *Ontario Birds*. All submissions are subject to review and editing and may be submitted to peer review beyond that of the editors. For photographic material used in *Ontario Birds,* the copyright remains in the possession of the photographers.