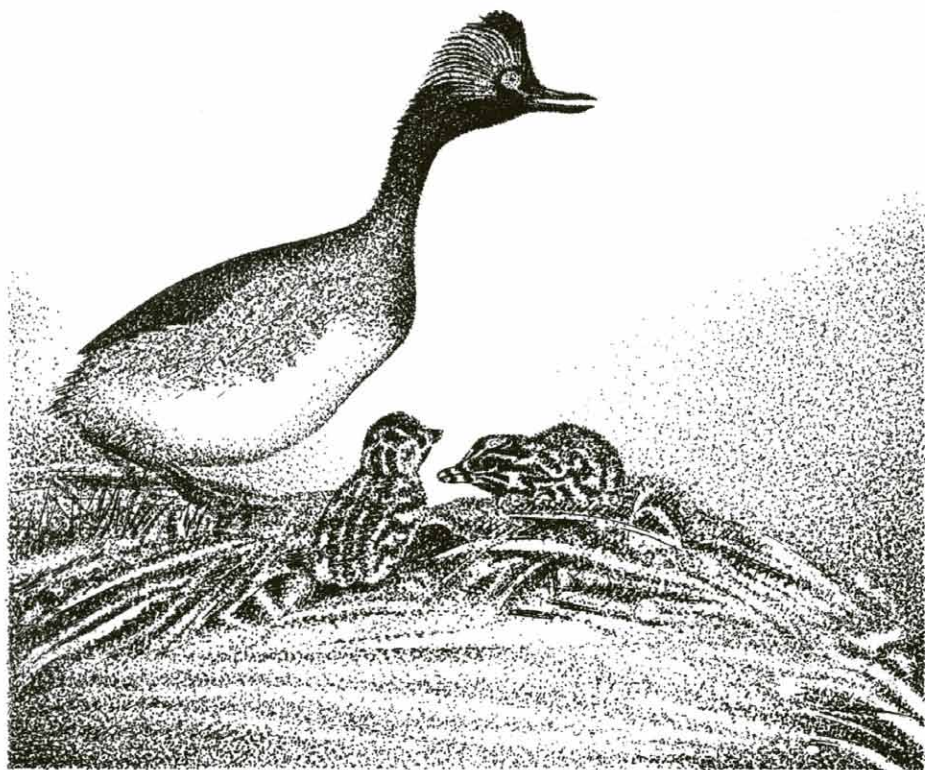


# ONTARIO BIRDS



Journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists  
Volume 15 Number 2 August 1997

# Ontario Field Ornithologists

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Ontario Field Ornithologists is an organization dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It was formed to unify the ever-growing numbers of field ornithologists (birder/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*), hosts field trips throughout Ontario and holds an Annual General Meeting in the autumn.

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 inquiries to: **Ontario Field Ornithologists, Box 62014, Burlington Mall Postal Outlet, Burlington, Ontario L7R 4K2.** (e-mail: ofo@interlog.com).

## Ontario Birds

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

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

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Cover Illustration: Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)  
with young by *Michael King*

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## Letters to the Editors

### Eastern Kingbird attempts to feed young Tree Swallow

On 30 June 1997, while birding at Tiny Marsh, Simcoe County, Ontario, I observed an Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) attempt to feed a young Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*). Both birds were perched on separate branches of a dead snag standing in the shallow water of the marsh. The young Tree Swallow was calling, begging for food, and conspicuously showing a wide open gape. The kingbird had a small insect in its beak.

The kingbird flew from its perch and hovered in front of the young swallow. It placed its beak with the insect close to the swallow's mouth, but did not place the insect in the swallow's gape. The swallow held its gape wide open and continued to call, begging for food.

The kingbird, after a brief attempt at hovering in front of the swallow, returned to its previous perch. The kingbird then swallowed the insect. Next, the kingbird flew at the swallow, pecking at it. The swallow flew away with the kingbird chasing it.

Excluding cowbirds, is this a rare observation of a species attempting to feed a different species?

Margo Holt  
Coldwater, Ontario

### Ron Tozer comments:

There are a number of reports in the literature of birds feeding unrelated young of the same species, and even young of other species (in addition to cowbirds). It has been theorized that this behaviour may occur when birds have lost their own young, but still have a strong urge to feed when

presented with the stimulus of a gaping mouth. Perhaps the ultimate example of what can happen involved a Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) in North Carolina, which was observed to feed goldfish in a garden pool for several days when they crowded to the edge with their mouths open (Welty 1963). The fish had apparently obtained food from humans in this manner, and their gaping mouths were enough to stimulate the cardinal to feed them. There is a published photograph of the event, in case this story seems hard to swallow!

### Literature Cited

Welty J.C. 1963. *The Life of Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

### Colour of Purple Finches

I have always known that male House Finches come in different colour morphs and have seen them from red through shades of orange to yellow, but I had never seen or heard of Purple Finches also having colour morphs until the last three years.

At my feeder at Dillon Cove, Carling Township, District of Parry Sound, I have had several Purple Finches that are yellow. My first sighting was on 6 May 1994 of a female-plumaged Purple Finch with a golden-yellow throat and rump. The following spring, on 9 May 1995, I saw another female Purple Finch with a yellow rump at my feeder, but thought it was not as bright as the one observed the previous year. Then, on 29 May 1996, I again saw a female with a golden rump, but this time she was not alone. I saw several with various intensities of yellow. On this particular date, one

was observed on the window sill just inches away from my face, giving me excellent views of a very golden rump.

Although Purple Finches are present throughout the summer and fall at my feeder, I have never seen the golden individuals at any time other than the spring dates mentioned above. If they are migrants, then there has been a consistency in their spring migration route to stop off at my feeder for three years in a row.

Have other readers observed this too, or is this plumage quite rare?

Jean Niskanen  
Oakville, Ontario

#### **Ron Pittaway comments:**

Bent's Life Histories says that buffiness and bright yellow olive are common on the upperparts of Purple Finches, "usually appearing of greatest intensity on the rump of old females" (Bent 1968). These birds are best considered plumage variants or examples of individual variation. True morphs

are genetically distinct colour types, usually independent of age, sex, season and subspecies, like morphs of the Snow Goose and Eastern Screech-Owl.

A study of female plumage variation in the House Finch suggested that "differences in individual expression of coloration in females stem from differential access to carotenoid pigments during molt" (Hill 1993). This explanation may apply to female Purple Finches as well.

#### **Literature Cited**

- Bent, A.C.* 1968. Life Histories of North American Cardinals, Grosbeaks, Buntings, Towhees, Finches, Sparrows, and Allies. United States National Museum Bulletin 237, Part 1, Washington, D.C.
- Hill, G.E.* 1993. The proximate basis of inter- and intra-population variation in female plumage coloration in the House Finch. *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 71: 619-627.

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## **OFO Annual General Meeting**

This year's AGM will be held on Saturday, 18 October 1997, at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters, Burlington, Ontario. Features include the Book Sale (Ron Scovell), the Bird Quiz (David Brewer), Birds of Algonquin Park (Ron Tozer), Colonial Waterbirds of Georgian Bay (Chip Weseloh), and presentation of the Distinguished Ornithologist Award to W. Earl Godfrey. Don't miss it! Register to attend today.

## Articles

### Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1996

by  
Robert Z. Dobos

#### Introduction

This is the 15th annual report of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). The members of the Committee in 1996 were Margaret Bain, David Brewer, Peter Burke, Robert Dobos (non-voting Secretary and acting Chairman), Nick Escott, Kevin McLaughlin, Donald Sutherland and Alan Wormington. Ross James served as Museum Liaison (non-voting) to the OBRC.

Of the 135 records reviewed during 1996, 86 percent were accepted. Two new species were accepted and added to the Ontario bird checklist: Bicknell's Thrush (south) and Bullock's Oriole (south and north). The official Ontario list now stands at 467 species. Also added to the list for southern Ontario is Spotted Towhee. One new breeding species, Eared Grebe, was added for Ontario.

OBRC records are archived at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). Researchers and other interested persons may examine filed reports and Committee decisions at the ROM by appointment. Please contact Brad Millen, Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Biology, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2C6, or call 416-586-5519.

#### Listing of Records

The format of this report follows that

used in previous annual reports, except as noted below. Accepted records are listed by their English and scientific names following the AOU Check-list (1983) and its supplements to date. Following the names, a binomial numbering system appears. The first number indicates the total number of accepted records (by the OBRC) prior to 1 January 1982 (the formation of the OBRC); the second is the total number of accepted records from 1982 to 1996 (including those listed in this report). An asterisk in place of the first number indicates that documentation was not required for the occurrence of these species prior to 1982. Date(s) of occurrence, number of birds, sex, plumage, and location(s) are provided when known. Counties, Districts and Regional Municipalities are shown in italics. All contributors of documentation are listed. Contributors who were known to be the finders of the bird are underlined. Finders who did not submit a report are also listed, when known.

A change to the listing of records which has been used in this report is with the plumage terminology. The terminology used here follows the Humphrey and Parkes (1959) system. For an excellent summary of this system, as well as a comparison to the previously used terminology based on that used in the National Geographic Guide (Scott 1987), see Pittaway (1995a).



Figure 1: Ontario Bird Records Committee members for 1996. Left to right: Rob Dobos, Alan Wormington, David Brewer, Margaret Bain, Kevin McLaughlin, Peter Burke, Nick Escott, Don Sutherland. Photo by *Ross D. James*.

Every effort has been made to verify information published regarding a record; however, it is possible that some inaccuracies may still exist. We would welcome any corrections or updates to any such records. Where dates or other details listed here differ from those quoted in other published sources (for example, *Birders Journal* or *Audubon Field Notes*) we have used the most accurate available information.

All records that were not accepted because of uncertain identification or origin are listed separately. Submitters of all "not accepted" reports receive a letter from the Chairperson explaining the reasons for the decision, along with copies of the comments of the voting members. These reports are also kept on permanent file at the ROM. A "not accepted" record can be reconsidered

by the OBRC if new evidence is submitted to the Committee for review.

### **Acknowledgements**

The OBRC would like to thank the many observers who submitted reports, photographs and sketches of rare birds during 1996. We are grateful to Matt Heindel of California and Jon Dunn of Ohio for providing their expert opinions on the reports of a "Cassin's" Solitary Vireo and "Appalachian" Black-throated Blue Warbler, respectively. We also thank Michel Gosselin of the Canadian Museum of Nature (CMN) in Aylmer, Quebec, and Henri Ouellet, formerly of the CMN, for information and comments on specimens of Bicknell's Thrush. The following people are also thanked either for obtaining and forwarding reports from

others, or assisting the Committee in other ways: Margaret Bain, Barbara Charlton, Allen Chartier, Bob Curry, Willie D'Anna, Nick Escott, Jean Griffin, Phill Holder, Jean Iron, Barry Jones, David Kraus, Sheldon McGregor, John Miles, Terry Osborne, Martin Parker, Ron Pittaway, Paul Pratt, Paul Prior, Ron Ridout, Kayo

Roy, Doug Sadler, Roy Smith, Marvin Smout, Mike Street, Ron Tozer, Allen Woodliffe, Alan Wormington and Bryan Wyatt.

I would also like to thank the other 1996 OBRC members for their assistance and cooperation throughout the past year, and for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this report.

## Accepted Records

### **Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica* South Only (3/14)**

1995 – one juvenal, 17-18 October, Laurel Creek Conservation Area, *Waterloo* (Craig A. Campbell, James J. Hummel, Robert Z. Dobos).

### **Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* North Only (0/4)**

1996 – one alternate, 15 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Jul K. Wojnowski, also found by David Okines, Nancy Parish, Kathy Palko, Jennifer Siphens).  
 – two definitive alternate and two juvenal, 11 May - 2 September, Emo, *Rainy River* (David H. Elder, Alan Wormington, also found by Roger Simms, Karyn Mikolieu, Chuck Miller)  
 - photo on file.

The Emo (Sewage Lagoons) record constitutes the first breeding record for Ontario. The nest was located and the two young were known to have fledged successfully.

### **Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis* (0/9)**

1996 – one alternate, 28 April - 14 May, Grand Bend, *Lambton/Huron* (David J. Milsom, found by T. van Oosterns) - photo on file.

### **Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* (2/16)**

1995 – one juvenal, 1-27 November, Van Wagners Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (1, 5, 12 and 27 November), Burlington, *Halton* (3 and 9 November), and Winona, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (5 and 10-11 November) (Michael H. King, Robert Z. Dobos, William J. Crins, William F. Smith, Kevin Hannah, also found by David D. Beadle, Alfred L. Adamo, Robert Yukich, John L. Olmsted) - photo on file.  
 – one juvenal, 2 November, Presqu'ile Provincial Park, *Northumberland* (Donald Shanahan).  
 – one juvenal, 17 November, Fort Erie, *Niagara* (Cathy Mueller, Betsy Potter, Michael H. King).

It was felt that all three records most likely pertained to different birds due to the increase in sightings in recent years.

### **Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* (0/2)**

1995 – one male, 28 October, Stoney Point, *Essex* (Thomas E. Broadwell).

This, the second record of this species for Ontario, was believed to be the same bird observed and photographed on the Michigan side of Lake St. Clair on 26-28 October (Mencotti 1996). It was likely the result of Hurricane Opal, which passed from the Gulf of Mexico to just south of the Great Lakes area on 5-6 October. Other inland frigatebird sightings during October 1995 occurred in Kansas and



Illinois (Mencotti 1996). The first Magnificent Frigatebird record for Ontario occurred at Point Edward, *Lambton* on 28 September 1988, following Hurricane Gilbert (Wormington and Curry 1990).

### **Frigatebird species *Fregata* sp. (0/1)**

1995 – one male, 15 and 30 October (not seen between these dates), Mississippi Lake, *Lanark* (15 October), and Snow Road Station, *Frontenac* (30 October) (H. Keith Hawes, Don St. Pierre, also found by Kingsley Hawes, Dennis Graham).

This occurrence was likely another result of Hurricane Opal. The descriptions provided were inconclusive as to which species of frigatebird was involved. Since other species of frigatebird have occurred in North America (Great Frigatebird (*F. minor*) in Oklahoma and California (Howell 1994) and Lesser Frigatebird (*F. ariel*) in Maine (AOU 1983)), the OBRC cannot assume that a frigatebird sighting pertains to a Magnificent Frigatebird unless adequately described as such.

### **Great Egret *Ardea alba* North Only (2/7)**

1996 – one, 22-30 April, New Liskeard, *Timiskaming* (Bruce Murphy) - photo on file.

### **Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* (1/24)**

1996 – one alternate, 5-6 May, Wardsville, *Elgin* (Harold L. Lancaster, found by Nina Hurdle, Edgar Hurdle).

– one definitive alternate, 19 May, St. Clair National Wildlife Area, *Kent* (H. Michael Street).

– one definitive alternate, 18 June, Cambridge, *Waterloo* (Edward Cheskey).

1995 – one definitive alternate, 14 May, Guelph, *Wellington* (Mary Moreton, Russ Moreton).

### **Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* (7/25)**

1995 – one alternate, 3-5 May, Presqu'île Provincial Park, *Northumberland* (Donald Shanahan, found by Doug Guay).

### **Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor* (2/18)**

1996 – one definitive alternate, 27 April - 5 May, Oshawa Second Marsh, *Durham* (Margaret J.C. Bain, found by Steven M. LaForest).

### **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea* (5/23)**

1996 – one definitive alternate, 21 May, Holiday Harbour, *Kent* (Alan Wormington, James N. Flynn) - photo on file.

1995 – one juvenile, 2 August, Hamilton Harbour, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Robert Z. Dobos, Craig S.A. McLauchlan).

The 2 August 1995 record is the earliest autumn date for this species in Ontario.

### **Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (2/23)**

1996 – two definitive alternate, 4 May, Kinmount, *Victoria* (Douglas P. Tate).

– one definitive alternate, 9 June, Hamilton Harbour (Windermere Basin), *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Robert Curry).

– one basic, 26 October, Aylmer, *Elgin* (David A. Martin, found by Jim Sandusky, Sue Sandusky).

### **Ibis species *Plegadis* sp. (3/22)**

1996 – one, 17 October, Queenston, *Niagara* (David J. Milsom).

– one, 10 November, Port Rowan, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul N. Prior).

### Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* South Only (2/44)

- 1996 – one definitive basic *frontalis*, 27 March, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).  
 – five, 21 April, Loretto, *Simcoe* (John B. Schmelefske).  
 1995 – two definitive basic, 30 September, Wildwood Lake, *Oxford* (James M. Holdsworth).  
 1994/95 – one definitive basic, 8 December - 1 March, Pittock Lake, *Oxford* (James M. Holdsworth).  
 1994 – one definitive basic, 13-14 November, Wildwood Lake, *Oxford* (James M. Holdsworth).

The Pittock Lake bird may be the first over-wintering record for Ontario.

### Ross's Goose *Chen rossii* South Only (0/12)

- 1996 – two definitive basic white morph, 25-26 February, Vittoria, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (John B. Miles, also found by C. Ann Miles).  
 – one definitive basic blue morph, 18 March, Long Point (Big Creek Marsh), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (David A. Sutton).  
 – one definitive basic white morph, 18-19 March, Etobicoke, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Barbara Reid, Zak Smith, Naish McHugh, Norman C. Murr) - photos on file.

The two birds on 25-26 February (see Miles 1996) provide the earliest spring occurrence of this species in Ontario. The 18 March bird at Big Creek Marsh is the first record of the blue morph for Ontario.

### Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* (1/19)

- 1996 – one female or first basic male, 11-22 January, Burlington, *Halton* (Robert Z. Dobos, found by John B. Miles).  
 – one alternate male, 16 April, Barrie (Kempfenfelt Bay), *Simcoe* (Jim Forrest, found by Alex Mills) - photos on file.  
 – one alternate male, 16-17 April, Harrow, *Essex* (Dick Grolman, Jantina Grolman, Lorraine H. Foott).  
 – one alternate male, 4 May, Hamilton Harbour, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Kevin A. McLaughlin, also found by Robert Dawson).  
 1995 – one definitive alternate female, 22 December, Hamilton Harbour, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Kevin A. McLaughlin).

### Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus* (1/8)

- 1996 – one, 28 April, Kirkwall, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Paul D. Smith, Anteo Talevi, found by Steven Clark).

The circumstances of this record are noteworthy. This bird was sighted by two independent parties about seven kilometres away from each other and one hour apart. Talevi observed the bird as it briefly joined the outdoors "birds of prey show" at the African Lion Safari! It was not one of their captive birds, and is certainly considered to be a wild vagrant.

### Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni* (8/24)

- 1996 – one definitive basic light morph, 18 April, Grimsby (Beamer Memorial Conservation Area), *Niagara* (Michael H. King, H. Michael Street).  
 – one definitive basic light morph, 11-12 May, Point Pelee National Park and Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, Ellen A. Smout, also found by William G. Lamond, Kevin A. McLaughlin, George M. Naylor, Sheldon McGregor).

### "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis harlani* (\*/1)

- 1996 – one juvenal dark morph, 8 January - 17 March, Toronto, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Michael H. King) - photo on file.

Amongst other features, the diagnostic barring on the underside of the outer

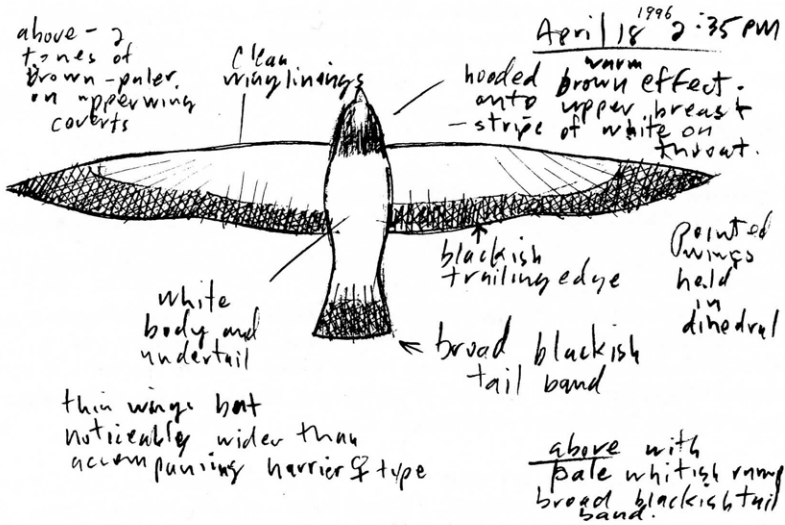


Figure 2: Definitive basic light morph Swainson's Hawk at Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, Grimsby, *Niagara* on 18 April 1996. Drawing by Michael H. King.

primary tips was noted on this bird, which separates juvenal Harlan's from other dark morph Red-tailed Hawks in this plumage (Wheeler and Clark 1995). This is the first accepted record of this western form by the OBRC; however, there are a number of older sightings which are considered to be valid (Pittaway 1993).

### Prairie Falcon *Falco mexicanus* (0/2)

1996 - one juvenal, 24 August, Long Point (Tip), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Colin Barton, Christopher J. Dunn, Paul N. Prior, also found by Cyril Crocker, Cathy B. Doran).

This is the second accepted record for Ontario. The location, date and age of the bird point to a wild origin.

### Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* South Only (1/32)

1996 - one first alternate, 2 June, Beaverton, *Durham* (Margaret J.C. Bain).

This bird was leg-banded with a dark blue narrow band over a silver metal band on the right leg, and had probably been banded as a chick in Michigan the previous year.

### American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus* (1/3)

1996 - two, 9 September, Port Colborne (Gravelly Bay and Sugarloaf Point), *Niagara* (William C. D'Anna, Alan Wormington, found by Mary Hart, Doug Hart) - photos on file.

This is the fourth accepted record for Ontario. These birds were undoubtedly a result of Hurricane Fran which passed through the area on 7-8 September (Curry 1996). Although only one bird was observed by those submitting documentation,

the original discoverers reported seeing two birds together; thus the record has been accepted as such.

**Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* (2/6)**

1996 – one, 28 May, Long Point (Squires Ridge), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Warren Claydon).

The range of dates of occurrence for the eight records of this species for Ontario are: 19 May - 23 June (6 records) and 1 September - 14 October (2 records) (Bain 1992, Pittaway 1995b, James 1991).

**American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana* (7/44)**

1996 – seven alternate (four females and three males), 15 May, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Alan Wormington, found by Reinhold Pokraka).

– two, 8-18 September, Blenheim, *Kent* (Blake A. Mann, Keith J. Burk) - photo on file.

1995 – one alternate, 2 May, Ajax, *Durham* (Brian Henshaw).

**Willet *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus* North Only (2/8)**

1996 – one, 7 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (David Okines, also found by Nancy Parish, Jul K. Wojnowski, Uli Faigle).

**Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (0/2)**

1995 – one basic, 8-21 December, Kingston, *Frontenac* (Ron D. Weir, R. Douglas McRae, Glenn Coady, John L. Olmsted, Robert Curry, Kayo J. Roy, found by Tony Miller) - photos on file.

An account of this occurrence was published by Weir (1996). Providing the



Figure 3: One of two American Oystercatchers at Sugarloaf Point, *Niagara* on 9 September 1996 following Hurricane Fran. Photo by Alan Wormington.

second record for Ontario, it closely follows the first at Port Perry, *Durham* on 10 September 1995 (Dobos 1996). Some have suggested that both records pertain to the same individual; however, since there is no evidence to clearly support this argument, the Committee considers the occurrences to be separate.

**Mew Gull *Larus canus* (3/11)**

- 1996 – one juvenal/first basic *brachyrhynchus*, 12 October, Wildwood Lake, *Oxford* (William G. Lindley, James M. Holdsworth).  
 – one second basic, 17 November, Queenston, *Niagara* (Richard Knapton, Robert Curry).

**California Gull *Larus californicus* (0/15)**

- 1995 – one definitive basic, 12 November - 1 December, Queenston and Niagara Falls, *Niagara* (William C. D'Anna).

**Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* (0/6)**

- 1995/96 – one definitive basic, 12 November - 1 January, Fort Erie (12-13 November and 1 January), Queenston (19-20 November), Niagara Falls (Whirlpool) (24-25 November) and Port Weller (27-28 November), *Niagara* (John B. Schmelefske, Betsy Potter, William C. D'Anna, Mary Ellen Hebb, Kayo J. Roy, Marcy Foster, found by Glenn Coady) - photos on file.

The above listed occurrences are considered to pertain to one individual bird, the province's sixth record. Remarkably, this is the third separate occurrence for this species at Port Weller within one year (Dobos 1996).



Figure 4: Definitive basic Ross's Gull at Port Weller, *Niagara* from 27-28 November 1995 (also present along Niagara River between 12 November 1995 and 1 January 1996). Photo by *Mary Ellen Hebb*.

### Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* South Only (\*2)

1996 – one juvenal, 26 September, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).

Curry (1996) has suggested that this and another reported Arctic Tern at this time were likely displaced by Hurricane Fran. The autumn occurrence of Arctic Tern on the Great Lakes is certainly not without precedent, and in addition to being carried from the Atlantic Ocean overland by Fran (as other seabirds definitely were), another possibility is that the storm may have simply stalled southbound migrants of this species already heading overland from James Bay into the Great Lakes area. Either scenario seems possible.

### Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* (1/3)

1996 – one juvenal, 8 September, Chub Point, *Northumberland* (Jarmo Jalava).

– one definitive alternate, 8 September, Waverly Beach, *Niagara* (Robert Curry, John L. Olmsted, John Lamey, Robert Z. Dobos, also found by T. Ronald Scovell).

– one definitive alternate (found dead, badly decomposed), 28 September, Long Beach, *Niagara* (Robert Curry, John L. Olmsted) - specimen (skeleton) in ROM.

These birds were obviously displaced from the Atlantic Ocean by Hurricane Fran (see Jalava 1996, Curry and Olmsted 1996, Lamey 1996). Curry (1996) gives a summary of reported sightings from Lakes Ontario and Erie following the storm, including a few sightings which have yet to be submitted to the OBRC. Given the number of displaced birds involved with this hurricane, there is no reason to believe that the 28 September specimen was the same individual as the one observed on 8 September. Thus, there are now four accepted records of Sooty Tern for Ontario. The only previous record for Ontario was of a bird on 14 August 1955 near Brockville, *Leeds and Grenville*, following Hurricane Connie (James 1984).

### Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia* South Only (0/1)

1995 – one, 5-6 December, Ottawa (Deschenes Rapids), *Ottawa-Carleton* (Michael Tate, found by Bruce Di Labio).

This is the first record for Ontario since 1953 (James 1991). Large late autumn/early winter flights of this species to the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence area have occurred in the past, often separated by several decades (Gaston 1988). The OBRC has not yet reviewed documentation for these historical occurrences of this species.

### Chuck-will's-widow *Caprimulgus carolinensis* (\*6)

1996 – one male, 13-14 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (John G. Keenleyside, Robert Z. Dobos, also found by Kim Eckert).

### Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya* (1/7)

1995 – one first basic, 10 September, Amherstburg, *Essex* (Robert C. Pettit) - photos on file.

### Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens* (1/3)

1996 – one, 18-20 May, Long Point Provincial Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (David J. Agro, Alan Wormington, also found by Robert S. Ridgely, Ken Berlin, Don Carr) - photos on file.

This, the fourth record for Ontario, is the first to occur in spring, and the first since 1982.

**Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis* (8/60)**

- 1996 – one, 29 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Jul K. Wojnowski, also found by David Okines).  
 – one, 1 June, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Jul K. Wojnowski, also found by David Okines, Kathy Palko, Jennifer Sipkens).  
 – one, 31 August, Toronto (Leslie Street Spit), *Metropolitan Toronto* (Norman C. Murr, Roy B.H. Smith) - photos on file.  
 – one, 2 November, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott, also found by Stanley V. Phippen, Brian Moore).

The 2 November bird at Thunder Bay is the latest date for northern Ontario.

**Gray Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis* (1/4)**

- 1996 – one first basic, 5 October, Sturgeon Creek, *Essex* (Paul D. Pratt, Alan Wormington, also found by Paul Desjardins) - photos on file.

Four of the five records of this rare vagrant to Ontario, including the above record, have been during the month of October, the exception being the bird on 26 July 1986 at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Wormington 1987).

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus* (3/34)**

- 1996 – one, 23 May, Presqu'île Provincial Park, *Northumberland* (William H. Stone).  
 1990 – one, 26 May or 2 June, Bloomingdale, *Waterloo* (Roberta Fisher).

**Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savana* (0/3)**

- 1996 – one, 3-13 September, Arner, *Essex* (Michael F. Malone, Stephen T. Pike, Alan Wormington, Allen T. Chartier) - photos on file.  
 – one, 25-28 September, Linton, *York* (Craig S.A. McLauchlan, David J. Milsom, Georgia Carley, Robert Carley, found by Jackie Jenkins) - photos on file.

It is remarkable enough that two records of this extreme rarity would occur in Ontario in the same year, but a third bird was also reported at Hay Bay, *Lennox and Addington* on 29 October 1996 (Ridout 1997), which has not yet been reviewed by the OBRC. The most recent previous record was on 29-30 September 1993 at Cayuga, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Bain 1994). The first occurrence of this species for Ontario, at Dorion, *Thunder Bay* on 28-30 October 1977 (James 1991), has not yet been reviewed by the OBRC.

**Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* South Only (2/3)**

- 1996 – one, 6 May, Prince Edward Point, *Prince Edward* (Eric A. Machell, also found by Myrna Wood, David Shirley).

This is the first accepted record of this species for southern Ontario since 1984 (Wormington 1986). The Committee considered that the date and location favoured a wild origin.

**Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii* (0/12)**

- 1996 – one, 22 May, Long Point (Squires Ridge), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Robin Gutsell, Warren Claydon) - photo on file.

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Poliioptila caerulea* North Only (2/9)**

- 1996 – one first basic, 13 September, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Jul K. Wojnowski, also found by Kerstin Kober, Cam Stevens, Mark Nelitz, Ann Sullivan) - photo on file.  
 – one, 3 October, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Tony Murray, also found by Robin M. Dawes).



Figure 5: Ash-throated Flycatcher at Long Point Provincial Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk* from 18-20 May 1996. Photo by Alan Wormington.



Figure 6: Gray Kingbird at Sturgeon Creek, *Essex* on 5 October 1996. Photo by Alan Wormington.



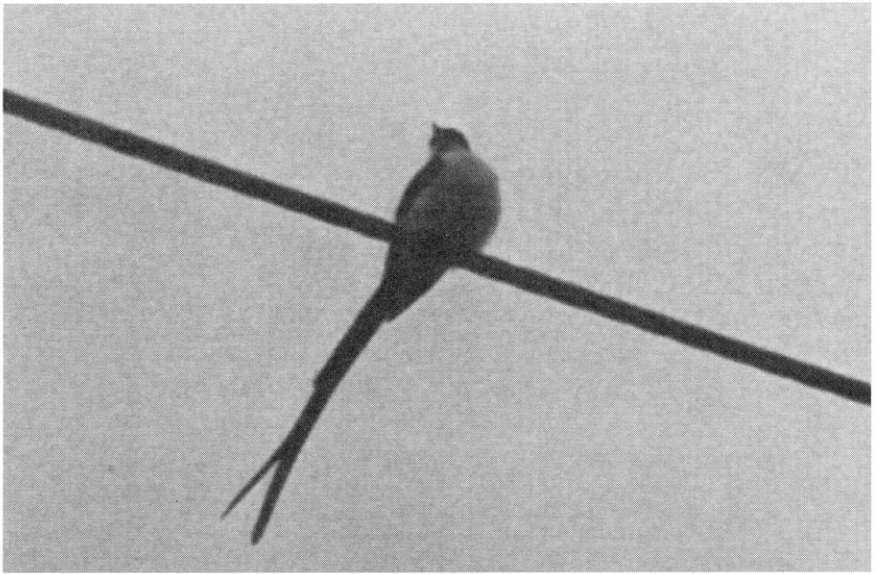


Figure 7: Fork-tailed Flycatcher at Linton, *York* from 25-28 September 1996. Photo by *Craig S.A. McLauchlan*.

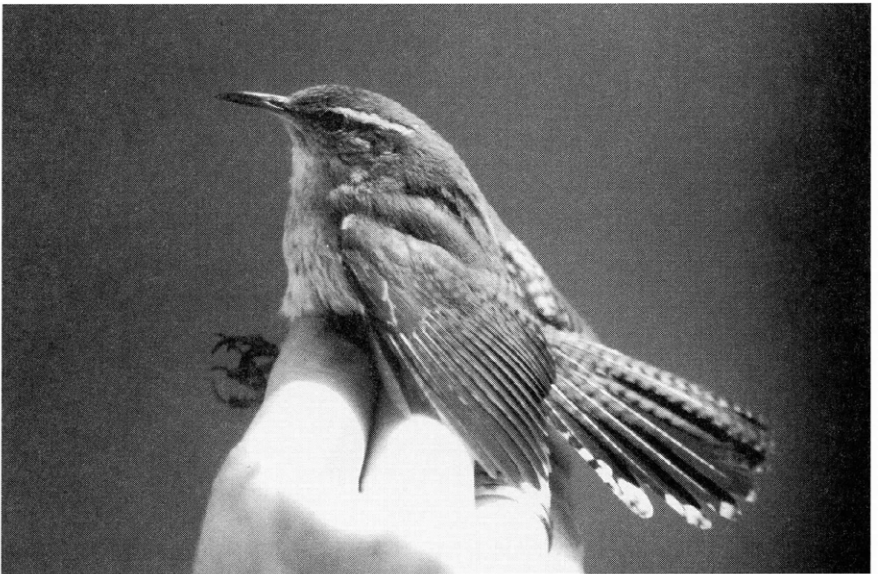


Figure 8: Bewick's Wren banded at Long Point's Breakwater Station (Squire's Ridge), *Haldimand-Norfolk* on 22 May 1996. Photo by *Warren Claydon*.

### Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (7/14)

- 1995 – one first basic, 11-12 October, Britannia Bay, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Michael Tate, Tony F.M. Beck, found by F. Reid) - photos on file.

### Mountain Bluebird *Sialia currucoides* (2/18)

- 1996 – one male, 19 October, Algonquin Provincial Park (Jake Lake), *Nipissing* (Colin D. Jones).  
 1995/96 – one female, 18 December - 1 January, Wheatley Provincial Park, *Kent* (G. Thomas Hince, also found by Tammy Dobbie, Derrick Mercer, Mark Randall).  
 1995 – one first basic male, 26 October - 1 November, Minnitaki, *Kenora* (Carolle Eady, Robin M. Dawes) - photos on file.  
 – one first basic male (different from above bird), 1 November, Minnitaki, *Kenora* (Carolle Eady) - photo on file.  
 1994/95 – two females, 19 December - 9 March, Wheatley Provincial Park, *Kent* (Alan Wormington, James N. Flynn, found by Mark W. Jennings) - photos on file.  
 1994 – one female, 26 November - 22 December, Curve Lake, *Peterborough* (Michael Richardson, Peter S. Burke, found by David Johnson) - photo on file.  
 1993 – one male, October (exact date not known), Minnitaki, *Kenora* (Carolle Eady).

The two birds at Minnitaki in 1995 occurred together on 1 November only. The female at Wheatley Provincial Park in 1995/96 is likely to be one of those present there in 1994/95, but these records are listed separately here for ease of reporting.

### Townsend's Solitaire *Myadestes townsendi* (4/24)

- 1995 – one, 13-14 October, Long Point Provincial Park (Old Cut), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Dennis A. Gralak, Ron C. Ridout, also found by Edward Berst, Susan Gralak, Stan Sacha, Gloria Sacha).

### Bicknell's Thrush *Catharus bicknelli* (4/0)

- 1981 – one first basic male, 26 September, Bath, *Lennox and Addington* (Ron D. Weir) - specimen (skin) in CMN (#88666).  
 1980 – one, 17 May, Prince Edward Point, *Prince Edward* (R. Douglas McRae) - photos on file.  
 1979 – one first basic female, 19 September, Bath, *Lennox and Addington* (Ron D. Weir) - specimen (skin) in CMN (#69348).  
 – one first basic female, 23 September, Prince Edward Point, *Prince Edward* (Fred Cooke, R. Douglas McRae) - specimen (skin) in CMN (#69604).

These provide the first four records for Ontario. The AOU recently split this species from the Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*) (AOU 1995). Subsequently, the OBRC obtained details of several existing records for review, including three specimens housed at the Canadian Museum of Nature (CMN), and another documented by quality photographs, all of which are listed above. These records have been verified by Dr. Henri Ouellet, former Curator of Ornithology at CMN, whose research led to the recognition of Bicknell's as a full species (see Ouellet 1993). Bicknell's Thrush is considered by some to be identifiable in the field given excellent viewing conditions and familiarity with other thrushes. However, the OBRC cautions that complete details of relevant features, preferably augmented with good photographs, would likely be expected as adequate documentation for its occurrence. See Pittaway (1996) for a summary of identification features.

### Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius* North Only After 1993 (5/49)

- 1995/96 – one male, 4 November - 11 January, Marathon, *Thunder Bay* (Lois Devereaux, found by Paul Inwood) - photo on file.



Figure 9: First basic Blue-gray Gnatcatcher banded at Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* on 13 September 1996. Photo by *Jul K. Wojnowski*.

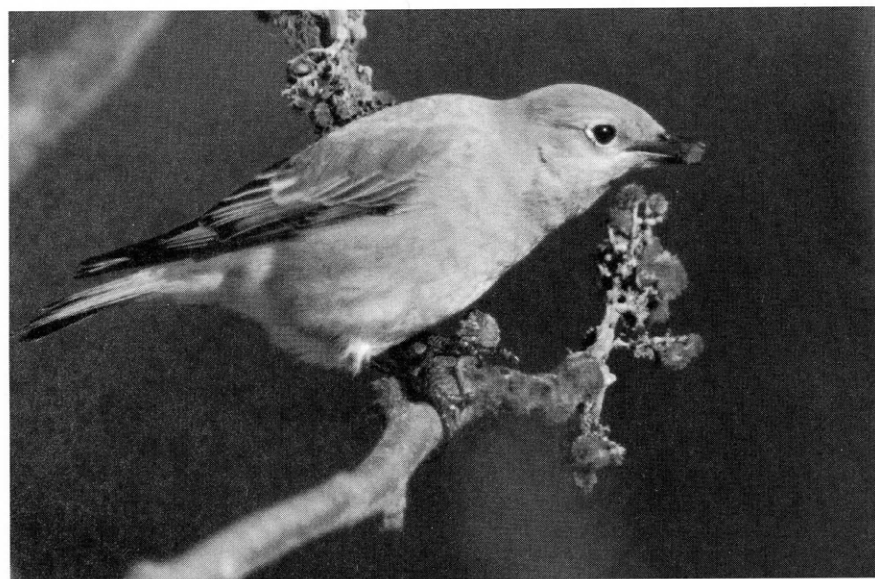


Figure 10: One of two female Mountain Bluebirds at Wheatley Provincial Park, *Kent* from 19 December 1994 to 9 March 1995. Photo by *James N. Flynn*.

**“Lawrence’s” Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera x V. pinus* (\*/7)**

1996 – one male, 11 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Kent* (Blake A. Mann, also found by Tom Chatterton).

**Black-throated Gray Warbler *Dendroica nigrescens* (4/5)**

1996 – one first basic male, 14 September, Toronto Islands (Muggs Island), *Metropolitan Toronto* (Edward Kelly, Ron Kellner).

This bird was mist-netted and banded by the Toronto Bird Observatory.

**Kirtland’s Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii* (7/9)**

1996 – one definitive alternate male, 10 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (James B. Lesser, Alan Wormington, James N. Flynn, also found by Jeffrey Goldsmith, Sheldon Kirsch) - photos on file.

**Yellow-breasted Chat *Icteria virens* North Only (2/3)**

1996 – one, 1-26 November, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Paul Strobl, Nicholas G. Escott, also found by Heidi Strobl) - photos on file.

On 26 November, the bird was captured due to its weakened condition, then flown to Guelph’s Wild Bird Clinic where it was rehabilitated.

**Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana* (2/12)**

1996 – one first alternate male, 20 May, Oxdrift, *Kenora* (Robin M. Dawes, Carolle Eady, found by Alice Wall) - photos on file.

It is interesting to note that the original finder reported a total of four birds at her feeder that looked like the Western Tanager, but only one was present (and photographed) when more experienced observers arrived later.

**Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus* (1/1)**

1995 – one female, 10 May, Dorland, *Oxford* (James M. Holdsworth).

This is only the second accepted record by the OBRC, the first being a male at Rosslyn Village, *Thunder Bay* on 6-7 May 1978 (Wormington 1986). A number of older occurrences (see James 1991) have yet to be reviewed by the OBRC.

**Blue Grosbeak *Guiraca caerulea* (7/27)**

1996 – one male, 20 May, Warsaw, *Peterborough* (Neil Boughen, also found by Leigh Boughen).

**Lazuli Bunting *Passerina amoena* (0/3)**

1996 – one male, 18-20 May, Copetown, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Robin A. Child, Bert Millar, also found by Raleigh Child).

This is the fourth record for Ontario, all of which have occurred during spring. However, evidence for one of these, at Pickle Lake, *Kenora* on 10 May 1979 (James 1991) has not yet been reviewed by the OBRC. It is interesting to note that this recent occurrence was part of a veritable explosion of this species east of its normal range during the spring of 1996, which included birds in North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and eastern Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, as summarized in the various respective regional summaries in *Audubon Field Notes*.

**Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* (2/6)**

- 1996 – one definitive alternate male, 13 May, St. Catharines, *Niagara* (F. Ainsley Barley, also found by Dorothy Barley) - photo on file.  
 – one female, 20-23 May, Holiday Harbour, *Kent* (James N. Flynn, Alan Wormington, found by June M. Gordon) - photos on file.

With eight records now accepted for the province, a pattern of spring occurrence is emerging. The range of dates for seven of these records is 29 April to 4 June.

**Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus* (0/6)**

- 1995/96 – one first basic male, 3 December - 9 April, Hamilton, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Ursula Kolster, Don Woodside) - photo on file.  
 – one male, 17 December - 3 March, Palermo, *Halton* (Robert Z. Dobos, Michael H. King, David J. Milsom, found by Alfred Kuhnigk) - photos on file.  
 1995 – one male, 18 October, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Matt T. Heindel).  
 1989 – one female, 17 December, Erieau, *Kent* (Alan Wormington, also found by Mark W. Jennings).

The AOU (1995) recently split the former Rufous-sided Towhee into this species and Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*). Two records of Spotted Towhee for northern Ontario had been previously published by the OBRC (Dobos 1996). The above records now add this species to the list for southern Ontario. Details of the Hamilton bird were previously published (Kolster 1996). An analysis of sound recordings of the call notes of the Palermo bird in 1995-96 suggested that it was one of the northerly interior races of this species, either *P.m. curtatus* or *P.m. arcticus* (Garrett 1996).

**Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla* North Only (0/11)**

- 1995 – one, 29-30 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (David Okines, also found by Marek Klich).

**Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus* (5/40)**

- 1996 – one male, 28 April - 1 May, St. Williams, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (George E. Wallace, Beth Wallace).  
 – one, 17 May, Bracebridge, *Muskoka* (Allan Sinclair) - photo on file.  
 1994 – one, 20 June, Kirkfield, *Victoria* (Barbara Kalthoff, also found by Joan Winearls) - photos on file.  
 1961 – one, 19 June, Moose River mouth (Sandy Island), *Cochrane* (Douglas C. Sadler) - photo on file.

**Lark Bunting *Calamospiza melanocorys* (3/19)**

- 1995 – one male, 24 May, Ile Parisienne, *Algoma* (David J.T. Hussell, C. Anthony Walker, also found by William C. Scharfe).

**Harris's Sparrow *Zonotrichia querula* South Only (3/28)**

- 1996 – one male, 29 April - 7 May, St. Williams, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (John L. Olmsted, also found by James A.N. Dowall).  
 – one first basic, 21 October, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Scott E. Shaum).  
 1995/96 – one first basic/first alternate, 2 December - 7 May, Ottawa, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Robert Gorman) - photo on file.  
 1994/95 – one first basic, *circa* mid December - 5 March, Cache Bay, *Nipissing* (J. Logue) - photo on file.  
 1994 – one definitive alternate, 6-7 May, Oshawa, *Durham* (Bruno Kern) - photo on file.



Figure 11: First alternate male Western Tanager at Oxdrift, *Kenora* on 20 May 1996. Photo by *Carolle Eady*.



Figure 12: First basic male Spotted Towhee at Hamilton, *Hamilton-Wentworth* from 3 December 1995 to 9 April 1996. Photo by *Don Woodside*.



Figure 13: Lark Sparrow at Kirkfield, Victoria on 20 June 1994. Photo by Barbara Kalthoff.

### **Bullock's Oriole *Icterus bullockii* (3/1)**

- 1989 – one female, 2 June, Schreiber, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington, also found by William G. Lamond).
- 1981 – one female or first basic male, 31 October, Peterborough, *Peterborough* (Peter Hogenbirk).
- 1980/81 – one female or first basic male, circa mid-December - 12 March, Port Dover, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Marvin S. Smout, Alan Wormington, found by Ted Shiltz) - photos on file.
- 1977 – one female or first basic male, 13-19 November, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Walter S. Zarowski, found by Keith Denis) - photos on file.

The AOU has recently split the former Northern Oriole into this species and the Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) (AOU 1995). These are the first four accepted records for this species by the OBRC, officially adding it to the Ontario checklist.

## **Not Accepted Records**

### **Identification Uncertain**

In most reports listed below, the documentation provided was found to be insufficient to establish the identity of the species claimed. In very few cases did the Committee consider that the identification was actually an error. Any of these reports may be resubmitted for further review if new supporting evidence is provided.

- 1996 – Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, one, 22 May, Long Point (Big Creek Marsh), *Haldimand-Norfolk*.
- Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*), one, 6 May, Stoney Point, *Essex*.

- Mongolian Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*), one, 1 September, Port Perry (Nonquon Sewage Lagoons), *Durham*.
- Mew Gull, one, 10 November, Niagara Falls, *Niagara*.
- Gray Flycatcher (*Empidonax wrightii*), one, 28 June, Foxey, *Manitoulin*.
- Bicknell's Thrush, one, 17 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*.
- Black-headed Grosbeak, one, 16 May, Toronto, *Metropolitan Toronto*.
- Black-headed Grosbeak, one, 17 May, Kitchener, *Waterloo*.
- Blue Grosbeak, one, 14-15 May, Binbrook, *Hamilton-Wentworth*.
- 1995 - Greater White-fronted Goose, 65, 5 November, Toronto, *Metropolitan Toronto*.
- Greater White-fronted Goose, four, 8 November, Port Stanley, *Elgin*.
- Swainson's Hawk, one, 11 September, Whitby (Lynde Shores Conservation Area), *Durham*.
- Cave Swallow (*Hirundo fulva*), one, 12 September, Collingwood, *Simcoe*.
- "White-winged" Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis aikenii*), one, 17 October, Wingham, *Huron* - specimen (tail feathers) on file.
- 1993 - Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, one, late May 1993, Buckhorn, *Peterborough*.
- 1989 - "Cassin's" Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius cassinii*), one, 19 May, Beachville, *Oxford*.
- "Appalachian" Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens cairnsi*), one, 10 May, Tillsonburg, *Oxford*.

## Updates/Corrections to Previous OBRC Reports

### 1995 Report (*Ontario Birds 14: 50-71*)

- under Tufted Duck, change bracketed numbering to "(1/14)".
- under Piping Plover, add "Michael McEvoy" as a contributor, and add "- photo on file".
- under Ivory Gull, 23-26 December 1995, add "David J. Milsom" as a contributor.
- under Band-tailed Pigeon, change "all occurring during fall migration" to "the first during spring migration".
- under Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 7-10 July 1995, the list of contributors should be changed to read "(Stephane Bonneville, Peter S. Burke, Jamie Fenneman, Greg Kubica, Stuart Mackenzie, Matthew J. Mills, Gavin C. Platt, Kayo J. Roy, also found by Peter Carson)".
- under Black-throated Gray Warbler, change dates to "25 April - 3 May", and add "Craig S.A. McLauchlan" as a contributor.
- "Figure 16" on page 68 should be changed to "Figure 12".

### 1994 Report (*Ontario Birds 13: 46-65*)

- under Greater White-fronted Goose, 23 November - 8 December 1993, add "Alf H. Rider" as a contributor, and add "- photo on file".
- under Tufted Duck, change bracketed numbering to "(1/10)".

### 1993 Report (*Ontario Birds 12: 41-58*)

- under Tufted Duck, change bracketed numbering to "(1/5)".

### 1990 Report (*Ontario Birds 9: 18-44*)

- under Rufous-sided Towhee, 10-17 November 1990, add "Walter S. Zarowski" as a contributor, and add "- photo on file".

### 1988 Report (*Ontario Birds 7: 43-54*)

- under Unaccepted Records (origin questionable), Ringed Teal, add "Anthony L. Lang" as a contributor.



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# Yellow-throated and Solitary Vireos in Ontario:

## 4. Egg Laying, Incubation and Cowbird Parasitism

by  
Ross D. James

The lives of the Yellow-throated (*Vireo flavifrons*) and Solitary Vireos (*V. solitarius*) are again similar through egg laying and incubation stages of the nesting cycle, unless otherwise noted.

### Egg Laying

Eggs were almost invariably laid one per day, until the clutch was complete (usually four days – Peck and James 1987). I once observed a delay of one day in the start of laying, apparently because of wet cold weather, but as soon as laying had started in any nest, weather did not stop them from completing the clutch. Eggs were laid in the morning between sunrise and about 0900 h, varying somewhat with the bird. Early morning laying is typical of most species, as it reduces the energetic demand of carrying an egg during an active daytime period, and reduces the risk of breakage at the same time.

A female I watched, returned from feeding, and sat low in the nest for 5 to 10 minutes. Then she moved a bit, placing her breast up on the nest rim and her posterior down into the bottom of the nest (see Figure 1). She could be seen moving up and down slightly as if breathing heavily, at a rate of about 90 per minute. This movement was punctuated by pauses of 5 to 10 seconds, when she remained almost motionless. She occasionally closed her eyes when

motionless. After about 15 minutes, she settled down on the nest to rest for another 5 to 10 minutes before departing from a newly laid egg.

Incubation did not appear to start until the clutch was complete, as is typical of most birds. But, as soon as even one egg was present, one or other parent would be on the nest most of the time. Until the clutch was complete, they sat rather high in the nest and appeared restless, looking all about themselves. The males were on the nest about double the time the females were there during the day, and eggs would frequently be left unattended for short periods (about 1 to 6 or 8 minutes at a time). The extra sitting time by the males allows the females maximum foraging time, that may be essential for egg production.

### Incubation

Once the clutch was complete, the eggs were virtually never left unattended other than in exceptional circumstances. The females now did more (or at least as much) of the sitting. Although I do not have sufficient data, it appeared that the females did more of the sitting when the temperature was cooler early in the day, and the males did as much during the heat of the day. The females incubated at night. They would settle down for the night about sundown or slightly earlier

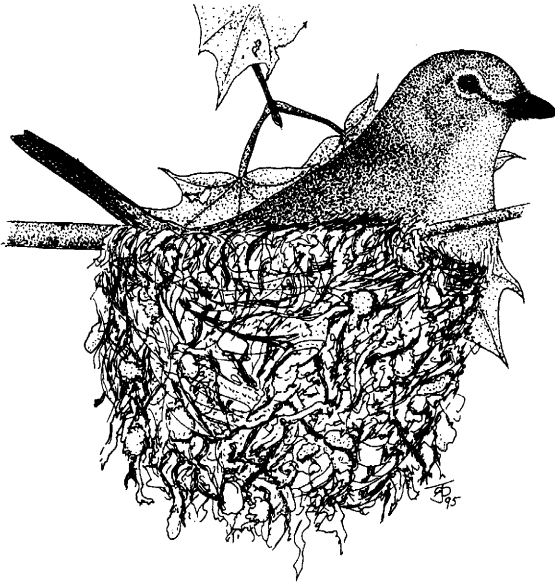


Figure 1: Redrawn from field sketches of a Yellow-throated Vireo, this illustrates the position assumed by the female during egg laying. Drawing by Ross D. James.

and remain there until about half an hour after sunrise.

While incubating, the females ordinarily sat quite motionless on the nest and sat very low so that they were scarcely visible there. However, they were awake and well aware of their surroundings. The males, however, invariably were more active, looking around the whole time. I even saw one hop off the nest to grab a nearby insect and return immediately to resume sitting. Both sexes occasionally rose off the eggs and reached under themselves before settling back on. They may have been turning the eggs at such times, as they must be turned frequently to remain viable.

When the males were not on the nest they were foraging or preening. They may wander quite far again at

this time; I have had the impression that some even went out of hearing range (to me at least). A few were virtually silent; most sang very slowly, even sporadically, but a few were rather persistent although slow singers when not sitting. There was considerable variation among birds.

Then they flew back and suddenly sang a few times near the nest before exchanging places with the female. The female usually gave contact notes, a trill or a *chee* call when returning to the nest area. The sitting bird would give a contact note in response to the incoming bird's call, or hop up to the nest rim, to indicate its readiness to exchange. However, if the bird on the nest was aware of a predator, or perceived that I was too close, it just sat quiet and motionless, and the

incoming bird did not come to the nest. Since one could always feed while the other sat, I never saw one bring food to the other on the nest.

Once on the nest, the males usually sang a few notes, then were silent. If they sat for a prolonged period (usually more than 30 minutes), they might begin to sing very slowly until the female returned. Fifteen to 20 minutes was a more usual exchange time, but that could be extended to as long as 45 minutes on occasion.

When a returning bird called, the other might immediately spring up off the nest, but would remain at the nest. Almost invariably, only when the incoming bird was approaching the nest did the leaving bird fly off. Thus, if you were not aware of the nest, it appeared as if one bird flew into and back out of the nest tree. Before settling on the eggs, a returning bird usually stood on the nest rim briefly peering into the nest.

### **Incubation period**

Incubation periods are variously defined as the interval from the laying of the last egg to the beginning of hatching (Peck and James 1987), or from the laying of the last egg to the hatching of that egg (Drent 1975). Whatever way it is defined, it is somewhat variable depending upon such factors as the attentiveness of the parent birds, the number of eggs in the nest, and the ambient temperature during incubation.

Defined the first way, the incubation period for the Yellow-throated Vireo is at least 12 days (Peck and James 1987). Defined the second way it is probably closer to 13 days (Rodewald and James, 1996). However, because of cowbird interference,

it was very difficult to get a good incubation period from the nests that were accessible. In the few nests available, one young vireo typically hatched prior to the others, but all young seemed to hatch within a 24 hour period at least (probably within about 12 hours) and were much the same size through the nestling period.

The Solitary Vireo nests in a cooler climate in Ontario. At least early in the season, nighttime temperatures were often near freezing, and the shady humid environment certainly felt cooler all the time. This environmental difference may be responsible for a slightly longer incubation. Incubation periods were about 13 to 14 days to the beginning of hatching. In nests observed early in the morning on the first day young were present, there were from one to three young hatched over night and the rest of the eggs hatched within the next 24 hours. In two nests with single eggs unhatched in the morning, they hatched within the next 12 hours.

### **Renests**

If eggs have been removed from a nest, a bird returning to the nest usually remained silent and looked about, or even sat on the nest for a short period. If older nestlings were taken, the adults would fly about searching for them, singing, giving contact calls, trills and *chee* calls, as they would do in searching for recently fledged young. They may search for a couple of hours with gradually diminishing intensity.

If a first clutch or brood was taken by predators, these birds typically renested. I had one pair of Yellow-throated Vireos that was working on its third attempt. They may be renesting

into early July, still trying to get a single brood off. In only one instance I was aware of did a female desert as a result of a nest loss (a Yellow-throated Vireo). The only second clutch that I have observed had 4 eggs as did the first (Yellow-throated Vireo). Usually the pair would be actively rebuilding within a day or two of a loss, and often within 100 m of the previous nest (rarely as far as 400 m away).

### Cowbird Parasitism

Over the years when I studied Yellow-throated Vireos, I became rather frustrated with the activities of Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*). Many nests were rather inaccessible, and of those that I could get to (although with difficulty), more than half were parasitized, making it hard to get accurate information on laying, incubation, and hatching.

This vireo is a frequent host to cowbirds, with overall rates as high as 50 percent in Ontario (Peck and James 1987). Although they have been known to bury cowbird eggs in the nest bottom (Jacobs 1903) or abandon a nest on occasion (Savage 1894), they typically accept cowbird eggs, and are unlikely to desert or bury if there are vireo eggs in the nest (Friedmann 1929). The cowbirds would lay even in vireo re-nesting attempts.

Of the parasitized Yellow-throated Vireo nests I observed, vireo eggs were invariably removed by cowbirds. I found as many as three cowbird eggs in one nest. Cowbirds would begin to lay as soon as a vireo started, but eggs might be removed even after incubation had started. With one pair in 1970, a clutch of four vireo eggs was present on 28 May, with one cowbird egg. By 8 June, three vireo eggs had been

removed and another cowbird egg laid. The last vireo egg was removed before the first and only cowbird hatched.

While the normal incubation period of Yellow-throated Vireo eggs is about 12 to 13 days, with cowbird eggs in the nest, the incubation period could be lengthened to 15 to 16 days. The larger cowbird eggs seem to prevent efficient heating of the smaller vireo eggs. In general, either because of egg removal, or a larger cowbird physically outcompeting and squashing young vireos, any vireo young that did hatch seldom survived unless first hatched.

While Solitary Vireos are subject to cowbird parasitism, it happens to very few nests in Ontario (less than 5% – Peck and James 1987). The majority of the population nests in extensively forested areas where cowbirds are fewer or absent. I saw only one nest parasitized and that one was near a roadway where cowbirds were likely to be found. Solitary Vireos have been known to bury cowbird eggs in the nest bottom also (Friedman 1929). However, that is not an expected response; they typically also accept cowbird eggs.

### Discussion

As with passerine birds in general, only the females of these species have a brood patch, to apply heat directly to the eggs and maintain proper incubation temperatures. It is appropriate then that females should incubate through the night and a greater proportion of time during cooler periods of the day. Male Solitary Vireos may develop a partial brood patch (Pyle et al. 1987). But, even without an incubation patch, a male can certainly insulate eggs to help maintain their heat. During warm weather, he may even be able to

provide enough heat to maintain proper incubation temperatures (see Ball 1983). The fact that males tend to sit high and actively look about all the time they are on the nest, however, suggests that they are unlikely to be very efficient at heating the eggs.

The nest exchange behaviour, where one bird leaves only as the other arrives, is no doubt a well developed means of deceiving predators. The outgoing bird is usually ready to depart the moment it hears an incoming bird, but delays departure until replaced. With similar looking birds, unless the exchange can be seen, the presence of a nest remains unknown. I have been fooled several times by this behaviour when looking for nests. There is a high probability that an unseen predator would also be fooled by a quick exchange, improving the vireos' chances of successful nesting (Another well developed deceptive behaviour is used when feeding young – more later).

Given the very close attentiveness to eggs once a clutch is complete, I am uncertain how a cowbird could lay more eggs or remove additional vireo eggs during the incubation period. While it is a larger bird, and might be able to just ignore the aggressions of a pair of vireos, this seems a dangerous strategy, as it could cause the vireos to abandon the nest. But, it seems more unlikely cowbirds would wait for many hours, until the vireos might happen to be distracted by a jay, for example, and then sneak in. The vireos are probably unlikely to desert once they have begun incubation, and tolerate a rather quick intrusion. They do recognize cowbirds as undesirable

and would likely leave a nest chasing one, allowing the cowbirds quick access to the nest.

Other than becoming alarmed by the presence of cowbirds, reacting as they might to a jay, I have not detected any behaviour specifically directed at cowbirds that might evolve to increase the chances of successfully thwarting this nest parasite. There is no doubt a great deal of loss in Yellow-throated Vireo nests in Ontario and elsewhere, as a result of Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism. However, it is pertinent to remember that it is human induced habitat changes that have allowed cowbirds to proliferate in eastern North America.

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## Notes

### First Ontario Breeding Record for Eared Grebe

by

David H. Elder and Roger M. Simms

The Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) is essentially a western species in Canada, breeding west and south from central Manitoba (Godfrey 1986). In Ontario, it is regarded as a rare but regular vagrant in the spring and fall (James 1991). Eared Grebes have been noted in the Rainy River area of north-western Ontario, primarily in the spring. Known records have been made exclusively on the sewage ponds of the towns of Rainy River and Emo. In early June of 1992, up to four pairs of Eared Grebes were present on the Rainy River sewage ponds. It appeared the birds might breed, but a sudden draining of the ponds for repairs ended that possibility.

On 11 May 1996, the authors observed an adult Eared Grebe in full breeding plumage on the Emo sewage ponds. A pair was noted by several observers in the same location on 23 May. In addition, a pair of Eared Grebes was present on the Rainy River ponds for several days during the same period. They subsequently disappeared. Glenn Coady advised the authors on 7 June 1996, that he had watched a pair of Eared Grebes on the Emo ponds a few days earlier engaged in courtship activities, and suggested that nesting was a possibility. That evening, Roger Simms visited the ponds at Emo and found an Eared Grebe sitting on a nest in the middle of

the first pond. New emergent vegetation was just beginning to appear above the surface of the water in the pond, and the nest, a mound of soggy vegetation, was anchored to the edge of an old clump of cattails (*Typha* sp.). The nest was not hidden and could be easily seen from the edge of the pond. Again, on 14 June 1996, the authors saw an adult on the nest. There was no sign of the second adult, but vegetation on the pond was growing rapidly and it could well have been hidden therein.

One downy young with both adults was seen by Roger Simms on 22 June 1996, and two young with an adult on 30 June. The authors saw one nearly full grown immature (dark slate colour on the head, neck and back with a white throat, breast and face, similar to the adult non-breeding plumage) and one adult on 9 July 1996. Roger Simms saw two immature-plumaged birds on the lagoon on 18 August 1996, and no Eared Grebes were seen after this date.

While it was not possible to access the nest to record the number of eggs, at least one and probably two young Eared Grebes were raised. Thus, the first breeding record for the species in Ontario occurred (Dobos 1997).

#### Acknowledgements

Alan Wormington kindly provided the photograph used in this article.



Figure 1: Eared Grebes (adult and one young) on Emo sewage pond, 6 July 1996.  
Photo by *Alan Wormington*.

### Editors' Note

David and Mary Elder found a pair of Eared Grebes nesting at Emo sewage ponds again on 29 May 1997 (Bain and Holder 1997).

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## Use of *Anemone canadensis* in Rose-breasted Grosbeak Nests

by  
Valerie E. Wyatt

The nest of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) is loosely built and usually constructed of twigs and lined with rootlets (Harrison 1975, Peck and James 1987). Less often, the nest exterior may contain plant fibres, stalks, grasses, pine needles and flower heads (Peck and James 1987). The nest often appears flimsy in that the eggs can often be viewed from below through the bottom of the nest. During a study of nesting productivity in Waterloo Region and Wellington County in 1996, 24 Rose-breasted Grosbeak nests were found in 14 woodlots. All nests were constructed primarily of small twigs; many of them also contained plant stalks that were forked and had small cone-shaped flower heads, which were visible from below, extending several centimetres out from the edge of the nest.

The plant stalks were subsequently identified as Canada Anemone (*Anemone canadensis*), a common native wayside species. This plant grows to a height of approximately 45 cm in large localized colonies on the edges of woods or roadsides (A. Anderson, pers. comm.). As the Canada Anemone blooms at the end of June, it is likely that Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were using dried stalks from the previous year for nest material.

Thirteen of the 24 nests contained

Canada Anemone. Nests throughout the woodlots contained anemone stalks, regardless of the distance to the nearest woodlot edge where the plants were found. Canada Anemone was found in 6 (55%) of 11 nests located 0-25 m from woods' edge, 2 (50%) of 4 nests situated 26-50 m from woods' edge, and 3 (50%) of 6 nests that were more than 100 m from the nearest woodlot edge. Of the 13 nests containing Canada Anemone, 8 (62%) were successful, and 5 (38%) were predated. The success rate for all nests was 50% (12 of 24 nests).

It appears that Rose-breasted Grosbeaks travel to woods' edges or clearings to collect this plant. One possible reason is that the very slender but strong anemone stalks have several forks at right angles to one another which strengthen the nest structure without providing excessive bulk. The use of anemone stalks might contribute to the ability of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak to raise its young in such an apparently flimsy structure.

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Allan Anderson of the University of Guelph for identifying the plant stalks. This field work was carried out as part of a study coordinated by Mike Cadman and Lyle Friesen of the Canadian Wildlife Service and Jock MacKay of the University of Waterloo, and was funded through the Ontario

Ministry of Natural Resources (Environmental Youth Corps), the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada's Biodiversity Convention Office, and the University of Waterloo. Helpful comments on an earlier draft of this note were provided by Mike Cadman and Lyle Friesen.

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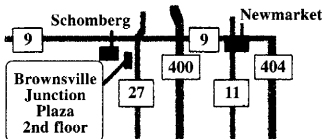
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# Aggression of Hairy Woodpecker toward Northern Shrike

by  
William J. Crins

Aggressive behaviour is frequent between individuals of the same species, and especially between males defending breeding territories (Terres 1982, Welty 1975). Interspecific aggression is illustrated in some well known cases, such as the attacks of Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) or Eastern Kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) on corvids and hawks, and the mobbing of predators by small passerines. However, cases of interspecific aggressive behaviour between species of roughly the same size are infrequently reported. Welty (1975) stated that "aggression rarely reaches the stage of overt attack but is more commonly expressed in ritualized postures, movements, or calls ("bluff") that serve to repel, intimidate, or appease enemies or competitors without the biological costs of actual combat".

Shrikes may elicit a defensive or aggressive response from other species, because they are predators of smaller birds. However, shrikes probably do not pose a serious threat to birds of the same or larger size. Thus, it was with interest that I watched a Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*) attacking a Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) for approximately one minute before the shrike departed. This occurred near the feeder at my house west of Huntsville, Ontario on 9 November 1995, at about 0730h. The woodpecker took several

flights directly at the shrike, until the shrike flew away.

I have been unable to locate other reports of aggressive behaviour of Hairy Woodpeckers toward Northern Shrikes. However, Kilham (1983) noted that "no bird seems sharper or more alert in the winter than a Hairy Woodpecker". Both Kilham (1983) and Stokes (1979) commented on the aggressive territoriality of male Hairy Woodpeckers, with these birds sometimes attacking suddenly from hidden locations, and knocking each other from perches. Thus, the innate aggressive behaviour associated with territoriality may have been transferred, in this case, to an interspecific interaction with a perceived (but probably not real) threat.

## Acknowledgements

I thank Ron Pittaway and Ron Tozer for comments on the draft of this note.

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# Unusual Nesting of the Hermit Thrush

by  
Ron Tozer

During June, 1991 (date not recorded), Vonnie Heron discovered an active nest of the Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) at her home on the Big East River near Huntsville, Ontario (Lot 11, Concession 5, Chaffey Township, District Municipality of Muskoka). She examined the contents twice during the nesting (dates not recorded), once when the nest contained eggs, and later when three young fledged as her hand approached the nest. Due to its unusual situation, Mrs. Heron showed the nest to Bill Crins while it was still active, and to the author after the young had fledged.

## Description

The nest was built on top of an old Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) nest (last active in 1990) which had been constructed on a nesting tray (at a height of 2.1 m) under the eave of a cottage building adjacent to Vonnie Heron's home (Figure 1). The cottage and home buildings are located in a small clearing (less than one acre) surrounded by mixed forest.

The nest itself was of fairly typical construction for this species, being a woven cup with a rather bulky, rough exterior composed of grasses, plant stalks and rootlets (Gross 1949, Harrison 1975, Peck and James 1987). The amount of vegetation which trailed below the main structure of the nest was apparently unusual for the Hermit Thrush, however (Figure 1).

## Discussion

Hermit Thrush nests reported to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme (Peck and James 1987) were "usually placed on the ground (91 nests)". However, the species also nests in deciduous and coniferous shrubs and small trees, typically 1 to 1.5 m above the ground (Harrison 1975, Terres 1982, Godfrey 1986). Peck and James (1987) did not report any Ontario Hermit Thrush nests on buildings, or in old nests of other species.

There are a few published accounts of Hermit Thrushes nesting on buildings from elsewhere, however (Jones and Donovan 1996). A nest with young about 7 feet from the ground on a shelf under the eaves of an occupied camp porch was reported in Massachusetts (Forbush 1929). Another nest was in a tin gutter under the eaves of the second storey of a home in New Hampshire (DeMeritte 1920). Also, a Hermit Thrush was reported nesting on a rafter under the roof of a building of the University of Colorado Biological Station at Boulder (Johnston 1943).

The use of old nests of other bird species by the Hermit Thrush, although apparently extremely rare, is not totally unknown either. Gross (1949) reported that a pair of Hermit Thrushes "observed by John May was nesting in what appeared to be a typical robin's nest 2 feet up in a young hemlock". Another Hermit Thrush nest was



Figure 1: Hermit Thrush nest on tray over door. Photo by *Vonnie Heron*.

reported in an old Eastern Phoebe nest at a height of 2.45 m, without further details (Jones and Donovan 1996).

The Hermit Thrush nest described in this note is apparently the first reported in Ontario on a building, and in the old nest of another species. Details have been provided to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Vonnie Heron for providing the photograph and her assistance in the study of this nest.

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# Grackles Catching Fish

by  
Jean Iron

On Sunday, 8 June 1997, Ron Pittaway and I took the new ferry from Toronto to Port Dalhousie to assess its fall pelagic prospects. We continued on the Niagara River extension to the "sand piles" at Queenston. Shortly after the ferry entered the Niagara River, we noticed Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) flying out from shore over the water, sometimes half-way across the river and back. At the famous Niagara "fly-past" spot, we decided to study one grackle as it made its sortie straight out over the river. About 100 metres off shore, it hovered about two to three metres above the water in tern-like fashion for several seconds. Then it flew down, scooped something silvery out of the river and, with the item dangling from its bill, flew directly to an area of shrubs and trees on the shore. We determined the silvery item to be a small fish or minnow that the grackle was possibly taking to its young.

As we travelled, we saw about 25 Common Grackles fishing over the river and returning to shore with a shiny fish in their bills. On examining the surface of the water we saw many stunned or dead minnows being carried along by the current. Because we were downstream from Sir Adam Beck Generating Station, we thought the fish may have died or been stunned as a result of going through the turbines.

A search of the literature revealed

that grackles feeding on fish is well documented and that fish can be part of the diet of grackle nestlings. Follett (1957) describes grackles fishing for River Emerald Shiners (*Notropis atherinoides atherinoides*): "On June 18, 1944, at Niagara Falls, Ontario, opposite the American Falls, thousands of slender fish approximately three inches in length formed dense shoals near the surface of the clear water. An occasional dead or dying fish, its white belly turned upward, floated conspicuously at the surface. The shoals were concentrated chiefly below a rocky point and in an eddy at the boat landing. Several Bronzed Grackles walked about on numerous small bits of driftwood floating in the eddy. As I watched, a grackle seized one of the slender fish and flew off, the bright silver body of the fish hanging from the bird's beak." On the Cayuga Lakes, New York, Hamilton (1951) observed that Common Grackles salvaged dead alewives (*Alosa pseudoharengus*) along the shores and fed them to their nestlings.

Grackles also take live fish. In Michigan, Beeton and Wells (1957) reported a female Common Grackle taking seven live Lake Emerald Shiners (*Notropis atherinoides acutus*) and carrying them to the same tree. Not one was eaten by the adult. "One of the minnows was seen wriggling in the bird's beak, and there seems no

doubt that the other minnows were alive also, since no dead ones could be seen floating on the surface. . . The bird flew back and forth eight to ten feet above the water, then upon sighting the minnow it dipped down, hovered immediately above the fish and captured it with a quick thrust of the beak. The grackle appeared to be very adept at catching the minnows; it was not observed to miss a capture and got only its breast feathers wet during the procedure." This method of catching fish was similar to the one we observed the grackles use on the Niagara River.

In *The Birds of North America*, Peer and Bollinger (1997) state that fish may be an important dietary item of Common Grackles living near large bodies of water and that to capture its prey, the Common Grackle "wades into shallow water (or hovers above the water) and captures live fish with its bill".

In conclusion, Common Grackles

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are opportunistic feeders that will take advantage of an available food source. They are skilled at fishing for live and dead fish. It will be interesting to look in other locations for Common Grackles using this feeding behaviour.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ron Pittaway and Ron Tozer for literature citations and helpful comments.

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## An Evening with Paul Lehman

A special presentation featuring "Migrant Hotspots of North America" by Paul Lehman, and "Identification of Longspurs" by Jon Dunn, will be held at 7 p.m. on Monday, 24 November 1997, at the Civic Garden Centre, Edwards Gardens, Toronto. This program is sponsored by the Toronto Ornithological Club, Birders Journal, and Ontario Field Ornithologists. A registration form will be in October's OFO NEWS.

# *Recognizable Forms*

## **Bill Colour and Identification of Female Barrow's Goldeneye**

by

Bruce Di Labio, Ron Pittaway and Peter Burke

### **Introduction**

The bill colour of adult female Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) in eastern North America is described inaccurately in most North American field guides and published literature. This has led to much unnecessary confusion among birders. Although we attempted to correct this misinformation (Di Labio and Pittaway 1987), errors have still appeared in recently published field guides. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the bill colour issue and review the field identification of adult female Barrow's Goldeneye in the winter.

### **Plumage and Age**

In winter, goldeneyes have two age classes: adult breeding (definitive alternate) plumage and first year (first basic/alternate) plumage. Goldeneyes acquire their first adult breeding plumage in their second autumn when they are over a year old. Most of our discussion refers to females in adult breeding plumage, from November to May, when their bill colour is the brightest. Female goldeneyes in summer (June to October) have all-dark bills because they lose most of the yellow-orange coloration. First year females in fall and early winter have dark bills; they are slower than adults to develop colour on their bills, often not until mid-winter to spring. The

yellow or orange on the bills of first year females is duller and less extensive than on adults. First year female Barrow's often show a mixture of dusky and yellow-orange, whereas same age/sex Common Goldeneyes (*Bucephala clangula*) usually have a dark bill with a muted yellow tip. Eye colour of first year females is noticeably duller than the brighter eyes of adult females. See Palmer (1976) and Tobish (1986) for more details of plumage, molt and age, but note our comments below.

### **Bill Colour**

In most field guides and identification articles, the bill colour of female Barrow's Goldeneye is said to differ between birds in eastern and western North America. For example, Madge and Burn (1988) state, "Females of western North America have all yellow bill, a feature not recorded in eastern populations, which have bicoloured bills ...". Similar descriptions appear in the National Geographic field guide (Scott 1987), in the recent Stokes field guide (Stokes and Stokes 1996), and even in the thorough discussion provided by Tobish (1986). The photographs of the eastern females with yellow-tipped bills in Tobish (1986) are of captive birds in Washington, D.C. (Claudia Wilds, pers. comm.). Note: these birds



are not like any adult female Barrow's Goldeneyes we have seen in North America; they probably originated from the Icelandic population.

Despite descriptions in the literature of different bill colours in eastern and western females in North America, we found no evidence to substantiate these claims. During the past 30 years, we have observed over 75 adult female Barrow's Goldeneyes wintering on the Ottawa River and upper St. Lawrence River in eastern Ontario and southern Quebec. All had "pumpkin" orange bills with a dark nail, often with small dusky areas on the basal half at close range, but appearing mostly or all yellow-orange at a distance (Figure 1). The bill colour of our birds is similar to females in western North America. In addition, 250 to 1000 Barrow's Goldeneyes regularly winter on the north shore of the lower St. Lawrence River in the Baie-Comeau area of Quebec. Adult females there also show "pumpkin" orange bills (Michel Gosselin, pers. comm.). We are not aware of any Ontario or Quebec observations of adult female Barrow's Goldeneyes with yellow-tipped bills like the descriptions of "eastern females" in many field guides.

There are four widely separated breeding populations of Barrow's Goldeneyes: western North America, Quebec and Labrador, Iceland, and probably southwestern Greenland (has bred). The bill colour of females from the tiny Greenland population is unknown. Since Ontario and Quebec females are orange-billed like western birds, are we seeing birds from the western North American population wintering in the east? This seems unlikely because Barrow's is a short-

distance migrant and because the size of the population wintering in the east agrees closely with the small population (2000-4000 birds) that summers and presumably nests in remote areas of Quebec and Labrador (Savard 1996; Michel Gosselin, pers. comm.).

We believe that there are no differences in the bill colour of adult female Barrow's Goldeneyes in eastern and western North America; both populations have bills in winter that are mostly yellow-orange in colour. However, most females of the Icelandic population have dark, yellow-tipped bills (Bardarson 1986) or orange-yellow tipped bills (Jonsson 1992), usually with a wider band of colour than on a Common. A very tiny number of the females in Iceland have all yellow-orange bills like North American birds (Garner 1991). The small population in Iceland (800-1000 pairs) is mostly non-migratory and we know of no North American records of this form. The Icelandic population is perhaps where the confusion about bill colour arose. We have never seen a female Barrow's in Ontario or Quebec whose bill was dark with a yellow tip like the birds in Iceland. Interestingly, the National Geographic Society field guide (Scott 1987) on page 87 illustrates a first year female with a yellow-tipped bill and David Sibley (pers. comm.) reports seeing a female Barrow's with a yellow-tipped bill in California. Perhaps a few first year females in North America can have bicoloured bills.

### **Field Identification**

The general appearance of female Barrow's and Common Goldeneyes is very similar (Figure 1). The most important field marks differentiating

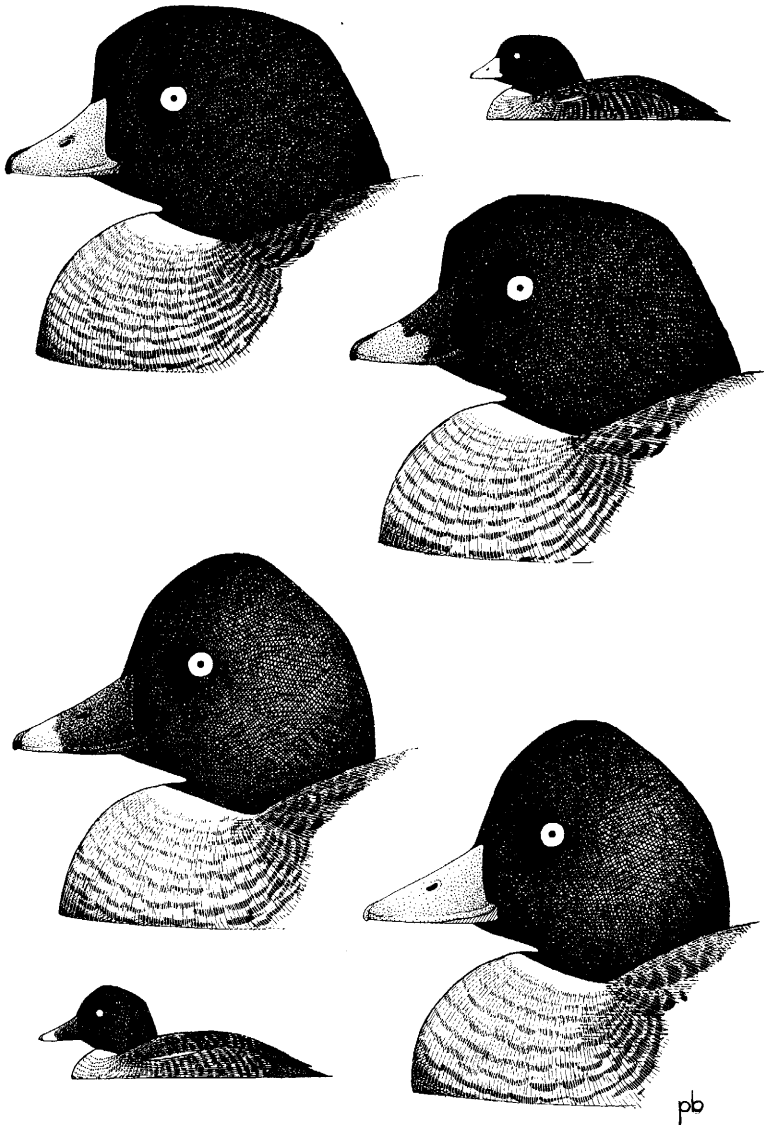


Figure 1: Female goldeneyes in definitive alternate plumage. North American Barrow's Goldeneyes (top left and right), Icelandic Barrow's Goldeneye (middle right), Common Goldeneyes (middle and bottom left), extreme variant Common Goldeneye with all-yellow bill (bottom right). The large heads are relaxed birds and small birds are sleeked down birds after diving. Drawing by *Peter Burke*.

these species are head shape and bill size, not bill colour. The head of the female Barrow's Goldeneye has an oval shape, created by a steep forehead, flat crown, and elongated hind neck feathers like a mane. The latter feature gives the appearance of a swept back crest, similar to the male Barrow's and the female Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*). At times, when the head is tucked tightly against the body, the crest even further accents the oval shape of the head. The head of the female Common Goldeneye lacks the "puffiness" of the female Barrow's. It has a rounded rather than flat crown and a sloping forehead. Note, however, that head shape can vary; it is sleeked down when diving and more normal in shape when relaxed. In Figure 1, the two small illustrations are of sleeked down birds that have just surfaced after diving and the four large heads are of relaxed birds. Caution: alert female Commons with their heads held high can show a surprisingly steep or vertical forehead that could cause confusion.

The head colours also differ. Female Barrow's has a dark chocolate brown head while the female Common has a slightly lighter brown head. This is not easily seen in the field without direct comparison. In addition, the Barrow's Goldeneye has a slightly, but noticeably, shorter bill than the Common (Godfrey 1986). This gives the Barrow's a stubby-billed appearance, which accentuates the steepness of the Barrow's forehead. The Common's bill is longer and flatter compared with a Barrow's (Figure 1).

Female Common Goldeneyes usually have dark bills with a yellow band near the tip. Therefore, scanning a

flock of goldeneyes for a bird with a mostly yellow-orange bill is a quick way to discover a possible Barrow's even at a distance. Caution: we have seen female Common Goldeneyes with extensive yellow-orange and even all yellow-orange bills on many occasions. For example, on 30 November 1996, while birding the Niagara River, the first author observed an adult female Common Goldeneye with a bill that was completely orange-yellow except for a small dark area at the base. On 28 December 1996, he scanned a flock of Common Goldeneyes along the Ottawa River at Britannia (Ottawa). One female with an orange-yellow bill stood out; the bill showed slight dark areas only at the base, nostril and nail. However, note that often the nail is yellow too in these variant yellow-billed female Commons (Figure 1). We stress that it is necessary to use head shape and bill size to confirm identification.

Some further checking is needed because head shape is said to be slow to develop in young females, but we feel safe in saying that even most first year female goldeneyes can be identified to species based on their head shape and bill size. First year males (female-like) in fall and early winter, before they develop facial spots, are also easy to identify to species by their distinctive head and bill shape. These differences can be recognized with practice.

### Hybrids

Several wild male hybrids between Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes have been reported from Ontario (Martin and Di Labio 1991). Their intermediate characteristics suggest that female hybrids also would be

intermediate in head shape and probably bill colour. Although the probability of encountering a hybrid is remote, any female that does not show the classic features of a Barrow's or Common Goldeneye should be left unidentified.

### Conclusion

The combination of head shape and bill size are the best field marks to distinguish female Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes. Bill colour of Barrow's is helpful, but it should not be used as a diagnostic field mark. A surprising number of Common Goldeneyes have mostly or all yellow or orange bills. There is no difference in bill colour between the eastern and western populations of adult female Barrow's Goldeneyes in North America; both populations have the same yellow-orange bills. However, adult female Barrow's in Iceland have yellow or orange tipped bills that are different from North American birds. Barrow's Goldeneyes wintering in the east probably originate from the nesting population in Quebec and Labrador.

### Acknowledgments

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## *Photo Quiz*

by  
Bob Curry



The bird in the photo is clearly a long-legged wader, a member of the heron family (Ardeidae) possessing the requisite long legs, comparatively slim build and chisel-shaped bill. Several herons are dark-plumaged, but only immature night-herons have a white-spotted dark plumage. American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) is dark but the neck is streaked, not spotted, the dorsal surface is essentially plain and unmarked, and the bill is much more dagger-like. Juvenile Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*) is dark with some spotting on the upper wing coverts but, again, is streaked on the neck and breast, has a much more rapier-like bill, and would not appear nearly as long-legged as this bird.

The identification problem becomes, then, which night-heron? The bird is a juvenile, as older birds would be plain-backed with the beginning of the adult head pattern. Generally, in bird identification one should pay close attention to shape and proportions. In this case, the bird can clearly be identified using these features alone. Earlier guides and notes overemphasized plumage differences, and I know of incidents in which observers struggled with the shape, size and extent of spotting in an attempt to find the rare (in Ontario) Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*), and indeed misidentified juvenile Black-crowned (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), overlooking significant and diagnostic structural differences.

Our bird is a **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**. Black-crowned Night-Heron is a relatively chunky heron with a thick, short neck. The photo bird is quite slender with a thin, but not serpentine, neck and long legs. Atop the slender neck is an oddly large

“blocky” head, and a bill which is very thick at the base (almost as deep as the head itself). In Black-crowned, the head does not seem disproportionately large, and the bill is not so deep at the base. The bill tapers only slightly and forms a rounded or blunt tip, whereas Black-crowned tapers to a point. Virtually every illustration I’ve seen of Yellow-crowned makes the bill tip too pointed. In body proportions and particularly in leg length, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron is more akin to the other herons than Black-crowned. Especially the tibia, above the “knee-joint”, but also the tarsi below the joints are longer. This is the cause of the feet and a section of legs extending beyond the tail in flight, but the different proportions are also evident to the trained eye on a standing night-heron.

There are, nonetheless, differences in the size, shape and extent of white spotting. Black-crowned has more extensive, elongated, tear-shaped white spots or blotches, particularly on the upper wing coverts but also on the back. The spots on Yellow-crowned are smaller, more rounded and squared-off on the bottom. The net effect is that Black-crowned is more blotched, and Yellow-crowned is more spotted. However, at the risk of redundancy, do not rely too heavily on spotting to distinguish these two.

Differences in soft parts colour in the two species are interesting, especially in this photo. There is a tendency for juvenile Yellow-crowned to have brighter yellow legs, but this is a tendency only; furthermore, the legs are often obscured by mud. Any such difference would, of course, not show in a black and white photo. The bill of Black-crowned is mostly greenish-yellow with a dark tip, culmen ridge and cutting edge. On a black and white

photo, this two-toned pattern would be clearly visible. Yellow-crowned has an almost entirely black bill, with just a very restricted light area at the base of the lower mandible. Why then does the bird in the photo appear to have a uniformly light bill with perhaps some duskiess on the lower mandible? I attribute this to an artifact of the photo and light conditions. The uniformity of shade still eliminates Black-crowned. I'm reminded of a colour print of two adult Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) photographed in Algonquin Park some years ago and submitted to the Ontario

Bird Records Committee. In the field, apparently, and in the photo, these birds had what appeared to be gleaming white bills. In all regards these birds were Common Loons. The point is that, particularly in photos, one needs to be wary of colours and shapes. Look at size, shape, and proportions first and you'll determine that this is a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, notwithstanding the apparent light bill.

This juvenal Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was photographed by Jim Flynn at Marentette Beach, Essex County, on 11 October 1994.

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