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Cover Illustration: Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)
by *Barry Kent MacKay*

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Letters

Jaeger Quiz

I enjoyed Bob Curry's photo quiz analysis of the two Pomarine Jaegers (*Ontario Birds* 19: 139–143), and especially liked the football analogy, which was a refreshing departure from the staid treatment of jaegers found in most of the literature.

Photographs of jaegers inevitably provoke differing viewpoints regarding species or age determination, with well known ambiguity of physical characters being a problem, compounded by the difficulty of interpreting them in the one dimensional product of a camera. Thus, I am offering a different opinion on the age of the Pomarine in Figure 2. It would appear to be a dark morph adult (definitive alternate) with no apparent sign of prebasic molt, rather than a juvenile, as stated.

Several features are important in this regard. The smooth, very dark head and underparts, including the underwing coverts, breast, belly and ventral region, differ from a typical juvenile, which is not so solidly dark, and also has contrasting light and dark barring on the underwing and undertail coverts. There does not appear to be any suggestion of a whitish patch at the base of the greater underprimary coverts. This patch is characteristic of most juveniles but is not found on adults. The broad, projecting central rectrices give the impression of having the tips broken off. This condition is well known in some late summer adults. The literature indicates consistently that there is only a minuscule projection of the central rectrices in juveniles, with even, round tips. The length and irregular look to the tips of the central rectrices of this bird would seem to preclude a juvenile.

Rather than detracting from Bob's instructive work, I hope that my comments will stimulate some useful thought and discussion on the photographs.

Kevin McLaughlin, 30 Bingham Road, Hamilton, Ontario L8H 1N4

Bob Curry comments:

It is difficult to argue with Kevin McLaughlin's careful comments on Pomarine 2. Nevertheless, let me try! My sense of this photo is that the bird was back lit and consequently the photo is underexposed. This, I felt, accounted for the apparent lack of patterning and barring on the underparts. Many times, I've seen juvenile Pomarines in life which appeared, under the conditions, to be all dark until the lighting changed. I do detect light bases to the underprimary coverts which, again, could be faint on account of the lighting and photograph. That said, the length of the central rectrices gave me trouble at the time of analysis for the Photo Quiz. These feathers are the best argument for aging as an adult. As Kevin states, identification of birds in photographs is fraught with difficulty, but he may well be correct in his analysis.

Articles

European Herring Gull in Ontario

Michel Gosselin and Ron Pittaway

Introduction

An unidentified first year gull in juvenal/first basic plumage was collected by the National Museum of Natural Sciences (now Canadian Museum of Nature) in Ottawa, Ontario, on 11 November 1974. When Pierre Devillers, of the Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles (Brussels), visited Ottawa in 1986, he identified the bird as a Herring Gull of the European subspecies group *Larus argentatus argentatus/argenteus* (Pierre Devillers, pers. comm.). He thought it was more similar to nominate *argentatus*, but he could not eliminate *argenteus* without access to comparative skins. His assessment, however, is consistent with the information in Golley and Elliott (1993). This specimen is the first record of a European Herring Gull in Ontario and the first specimen for Canada. It is specimen number CMN 62001 in the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa. It was determined to be a female through dissection by Richard Poulin of the Museum. Measurements of the specimen are: wing chord 419 mm, exposed culmen 49 mm, tarsus 61.5 mm. Figures 1 and 2 show dorsal and ventral views of the European Herring Gull (in the middle) compared with two American Herring Gulls (*L. a. smithsonianus*).

Discussion

Comparing same age and plumage, the European Herring Gull from Ottawa is distinguished from American Herring Gulls by the combination of whiter and less vermiculated bases to its tail feathers (creating a more defined subterminal tail band), whiter upper tail coverts and rump, coarser and sparser dark markings on the undertail coverts, paler and more checkered upperparts (including wing coverts and tertials), and a more streaked breast (Grant 1986, Dubois 1997). It differs from the Pontic/Yellow-legged Gull complex (*L. cachinnans/michahellis/atlantis*), and from the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*), by its heavily marked greater secondary coverts, more notched tertial edges, and paler inner primaries (Grant 1986, Garner and Quinn 1997). It is distinguished from the Vega Herring Gull (*L. a. vegae*) of Siberia and western Alaska mainly by its lighter underparts in direct specimen comparison (Pierre Yésou, pers. comm.).

Figure 1. Dorsal view: (left) large female *Larus argentatus smithsonianus* from Ottawa, 6 November 1974, CMN 61999; (middle) female *L. a. argentatus/argenteus* from Ottawa, 11 November 1974, CMN 62001; (right) small female *L. a. smithsonianus* from Ottawa in mid-October 1982, CMN 84198. Photo by *Michel Gosselin*.

Figure 2. Ventral view: (left) large female *Larus argentatus smithsonianus* from Ottawa, 6 November 1974, CMN 61999; (middle) female *L. a. argentatus/argenteus* from Ottawa, 11 November 1974, CMN 62001; (right) small female *L. a. smithsonianus* from Ottawa in mid-October 1982, CMN 84198. Photo by *Michel Gosselin*.

Conclusion

European Herring Gulls of the nominate subspecies *argentatus* breed in Denmark and Scandinavia east to Kola peninsula, and the subspecies *argenteus* breeds in Iceland, the British Isles, and the North Sea coast from France to West Germany (Cramp 1983). In all likelihood, birds nesting in Greenland also belong to one of these two subspecies (Boertmann 1994). European Herring Gulls have been reported several times and photographed in Newfoundland (Mactavish 1995, 2000), and once in Nova Scotia (Ian McLaren, pers. comm.). A few may occur regularly in Ontario. Over the last 10 years, occasional individuals showing the characters (slightly darker mantle and reduced black in wingtips) of adult northern European Herring Gulls of nominate *argentatus* have been seen on the Niagara River of Ontario and New York State (Ron Pittaway, pers. obs.). Here we report the first record of a European Herring Gull for Ontario and the first specimen for Canada.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Pierre Devillers for identifying the European Herring Gull specimen from Ontario. We thank Jean Iron, Bruce Mactavish, Ian McLaren, Richard Poulin, Ron Tozer and Pierre Yésou for helpful comments.

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Of Blue Jays and Mimicry

Ross D. James

Most of us are aware that Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) are capable of giving imitations of hawk calls. Few of us, however, may actually have heard a jay doing so, for in my experience, it is only a relatively few jays that do the imitations. Some people may have heard an imitation, but been unaware of what they were hearing. Some of the imitations are remarkably good, and if heard only, without seeing the caller, a listener may consider that it was given by the appropriate species.

In a variety of papers relating to this behaviour in wild birds, the species mimicked include Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) (Nicholson 1936, Bent 1946, James 1988), Red-tailed Hawk (*B. jamaicensis*) (Baird et al. 1875, Bent 1946), Broad-winged Hawk (*B. platypterus*) (James 1988, Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999), Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999), Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) (Atkins 1989, Hailman 1990), and American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) (Baird et al. 1875, Chapman 1904). Two species other than hawks also have been mimicked by wild Blue Jays, the Eastern Screech-Owl (*Otus asio*) (Sutton 1977, Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999), and Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*) (Phillips 1993). To this list I will add another species, and present some further observations of mimicry in Blue Jays that suggest a new interpretation of why the jays mimic.

Observations

From 23 to 25 August 2000, I visited a cottage on southern Georgian Bay (north of Wasaga Beach). The first afternoon there, I quickly saw and heard Blue Jays in the pine trees about the cottages. There were single jays, or a few well-spaced birds, possibly family members, foraging through the trees. Few other species were about and none were as noisy as the jays. It was easy to tell what was doing the calling. On the deck in the late afternoon, I was soon treated to the sound of a jay calling loudly in what was a very uncharacteristic way. I expected a hawk call, but could not identify it as such. There did not seem much chance of any hawk being resident here among the several rows of cottages extensively spread along the shores in this area.

Finally, after hearing several more calls, it became clear to me that it was not what I expected at all, but an imitation of the penetrating "scream" of a Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*). There were gulls screaming from time to time in the background along the shores of the bay. The cottage, however, was

in the third row back from the beach, and all lots were more or less well treed. It was only beyond the cottages and over the sand dune back of the beach before it became open enough for the gulls. There were no gulls near the jays when they were calling like a gull. The gull calls of the jay were not frequent, but a few were rather randomly given among the more usual ringing jay calls expected at this time of year. In other words, the calls were not associated with any behaviour other than foraging, as far as I could see. The jay doing the gull call was apparently resident here at this time, and I heard at least one such call on the three days I was there, without spending a great deal of time where I could have heard it.

The second observations of Blue Jay mimicry that are of relevance here occurred near my home. I live in the rolling rural farmland near Sunderland, Ontario, with plenty of wooded areas along the Beaver River, and in fence rows. For a couple of years now, I have been aware of a jay (presumably only one) that regularly imitates the scream of a Red-tailed Hawk (also an inhabitant of the area). The imitation is a good one, and I have to consider where it is coming from before deciding which species is actually calling. The jay would reveal itself soon by giving a typical jay call after initially giving one or several hawk calls. But, the pertinent point in relating this is that I can hear the Blue Jay much more frequently imitating a hawk than I ever hear the real hawk. And, more importantly, the jay imitates the hawk at any season of the year.

The hawk imitation by the jay is most frequently heard in late summer or autumn, when the jays are more vocal anyway. And I have heard it when there is snow on the ground (although the jays seem to retreat to town to the bird feeders in most of the winter). I think I have heard it probably at least once a month (sometimes several times a month) over the past couple of years. The calling bird may be alone (or probably within hearing of another jay, or jays), or may be accompanied by one or more other birds. There is never any apparent conflict or excitement of any sort. The jay just uses it as if it were any other jay call to let the world know it is there.

Hypotheses

Numerous explanations have been offered to try to explain the functional significance of the mimicry of hawks by Blue Jays (Goodwin 1976, Hailman 1990, Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). Among the possibilities put forward are:

1) Enhanced sexual selection during pairing. Certainly, enlarged song repertoires are known to enhance the chances of successful pairing (Howard 1974, Krebs et al. 1978). However, if this were the reason, why would they call in autumn (more than spring), or even in win-

ter? And why imitate only hawks instead of any species, as the mimids do?

2) Mate identification within pairs. While individual recognition is important, not only to pairs, but also among neighbours, why call at seasons when birds are not closely paired, and often flocked? And again, why only hawks?

3) Enhanced territorial defence during the mating season. But, the defence of consistent or extensive territorial boundaries is nonexistent as far as other Blue Jays are concerned (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). Blue Jays do keep away neighbouring pairs, but neighbours are the very ones likely to be well aware that it is only mimicry anyway. And why would they call more outside the breeding season?

4) Used in mobbing or enhancing threats to predators approaching nests. While calling like a hawk might enhance the chances of discouraging other birds from coming near a nest, why bother using these calls in late summer, autumn, and winter? And the hawks most frequently mimicked are buteos, not particularly dangerous to other birds in woodlands. In none of the many instances I have witnessed has there been any evidence of mobbing.

5) To alert other individuals (presumably jays) to the near presence of a raptor. Again, in the numerous instances I have witnessed, there has never been a hawk anywhere near, and there were not any gulls close to the jays at Wasaga. And I imagine the birds are well able to communicate danger by other calls.

6) To indicate where a hawk was previously. Why bother? Why would there be any threat if it was gone? And hawks could be anywhere, so they would have to use them all over the place. Also, it would be more beneficial to imitate an accipiter than a buteo or a Ring-billed Gull.

7) To deceive other species into believing a raptor is present. There seems little reason to do so at most any time of year other than the breeding season. I do not have a bird feeder from which jays might be trying to chase other species and jays probably are well able to chase off most other species that might compete for food anyway.

8) Blue Jays simply incorporate environmental sounds into their repertoire. While Blue Jays are certainly capable of imitating other things (captive birds have imitated cats, whistles, words, and other birds; see Ramsey 1972, Terres 1980), why would they not incorporate the songs of many birds other than raptors in the wild? Steller's Jays (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) incorporate many other animal sounds (Greene et al. 1998).

9) Hawk calls are native to the repertoire of jays. Why would the calls of hawks be native to jays any more than the calls of some other species? If hawk calls were native to jays, why would all jays not be using these calls all the time? I have seen relatively few jays using hawk calls. And are we also to suggest that Fish Crow calls, or Screech-Owl, or Ring-billed Gull calls are also native to Jays?

In the end, all we have are possible uses of hawk calls, that might apply some of the time, and then apparently apply only with a few individuals. There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest some of the above uses may have happened at some place to some birds. But, despite more than a century of observations, nobody has a good explanation that would provide any real functional significance to Blue Jays imitating raptors.

Discussion

Most passerine birds learn at least part of their vocal repertoire, often by imitating the sounds of neighbouring birds (Kroodsma 1982). Learning is certainly a component of the development of Blue Jay calling (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). Such learning typically takes place during the first few weeks or months of life, and once incorporated into a vocal repertoire, a call is likely to remain through the life of the bird (Marler and Mundinger 1971, Nottebohm 1975, Marler and Peters 1981).

Early in life, a bird is subject to the greatest probability of being killed by a predator. I suggested before (James 1988) that perhaps the raptor calls were learned at a time of stress or high excitement when the birds were learning their calls. Such excitement could be caused by a raptor near a nest or a recently fledged jay, and could provide a model from which to learn. This would be consistent with their learning only the calls of potential predators, primarily hawks, but also gulls, owls, and crows. Several authors have noted that Blue Jays often appear to give hawk imitations at times of high excitement (Goodwin 1976, Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). This suggests that they may be given in a situation offering a stimulus similar to that in which the calls were learned. I have seen very little excitement evident in any of the incidents I have witnessed, but at least if given at such times, it is consistent with the stimulus situation that would promote the learning only of the calls of predators.

I would suggest then, that in most instances, there is probably no particular functional significance to the mimicry of hawk calls by Blue Jays. These calls are given in a whole variety of situations that have suggested many functions, none of which are supported by any compelling evidence. This might not preclude an individual jay from learning to use a hawk call in a functional way to its advantage. But, the inci-

dence of such functional use of a predator call seems very rare. Overall, it seems more likely that the calls are learned inadvertently by a few birds, enhanced perhaps by the presence of a calling predator at a critical time in the life of the jay; something that is likely to be remembered in more ways than one.

Young birds are usually constrained in what they learn by inherited "sensory templates" that allow them to select only certain songs from a rich sound environment of many bird species (Marler and Peters 1982). Why Blue Jays should so easily be able to pick up a fairly wide variety of types of predator calls is unknown. However, Blue Jays are very vocal, using many variations of typical calls, with many calls used in multiple contexts, such that functions of any one of them are difficult to identify (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). Some of the hawk imitations are considered to be variations of their usual "jeer" call (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). Variations on existing calls, and a fairly wide facility to improvise, may provide jays with the ability to learn novel sounds especially with a strong stimulus. Then, once the calls are incorporated into the repertoire, they become just a part of their calling. Hawk (owl or gull) imitations would serve the same function as typical "jay" or "jeer" calls that are used in many contexts and situations. While the "jeer" call may be used in mobbing, it also is apparently used just for contact, and often by lone jays not obviously interacting with other jays or engaged in any apparent social behaviour (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999).

What I find intriguing is that we may be able to test the possibility that predator imitations have no particular functional significance for Blue Jays. By providing a strong novel stimulus to young Blue Jays, with recorded calls and/or mounted predators, at an appropriate song learning age, we can see what are the results among those birds as they mature. The major difficulty may be finding the dispersed young again, dispersal being something we apparently know nothing about.

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Consumption of Dead Bald-faced Hornets by Blue Jays in Winter

Doug Tozer

On 15 December 2000, at 1430h, within a poplar-pine mixed forest near Dwight, *Muskoka* (45° 19' N, 78° 58' W), I observed a Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) feeding on the contents of a Bald-faced Hornet (*Dolichovespula maculata*) nest for a duration of about 15 minutes. The jay hung upside down on the side of the nest, and retrieved dead hornets from inside by inserting its head into a hole in the bottom of the nest. At times, the bird's head and most of its shoulders disappeared inside the approximately 15 cm diameter hole, which was the entrance used during the summer by the hornets that had been enlarged by the jay (Figure 1). The jay also hovered in midair below the hornet nest, where it pulled hornets from within through the hole. On three occasions, it was possible to identify what the jay was consuming, as it flew to a nearby branch to swallow its food: twice, adult hornets, and once, a whitish, plump object that was likely a larva. Later, on 11 March 2001, at 1330h, two Blue Jays were observed feeding at the same hornet nest in a similar manner to the December observation described above, suggesting that the hornet nest may have been a source of food for Blue Jays throughout the winter.

The hornet nest was of typical construction for Bald-faced Hornets, consisting of a large, globular structure composed of paper-like material (Borror et al. 1989), suspended below the lowest branch of a large Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*). The hornet nest was 2.54 m (measured to the base of the nest) above the ground, and 2.13 m above the snow surface (measured on 15 December 2000), and 2.74 m from the main trunk of the tree in which it hung. It measured 21.6 cm at its widest point, and 27.9 cm at its greatest height. Observations were made using binoculars from within a nearby building, located approximately 40 m away. The weather conditions were overcast and –4°C on 15 December 2000 and clear and warm (temperature not recorded) on 11 March 2001.

Discussion

The Bald-faced Hornet is a member of the Hymenoptera (an order of insects containing the sawflies, parasitic wasps, ants, wasps, and bees) (Borror et al. 1989), has a distinctive black and pale yellow pattern on its body (Borror and White 1970), and is renowned for its ferocious disposition while defending

its large, exposed paper nests (Macnamara 1918). It has three castes: queens (fertile females), workers (infertile daughters of queens), and drones (males) (Borror et al. 1989). Queens overwinter some distance away from the summer nest, hibernating in protected places such as cracks or crevices in tree trunks (Macnamara 1918). Workers and drones, along with the last larvae and pupae of the summer, die inside the nest in autumn with the onset of cold temperatures (Macnamara 1918), which is why there were dead adult and larval hornets for the Blue Jays to consume within the nest I observed. Queens emerge from hibernacula in spring and build new nests in which they lay eggs fertilized with sperm from matings that took place the previous fall (Borror and White 1970, Borror et al. 1989). Workers hatch from these eggs, and new colonies are formed (Macnamara 1918).

Blue Jays belong to the family Corvidae, its members being well-known for their opportunistic and often clever feeding habits (Savage 1995). Blue Jays regularly eat "arthropods, acorns and other nuts, soft fruits, seeds, and small vertebrates" (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). Their diet consists mostly of vegetable matter, but they are known to prey on diverse vertebrate prey such as bird eggs and young, fishes, frogs, mice, and on one occasion even a snake (Langevin and Dauphin 1996). This species sometimes takes large, fly-

Figure 1: Bald-faced Hornet nest from below, showing entrance that has been enlarged by foraging Blue Jays, near Dwight, *Muskoka*, December 2000. Photo by *Doug Tozer*.

ing insects such as dragonflies and cicadas on the wing, hawking them flycatcher-like in midair and manipulating them at a perch prior to consumption (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999).

Reports in the literature of Blue Jay consumption of Hymenoptera are scant. However, Blue Jays have been reported to capture and kill adult wasps around active nests during warm months, but apparently these birds did not consume their prey, and instead discarded the wasps without eating them (Tarvin and Woolfenden 1999). In contrast, Shepard (1979) observed a Blue Jay in June in central Oklahoma, USA, that appeared to capture and consume adult *Polistes* (a genus of wasps within the paper wasp subfamily that is closely related to yellow jackets and hornets), which it caught on the wing near a wasp nest under the eave of a building and consumed at a nearby perch. The same bird was also reported eventually to break the small wasp nest free from its attachment, carry it to a nearby perch, and consume the larvae from within while holding the nest in its foot (Shepard 1979). The Blue Jay described by Shepard (1979) "would hang over, peering intently up under the eaves. Several times it dropped from the trough, flew up under the eaves, and hovered there briefly", which is quite similar to the manner in which the Blue Jays described in this note foraged at the Dwight hornet nest. It is also interesting to note that *Polistes*

wasps, the type observed by Shepard (1979), characteristically build quite small nests with no outer covering (Borror and White 1970). In contrast, Bald-faced Hornets build much larger, covered nests, up to 30 cm in diameter (Borror et al. 1989), that presumably require more energy in order for a bird the size of a Blue Jay to gain access. In fact, closer examination of the Dwight hornet nest during April 2001 revealed uneaten adult and larval hornets in the upper third of the nest, which the Blue Jays either could not reach, or did not bother to reach through the hole at the bottom of the nest.

This note reports on yet another example of the adaptable foraging behaviour of Blue Jays. A review of the literature failed to turn up any references to consumption of dead adult and larval hornets by this species. However, Blue Jays have been reported to consume live individuals of *Polistes* during summer (Shepard 1979). This note represents the first documentation of consumption of dead Bald-faced Hornets from a large nest during winter.

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Notes

Cedar Waxwings Eating Tussock Moth Females in Early Winter

Bill Crins

On 26 December 2000, while on the Hamilton Christmas Bird Count in my territory southeast of Waterdown, between Mountain Brow Road and the rim of the Niagara Escarpment, I encountered numerous Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). They are present here in good numbers almost every year, feeding on the fruits of Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*). However, one group of about 25 waxwings was found to be gleaning something from the bark of mature Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*) trees in an area of more mature forest adjacent to the thickets of buckthorn.

Initially, I could not see what the birds were gleaning. Since this group of waxwings persistently fed in this way, in spite of the nearby source of berries and the presence of other waxwings, I examined the bark closely, and discovered that there were large numbers of plump, hairy, pale brownish grey, wingless female moths (believed to be White-marked Tussock Moths, *Orgyia leucostigma*) in the fissures of the bark, apparently frozen in place. The waxwings were taking advantage of these frozen moths, hovering in front of, or perching on, the bark or small twigs beside the trunks to pick out the moths. About an hour later, after covering this area by way of a looping route, I returned to the location where the waxwings had been gleaning the moths, and the birds were still present, feeding in the same way. It appeared that this group of

waxwings had capitalized on a food source that the other waxwings and other species in the area had not.

Cedar Waxwings are known to glean and fly-catch for insects during the summer. They have been known to inspect and glean bark for insects, but usually focus on aerial and foliage-borne insects (Tyler 1950, Witmer 1996, Witmer et al. 1997). Males bring insect food to newly hatched young for the first three days of life, but then switch to bringing fruit (Putnam 1949). However, generally, this behaviour of feeding on insects by gleaning or fly-catching is described as "beginning abruptly in May and declining steadily through Sep[tember]" (Witmer et al. 1997). Although fruit constitutes a huge proportion of the food eaten by waxwings (ca. 85 percent; McAtee 1926), a rather large variety of insects has been reported as food, including various Homoptera, Lepidoptera, Hymenoptera, Diptera, Odonata, Neuroptera, and Coleoptera (particularly in the families Scarabaeidae and Chrysomelidae) (McAtee 1926, Witmer 1996, Witmer et al. 1997). They also are reported to glean insects from spider webs (Burtt et al. 1976).

Pittaway (1990) reported on Bohemian Waxwings (*B. garrulus*) feeding on an unusual food source when berries were available, but in that case, the food source was White Elm (*Ulmus americana*) buds, not insects. Regardless of food type (berries or insects), Cedar Waxwings tend to select abundant foods, and this appears to be consistent with the current observation (the tussock moth females, although inconspicuous to the human eye, were found to be common on the bark of the oaks upon close inspection). Also, this appears to be the first report of Cedar Waxwings gleaning insect food during the winter in a cold climate.

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Feeding Behaviour of Bohemian Waxwings

David H. Elder

Each fall and winter, varying numbers of Bohemian Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*) show up in Atikokan in northwestern Ontario. The birds feed on a variety of wild and ornamental fruits and berries, such as American Mountain Ash (*Sorbus americana*), Showy Mountain Ash (*S. decora*), Highbush Cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*) and Flowering Crab (*Malus* sp.). The limiting factor of the food is the amount produced each year. Some years there is an abundant crop and in other years, few fruits and berries are available. In addition, migrating American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*), which pass through in late October, usually before the waxwings arrive, can severely deplete the volume of fruit. The Bohemian Waxwings will frequently feed consistently on a certain tree or bush until it is stripped of fruit. Often, they perch as a flock in a nearby tree and fly, a few at a time, to the fruit-bearing tree, eat a few fruits and return to the rest of the flock. There is a constant coming and going and only rarely are all the birds in the flock feeding at once.

Eventually, the food resources are used up and the flocks of waxwings usually disappear, not to be seen until the following winter. Some Bohemian Waxwings do stay and turn to a different food source – the small, round, reddish buds of Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) and Silver Maple (*A. saccharinum*). There are many of the maples along the streets of Atikokan. The waxwings, a few at a time, feed on the buds by first flying into the maples, perching on the outer twigs and then reaching out to carefully nip off several buds before returning to the flock. The flocks do not seem to return to a particular tree repeatedly, perhaps because the trees and buds are in very good supply.

Discussion

Why do the waxwings eat the maple buds? Perhaps the small reddish buds attract their attention because they resemble the red-coloured fruits and berries they usually eat. Maple buds would seem to be an acceptable food source for Bohemian Waxwings in the absence of other fruits.

Bent (1950) listed the "buds of poplars" (*Populus*) among the foods of these waxwings. Cramp (1988) noted the buds of several tree species in the diet of Bohemian Waxwings in Europe. Pittaway (1990) reported Bohemian Waxwings eating the buds of White

Elm (*Ulmus americana*) in an area that had abundant buckthorn (*Rhamnus*) berries, upon which they fed regularly.

It has been theorized that even when fruits and berries are readily available, Bohemian Waxwings may feed on tree buds "for their protein content as a lack of protein in fruit seems to be the most important limitation of a diet which is high in fruit" (Pittaway 1990).

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In Memoriam

George A. Scott (1916–2001)

Jim Richards and Ron Tozer

George Alton Scott was born in Adolphustown, Lennox and Addington County, Ontario, on 31 May 1916. He passed away at Oshawa on 28 April 2001, at the age of 84 (just one month short of his 85th birthday). George lived and birded in Oshawa for more than half a century, beginning in 1944. During this time, he recorded in meticulous detail the species he observed, the number of individuals, dates and locations, and behaviour. His observations are a major contribution to the documented knowledge of the birds of Durham Region (see Speirs 1973–1979, Tozer and Richards 1974).

We know relatively little about George Scott before he moved to Oshawa. He was a very quiet, private man, bordering on reclusive, and little given to speaking about himself — even among those of us who frequently birded with him. However, George once opened up briefly to Dennis Barry concerning his early years (Carney 2002). His father died when George was four years old, and his mother later moved to Toronto, leaving George at Adolphustown with a woman who needed a boy to help around her farm. George remained on the farm into his late teens, and never went to high school. It was apparently during these years on the farm that George's interest in nature, and particularly birds, was kindled.

As a teenager during the Depression, George travelled northward in Ontario to work on the railway and in the mines, "jumping on freight trains to get from place to place" (Carney 2002). His knowledge and skill in bird identification continued to develop in this period of his life. It was during his time in northern Ontario that he observed a Northern Wheatear along the rail line at Ferland, north of Lake Nipigon, on 6 June 1941, which he later reported to Jim Baillie at the Royal Ontario Museum (Barlow 1966). This was only the fifth Ontario record of this species, and the first in spring, according to Barlow (1966).

By 1944, George had settled in Oshawa. He operated his own sign painting business, which made use of his considerable artistic talent. And, perhaps most importantly, it allowed George to work outdoors and be his own boss. He could take off to see some rare bird whenever

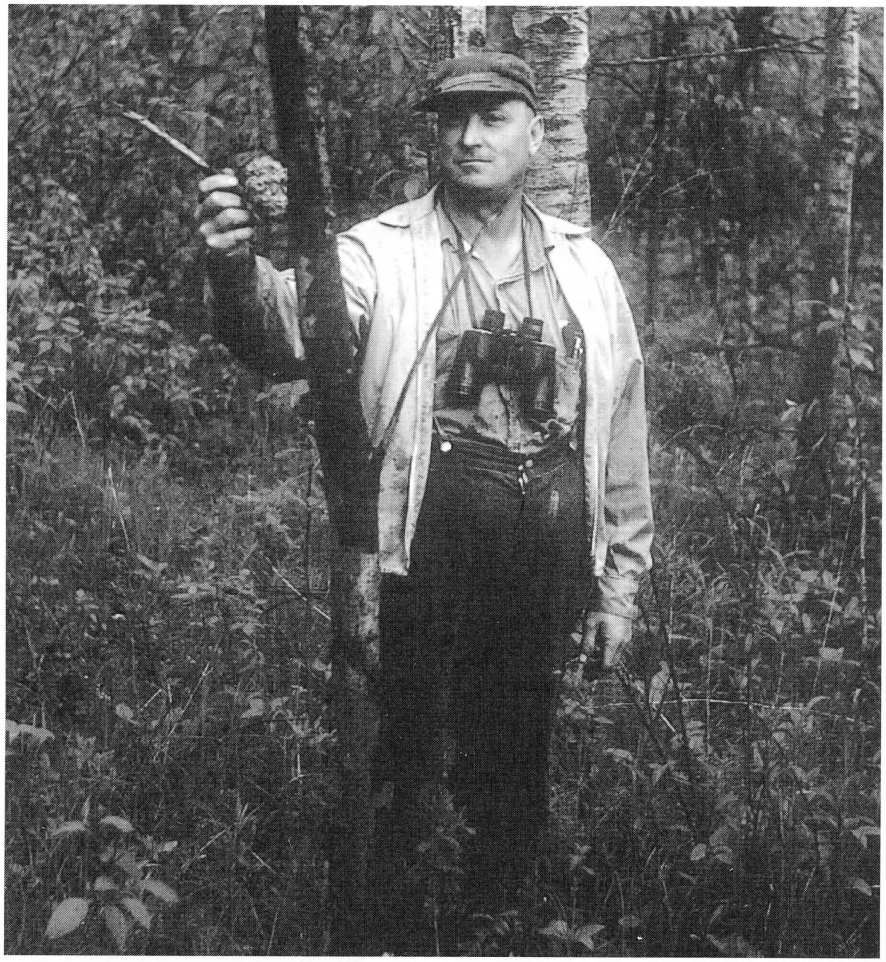

Figure 1: George Scott with a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher nest in Ghost Road Woods, Oshawa, on 28 May 1965. Photo by *Jim Richards*.

he wanted, and he often did. George lived alone his entire adult life, and nature was his sole passion. He travelled extensively in North America in pursuit of birds, and also undertook birding trips to more remote locations, including the arctic, Papua New Guinea, Madagascar and Patagonia (Carney 2002).

However, George Scott was primarily a "locality birder". From 1944 to the early 1990s, he birded the same route nearly every week, visiting sites such as Beaton's Point, Second Marsh, Ghost Road Woods, Oshawa Harbour, Harbour Road Woods, Oshawa Creek Woods (at Thomas Street and Ritson Road),

Bonnibrae Point, and Pumphouse Marsh. His itinerary was so repetitive that we could usually locate his familiar blue Volkswagen van just by knowing where he would be at a given time of day during the 1960s. His detailed notes of these weekly birding trips provide an incredibly valuable chronicle of bird numbers and species during five decades at one location, with fairly standardized birding effort and observational skills. Today, we can trace changes in bird numbers and diversity through his unique records. Such long term databases are extremely rare.

He observed a long list of rare and unusual species during his half century of birding in the Oshawa area, including Pacific Loon, Western Grebe, Northern Gannet, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, King Rail, Ruff, Franklin's Gull, Ivory Gull, Dovekie, Thick-billed Murre, Razorbill, Dickcissel and nesting Brewer's Blackbirds. On 1 June 1962, George found three Little Gull nests with eggs in Oshawa Second Marsh, documenting the first breeding record for the species in North America. He later published a note about this unprecedented occurrence in *The Auk* (Scott 1963).

George was a birding mentor for several young people in the Oshawa area over the years, including Dennis Barry, Paul Bridges, Charles Christy, James Kamstra, Jim Mountjoy, Bill Neal, Todd Norris, Glenn Owen, Mark Saunders, John Theberge, and the authors. He provided expertise and inspiration, showing us the value of making detailed notes in the field, and later recording these observations in our journals. His vital confirmation of the identifications made by less experienced observers who accompanied him was extremely helpful in developing their birding skills. Although extremely shy and quiet by nature, George was often eager to have birding companions and generous in his attempts to help others see the many rare birds he found.

George was a founding member of the Oshawa Naturalists' Club in 1955 (which became the Durham Region Field Naturalists in 1976). His line drawings adorned the

newsletter of the Oshawa Naturalists' Club for many years, and later that of the Pickering Naturalists, as well. He had a broad interest in natural history, and developed considerable botanical expertise, in particular. In 1996, he was awarded the Pickering Naturalists' Conservation Award for "his contribution to the understanding of the natural history of Thickson's Woods, Pumphouse Marsh and Oshawa Second Marsh, and most especially for his diligence in preserving and recording an extensive record of plants and animals in Durham Region" (Leadbeater 2002). George was named an Honorary Life Member of Friends of Second Marsh on 27 April 1996, in recognition of his valuable contributions to the faunal and floral knowledge of Oshawa Second Marsh. Durham Region Field Naturalists published a special memorial edition of *The Naturalist* which celebrated George's influence on his fellow naturalists and documented his many natural history accomplishments (Richards and Tozer 2002).

With the death of George Scott, another of the province's diminishing group of veteran naturalists is gone. His contributions to ornithology and botany in Durham Region, and Ontario, were significant, and will continue to be appreciated and consulted in the years to come. For those of us who were fortunate to be his friends and spend some time with George in the field, he will always be remembered fondly. We are all diminished by his passing.

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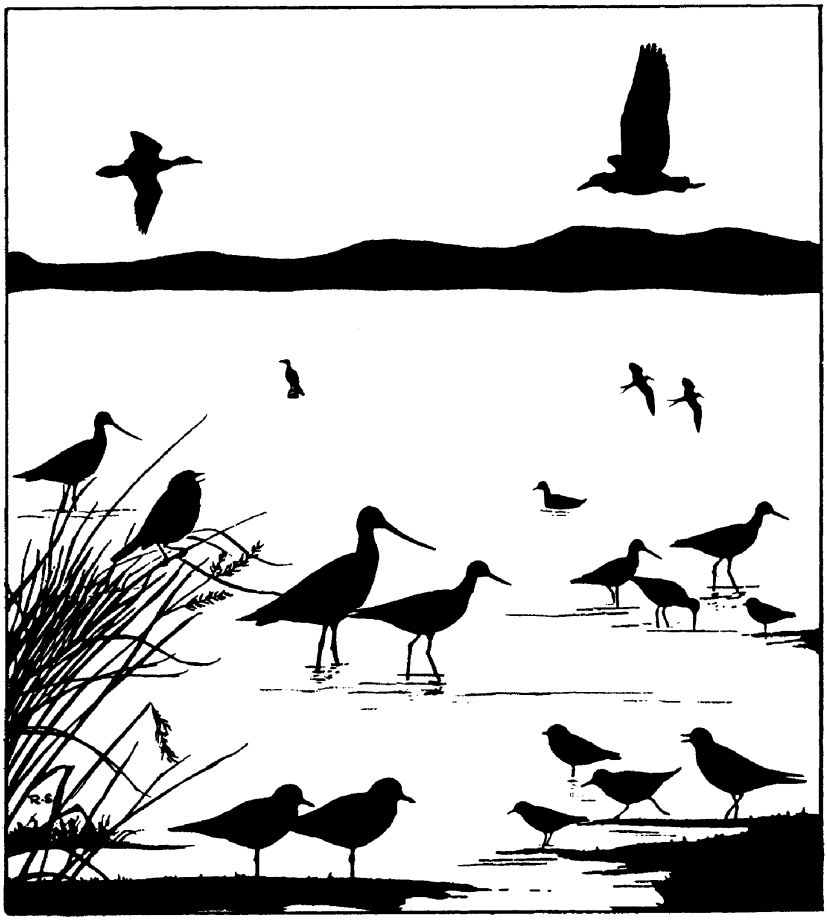
Birding in the Hamilton Area

John Olmsted and Ronald Scovell



Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide visiting birders with the information they require to make the most of a visit to the Hamilton area, and also to update our Hamilton site guide published 12 years ago in *Ontario Birds* (Olmsted and Scovell 1990).

This guide is best utilized in conjunction with two other sources of information: *Checklist of the Birds of the Hamilton Area* (Hamilton Naturalists' Club 2000), available from the Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Box 89052, Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4R5, which details the 377 species of birds that have been recorded in the area, and designates breeding species and those deemed to be rare; and *Date Guide to the Birds of the Hamilton Area* (Hamilton Naturalists' Club 1988), which gives additional information on the documentation required for each species on the checklist.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Area Covered

The *Checklist of the Birds of the Hamilton Area* states that the area covered is within a 25 mile (40.2 km) radius of Dundern Castle, Hamilton, Ontario.

When to Come

Hamilton's main claim to birding fame is the fall migration (15 August to 15 December) along the shore of the west end of Lake Ontario. Loons, grebes, geese, ducks, shorebirds, jaegers (all three species are possible), gulls, and possibly a stray from the Atlantic lure local birders out in numbers. The key weather element we hope for is a strong wind out of the east or northeast. Such a wind brings the birds within view from the shore of Van Wagners Beach.

Reporting Observations

Immediate reports for any rarity on or not on the checklist should be made to the Hamilton Birding Hotline at (905) 381-0329. Any rare species or rare date of occurrence should be documented by a detailed written description, drawing, photograph or video. Please send your details to the Hamilton Bird Records Committee, Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Box 89052, Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4R5.

WHERE TO GO

Beverly Swamp Loop (Half Day). See Map 1.

1. Concession 8

- From Clappison's Corners, which is the junction of Highways 5 and 6, proceed north on Highway 6 for 11 km to West Flamborough Concession 8 W.

- Turn left and continue west for 8.0 km to the heart of the Beverly Swamp.

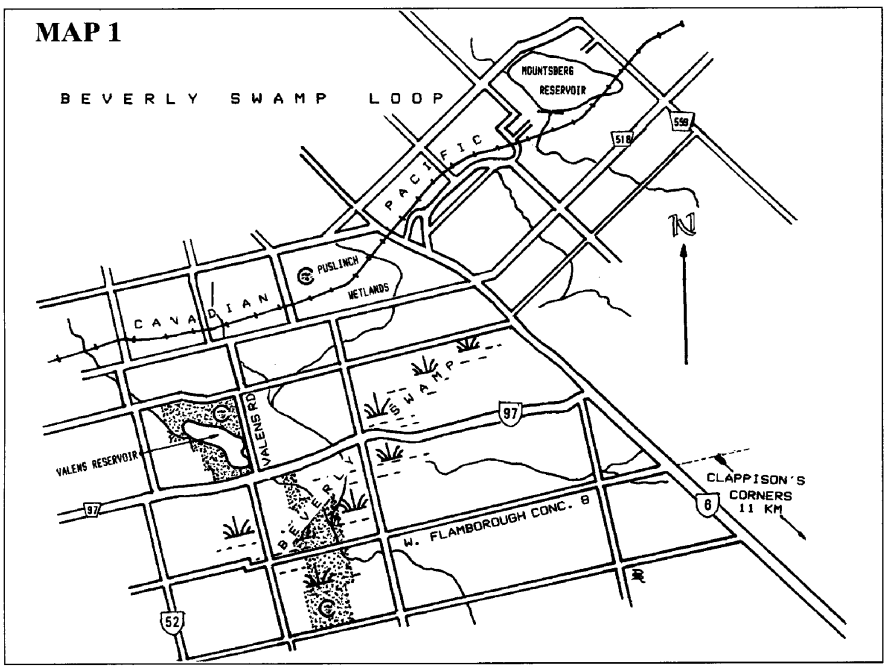
From the road, explore the areas of wet woodlands both to the north and south for nesting species such as **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Acadian, Willow** and **Alder Flycatchers; Winter Wren, Yellow-throated Vireo** and **White-throated Sparrow**.

2. Valens Reservoir

- Go west on Concession 8 to the first intersection, Valens Road, and turn right. Drive north to the next crossroads, Regional Road 97.

- Turn left onto Regional Road 97 and drive west for 1 km to the Valens Conservation Area.

Roads within the conservation area give access to vantage points on the west side of the lake, which may have 20 species of **waterfowl** in the spring. Walk through the campground area at the northwest corner of the lake for **passerines**.



- Return to the entrance of the conservation area, turn left on Regional Road 97, and drive back (east) to Valens Road.

- Turn left (north) for 0.4 km, and check the reservoir on the left and the marsh on your right.

3. Puslinch Wetlands Reserve and Crief Bog

- Continue north on Valens Road to the second crossroad.

- Turn right (east) and after 1.5 km, turn left (north again).

- Drive 0.3 km to the CPR rail line.

Park and walk along the road. Do not walk along the tracks or off the road. This is a good area for **rails**, and both **Willow** and **Alder Flycatchers**.

4. Mountsberg Reservoir

- Return south 0.3 km, then turn left (east) and travel 4.3 km to Highway 6.

- Turn right (south) on Highway 6 for 0.2 km and turn left (east) on Regional Road 518 (Campbellville Road) for 5.8 km, to Regional Road 559.

- Turn left (north) onto Regional Road 559 and continue past (at 1.2 km) the entrance to the Mountsberg Conservation Area.

- At the north end of Regional Road 559, you are forced to turn left onto a paved road that parallels Highway 401. After 1.6 km, there is a lookout tower on your left at Blue Heron Marsh.

This is a good vantage point for viewing the north end of the lake, excellent for **waterfowl** in spring and fall. If water levels are low, this area can be excellent for **shorebirds** from July through September. As well, you can bird the marshes on either side of the road for the next kilometre, until the road comes to a creek.

- 0.5 km past the creek, turn left (south) and drive on a winding road until you see a sign for the conservation area. Turn left for 0.8 km to a parking lot near the dam, a good lookout for the southern part of the lake.

- Retrace your route to the last left turn. At that junction, turn left (south), and drive for 0.5 km to the next intersection.

- Turn left and drive 1.6 km to Regional Road 518.

- Turn right (west) and drive 2.5 km to Highway 6.

- Turn left (south) and drive 16 km to the junction of Highways 5 and 6 to complete the loop.

Ancaster Loop (4 hours)

1. Sulphur Springs

- Take the Mohawk Road exit west from Highway 403. Drive west along Mohawk until it ends at Highway 2 (Wilson Street). Turn left (south) and drive 1.5 km to the first stoplight at Sulphur Springs Road.

- Turn right (west) and follow Church Street for 2 km until it dead ends. Turn right again and follow the twisty road down into the valley.

- Where the first stream crosses the road, turn right into a parking area provided by the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority. Follow the Valley Trail out of the lot to the Hermitage, a large stone ruin, then down into the Sulphur Springs Creek Valley.

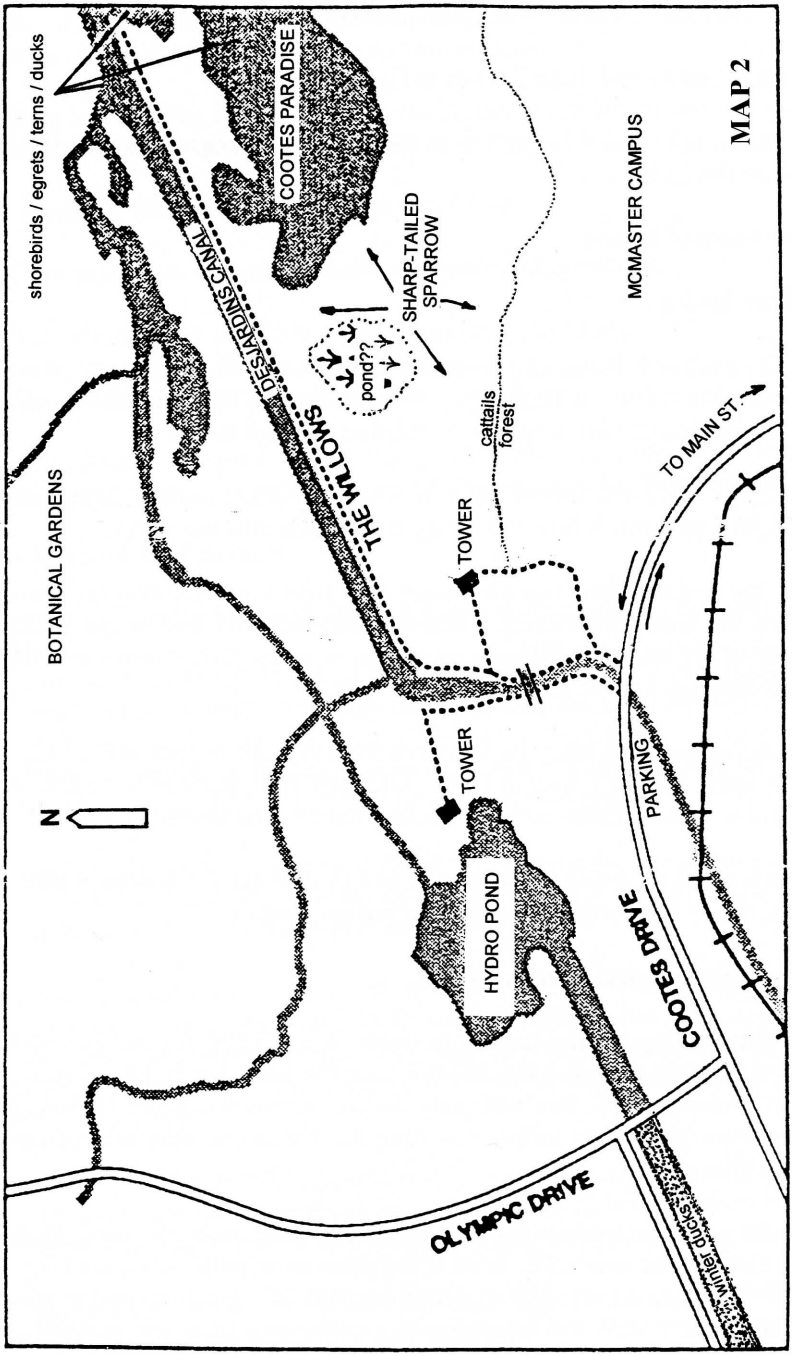
- From the Valley Trail, take the Monarch Trail that climbs out of the valley into an apple orchard. Switch to the Orchard Trail, passing the Merrick field house with its many feeders, circling back to the parking lot.

This area is good in spring for **migrants**, and in summer for **breeding birds**. In winter, this is Hamilton's best spot for **winter finches**.

2. Mineral Springs and Martin's Lane

- Leave the parking lot and turn right (west) along Sulphur Springs Road, which turns right after 0.3 km. Do not take the turn, but rather continue straight ahead (west). You will pass the headquarters of the Hamilton Conservation Authority before reaching the hamlet of Mineral Springs, at 3 km.

Park on or near the bridge to check the many feeders in the area. Walk Martin's Lane to the south. The road is not open to vehicles. After a walk of 2 km, you will reach a very sheltered area on your left, which is good in winter. A further 2 km walk will bring you to a more open area, just before the


shorebirds / egrets / terns / ducks
BOTANICAL GARDENS
DESJARDINS CANAL
COOTES PARADISE
THE MILLSWOMS
pond??
SHARP-TAILED SPARROW
cattails
forest
MCMASTER CAMPUS
TOWER
TOWER
TO MAIN ST
HYDRO POND
PARKING
COOTES DRIVE
OLYMPIC DRIVE
N
MAP 2

road becomes suitable for vehicles from the south. This is an excellent area for **Blue-winged** and **Golden-winged Warblers**. In 2001, both **Lawrence's** and **Brewster's Warblers** were reported from this location. **Hooded Warblers** nest along Martin's Lane and in the adjacent areas of the Dundas Valley.

Dundas Marsh (Full Day). See Map 2.

1. South Shore: Princess Point to University Landing

- Exit Highway 403 at York Boulevard.
- At the first traffic light, turn right (south) onto Dundurn Street.
- At the next traffic light, turn right (west) onto King Street, and travel across a large bridge (over Highway 403).
- At the next street, Macklin, turn right (north) and go for 2 km. Macklin ends at the Princess Point parking lot. Park.

Check the mudflat and the Point itself. Look west up the marsh for **waterfowl**. You are able to follow trails along the south side of Dundas Marsh all the way to McMaster University. Check out Caleb's Walk, Kingfisher Point and University Landing. Kingfisher Point provides a good look at the southern portion of the marsh. East from the parking lot is a trail that goes under the High Level Bridge to provide access to the west end of Hamilton Harbour. This is a good fall and winter location for **ducks** and **gulls.**

2. Spencer's Creek, Dundas Hydro Pond, and The Willows

- Return on Macklin Street to King Street. Turn right and go one block.
- Turn left (south) and go on Paradise Road for two blocks.
- Turn right (west) and go on Main Street (Highway 8) for 3 km, past McMaster University.
- After 3 km, turn right (north) at the traffic lights onto Cootes Drive.
- After crossing Spencer's Creek at 2 km, park on the shoulder of the road. Better still, park on the opposite side of the road by driving into Dundas on Cootes Drive and returning on the other side of this divided highway to a designated parking area (with a two hour limit).

Figure 1: Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Drawing by *Ron Scovell*.

Figure 2: Tufted Titmouse. Photo by *Barry Cherriere*.

Walk north on the west side of the creek. In 150 m, you will come to the hydro pond on your left. A bridge crosses the creek to the east bank. From here, it is a short walk to Paradise tower (no longer accessible) and a longer walk along the creek to the east, out to the centre of the marsh. At the end of "The Willows" (with low water) is a mudflat that attracts **ducks, gulls, terns** and **shorebirds**. A gap at the halfway point out to The Willows is just past an area of cattail marsh (on the south side) that is visited in early October by **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows**. It is the last area of cattail before the water, and is accessible from the end of the short tower trail (see Map 2) when water levels are low. "Walk" the area between the small open pond and the water's edge, and watch for small, "short-tailed" sparrows to flush ahead of you. During most falls, this area provides excellent opportunities for **godwits, phalaropes, American Golden-Plover, Long-billed Dowitcher, White-rumped Sandpipers,** and occasionally **Willet, American Avocet** and **Western Sandpiper.**

3. The Arboretum and the North Shore

- Continue west on Cootes Drive for 1 km to the first traffic lights, at Olympic Drive. Turn right (north) and drive 3 km to York Road.

- Turn right (east) again and travel 2 km to Old Guelph Road.

- Turn right (south) again, and travel 2 km to just past the railway bridge, and drive to the Arboretum on your right.

- Turn right (west now) yet again; the road dead-ends in a circular parking lot just past the Nature Interpretive Centre of the Royal Botanical Gardens.

In winter, the numerous fruiting trees here are good for **Cedar Waxwings** and **American Robins**. From the parking lot, take the trail to Bull's Point to view the north shore of the Dundas Marsh. A paved road running north from the circular parking lot leads to an area of fruiting trees. **Bohemian Waxwings** and **Pine Grosbeaks** have been seen there occasionally. Check the feeders and the path which runs from the Centre south and downhill to Cootes Paradise for **Tufted Titmouse**.

Figure 3: Red-necked Grebe. Photo by *Barry Cherriere.*

Figure 4: Red Phalarope on Burlington Beach pier, 21 July 1997. Photo by *Barry Cherriere.*

Hamilton Harbour

1. West End (Harbourfront Park, Valley Inn, The Cemeteries, La Salle Park)

- For birding the west end of Hamilton Harbour, it is convenient to start at the Harbourfront Park. To reach the park, exit Highway 403 at York Boulevard. Continue on York to Bay Street, roughly 4 km.

- Turn left (north) and drive 2 km.

- Cross over the major rail lines, then turn left (west) and travel to the first street, Strachan.

The park is on your right just before reaching the CNR rail lines and the shore. This is a **migrant trap** and a good viewing spot for the southwest end of the harbour.

- From Harbourfront Park, birding continues at Valley Inn. To get there, return to the High Level Bridge via York Boulevard.

- Cross the bridge, and take the second right, Valley Inn Road.

- Cross the bridge at the bottom of the hill, and turn left.

- Cross a second, smaller bridge and park 100 m ahead on the right.

To the right (east) starts the Toll Gate Trail. Below the beginning of the trail there is usually a large mudflat where there are often **shorebirds** in migration. Look for the short side path on the right which leads down to a crumbling viewing platform. Farther along the trail, under the large bridge and continuing up the valley, is a good spot for **late fall migrants**.

- When you leave the Toll Gate Trail area, drive over the small bridge, and take Valley Inn Road up the hill on your left to Woodland Cemetery.

There are several areas in the cemetery which provide viewing sites over Hamilton Bay. It is good in migration for **Tundra Swans, loons, grebes** (including **Western**), **geese,** and **ducks**. The tall trees attract **Bald Eagles** and **Ospreys**, as well as large flocks of **warblers, sparrows** and other **passerines.**

- From the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery to the east of Woodland, drive northeast along Plains Road for 2.5 km to La Salle Park Road.

- Turn right (south) and follow the road to its end at the La Salle Park dock. This is a good viewing point for **waterfowl**, especially to the east where there are several islands.

- Return to North Shore Boulevard, and turn right, through the park.

In the northeastern portion of the park, on the north side of North Shore Boulevard, there is a mature woodlot that has had interesting species such as **Tufted Titmouse, Varied Thrush, Black Vulture** and **Carolina Wren.**

2. East End (Hydro Islands, Toll Gate Ponds and Windermere Basin)

- Coming along the QEW from the direction of Toronto, take the exit for Eastport Drive, which is after the Highway 403 interchange and just before the Skyway Bridge.

- The harbour is on your right. When you first come to it, look for the Hydro Islands, three small islands that once bore hydro towers. Check for **gulls, terns, ducks** and **shorebirds**. Take care parking and viewing from the roadside along this route. Several larger islands have nesting **Common** and **Caspian Terns,** and **Double-crested Cormorants**.

- After scanning the islands, continue straight along the road and you will pass the Centre for Inland Waters. There is an accessible area for viewing the bay from the north end of CIW.

- Cross the lift bridge over the canal.

Three kilometres farther south, on your right, are ponds separated from the main harbour by low dikes. These are the Toll Gate Ponds. Adjacent to them is a landfill site. The northern pond is home to **Double-crested Cormorant** and **Black-crowned Night-Heron** colonies. Both ponds are favourites for **ducks**. The south end of the south pond often has mudflats, good for **shorebirds**. The landfill area has large **gull** and **tern** colonies. This is the site of Ontario's first **Snowy Egret** nesting. These ponds are being filled in and will eventually disappear.

- Continuing about 1 km south of the Toll Gate Ponds, you will come to the Pier 25 entrance and Windermere Basin. PLEASE NOTE: this is accessible on weekends only.

This is a favourite spot for large flocks of wintering **ducks**. There are several records of **Tufted Duck** at this location. At the south end of the basin, Red Hill Creek empties into the harbour. In winter, this is a good spot for **Pied-billed Grebe, ducks** (notably **Northern Pintail** and **Green-winged Teal**) and **herons**. Both **Great Blue Heron** and **Black-crowned Night-Heron** are possible here. This location can be viewed from Eastport Drive just before it ends at Woodward Avenue.

Lake Ontario Shoreline: Oakville to Hamilton

1. Bronte Harbour (mouth of Bronte Creek)

- Take Bronte Road south off of the QEW, down to the lake in the centre of Bronte.

Check the lake on both sides of the pier. The harbour is good for wintering **gulls** and **ducks**. The area to the left (east) has had nesting **Red-necked Grebes** in recent years.

2. The Shell Pier

- Leaving Bronte Harbour, turn left (west) on Highway 2 and drive for 2 km until you come to the pier of the Shell Refinery. There is parking here on the lake side of the highway.

The Shell Pier is another spot to look for **gulls** and **ducks**. On the north side of the highway, Shell Park can be good for **landbirds** during all seasons.

3. Appleby Line

- The shoreline can be reached by turning left off of Highway 2 and proceeding to the end of the road. Appleby Line is 1.5 km west of Shell Park.

4. Shoreacres Creek and Paletta Park

- If you feel like a short walk to look at the lake and check for **waterfowl**, stop here, halfway between Appleby and Walker's Lines. You can walk from Highway 2 to the lake. Large numbers of **Red-necked Grebes** congregate in the bay to the west of the creek each spring.

5. Walker's Line

- The shoreline can be reached by turning left off of Highway 2 and proceeding to the end of the road. Walker's Line is 2 km west of Appleby Line.

6. Sioux Lookout Park

- Located 1.1 km from Walker's Line, there is a parking lot on the south side which affords an excellent viewing area for **ducks**.

7. Guelph Line

- The shoreline can be reached by turning left off of Highway 2 and proceeding to the end of the road. Guelph Line is 0.9 km west of Sioux Lookout Park.

Appleby, Walker's and Guelph Lines are good lookout points for the lake. In April, Appleby and Walker's are especially good for **Red-necked Grebes**, and there have been several records of **Western Grebe**.

8. Travelodge Hotel and Spencer Smith Park (foot of Brant Street)

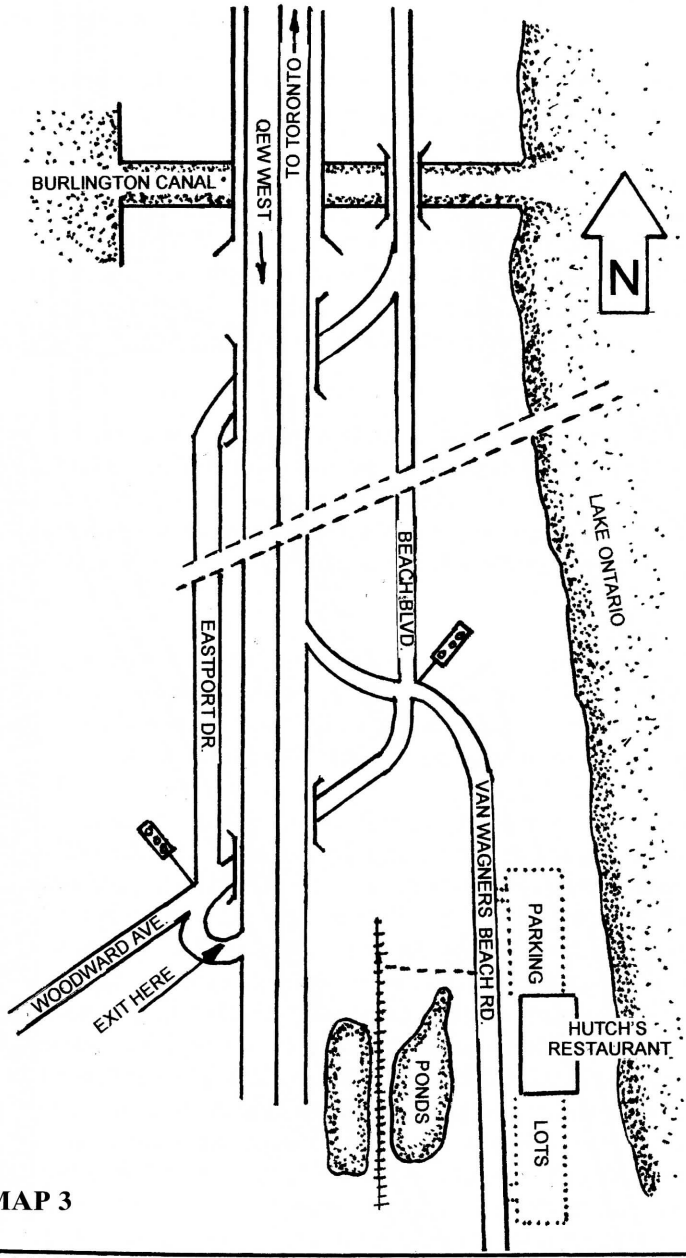
- About 2 km west of the Guelph Line, turn left off Highway 2 to the parking lot. **Dabblers, coots** and **Trumpeter Swans** frequent the shores around the parking lot during the winter.

These are two more locations for checking Lake Ontario. They are good for **ducks** and for **gulls** if there are strong northeast winds in the fall.

9. Burlington Canal

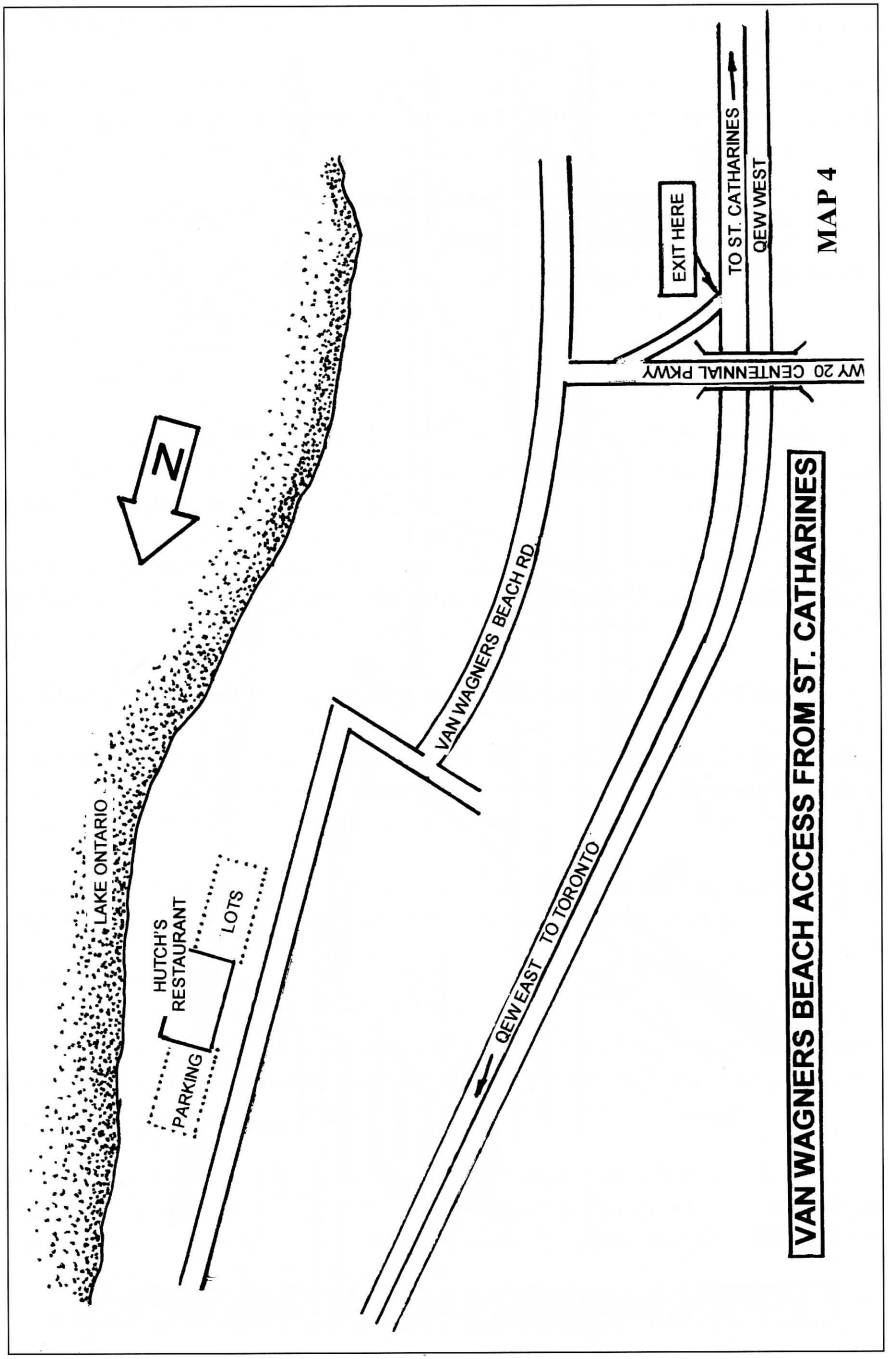
- At the west end of Spencer Smith Park, turn left along Beach Boulevard and drive about 2 km until you reach the shipping canal. Park on the property of the Centre for Inland Waters.

Walk along the pier out into Lake Ontario. Check the small woodlot on the Burlington (east) side of the canal for spring or fall **migrants**. The beach on this side is often good for **shorebirds**. Check the piers on both sides of the canal in late fall for **Purple Sandpipers**.



MAP 3

VAN WAGNERS BEACH ACCESS FROM TORONTO


LAKE ONTARIO
N
HUTCH'S RESTAURANT
PARKING
LOTS
VAN WAGNERS BEACH RD
QEW EAST TO TORONTO
EXIT HERE
TO ST. CATHARINES
QEW WEST
WY 20 CENTENNIAL PKWY
MAP 4
VAN WAGNERS BEACH ACCESS FROM ST. CATHARINES

10. Van Wagners Beach (Southern Ontario's Pelagic Birding Hotspot). **See Maps 3 and 4.**

- From Toronto, take the QEW towards Hamilton. When you reach the North Shore Boulevard / Eastport Drive cutoff, you have two options.

- The fastest route is to stay on the QEW over the Skyway Bridge and exit at Woodward Avenue. Turn right at the stoplight at Woodward and proceed under the QEW to the next stoplight (about 200 m) where you will turn right onto Van Wagners Beach Road. Stay on this road for approximately 1 km until you see Hutch's Restaurant (the fish and chips are fabulous) where you can park on either side of the restaurant in the spacious parking lots.

- The second option is to take Eastport Drive which goes under the Skyway Bridge and eventually takes you by the Tollgate ponds and Pier 25, where you can stop to look for waterfowl and shorebirds. Eastport Drive ends at the stoplight at Woodward Avenue where you will turn left and go under the QEW to Van Wagners Beach Road. See above directions to complete the trip.

- From St. Catharines / Fruitland etc., exit at Highway 20 / Centennial Parkway, and go north to the traffic lights. Turn left (west) onto Van Wagners Beach Road and follow the winding road past Confederation Park until you see Hutch's Restaurant on your right.

The term "pelagic" means "pertaining to the ocean", so a novice birder might wonder why this term is used in reference to Van Wagners Beach. The truth is, this site is a haven for stray pelagics starting in mid August and continuing through to mid December. Those "in the know" watch the weather reports for strong east or northeast winds, and when they are forecast, Van Wagners outside Hutch's Restaurant will be lined with rows of scopes scanning the horizon for pelagics. The birders set up their scopes on the north and south sides of the restaurant. The owner is quite friendly to birders and was awarded an OFO Certificate of Appreciation for his generosity several years ago. The list of oceanic species seen at this site is truly amazing. All three **jaeger** species are possible each fall, starting with the rarer **Long-taileds** in mid August to early September, followed by the more numerous **Parasitics** which arrive in September along with an occasional **Pomarine**. Although jaegers are the prime target, other pelagic species which have occurred include immature **Northern Gannets**, **Great Cormorant**, **Sabine's Gull**, immature **Black-legged Kittiwakes** (over one hundred were seen in

Figure 5: Red-throated Loon, Desjardins Canal, 29 January 1989. Photo by *Barry Cherriere*

Figure 6: King Eider. Photo by *Barry Cherriere.*

several flocks of as many as 25 individuals on 10 October 1982), **Red-throated Loon**, **Common** and **King Eiders**, three **scoter** species, **Purple Sandpiper** and **Northern** and **Red Phalaropes**. On 14 December 1999, Bob Curry spotted an **Ancient Murrelet** in Burlington, and there have been a few reports of other **alcids** flying by, mostly too far out for positive ID. In the fall of 1997, a recently perished **Northern Fulmar** was picked up on the beach.

11. Van Wagners Beach Ponds

Opposite the beach lookout are two ponds dissected by an old railway bed. Check the ponds for **shorebirds**, **ducks** and **herons**. The areas around the ponds are often good for **passerine** migrants in the fall. There is a good birding walk between the ponds, along the old rail line. It can be reached by walking east around the near pond and proceeding around an old residence at the east end of the pond. There is also a path through the rushes and cattails directly across from the west end of Hutch's Restaurant which leads to the old rail line.

12. Fruitland Road

- Exit the east end of Van Wagners Beach area via Highway 20 to QEW, heading east toward Niagara Falls.
- After 5.2 km, take Fruitland Road to the lake.

13. Fifty Point Conservation Area

- Head east on the QEW for 6.1 km to 50 Point Road.
- Take this road north to the North Service Road.
- Then drive east to the entrance of the Conservation Area.

Check out the marina area for **ducks** in winter. There is a wonderful vantage point to the east of the mouth of the harbour for spring and fall **water birds**. The woodlot east of the marina is good for **passerines** in the spring and fall. Tell the attendant at the toll booth that you are going in to look for birds. They will probably not charge admittance.

Hawk Watching in the Hamilton Area

1. Beamer Conservation Area

- Located 9.2 km east of Hamilton via the QEW. Take Christie Road exit south through town and up the escarpment.

- Turn right at the top of the hill and drive west 1.6 km to the Beamer Conservation Area, located on the east side of Quarry Road.

- Turn right to the parking lot area. This is the location of the well known Grimsby Hawk Watch.

The best months are March, April and May.

2. Woodland Cemetery

The best viewing is the eastern end, with the open fields along the bluff. See Hamilton Harbour: West End for location.

3. Ministry of Transportation Parking Lot

- From Highway 403, exit onto Highway 6, heading north toward Guelph.

- At the traffic light, 400 m up, turn right (east) and drive 100 m; park in the adjacent lot on the right.

4. Top of Clappison Cut

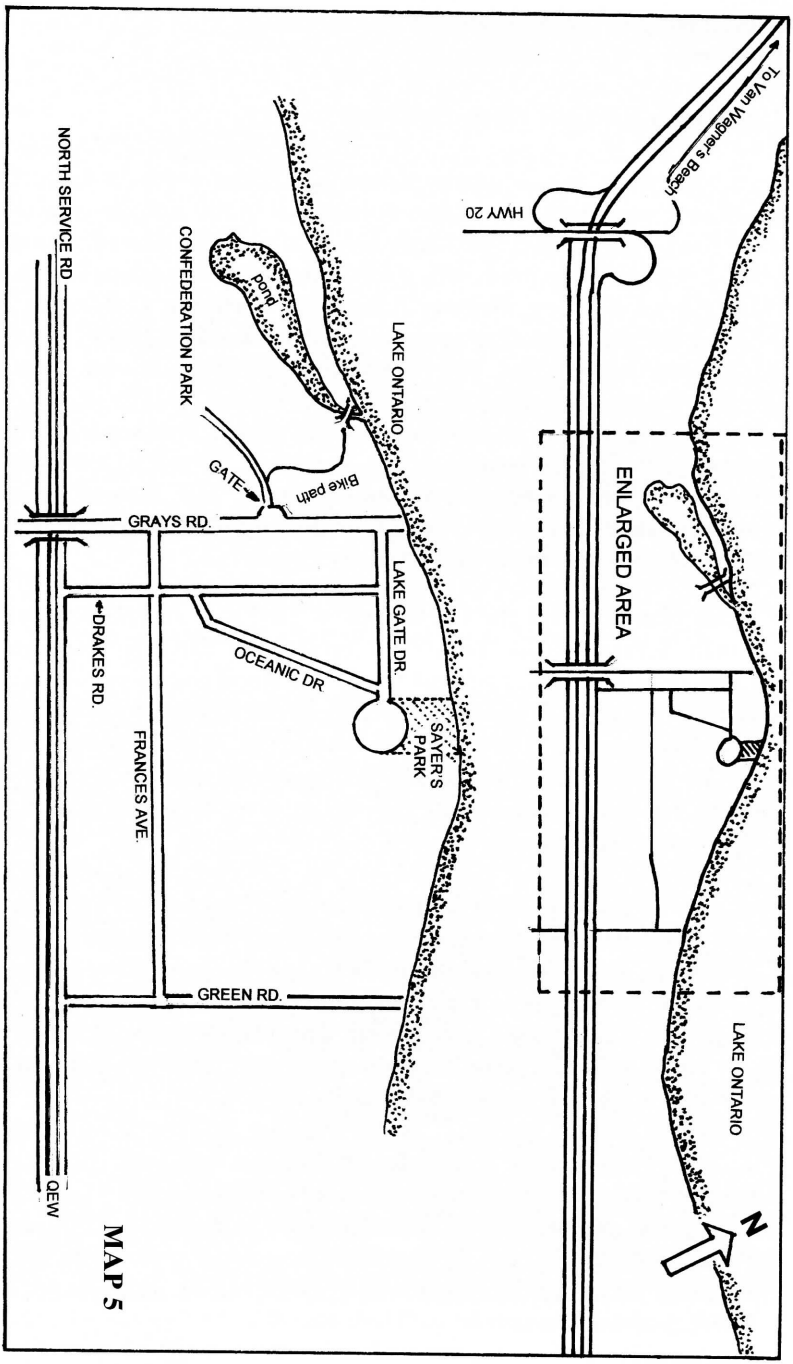
- From the parking lot, turn right (north) onto Highway 6 and drive 1.9 km to the top of the escarpment.

- Turn right (east) at the first road, that then turns south to the edge of the escarpment. Park just past the long white commercial building on your left (east).

5. High Level Bridge

- Exit from Highway 403 at York Boulevard.

- Once on York Boulevard, cross the bridge and pull off to park in the lot on the right (west) side. Park in the adjacent cemetery if it is no longer possible to park in this lot. Areas on the other side of the bridge are also good.


To Van Wagner's Beach
HWY 20
ENLARGED AREA
LAKE ONTARIO
N
LAKE ONTARIO
CONFEDERATION PARK
pond
GATE
Bike path
GRAYS RD.
LAKE GATE DR.
SAYER'S PARK
OCEANIC DR.
DRAKES RD.
FRANCES AVE.
GREEN RD.
NORTH SERVICE RD
QEW
MAP 5

September and October are the best months of the year for these last four locations.

Lake Ontario Winter Ducks. See Map 5.

In recent years, a new phenomenon has taken place in Lake Ontario's southwest end. Wintering **ducks**, sometimes in the hundreds of thousands, have been appearing in amazingly large rafts on the lake off Stoney Creek. The rafts are mostly pure, with a few "strangers" mixed in. The three main flock types consist of **Greater Scaup** and **Common Goldeneye** (both of which are reasonably close to shore), and **Long-tailed Duck** (which stay far out toward the horizon). The incredible sight of these rafts alone is worth the trip, but the number of scarcer and even rare species that may also be seen make it a must. **Lesser Scaup**, **Canvasback**, **Redhead**, all three **mergansers** and all three **scoters** can be expected, as well as the possibility of **Harlequin Duck**, **King** and **Common Eider**, and **Barrow's Goldeneye**. **Northern Gannets** also have been seen on a number of occasions. There are four accessible viewing areas in Stoney Creek:

- From Hamilton via the QEW, exit at Highway 20 and go north to the North Service Road. Turn right (east) and drive to the east end of Confederation Park. Just past the Grays Road overpass, turn left (north) onto Drakes Road; then turn left (west) onto Frances Avenue for 100 m; and then turn right (north) onto Grays Road. The viewing area at the foot of Grays Road has been greatly reduced by a recently erected chainlink fence, but with a little effort you can look west along the shore to see if there any rafts of ducks present.

- To get closer to ducks to the west, drive back up Grays Road about 200 m and you will see an entrance to a road into the park, with a closed gate, on the right (west) side. At the south end of the gate, there is a pedestrian entrance. This leads to a service road going west into the park. The road intersects with a paved bicycle path which leads north to the lake. Follow this path to a bridge over a lagoon and a short distance later you will have full viewing access to the lake and the ducks.

- To see birds to the east of Grays Road, go back north from the Confederation Park entrance on Grays Road to Lake Gate Drive. Turn right (east) and proceed to the traffic circle at the end of the street. Sayer's Park is on your left, and there is full access to the waterfront. There is "No Parking" on the circle, so you will have to park on Lake Gate or Oceanic Drive, and walk back.

Figure 7: Northern Gannet, off Burlington Beach canal, 28 November 1998. Photo by *Barry Cherriere*.

Figure 8: Greater Scaups and Redheads, Hamilton lakefront, 18 February 2001. Photo by *Barry Cherriere*.

- To see ducks farther east, drive south on Drakes Road, and turn left (east) onto Frances Avenue. Proceed over to Green Road. Turn left (north) on Green Road and drive to the end of the street. There is unlimited viewing from this point. If the ducks have drifted farther east, return to the North Service Road and drive east about 1.5 km to Dewitt Road and turn north to the lake. There is ample parking and unlimited viewing.

Conclusion

Hamilton records 285 to 300 bird species in any given year. With the information in this guide, we hope you will come and join us at some of the many enjoyable locations for birding. Please let us know about any discoveries that you make in our area.

Hamilton Area Birding Hotline: (905) 381-0329
Hamilton Naturalists' Club Website:
www.hwcn.org/link/hamnature/index.html

Acknowledgements

We appreciate the efforts of the reviewers, especially those of Rick Snider and Bob Stamp.

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John Olmsted, 32 Miles Court, Hamilton, Ontario L8P 4G6

Ronald Scovell, 3 Sims Crescent, Toronto, Ontario M9V 2S9

Nikon

Photo Quiz

(sponsored by Nikon Canada)

The hooked bill and large talons immediately categorize this as a bird of prey. Moreover, the slim proportions and long body together with small head, and face not flattened at all, reveal a diurnal predator or hawk.

It is an immature hawk as revealed by the brown plumage and, to the extent that it is visible, the streaked rather than barred underparts. More precisely, it is a juvenile. Most passerines retain a juvenal plumage for a short period of time before molting into a first basic plumage. Away from the breeding grounds, we seldom see passerines in juvenal plumages. However, young of most species of hawks (of course, there are exceptions!) retain their first feathers until they are about a year old. Then they molt into a basic plumage, which can be distinguished from adult plumage only in some species.

As readers know, hawk identification, and indeed bird identification in general, is an exercise in classification. Our brains do most of this almost instantly when our eyes capture an image. The job of this column is to break these processes down into discrete parts.

We group hawks according to morphological similarities into families, subfamilies and genera. We are all familiar with the quintessential buteo, the Red-tailed Hawk. Many of the buteos in immature plumages are brown and streaked like our bird. They have chunky bodies and short to medium-length tails. The effect of the shorter tails and long wings in most species is that the wingtips extend well down the tail, almost to the tip of the tail on some species and even beyond in a couple. Nonetheless, two of our buteos approach the subject bird in general appearance. Perched juvenal Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks are brown above and streaked below and do not always appear chunky. Their wingtips do, however, extend three-quarters of the way down the tail, and they have dark irides. These features cannot be ascribed to our very slim bird whose wingtips barely extend a third of the way down the tail. It is not a buteo.

Female Northern Harriers are slim brown hawks. Once again, they have longer wings, with the primaries extending more than half way to the tail tip. Also not evident on our bird is the harrier facial disc outlined in lighter feathers, similar to that of owls, and which is used to gather sounds during crepuscular hunting. Also note that on brown (i.e., non-adult male) Northern Harriers, the eye is marked above and below with white lines of feathers. The total effect is to give this species a highly distinctive visage. It is not a Northern Harrier.

One kite and several of the falcons are brown-backed. Immature Mississippi Kites are brown dorsally but have large dark eyes and black surrounding the eye. They also have very long wings, suitable for aerial foraging and which extend beyond the tail. The falcons, such as Merlin and Peregrine, which in some plumages are brown-backed, have a classic bull-chested appearance, large dark eyes and

long wings that extend to or almost to the tail tip.

So this bird standing out in the open on a fence post is one of those forest hunters of the genus *Accipiter*. These are short-winged, long-tailed birds. All three of our accipiters are brown in juvenal plumage, and have yellow eyes. Especially given the fleeting looks we often get, any one species can be mistaken for either of the other two. Fortunately, this excellent photo permits leisurely discussion about many of the features used to distinguish the three. We cannot see the underparts adequately but we can take these features one at a time to explain why this is a juvenile **Cooper's Hawk**.

Shape and proportions: The bird is rather long and lanky, with an extremely long tail, a feature of Cooper's. Sharp-shinned Hawk is more compact, with a proportionately shorter tail. Northern Goshawk is a more robust bird, with a broader tail.

White supercilium: This feature is quite variable. It is nearly always prominent in Northern Goshawk and found to varying degrees in the other two. This bird has a bolder eyeline than I usually see on Cooper's Hawk.

Back: The white mottling on scapulars and tertials is least on Sharp-shinned Hawk and more obvious on the larger two.

Legs: The legs (tarsi) are positively "spindly" in Sharp-shinned Hawk. This bird has quite strong looking legs, as in the larger two.

Tail: The tail in this excellent photo can be used to eliminate Northern Goshawk. In that species, each dark band on the tail is margined in white. Moreover, the tail bands are wavy rather than even as on this bird. Cooper's Hawk frequently has a broad white tip to the tail. However, in its second calendar year, wear reduces this feature. The extensive white blotching dorsally also suggests the effect of time and weather. The outer rectrix on Cooper's Hawk is slightly shorter than the other tail feathers, creating rounded edges to the tail which can be seen in this bird and which points more to this species. But beware that some Sharp-shins can have rounded tails.

Head: All three accipiters can appear to have rounded heads. However, when perched, Cooper's can raise the feathers at the rear of the crown (hackles) or they can be raised by the wind, as other feathers appear to be in this case. A distinctive Cooper's Hawk head profile is thus created.

In the case of Cooper's Hawk, then, some of the noted features, in particular the tail pattern, eliminate the larger Northern Goshawk and others, in combination, eliminate the smaller Sharp-shinned hawk. Barry Cherriere photographed this juvenile Cooper's Hawk during April in Texas.

Bob Curry, 3115 New Street, Unit 30, Burlington, Ontario L7N 3T6

Ontario Field Ornithologists

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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 listserve (ONTBIRDS, coordinated by Mark Cranford), hosts field trips throughout Ontario, and holds an Annual Convention in the autumn.

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Material submitted for publication should be on computer disk, or typewritten (double-spaced). Please follow the style of this issue of *Ontario Birds*. All submissions are subject to review and editing. Submit items for publication to the Editors at the address noted above.