

Kestrel's Puzzling Behaviour

by Fred Lyonde

My residence is on the 14th floor of the south tower of a twin-building condominium which adjoins a golf course in Mississauga. From time to time, American Kestrels perch on the buildings and search for prey on the golf course.

During the first week of June 1995, on several occasions I removed the cobwebs from a window frame using a white paper towel. Each time I opened the window with the paper towel in hand, a female kestrel flew towards me from her perch on the north tower, some 50 metres away. On each occasion, she hovered in front of me for a few seconds, about 60 centimetres away. She then flew off only to return and fly by the window several times before returning to her perch. Every time I repeated the white towel exercise, she returned and repeated the hover and fly-by routine. But she did not react when I extended my arm without the paper towel.

This scenario was played out several days in a row. On the third day, a male kestrel appeared on the perch alone but did not respond to the appearance of the towel. The female reappeared on day four by herself and once again flew quickly towards my window whenever I opened it with towel in hand. The following day, the last one I carried out the procedure, both male and female were on the perch but only the female reacted, the male remaining on his perch.

I can offer no explanation for this fascinating display by the female kestrel and would be interested to learn if any similar occurrences have been reported.

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OFO NEWS

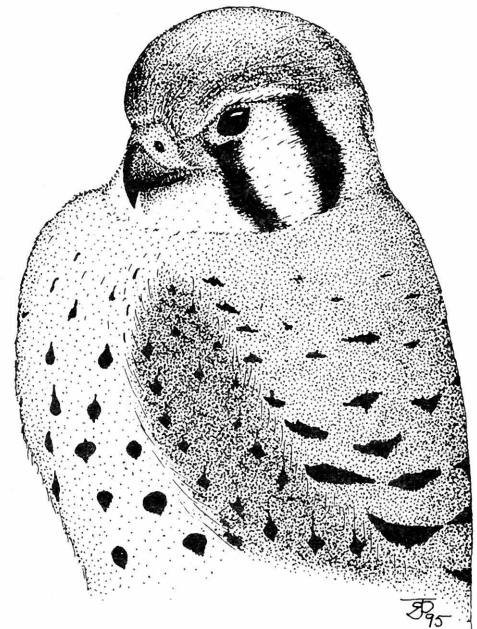
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OFO NEWS asked David Bird of McGill University, an expert on kestrels, to comment on this behaviour.

The behaviour exhibited by this female kestrel is puzzling indeed! Because of the timing of the observations, i.e. June, my guess is the kestrels are a breeding pair. American Kestrels often choose to nest in urban/suburban habitat, wherever a suitable nesting cavity and adequate prey species, e.g. insects, voles and mice, and small birds, are available. Dissecting this peculiar behaviour, we can conclude at least two things. First, only the female was interested in the white towel and second, she was not interested in the hand/arm without the towel. I suggest two possibilities. Perhaps the white towel in some way looked like a vulnerable prey item, but I doubt this. For example, in raptors objects coloured red can stimulate adult or nestling raptors to regard that object as a piece of bloody meat suitable for tearing. As a result it is not recommended to use red leg bands or other red markings because of this potentially injurious stimulation. Alternatively, the towel appeared more to resemble a threat in some bizarre manner. I wonder whether her nest site was close to the gentleman's window and the white towel simply attracted the female's attention more than the bare arm. In any event, this is the first I have heard of such behaviour in a raptorial bird and I would welcome other explanations.



American Kestrel

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Toronto's High Park

Favourite Birding Hotspots

by Bob Yukich

High Park, situated in the west end of Toronto, has been well birded over the years. Strategically located close to Lake Ontario, it serves as an oasis for migrating birds that concentrate along the lakeshore in spring and fall. Including adjacent Sunnyside Beach, it boasts an impressive list of at least 275 bird species, including such rarities as King Rail, Vermilion Flycatcher, Kirtland's Warbler, Mew Gull, and Lark Sparrow which bred once in the 1930s! Thirty-eight warbler species have been recorded in the park.

High Park consists of 400 acres of partially manicured parkland with a variety of habitats ranging from wetlands to black oak savannah. This latter habitat, now rare in Ontario, originally covered much of the park but has gradually disappeared due to mowing and gardening practices, along with the introduction of non-native vegetation. Restoration plans are now underway for some of this unique habitat and for the wetlands of Grenadier Pond, so what is now good birding can only get better.

What follows is roughly a counter-clockwise walk through the park beginning at the northwest corner. Parking is available in the park, except on Sundays during the summer. Birding can be good at any time of year.

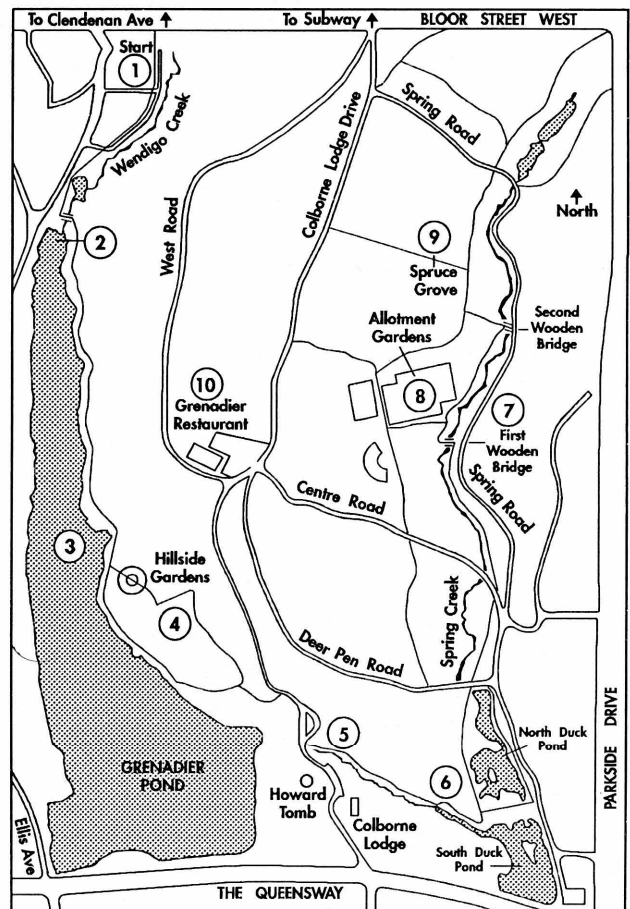
1. Wendigo Ravine. Access from Bloor St. at Clendenan Ave., a short walk west of High Park subway station. A stairway takes you down Wendigo Way. During winter, neighbourhood feeders and the open waters of Wendigo Creek attract land birds. In early spring look for Winter Wrens along the creek, flocks of kinglets, and later White-throated Sparrows. Rusty Blackbirds can sometimes be found in migration. In April and early May look closely at any waterthrush; Louisiana Waterthrush has occurred here. The east slope is the best place for Connecticut Warbler in late May (knowing the song will help you find this skulker), also Acadian Flycatcher. Look for all the thrushes; your best bet for Gray-cheeked is in late May. Continue along the creek south through the small playground to the north end of Grenadier Pond.

2. Marsh at the North End of Grenadier Pond. In winter scan the flocks of mallards in the cattails near the pumphouse for Wood Duck and Green-winged Teal. Also check the small sedimentation pond to the north. In spring and fall Virginia Rail or Sora can sometimes be seen along the marsh edges. Obtain good views by walking south along Ellis Park Rd. or from the paved path on the east side of the pond. From mid-summer to fall Great Blue Heron and Black-crowned Night-Heron feed here. Great Egret is occasional in May and rare in summer. From July onwards various dabbling ducks and shorebirds (mostly Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper and peeps) can be found in shallow water and on mudflats. Check the trees on the west side for Osprey from late August through September. If you're into winter listing, check the cattails for a lingering Common Yellowthroat in early December, and a

singing Carolina Wren in the surrounding neighbourhood. Continue south following the paved path.

3. Grenadier Pond. Interesting at any time of year, but it is most productive during migration. In spring and fall scan the west side for Pied-billed Grebe, Hooded Merganser and Ring-necked Duck. There is always a large flock of Northern Shovelers, many overwinter. All three merganser species can be found prior to freeze-up. Watch for your first Caspian Tern in mid-April, and all six swallow species a little later. From December through March scope the flocks of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls that loaf on the ice at the south end of the pond. A good vantage point is from Ellis Ave. and The Queensway. "White-winged" gulls are regular, more so in early spring. During the winter of 1990/91 a Mew Gull occurred and in 1993 a Laughing Gull spent part of the winter. Amongst hundreds of Canada Geese, Mallards and Black Ducks in the small patch of open water there are usually Northern Shovelers and sometimes a Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal and Northern Pintail.

4. Hillside Gardens. The formal plantings with open grassy areas and scattered trees are good for a variety of migrant



Map by Michael King

passerines, especially after a major fallout. For years a pair of Orchard Orioles nested, preferring the tall conifers as nesting sites. In certain winters, winter finches take advantage of the various seed crops, and waxwings and robins feed on berries. The ornamental shrubs and feeders near the caretaker's residence provide food and shelter for wintering sparrows. Ovenbird has occurred in December. The wooded slope to the north with its savannah openings can be excellent for migrating songbirds. Continue south moving diagonally up the hillside along the various paths until you see the Purple Martin House down by the pond on your right. Walk up to Colborne Lodge Drive and turn right.

5. Colborne Lodge and Howard Tomb. This is one of the more productive areas in the park for warblers in May and is the best spot for early arrivals in late April. When the rest of the park is quiet there is always something to be found here. This is one of the better areas for Cerulean Warbler. A female "Audubon's" Warbler was here in early May 1995 along with a young male Summer Tanager. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher breeds and is more easily found here than elsewhere. Next, follow one of the trails running east from Colborne Lodge down to where the paved path crosses Spring Creek.

6. South End of Park and Duck Ponds. This area can be good in migration, and in winter some park users maintain makeshift bird feeders that should be checked. One year a Brown Thrasher overwintered. Continue east along the walkway to the North and South Duck Ponds. Best views are from the east side along Spring Rd. Black-crowned Night-Herons feed and roost much of the year. Among the barnyard geese and ducks look for Hooded Merganser and Wood Duck year round. Continue north along the east side of the ponds and cross Deer Pen Rd. to enter a low-lying wet area, slow to freeze due to ground seepage, on the west side of Spring Creek. Look for lingering migrants in early winter. The adjacent wooded slope has a wood-chip path running through it and can be good in migration. Listen for Pine Warbler in early spring. Walk back to the paved path and continue north across Centre Rd. to the east side of Spring Creek.

7. Spring Road Ravine. This stretch of the creek is best in migration and winter when the water remains open. Louisiana Waterthrush is rare in spring; a singing male was present much of June 1992! The slopes on both sides of the road can be alive with spring and fall migrants. One of the better spots is near the first wooden bridge as you walk north. One of the very few Veeries ever reported for Ontario in winter was here on a recent Christmas count. Check for Winter Wren in winter and Great Horned Owl in the tall pines. Screech Owl is resident but hard to find. Continue along the creek to where Spring Rd. turns and rises sharply to the west just below Bloor St. Spring migrants moving north sometimes concentrate here. Kentucky Warbler and Summer Tanager have been found. Walk back to the first wooden bridge mentioned earlier.

8. Allotment Gardens. Cross the bridge and walk west up the pathway until you reach a wood-chip path. Turn right and watch for the large fenced vegetable gardens on your left. In spring and especially in fall look for sparrows. Fox Sparrows are almost certain in April, as are Lincoln's in the fall. Flocks

of Eastern Bluebirds are regular in late October (look also on the surrounding hillsides) and Eastern Phoebes can be seen. Your best chance for Orange-crowned Warbler will be in October in the gardens and the surrounding weedy vegetation. A few very late Indigo Buntings turn up regularly at the beginning of October. In winter check the bird feeders. Field Sparrow has overwintered. Follow the wood-chip path that begins on the north side of the larger fenced garden. After it descends, turn left (north) on the next main path and continue to a grove of tall spruce trees on your left.

9. Spruce Grove. Here and in the nearby cedars and pines look for Saw-whet Owl in late October and again in April, Long-eared in November. This area can be good for sparrows and warblers in migration. In May, Yellow-breasted Chat and Kentucky Warbler have been seen. Continue up the paved path to Colborne Lodge Drive.

10. Grenadier Restaurant and Hawk Migration. This is becoming a very popular site for observing hawks in the fall. From early September into November, hundreds of migrating raptors moving west along the north shore of Lake Ontario pass directly over High Park. Numbers of birds recorded here rival those of other well-known locations. There have been single-day counts of more than 6000 Broad-wings and 1100 Red-tails. Both eagles can be seen and all the accipiters are well-represented. Come on cool days with northwest winds and a few clouds. A good spot to watch is from the small rise on the north side of the restaurant parking lot. When hawks are moving to the south you can watch from the hilltop overlooking the floral maple leaf and Grenadier Pond just south of here. Access to the restaurant is from Bloor St. via West Rd. or from The Queensway via Colborne Lodge Drive. Good birding!

OFO Certificate of Appreciation

OFO Certificates of Appreciation were awarded to the following people for their courtesy, hospitality and helpfulness to the Ontario birding community:

Jean & Eric Niskanen
Parry Sound
Band-tailed Pigeon
September 1994

Barbara Horth & Eugene Kideres
Thunder Bay
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch
January 1995

Helen & Murray Sutherland
Queensville
Varied Thrush, January 1995

Daniel Johnstone
Area Superintendent
Niagara Region Environmental
Services
Port Weller Pollution Control Plant
Ross's Gull, February 1995

Bill Hutch
Hutch's Restaurant
Van Wagner's Beach, Hamilton
For warmth and protection on
jaeger days

Special awards were presented to the following OFO members for their outstanding contribution to OFO:

Peter Burke
For designing the new OFO Logo
of the Pileated Woodpecker
May 1995

Jack Cranmer-Byng
Co-Editor of *Ornithology in
Ontario* (1994)
May 1995

Phill Holder
Publisher of *Ornithology in
Ontario* (1994)
May 1995

Martin McNicholl
Co-Editor of *Ornithology in
Ontario* (1994)
May 1995

Bill Walker
OFO Membership Secretary
1989-1992
March 1995

In Defence of the Cowbird

by
George Peck

The Brown-headed Cowbird, *Molothrus ater*, is a brood parasite that has parasitized a total of 86 host species in Ontario. Two of these, the Virginia Rail and the Spotted Sandpiper, were accidental and unique hosts. Brood parasitism is the term used to describe the habit of some birds who lay their eggs in the nests of other species, and our cowbird more particularly, is known as an *obligate parasite* that does not build its own nest and cannot survive independently of its host. Some authorities believe the ability was lost over time for reasons that are not definitely known. One early theory to explain this lost ability was that in following the nomadic grazing herds, the cowbird often strayed so far from its nest that it could not return and had to seek out a nearby nest in order to secure its egg. However, Dr. H. Friedmann, the acknowledged cowbird authority, did not concur with this theory.

Worldwide, brood parasitism is practised by about 80 species of birds in five families: ducks (Anatidae), cuckoos (Cuculidae), honey guides (Indicatoridae), troupials (Icteridae) and weaverbirds (Ploceidae). Some of these are *nonobligate parasites* like our Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos who occasionally lay eggs in the nests of other species, but are not wholly dependent on them as hosts.

Because this parasitic habit is an evolutionary adaptation developed over eons, and is a trait that is genetically fixed, it should be considered as such and not given the anthropomorphic designation of a 'bad deed' done by a 'bad bird'. As some wise philosopher once observed, 'there are no bad birds, only bad people' (people who impose their own moral standards on wildlife). We are hopefully more enlightened today than was even the renowned A.C. Bent who in 1958 in his *Life Histories of North American Blackbirds, Orioles, Tanagers, and Allies*, referred to the cowbird as a "shiftless vagabond and imposter".

The classic definition of a parasite, at least a successful parasite, is one that lives on but does not ultimately destroy its host. It is perhaps stating the obvious that the cowbird could not exist without its hosts; thus a population increase in cowbirds indicates that its major hosts are alive and well.

This optimistic outlook brings to mind the increase of the Double-crested Cormorant on the Great Lakes which fishermen and some others regard as a potentially disastrous situation. I prefer to think of it as an indication that the fish

population (both commercial and noncommercial species) is increasing due to a decrease in the pollution levels of the Great Lakes, and that the cormorant population increase is actually a good omen—but I digress.

In Ontario, the 10 hosts with the largest number of parasitized nests, which constitute 67.7% of over 3300 records, were Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Yellow Warbler, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Phoebe, Red-eyed Vireo, American Goldfinch, Veery, Cedar Waxwing and Northern Cardinal (Peck and James 1987). Perhaps surprisingly, one of these, the Cedar Waxwing, is one of the six known 'rejecter' species which habitually do not tolerate and will remove cowbird eggs from their nests (Rothstein, 1975). The other rejecters are Eastern Kingbird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher and Northern Oriole.

There is little or no evidence of deleterious effects on the cowbird's most frequent hosts and indeed, parasitism may



Cowbird in Cerulean Warbler nest

serve as a necessary control on passerine populations. In former less-altered times, it helped provide some equilibrium to the now very shaky 'balance of nature'. However, with species whose populations have been drastically depleted, often by human interference, the cowbird then can become an additional threat. Such species as the Kirtland's Warbler that breeds only in central Michigan and whose population was 347 territorial males in 1991,

and the endangered Black-capped Vireo population of Oklahoma and Texas with a US population between 250 and 500 birds (Ehrlich et al. 1992), are cases in point. For such species cowbird trapping on the breeding grounds may be warranted and indeed has been carried out. Although these trapping programs have greatly reduced the percentage parasitism in the trapping areas, resulting host population increases have not been as obvious. This would indicate that other factors such as the decimation of breeding and winter habitats and pesticide pollution are the major reasons for the continuing declines of these species.

Originally, the Brown-headed Cowbird or 'buffalo-bird' was an inhabitant of the central plains and prairies. There it followed the wandering herds of buffalo and more recently cattle, and foraged near them. It gradually spread eastwards as land-clearing for agricultural purposes in later decades provided the species with its preferred open habitat.

In Ontario, the chosen breeding habitats of the cowbird are dry, open or semi-open areas with growths of deciduous, mixed and coniferous shrubs or small trees a predominant feature. Extensive dense woodlands are avoided, accounting for the bird's scarcity in the boreal forest region.

In Ontario, cowbirds most often select hosts with elevated tree and shrub nests (80.4%), and less often hosts with ground nests (19.6%). The elevated nests selected by the cowbird were most often in deciduous trees and shrubs, with hawthorn the most frequently used. The inner nest diameters of five of the six most frequently parasitized hosts averaged 5 cm (2 in.), possibly indicating that small nests and small hosts are advantageous to the survival of cowbird young.

Recent studies in southern Ontario (Scott and Ankney 1980) showed that a female cowbird lays about 40 eggs per year—an amazing fecundity! Such a large egg number is necessary because parasitism is a hazardous method of reproduction with an unusually high percentage of failure (Friedmann and Kiff 1985). The successful fledging rate of the cowbird varies from 16% in nests of lightly-parasitized hosts to 25% in the nests of heavily-parasitized hosts. In certain hosts like House Finch, Pine Siskin, and American Goldfinch, the success rate is zero! The average number of eggs laid in 90% of parasitized nests ranges from one egg (65.3%) to two eggs (24.6%) (Peck and James 1987). In the Ontario Nest Records Scheme (ONRS) files, most cowbird eggs were laid before any host eggs were laid (115 records), after some host eggs were laid (81 records), after the last host egg was laid (8 records), after host young were in the nest (5 records), and in old or deserted nests (3 records). Often more than one female cowbird will lay in the same host nest, and a Wood Thrush nest was found that contained one thrush egg and 12 cowbird eggs; and a Song Sparrow nest contained one sparrow egg and 10 cowbird eggs. Even cavity-nesting hosts are sometimes parasitized and one nest of a Prothonotary Warbler contained three eggs of the host and seven eggs of the cowbird, while another Prothonotary nest contained seven cowbird eggs only.

Cowbirds have been observed and photographed removing host eggs and young from nests, usually but not always when they are preparing to deposit their own egg. Incubation periods of cowbird eggs which range from 10 to 14 days are similar in duration to the incubation period of many of their passerine hosts' eggs.

Some cowbird hosts have developed defences against parasitism which include nest abandonment, egg removal, and the burying or building-over of cowbird eggs. When cowbird eggs were removed by humans, which occurred with 27% of all nests reported to the ONRS, hosts sometimes deserted their nests.

In Ontario, the newly-arrived House Finch has been subjected to a high rate (42%) of cowbird parasitism. By contrast, in the House Finch's original range in western North America the percentage parasitism is very low. This low rate in the west is indicative of an evolved beneficial adaptation because cowbird young cannot survive in House Finch nests. All the cowbird young invariably starve to death, usually within the first week, as a result of an improper diet supplied by their seed-eating foster parents! Other high Ontario rates

of parasitism in the ONRS files were Purple Finch (39.8%), Red-eyed Vireo (38.4%), Chipping Sparrow (32%), Yellow-rumped Warbler (31.1%) and Yellow Warbler (29.6%).

Although it should not be necessary to defend an organism's existence by citing its positive economic status, it appears that in this regard the cowbird rates well, in that the



Larger cowbird egg in Field Sparrow nest

majority of its diet is made up of weed seeds and insects.

Over millennia, the Brown-headed Cowbird, like its equally successful fellow-icterids, the Red-winged Blackbird and the Common Grackle, has successfully adapted its method of reproduction, filled an empty niche and revealed itself to be a miracle of evolution that has earned the right to survive.

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George Peck, Research Associate, Department of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

An Evening with Jon Dunn

An illustrated talk on the Identification of Warblers

Monday 20 November 1995, 8:00 p.m. Cardinal Carter Academy, 36 Greenfield Ave., North York (one block north of Sheppard, east of Yonge). Send \$15.00 cheque payable to the Toronto Ornithological Club to Hugh Currie, 29 Helena Ave., Toronto ON M6G 2H3, (416) 653-0176. Jon Dunn is an OFO member. Sponsored by The Toronto Ornithological Club, The Ontario Field Ornithologists and Birders Journal.

The James L. Baillie Memorial Fund for Bird Research and Preservation is accepting applications for grants for individual or club projects on birds, application deadline: January 1996. For information contact: David Hussell, James L. Baillie Memorial Fund, Canadian Centre for the Study and Preservation of Birds, Box 160, Port Rowan ON N0E 1M0 (705) 586-3531

Future Field Trips

November 26, Sunday, Niagara Gull Watch. Meet at Niagara-on-the-Lake at the mouth of the River at 9:00 a.m. Leader: Ron Scovell.

White-throated Sparrow in The Birds of North America

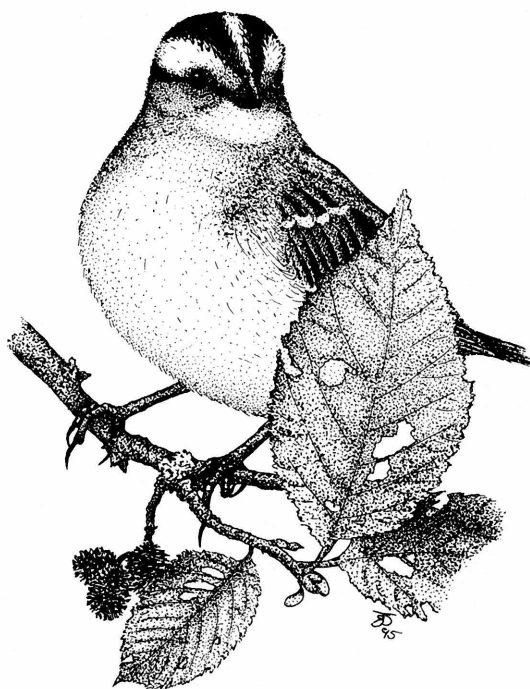
by
Bruce Falls

When the American Ornithologists' Union advertised for authors for a new series on the Birds of North America (BNA) I offered to write the account for the White-throated Sparrow. I checked with Jeff Kopachena, who had just finished his doctoral research with me and had a great deal of information on life history and growth. He agreed to be the co-author. This series is intended to replace Bent's *Life Histories of North American Birds* and Palmer's *Handbook of North American Birds*. I felt that we should write the white-throat account because my students and I had worked on this species since the late '50s and Lowther and I had written the account in the Bent series. It became a major undertaking because, apart from our own work, much research had been done on the White-throated Sparrow. For example, it was one of the first species to be used in studies of the annual cycle of physiology and behaviour associated with breeding, molting and migration.

Our studies began because of my interest in bird song. I was trying to find out what cues birds use to recognize their own species' song. I did this by altering recorded songs and playing them back to birds in the field. The white-throat was a good subject because its simple whistled song was easy to manipulate. I came up with a recipe for an effective white-throat song. Later Ron Brooks and I showed that males recognize their neighbours' song by their pattern and pitch.

While I was studying song, one of my graduate students, Jim Lowther, investigated nesting behaviour. He discovered that only females incubated but that some of them were brightly coloured, while others were dull. He had discovered tan- and white-striped morphs (colour phases) and went on to show that they occurred in both sexes and that pairs consisted of one of each. The female could be the brighter bird in some cases. These two subjects—bird song and colour morphs led to many further studies and Jeff and I tried to bring our BNA account up to date. We had so much material that the editors allowed us to write a longer than average piece.

We couldn't confine our writing to our own interests. There was a detailed outline to follow with such headings as Distinguishing Characteristics, Distribution, Systematics, Migration, Habitat, Sounds, Behaviour, Breeding, Populations, Appearance, Measurements, Priorities for Future Research, and References. To save space the authors must write in abbreviated style which I found difficult. This makes parts of the text hard to read. However, the accounts are intended to be references, so information took precedence over readability. We succeeded in drawing together what was known about the White-throated Sparrow. A disappointment was that the colour photos chosen (by the editors) to depict the two morphs were not very typical.



White-striped morph of the White-throated Sparrow

Notes from the OBRC by Bob Curry

Once again I'm impressed with the increasing quality of rare bird write-ups received by the Committee. The acceptance rate continues to increase and the drawings, descriptions and photographs received even from many first-timers often accompanied by unnecessarily apologetic notes renders the rapidly accumulating database of the OBRC a more significant role in documenting the status of rare birds in Ontario.

Birders derive pleasure from various aspects of bird study and it is not for anyone to state what others must do in the way of keeping records and descriptions of their sightings. Nevertheless, I submit that writing descriptive notes in the field and following up by writing an account of the circumstances surrounding a rarity discovery and detailing the bird will add a depth of satisfaction to your sightings far beyond the initial discovery. Next, go back through as many of the OBRC Annual Reports as you have from 1982 to the present and you will get an excellent understanding of the overview of rare birds in Ontario. Moreover, if you want to discover some of the rarities, learning about their status and distribution in the province through the reports is an excellent way to begin.

And this is my perennial request to old-timers out there like myself to submit reports for any review list species which you saw before 1982. We've eliminated the historical designation but committee members do not expect the kind of details that we do for current reports and the more complete the files and the reports are for rarities the more interesting they will be for both hobbyists and professionals in the future. Why not make it a winter project to dig out your old records and put them to paper for submission?

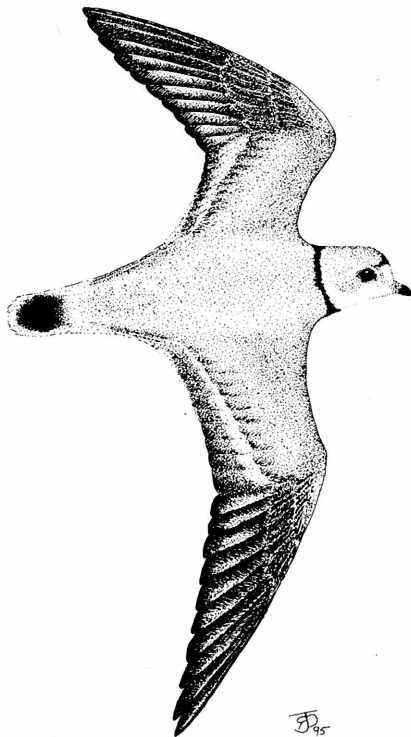
Send your rare bird reports directly to Rob Dobos, OBRC Secretary, 178 Cedarbrae Avenue, Waterloo ON N2L 4S3

Rainy River Tour

by Dave and Mary Elder

During the two-day tour of May 26 and 27, the 17 participants recorded a total of 122 species. Most people came to see the special birds of the Rainy River area and they were not disappointed. Rainy River and prairie specialties included: American White Pelican, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Yellow Rail (heard), Marbled Godwit, Connecticut Warbler, Franklin's Gull, Black-billed Magpie, Sedge Wren, Le Conte's Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Blackbird and Yellow-headed Blackbird. A highlight was seeing two Piping Plovers on Windy Point that were behaving like a pair. Upon seeing the plovers, the group did not go any further, but retreated in order not to disturb them. We hope that other birders in future will do the same. The last stand of the Piping Plover in Ontario is on the barrier islands where predation from raccoons and foxes is limited. Though there is suitable habitat, in reality not many spots meet their nesting needs, and they have not been very successful these last few years.

This year's OFO group was the largest ever, and everyone had a great time.



Piping Plover

Carden Alvar

by Ron Pittaway

Unknown to most birders until a few years ago, the Carden Alvar is now Ontario's birding hotspot for grassland and marsh specialties in early summer.

65 birders on the June 4 field trip enjoyed a warm sunny day and found many of Carden's sought after species. Highlights were a pair of the critically endangered Loggerhead Shrikes, and singing Sedge Wrens and Grasshopper Sparrows that were easily studied through telescopes. In fact, take your scope to Carden; its wide vistas and abundance of perches make a telescope as useful in Carden as on the beach for shorebirds and waterfowl.

Among the 104 species recorded were Upland Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Vesper Sparrow, Rufous-sided Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Bluebird, Alder Flycatcher, Common Nighthawk, Red-headed and Pileated Woodpeckers.

We ended the trip at the Beaverton Sewage Lagoons beside Lake Simcoe where a few Semipalmated Sandpipers were still going north. Several hundred Bonaparte's Gulls in first summer plumage (year-old nonbreeders) made an impressive sight. Lake Simcoe with its abundance of minnows is an important summering area for Bonaparte's Gulls. We watched them perching in trees as if practising for next summer in the boreal forest where as adults they will nest in trees!

If you are a new member and would like a copy of my Carden site guide which appeared in the December 1991 issue of Ontario Birds, please write or phone and I'll send you a copy:
Ron Pittaway, Box 619, Minden ON K0M 2K0 (705) 286-3471

Owen Sound

by
Jerry Guild

The new OFO trip to the Owen Sound area on June 10 was well attended. The group saw 94 bird species at peak nesting time. Leader Dave Fidler, a long-time OFO member and former Metro Toronto resident, moved to the country near Owen Sound in 1984 'to get away from it all'. Aply assisted by Dave Tannahill, a new OFO member, and Mark Wiercinski, a warden with the Bruce National Park, Dave started the trip on his 82-acre property, which contains bush, swamp and part of a provincially significant wetland. Different habitats, predominantly hardwood tracts, open expanses, and some marshes and sewage lagoons, characterize the area around Owen Sound that Dave selected for the tour. Conifers become more common as you go north up the Bruce Peninsula. Highlights of the trip included the following birds on territory: Brewer's Blackbird (common if you know where to look), Upland Sandpiper, Common Raven, Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers, Grasshopper Sparrow, and a Red-shouldered Hawk nest with young close to fledging.

Breeding species on Dave's land include Mourning Warbler, Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers, Eastern Bluebird, Scarlet Tanager and Indigo Bunting. Some parts have not been farmed in 25 years and are reverting to woodland. Over the past ten years the birds have changed too. Once there were nesting meadow species such as Eastern Meadowlark and Vesper Sparrow, now woodland species inhabit these successional areas.

Birders wanting a change of venue for their birding jaunts will enjoy exploring the Owen Sound area. The possibility of finding rarities is high. Bruce County has 8-10 records of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, so there are many chances to find your own birds.

Many thanks to Dave who looks forward to assisting with future field trips in the Grey-Bruce area.

What to Know when Buying Binoculars

by Vitus Schilling of Leica Camera

Second in a series for birders considering buying new binoculars.

Magnification

Magnification or power is the major criterion in selecting a pair of binoculars because it determines how much larger an object appears compared to viewing it with the naked eye. Most birders chose binoculars with a magnification between 7x and 10x. One is tempted to think 'the higher, the better' but be aware of a few trade-offs when selecting a high magnification. Comparing 7x with 10x of the same brand:

- Higher magnification results in a narrower field of view.
- Higher magnification results in a shallower depth of field; not a problem when viewing shorebirds or waterfowl, but a disadvantage at close range for watching woodland birds because one must do more focusing.
- Higher magnification can be more difficult to hold steady. The object's movement and heat waves also are magnified.

For most uses, the magnification should not exceed 10x. This means that the object appears ten times larger. A 10x pair of binoculars is about the highest magnification a hand-held observation allows. Experienced birders who prefer 10x have learned to hold them steady.

Field of View

Field of view is the total area visible at a viewing distance of 1000 metres. It is a feature of the manufacturer's design and does not depend on the magnification or the diameter of the objective lens alone. In general, field of view at 1000 metres should be between 100 and 150 metres, or between 300 and 450 feet at 1000 yards. Keep in mind that some binoculars with a large field of view may provide a sharp image only in the centre, with the image quality dropping dramatically towards the edge or margin, a noticeable feature of 'wide-angle' binoculars. Avoid binoculars that are less than 100 metres or more than 150 metres.

In summary, many Ontario birders have switched from 10 power to high quality 7x or 8x because these binoculars are more versatile. Why not try sevens or eights in combination with a good telescope?

A test at the point of purchase (or under field conditions if possible) is essential and will convince you that you get what you pay for.

Next time: *Binoculars and eyeglass wearers.*

House Finch Disease

Many House Finches with a severe eye disease were observed at a Toronto feeder in August and September 1995. It is caused by the bacterium *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* which is spreading in the East. Visible symptoms of the Toronto birds included: swollen red eye and surrounding area, loss of feathers around the eye, and closing eye(s). Some birds are blind in one eye and have a deteriorating condition in the other. For more information, see *Birdscope* 9(3): 4-5, by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Birders should watch their feeders for House Finches with evidence of this disease.

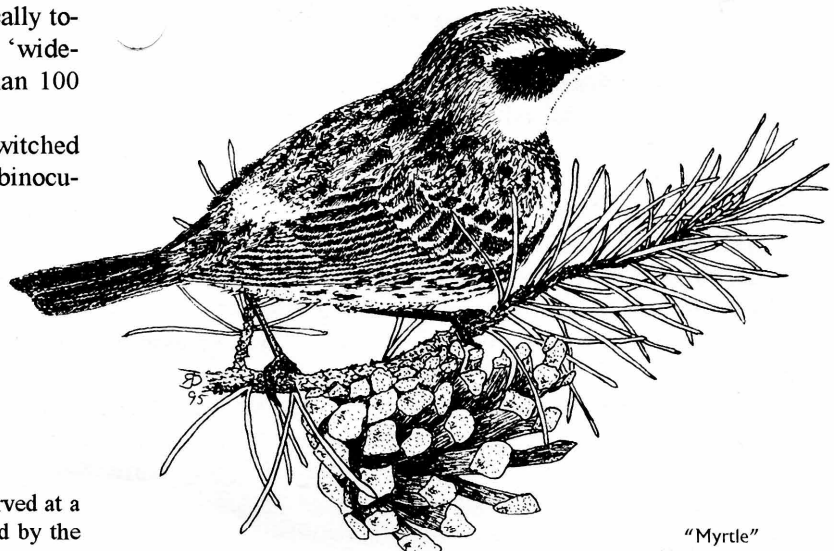
Ross James Profile of an Artist

This issue of *OFO NEWS* is illustrated by Ross James, Department of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum.

No, I can't say that I have been drawing all my life, although I vaguely remember liking to colour in grade school. My first attempt at public illustration was a pencil drawing done in my early university years. A leap, of some sorts, came in the early seventies when I entered an acrylic painting in a museum staff art show. That resulted in having a published colour illustration of my art in *Rotunda* magazine. (And *Rotunda* you ask? Well, don't worry about it, there is seldom anything about birds anyway).

There always seems precious little time to devote to art of any sort. Specific projects, such as the illustrations for the *Breeding Birds of Ontario*, pushed me to find the time. Otherwise it just happens once in a while when I get fed up with too many other things, and say to hell with them, and get out my pens or some brushes and retreat to a quiet place for a little enjoyment. After all, one needs to retreat into ones being once in a while, to watch lines, dots and brush strokes merge to something you can call your own and feel a sense of accomplishment about, and enjoy showing others.

I have worked mainly with pen and ink, or with acrylic paints, although I haven't done a great deal of painting. Finding time to finish a large work (that might take months) isn't a very appealing thought. As much as I like to work in colour, there is also satisfaction in taking a few hours with pen and ink, and presto there it is. Something to hang your hat on. But, I dream of painting more some day. Retirement was when?



"Myrtle"
Yellow-rumped
Warbler

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