



OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

Volume 17 Number 1

February 1999

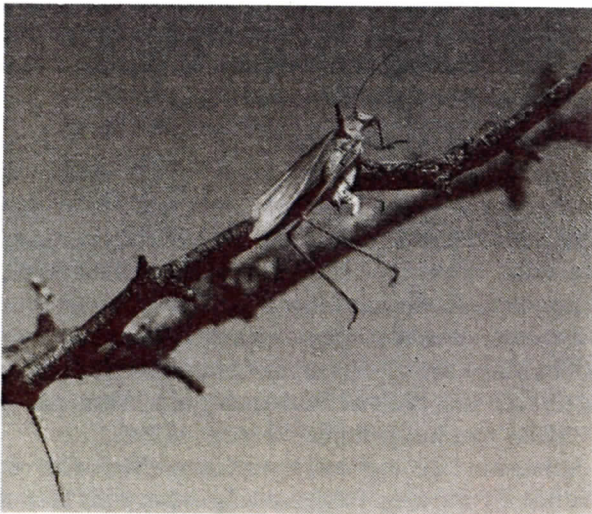
Shrike's Larder

Ron Pittaway

Shrikes are famous for impaling animals on thorns and barbed wire. Where there are no sharp spines, shrikes wedge prey between forked branches.

Why do shrikes impale prey? Like other passerines, shrikes lack the powerful feet and claws of hawks and owls, a shrike's feet are not much stronger than a robin's. Impaling and wedging probably evolved as a way of holding large food. Impaling also serves to store food for later use. Also, shrikes regurgitate the indigestible parts of their prey in the form of a pellet, often waiting to cast off a pellet before feeding again, yet another reason for temporally impaling prey. Small prey such as insects are crushed in the bill before swallowing whole or held in a foot against a perch and picked apart or impaled for later use.

Bent's (1950) *Life Histories* note that impaled prey are frequently not eaten. More recently, Yosef in *Natural History* (June 1991:37-38) suggests that impaled prey has territorial significance. Male Loggerhead Shrikes with "impressive caches" may be more attractive to females.



Impaled Bush Katydid (*Scudderidae* sp.)
Photo by Ron Pittaway

ONTBIRDS Soars Over 500

Mike Street

ONTBIRDS, OFO's new Internet mailserver for Ontario bird sightings, is very popular with OFO members. A mailserver is like an automatic post office; when someone sends an e-mail with a report of a sighting to the server, it relays the message to all subscribers. From its start last September to 1 February 1999, ONTBIRDS' 500 subscribers have posted more than 575 messages.

ONTBIRDS reports have ranged from Northern Gannets at Hamilton and a major concentration of Purple Sandpipers at Presqu'ile Provincial Park to Christmas Count highlights, a Virginia Rail seen in winter and Gray Partridge at Brantford Airport.

ONTBIRDS is intended almost exclusively for sightings. It is *not* an Internet "Chat" line. The few exceptions are to inform birders of birding related events. Interested? Follow these instructions precisely. Send an e-mail to:

majordomo@hwc.org

Skip the subject line and in the body of the e-mail, type:

subscribe ontbirds

Skip another line, and type:

end

Then send the message. That's all it takes.

AOU Check-list Committee

Congratulations to Dr. Jim Rising of the University of Toronto who is a new member of *The Committee on Classification and Nomenclature* of the American Ornithologists' Union. Jim is well known for his research on sparrows and orioles.

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Favourite Birding Hotspots

The Toronto Islands

Norm Murr

The Toronto Islands are just a 10 minute ferry ride from downtown Toronto. During spring and fall migration it is hard to believe that you are in a large city. You can pick up a ferry schedule at the ferry docks on Queens Quay at the foot of Bay Street. Most active birders take the 6:30 or 7:00 a.m. ferry to Wards Island or the 8:00 or 8:15 a.m. to Hanlans Point. I suggest that you take an early morning boat as this is the best time for Hanlans Point and Wards Island as well.

This guide covers mainly the migration periods of mid-March to early June and mid-August to early November.

AREA 1: Wards Island Dock to the Eastern Gap

Be sure to check the harbour and ferry dock area after you leave the ferry, then walk to the corner of 6th Street and Channel Avenue. The clumps of bushes and trees here and close by are excellent for all the common vireos and warblers, including Philadelphia and Blue-headed Vireos, Northern Parula, Blue-winged, Orange-crowned, Pine and Mourning Warblers. A walk along the streets beyond could produce many more warblers such as Cerulean, all the thrushes and Chipping Sparrows. Carolina Wren breeds here.

Check the bushes and trees along Lakeshore Avenue from 5th Street to 1st Street for thrushes, vireos, warblers and sparrows. Take your time as Whip-poor-will and Yellow-breasted Chat have been found here.

The area bounded by 1st Street, the Eastern Gap and the lake is one of the best small areas in Toronto; I have recorded 172 species here, including Tufted Titmouse.

AREA 2A: Wards Island: Area 1 to Fire Station

A walk along or beside the boardwalk can be rewarding for landbirds, especially sparrows. Cerulean Warbler has been seen and Mourning Warblers are regular.

Watch for Northern Mockingbird, both cuckoos and Eastern Towhee. Sometimes four to six Brown Thrashers are seen during one walk and all six swallow species are quite common around the boardwalk. Check the lake for waterfowl, including all three scoters and Horned Grebe.

AREA 2B: Wards Island: Fire Station to Area 6 (The Trap)

Similar to AREA 2A but watch for Connecticut, Pine and Prairie Warblers. Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole and Indigo Bunting can be here in good numbers. Winter Wren and Gray Catbird can be common along the boardwalk. All six species of swallows often swoop and feed along the boardwalk. Black-crowned Night-Herons fly to and from the Leslie Street Spit. Watch for Common Loons overhead.

AREA 3: Algonquin Island

This residential area has a field and woods at the west end. Most common warblers and several sparrow species are often found along the streets and Carolina Wren is resident here. Thrushes and orioles occur in good numbers and the area is worth checking if you plan an all day trip to the islands.

AREA 4: Snake Island

Reached by crossing a wooden foot bridge, this island, dominated by tall willows and thick underbrush, can be productive when other areas are quiet. Check the lagoon for Horned and Pied-billed Grebes. Watch for all the regular warblers as well as Mourning, Connecticut and Northern Parula. Worm-eating Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat have been seen on this island. Tree Swallow, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Common Grackle breed here. In April, the waters of the harbour have large numbers of waterfowl, including Horned, Eared (rare), Red-necked and Pied-billed Grebes, Ruddy and Wood Ducks, Redhead, Canvasback and all three scoters.

AREA 5: Snug Harbour

Just west of Snake Island, cross over a stone footbridge and immediately turn right along a hardly visible path. This small very brushy area has wetter habitat than Snake Island and can be very good. Most of the same birds found on Snake Island are here along with Northern Waterthrushes and Ovenbirds. Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded and Connecticut Warblers occur, and Green Heron, Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser frequent the lagoon. This is a good place for Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows as well as American Woodcock.

AREA 6: "The Trap"(SE of the Island Church)

Over the years, this has turned out to be one of the best areas on this end of the islands. Every time I check it I find a variety of birds, including all the regular ones found elsewhere and American Woodcock, both cuckoos, Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Whip-poor-will, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Orange-crowned, Mourning and Connecticut Warblers, and in May of 1996, a Harris's Sparrow. The underbrush has been thinned out but should always be checked as you pass.

AREA 7: Centre Island

This manicured area of grass and old willows is heavily used by people. Check the lagoon for Pied-billed Grebe and Hooded Merganser and the pier on the south side for nesting Cliff Swallows. Pine, Blackpoll and Cerulean Warblers have been seen in the tall trees so check them carefully.

AREA 8: The Sanctuary (front part)

The front part of the Sanctuary is good for all the regular vireos, thrushes, warblers and sparrows. Some good birds have been found here. Yellow-breasted Chat was until recent years a regular in May. Look for Yellow-throated and Philadelphia Vireos, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Orange-crowned, Pine, Prairie, Cerulean, Hooded, Mourning and Connecticut Warblers in the spring and fall. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, House and Carolina Wrens, and Willow Flycatchers breed here and in AREA 9. A Blue Grosbeak was here in May of 1998.

Also seen over the years were Acadian, Olive-sided and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, Whip-poor-will, and a variety of sparrows. In the wet areas look for Least and American Bitterns.

Check the area thoroughly for Long-eared and Northern Saw-whet Owls in October and winter. *Please do not disturb the Owls.* You can enjoy them from a proper distance.

AREA 9: The Sanctuary (back part).

The rear area of the Sanctuary is behind and beside the maintenance storage area and has all the birds of the front part. This is the better of the two areas for owls. A Boreal Owl was found here. Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows and Eastern Towhee can be common. Nelson's Sharp-tailed and Grasshopper Sparrows were seen in a recent May. Look and listen for Carolina Wren as it breeds in some years.

Watch overhead for raptors that sometimes hunt the area.

AREAS 10 & 11: School (Old) and Lighthouse

No write up of this area would be complete without mentioning that in October 1993, a Variegated Flycatcher spent many weeks around the lighthouse.

Look near the lighthouse for Northern Saw-whet Owl, Eastern Bluebird, Connecticut and Mourning Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, Summer Tanager, Grasshopper Sparrow and Acadian Flycatcher. In the woods across the road you may find Whip-poor-will, Willow, Alder, Yellow-bellied and Great Crested Flycatchers. At the western edge of the woods, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting and Baltimore Oriole are likely. Watch for the occasional Northern Mockingbird.

AREAS 12: Gibraltar Point

Gibraltar Point acts as a migrant trap and has birds most days. You may find Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Yellow-throated and White-eyed Vireos, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Mockingbird, Orchard Oriole and a good variety of warblers and sparrows. On the lake look for Red-necked and Horned Grebes and an occasional shorebird.

The wet area is one of the best places to look for Orange-crowned Warbler, Nelson's Sharp-tailed and Grasshopper Sparrows. Sedge and Marsh Wrens and Least and American Bitterns have occurred.

Check the trout pond for waterfowl, herons and all six swallows.

AREA 13 & 14: Hanlans Point (South & Central)

As you start north through the bushy and sandy areas you should find some of the same birds as Gibraltar Point along with Chipping, Fox, Lincoln's and Clay-colored Sparrows. The usual warblers may include Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Connecticut, Mourning and rarely, Yellow-breasted Chat. Just south of the south end of the airport fence look for Hooded, Prairie and Cerulean Warblers. A Black-throated Gray Warbler was found in May 1998. Also found a couple of times in the fall was

Black-backed Woodpecker. Many flycatchers, thrushes and sparrows occur during a fallout.

AREA 15 & 16: Hanlans Point NW and Airfield

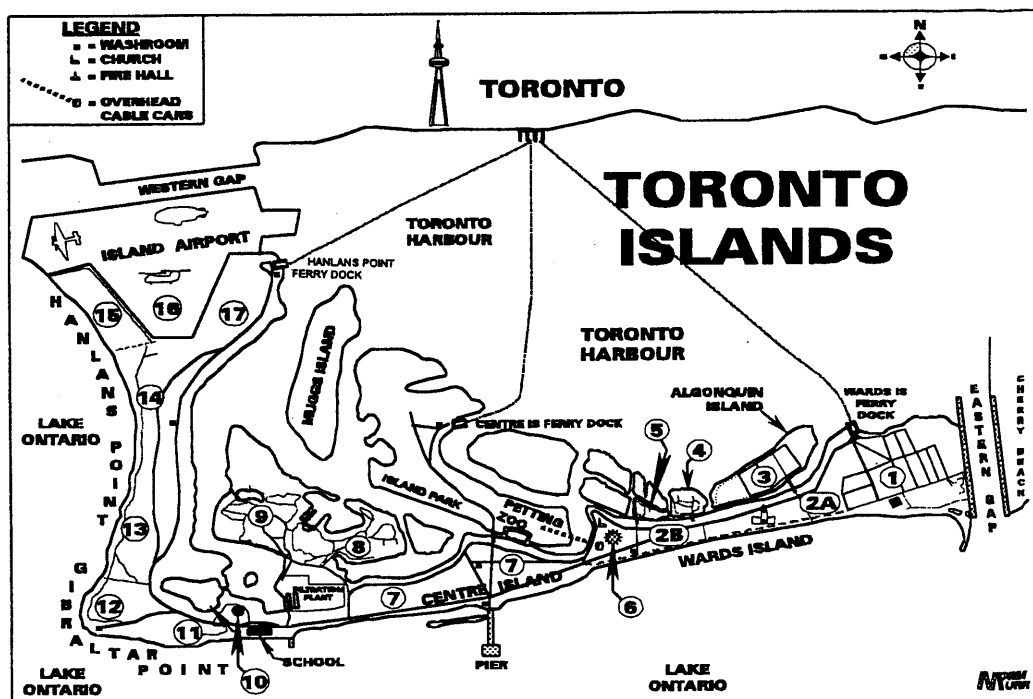
These are not the most productive areas but should be checked for Swamp, Savannah and Song Sparrows. A Le Conte's Sparrow showed up at the north end in fall 1996. In spring 1998 two Marsh Wrens and American Bittern were in the wet area.

Eastern Meadowlarks breed here and frequent the airfield along with Bobolinks. Check the fence for Eastern Kingbird and Eastern Phoebe.

The beach is the best place on the islands to find shorebirds. Sometimes "white-winged gulls" turn up. Puddles on the airfield may attract Short-billed Dowitcher and Dunlin.

AREA 17: Hanlans Point: South End of Fence to Ferry Dock

You should walk this area in early morning, starting at the ferry dock, but it can still be good later in the day if you come from Centre Island. The trees, bushes and grass can be full of birds, enough to keep you busy for a couple of hours if you pick the right day.



Expect to see all the regular vireos, warblers, thrushes and sparrows. Rarer species are Yellow-throated and Olive-sided Flycatchers, Orange-crowned, Blue-winged and Golden-winged, Mourning, Connecticut, Prairie, Cerulean and Hooded Warblers, Orchard Oriole, Eastern Bluebird, Gray-cheeked Thrush and Clay-colored Sparrow. A surprising Yellow Rail was found along the airport fence.

As you walk, keep a sharp eye out for accipiters and falcons hunting this area.

If you only have a half day I highly recommend that you bird the areas from the Hanlans Ferry dock to Gibraltar Point if there is a fall out.

I hope you find this guide helpful. Get up and get out early and you will be rewarded birding the Toronto Islands.

Why I Love Spruce Grouse

Jim Bendell

I am from the east end of Toronto from English parents who had little formal education beyond public school. I liked to read authors like Seton, Lofting and Roberts. Through the public library, Boy Scouts, the Royal Ontario Museum, and excellent teachers, I began my lifelong wonder and thrill of the outdoors. My wilderness was the Don Valley. By chance I got a summer job with the old Lands and Forests at the Wildlife Research station in Algonquin Park in 1946. Next to marrying a wonderful woman, this was the determining point of my life. In the Park, I met professors of zoology and worked alongside men and women and older experienced men who loved nature and knew what they were doing. No question, I would become a biologist!

I studied biology with an emphasis on zoology at the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia. In my undergraduate and graduate days the pioneering and seminal work of Charles Elton on cyclic fluctuations in Canadian wildlife attracted much attention, and still does. I consider myself privileged to know the Canadians and others who have worked on this problem from the 1930s to the present time.

I must confess that as an undergraduate, population problems were merely part of the curriculum with little personal concern. As a graduate student, my supervisors said: "work on Blue Grouse and disease" which I did until I had a brilliant flash of the obvious; why are there so many grouse? As part of our honeymoon, my wife and I were plunked on Vancouver Island near Campbell River. The area was in early recovery from logging and a huge forest fire. One could look up old roads and see 8 to 10 Blue Grouse males in sexual display within 500 metres. Amazing! Here was my Holy Grail and personal quest and it still is. Over the years the search for answers has been fun and rewarding in the knowledge gained from successes and failures, and in the support of friends and colleagues. Much of what I write is the result of their ideas and good work.

Why are there so many grouse? This has led to the general question of abundance and distribution; what determines the balance and level of density of populations, and what determines their local and geographic distribution? Answers to these questions are fundamental to resource management and what must be decided in planning for our own population. In seeking answers we have touched on demography, ecology, behaviour,

genetics, nutrition and body chemical composition.

Why study grouse? They are good study material and also very beautiful. They can easily be counted, caught and observed, and are largely nonmigratory. They operate by sight and sound in the daytime which puts us and them together. Some kind of grouse is found close to home anywhere in Canada so costs and time to travel to study areas can be reduced. Grouse are truly northern birds and have evolved to live with our strongly seasonal climate and the snow and the joy of biting insects it brings. Some live the winter well on conifer needles low in quality and high in toxins. How this is done may provide food to humans. Grouse are largely herbivores and are therefore prey and food supply to numerous predators. All in all, grouse are good study material for population research and for their unique and valuable attributes.



Male Spruce Grouse Photo *Mike Runtz*

Why study Spruce Grouse? We wanted to pursue the population problem with a grouse easily studied in simple natural habitats within a day's drive of Toronto. We also wanted a place where commercial forestry and hunting occurred, and we were free to experiment with the bird and its habitat. All this translated into Spruce Grouse near Gogama, Ontario. Given adequate time, smarts and money, much more knowledge could be added to what we have gained from this animal and place.

How we studied Spruce Grouse. Building on our results with Blue Grouse on Vancouver Island, we compared the demography, habitat and behaviour of populations at different densities and focused on

the role of females in regulating density and distribution. A strong but wrong rival view of population regulation is that predators, especially nest predators, determine the density of grouse so we gave particular attention to them. We also studied as many species of plants and animals in our forests as we could for interest, basic inventory and potential interaction with grouse; for example, the production of berries that may affect the food supply in fall, and the abundance of Masked Shrews that may compete with young chicks for insect food. Since 1979 we have censused 21 forests from Chapleau to Kirkland Lake and done intensive work in four forests near Gogama. These are young (15 year), medium aged (26 years), old (65 years) Jack Pine plantations, and old logged and burned coniferous-deciduous forests (65 years). Our methods included total census, sampling by trapping and pellet counts, radio telemetry, experimental removal of hens and males and application of the

insecticide *Bacillus thuringensis* (*B.t.*) to determine its effect on insects, grouse chicks and other wildlife. Currently, I am continuing our experimental distribution of artificial nests of chicken eggs in the four study forests to measure predation and the effect of microclimate on the gain or loss of weight of eggs. My wife and I do the leg and egg work and continue the census each year of Spruce and Ruffed Grouse and Snowshoe Hare begun in 1979. The field work with chicken eggs will finish this spring of 1999.

What have we found? Plantations of any kind and Jack Pine forests are generally considered barren of wildlife. Jack Pine forests are a major component of our boreal forest yet are generally neglected. From our work, plantations of Jack Pine can be extremely productive of wildlife and this depends on the age of the stand and the quantity and quality of the shrub and herb layers on the forest floor. *In plantations of Jack Pine of 11 to 21 years of age we found the highest density of Spruce Grouse reported anywhere. Spruce Grouse city!*

We see precise regulation of populations of Spruce Grouse at different levels of density and no evidence of cycles in abundance. Hares and Ruffed Grouse fluctuate more in numbers but apparently do not cycle, and this is in simple plantations of pine and in more complex mixed conifer and hardwood forest. We found a 20-fold difference in the abundance of grouse and hares in forests but 30 km apart. High density is associated with the early stage of forest succession in the young plantation. We see no clear relationship among the numbers of hares, Ruffed and Spruce Grouse.

Demographic and removal studies show population regulation in Spruce Grouse (as in Blue Grouse and Gray Squirrels) is by ejection of surplus yearlings in spring by established adults and yearlings. In Blue Grouse, intrinsic differences in behavioural types seem part of this spacing process. We have yet to make this analysis of our data on Spruce Grouse. A hot topic for future research is the difference between recruits and dispersers, its cause, and what happens to animals that disperse.

The territorial behaviour of hens apparently sets breeding density of Spruce Grouse (and Blue Grouse) and males adjust

their numbers to the number of females. Females rule! The size of territories of hens, time of laying, and clutch size are all related to the kind and amount of food hens need for laying eggs. After a winter diet of Jack Pine needles, hens switch to new herbaceous growth such as flowers of Trailing Arbutus and capsules of moss (*Polytrichum*) apparently needed for ovulation.

With the cooperation of the Canadian Forestry Service and Canadian Wildlife Service, we applied a conventional treatment of *B.t.* insecticide and assessed the impact on a number of birds, mammals, amphibians and arthropods. We focused on Spruce Grouse and caterpillars. The insecticide knocked down caterpillars on low shrubs and herbs by 60 percent. While our evidence is weak, chicks grew slower and suffered higher mortality where caterpillars were reduced. Hence *B.t.* had impacts beyond target caterpillars, and caterpillars may be essential foods of chicks and part of the resources comprising the territories of breeding hens.

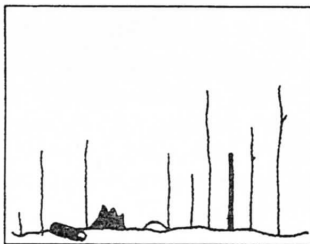
The fate of hundreds of artificial nests in different forests and old nests over four years suggests the amount of predation cannot explain the density of grouse. Most loss of simulated and actual Spruce Grouse nests was to Black Bears and Red Squirrels. However, I was astonished to find chicken eggs gained weight in the old nests of Spruce Grouse and in imitated nests in forests where Spruce Grouse were and are abundant. On the other hand, eggs lost weight in forests where Spruce Grouse were few or absent and Ruffed Grouse were abundant. The density of pores in the eggshell of Spruce Grouse is greater than that in Ruffed Grouse which suggests greater water loss from the embryo of Spruce Grouse. Perhaps the microclimate of the forest floor partly explains the local and even geographical distribution of these two grouse. Thus the Spruce Grouse conforms to the distribution of the moist boreal forest. The Ruffed Grouse inhabits the drier deciduous forest.

If you have any thoughts on anything I have said, I would be delighted to hear from you.

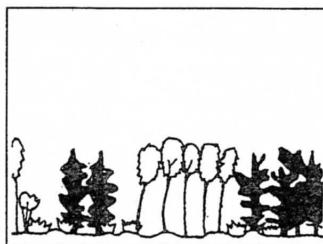
J.F. Bendell, RR 2 Clayton ON K0A 1P0

Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto.

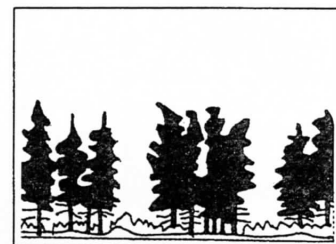
Typical Forests of Gogama, Ontario



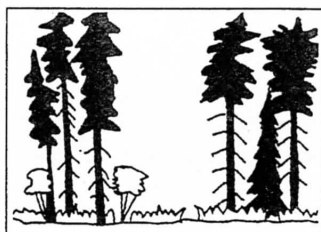
A. Young Jack Pine, burned 1981, profile 1981. Age 0. No Spruce Grouse, Ruffed Grouse or Snowshoe Hares for 0-7 years.



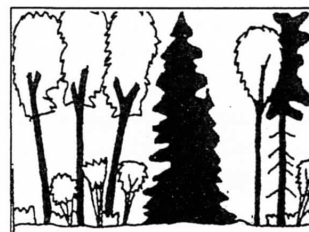
B. Young Jack Pine and deciduous, profile 1994. Age 11 years. Snowshoe Hares are abundant. Some Ruffed Grouse. Very few Spruce Grouse.



C. Medium aged Jack Pine, seeded 1970, profile 1994. Age 24 years. Spruce Grouse and Snowshoe Hares are abundant. No Ruffed Grouse.



D. Old Jack Pine, seeded 1948, profile 1994. Age 46 years. Spruce Grouse are low. No Ruffed Grouse. Very few Snowshoe Hares.



E. Old mixed conifer-deciduous, logged 1940, profile 1994. Age 54 years. Ruffed Grouse and Snowshoe Hares are abundant. Very few Spruce Grouse.

Shrike ID

Ron Pittaway and Michael King

Introduction: Field guides make shrike identification seem much easier than it is. Most field marks used to separate adult Loggerhead and Northern Shrikes show variation and overlap. We do *not* discuss the identification of first year Northern Shrikes because they are easily identified by their brownish coloration, heavy barring below and lack of a face patch between the eye and bill. We include a section on aging Loggerhead Shrikes at a distance in summer which should be useful to those monitoring populations on the breeding grounds.

Status: The Loggerhead Shrike is endangered and declining in southern Ontario with very few breeding pairs in recent years. A few Loggerheads return in late March, but most arrive in mid-April. Most Loggerheads depart the province by late September; later birds should be identified with caution. The Northern Shrike breeds around Hudson and James Bays in northern Ontario. It is a scarce to uncommon winter visitor to southern Ontario. The first Northern Shrikes arrive south in early October and the last ones linger to late April. Use extreme caution identifying a shrike in March and April when both species may be present in southern Ontario.

Pitfalls: Northern Shrikes are most often misidentified as Loggerhead Shrikes in spring, especially March and April. Why? (1) Northern Shrikes lose much of the barring on their underparts by wear and appear clear breasted, (2) the Northern's bill becomes all dark in spring and (3) Northern Shrikes in spring act like Loggerheads by perching lower to hunt emerging worms, insects and frogs. For an identification challenge, compare the Loggerhead (middle left) and spring Northern (middle right).

Underparts: Fall Loggerheads may show faint barring on the breast at close range, whereas fall and early winter Northern Shrikes are distinctly vermiculated below (top right). However, Northern Shrikes in spring often appear clear breasted because the vermiculations have worn off (middle right). Therefore, a distinctly barred shrike in fall and early winter is a Northern, but the lack of barring on a late winter or spring shrike is inconclusive for Loggerhead.

Black Mask: In Loggerheads the black mask usually extends narrowly above the bill (left head), whereas most Northern Shrikes have no black there (right head). However, Godfrey (1986) cautioned that most Northern Shrikes, but not all, lack any black on the forehead. As well, Zimmerman (1955) "examined one Loggerhead Shrike that showed whitish feathers at the base of the culmen." At close range, a typical Northern Shrike face shows a *narrow whitish arch* over the base of the bill (right head). Another helpful mark, Northern Shrikes (absent in Loggerheads) *usually have a small white area below the eyes*, sometimes joined to the gray lores (right head and top right bird).

Bill Colour: Some Loggerheads have a pale base to the bill in fall, usually much smaller than in Northern Shrikes and confined to the lower mandible (Zimmerman 1955). However, a pale base to the lower mandible has not been reported for Loggerheads in Ontario (James 1983). In fall and early winter Northern Shrikes (top right), *the pale base of the bill is extensive* (one-quarter to one-third), often extending onto the upper mandible. *Caution:* Both species have entirely black bills in spring, sometimes as early as mid-March in Northern Shrikes (Zimmerman 1955).

Bill Size and Hook Size: Both species have hooked bills, but in most Northern Shrikes the hook is proportionately longer. Most Loggerheads have stubbier bills with a smaller hook. With practice it is possible to identify some Northern Shrikes by their longer, heavier and more strongly hooked bills. It is not unusual to see a shrike whose bill appears intermediate!

Rump Colour: Compare the two birds in flight. Most, but not all, Northern Shrikes have a contrasting white rump, noticeable in flight; it sometimes shows on perched birds. Ontario Loggerheads usually have gray rumps, showing little contrast with the back and tail. The western subspecies *Lanius ludovicianus excubitorides* (a possible vagrant to Ontario) of the Loggerhead Shrike has a whiter rump, more like a Northern, than eastern *L. l. migrans*. Rump colour is not diagnostic, but strongly suggests either Loggerhead (gray) or Northern (white) in Ontario.

Behaviour: Northern Shrikes typically perch near the top of a tall tree and fly higher than Loggerheads, usually maintaining level and slightly undulating flight between perches. Upon perching, Northern Shrikes repeatedly flick their tails upwards (James 1983). Loggerhead Shrikes rarely perch higher than 10 metres, usually lower on a shrub or mullein stalk. Taking flight, Loggerheads drop low, speeding along the ground, swooping upward to perch again. In many hours of watching Loggerheads, we rarely noted vigorous upward tail flicking. Usually after perching, a Loggerhead will tilt or wag its tail downwards in a deliberate motion reminiscent of an Eastern Phoebe. Northern Shrikes may move their tails downwards when balancing or in a wind, but they normally energetically flick their tails upwards. The different behaviours described above are not diagnostic, but suggest either Loggerhead or Northern Shrike.

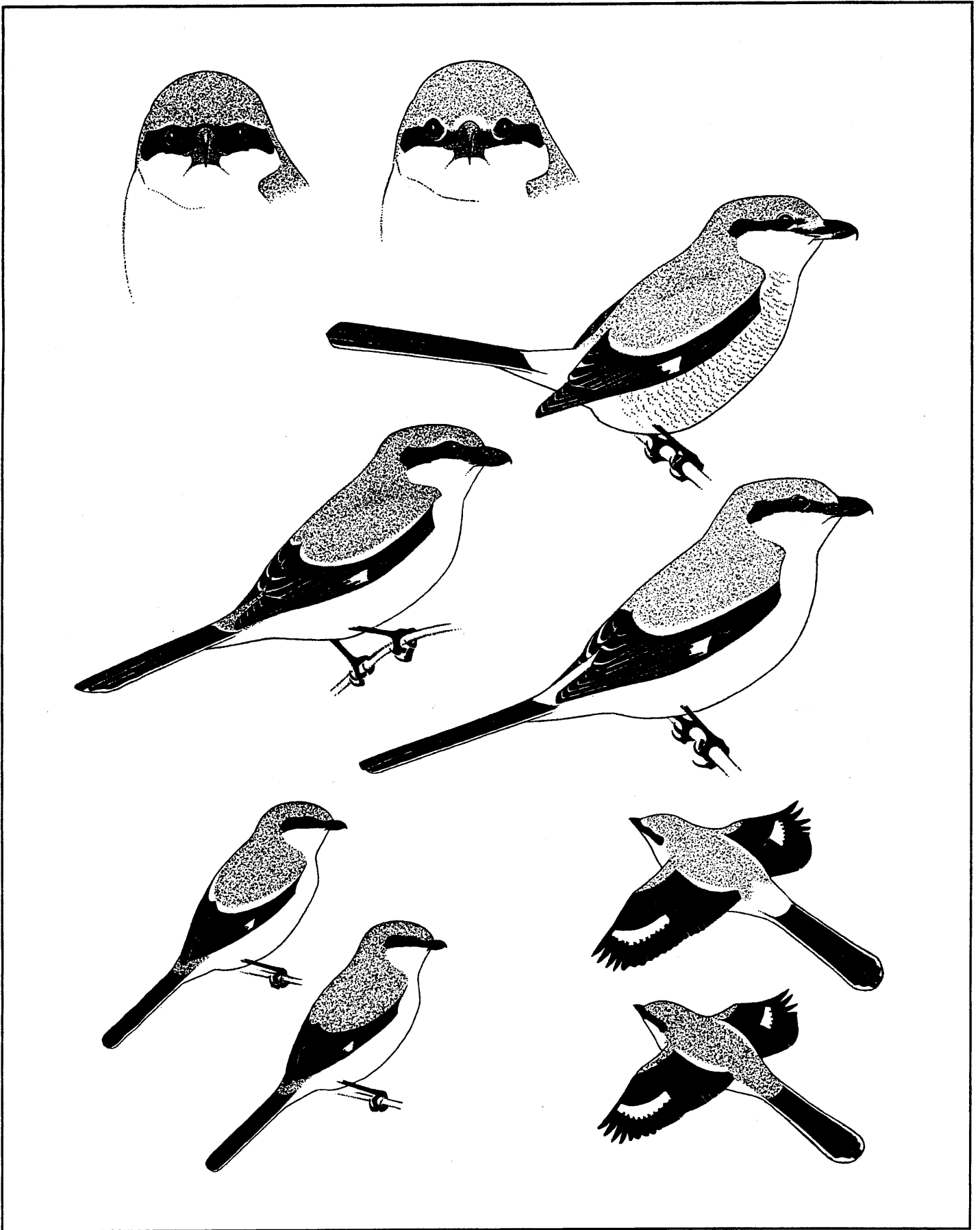
Sexing and Aging: The sexes of both species are alike in all plumages. Juvenile Loggerhead Shrikes at close range (not illustrated) are grayer overall than adults with fine barring on the underparts (except the throat), a more contrasting whitish throat and a somewhat duller mask stripe. At a distance, adult and juvenile Loggerheads appear very similar as shown by the two small perched birds at the bottom left. Adults (left bird) usually show a conspicuous wedge of white feathers, sometimes hidden, between the black wings and gray back. This mark is formed by the white tips of the outer scapulars and can be seen at a long range. Juveniles (right bird) lack the white scapular edges. Loggerheads retain juvenal plumage for only a few weeks in summer before molting into an adultlike plumage. Adult Northern Shrikes also show white scapular edges. Brownish first year Northern Shrikes become adultlike by spring.

Acknowledgements

We thank Michel Gosselin, Jean Iron, Mike Turner and Ron Tozer for helpful comments. Brad Millen kindly allowed access to study skins at the Royal Ontario Museum. Zimmerman (1955) and James (1983) referenced below are essential reading on shrike identification.

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Top Heads: Loggerhead Shrike (left) and Northern Shrike (right), **Middle Three Large Birds:** adult Loggerhead (middle left), fresh fall adult Northern (top right) and worn spring adult Northern (middle right), **Bottom Two Perched Birds:** adult Loggerhead (left) and juvenile Loggerhead (right), **Two Flying Birds:** Northern (upper) and Loggerhead (lower) by *Michael King*.

Shrikes, Cows and Coyotes

Ron Pittaway

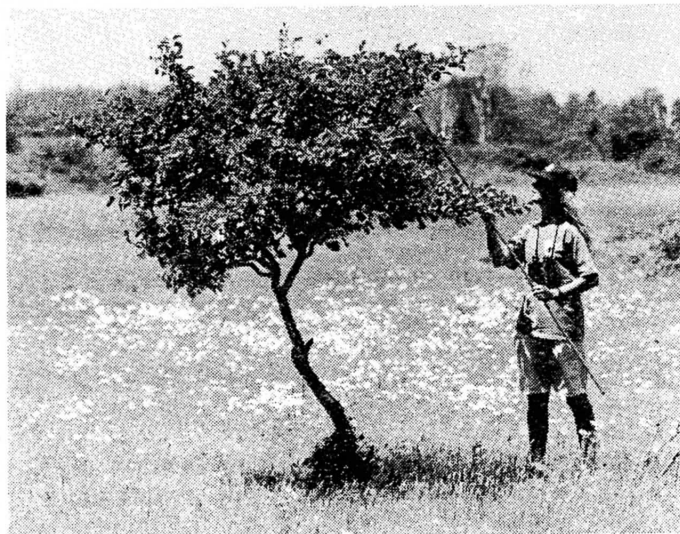
On 19 June 1991, Marie-Christine Paquin of McGill University and I checked a Loggerhead Shrike's nest with five eggs at the Cameron Ranch on Carden Alvar in Victoria County. We expected the eggs to hatch soon because there were five eggs in the nest when it was found on 6 June. As shown in the photograph, the nest was in a hawthorn about three metres high, having a bare trunk and branches clumped at the top. Both adult shrikes were nearby during our brief visit on the 19 June.

I returned the next day on 20 June, mysteriously the adult shrikes were gone and the nest which contained five eggs the day before was now empty! Examination of the nest showed no evidence of damage (or a struggle) such as being climbed at night by a raccoon. There were no broken eggs on the ground. Did a farm boy or egg collector take the eggs? This seemed unlikely because the thorny branches protecting the nest were not broken. Did a snake climb the nest tree? There are no tree snakes in Carden. I was baffled.

That evening I phoned Marie-Christine in Lindsay to tell her about the missing eggs. She too was puzzled, but she solved the mystery the next morning. About 7:00 a.m. on 21 June, she observed three cows rubbing against the nest tree. Their rubbing actions caused the nest tree to whip back and forth. Marie-Christine felt that this action would have knocked the eggs out of the nest. When the cows moved on, a coyote appeared, it sniffed the ground below the nest tree as if expecting food.

The probable explanation for the mysterious disappearance of the eggs was: (1) cows knocked eggs out of the nest by rubbing against the tree and (2) a coyote found the broken eggs on the ground and ate the evidence. We never would have known what happened if the cows and coyote had not returned to the scene of the crime!

On two other occasions, I've found broken shrike eggs on the ground below a nest, apparently shaken out of the nest by cattle. Loggerhead Shrikes depend on cattle grazing to produce suitable breeding habitat on the Carden Alvar, but cows rubbing on nest trees sometimes cause nest failures.



Checking shrike nest with a mirror in Carden 19 June 1991
Photo by Ron Pittaway

Gull Quiz

Chris Escott

Can you answer these questions about Ontario gulls?

1. What is a "two-year" gull, how many species of two-year gulls occur in Ontario and what are they?
2. Little Gull is found annually in Ontario, but this has not always been the case. When was it first recorded in the province and has it bred in Ontario?
3. One species of gull that occurs in Ontario has a markedly forked tail, and this is reflected in one of its former colloquial names. Which species is it?
4. There has been a recent report in late 1998, still to be reviewed by the OBRC, of a first winter (first basic) "Common" Mew Gull, *Larus canus canus* from Point Pelee. What three recognizable forms of this species have been recorded in North America and where do they normally occur?
5. Where does the Iceland Gull breed, and does the Kumlien's subspecies of Iceland Gull breed throughout this same range?
6. What are the key field marks that identify a Black-tailed Gull and when can we expect one to show up in Ontario?
7. How many gull species are on the OBRC Review List, and what are they?

Answers page 10

Notes from the OBRC

Ron Tozer

At the OBRC Annual Spring Meeting in Toronto on 27 March 1999, members will undertake final votes on records previously circulated by mail where a decision had not been achieved, and vote on some other records where mail circulation was not completed. David Brewer, Peter Burke and Nick Escott will be completing their three year terms at the meeting; we appreciate their enthusiastic participation on behalf of OBRC. Two persons will be elected at the meeting to serve the 2000 to 2002 term.

The 1999 committee consists of: Margaret Bain, Bob Curry (Chair), Rob Dobos, Ross James (ROM Liaison), Kevin McLaughlin, Doug McRae, Ron Pittaway, Kayo Roy (Secretary) and Ron Tozer.

We are very pleased that Kayo Roy is taking over as Secretary, and anticipate that he will bring the same strong dedication and competence to OBRC operations that we have enjoyed for the last four years under Rob Dobos. Thanks again for all your hard work, Rob, and welcome aboard, Kayo!

OFO President Jean Iron is working with the FON to produce a new field checklist based on the *Checklist of the Birds of Ontario*, published in the December issue of *Ontario Birds*. Watch for it!

Please submit your Review List rare bird reports to:

Kayo Roy, OBRC Secretary

13 Kinsman Street

Fonthill ON L0S 1E3

E-mail: kayoroy@niagara.com

Thieving Wigeons

Jean Iron and Norm Murr

Poacher, thief, pirate, robber! These unflattering terms describe the American Wigeon. How did wigeon earn these names?

The second author (NM) first noticed American Wigeons stealing food from American Coots on the Leslie Street Spit, Toronto, in the fall of 1997. The coots would dive below the surface of the bay and return with a beak full of vegetation. The wigeons would immediately swim over and help themselves to some of the plant material and to any that surfaced beside the coots. The coots always had enough left to feed themselves. Maybe the coots had to dive twice as much to satisfy their needs, but there were no aggressive moves by either species. Again for three weeks in October 1998, the coots were accompanied by their usual group of wigeons on the Spit.

This feeding behaviour is well documented in the literature. Bent (1923) says: "the baldpate, being a poor diver and yet extravagantly fond of the succulent roots of the, so-called, wild celery, has to be content with what small bits of this delicacy the canvasback lets drop or what it can steal from this expert diver on its return to the surface." The American Wigeon, previously spelled Widgeon, was formerly known as the Baldpate.

Tozer and Richards (1974) remarked: "Widgeons will occasionally steal food from other waterfowl, earning the title of 'poacher'. For instance, on November 16, 1973, a flock of 50 Baldpates was observed taking vegetable matter from a feeding group of 150 American Coots."

American Wigeons are almost entirely vegetarian. They eat pondweeds, grasses, algae, sedges, wild celery, waterweed, water milfoils, duckweeds, smartweeds, arrow grasses, and water lilies (Bent 1923). They associate most frequently with waterfowl that enjoy a similar diet, the greatest overlap being between coots, wigeons and Gadwall (Eddleman, Patterson and Knopf 1985). Wigeons particularly like the roots and shoots of deep water plants which they are unable to acquire on their own. They wait until coots, Canvasbacks, Redheads or scaups return to the surface from a deep dive, bringing fresh food with them. Then, they literally grab the grasses away from diving ducks, sometimes right out of their bills! Often they gobble up dislodged grasses, stems, roots and seeds.

American Wigeons usually feed in shallow water along lake, river and pond shores. As waterfowl deplete the food in

shallow water, coots diving in deeper water make food available to non-diving wigeon (Eddleman et al. 1985).

American Wigeons benefit from robbing coots and diving ducks of food, but does robbing adversely affect their victims? Knapton and Knudsen (1978) studied wigeons robbing coots at Oak Hammock Marsh in Manitoba. They believe "Coots lose food for which they have expended energy, and therefore the process should be more properly termed piracy." Ryan (1981) noted that coots dived more often and generally left food for wigeons from their first dive, then while wigeons were preoccupied eating, they dived again for themselves. Coots that tried to evade by swimming away were generally not successful as wigeons caught up to them. Also, coots did not try to defend themselves or act aggressively. These findings are surprising since coots are very aggressive and defensive on the breeding grounds.

Why do coots and other waterfowl tolerate wigeons' thieving behaviour? The reasons may be two-fold. Coots consumed less energy by leaving food for wigeons than by evading or behaving aggressively (Ryan 1981). Also, having wigeons around may benefit the group because they respond quickly to the presence of hunters and other danger. Their piracy and distinctive whistling noise keeps all the ducks in a state of restless excitement (Bent 1923).

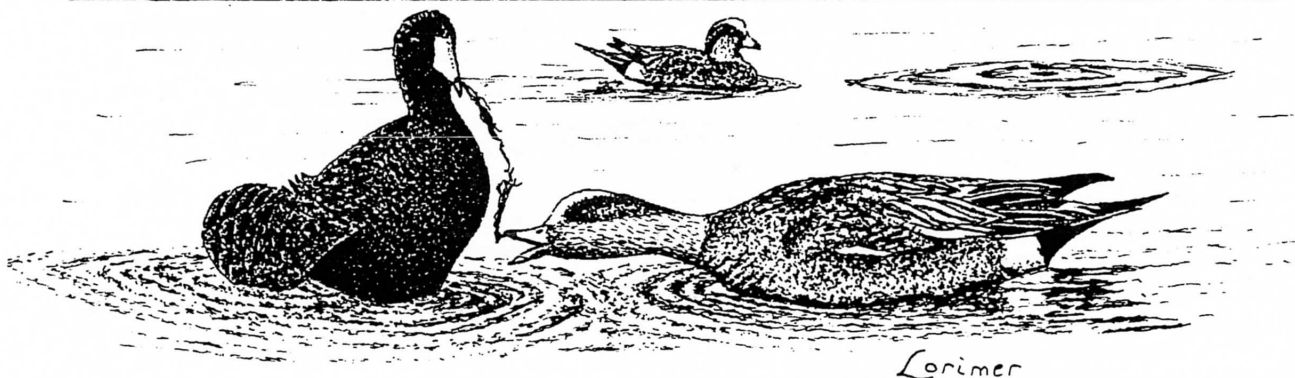
In summary, American Wigeons and Eurasian Wigeons too, steal food from coots and diving ducks because they are unable to dive to reach deeply growing plants. Coots and other waterfowl do not react aggressively or evade these actions since it is less energy consuming to tolerate thieving. In addition, they may benefit from the presence of wigeons, which are nervous and quick to respond to the presence of danger.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Ron Pittaway and Ron Tozer for locating reference material and commenting on earlier drafts.

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American Wigeon stealing food from American Coot by Peter Lorimer

Gull Quiz Answers *from page 8*

Chris Escott

1. A "two-year" gull reaches its first adult (definitive) plumage in its second year. It passes through the following plumages, each of which has its own unique identifiers that the field observer must know: juvenile, first winter (first basic), first summer (first alternate), then adult winter (definitive basic) which it acquires when about one and a half years old, followed by adult breeding (definitive alternate) plumage. In Ontario the following five species are two-year gulls: Bonaparte's, Black-headed, Ross's, Sabine's and Ivory Gulls.
2. Ontario's first and Canada's second Little Gull sighting occurred at Port Stanley on 16 November 1930, but it wasn't until the mid-1950s that it began appearing regularly each year. In 1962 the first North American nest of a Little Gull was discovered at Second Marsh, Oshawa, and there have been more than a dozen breeding records in Ontario since then. See OFO's Special Publication No. 1 (1994) *Ornithology in Ontario* for a good species account.
3. The tail of the Sabine's Gull in all plumages is forked. It was once known as Fork-tailed Gull.
4. The *Larus canus* group consists of four subspecies, three of which have occurred in North America: nominate Common Gull of northern and central Europe, the Mew Gull of western North America, and the Kamchatka Gull of northeastern Siberia. These might one day be split into separate species. *Birding* 25(6): 386-401 (1993) has an interesting article comparing these three forms.
5. Iceland Gull breeds from Ellesmere Island and Greenland south to Baffin Island. Kumlien's Gull is currently treated as a subspecies of Iceland Gull but has also been described in the past as either a hybrid or a separate species. Kumlien's Gull breeds primarily in southern Baffin Island. It is the common subspecies seen in Canada.
6. The adult Black-tailed Gull, when standing, looks like a yellow-legged Ring-billed Gull with a darker mantle, approaching that of the Lesser Black-backed Gull, and a noticeably longer bill ringed black but with the addition of a red tip. In flight it shows little or no white spots at the wing tips, and a black tail fringed with white on both terminal end and sides. Apart from one California record in 1954, this species was unknown in North America until 1980. Since then it has been recorded at least 25 times, including 6 times in Canada (BC, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland). The pattern of vagrancy suggests Black-tailed Gull could show up in Ontario any day now! See *Birding* 30(6): 470-483 (1998) for more details.
7. The OBRC Review List for Southern Ontario currently requests documentation for five species, Mew Gull, California Gull, Slaty-backed Gull, Ross's Gull and Ivory Gull. In Northern Ontario the list expands to include Laughing Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-headed Gull and Black-legged Kittiwake. For guidelines on documenting rare birds, see *Ontario Birds* 2(2): 75-79 (1984) or the OFO Web Page (www.interlog.com/~ofo) where this article has been updated.

Grand Bend

Tom Hayman

We saw northern migrants meeting summer and year round residents. Imagine seeing Black-billed Cuckoo and Snow Bunting, Eastern Phoebe and Black Scoter all on the same day. It was an OFO, Ontario Field Ornithologists, field trip on Sunday 25 October 1998. We met at the Colonial Hotel at 9:00 a.m. and headed out.

Handling 14 cars with 30 birders and giving everyone a chance to see the birds was a concern at first. But the cars turned out easier to handle than expected, and we got to good birding and unusual sights on a remarkably warm and pleasant day for late October.

First stop was at the site of the old Kettle Point lighthouse which sadly has been torn down. Good news is that there is now a large flat area at the point where you can stand or sit if weather permits without infringing on private property. Gail Worth of Brantford spotted two Red-necked Grebes. We got good looks and added them to Horned Grebes that were sitting there by the dozens. There were Lesser and Greater Scaups flying and Red-breasted Mergansers, but the highlight was the sight of a hunting Merlin. Then, as if to order, a Snow Bunting flew in from the lake and perched on a low wall in the sun in full view only a few feet away.

Next stop was at the Forest lagoons, which held lots of waterfowl. As we looked at the many duck species, including dozens of ruddies, a group of 10 Tundra Swans landed, followed by a flock of seven blue morph Snow Geese overhead. An American Pipit walked at the lagoon's edge and an American Tree Sparrow sang in the sun. We noted Pectoral Sandpipers, Common Snipe and Dunlin. We moved on to Pinery's visitor centre where we ate our lunch while looking at their many feeder birds, including Purple Finch, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Tufted Titmouse. In all areas, beside the many American Tree Sparrows, we found countless flocks of late migrating American Robins.

Our next trail was along the old riverbed south from the dam near the centre, a favourite. We were not disappointed. A great sight was a Ruffed Grouse that ran across our path into some brush then froze, standing with its neck stretched high to look like a sapling growing beside a small tree. It stayed for 15 minutes, enabling us all to see this remarkable sight. It looked much like the pose a Long-eared Owl assumes when frightened and was a life bird for several. We noted many Cedar Waxwings feeding on the multitudes of High Bush Cranberries and other fruits. Our next walk at Riverside harboured a Winter Wren that had been hiding under the boardwalk for a month now. Last stop was beside Lake Huron near sunset at Campground #5 where we picked up Black Scoter, a lifer for some, to finish our day. At 76, our total was a good one for late October. Sixty trained eyes do help. Included were 17 waterfowl, five woodpecker species and a Northern Mockingbird.

Westmeath Dunes, Ottawa River

Chris Michener

It was a beautiful sunny day when 20 people met in Westmeath on Saturday 3 October 1998. The wind was strengthening and the temperature just above 0°C. With the sun's rays still strong, it wasn't long before everyone warmed up a bit.

We drove west to Sand Point Road, parked, then walked along the beach into Westmeath Provincial Park. The park boasts several kilometres of original Ottawa River sand beach shoreline and some of the dune plants are locally and provincially rare. Songbirds were difficult to observe due to the wind and many may have migrated early. However, American Pipits were abundant, two Brant were a week early and a Northern Shrike was two weeks early by our records (Pembroke Area Field Naturalists). We observed plenty of Black-bellied Plovers as well as Dunlin, Semipalmated Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper and Common Snipe. We flushed American Bittern about five times from beach vegetation. They may have been different birds as they weren't seen returning after being flushed. Plenty of Leopard Frogs (including dark-pigmented) would have made easy prey. Northern Harriers patrolled the beach grass.

Our daily species total was increased by a trip to Lake Doré in the afternoon. Dozens of Horned and Red-necked Grebes were seen as well as a Pied-billed Grebe. White-winged and Surf Scoters, early Buffleheads, scaup sp., many Common Loons and scores of Bonaparte's Gulls highlighted the sightings on the lake.

Forty-eight species were recorded on the outing. No Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows were seen, which is unusual for 3 October. I want to thank the 11 birders who travelled long distances to explore some of the Upper Ottawa Valley. I hope they return and bird the Pembroke area again.

Shrikes and Mockingbirds

Ron Pittaway

Northern Mockingbirds are rare north of Lake Ontario. On the Carden Alvar in Victoria County, I have several times noted mockingbirds sharing the same habitat with nesting Loggerhead Shrikes. Mockingbirds sometimes steal from shrike larders. Ficken and Ficken (1982) in the *Wilson Bulletin* 94(2):223 commented on the interspecific plumage similarity of the Loggerhead Shrike and Northern Mockingbird. They felt the mockingbird may benefit from its similarity to a shrike because other species might be deceived by its resemblance, thus scaring off competitors for habitat. Given the rarity of both Loggerhead Shrikes and Northern Mockingbirds in central Ontario, one wonders if the association of shrikes and mockingbirds in Carden is strictly coincidental.

1997 Owl Symposium

The proceedings (+ 600 pages) of the 1997 Owl Symposium held in Winnipeg are available free (while copies last) from the US Forest Service in Madison, Wisconsin by calling 608-231-9237. The proceedings are also on the Internet:

www.ncfes.umn.edu

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OFO trips

Future Field Trips

April 17 (Saturday) Gore Bay, Manitoulin Island. Leader: Doreen Bailey and the Friends of Misery Bay. To register, call Jerry Guild by April 1, 905-823-1973. Sharp-tailed Grouse lek and area.

April 24 (Saturday) Algonquin Provincial Park. Leader: Ron Tozer. 705-635-2315. Meet at the WEST GATE of the park at 9:00 a.m. Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee. Park permit \$10.00 per car required.

May 1 (Saturday) Rondeau Provincial Park. Leader: Allen Woodliffe. Meet at the Visitors Centre at 8:00 a.m. Park entrance fee applies. Camping will be available. For rates and reservations call 519-674-1750. Early migrants.

May 8 (Saturday) Leslie Street Spit, Toronto. Leader: Norm Murr. 905-770-7325. Meet at the base of The Spit parking lot at 8:00 a.m. Spring migrants.

May 22 (Saturday) Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area. Leader: Terry Sprague. 613-476-5072. Meet at Canadian Tire parking lot on Hwy 33 just west of Picton at 9:00 a.m. Motels nearby. Spring migrants.

May 28-29 (Friday-Saturday) Rainy River. Leader: Dave Elder. 807-597-2008 or Box 252 Atikokan ON P0T 1C0. Meet at the junction of Worthington Rd. #3 and Hwy 11, about 10 km east of Rainy River (3 side roads east of town) at 7:00 a.m. local time. American White Pelican, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Yellow Rail, Piping Plover, Marbled Godwit, Western Kingbird, Sandhill Crane, Black-billed Magpie, Connecticut Warbler, Le Conte's Sparrow. Please register by 1 May or trip will be cancelled.

May 30 (Sunday) Carden Alvar, Victoria County. Leader: Ron Pittaway. 705-286-3471. Meet in Kirkfield at the parking lot of Lady MacKenzie School on the right on Victoria 6 (formerly 503) about 1 km north of Hwy 48 at 9:00 a.m. Loggerhead Shrike, Sedge Wren, Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows.

June 12 (Saturday) St. Clair Wildlife Reserve and Pelee. Leader: John Miles. 519-587-5223. Meet at the parking lot of the St. Clair Wildlife Reserve at 7:00 a.m. Breeding birds: Yellow-headed Blackbird, Least Bittern, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat.

June 19 (Saturday) Bruce Peninsula. Leader: John Miles. 519-587-5223. Meet at the entrance to Spirit Conservation Area about 1.5 km north of Wiarton on the east side of Hwy 6 at 8:00 a.m. Excellent chance to see Bruce Peninsula and its birds. Possible: Brewer's Blackbird, Common Raven, Virginia Rail, Clay-colored Sparrow, Sandhill Crane, Upland Sandpiper, breeding birds.

1998 OFO Certificates of Appreciation

Every year OFO recognizes individuals and organizations for their hospitality, cooperation and personal efforts to help birds and the Ontario birding community.

The recipients of the 1998 OFO Certificates of Appreciation are:

Jack and Dawn Christilaw

Kilbride
Varied Thrush
January 1998

Magnus and Isobel Huber

Harmony
Spotted Towhee
March 1998

John Carley

For his efforts to protect the Leslie Street Spit in Toronto
17 October 1998

Harry Kerr

Toronto
Keeping the phone lines open to inform birders about rare birds
17 October 1998

Michael King

Toronto
For his maps and illustrations in *OFO NEWS* and *Ontario Birds*
17 October 1998

Stephan Mangotich & CoSteel Recycling

Being the primary donor of NPHW tower at Beamer Conservation Area and managing the project
17 October 1998

Wendy Fox

Canada Trust, Friends of the Environment Foundation

Grimsby
For a significant financial donation to the NPHW tower at Beamer Conservation Area
17 October 1998

To nominate a person or organization for an OFO award, send a letter or e-mail to: Chris Escott, 1 Shouldice Court, Toronto ON M2L 2S3 e-mail: escott@user.rose.com

Please provide the name of the person or organization, address, phone number, the reason for the award, and your name.

Gord Harry

Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority

Allowing the tower on Conservation property, arranging permits and the installation of footings.
17 October 1998

Lionel Schipper

Arranging the donation of the NPHW tower at Beamer Conservation Area.
17 October 1998

Pete Koenig

System Administrator Hamilton/Wentworth Community Net (HWCN)

Setting up the Majordomo software for e-mail lists. *Ontbirds* was the first for HWCN
17 October 1998

Kit Darling

Hamilton/Wentworth Community Net (HWCN)

Establishing an e-mail list capability for *Ontbirds*
17 October 1998

John Chalmers

St. Lawrence Seaway Authority
Allowing birders on Seaway property at Port Weller East
December 1998

Albert Vanderliek

Bismark
Welcoming birders to watch birds at the large pond on his property
December 1998

Thank You

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Gus Yaki

Winnie Yung

Shrike versus Kingbird

Ron Pittaway

Loggerhead Shrikes and Eastern Kingbirds share the same breeding habitat on the Carden Alvar in Victoria County. Both are aggressive species. The Eastern Kingbird's scientific name *Tyrannus tyrannus* suggests that it is a modern day *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Birds are thought to have evolved from a line of dinosaurs.

Kingbirds are well known for fearlessly attacking and chasing hawks and crows off their territories. Shrikes kill birds and other vertebrates by severing the spinal cord with their hooked bill and pair of toothlike projections on the upper mandible near the tip.

Which is top bird, shrike or kingbird? Twice I've seen Eastern Kingbirds aggressively tail chasing Loggerhead Shrikes. Both times the shrikes didn't fight back, they fled. One of the shrikes was a recently fledged juvenile, the other I couldn't age. Dispersing juveniles are more vulnerable than adults to kingbird attacks. Shrikes and kingbirds normally co-exist peacefully, but when there's a duel, I bet on *T. tyrannus*.

Gerry Bennett and Henri Ouellet

OFO members were greatly saddened by the recent deaths of Gerry Bennett and Henri Ouellet. Tributes to Gerry and Henri will be published in the April 1999 *Ontario Birds*.

Taverner Cup Birding Competition

Saturday 29 May 1999

For more information and to enter a team, contact
Jeff Harrison, 514-486-4943, Fax 514-487-8580
E-mail: dha@magi.com

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