



# OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

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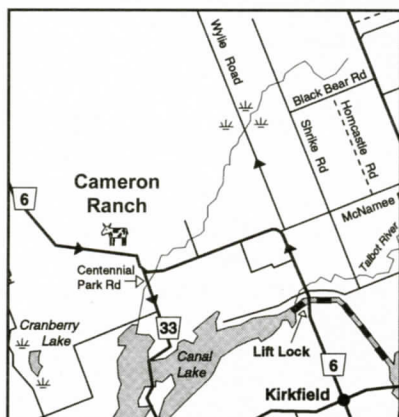
## Carden Alvar Save Cameron Ranch

Jean Iron and Ron Pittaway

The Nature Conservancy of Canada in partnership with the Ontario Field Ornithologists, Couchiching Conservancy and Toronto Ornithological Club is fund raising for \$950,000 to save the 3000 acre Cameron Ranch. This will be one of the largest land acquisitions in southern Ontario in the history of the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

The Cameron Ranch is part of the Carden Alvar, which is designated as an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International. Carden is nationally significant as one of the last strongholds of the endangered Loggerhead Shrike and it has high populations of grassland birds, a declining group in North America. Like Point Pelee, Carden is now an internationally famous birding area, drawing birders and naturalists from all over the world.

See the Cameron Ranch brochure enclosed with this issue. Please give generously to save the Carden Alvar, which is one of the most important birding areas in Ontario. If you know of potential corporate donors, we would love to hear from you by e-mail at: [jeaniron@sympatico.ca](mailto:jeaniron@sympatico.ca) or 416-445-9297. The Nature Conservancy of Canada needs your help to save the Cameron Ranch.



## Bruce Falls Distinguished Ornithologist

Jean Iron and Ron Pittaway

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Bruce Falls of Toronto will be the fifth recipient of the OFO Distinguished Ornithologist Award.

Bruce has had a long and distinguished career as a professional ornithologist. He is also a mammalogist, having done his doctoral studies on the White-footed Mouse at Long Point on Lake Erie, which continues to be one of his favourite birding areas.

As professor of zoology at the University of Toronto, Bruce supervised many graduate students who conducted research at the Wildlife Research Station in Algonquin Park. Bruce and his students have studied many bird species, including rails, catbirds, Ovenbirds, sparrows, meadowlarks and blackbirds. He has authored dozens of scientific papers on birds in peer reviewed journals. As well, Bruce co-authored the accounts of the White-throated Sparrow in Bent's Life Histories (1968) and the new *Birds of North America* (1994).

Bruce is a member of the American Ornithologists' Union, past president of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists, member of Bird Studies Canada, The Brodie Club, Toronto Ornithological Club, and Ontario Field Ornithologists. He is very supportive of OFO, including writing articles in *OFO News*.

Now retired, Bruce and his wife Ann are active and enthusiastic members of the Ontario birding community, with a recent interest in videotaping birds. They make annual May trips to Point Pelee, do Big Days in support of the Baillie Birdathon, and participate in the Breeding Bird Atlas and Forest Bird Monitoring Program.

Bruce Falls was nominated by the editors of *Ontario Birds*: Ron Tozer, Bill Crins, and Ron Pittaway. The Distinguished Ornithologist Award will be presented to Bruce by Ron Tasker, his longtime birding friend, at the OFO Annual Convention and Banquet in Kingston on Saturday, 28 September 2002.

# A Young Birder's Story

Andrew Keaveney

Aaaannnnnhhh. Aaaannnnnhhh. Aaaannnnnhhh. No, this is not the most annoying sound in the world. It's my alarm clock. Then again, maybe it is the most annoying sound in the world. I slam it down hard after a hard night's work of watching movies and playing video games. The time. Five o'clock. AM! I rush out of the room with my big winter jacket, gloves, hat and all. Binoculars in hand, I make my way down the 6 flights of steps and out around the back of Lennox-Addington, University of Guelph Residence. My chariot awaits. A car door opens and out pops Andrew Davis, my birding partner and ride for the day. First stop, Lewis's Woodpecker, Wooler, Ontario. Never heard of Wooler? Can't blame you. I hadn't until about two weeks earlier. For the past two weeks Wooler and surrounding area had been running low on donuts and coffee due to excited visitors in a hurry to get their bins on a woodpecker. So this is where Andrew and I were headed, not knowing it was possible to get lost within a kilometre of the location, or that my camera would run out of batteries before I got off my first shot, or that we would have to wait 45 minutes before we realized that the woodpecker was in the tree behind us. Once we were satisfied with that exceptional bird, we (Andrew) drove all the way back in the other direction to Hagersville to see yet another bird, this time a LBJ (little brown job), the Smith's Longspur. With our birding skills stretched beyond reality and our luck that we pulled out of somewhere else, we were able to find both 'target species' and add two new checks to our holy and sacred Ontario lists.

I had never met the other Andrew before that morning and, in fact, we had just discovered that we both existed through *Ontbirds* and a few preceding e-mails. The prospect of seeing this rare bird was enough to send us over 500 kilometres just two days later. And I think this is where I hit the main point of this article.

I've been watching birds for more than 12 years now and birding fairly intensely for nearly 7 years. My friends always used to ask what makes me tick, but now I think they understand enough not to ask. That and the fact that now most of my friends are birders. I'm supposed to tell you about what it's been like birding as a teen over the past few years. But I've tried hard to put it into words, and it can't be done. Birders should know exactly what I'm talking about. You'd have to have "been there". Shared it! The experiences, that is: Point Pelee in early May; Algonquin Park during the summer of 2000; World Series of Birding, Cape May, New Jersey, May 2001; Rainy River, June 2001; Rondeau Park during summer 2001; and Costa Rica, Christmas 2001. And the hundreds of parks, towns, valleys, lakes and hills I visited for one simple reason. Birds. And why not. Birding is one of the easiest ways to get outdoors. To go to far off places and make personal discoveries and

memories that will last a lifetime, especially if you invite someone along for the ride. Now that I'm in university there's a lot more going through my mind when it comes to the big question. "What do I want to do with my life?" I know that birds are going to frame my life's work, and I can't think of anything else in the world I would rather do.

A common phrase I hear older birders say is that there are so few younger birders these days. I disagree. Maybe you have to look a little harder. A recent article in the February 2002 issue of *Birding* magazine published by the American Birding Association (ABA) gave the results of a study done on the popularity of birding. In this article was a profile of the age of birding participants. Birders between the ages of 16 and 24 years old have gone up by at least 5% since 1995. The article explains the demographics behind the growth of birding and I highly recommend it to all birders.

I know most of the young birders across Ontario, if not by acquaintance, then by name. It is remarkable what these and other North American young birders can and have accomplished. Nevertheless, I enjoy meeting older experienced birders even more than ones my own age because they know what birding was like before the current 'youth invasion' and their experiences may never again be repeated by us youngsters. It truly is a 'sport' for the young at heart.

A good way to become acquainted with young birders is to join *TeenBirdChat* or become a youth member of the ABA. First, *TeenBirdChat* is a group of young birders who send e-mails back and forth to a server at yahoogroups and exchange daily outings, winter lists and photo quiz IDs. If an older, more experienced birder saw some of the things posted, they would be hard pressed to say they came from 'kids'. Secondly, the ABA is heavily involved with youth, everything from sponsoring youth birding teams to organizing youth conventions (the second ever Youth Birding Convention will be held from 29 July to 4 August 2002 at Sierra Vista, Arizona). ABA also publishes a newsletter done by the youth members of the ABA. We are out there. Where? Wherever the birds are I guess.

The next time you see a kid with binoculars, make sure you say hello and get his name. He may just be the next Ted Parker.

Ted Parker (1953-1993) was an brilliant young birder and inspiration to many of today's young birders. Ted set a new North American Big Year record of 626 species in 1971. When in university, he already was known across North America for his identification skills and interest in birds and nature. Ted later researched birds and conservation in tropical America. His career ended tragically in a plane crash in Ecuador in 1993. Ted Parker also wrote the book *A Parrot Without a Name*.

# Winter Ovenbird

George Bryant

While preparing to lead a 10 a.m. Toronto Field Naturalists outing on 6 February 2002 at Sunnybrook Park, I checked out the park's heated washrooms. To my amazement, there was an Ovenbird basking in the sun centimetres in front of the transom to the men's door, from which warm air was wafting. The bird took off and I was unable to show it to the group.

Fortunately, at 12:30 p.m. we rediscovered the bird about 100 metres north of the building. It was under a Norway Spruce by the path eating peanut bits cast from a nearby feeder. From there the Ovenbird flew west to an embankment where stumps and leaf litter protruded from the snow. This bird was seen on several days thereafter by many observers always by the spruce tree with the last observation being 7 March by Bruce and Ann Falls.

Sunnybrook Park is part of a series of Toronto parks covering the valley floor and slopes of the Don River. At the Ovenbird site there is considerable "climax" forest with Sugar Maple, Hemlock, White Pine and Black Cherry predominating. The understory provides suitable habitat for migrating Ovenbirds but urban pressures such as cats and raccoons preclude successful breeding.

A paved trail follows the course of Wilket Creek, a tributary of the Don River. Here during this winter several persons had placed small feeding stations beside the trail. One individual had been placing crushed peanuts in the feeders and also under the Norway Spruce on a daily basis since November.

The above average temperatures that had reigned for the past 18 months continued into this past winter with averages for December and January being 3 to 4°C above normal. Temperatures in February were closer to seasonal norms with at least two cold spells about February 7 and 14 when daily lows were below -10°C. The largest and first significant snowfall did not occur until 31 January-1 February. This was followed by another medium snowfall on 18-19-20 February.

I assume this bird had been somewhere in the Don Valley throughout the fall and early winter. The arrival of below freezing temperatures and substantial snow cover would finally preclude the Ovenbird from foraging for its usual invertebrate prey. However, this Ovenbird survived both snowfalls and was last seen on 7 March, in its usual place under the Norway Spruce.

In southern Ontario, there are several records of Ovenbirds lingering as late as December, including five from the Greater Toronto Area (Smith 2002). There are a few January records: one at a Hamilton feeder until 12 January 1997, and an individual survived at an Ottawa feeder until 28 February 1991. The earliest spring record



Ovenbird at Sunnybrook Park in Toronto on 7 March 2002, which was the last day it was seen. Photo from a video by Bruce Falls.

for the species in Ontario is 16 April 1994 at Point Pelee (Wormington 2002).

An excellent article by Mulvihill and Leberman (1997) provides insight into winter survivability of Ovenbirds. From 4 to 19 January 1983, they observed an Ovenbird at Powdermill Nature Reserve in mountainous western Pennsylvania. On three occasions, 8, 18 and 19 January, they netted the bird and took measurements. Mild weather ended on 12 January with cold temperatures and light snow cover and the Ovenbird resorted to feeding on white millet seed. However, the measurements showed that the Ovenbird was losing weight, had no visible fat deposits and was not maintaining a positive energy balance. The authors conclude that the Ovenbird starved during the long bitterly cold night of 19-20 January 1983.

Circumstances were similar for Toronto's Ovenbird. The bird subsisted on crushed peanuts for some time, yet we wonder if it survived.

## Acknowledgments

I thank Roy Smith for providing Toronto area records, Alan Wormington for other Ontario records, and Bob Curry for pointing out the Mulvihill and Leberman article. Neil Meehan saw the Ovenbird on three occasions during regular walks and was able to clarify the food source.

## References

- Mulvihill, R.S. and Leberman, R.C. 1997. Factors affecting the survival of Ovenbirds wintering in the Northeast; Wilson Bulletin 109.
- Smith, R. 2002. Multi-Seasonal Report By Project: Ontario Data (Toronto Ornithological Club).
- Wormington, A. 2002. Notes on the Status and Distribution of Ontario Warblers. Unpublished Manuscript.

## Feeding Loggerhead Shrikes

Ron Pittaway

A message dated 27 November 2001 by Cheryl Lavers of the Arkansas Listserv on the Internet suggests that supplementary feeding of Loggerhead Shrikes is a possibility if finding enough food was a problem for shrikes. She reports "putting balls of ground meat" onto a chain link fence in severe weather, which were eaten by shrikes. The species of shrike was not specified.

This report suggests that Ontario's endangered Loggerhead Shrikes could be provided with emergency food. In the early 1990s, I found three broods of young shrikes dead in their nests after several days of unusually cold, wet and windy weather. The young died of starvation and hypothermia because the adults could not find food for them. Interestingly, shrikes that were incubating eggs during the cold spell later hatched their eggs. Perhaps during emergencies, Loggerhead Shrikes could be provided with impaled larders of Carden beef.

## Early Fledged Mourning Dove

Ron Pittaway

On 14 April 2002, Jean Iron, Eleanor Beagan and I saw two Mourning Doves in juvenal plumage at Jean Iron's feeder in Toronto. Both young birds were hatched (born) in 2002 and aged as juveniles by their woollier plumage and distinct pale edges to the wing coverts and scapulars in direct comparison with two adults.

The 14 April is apparently the earliest record of independent fledged juvenile Mourning Doves in Ontario. Bill Watson (e-mail) of Tonawanda, New York, reported that 24 April is the earliest record of a fledged juvenile in New York State. Peck and James (1994) cite the earliest Ontario egg date as 12 March for Elgin County. With an incubation period of 14 days and another 15 days in the nest before fledging (Mirarchi and Baskett 1994), a 12 March egg date could produce fledged young about 10 April, several days before my sighting of 14 April.

I thank Ron Tozer for information and assistance with the literature.

### Literature Cited

**Mirarchi, R.E. and T.S. Baskett.** 1994. Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 117 (A. Poole and F. Gill, Editors). Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and American Ornithologists Union, Washington, DC.

**Peck, G.K. and R.D. James.** 1994. Breeding Birds of Ontario: Nidology and Distribution. Volume 1: Nonpasserines. First Revision - Jaegers to Woodpeckers. Ontario Birds 12(1):11-18.

## Notes from the OBRC

Peter Burke

On 23 March 2002 the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) met at the Royal Ontario Museum for its Annual General Meeting. The Committee for 2001 voted on over 150 records this year and many final decisions were made at this meeting.

Bill Crins is the new Secretary for 2002, replacing Kayo Roy who has stepped down after serving three years in a very demanding position. The new voting members for 2002 are Ron Tozer, Chris Escott and Dave Elder. They have replaced retiring members Kevin McLaughlin, Margaret Bain and Rob Dobos, who have all served three year terms. Voting members must take a break of at least one year before being eligible to serve again for another three year term. Peter Burke continues as Chair for another year.

Please visit the OFO website at [www.ofo.ca](http://www.ofo.ca) and view the updated OBRC page. Sandra Eadie has done a fantastic job of adding several new features such as an electronic *Rare Bird Report Form* and a new article on *How to Document Rare Birds*. The report form on the OFO Web is submitted directly to the Secretary and additional evidence (drawings, photos) can be sent in electronically as well. In addition, there are abbreviated versions of the form and the article that can be printed out and taken into the field or kept in your car for reference.

Piping Plover has been added to the northern Ontario review list effective 2002. In southern Ontario, all records of Chuck-will's-widow, past and present, are requested for review. This includes the period of time when they were regularly occurring at Rondeau.

The committee has agreed that first provincial records do not require the supporting evidence of a specimen or photograph in order to gain official status on the OFO checklist. While some committees in North America are adopting this policy, the OBRC feels that a written description is sufficient evidence if the details are 100 per cent convincing.

We look forward to receiving your documentation of provincial rarities. The committee will meet again this fall for a policy meeting.

Please send rare bird reports to:

Bill Crins, OBRC Secretary  
170 Middlefield Road  
Peterborough ON K9G 8G1

E-mail: [bill.crins@sympatico.ca](mailto:bill.crins@sympatico.ca)

# Coker Bluebird Boxes

Herb Furniss

# New Peterson Guide

Ron Pittaway

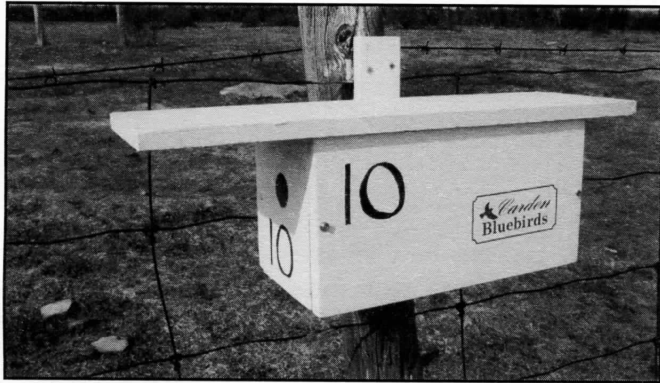


Figure 1. New Coker bluebird box is also called a "mud room box." Invented by George Coker of Winona, Ontario. It looks like a rural mailbox, 14 inches long with a 24 inch roof. Box has a front room where adult birds can shake themselves off in cold wet weather before feeding young. Photo of bluebird box 10 on Wylie Road in Carden by Herb Furniss.

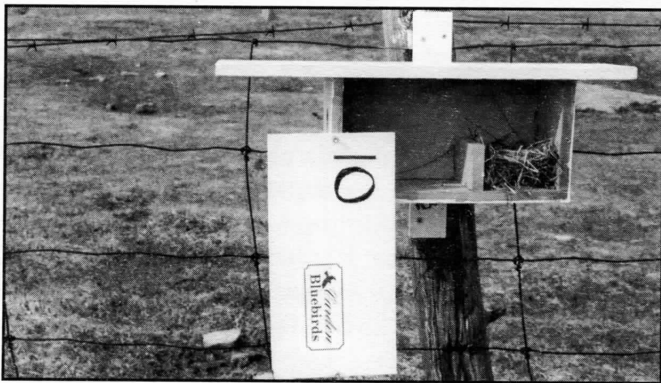
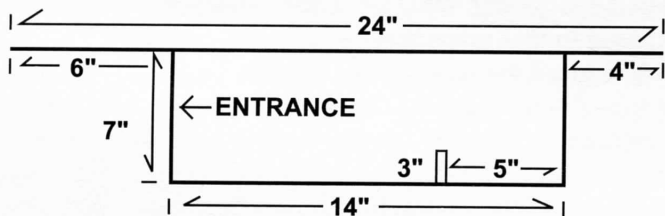


Figure 2. Bluebirds enter through a hole into a mud room, then hop over a 3 inch partition to the nest at back of box. As well as letting wet adults shake themselves off, it is hoped the nest will be out of reach of raccoons. Photo by Herb Furniss.



The Coker bluebird box is 14 inches long with a 24 inch roof. It is 7 inches high. Eastern Bluebirds produce more young from this design of bluebird box. Drawing by Herb Furniss.

Herb Furniss and Don Parkes maintain the Carden Bluebird Trail along Wylie Road and Juniper Lane on the Carden Alvar.

What is the best field guide for beginning and intermediate birders? It is the new fifth edition Peterson Field Guide (2002) to the *Birds of Eastern and Central North America*. Distributed in Canada by Thomas Allen & Son Limited and sells for \$32.95.

*Field Marks and Arrows:* Peterson's paintings compare birds in similar poses, showing field mark patterns such as colours, crests, eye rings, wing bars, rump patches and tail shapes. Peterson uses arrows to point out each bird's diagnostic field marks, making you concentrate on the most important distinctions when first learning bird identification. Text on the facing page describes each field mark.

*Text:* Concise text on the pages opposite the illustrations conveys an extraordinary amount of information on identification, similar species, voice, scientific name, size, abundance, habitat, range, distinctive subspecies (races) and morphs (phases), and other important facts free of technical terms.

*Similar Species:* This very important feature alerts you to the most similar birds and tells you how to eliminate them before making an identification. No field guide is 100% failsafe, so be cautious identifying rare, unfamiliar, and out of range birds. Seek the advice of experienced birders and learn from them.

*Voice:* Learning songs and calls is frustrating for most birders, but absolutely necessary. Peterson's descriptions and phonetic renditions are some of the best. I love the Canada Warbler's jumbled staccato song which goes *chip, chupety swee-ditchety*.

*Range Maps:* Peterson's 452 maps in the back of the guide are the largest and best of any field guide. They show provincial and state borders making it easy to see if a bird breeds, migrates or winters in your area. Much smaller thumbnail maps accompany the descriptions opposite the illustrations.

*Life List:* A checklist is part of the guide so you can check new birds as you identify them. The checklist also allows you to check off distinctive subspecies such as the Oregon Junco and morphs such as the Blue Goose.

*Other Features:* New birders should learn the roadside and flight silhouettes inside the front and back covers. Also study the vital introductory text and illustrations, which show you how to identify birds by wing, tail, bill and overall shapes and patterns. Memorize the bird topography diagram on page 13. These are the fundamentals.

*Guide Size:* This edition is a little bigger than previous ones, but still fits in your jacket or back pocket. Take it into the field with you. Highly recommended.

*Roger Tory Peterson, 28 August 1908 to 28 July 1996, died just before finishing the last plate of this guide.*

# Disease in Wild Birds

Bruce Hunter

During a one-week period last winter Mrs. Crowley found 13 House Sparrows and two Evening Grosbeaks dead under or near her bird feeder. The diagnosis was salmonellosis. About 250 Ring-billed Gulls and 50 Red-throated Loons and mergansers were found washed up on the northern shore of Lake Erie. The diagnosis was type E botulism. Last summer, newspapers in the eastern USA and southern Ontario contained stories of mortality in crows and Blue Jays. The diagnosis was West Nile Virus. More and more frequently the public has been made aware of disease occurrences in wild bird populations, and this in turn has raised many questions about environmental health in broader terms. But are these occurrences really unusual, or are they simply a function of increased awareness and more press?

## Disease Effects on Populations

Disease has always been part of the natural history of wild populations. Wild birds, like all animals including humans, are susceptible to and may die from many naturally occurring disease conditions ranging from internal and external parasites to bacterial and viral infections. Public concern about wild bird disease is generally centred on those conditions that might be transmitted from birds to people, such as salmonellosis or the emerging West Nile Virus story, or diseases like Newcastle Disease (caused by a paramyxovirus) that could be transmitted to people's pet birds or possibly commercial poultry. We know very little about the impacts of most disease conditions on wild populations of birds.

## Studying Disease

Disease in wild bird populations is difficult to study. Sick birds often sneak off and die in poorly accessible areas. Individuals that are sick or die are rapidly removed from the environment through an efficient network of predators and scavengers. Bird carcasses are small and seldom remain intact for more than a day or two. People finding an individual bird carcass are unlikely to pick it up and make the effort to submit it to a diagnostic laboratory. Therefore our largest body of knowledge relating to wild bird diseases pertains to those conditions associated with large-scale mortality. These mortality events not only have the greatest chance of being discovered, but also generate sufficient public concern to result in bird carcasses being submitted for diagnosis. Epizootics

affecting large numbers of waterfowl occur every year in North America. Diseases like type C botulism, a neurotoxin produced by a spore forming soil bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*, or avian cholera, a severe bacterial disease caused by infection with *Pasteurella multocida*, annually kill thousands of ducks, geese and shorebirds. But even with these conditions where local mortality is high, we don't know if they cause significant effects on North American waterfowl populations.

## Sub-lethal Effects

There is almost no information on the sub-lethal effects of disease in wild birds. In commercial and pet birds, clinical illness, not necessarily resulting in death, may alter growth rates, lengthen the time from hatching to fledging, and impair the ability to reproduce or cause many other adverse outcomes. It's logical that similar effects would occur in wild birds, but these more subtle consequences are difficult to monitor and measure. There is a growing body of literature indicating that sub-lethal disease does impact wild birds. For example, external parasitism damaging plumage has shown to significantly affect mate selection by female pheasants in Britain, and we are all familiar with the organochlorine (DDT) story reducing hatching success in birds of prey like the Peregrine Falcon. Great Horned Owl and Red-tailed Hawk nestlings tormented by black flies tend to leave the nest earlier and suffer higher than normal losses from predation. There is clearly much to learn about host/disease interactions in wild populations.

## What is Not Known

Disease in wild birds is very complex. For a disease to occur there first needs to be a susceptible host, that is, a bird not already immune to the particular disease. This may be a young bird, or a bird that has never been exposed to that infectious agent before, or perhaps a bird with reduced immune system capacity as a result of stress or sub-clinical chemical exposure. Next there needs to be a pathogenic (disease causing) agent with the capability of infecting that particular species of host. Finally, the environmental conditions must be such that the susceptible host and the infectious agent interact. Epidemiologists depict this interaction as the "epidemiological triangle". In wild populations of birds these factors are very difficult to study or even characterize. When are baby birds of different species



Dead Common Loon on 26 November 2001 at Peacock Point east of Port Dover on north shore of Lake Erie. The outbreak of Avian Botulism Type E in the fall of 2001 killed loons, grebes, cormorants, ducks and shorebirds. Photo by Barry Jones.

able to mount an effective immune response? What level of protection against certain disease causing agents is provided to the baby bird from its mother through the egg? How do infectious agents arrive in a population of birds and how is the agent maintained? What conditions are necessary for active infections to occur and trigger transmission to other birds? Do some birds recover from infection and remain long term carriers of the agent becoming reservoirs for future outbreaks? Does disease have any effect on species at the population level? Are there factors relating to the way we manage wildlife that enhance the chance of disease transmission? The answers to these and many more questions remain largely unknown.

### Importance of Disease

The first step in understanding the importance of disease is to determine which disease conditions are present and the prevalence of these condition in bird populations. Canada is fortunate to have an excellent wildlife disease surveillance system in place. The Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre <http://wildlife.usask.ca> has regional diagnostic laboratories associated with each of the four Canadian veterinary colleges. These centres provide routine wildlife diagnostic services and maintain a wildlife disease database for Canada. The regional laboratories work closely with provincial and federal wildlife agencies in responding to unexpected mortality events and with public health agencies in establishing disease surveillance efforts for emerging disease issues with potential human health significance, such as the recent West Nile Virus. This growing database is available to wildlife disease researchers and it is shared with similar agencies in other countries. Wildlife disease information is used by wildlife managers in making good

management decisions and wildlife disease surveillance is important in the early detection of larger environmental health problems. Perhaps most importantly, understanding wild bird health and disease provides insight into the natural history of species struggling to survive in a changing world.

*Dr. Bruce Hunter is an expert on bird diseases with the Department of Pathobiology of the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph.*

### Type E Botulism, Lake Erie

**Doug Campbell** of the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre, **Jeff Robinson** of the Canadian Wildlife Service, **Tim Johnson** and **Phil Ryan** of the Ministry of Natural Resources

Since 1999, botulism has occurred annually on Lake Erie, beginning with episodic mortalities in gulls and shorebirds during the summer, and reaching a peak during the migration of fish-eating birds, particularly Common Loons and Red-breasted Mergansers, in October and November. Source of the toxin is not known; many of the loons have fish remains in their gizzards. Identification of gizzard contents from the 1999 outbreak, done at the MNR laboratory in Wheatley, identified gobies (a species of fish from the Caspian Sea that has recently invaded the Great Lakes) as the species most commonly present. Since loons and mergansers eat live prey, it raises the question of whether sick gobies, affected by botulism themselves, are being consumed. Birds such as gulls are presumably ingesting toxin while scavenging on carcasses of fish, birds, or mudpuppies, that may have died of botulism or other causes. The geographic area of botulism occurrence has shifted from the western basin of Lake Erie in 1999 to the middle and eastern basins. This year, much of the reported mortality occurred in the area between Port Dover (east of Long Point) eastwards to Dunnville, at the mouth of the Grand River.

This note was first published in the Winter 2001/2002 issue of the *Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre Newsletter* 8(2):9.

### Bird Feeder Diseases

**Ron Pittaway**

Last winter's outbreak of *salmonellosis* in redpolls at bird feeders was a grim reminder to clean our feeders well with disinfectant to help prevent the spread of diseases. Another feeder disease is *mycoplasmosis*. This horrible eye disease affects mainly House Finches, having caused a major decline in the eastern population. It also has been reported in American Goldfinches, Evening and Pine Grosbeaks. Are we aiding the spread of bird diseases by concentrating birds at winter feeders? Should we be changing the way we feed birds?

# Kinglet Killer

Jean Iron

On 9 October 2001 while birding in Brookbanks Ravine near my house in Toronto, another walker told me about the little birds that were “trapped in thistles.” Intrigued, I went to the spot and saw two dead kinglets hanging in the burs of Common Burdock (*Arctium minus*), one a Golden-crowned Kinglet and the other a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

On 17 October 2001, I again checked the Common Burdock plants in Brookbanks Ravine for trapped birds. Along a 200 metre stretch I found 8 dead kinglets in the burdock burs, most were Golden-crowned. Figure 1. The birds were spread-winged, spread-tailed, and caught by many parts of their bodies, including the bill. The more they struggled, the more they became stuck. I estimated they had died over a period of few days to several weeks earlier.

While doing the Hamilton Naturalists Club Fall Bird Count in Centennial Park near Van Wagners Beach on 2 November 2001, I found a dead Golden-crowned Kinglet trapped in a patch of burdock.

Again in Brookbanks Ravine on 19 November 2001, Ron Pittaway and I found a freshly dead Golden-crowned Kinglet trapped by the burs of burdock.

Common Burdock is a plant with large flat leaves that look like rhubarb. Figure 2. The flowers resemble thistles and when they die the seeds form a round ball that attaches by its barbed velcro-like hooks to clothing, dogs, and anything it touches. Common Burdock grows 1-1.5 metres tall or more. Each stalk is loaded with round balls of seeds surrounded by hooks. After a walk through a waste or brushy area, the odds are that you have had these burs clinging to your clothing. Burdock is not a native North American plant; but was introduced from Europe.

I wondered why there were so many dead kinglets in this stretch of Brookbanks Ravine. The burdock plants were close to the creek and the edge of the woods. They were growing close to goldenrod, asters, wild grape and other fruit and seed-bearing plants. When the kinglets migrated through in September and October, they probably gleaned insects from the flowers and seed heads of goldenrod and other plants and inadvertently became trapped in the burdock. Because of their small size, many kinglets were unable to escape and became more stuck as they struggled. On 19 October, I noticed House Sparrows going in and out of the burdock, but did not find any of this species entangled.

Mark Kubitz (1989) reported finding a Golden-crowned Kinglet trapped in burdock in May 1989. A spring occurrence is unusual as most birds are trapped in



Figure 1: Freshly dead Golden-crowned Kinglet killed by being entangled in the burs of Common Burdock in Brookbanks Ravine, Toronto, Ontario on 17 October 2001. Photo by *Jean Iron*.



Figure 2: Basal leaf of Common Burdock with a “toonie” for scale showing the large size of mature leaves. Seed plant in fall is often 1.5 metres high or more and loaded with sticky burs. Photo 19 November 2001 by *Jean Iron*.



the fall. He located literature reports that involved the following birds killed by burdock: Blue-headed Vireo, American Goldfinch, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Pine Siskin and Black-capped Chickadee.

Brewer (1994) reported finding a dead Blue-gray Gnatcatcher caught in burdock. Martin McNicoll (1994) updated the literature review and reported the following being hooked: Magnolia Warbler, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and a warbler sp. Even small bats have been killed in this way.

In Bent (1949), James G. Needham in 1909 describes finding "scores" of Golden-crowned Kinglets entangled in the hooks of the ripening heads of burdocks one autumn in a partly wooded pasture near Lake Forest, Illinois. Needham wrote, "They were visible in all directions, scores of them sticking to the tops of the clumps on the most exposed clusters of heads. The struggle had ended fatally for all that I saw, and its severity was evidenced by the attitudes of their bodies and the disheveled condition of their plumage. I examined a number of the burdock heads to determine what attraction had brought the kinglets within range of the hooks, and found insect larvae of two species present in considerable abundance. Most abundant were the seed-eating larvae of an obscure little moth (*Metzgeria tapella*), but the larvae of the well known burdock weevil were also present in some numbers. Doubtless, it was in attempting to get these larvae that the kinglets (mostly young birds) were captured."

Small birds like kinglets stand no chance against burdock, whose seed heads are a mass of barbed hooks. I got a barbed seed stem in my eye and had to go to an eye specialist to have it removed.

This summer I will be cutting the large basal leaves of burdock plants before they flower and set burs. I urge others to remove this deadly plant in your area to save the lives of many small birds.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Ron Pittaway for valuable comments and discussions on burdock and birds, and Ron Tozer for checking references.

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# Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

**Mike Cadman**

The Atlas is into its second year and things are going very well, but there are still birders who are not participating, so we've taken some steps to make it easier than ever for people to take part. We have developed "Casual Observation Cards", which are intended to make it easy for anyone to report birds to the atlas - whether or not you actually cover a particular 10 km square for the project.

The cards are 5x7" and fit easily into your glove compartment. When you observe breeding evidence for a bird (which can be as simple as a bird in its breeding habitat in its breeding season), you can enter the specifics on this form. You'll need to know the atlas square number, so it's best to get a regional map from your atlas Regional Coordinator along with the supply of data cards. Don't report every robin you might see, but any reasonably uncommon bird or confirmed breeding evidence for any species would be important to report.

The cards can be used anywhere in Ontario. If you're travelling around, keep a supply with you. There is space to report up to 15 records on any one card in one atlas region. If you spend more time in any one spot and have more than 15 species, we would hope you'll fill in a full breeding evidence form.

The cards, regional maps and Atlas Guide for participants are available from Regional Coordinators, who are listed on the atlas web page: [www.birdsontario.org](http://www.birdsontario.org)

If you haven't seen the data from the first year of the atlas, look on the web page. There are some fascinating findings already. See for example, the maps for the Merlin, Raven, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Northern Mockingbird. Much has changed in the past 20 years, and I'm sure we'll find out a lot more by the time the project is complete.

If you have any questions about the project, talk to your Regional Coordinator, or contact the atlas office at 1-866-900-7100, e-mail: [atlas@uoguelph.ca](mailto:atlas@uoguelph.ca)

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# Tough Dove

Ron Tozer

During the morning of 29 March 2002, some creature was heard as it came down the chimney and into the Franklin stove at our home in Dwight, Ontario. When I opened the Franklin on 3 April in late afternoon, I found that the creature was a Mourning Dove, weak, but still alive. The bird's plumage was darkened from ashes in the stove, but not particularly disheveled. Remarkably, this bird had survived far into its sixth day without food or water.

I removed the Mourning Dove from the stove, and took it out to our backyard feeding tray, where I placed the bird beside a supply of mixed seed and a pan of water. Almost immediately, the dove flew weakly toward a nearby shrub, where it tumbled to the ground when attempting to land. I followed the bird into the shrubbery, picked it up again, and put it back on the feeding tray. Soon, the dove started to eat seed and drink the water. Then it closed its eyes, apparently exhausted. Later, it awakened and began feeding again. It was still on the feeder at dusk when other birds had gone to roost, but had disappeared later when I looked out.

Early on 4 April, the sooty Mourning Dove was back on the tray, and feeding avidly. It was much more active and alert than the day before. The dove continued to visit the feeder for several days thereafter, apparently none the worse for its ordeal. I suspect that the sooty appearance gradually disappeared so that soon it was impossible to distinguish the bird from the other Mourning Doves at the feeder.

This was an unusual occurrence. Cavity-nesting birds, such as Wood Ducks, are occasionally observed to fall down chimneys, apparently while searching for nest sites. Mourning Doves normally nest in the open, although there are very rare records of nests in tree and log cavities (Peck and James 1983). They certainly would not be expected to be exploring chimneys. Perhaps, this dove just lost its footing and fell down the chimney.

Six days is a long time for a bird of this size to survive without food or water. However, studies of captive Mourning Doves suggested that this species may possess a physiological mechanism that allows them to substantially reduce their body temperature and, correspondingly, their metabolic expenditures when exposed to low ambient temperatures and the absence of food (Ivacic and Labisky 1973). Mourning Doves become torpid under such conditions (Mirarchi and Baskett 1994). This capability was probably what made it possible for the dove to survive in our stove.

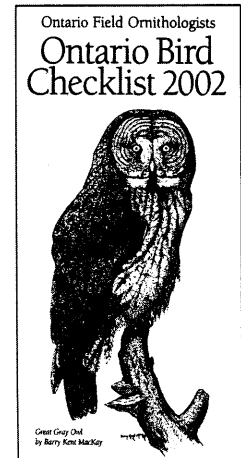
The Mourning Dove's utilization of cornfields and bird feeders, combined with its adaptation to cold conditions and short-term food deprivation, has allowed this tough dove to successfully overwinter throughout southern Ontario, and much farther north in the province (Tozer 1994).

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## Ontario Bird Checklist 2002



Completely updated checklist with all 474 species that have occurred in Ontario. Cover illustration is a Great Gray Owl by Barry Kent MacKay.

Cost: \$1  
plus 50 cents postage

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Caps \$12 and bucket hats \$13 plus  
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## West Nile Virus

An American Crow found dead in Mississauga on 19 May 2002 tested positive for West Nile Virus, indicating an early start to the season. The virus was first found in Ontario last August. Mosquitoes spread the virus mainly to birds, but humans can become infected. Although the number of deaths in North America has been small, birders in areas with mosquitoes should use an insect repellent, preferably one with a high percentage of DEET.

# OFO Trips

**August 10 (Saturday) \*New Trip\***  
**Rock Point Provincial Park and Eastern Lake Erie Shore**  
**Leader: Willie D'Anna**

Meet at **8 a.m.** at entrance to Rock Point Provincial Park near entry kiosk. Park entrance fee.

Directions: *From the west on Highway 3*, drive into Dunnville. Where Highway 3 curves left, continue straight, staying along the river. When you reach the bridge that goes right over the river, continue straight ahead onto County Road 3 eastbound. Go through Stromness and turn right onto Rymer Road (about 8 km from the bridge in Dunnville). Take the first left in 1/2 km onto Downy Road. At next intersection turn right. Park entrance comes up shortly on your left. *From the east on Highway 3*, drive into Dunnville and turn left onto Inman Road. Turn right onto the next road, Mumby Road. Follow this to County Road 3 and turn left. Follow directions from bridge in Dunnville above. Shorebirds and early fall migrants.

**August 18 (Sunday)**  
**Durham Region and Lake Ontario Marshes**

**Leader: Rayfield Pye.**

Meet at **7:30 a.m.** at the southwest corner of the Pickering GO Train station parking lot. From the east on 401, exit at Liverpool Rd and go south to Bayly St. From the west, exit at Whites Rd and go south to Bayly. Follow Bayly east to the Pickering GO Station located on Bayly St. one block east of Liverpool Rd. Early fall migrants and butterflies.

**August 25 (Sunday)**  
**Palgrave, Tottenham, Schomberg**  
**Leader: Dave Milsom**

Meet at **8 a.m.** on Patterson Sideroad just off County Road 50 in Palgrave to visit the Palgrave Conservation Area, Tottenham area sod farms and the Schomberg sewage lagoons. Early fall migrants.

**September 8 (Sunday)**  
**Presqu'ile Provincial Park**

**Leaders: Don and Ian Shanahan**  
Meet at **8 a.m.** at Beach 4 parking lot. Park entrance fee. Fall migrants, shorebirds, raptors.

**September 14 (Saturday)**  
**Hawk Hill, High Park, Toronto**  
**Hosts: Don Barnett and the Greater Toronto Raptor Watch**

Meet at **10 a.m.** in the Grenadier Restaurant parking lot. Use *only* the Bloor St. entrance at High Park Avenue.

**September 28-29 (Saturday and Sunday)**

**OFO Annual Convention, Kingston**  
Field trips to Amherst Island, Prince Edward County and local hotspots for Convention participants. See enclosed flyer for details.

**October 12 (Saturday) \*New Trip\***  
**Hamilton, Burlington, Stoney Creek and Vicinity**

**Leader: Kevin McLaughlin**

Meet at **8:00 a.m.** in Hutch's Restaurant parking lot at Van Wagners Beach in Hamilton. From Niagara on QEW, exit Centennial Parkway, turn left onto North Service Road and follow to Van Wagners Beach Road. Continue to Hutch's Restaurant. From Toronto on QEW, exit Woodward Avenue, turn right at lights, then right at next lights, go under bridge, turn right onto Van Wagners Beach Road, and continue to Hutch's Restaurant.  
Fall migrants.

**October 26 (Saturday)**  
**Hawk Cliff and Area, southwest of London**

**Leaders: Pete Read and Ian Platt**

Meet at **9:30 a.m.** From Hwy 401 interchange 177, take Hwy 4 south through west St. Thomas until it becomes Sunset Drive. Continue about 8-10 km to Union. Turn east onto County Road 27, Sparta Line Road. Go east one road, about 3 km, to County Road 22 (Fairview Road). Head south. The second road south is County Road 24, (Dexter Line) and a stop sign. Looking south you will see the sign for Hawk Cliff. Continue south on the dirt road to lake. Park along road allowance. Raptors, waterfowl, gulls, late migrants.

## Thank You

OFO is a registered charity and donors receive a tax receipt for donations over \$10.00. Donations are an important source of income. They support our publications, including *Ontario Birds* in colour, and all our services to birders. We are grateful to the following members for their generosity:

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## In Memory

OFO appreciates the special donations in fond memory of Terry Pratt and J. Murray Speirs.

# Jim Griffith Retires

**Jean Iron**

Jim Griffith retired in April after seven years of tireless service as OFO's Treasurer and member of the Board of Directors. A chartered accountant by profession, Jim brought this expertise to manage OFO's finances. He made a number of important investments of OFO funds that have helped secure a solid financial future for OFO.

Jim is well known to Toronto birders and he also is a past treasurer of the Toronto Ornithological Club. He now will have more time to go birding and travel with his wife in pursuit of life birds. On behalf of the Board of Directors and members, I thank Jim for serving OFO so well.

# Eileen Beagan: Treasurer

**Jean Iron**

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce the appointment of Eileen Beagan of Toronto as OFO's new treasurer and member of the board. Eileen brings many years of experience with the banking industry to the position.

Eileen started birding about 10 years ago. She particularly loves birding the Carden Alvar, Cranberry Marsh and Thicksen's Woods, often in the company of her sister Eleanor.

OFO is indeed fortunate to have the management of its finances again in capable hands.

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## OFO Annual Convention

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Paul Mackenzie

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Bruce Di Labio

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We welcome Ron Scovell's Old and New Book Sale.

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