



OFO NEWS

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Record Roundup of Ross's Geese

Ken Abraham

On 31 July 2002, an Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources banding team working near Cape Henrietta Maria in Polar Bear Provincial Park captured 64 Ross's Geese and 6 Ross's x Lesser Snow Goose hybrids in two roundups. Over the next week of banding, 3120 Snow, 84 Ross's and 10 hybrid geese with obvious Ross's characteristics were captured. This was the largest number of Ross's Geese ever caught in Ontario and the one day total of 64 on 31 July ranks as a record for Ross's Geese seen or encountered in one day in Ontario. Moreover, 41 flightless adults and 43 goslings is the most evidence of breeding ever recorded in Ontario. During similar banding in 2000, we captured only 3 Ross's and 2 hybrids among 2122 total adults, and in 2001, we captured only 4 Ross's among 2278 total adults plus 5 young (one family).

Cape Henrietta Maria is southern Hudson Bay's largest nesting colony of Snow Geese, with about 200,000 pairs of Lesser Snow Geese, including an unknown number of Ross's Geese. Using these banding data, we made the crude estimate that roughly 280-360 pairs of Ross's Geese might have nested in Ontario in 2000-2001, but after our 2002 experience, the estimate may be as high as 2250 pairs. These estimates must be viewed cautiously. The variation between the 2000, 2001 and 2002 estimates may represent sampling error (e.g. such small capture samples from a very large colony that we may, by chance, have missed aggregations of Ross's Geese in the previous 2 years), or it may represent an anomalously high number of nesting Ross's Geese in 2002 (e.g. in this year of late snow melt and delayed migration of the millions of geese which pass through the Hudson Bay Lowland each spring; some may have decided to stay and nest rather than move on). In either case, the evidence of substantial nesting of Ross's Geese in Ontario is clear and documents a dramatic increase over the past 25 years; see Paul Prevett's 1987 account in the first Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas.

The banding crew included OFO's Jean Iron, MNR staff Lucy Brown, Jim Castle, Don Filliter, Tyler Muhly and the author. Banding is used to monitor survival, harvest and distribution of Snow Geese and is part of a continent wide program supported by the Canadian Wildlife Service, United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arctic Goose Joint Venture.

Although the Ross's Goose was once the rarest of North America's geese, its population has grown amazingly from 34,000 in 1966 to 805,000 in spring 1998. Once confined to the central Arctic and western U.S., it has now expanded into the eastern Arctic and mid-continent area as reported by Kelley, J.R., D.C. Duncan and D.R. Yparraguirre. 2001. *Distribution and Abundance in T.J. Moser, editor. The Status of Ross's geese. Arctic Goose Joint Venture Special Publication. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. and Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa, Ontario.*



Flock of Ross's Geese on 31 July 2002 near Cape Henrietta Maria on the coast of Hudson Bay in Ontario. Photo by Ken Abraham.



Ken Abraham with two adult Ross's Geese and one gosling on 2 August 2002 on the coast of Hudson Bay in Ontario. Photo by Jean Iron.

Flycatching Ring-billed Gulls

Don Shanahan

For several years in the late 1990s, while walking the beach on August evenings at Presqu'île Provincial Park, Northumberland County, my son Ian and I occasionally saw groups of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) that appeared to be flycatching. I qualify the flycatching statement because for most of our observations no insects were seen as the gulls cruised just above Eastern Cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*) growing immediately east of the beach. Becoming more curious, we noticed that "flycatching behaviour" occurred infrequently in late summer, usually after 20 August, lasted about 30 minutes and always on hot, humid evenings. Gathering in flocks, the gulls would fly back and forth across a given area at heights of 5 to 30 metres. The gulls flew slowly with steady wing beats, then with wings spread, would lift their necks and snap at minute prey. Even tracking individual gulls with a spotting scope, could not reveal what they were eating. Checking the beach and area about the cottonwoods also failed to produce a prey candidate. While Green Darners (*Anax junius*) and Lady Bird Beetles (*Coccinellidae*) were usually abundant, they were easily seen and did not appear to be eaten by the gulls. Columns of Midge Flies (*Chironomidae*) were absent at these times. The Ring-billeds were occasionally joined by a handful of Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*) and Bonaparte's Gulls (*L. philadelphia*). On 31 August 2000 and 21 August 2001, the gulls were joined by up to 20 Common Nighthawks (*Chordeiles minor*) and by dozens of swallows. This grouping of birds was impressive and confirmed that the prey was very small.

On the evening of 7 September 2001 the plot took another twist. Between 1800 and 1830h, Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls were eating flying ants (*Formicidae*) in the region of Beach 4 and the cottonwoods immediately adjacent. After 1830h, the gulls spread north to feed over the entire 2 km of beach edge cottonwoods as well as over the water and later over the north end of the beach. Unlike in previous instances, the large flying ants (6 to 8 mm long) could be seen in the air, the gulls were seen eating them and it was easy to capture a few ants to verify their identification.

During the evening of 31 August 2002, another major flycatching episode occurred over Presqu'île Beach. This time various sizes of flying ants were seen eating from ground level by Ring-billed, Herring and Bonaparte's Gulls. The smallest ants captured were about 2 millimetres long and disappeared from sight when flying at heights above about 15 metres. It seems probable that these small ants were the "invisible prey" referred to earlier.

Gulls in general are known as very successful opportunistic foragers eating a wide range of food (Sibley 2001). Tinbergen (1967) refers to Herring Gulls taking insects, including flying ants. The hawking of ants and other insects by Herring Gulls is also referred to in Graham (1975). He also refers to California Gulls (*L. californicus*) consuming midges (*Chironomidae*), which are very tiny. Bent (1963) refers to insects as being part of the Ring-billed Gull's diet as does Ehrlich et al. (1988) and Crosby (1986). Burton (1960) reports seeing Ring-billed Gulls "snatching...ants from the air" on 6 September 1960 at Basswood Lake, Algoma District. As was the case at Presqu'île, these ants were no doubt gravid females dispersing to establish new colonies. There is much anecdotal evidence about the consumption of flying ants by various species of gulls. However, I was unable to find accounts of Ring-billed Gulls flycatching for prey that was too small to be seen.

While the flycatching I have described remains predictable and interesting, it leaves some questions unanswered. If the gulls were eating tiny flying ants during times when no prey could be seen, could there be other miniscule species of insects being preyed upon? It also seems reasonable to wonder how it is energetically profitable for Ring-billed Gulls to pursue airborne prey that is so tiny?

Acknowledgements

I thank Philip Careless for his comments on the insects referred to in this note, Ian Shanahan for field observations and the editors of *OFO News* for providing references and pertinent information.

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Throw out those cowbird eggs? A tale of two Song Sparrows

Ross James

The Brown-headed Cowbird is a well known nest parasite, laying its eggs in many other birds' nests. This behaviour and the parasitic way of life in general does not appeal to me a great deal and I am sure the same applies to most of us. Yet it is another strategy for reproduction and survival, one of many that are found in the world of birds, no less marvelous than the others. The buffalo bird, as cowbirds once were known, if they were to follow the roaming bison, couldn't stay in one place long enough to raise a family. The successful members of the species left their eggs behind, as they followed the shifting herds.

This was not a nasty thing to do from their perspective, just a means to follow a nomadic way of life. We have to blame our forefathers for destroying their roaming habits and encouraging them to expand across the continent to practice their way of life with a whole new array of birds. But some of us still look askance at the cowbirds habits, and throw out their eggs whenever we are presented with the opportunity. Presumably we want to help the birds that have been parasitized. But, are we helping?

This past summer, I found two Song Sparrow nests that presented me with some questions. The first nest eventually had three cowbird eggs, as well as five sparrow eggs. And yes, two of the cowbird eggs hatched first and the sparrow chicks did not fare well at all. Now, I could have removed the cowbird eggs, and then the sparrows might have raised their five young ones.

But, consider that the behaviour of this pair of birds was such that it was not able to go about its nesting without revealing its nest to cowbirds—probably more than one female. If these young survived, genetically all would probably be much like their parents, unable to foil the efforts of cowbirds. Thus the success of the parasitic way of life would be assured and enhanced for another generation at least. By removing the cowbird eggs, I might have helped one pair of sparrows raise young, but would I not also have been perpetuating the genes of birds that allow the parasitic way of life?

The second Song Sparrow nest was in my own back yard, located about ten paces from my TV aerial. That aerial is a favourite perch of many birds, including cowbirds. From there the cowbirds can scan quite an area of surroundings for nesting birds. Yet the Song Sparrow pair laid and incubated a clutch of eggs right under the cowbirds beaks and never revealed their secret. This pair of sparrows doesn't need my help. They are looking after the future of Song Sparrows by passing on genes that ought to

minimize the cowbirds chance of success in future.

With the exception of a very rare species such as the Kirtland's Warbler, there is no possible way that people can find enough nests of any species to make a significant difference to their reproductive success by throwing out cowbird eggs. If Song Sparrows, or any other species, are to overcome the potential harmful affects of cowbird parasitism, they must develop strategies on their own to deal with the cowbirds.

If we throw out the cowbird eggs from a birds nest, are we not helping to perpetuate the behaviour of birds that cannot apparently deal with cowbirds? If we thus dilute the gene pool of pairs that can avoid cowbirds, by artificially perpetuation birds that cannot, are we really helping the species in the long term? Would it not be better to let a nest fail because of cowbirds and minimize the passing of less successful genes to the next generation?

CD Announcement

Bird Songs of the Great Lakes

By John Neville, 2002

Cost: CD \$23 Cassette: \$14

Available from Neville Recording, 138 Castle Cross Road, Salt Spring Island BC V8K 2G2

Www.nevillerecording.com

E-mail: songbird@saltspring.com

This CD comprises the songs of 101 species of birds found around the Great Lakes. Many of the recordings were made at Ontario locations such as Bachus Woods and Wilson Tract near Long Point, Rondeau, Bruce Peninsula, Pelee Island and Manitoulin Island. Some tracts were done by other recordist such as Monty Brigham, Kevin Colver and Lang Elliott. Helpful is the list of species on the back cover with the location of the recording.

The CD arranges the bird songs in habitat categories: Backyard, Deciduous, Mixed Woodland, Boreal Forest, Night Sounds, Marshes, Field, Alvar and Great Lakes.

John Neville, the narrator, introduces each species and includes information about habitat or nesting. Each recording is about 40 seconds in length. The total playing time is 73 minutes. The recordings were made during the spring of 2000 and 2001.

Douglas Campbell Sadler

Distinguished Naturalist, Teacher and Author

Geoff Carpentier

I first met Doug in 1973 when I was freshly out of university and newly arrived in Peterborough. I remember the circumstances vividly. One day I looked out my kitchen window and saw a female Dickcissel on our bird feeder. Not sure who to call, it was suggested that Doug Sadler, a noted local bird expert, would be interested. When I called him, I could hear the hesitation in his voice and the caution in his answer as he tried to determine whether or not I knew a Dickcissel from an albatross. Luckily I did and the bird stayed for three days to the delight of many birders.

And so began a friendship that is now in its fourth decade. Throughout those early years, I spent many hours with Doug and never ceased to marvel at the wealth of information he carried in his head, not just about birds, but also insects, plants, mammals, geology, archeology, and just about anything else to do with the outdoors. Doug's knowledge didn't stop with simply knowing what name to apply to an animal or a plant, but included a thorough understanding of relationships and interactions.

Let's pause for a moment and see where Doug came from and how he learned what he did. Born in London, England in 1916, Doug served in World War II in the British infantry, 7th Armoured Division, fondly known as the Desert Rats. He was wounded and captured in Holland in October 1944, and later served in Germany and Southeast Asia. Once the war was over, he returned to his native England where he was a farmer, a vocation he carried with him to Canada in 1950. So, let's see ... born in 1916 and came to Canada in 1950—that would make him 34 years old and still I haven't mentioned birds or nature—but be patient.

Doug has been passionately interested in the environment and living organisms his entire life. Once he came to Canada he focused his attention on natural history studies after he attended teachers college and emerged as their top student. This ultimately led to jobs with the Northumberland Board of Education as Vice-principal, then later with the Peterborough County Board as Outdoor Education Consultant. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Geography from Trent University in 1978. This says so much about Doug, he was 62 years old and was still going to school to learn. If that wasn't enough, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Trent in 1988. For Doug, learning and teaching continue to be a passion that he will pursue until his time is done. Some of Doug's protégées include Peter Burke, Doug McRae, Mike Oldham, Martin Parker, Paul Bristow, Peter Hogenbirk and Terrie Smith.

He was a part time teacher at Sir Sandford Fleming College for many years, and was awarded the prestigious Fellowship in Applied Education by the College 1996. He is well recognized by his peers and received the following



Doug Sadler. Photo July 2002 by Heather Watson.

awards and recognitions: Award of Merit in 1962; City of Peterborough Sustainable Development Award in 1990; Commemorative Medal, 125th Anniversary of Confederation of Canada, 1992; recognized in Canadian Who's Who since 1993; featured in newly created cultural Pathway of Fame, Cray Park, Peterborough, July 1998; received the Richards Educational Award in 1986; identified in 1999 as one of the 50 people who have influenced the development of Peterborough during the past 100 years; won the national Kortright Award for excellence in nature writing five times plus one honorable mention; and was awarded Peter Robinson Award as part of Celebration 2000 on 150th Anniversary of Peterborough, Ontario.

Doug is more than all his qualifications and trophies. He feels the need to be a part of it all. He served as President of Peterborough Field Naturalists for several years; was on the Board of Directors and the Executive of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists for 17 years when the organization was establishing its role in Ontario; served as its President from 1966-68; served on the Advisory Boards of the Otonabee Region Conservation Authority for over 25 years and was

the former Chairman of the Public Liaison Committee of Peterborough City-County Waste Management Study, to mention only some of his accomplishments.

He has proven himself in the classroom and committee room, but what about the field? Apparently so. He served at the local, regional and provincial levels in Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project 1981-86, led many field trips in Ontario, Yucatan, Hudson Bay, Cuba, Arizona and Newfoundland for many different agencies and taught outdoor education programs to students of all ages for many years.

Doug also is an accomplished photographer and has won numerous awards for his abilities and more importantly shared these photos with students and peers alike, both in the classroom and his books and writings. He is widely traveled in Asia, Europe, Africa, North and South America. Perhaps his most prolific and lasting ability resides in his skill with the pen or more correctly the keyboard now. Remarkably he has published an outdoors weekly column in the Peterborough Examiner since 1957, having written almost 2300 columns during that time! Also, he wrote a series for Ryerson called *Science in Action*, a book on the birds of Peterborough County titled *Our Heritage of Birds: Peterborough Area in the Kawarthas* in 1983, *Reading Nature's Clues* in 1987, and *Winter, a Natural History* in 1990. Additionally, he contributed to other books including: *Peterborough, Land of Shining Waters* in 1967, *Stories of the Outdoors* in 1970, *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Ontario* in 1987 and *Ornithology in Ontario* in 1994.

Doug is now 86 years old and still active. He has written five more books and awaits their publication: *Birds From the Ground* which is an exciting piece on avian archeological records; *Nature's Great Survival Game: Sustainability in Nature; Is That You, God? An Earthling Looks at the Cosmos;* *The Two-Way Eyeball* about the art of nature photography and his own *Wartime Memoirs*.

Doug resides in Lakefield with Joan, his wife of over 60 years, who in herself has lived a full life and admittedly keeps "Doug in line as much as anyone can." Their daughter Heather is as big a fan of Doug as I am!

But what story about someone as distinguished as this would be complete without some mention of the human side. One of my fondest memories of Doug revolves around his desire to speak Spanish to the community when he travels. In South America, we would send Doug out to talk to the "locals" and seek directions to our destination. Invariably, he would get three or four opposing opinions, supported with waving arms and pointing. But the hand signals they used to describe where to go were often surprisingly consistent. We would sit back, out of earshot, and watch the hand movements. When Doug returned we would surprise him by repeating the directions we had deciphered based on the hand signals. But don't tell him, he's never figured out how we always knew where to go.

And so, I salute you Doug—a life long friend, mentor and teacher to me and so many others. All the best for many more years.

New Field Trip Rock Point Provincial Park

Willie D'Anna

On 10 August 2002 about 30 birders met at the entrance to Rock Point Provincial Park on Lake Erie south of Dunnville. We found 12 species of shorebirds at the park, including one almost colourless adult Short-billed Dowitcher, at least one Black-bellied Plover (also seen at three or four other stops), two White-rumped Sandpipers, a single Solitary Sandpiper (seen by only one person) and a flying Whimbrel. We saw Caspian and Common Terns, Bonaparte's Gulls and both Common and Red-breasted Mergansers. Lots of Yellow Warblers and Baltimore Orioles flitted through the willows at the back of the beach, where we also had a Scarlet Tanager and many other songbirds. A Carolina Wren sang as we returned to our cars.

We stopped next at Reeb's Bay, which is across from the cemetery a few miles west of Port Colborne. There were quite a few peeps here including the first juvenile Semipalmated Sandpiper of the day and my first of the year. Our next stop was the pond on Cement Plant Road, where the juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron that Betsy Potter and I found earlier in the day was still there for everybody to see. I think we could have ended the trip there and sent everyone home happy! We also added two Great Egrets and two Great Blue Herons.

While we ate lunch at Windmill Point, an adult and juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker called and a Carolina Wren sang. At the east end of the point, off Stone Mill Road, we had one Green-winged with 13 Blue-winged Teal and our first Greater Yellowlegs. An eclipse male Bufflehead was a very unusual find in summer. An immature Black-crowned Night-Heron completed our North American night-heron list.

At the foot of Buffalo Road, we added one more Blue-winged and one more Green-winged Teal and another Great Egret. At the foot of Kraft Road, our last stop just a few kilometres west of Fort Erie, we had a nice mix of shorebirds, including a fairly close Whimbrel and several dozen Common Terns. Our 69th and last species of the day was a Great Black-backed Gull (actually two). Lots of interesting butterflies also were seen, including two Giant Swallowtails.

I am preparing a birding site guide to the Lake Erie shore from Rock Point to Fort Erie. It will have a map by Andrew Jano. Watch for it in the June 2003 issue of *OFO News*.

Changes to the AOU Check-list of North American Birds

Jim Rising

Every second year, in the July issue of the ornithological journal *The Auk*, the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Committee of Classification and Nomenclature publishes a Supplement to the AOU Check-list of North American birds. This supplement is an annotated list of changes made to the Check-list, which generally is accepted as the "official" list of birds from the AOU area: Canada, United States, Mexico and Central America. As such, the names, sequence of species and classification of the Check-list are used in provincial and state lists and many field guides, and are also followed by the American Birding Association (ABA). The Check-list Committee meets once a year to discuss changes in classification and nomenclature that have been proposed in the literature or that are necessitated by errors in previous lists. This committee is chaired by Richard Banks of the U. S. Geological Survey and the National Museum of Natural History in Washington. Other members of the committee are Carla Cicero (Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley), Jon Dunn (Bishop, California), Andrew Kratter (Florida Museum of Natural History), Pamela Rasmussen (Michigan State University Museum), J. V. Remsen, Jr. (Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University), Douglas Stotz (Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago) and Jim Rising (University of Toronto and Royal Ontario Museum).

Jon Dunn is the only member of the committee who is not an avian taxonomist, although he is quite knowledgeable about many taxonomic matters. His special and very important role is to keep the committee informed about the validity of extralimital records and to help track range extensions for the next edition of the Check-list. Other members of the committee are responsible for assessing proposed changes in the taxonomy of specific groups. For example, I am responsible for making the initial assessments of proposed changes in the taxonomy of sparrows, cardinals, finches, and blackbirds. Thus, when a paper proposing the placement of the Blue Grosbeak in the same genus as the Indigo Bunting was published, I summarized information in that paper and other relevant papers for the committee and recommend changes to the Check-list. The committee members, then, discussed this proposal (this is often done by e-mail), then voted on, and, in this case, accepted the proposal. The committee is, and probably needs to be, conservative, so unless there is near unanimous sentiment for a change, the status quo is maintained in the list. Below are some of the changes that

were published in *The Auk* as the 43rd Supplement to the Check-list that may be of special interest to Canadian students of birds.

The Black-browed Albatross had been placed on the Check-list on the basis of a record from Martinique; a sight record off the coast of Virginia on 6 February 1999 is the first record for the United States.

At the time of the publication of the last Check-list, the Bermuda Petrel was known only from Bermuda. Recently there have been at least 10 records off the coast of North Carolina between late May and mid-August.

On the basis of vocalizations and morphology the Dark-rumped Petrel (*Petrodroma phaeopygia*) has been split into two species, the Galapagos Petrel (also *P. phaeopygia*—one of the odd ways that nomenclature works) and Hawaiian Petrel (*P. sandwichensis*). The former has been recorded off the coast of Costa Rica and perhaps north to western Mexico.

Records of Bulwer's Petrel now have been accepted for the coast of North Carolina and Monterey Bay, California, in addition to off the coast of Florida.

All of the spoonbills of the world have been merged into a single genus, *Platalea*, thus changing the name of the Roseate Spoonbill from the unpronounceable *Ajaia ajaja* to *Platalea ajaja*, which is nearly as bad!

The genus *Porphyryla* is merged into *Porphyrio*, thus changing the name of the Purple Gallinule from *Porphyryla martinica* to *Porphyrio martinica*.

Because of differences in morphology and winnowing displays, the American snipe have been split from the Old World snipe. Ours will be called Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) and the Old World snipe will still be called the Common Snipe.

The Gray-hooded Gull (*Larus cirrocephalus*) is added to the North American list on the basis of a record from the panhandle of Florida on 26 December 1998. There is also a sight record from off the Pacific coast of Panama.

The Kelp Gull (*L. dominicanus*) is added to the list. They have been on Chandeleur Islands, Louisiana since 1989 where they have hybridized with Herring Gulls, and there are also records from Yucatán, Texas, Indiana and Maryland in January and February 1998 and 1999.

The Mitred Parakeet is now considered established in southern California, and is added to the list.

There are now two accepted records of the Stygian Owl for the United States, both from the Rio Grande valley in Texas on 9 December 1994 and 26 December 1996.

There are morphological differences between the “Long-tailed” Hermits of North and South America, and the committee accepted the recommendation to split these as two different species. The one that occurs in the AOU area is now the Long-billed Hermit (*Phaethornis longirostris*). For similar reasons, the North and South American “Little” Hermits are split; the North American species becomes the Stripe-throated Hermit (*P. striigularis*).

A phylogenetic analysis of the trogons shows that the Eared Trogon is most closely allied to the quetzals. Thus the committee accepted a recommendation that its English name be Eared Quetzal.

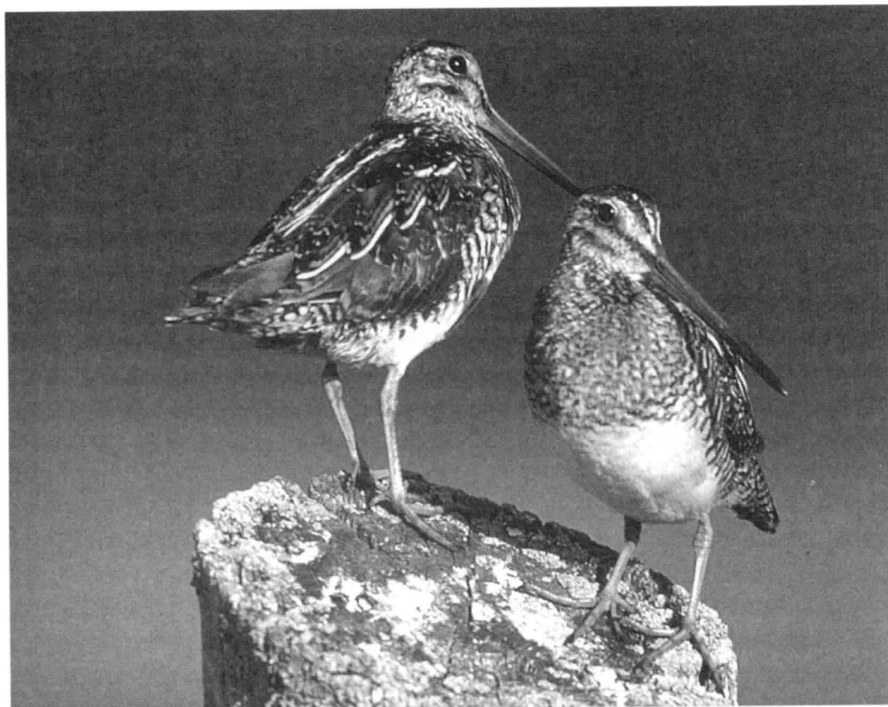
Records of the Piratic Flycatcher in the United States have been accepted. There are records from southeastern New Mexico in September 1996, Big Bend Park in Texas in April 1998, an oil rig off the coast of Texas in October 2000, and southern Florida in March 1991; this record was originally published as a Variegated Flycatcher.

As a consequence of a re-evaluation of the nature of the hybrid zone and vocal and genetic differences, the Black-crested Titmouse (*Baeolophus atricristatus*) is recognized as a species distinct from the Tufted Titmouse, which retains the name Tufted Titmouse (*B. bicolor*).

On the basis of a record from Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska on 23-24 September 1999 the Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) is added to the Check-list.

A record of the Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush from Laguna Atascosa refuge in Texas on 8 April 1996 is accepted as the first for this species from the United States.

Molecular analyses show that the Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*) is closely related to the Lazuli Bunting. As a consequence of this and because of similarities in behaviour, molts, and plumages, the Blue Grosbeak is moved to the genus *Passerina*. The sequence of species in this genus will be: Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Indigo Bunting, Rose-bellied Bunting, Orange-breasted Bunting, Varied Bunting, and Painted Bunting. This sequence is supported by genetic data that suggest a close relationship between the Varied and Painted



Two Wilson's Snipe on the Carden Alvar on 13 July 2002. Photo by Sam Barone.

Buntings and between the Blue Grosbeak and Lazuli Bunting. The Indigo and Lazuli Buntings are placed close to each other on the basis of vocalizations and because they frequently hybridize with each other.

The Appendix of the Check-list contains a list of species for which there is insufficient evidence for placement on the main list, including introduced populations that are not yet considered to be established for a sufficiently long time. The Peach-faced Lovebird (*Agapornis roseicollis*), a popular cage bird, is considered established around Phoenix, Arizona, where it has been reported nesting in cavities in saguaro cactus and in palms and they also have been reported in southern Florida. On this basis this lovebird has been added to the Appendix. If you are interested in seeing the most up-to-date list, see

<http://www.AOU.org/aou/birdlist.html>

The Committee considered several proposals that were not accepted at this time as they thought the evidence for change was not adequate. This included a proposal to split the large duck genus *Anas* into two or three genera. In the 1957 Check-list (5th Edition) the wigeons were placed in the genus *Mareca* and the Shoveller was placed in the genus *Spatula*, but these have been included in *Anas* in more recent editions. Earlier, the teals and pintail were also put in separate genera. The committee also found the evidence for splitting the Green-winged and Common Teals was insufficient; this split has been accepted by the German and British committees. The Committee also did

not think that the arguments for splitting the Cave Swallows or Curve-billed Thrashers were sufficiently compelling to warrant a change at this time. We did not accept a proposal to include the Blue Bunting in the same genus as the Indigo Bunting.

You may wonder why there always seem to be so many changes to the Check-list. It is not, I can assure you, because anyone makes money by making changes, as would be the case, say, in writing a new edition of a textbook. For the most part, these changes are suggested as we learn more about birds—their relationships and distribution. The emergence of techniques of rather routinely sequencing DNA rapidly and inexpensively, and some other molecular procedures has led to a proliferation of studies clarifying the relationships among species, and to a lesser extent the relationships among the more inclusive groups (Families, Orders, etc.). For example, there now is excellent evidence that ducks and chicken-like birds are fairly closely related and emerged as groups very early in the evolution of modern birds. Unless our thinking changes, look for the next Check-list to jump from tinamous to chickens and ducks, not loons and grebes!

Another reason that changes occur is that philosophies of classification change. A period of “excessive” splitting started early in the 19th Century and by 1920, many genera of birds were monotypic, that is, contained only one species, or contained only a few closely-related species. Starting with the 1931 Check-list a period of lumping started. To the extent that the splitting was indeed excessive this was a salutary trend, but it did result in some lumps that seemed to many to be excessive as well. Thus, to a certain extent we are seeing some splitting to compensate for the excesses of the past. To the extent that classification is subjective, we must anticipate that classifications will track changes in philosophy. However, modern methods, especially molecular methods, make it possible sometimes to produce what are probably accurate phylogenies and these could be the basis of more objective and stable classifications.

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Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

Second Year a Great Success

Mike Cadman

The year 2002 was the second of five for the atlas project, and thanks to a fantastic effort by Ontario's birders, was a big year in many ways.

In 2002, the push to cover northern Ontario began in earnest. In the far north, 100 km blocks were covered at Moosonee, Fort Albany, the northern James Bay coast, Polar Bear Provincial Park, Akimiski Island, the Fawn and Severn Rivers and Bearskin Lake. Particularly interesting was the notable increase in Bald and Golden Eagles in the far north since the first atlas. Northern Hawk Owls, too, were in relatively large numbers in the northeast.

You can see the maps of these species and all others, and review summaries of data to date on the atlas website. Data summaries are updated daily and maps every couple of months. There are lots of interesting changes on the maps. The expansion of Sandhill Crane, Northern Mockingbird, Cooper's Hawk, Merlin, Common Raven, Red-bellied Woodpecker and many others is clearly depicted on the maps, and will continue to evolve as more data comes in. The scarcity of Bobwhite, Loggerhead Shrike and Henslow's Sparrow is also evident.

Point counting, which will allow us to map the relative abundance of many species, really got going in 2002. Although all data aren't yet in our database, over 7900 counts have been reported in over 500 squares to date. People are finding that point counts add a new and interesting dimension to their atlasing, helping them assess how common each species is in their square, and leading them to previously undiscovered areas.

We also produced a CD-ROM for atlassers to help with bird song identification. Atlassers can get a copy free of charge from their regional coordinator.

In 2003, we'll continue to build coverage and the point count database throughout the province. There will be more opportunities for birders wanting to atlas in the north, and funding available to help with travel costs. We're particularly in need of people interested in atlasing by canoe on remote rivers in the far north. It also looks like central Ontario from Algonquin Park to Temagami and west to Sudbury is going to be a challenging area to complete. We'll be having more square-bashes in that area—and everyone is invited.

Thanks to everyone who has made the project so successful. See the atlas web page www.birdsontario.org for details about the project and how to get involved or contact us at:

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas,
University of Guelph, Blackwood Hall, Room 211
Guelph, Ontario, N1G 2W1
Phone: 519-826-2092, Fax: 519-826-2113
E-mail: atlas@uoguelph.ca.

Should We Feed Birds?

John Prescott

Department of Pathobiology, University of Guelph

Ron Pittaway asks in the June 2002 *OFO News* whether we should be “changing the way we feed birds?” After the 1997-1998 winter irruption of Common Redpolls and their widespread loss because of salmonellosis, I had a crisis of conscience while cleaning the winter accumulation of feed and faecal debris (grunge) from my feeder. Was I doing more harm than good in feeding birds?

For the next winter feeder season, a group of veterinary students surveyed bird feeders in Guelph for hygiene and *Salmonella*. They assessed the hygiene of 124 feeders on five occasions through the winter and sampled the grunge each time for *Salmonella*. The good news was that no *Salmonella* were isolated at any time. The most hygienic feeder was the squirrel proof feeder, although these became less hygienic over the course of the winter, probably because they were harder to clean. The other feeder types (hopper, tube, table) did not change hygiene scores over the winter. We did find that the hygiene of feeders co-maintained by older couples became worse over the winter, although age was not important if the feeder was the responsibility of only one person.

Our conclusion was that *Salmonella* did not build-up at feeders over the winter, and feeders (apart from squirrel proof feeders, which started off as most hygienic) did not get grungier over the winter. Our participants may have been on their most hygienic best behaviour, even though they were asked to behave “as usual.” I now feed winter birds with a squirrel proof feeder and a clear conscience.

We discovered that most people who feed birds have no affiliation with any birding or nature organization. If an outbreak of disease occurs, then word about cleaning feeders with bleach or even removing feeders altogether for a time, should go out through public announcements (radio, television, newspaper) and not just the birding listserves.

Salmonellosis resulting from *Salmonella typhimurium* phage type 40 is associated with Common Redpolls and to a lesser extent with Pine Siskins and occasionally other feeder species. This *Salmonella* strain is also common in feeder salmonellosis in birds in Britain and more generally in Europe, where it occurs especially in greenfinches. The strain is unique to feeder birds and the occasional cat that picks up dying birds, and sometimes people who handle the sick birds, the feeder grunge or even the infected cat.

Salmonellosis in redpolls and siskins is likely partly genetically predisposed and partly predisposed by flocking behaviour, and it probably results from maintenance of this unique strain by *Salmonella* carriers in these species. Faecal contamination of feeders by carriers and the ravenous behaviour of these susceptible flocking birds produces the outbreaks. We can ameliorate outbreaks by removing feeders once birds start dying or by rigorous cleaning with 3% household bleach every few days wearing rubber gloves.

Mycoplasmosis eye disease in House Finches may be a special case of feeder associated mortality. It is highly ironic that feeding probably initiated the massive increase in the population that occurred when a few of these western birds started breeding in the east, probably after escape from captivity. Many will remember the piles of these birds squabbling over feed. Since mycoplasma survive poorly in the environment, especially in the winter, it is likely that keeping feeders full in the summer, coupled with the dependence of this species on feeders, their flocking activity and a genetic susceptibility, led to the dramatic mycoplasma induced crash in the population. The recovery of the House Finch population, if it occurs, may have to wait until a genetically resistant population develops. This may take considerable time because of their very homogenous genetic base (the population grew from a few pairs).

So, should we feed birds? Yes, but with intelligence and understanding. Bird feeding gives enormous pleasure to many people, is an important contact with the natural world and supports an enormous number of birds. In Britain, a trainload of 15,000 tons(!) of peanuts is estimated as enough to support the entire greenfinch population. In North America, bird feeding may support up to two billion birds.

Surprisingly, there are no standards for feeders or bird feed. While not formally assessed in our study of bird feeder hygiene, some feeders were noted to be badly designed. For example, birds can easily defecate in the large troughs of some hopper feeders. Some bird feeders are bizarre in design. Anyone can build and sell a feeder. In addition, anyone can package a mix of cracked corn, wheat and rice in a plastic bag, print a cardinal on the front and add a price tag of \$4.99, even though only squirrels will eat the stuff. No wonder some people asked us “where are the birds?”

Some national or international bird organization could develop standards for bird feeder design and bird feed, awarding a logo to feeders and feed that meet acceptable standards. It should be at “arm’s length” from the bird feed companies and might be welcomed by them. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association’s Pet Food Certification program has significantly improved the standard of pet food in Canada and might be the model for such a program. There is enormous scope for educating the large bird feeding community on how to do it well. This could be funded by revenue generated from providing a certification program.

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Viewing Stands in Elgin County

Bill and Marjorie Prieksaitis

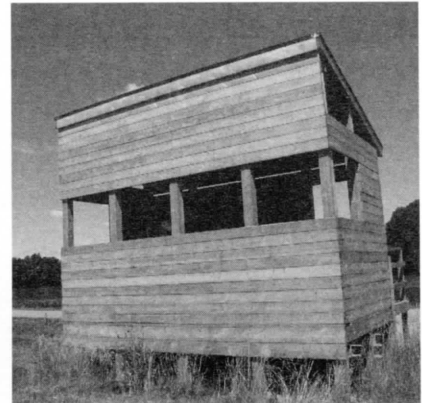
Over the past six years, a committed group of naturalists has built wildlife viewing stands at most of the lagoons and wildlife areas throughout Elgin County. This article chronicles why and how they were built, their locations throughout the county and what birders can expect to see should they visit.

During an October 1996 meeting of the West Elgin Nature Club, a 50th anniversary project for the Club was discussed. Harold Lancaster, a charter member, suggested that some type of viewing stand would enhance waterfowl viewing at the West Lorne lagoons, located southwest of London near Lake Erie. The areas surrounding the cells were overgrown with woody vegetation, which made viewing difficult, and the waterfowl were easily frightened when birders tried to approach the edge of the lagoon. Ken Wilton, owner of Meadowlands Construction, volunteered to draw plans, prepare a material list, secure prices, and oversee the building of the stand. Bill Prieksaitis was asked to secure the funds necessary for the project. Brad Reive was requested to obtain permission from the Council of the Village of West Lorne. At the November meeting, Ken told the group that plans and prices were completed. Bill had secured funding from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Friends of the Environment-Canada Trust, St. Thomas chapter, The Order of Good Cheer and the Elgin Stewardship Council. In total, \$1,800 was raised. Brad presented an agreement from the village, which allowed public access and a site for the stand. The following Saturday, Ken and five volunteers from the Club began construction at 9 a.m. and completed the stand by 4 p.m. The first viewing stand built by the Club was ready for use. Since its construction, it has been a great success and has improved viewing opportunities for birders while reducing stress and disturbance to the birds.

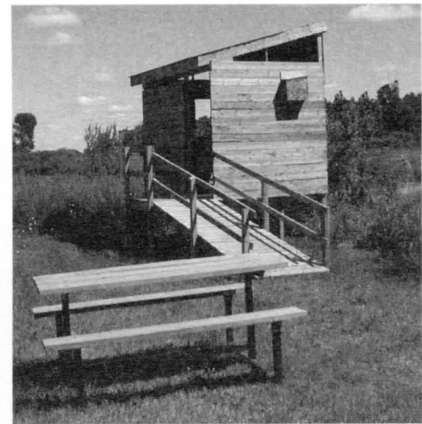
Based on the popularity of the concept, Ken, Bill and volunteers from the West Elgin Nature Club, the St. Thomas Field Naturalists and Elgin Stewardship Council have built six more stands in the county with the assistance of the above sponsors and the Shell Environmental Fund. Each stand is open to the public. The following table shows where they are located.

Location	Address	Date Built
West Lorne Lagoons	25030 Thomson Line	1996
Fingal Wildlife Area	34764 Scotch Line	1998
Hwy 401 Eastbound <i>West Lorne Service Centre</i>	Hwy 401 <i>MTO Park</i>	1999
Aylmer Wildlife Area	10594 Hacienda Rd	2000
Port Stanley Lagoons <i>Two viewing stands overlook 4 cells</i>	37375 Scotch Line	2001
Rodney Lagoon	22590 Pioneer Line	2002

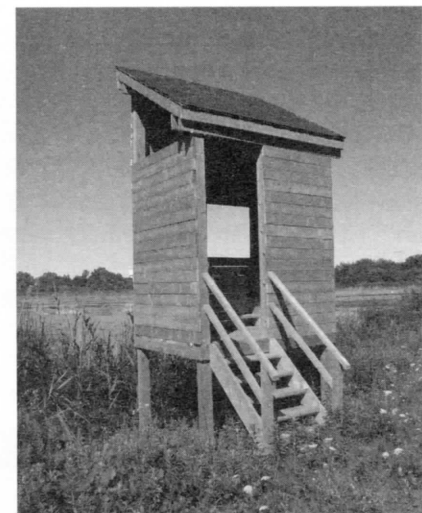
The viewing stands are best visited in early spring for the Tundra Swans and waterfowl migration and in late summer and early fall for shorebirds and waterfowl. An early spring visit to the Aylmer Wildlife Area or the Highway 401 Eastbound-West Lorne Service Centre (also known as Wendy's Pond) is an outstanding opportunity to get some close looks at huge flocks of Tundra Swans, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Green-winged and Blue-winged Teals, and Ring-necked Ducks. Rarities seen over the years at both locations include Eurasian Wigeon, Ross's Goose and Greater White-fronted Goose. In the fall of 2001, over 24 species of shorebirds were seen at the Port Stanley



Port Stanley Viewing Stand



Fingal Viewing Stand



Rodney Viewing Stand

All photos by Bill and Marjorie Prieksaitis

Algonquin Park Square Bash

Ron Tozer

Lagoon, including Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits and all three species of phalaropes. A stop at these stands is an excellent addition to a Hawk Cliff visit, being only 10 minutes from the Cliff itself. Low water levels at the Rodney Lagoon in 2002 produced a good number of shorebirds including a Western Sandpiper. In addition, the areas surrounding most of these lagoons and wildlife areas also provide good birding opportunities: warblers, flycatchers, swallows and other migrating songbirds.

The birders of Elgin County would like to thank all the volunteers and sponsors of the viewing stand projects and we hope that birders from across Ontario will visit soon! For more information about the viewing stands or their locations, please contact Bill or Marjorie Prieksaitis: E-mail: wilmar@gtn.net phone:519-785-0176

Future OFO Field Trips

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.

November 24 (Sunday) Niagara River Gull Watch. Leaders: Ron Tozer and Jean Iron.

Meet at **9:00 a.m.** in Niagara-on-the-Lake at Queens Royal Park near the mouth of the Niagara River at Regent and Front Streets. Gulls.

January 12 (Sunday) Petroglyphs Provincial Park. Leader: Geoff Carpentier.

Meet at **9:30 a.m.** at the park entrance. Go north on Hwy 28 from Peterborough past Lakefield and Burleigh Falls to Woodview. Just north of Woodview turn right on Northey's Bay Road and go 11 km to the park entrance. Bald and Golden Eagles, Common Raven, Gray Jay, winter finches, possible Bohemian Waxwings.

February 8 (Saturday) Fisherville Area, Haldimand-Norfolk County.

Leader: John Miles. Meet at **9 a.m.** in the parking lot of the high school in the north end of Cayuga on County Road 54. Hawks and Owls.

OFO's Breeding Bird Atlas Square Bash was held in Algonquin Provincial Park from 19 to 25 June. A total of 15 birders participated in some part of this week-long event to assist with the huge task of atlasing in Region 27, which has 157 atlas squares! We operated out of Achray Campground on beautiful Grand Lake in the East Side pine country of Algonquin. This is a dramatically different environment from Algonquin's Highway 60 Corridor that is familiar to most Ontario birders, and several participants were enjoying its birds and scenery for the first time.

Despite the nearly constant attention we received from black flies and mosquitoes, our compatible and enthusiastic group had a fun time. Most of us camped at Achray, but some stayed at motels in Pembroke. The weather was favourable after the often torrential rains earlier in June. We were able to do some atlasing in nine different atlas squares bordering the Sand Lake Road, from outside the Park boundary to Lake Travers. The total group bird list for the week was about 110 species. Interesting observations included a Black-backed Woodpecker nest with noisy young near fledging, Golden-winged Warbler outside the Park, brief views of a Fisher, Red Crossbills (heard only), Green Heron at Berm Lake marsh, and several sightings of Macoun's Arctic, a butterfly of the jack pine areas which flies only in even-numbered years in eastern Canada. Apparently indicative of the high mortality of aerial insect-eating birds during the cold and snow of May in Algonquin was the sighting of only one pair of Barn Swallows during the entire week. Normally, this swallow is a common nesting species in the area, both on structures and on cliffs in the Barron Canyon.

Most of the participants in this event were hoping to learn more about atlasing methods and to improve their skills in birding by ear. Those with less experience accompanied others who were more familiar with Algonquin's birds. One early morning was devoted to demonstrating how to undertake Point Counts and the use of a GPS unit. We also discussed the appropriate use of the various codes on the atlas data cards.

During the non-birding times of the day, many of us enjoyed swimming at Achray's beautiful sand beach. We also explored the Barron Canyon Trail overlooking the 100 metre cliffs bordering the Barron River, visited the huge radio telescope at Lake Travers, walked to the site on Grand Lake where Tom Thomson painted *The Jack Pine*, and enjoyed the spectacular Poplar Rapids on the Petawawa River. Whip-poor-wills called at dusk each evening in the campground, and loons serenaded us during the night. The opportunity to live and bird together over several days allows participants to form a closer bond than is frequently possible on the usual one day trips run by OFO, and everyone seemed to really enjoy the experience. I would like to thank everybody for their great effort.

Ron Tozer

Atlas Regional Coordinator (Region 27 Algonquin)

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Brewster's Warbler on the 6 June 2002 along Wylie Road on the Carden Alvar. Brewster's is a hybrid between Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers. As Blue-winged Warblers keep spreading northward, we can expect more sightings of Brewster's and perhaps the rarer Lawrence's Warbler hybrid. Eventually the Golden-winged Warbler may disappear from Carden by hybridization and be replaced by the Blue-winged Warbler. Photo by Sam Barone.

Membership Change

There are changes to the 2003 membership in OFO. Now there is only one Annual Membership category at \$25. Membership can be individual or it can include family members at the same address. A membership includes one mailing per publication to your address. These changes cover the increased cost of postage and make Eleanor Beagan's duties as Membership Secretary much easier.

Ontbirds

Mark Cranford - Coordinator

Ontbirds with about 1400 subscribers is OFO's successful listserv for reporting and getting bird sightings. **Ontbirds** has revolutionized birding in Ontario.

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Questions: contact Mark Cranford

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OFO Celebrity Birder Thanks Sponsors

OFO Celebrity Birder Thanks Sponsors

Maris Apse

My sincere thanks to all the OFO members who sponsored me in the 2002 Baillie Birdathon. Bird Studies Canada just informed me that I won the Quest Nature Tours prize—a fully paid trip for two to Cuba. Surely more than doubling the usual dollars I raised was a major factor in winning this prize. Penny and I are eagerly anticipating this wonderful opportunity for our second visit to Cuba. I would like to thank the OFO Board for asking me to be the OFO Celebrity Birder; Chris Escott for all his efforts in coordinating it; Sandra Eadie for putting it on our website; Tyler Hoar for his most able assistance; Glenn Coady for my warm up run with him in 2001; and Barry Griffiths of Quest Nature Tours for his support of the Ontario birding community with these super prizes.

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