



OFO NEWS

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Cameron Ranch Update

Jean Iron and Ron Pittaway

The closing date for the purchase of the 2869 acre Cameron Ranch on the Carden Alvar is 31 March 2003. Full funding is incomplete, so please consider a generous donation to The Nature Conservancy of Canada. Phone toll free at 1-877-343-3532 ext. 226 or www.natureconservancy.ca. A charitable tax receipt is issued for all donations. Your help is needed to secure this globally rare alvar habitat for declining grassland birds such as the Loggerhead Shrike, rare butterflies, rare wildflowers, and for generations of naturalists.

For a copy of OFO's Birding Guide to the Carden Alvar, please e-mail jeaniron@sympatico.ca with your name and full postal address or phone 416-445-9297.

Carden Bluebirds

Herb Furniss

2002 was a banner year for Eastern Bluebirds on the Carden Alvar. Our nest box trail fledged 156 birds. We could never have done it without the new Coker box. However, I had an e-mail from Ron Reid stating that 15 of the new boxes had been destroyed by vandals. I guess that is the price of being in an isolated location.

Since the design of the Coker box appeared in the June 2002 issue of *OFO News* 20(2)5, I have received a few questions. Gerry Lannon asked about drain holes below the nest area. There are no drain holes. George Coker's argument is that they aren't needed because the box stays dry and holes would give further access to insects. How about air circulation holes? George says air vents let in insects and cold wet weather. I was dubious myself about no drain holes and no air vents, but after two years of use I can say he is right. I paint my boxes white to reduce heat. Added protection from weather comes from the roof extension above the entrance hole.

Loggerhead Shrikes 2002

Ron Pittaway and Jean Iron

Robert Wenting, Chair of the Eastern Loggerhead Recovery Team, reported that 39 pairs of Loggerhead Shrikes were located in 2002 in three widely separated areas of southern Ontario. Shrike reproduction was good considering the poor weather last spring.

Movement of shrikes between the Carden Alvar east of Lake Simcoe and the Napanee Alvar west of Kingston was confirmed. Chris Grooms, a member of the Recovery Team, reported that "two shrikes colour banded in 2001 as nestlings in Carden were spotted in the Napanee area in 2002." One shrike banded in Napanee was found in Carden. All of these birds were part of breeding pairs. This move of about 180 km demonstrates that gene flow is happening between Carden and Napanee, which has management implications for the two populations.

Fourteen Loggerhead Shrikes were released in August 2002 in the Smith Falls area south of Ottawa. All the shrikes were reared in cages by captive parents. The shrikes were banded. Reports of banded shrikes can be reported to the federal Species At Risk toll free number at 1-866-833-8888.

Sadly, five Loggerhead Shrikes in the captive breeding program at the Toronto Zoo died last summer of West Nile Disease. The effects of West Nile Disease on wild shrike populations may pose another problem for this critically endangered bird.



Loggerhead Shrike by Peter Burke

Favourite Birding Hotspots

Minesing Swamp

Dave Milsom

Minesing Swamp is located just east of the town of Angus, west of Barrie, and south of Georgian Bay. It is concentrated on the Nottawasaga River and its valley, including the Mad River and many other tributaries. The swamp comprises 6,000 hectares of wetlands and is classed as a Provincially Significant Wetland, an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI), and has been designated as an internationally significant Ramsar site. The swamp plays a vital role in the control of flooding each spring. Swamps, marshes and fens are all found within its borders. Minesing Swamp contains major peat deposits.

Minesing Swamp resulted from the last Ice Age, subsequent flooding, erosion and the deposition of sediments. During the War of 1812, the swamp and Nottawasaga River formed an important supply route for the British to Fort Michilimackinac on Lake Huron.

Birding Season

One of the best times for birders to visit the swamp is early spring when the Nottawasaga River floods and the resulting vast wetlands harbour thousands of waterfowl.

Much of the great birding occurs in late spring and summer when mosquitoes are prevalent and a canoe is required to penetrate the interior of the swamp. A compass is necessary if traveling into the interior.

Late spring finds the receding waters suitable for migrating shorebirds, waterbirds and herons. Migrating warblers and other passerines can be found in the woodlands. Many species arrive in May to breed in the area. In fall, the swamp forests provide temporary food and shelter for migrants heading south.

The Birds

Minesing Swamp is noted for its waterbirds and for the birds of its adjacent Carolinian and boreal forest habitats. 221 species of birds have been recorded. 135 species breed within Minesing Swamp. There are 23 species of mammals, 30 species of fish, several amphibians and reptiles and over 400 species of plants, including many orchids. The Great Blue Heron colony in the heart of the swamp is the oldest heronry in Ontario and contained about 170 nests in 2002.

Birds expected in early spring include Great Blue Heron, Mallard, Wood Duck, Black Duck, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, hundreds of Northern



Northern Pintail by Brenda Carter

Pintail, Canada Geese, Tundra Swan, Pied-billed Grebe, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, Killdeer, Rusty and Red-winged Blackbirds, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Meadowlark, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Winter Wren, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle and American Kestrel. In the spring of 2002, an OFO group discovered a pair of territorial Barred Owls.

Some of the more uncommon Carolinian species of Minesing, which are generally uncommon north of Lakes Erie and Ontario, include Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-winged, Golden-winged and Cerulean Warblers. Prothonotary Warbler formerly bred, as did the Loggerhead Shrike.

Northern birds nesting in Minesing include Sharp-shinned Hawk, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Whip-poor-will, Sedge Wren, Pileated Woodpecker, Purple Finch, Eastern Screech-Owl, Short-eared and Great Horned Owl, and Yellow-rumped and Magnolia Warblers. A recent colonizer of the swamp, breeding in increasing numbers, is the Wild Turkey. Ruffed Grouse is the traditional breeding gallinaceous bird.

In winter, birds possibly found in Minesing Swamp are Great Gray, Snowy, Northern Hawk and Barred Owls, Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings and Pine Siskins.

Many mammals inhabit the swamp, including White-tailed Deer, Raccoon, Muskrat, Beaver, River Otter, Mink and Eastern Cottontail Rabbit.

Birding Tour

See map. Much of Minesing Swamp is inaccessible without a canoe. To access the swamp by car the following route is recommended. Trails are available at each stop.

From the main street in Angus, proceed east towards Barrie about 1 km on Simcoe County Road 90. Turn left heading north on Essa Township's McKinnon Road, which after 1 km becomes a dirt road. Check the fields to the west (left) for shorebirds and ducks. Go a further 0.7 km and look for an open body of water to the west (left) next to the road. Check this and all the area north of here to Sunnidale Concession 2, which is 3 km from County Road 90. All this area can be very productive even until June if water persists. This occurred in 1998 when two Glossy Ibises spent a week in the area.

Continue north on McKinnon Road as far as you can go, usually only 0.6 km, to the gated entrance to the Minesing Reserve. This section of road is often impassable in spring due to flooding. The house closest to the reserve, #9605, usually has productive bird feeders by the laneway.

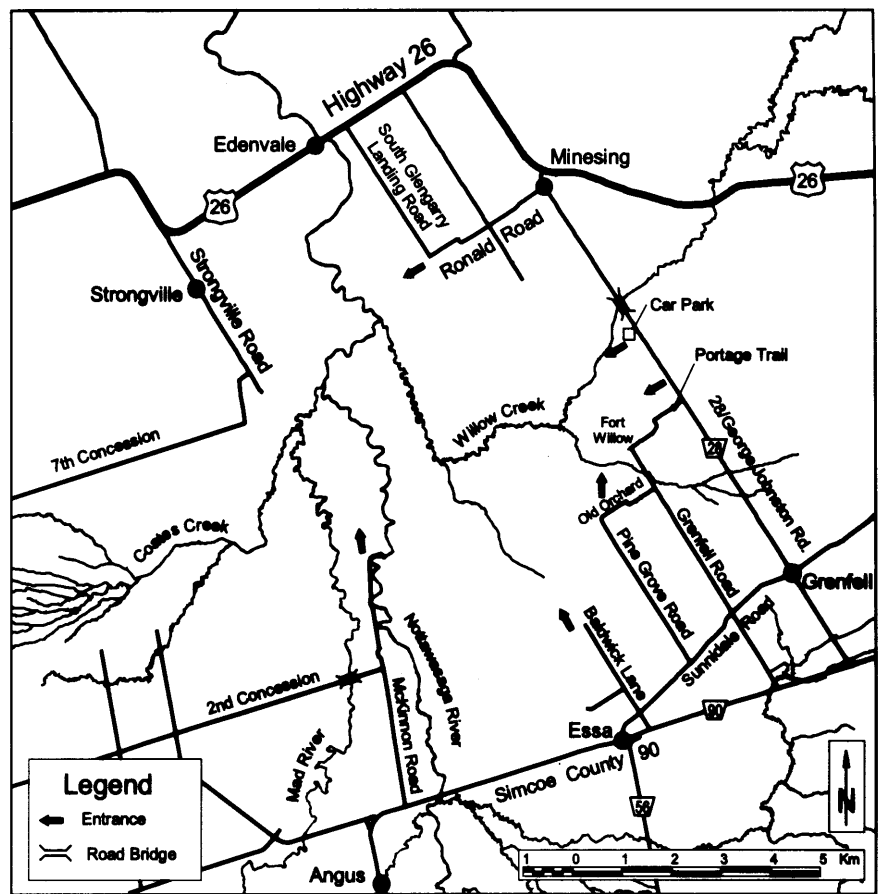
Now retrace your route back to Sunnidale Concession 2. Turn right and drive slowly west 0.7 km until reaching the bridge over the Mad River. On both sides of the road along this stretch, birds should be numerous. The fields west of the bridge are good for birds when wet but are usually dry.

At the Mad River, turn around and drive back down McKinnon to County Road 90. Turn left (east) towards Barrie. After 4.4 km, just past an Olco gas station, turn left (north) onto Sunnidale Road. Stay on Sunnidale Road 1.1 km until reaching Baldwick Lane. Go north here until it ends after 2 km. All along here check woodlots, farms, barns and rough fields for Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Meadowlark and other blackbirds. At the dead end, proceed on foot along a well marked path into the swamp. Wear waterproof footwear. Breeding birds here include Brown Thrasher, Pine, Black-and-white, Blackburnian, Black-throated Green and Magnolia Warblers, Red-eyed Vireo, Baltimore Oriole, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Pileated Woodpecker and Ruffed Grouse.

Returning south to the Sunnidale intersection, turn left (east) and continue 1.5 km until reaching Pine Grove Road in Grenfell. At this point turn left (north).

After passing through good Wild Turkey habitat and crossing the North Simcoe Rail Trail, at about 2.6 km you reach the Ganaraska Hiking Trail on the left side of the road. This is really just an extension of the rail trail, which is signposted on the opposite side of the road. A 100 metre walk along the Ganaraska Trail brings you to a magnificent overlook of the entire Minesing Swamp. Continuing further on this trail brings you into a forested area and to Fort Willow and an 1812 supply depot.

Continuing north on Pine Grove, you reach the Old



Map by Andrew Jano

Orchard sign 1 km from the Ganaraska Trail. Turn left here past Fort Willow until reaching George Johnston Road after 2.5 km. Ignore the Portage/Grenfell sign part way down this section. You have been traveling along Portage Trail up to the George Johnston Road, formerly #28. Now head north again by making a left turn. At 1.1 km stop at the North Simcoe Rail Trail again. Walk west for 1 or 2 km to find Golden-winged, Black-and-white, Blackburnian, Magnolia, Common Yellowthroat and Yellow-rumped Warblers in spring and summer, as well as amphibians, reptiles, butterflies and dragonflies. Then drive north a further 1.4 km to a parking lot on the west side for canoe access to the swamp. There is a trail leading west here that can be productive, as can scanning the adjacent fields for geese and shorebirds.

Continuing north on County Road 28 to the village of Minesing, turn left (west) on Ronald Road a further 2.9 km from the car park. Drive 2.8 km to a walking trail heading west at the corner of South Glengarry Landing Road and Ronald. Walk the trail west until reaching open water and meadows. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers breed here in the forested area. Waterbirds abound in springtime.

The above locations are the best access points for birders to the Minesing Swamp by car. March to July are the best months to visit. I hope to see you out birding at Minesing Swamp.

Atlas Results After Two Years

Mike Cadman

Thanks to a tremendous effort by Ontario's birders, the Atlas project is going very well after two years. We still have a huge amount of atlasing ahead of us, but at this point, we're a little ahead of where we were after two years in the first Atlas. To date, over 46,000 hours of field work have been recorded, compared to 38,000 after two years of the first atlas, and over 300,000 data points are already in the project's database.

All that data provides the opportunity for an examination of how things have changed since the first atlas—and there is a lot of change evident. This article outlines some of the most obvious changes. I'll focus on southern Ontario in this article, because northern Ontario has been rather spottily covered at this time. I'll also omit data on species reported in very few squares and colonial species because those results might change considerably when the review process is complete. The results provided below must be taken as preliminary and tentative because thorough checking of these results by Regional Coordinators and the Atlas Significant Species Review Subcommittee is not yet complete. Nevertheless, although the actual number of records might be changed slightly by the review process, I expect the major changes outlined here are generally reflective of real trends.

All results summarized here can be viewed on the atlas web page www.birdsontario.org in the data summaries or in map form.

Expanding and Increasing Species

Even though we're comparing two years of data from this Atlas with five years from the first, a number of species have been reported in more squares than they were during the first—and some considerably more.

The three species showing the largest proportional increase in the number of squares in which they have been reported are the Trumpeter Swan, Peregrine Falcon and Wild Turkey. The Trumpeter Swan has gone from no squares in the first atlas to 49 in the new atlas. The Peregrine has gone from 3 squares in the first atlas to 49 in the new atlas, while the Wild Turkey has gone from 19 to 351! All three of these species have been the object of highly successful reintroduction programs. The number of squares for the swan and the turkey are likely to increase substantially as more data comes in (it has been suggested that Wild Turkey occurs in most squares in southern Ontario), but the Peregrine results are based on MNR's survey of the species in 2001, so are not expected to increase much in the remaining years of the atlas.

Two of the next largest proportional increases are also for birds that have benefited from being introduced. The Mute Swan is up from 17 squares in the first atlas to 84 so far in the second atlas. The House Finch has increased from 187 squares in the first atlas to 615 in this atlas. The Canada Goose, which has been reintroduced to much of southern Ontario is up to 1233 squares already, compared to 944 in the first atlas. The Eastern Bluebird, benefiting from nest box programs, is up to 792 squares, compared to 737 in the first atlas.

Other species showing considerable increases in the number of squares reported include: Black-billed Magpie, reported in 21 squares in the current atlas and only six in the first; Bald Eagle, up to 331 squares in this atlas from 239 in the first atlas; and Merlin, up to 358 squares already, but were reported in only 263 during the first atlas.



The Carolina Wren is increasing and expanding its range.
Illustration by Brenda Carter.

Some southern species are expanding north into the province. For example, Carolina Wren has been reported in 112 squares so far, compared to 39 in the whole first atlas; Hooded Warbler has been reported in 54, compared to 21 in the first atlas; and Orchard Oriole is up to 130 squares already, compared to 113 in the first atlas. Northern Mockingbird, Northern Cardinal, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Tufted Titmouse have all already been reported in more squares in this atlas than they were in the first.

Contracting and Declining Species

It is more difficult to detect range contractions at this stage, because we're comparing two years of work to 5 years. Nevertheless, a few species have been reported in far fewer squares, based on the effort to date, than would be expected if birds were distributed as in the first atlas.

Perhaps the most evident change among common species has been in the Chimney Swift, which has been reported in only 414 squares, compared to 1328 in the first atlas (i.e. 69% fewer squares). Many of the squares where it was formerly reported are already well covered, but the bird, which is usually obvious if present, has not been reported.

The Common Nighthawk has been reported in only 301 squares, compared to 1320 in the first atlas (77% fewer squares). Similarly, the Whip-poor-will has been reported in only 234 squares, compared to 884 (73% fewer squares). These two are crepuscular species, so may be under-censused so far in the second atlas. Note, however, that American Woodcock, another crepuscular species, has already been reported in only 43% as many squares as in the first atlas.

Interestingly, the introduced Gray Partridge has been reported in only 30 squares, compared to 112 in the first atlas (73.2 fewer squares) It has been reported in only two squares in the area between Long Point and Hamilton, compared to 32 during the first atlas.

Several *Species At Risk* have also shown marked contractions. The Red-headed Woodpecker has been reported in only 174 squares, compared to 732 in the first atlas (76% fewer squares). Loggerhead Shrikes have been reported in only 31 squares, compared to 145 (79% fewer squares) in the first atlas, and Northern Bob-white has also been reported in only 17 squares, compared to 79 (79% fewer squares) in the first atlas. Henslow's Sparrow is down from 38 squares in the first atlas, to only 7 (82% fewer squares) so far in the second. These latter three species all use grassland habitat and their decline may be indicative of more widespread declines in birds using this habitat.



Juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker:
a declining species
by Brenda Carter

Conclusion

As you can see, although we're only two years into the Atlas, there is already a goldmine of information in the new atlas. However, we still need a lot more data to complete the picture. If you aren't contributing, please get involved. The more complete the coverage we get, the more the atlas will tell us about the current distribution and status of Ontario's birds and the better it will be as a bird conservation tool.

For more information on the atlas project and how to get involved, see www.birdsontario.org or contact us at e-mail atlas@uguelph.ca or phone toll free 1-866-700-9100.



The Red-headed Woodpecker is declining in Ontario.
Photo by Sam Barone.

Thank You

OFO is a registered charity. Donors receive a tax receipt for donations over \$10. 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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I Can't Believe I Ate the Whole Thing

Wolfgang Luft

During one of our visits to Ottawa last year, in late August I went birding in one of my favourite spots, Stony Swamp. While walking on the boardwalk over one of the wetlands, I noticed several Solitary Sandpipers (*Tringa solitaria*) feeding in an area where the water was only a few millimetres deep over submerged sphagnum moss. The birds were walking about foraging in the crevices in the moss substrate. While observing the closest bird at only about 4 or 5 metres away through my binoculars, it grabbed a large tadpole from the water and pulled it onto a small area where the moss was slightly emergent from the water. The tadpole being light green in colour was obviously the tadpole to one of the larger frogs (*Rana* sp.), perhaps the Green Frog or even Bull Frog. The tadpole flopped about on the surface trying to get back into the water. The bird jabbed at the prey several times before the tadpole managed to flip itself back into the water. Quickly the bird recaptured this juicy morsel. It appeared as if the globular body of the tadpole was about the size of my thumbnail, meaning the body of the tadpole was about one third the size of the bird's head, plus the tail. After several more jabs it finally positioned the prey appropriately and brought it headfirst into its beak. The prey was then swallowed relatively quickly with several convulses of the throat muscles until the tadpole was inside the now visibly distended crop. The little sandpiper then stood there for several minutes without moving; either resting from the effort or contemplating the enormity of the lunch it had just swallowed. I didn't know that the thin billed bird had such a huge gape that it was able to swallow this very large still living tadpole all in one gulp. It would be analogous to a human trying to swallow a grapefruit all in one bite. I was amazed at this accomplishment.

The Solitary Sandpiper's taste for tadpoles is documented by Moskoff (1995) in *The Birds of North America* (BNA) series. Insects, supplemented by small crustaceans, small mollusks and frogs are the main food items taken. A study of the Solitary Sandpiper's diet describes how, in slightly more than 30 minutes, one sandpiper ate 12 shiners, 60 tadpoles, 5 large hellgrammites, 7 caddis-fly larvae, many small flies, and small snails, which it extracted from their shells (Shelley 1933 cited in BNA).

I thank Ron Tozer for locating references.

Literature Cited

Moskoff, W. 1995. Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 156 (A. Poole and F. Gill, editors). Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and American Ornithologists Union, Washington, D.C.

Notes From The OBRC

Peter Burke

On 6 April 2003 the OBRC will meet at the Royal Ontario Museum for its Annual General Meeting. Nick Escott and Peter Burke (Chair) are retiring after completing three year terms. New elected voting members for 2003 are Bob Curry and Ron Pittaway. Ron and Bob bring a wealth of knowledge to the committee and we look forward to their return. Bill Crins continues to serve as Secretary in 2003.

Please visit the OFO website at www.ofo.ca and view the OBRC page. Here you will find an electronic Rare Bird Report Form and an article on How to Document Rare Birds. The report form is submitted directly to the Secretary and additional evidence such as drawings and photos can be sent electronically as well. With the increased popularity of digitizing, taking a digital photograph through the lens of a telescope, we are experiencing an explosion of superb documentation of recent rarities. To check out some examples, visit the OFO website.

Due to a lack of issues, a Fall Policy Meeting was not held in 2002. Developing topics such as funding the computerization of the database and "what to do" with Trumpeter Swan will be discussed at our Annual Meeting in April.

We look forward to receiving your documentation of provincial rarities via the OFO website or by mail to Bill Crins, OBRC Secretary, 170 Middlefield Road, Peterborough ON K9J 8G1.

Weaver Loggerhead Shrikes

Ron Pittaway

Why do shrikes use barbed wire and thorns? Previously I reported that being weak footed, impaling helps shrikes to hold their food and serves to store food for later use. Also, since impaled prey are often not eaten, impaling may have territorial significance because male shrikes with impressive caches may be more attractive to females (Pittaway 1999).

Here is another use of barbed wire. Burton (1999) watched a male Loggerhead Shrike in Indiana take a half metre piece of twine and attach it to a barbed wire fence. It then pulled off strands which were used in the lining of the nest. Burton observed another male impale a root with rootlets on barbed wire. He did not see the shrike use the rootlets in the nest, but the use of rootlets in shrike nests is well known. Burton suggests that using sharp objects such as barbed wire as anchors for manipulating and processing nest material could be an extension (or precursor) of impaling prey for tearing apart.

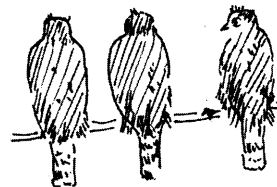
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Burton, K.M. 1999. Use of barbed wire by Loggerhead Shrikes. *American Midland Naturalist* 142:198-199. Abstract by T. Leiden (2000) in *Journal of Field Ornithology* 71(1):174.

Pittaway, R. 1999. Shrike's Larder. *OFO News* 17(1):1.

A Summer with Merlins

Mary Anne Miller



Once again in 2002, Merlins nested within sight of our cottage in Haliburton County in central Ontario. The following selections are from my detailed notes.

On 10 May 2002, before we even landed at our small island cottage, I knew we again had company. That distinctive trilling *kree kree kree* announced the residents. I guessed where to look. Last year crows built a nest 13 metres up in a White Pine, 15 metres from the cottage, and sure enough there they were. Two Merlins flying and vocalizing. This was the second crow's nest they had used on the island, and the third summer they had been with us. The nest was not close to the trunk but well out on a branch, clearly visible from our screened porch. For the next three months I spent many hours peering at it through a scope, watching the adults zipping by, listening to their distinctive cries and becoming very attached to the chicks as they developed into virtual adults.

I soon learned that for the first month or so the female stays close to home. She was sitting on the nest by 19 May, and until the third week of June was on it or close by and food arrived by rapid transit. A series of trilling *kree kree* announced the arrival of the male, and with an instant take off she would meet him mid-air or on one of two perches. Not far from shore there would be a split second exchange of prey after which each returned in a flash to their duties. I watched the male cruise the shore, hunting prey. Sometimes he sat for 15 to 20 minutes on a dead snag projecting above the tree line across the lake.

As the days warmed, we were treated to a bumper crop of buzzing deer flies and dragonflies. This suited the Merlin very well. He had no trouble catching dragonflies in mid-air and returning to a perch to de-wing and devour. A Blue Jay managed to escape him, disappearing into a dense bay bush, but I suspect the Chipping and Song Sparrows were not so lucky. Several usually nest nearby but not this year.

Typically the Merlin family day began at about 5:30 a.m. with some gentle trills. The first two weeks of June were relatively quiet. The female often cried as she flew off to meet the male but otherwise was silent. Activity increased during the last two weeks of June. There were more visits to the nest, more cries of a less harsh *kia kia kia*, and more fluttering on the nest.

30 June was the big day. A fluffy light buffy-grey head appeared above the tangle of sticks and to the left was another moving bundle of fluff.

1 July was a warm day. At 12 noon, loud aggressive cries *kree kree kree* and a flash announced a delivery. The female took off and returned with a meal. She tore it apart at the nest and fed three young. One gave up waiting its turn and took a piece right from her bill. On 2 July the first cries were at 6:10 a.m. and at 6:20 there was a high pitched call from a chick, the first time I was sure of the young making a sound. On 5 July I could see a few flight feathers on the young and the female was not sticking as close to the nest. On 6 July I saw a tail with banding. There were lots of feeding expeditions and the young were moving about in the nest.

A week later on 12 July after a delivery of food, one young

appeared on the rim of the nest flapping feathered wings, spreading a feathered tail, down flying in the afternoon breeze, while a second was tearing apart a bloody meal. A third downy young watched, preening.

On 14 July there was little down left on the young. Their backs were smooth, slate brown feathers with small tufts of down, their throats pale buff, the breasts were beautifully marked but below all this were magnificent doubledoons of fluff. When they perched on the rim of the disintegrating nest we had wonderful views of the billowing thighs through our 45 times magnification 15 metres away.

On 15 July there were **four** young perched on the rim of the nest. There was lots of trilling, flapping and hesitating steps. By 7:30 a.m. three were out, hopping, teetering, flapping, sitting sometimes horizontally or sometimes upright; they had left the nest. The fine twigs of the pine branches were a challenge to negotiate. Wings got caught, feet tripped but they were persistent. Within an hour, the three had moved a metre or so away from the nest to more exposed branches of the pine.

On 21 July I noted our little island had become a very noisy spot with sometimes four Merlins in full cry at once, all giving a *kia kia kia* in high piercing and rising syllables. Two birds were often flying adeptly round and round the nest area. It was the centre of activity but the nest was not. On 22 July there were only tiny tufts on the heads of three juveniles, one had some down tufts in its tail.

By 25 July the juveniles were on their own. The next day, they circled wildly through the trees, over the point, back into the woods, crying persistently. Was this exercise, practice, games? An Osprey appeared. Two screaming jets shot out from the home pine and drove off the intruder.

The behaviour of the juvenile Merlins continued much the same to 5 August, though with more time being spent away from the island and the far shore perch. By 8 August, things were much quieter, and on 9 August we saw no more than two at any one time and only on four occasions. On 12 August, one Merlin briefly appeared at 11:20 and its cries resulted in a vocal reaction from two crows. We realized we had probably said goodbye to our companions of three months.

Though we had learned a lot about their behaviour, many questions remained unanswered. Will two be back next year in a nest we spotted high in a nearby White Pine? Does the same pair return? Where did the male spend the nights? Was he off on his own nearby? And the various cries: at least four different ones. Eastern Phoebes successfully nested under the cottage roof; Purple Finches and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds happily used nearby feeders; a Red-eyed Vireo sang throughout. Had they nothing to fear? Were the juveniles still together or had they split up by 12 August to go their own ways.

Subsequently, I saw single Merlins on 25 August, 28 September and my last sighting was on 29 September, but they may have been migrants from elsewhere. We look forward to the Merlins returning this summer.

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A university student's summer atlassing in northern Ontario

Andrew Keaveney

Imagine the typical birding scene in May where hundreds of birders are swarming to migrant traps such as Point Pelee or Long Point to witness the spectacle of migrating gems like warblers, buntings and tanagers. In just a few square kilometers we can view many different species that for the rest of the season will spread out over many thousands of square kilometers. But migration gives a somewhat false impression about what we have coined 'birding'. Birds have territories, homes and families! There is as much to be learned in breeding areas as on migratory routes.

As many of you know, Ontario is in the middle of its second Breeding Bird Atlas. As the name suggests, the purpose of this study is to provide up-to-date maps of the distribution and abundance of the breeding birds of Ontario. There are literally hundreds of birders participating in this project that has just finished its second of five field seasons. Anyone can participate in the Atlas project. But for some of us, this is more than just a project to go birding in Ontario during the summer months. It's the opportunity of a lifetime to travel to some of Ontario's most remote corners and visit its most sought after features. Because Ontario is such a vast region, most of which is not populated to any extent or traversed on a regular basis, there is no way that the entire province could be properly atlassed. But that hasn't stopped many of us from trying. The more remote and inaccessible squares still need to be atlassed to see which birds reside there. This is where my story comes in.

This past summer Bird Studies Canada received a grant from the Living Legacy Trust (LLT) to assess the effect of forest management on birds in forested landscapes. The project's methods are compatible with Atlas methodology, and the data will provide a big boost to the Atlas project as all of the data collected will be submitted to the Atlas database. The LLT project covers the forested regions of central and northern Ontario, including all of the boreal forest. The LLT project hired 15 people this summer to collect data in these remote and hard to access corners of the province. This group of birders and naturalists was paid to go where no one else will dare! I'm going to tell you about the people that really made this project worthwhile by going beyond the call of duty to study the birds of Ontario. And by the end of this article you'll understand what I mean by *beyond the call of duty*.

Atlas coordinator Mike Cadman and assistant coordinator Nicole Kopysh headed up three teams of people picked to work in northern Ontario for the 2002

breeding season. While Mike coordinated this year's atlas from Blackwood Hall at the University of Guelph, he somehow managed to keep track of our three teams up in central and northeastern Ontario. These all star teams consisted of Team 1: John Haselmayer, Andrew Keaveney (that's me), Rachel Bryan, Sandra Pusey and Chris Kaloudas; Team 2: Doug Tozer, Cindy Cartwright, Kathy Parker and Bart Young, and Team 3: Nicole Kopysh, Fergus Nicoll, Marc Sardi, Myles Falconer, Tim Irvin and Josh Shook. Each team had at least two experienced birders capable of doing point counts, two field assistants and a driver.

I can honestly say that no one knew what they were getting into. It all started out at Trent University. That was where we all met for the first time and that was where the tears would fly seven weeks later. After our initial greetings to the Atlas project, Mike introduced us to our new homes...three gigantic four wheel drive Dodge Ram 1500s, one for each team. These vehicles would become the highlights of many of our summer experiences. I think most of us know what they want their first vehicle to be now! After we got our gear into the three monster trucks we headed to the grocery store. I've never bought so much food in my life. Eggs, bacon, juice crystals, chicken, pasta, you name it, we bought it. We found it to be quite the exercise over the next few weeks to fit both our enormous load of gear and food in the back of the truck.

Later that afternoon, we headed to Algonquin Provincial Park where we stayed for over a week learning more about point counts, GPS units, vegetation surveys, collecting breeding evidence, and most of all...about each other. That was an incredible week of exploring mainly the interior parts of the park where most campers never reach unless hiking for days at a time. The ordinary camper would be surprised to know that Algonquin is dissected by interior logging roads. Not all of these roads are always accessible, as we soon learned. But we weren't about to let a few fallen trees or washed out roads spoil our fun and hard work atlassing.

It was somewhat emotional when the day finally came to depart on our separate ways. Two crews headed for the more northerly regions, while the third crew remained to survey Algonquin. For the next five or so weeks we would be led here and there, to and from, and back and forth along provincial, county, municipal and logging roads, as well as the odd railway bed. I can honestly say that there were some moments in the project when I asked myself whether or not I should just give up right there and



Front row left to right: Bart Young, Doug Tozer, John Haselmayer and Marc Sardi. Standing left to right: Fergus Nicoll, Nicole Kopysh, Andrew Keaveney, Myles Falconer, Kathy Parker, Sandra Pusey, Cindy Cartwright and Rachel Bryan. Sitting on vehicle: Chris Kaloudas. July 2002. Photo by Mike Cadman

then and go home. It wasn't an easy job. Not at all. We all had our struggles and days that just wouldn't go right. But we didn't let any bears, alder thickets (absolute worst fear of any atlaser), soaked vegetation, creeks that weren't on the maps or agitated birds stop us from doing our jobs.

Let me take you through our average day on the job. Wake up call was usually around 4 a.m. Fifteen minutes to get our stuff together—I took a little longer. Truck then took off like a bullet. Although we tried to camp as close to our study sites as possible, that didn't always work out. It would sometimes take over an hour to arrive on site. Our group of five then broke up into two teams, one led by John, and the other by me. Chris Kaloudas, our point count recorder, would switch between teams every other day. While John and I did our point counts, it was up to Chris to 'test' us by using an amazing CVX microphone that recorded the bird sounds while we listened with our ears. I don't know if we were as good as the microphone. Let's hope so. So from about 5:00 to 10:00 each morning we would point count. Then we would grab a quick snack and start searching for breeding evidence. This involved looking for different behaviours that indicate the birds may be breeding, for example, singing birds in breeding habitat, nests, fledged young. Lunch came around noon (sandwiches galore) and then we set out again for more hours to complete the 20 hour minimum coverage per square.

Ontario is such an amazing place to explore. When mornings fell silent or birds became repetitive, we always turned to whatever next interested us. For me it was the

butterflies and wildflowers. I even decided to do a big net list—most butterflies seen in one year in Ontario—seeing about 80 species in 2002 of the 120 likely candidates. There is much variety in the plant and butterfly worlds and they are *almost* as fascinating as birds.

I want to give readers something to "awe" over and let you listen to other perspectives. Here are some comments from my peers when I asked about their favourite experiences.

Myles Falconer: "I think the funniest part about the summer was doing point counts with Fergus Nicoll. Every morning we would try to navigate through wet, impenetrable alder thickets, screaming and cursing until our throats became sore. We developed quite a love for point counts. When I look back at the summer, I realize that it was one of the best summers I've ever had."

Sandra (Sandy) Pusey: "Joques near Hearst. John and I had just finished a point count in the middle of a black spruce bog when I asked him, "Did you get the peacock?" He gave me a look like I was totally demented and replied, "You thought that was a peacock?" "Ya" Then with great wisdom he stated, "I think it was a weird raven call." A couple of days later he told me that while atlasing, he saw a peacock. He had also seen a sign for a Wildlife Park."

Cindy Cartwright: "Holding a Sharp-tailed grouselet in my hand, 4x4 driving lessons, water fights, standing in a canoe checking phoebe nests, a sky-high lift to see raccoon babies in a tree, Bart rescuing a damsel in a distress, being dive-bombed by a Greater Yellowlegs,

betting eggs on the moon (inside joke).”

The most mind blowing moments that I had on the project were when I was alone, hiking miles from any human presence. It was then when the birdlife, no, the wildlife in general could be found abundantly, and it was only then that I was able to study them intently. It was at this time that I could actually learn a great deal from them.

I know you're waiting to hear what we found. There is so much to tell so I'll just give the highlights. Along the northeastern edge of Lake Superior we found a Western Meadowlark and a House Wren that were nicely out of range. The two big surprises in our group were the numbers of Northern Hawk Owls and Sharp-tailed Grouse found. The owls were quite common and usually found in family groups by the calling of their downy young. We found several grouse, including mothers with young "grouselets". What is most remarkable is that both these species were found in clear cuts. Clear cuts are large expanses that have been logged of all trees. However, we found that they provided an almost prairie-like mix of birds that seemed noticeably different from the surrounding forests. The greatest moments for every group were when a nest was actually found. Some of the cool nests we found were White-throated Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird, Ovenbird, Broad-winged Hawk, Three-toed Woodpecker and Belted Kingfisher.

In the end, our group alone atlased about 25 squares, and all three groups together must have atlased almost 80 squares. In addition to being used for the Living Legacy Trust project, all this data will be submitted to the Atlas data base.

If you think that you're interested in this kind of work, then see if you fit the following qualities: great group dynamics; physically fit and able to walk at least 10 km a day; a great interest in birds and wildlife; experienced in camping, hiking, canoeing; have some wilderness skills; and of course you must be an outdoors person.

This project was the second most incredible experience of my life, next to Costa Rica of course. I and many of the other participants would be glad to continue with the project next field season. If you know someone out there, whether from Ontario or not or if you yourself found this article interesting and like to volunteer for this type of work, consider participating in the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Then maybe I'll see you next year on a shoreline along Lake Superior or perhaps along an abandoned railway bed in Algonquin's interior.

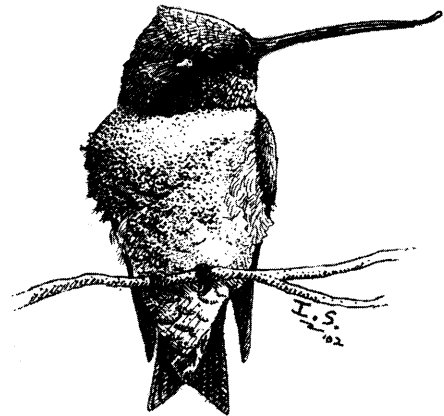
If you would like to know more about the my breeding bird atlas work last summer, please e-mail me at <UofGtwitcher@msn.com>. It is great way to gain biological inventory and survey skills while learning about our birds and province.

Always Have a Back-up Plan

Ian Shanahan

In a bumper-crop year for migrating birds, it is easy to ignore Yellow Warblers and Baltimore Orioles. Yet, in a subpar year such as spring 2002, these birds deserve our appreciation. In all honesty, May 2002 won't go down in history as a banner year for spring migration at my local birding mecca, Presqu'ile. However, this past spring may have been my most enjoyable one yet.

Conditions never were quite right for a fall-out, and May went by without supplying many people with some traditionally common species. However, amidst those alarmingly quiet days, the faithful song of the Yellow Warbler broke the silence. They, along with the Baltimore Orioles, White-crowned Sparrows and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, made some frustrating days transform into delightful outings.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Ian Shanahan

On one particular excursion, my dad and I watched a pair of the Yellow Warblers establish a nesting territory. While the female secretively foraged in the dogwoods, the male sang from three nearby trees. These trees were situated in a triangular pattern surrounding the nest. Such attention to detail by a songbird is astounding, but also is easily overlooked in a year when birds seem to be dripping from the trees.

At a local feeder, it was entertaining watching Baltimore and Orchard Orioles as well as five male Ruby-throated Hummingbirds fight over a single nectar feeder. This all happened as White-crowned Sparrows fed on the porch below and 20 American Goldfinches fed on the niger feeder above.

On a cold and dreary February day as the gray skies cast miserable shadows across the ground and you are sitting inside, think back to those balmy May afternoons when the Yellow Warblers filled the trees. They certainly make for an excellent back-up plan when nothing else is around.

Should We Feed Birds? Why Not!

Steve Elliott

After reading John Prescott's well written article "Should We Feed Birds" in the October 2002 *OFO News* 20(3):9, I would like to provide some additional comments relating to that article about birdfeeding and birdfeeders.

Birdfeeding provides enormous pleasure to people who want to feel some closeness with nature on a daily basis. Most want to "help" the birds by supplementing natural food sources. The past year was particularly bad for people reporting sick or dead birds in their yards. Since few of these birds were tested it was hard to determine the exact causes. Salmonellosis is likely to have been one of the culprits. It often takes an incident like a bird dying in someone's yard before they take an active interest in birdfeeder cleaning. There are still plenty of people who have fed the birds for years but never once cleaned their feeders. One of the goals of any good birdfeeding store is to educate customers and promote feeder cleanliness and yard hygiene.

We recommend people consider the following:

- Provide multiple feeding stations in different areas of your yard to disperse bird activity. Crowding can cause stress making birds more vulnerable to disease.
- Clean and disinfect your feeders regularly with a 10% bleach and water solution. This works well. Rinse well and dry thoroughly.
- Keep seed clean and dry to prevent mold. Utilize a weather guard over tube and suet feeders and look for wooden feeders with good roof overhangs.
- Use a good quality seed or mix so the birds eat more and waste less.
- Rake up uneaten seed and shells. Dispose of them in your garbage rather than tossing elsewhere in your yard.
- Use a ground feeder rather than broadcasting it on the ground—easier to clean and control.
- Move your feeders periodically so there will be less concentration of bird droppings.
- If you find a dead bird near your feeder not killed by a predator, remove it and disinfect your feeders. On a personal note, always wash your hands after filling your

feeders and use rubber gloves while cleaning them.

As for feeder designs, it's like trying to invent the better mousetrap. Everyone has a new idea and opinion. Many feeders are difficult to disassemble so people are discouraged from cleaning them. Cleaning should be a consideration when purchasing a new feeder. Remember that you can have an impact. Feeder improvements are often driven by the feedback given to birdfeeding stores by their customers. As an example, up until a few years ago, wooden feeders had solid bottoms and poor drainage. Now many incorporate removable screen bottoms for drainage and easier cleaning. More feeders are adding larger roofs to guard against the weather. These were things that customers wanted. One new tube feeder has only one wing nut to remove that disassembles the feeder for cleaning. The feeder is even dishwasher safe. The challenge for retailers is that better quality and better features often adds to the cost. Most of you appreciate that investing in a good feeder is like buying top quality optics—in the end the results are better and you're happier. However, when you started birding you probably didn't start with top end optics and that is also the case with most people starting to feed birds. Our goal is to point out the features of each feeder and let the customer make the choice.



This squirrel proof feeder is easy to clean. It disassembles with one thumbscrew, is dishwasher safe, and its perching area requires little cleaning as both bird and seed droppings fall to ground. Good drainage and ventilation keep seeds dry.

Seed is also a difficult area in this regard. Price discounters and other non-specialty stores tend to buy based on price. How do you keep prices down? Load the bag with grains like wheat, milo and cut corn which are less expensive but also less desirable to the birds. Birds tend to pick out the seeds, like sunflower, that they do want and toss the rest. People are often fooled by the biggest bag for the least money. However, it is difficult for the average person to look at seed and determine the quality. You have to rely on the reputation of your retailer. Most birdfeeding stores start with a high quality seed, clean it better, store it properly and only use the seeds that provide the best nutrition for the birds. Better seed means less waste and usually more birds.

So there is no reason to stop feeding birds but you can enhance the experience for you and the birds by using good feeders, good seed and yard hygiene.

Steve Elliott, Wild Birds Unlimited, Thornhill, Ontario

Ontario Forest Bird Monitoring Program

Mike Cadman

The Ontario Forest Bird Monitoring Program (FBMP) is an on-going project that tracks bird populations in forested areas. The program is run by the Ontario Region of Canadian Wildlife Service. This article outlines and examines the trends among forest birds over the project's first 15 years from 1987 through 2001.

The FBMP was developed to provide a complement to the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). BBS is the primary means of tracking breeding bird populations in North America, and is run by the Canadian Wildlife Service in Canada and the US Geological Survey in the U.S. Over 2000 routes are run annually across North America, about 100 of which are in Ontario.

BBS routes consist of 50 point counts, 0.8 km apart along secondary roads. The BBS therefore monitors populations in roadside areas, which might not be representative of trends in the whole landscape, particularly off-road areas.

FBMP sites are situated primarily in large, mature, unmanaged forested areas, which are undergoing relatively little change other than from natural disturbance. As such, FBMP results complement the BBS data in providing an enhanced understanding of forest bird population trends in southern and central Ontario where most BBS and FBMP routes are located.

Methods

FBMP sites consist of 5 stations, at least 200 m apart, and 100 m from the forest edge. Volunteers, who must know forest birds well by song, cover each site twice each year, in the peak of the breeding season. The first visit must be between May 24 and June 17, and the second visit must be between June 13 and July 10, with at least six days after the first visit. Having two visits provides a more thorough assessment of the birds breeding on each site, and spacing out the visits helps ensure that birds active at different times are well represented. For example, chickadees are quiet in late May once they have established their territories, but they become more active later in June when adults are busy feeding young.

At each station a 10-minute point count is run between dawn and 5 hours after dawn. In 2002, the data collection protocol was modified so that data were collected in two 5-minute periods within each 10-minute survey, and each bird is recorded at more than or less than 100 m from the station. This ensures that the data are compatible with the 5-minute North American Standard for point counts, and with the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. FBMP data will be

included in the Atlas. Counts are only run during low wind (<20 km/hr) and no precipitation.

Results

The FBMP monitors 75 species well enough to provide trend information, 50 of which are forest-dependent birds and are considered the "target" species for the program. The remaining 25 are "edge" and early successional species, which do occur in forests, e.g. Song Sparrow, but occur more commonly in habitat other than forest.

Table 1 shows the commonest species on FBMP sites, and the number and percentage of sites each species is reported on. These are the birds you would most expect to hear in large mature forests in southern or central Ontario.

Note that the American Crow is on the list. Although it is not a species of extensive woodlands, its voice carries great distances, so it is frequently reported on FBMP surveys, which are "unlimited distance" counts. Although the crow is not a target species for the FBMP, it will be interesting to see if numbers drop with the arrival of the West Nile Virus (WNV), to which crows are known to be highly susceptible. As little is known of the susceptibility of most species to WNV, FBMP, BBS and other monitoring projects provide a way of assessing the impact of WNV on populations of many species.

Tables 2 and 3 show the statistically significant trends over the 15 year period from 1987 through 2001, i.e. those with over a 90% probability. "Trend (%)" indicates the annual percent rate of change of each species. Eighteen species had a significant population trend, 13 of them increasing and 5 decreasing. While this overall tendency to an increasing population of forest birds is encouraging, a closer examination of the results is less so. Twelve of the 13 increasing species are either edge or interior-edge species, while three of the five declining birds are forest interior species: Blackburnian Warbler, Scarlet Tanager and Winter Wren. Forest interior birds generally require more extensive and less disturbed forest areas, while edge and interior-edge birds are less demanding.

Doing separate trend analyses in each Ecozone (Mixedwoods Plain is south of the Canadian Shield and Boreal-Shield is on the Canadian Shield) helps explain some of the overall trends. See Table 4. Note that of the 12 increasing species for which it is feasible to calculate a trend in the Mixedwoods Plain, all are increasing, and 10 of the 12 are increasing significantly. This result was rather surprising and we have not yet looked into why it

might be, but it's interesting to speculate. It might reflect the overall increase in forest cover south of the Canadian Shield, which has continued throughout this century, as much of the region's marginal farmland has reverted to scrub and then forest. The resulting reforestation may be enhancing populations of edge and interior-edge species, which might result in increases even in fairly mature sites like those monitored by FBMP. Conversely, the increase in edge species and interior-edge species might be a result of the ice storm that severely damaged the canopy of many forested areas in eastern Ontario. For example, the apparent dramatic increase in the Eastern Towhee may be an anomaly of a few sites that were affected by the ice storm. Overall, towhees are much less common than in the past mainly due to forest maturation. There are many possibilities and we will be looking more closely into this.

The Hermit Thrush is the only forest interior bird among the increasing species and its increase has been south of the shield (Table 4). Its expansion south from the Canadian Shield is also being documented by the Atlas project.

Among species showing a decline on FBMP sites, the Scarlet Tanager is declining primarily in the Mixedwoods Plain and is roughly stable on the shield. Research through Cornell's Project Tanager has revealed that Scarlet Tanagers are less successful in fragmented woods. This could lead to declining populations, which would be consistent with the observed trend; woodlands on the shield are considerably less fragmented and more extensive than that of the Mixedwoods Plain. Still, a significant decline in a forest interior species is a cause for concern, and for a further look into what the problem might be we should see if we can rule out the ice storm, for example, before going any further.

A sincere thank you to the dedicated volunteers who have made the FBMP feasible. The FBMP is almost unique in North America, only Vermont has a similar volunteer-based program in place, and that Vermont project is based on Ontario's FBMP.



Hermit Thrush is increasing south of the Canadian Shield.
Illustration by *Brenda Carter*

Table 1: The 12 most frequent species reported on FBMP sites.

Species	Sites	% Sites
Red-eyed Vireo	230	77%
Ovenbird	215	72%
Blue Jay	213	71%
American Robin	210	70%
Great Crested Flycatcher	195	65%
Black-capped Chickadee	193	65%
Eastern Wood-Pewee	187	63%
American Crow	180	60%
Veery	173	58%
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	154	52%
Wood Thrush	138	46%
Scarlet Tanager	135	45%

Table 2: These 13 species show significant increasing trends. A trend is the average percent population change each year from 1987 through 2001.

Increasing Species	# Sites	% Trend	Status
American Crow	180	+3.0 %	Non-target
American Goldfinch	115	+4.0 %	Non-target
American Redstart	111	+5.0 %	Target
Baltimore Oriole	88	+3.6 %	Non-target
Eastern Towhee	28	+10.0 %	Target
Gray Catbird	49	+7.5 %	Target
Great Crested Flycatcher	195	+2.2 %	Target
Hermit Thrush	102	+3.4 %	Target
Mourning Dove	99	+7.4 %	Non-target
Northern Cardinal	68	+5.2 %	Target
Red-eyed Vireo	230	+2.8 %	Target
Yellow Warbler	42	+8.4 %	Non-target
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	103	+5.8 %	Target

Table 3: These five species show significant decreasing trends. A trend is the average percent population change each year from 1987 through 2001.

Decreasing Species	# Sites	% Trend	Status
Blackburnian Warbler	77	-3.7 %	Target
Nashville Warbler	107	-4.5 %	Non-target
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	154	-2.4 %	Target
Scarlet Tanager	135	-2.6 %	Target
Winter Wren	108	-4.5 %	Target

Table 4: Some trends are better shown by separating Mixedwoods Plain and Boreal Shield ecozones, which are combined in Tables 2 and 3.

Species	Boreal Shield Ecozone		Mixedwoods Plain Ecozone	
	% Trend	Sig	% Trend	Sig
American Crow	+3.6		+2.7	
American Goldfinch	-1.6		+4.8	*
American Redstart	+1.1		+7.2	*
Baltimore Oriole	ID		+3.6	*
Eastern Towhee	-3.7	*	+12.6	*
Gray Catbird	ID		+7.5	*
Great Crested Flycatcher	+0.6		+2.5	*
Hermit Thrush	+0.3		+9.5	*
Mourning Dove	ID		+7.4	*
Northern Cardinal	ID		+5.5	*
Red-eyed Vireo	+2.3		+3.2	*
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	+6.2		+4.9	
Decreasing Species				
Blackburnian Warbler	-4.0	*	-2.3	
Nashville Warbler	-4.8	*	-6.3	*
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	-2.8		-2.6	*
Scarlet Tanager	-0.4		-3.5	*
Winter Wren	-6.4	*	-2.8	

ID = Insufficient data to calculate a trend

* = statistically significant trend



Rose-breasted Grosbeak is decreasing in both the Boreal Shield and Mixedwoods ecozones.
Illustration by Brenda Carter.

Stranded Loons and Grebes

Annie and Erwin Meissner



Stranded Common Loons and Red-necked Grebes
Gore Bay, Manitoulin Island, 20 April 2002.
Photo by Erwin Meissner.

There are all kinds of dangers awaiting eager spring migrants. Nature has its own way of dealing with things regardless of what we think or feel.

The 20 April 2002 was a sunny day with an icy wind coming off the lakes. We spent the day on Manitoulin Island looking for newly arrived migrants. Low lying meadows and fields were flooded with the spring runoff, which came late and suddenly, with temperatures reaching 26°C a few days before. Puddle ducks (teals, Pintails, Mallards, Blacks) and Canada Geese were everywhere, with small flocks of Sandhill Cranes settling between them. Killdeer filled the clear fresh air with their plaintive calls and the first sweet songs from Eastern Meadowlarks and Song Sparrows could be heard across the open spaces. Way above in the cloudless sky, Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks held a sharp lookout on things below.

Our search took us to Gore Bay along the Janet Head Road. The prevailing west winds had pushed the recently broken up ice back into the open bay, choking it completely. Dark spots on the ice close to shore drew my attention. They turned out to be two loons stranded on the ice with two Red-necked Grebes close by in the same predicament. About a kilometre of tightly-packed ice was between them and open water. There was no way for them to reach it. They cannot walk any distance or fly because a long stretch of open water is needed as a "runway" in order for them to become airborne. So there they were, literally "sitting ducks" on ice.

In town, we tried for two hours to get attention to the birds from several authorities but to no avail. The MNR was on strike, the conservation officer was out on call and the OPP would or could not respond. We also put out help calls to friends on the island to make them aware of the birds in need, then headed home with heavy hearts.

The next day we received word that a pair of Bald Eagles had made a feast out of them and what was left the gulls and ravens finished off.

Just another small episode in the web of life.

Future OFO Field Trips

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.

March 22 (Saturday) Long Point and Vicinity. Leader: George Pond.

Meet at 9 a.m. at the main parking lot of the St. Williams Forestry Station on County Road 24 west of the intersection with County Road 16. Waterfowl and early spring migrants.

April 12 (Saturday) Gore Bay, Manitoulin Island. Leader: Steve Hall.

Sharp-tailed Grouse lek. Cost: \$20 per person. This trip is limited to 15 participants. **Please note:** You must register by April 1. OFO members receive priority. For more information and/or to register, contact Don Barnett: phone: 416-588-9724 e-mail: <dwb126@yahoo.ca>

April 19 (Saturday) Algonquin Park. Leader: Ron Tozer.

Meet at 9 a.m. at the WEST GATE of the park. Park entrance fee. Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee.

April 27 (Sunday) Tiny Marsh Provincial Wildlife Area.

Leader: Ron Fleming. *New Trip*

Phone 905-898-7216. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the commuter parking lot on the southwest side of the interchange at Highway 9 and Highway 400, or meet at 9:00 a.m. at Tiny Marsh Nature Centre. Take County Road 27 north past Elmvale to Simcoe Road 6 and turn left (west). Proceed to 1st Concession Road, Tiny-Flos Townline. Turn left (west) and continue about 4 km to the Nature Centre. Waterfowl and early spring migrants.

May 3 (Saturday) Rondeau Provincial Park. Leader: Maris Apse.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Visitor Centre. Park entrance fee. Spring migrants.

May 17 (Saturday) Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area.

Leader: Terry Sprague.

Meet at 7 a.m. at the bird sightings board at Ducks Dive Cottages & Charters, just outside the entrance to Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area. From Picton, take County Road 10 (Lake Street at the LCBO) for 8 km to Cherry Valley, then left at the stop sign and follow for 6 km to Milford. At the post office, turn right and follow County Road 10 to the Mariner's Museum at South Bay. Turn right and follow County Road 13 for 17 km to Prince Edward Point. Spring migrants.

May 24 (Saturday) Opinicon Road Area North of Kingston and Amherst Island.

Leader: Ken Kingdon.

Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the parking lot of Denny's Restaurant next to the Days Inn just south on Division Street, Kingston (exit 617 from Hwy 401). In the morning, breeding birds north of Kingston: Golden-winged and Cerulean Warblers, Yellow-throated Vireo, Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos. The afternoon on Amherst Island for shorebirds, ducks and more. Ferry charge.

May 25 (Sunday) Leslie Street Spit, Toronto. Leader: John Carley.

Meet at 8 a.m. at the base of the Spit parking lot near the intersection of Leslie Street and Unwin Avenue. Late migrants, breeding birds and butterflies.

May 30 (Friday) and May 31 (Saturday) Rainy River. Leader: Dave Elder.

Phone: 807-597-2008

e-mail: <melder@atikokan.lakeheadu.ca>

Meet at junction of Worthington Road #3 and Hwy 11, which is about 10 km east of Rainy River (3 sideroads east of town) at 7:00 a.m. *local (Central) time.* American White Pelican, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Yellow Rail, Marbled Godwit, Piping Plover, Western Kingbird, Sandhill Crane, Black-billed Magpie, Connecticut Warbler, Le Conte's Sparrow. **Please note:** those members intending to participate MUST register with Dave Elder by May 1.

June 14 (Saturday) St. Clair National Wildlife Area and Point Pelee National Park. Leader: John Miles.

Meet at 7 a.m. at the parking lot of the St. Clair Refuge off Townline Road about 18 km west of Chatham. Breeding birds: Yellow-headed Blackbird, Least Bittern, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, rails.

June 21 (Saturday) and June 22 (Sunday) Bruce Peninsula.

Leader: John Miles.

On Saturday meet at 7 a.m. at the Tim Hortons in Hepworth about 12.5 km south of Wiarton on Highway 6. On Sunday meet at 7 a.m. in the parking lot of the Tobermory airport, west of Highway 6 on Warner Bay Road. Park entrance fees. *Accommodations on the Bruce can be difficult in summer; it is strongly recommended that participants arrange their lodgings early.* The Bruce birds: Brewer's Blackbird, Common Raven, Virginia Rail, Clay-colored Sparrow, Sandhill Crane, Upland Sandpiper, breeding warblers. Also wildflowers, ferns and butterflies.

Early Fledged Mourning Dove

Ron and Mary Tasker

The article by Ron Pittaway "Early Fledged Mourning Dove" in the June 2002 *OFO News* Volume 20(2):4 recalled an experience of ours. On 28 March 2002 as we were leaving our house at 12 Cluny Drive in Toronto, we were startled by a small poorly flying dove in the dense shrubbery on the east side of our greenhouse. We easily captured it with a butterfly net, at first thinking it might be an injured exotic species. When examined, see photographs, it proved to be a juvenile Mourning Dove. The parent birds were not seen.



Mourning Dove showing the soft woolly plumage and pale feather tips of a juvenile in Toronto on 28 March 2002. Photo by Ron Tasker.



Juvenile Mourning Dove showing distinct pale edges to the wing coverts and scapulars in Toronto on 28 March 2003. Photo by Ron Tasker.

OFO Awards

Each year OFO recognizes individuals and organizations for their contribution to the birds and birding community of Ontario. This year the following people will receive an OFO Certificate of Appreciation:

- **Geoff Carpentier** for his tireless work to obtain access on behalf of all Ontario birders to the Port Perry Sewage Lagoons. He will receive a second award for generously donating his time and raising funds during the Baillie Birdathon on behalf of OFO for the last 10 consecutive years.
- **Ron Tozer, Ron Pittaway and Bill Crins** for their dedicated volunteer efforts as Editors of *Ontario Birds* and for making it Ontario's finest birding publication.
- **Homer and Jean Leavitt** for their outstanding hospitality to Ontario birdwatchers during the stay of the Lewis's Woodpecker on their property during winter 2002.
- **Gerry Vanderzanden and Grace de Vries-Vanderzanden** for their outstanding hospitality to Ontario birdwatchers during the stay of the Smith's Longspur on their property during winter 2002.
- **Ken Wilton, Ray Dodman, Brad Reive, Bill Prieksaitis and Harold Lancaster** for their leadership and efforts in building seven wildlife viewing stands at sewage lagoons and wildlife areas throughout Elgin County to minimize bird disturbance and enhance viewing opportunities.
- **Lorne Spicer, Al Hurst and Gordon Longhurst** for their persistence in obtaining access on behalf of all Ontario birders to the Port Stanley Sewage Lagoons and their involvement in building the wildlife viewing stands throughout Elgin County.

George Prieksaitis, Chris Escott and Jean Iron
OFO Awards Committee

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OFO Annual Convention

Point Pelee

20 and 21 September 2003

Mark your calendars now. Enjoy a great weekend of fall birding at Point Pelee. Field trips will focus on identification led by expert leaders. On Saturday evening we will come together for a banquet and program at the Roma Club in Leamington.

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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