OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

Volume 22 Number 1 February 2004

Diamond Birds in the Rough

Ron Pittaway

Diamonds have been discovered in northern Ontario south of Polar Bear Provincial Park in the Hudson Bay Lowland. During the ice free season, ships coming from the Atlantic will unload fuel and supplies onto barges offshore in James Bay. The barges will go to the First Nation coastal community of Attawapiskat, which will have handling facilities. Barging will require the dredging of parts of James Bay and the Attawapiskat River. Dredged materials will be dumped into James Bay. A fuel pipeline and winter road will go about 90 km inland from the coast to the diamond mine. Another improved winter road will go along the James Bay coast from Moosonee through Fort Albany to Attawapiskat. Diamonds just might be the beginning of major developments in the Hudson Bay Lowland of Ontario. There is potential for hydroelectric dams, mining, peat extraction, and oil and gas exploration. Such developments pose unknown changes to bird populations and wildlife habitats.

The muskegs, string bogs, barrens, forests, lakes, rivers, coastal marshes, and tidal flats of the Hudson Bay Lowland comprise one of the largest wetland wilderness areas in the world. Before shipping, barging, roads, pipelines, and diamond mines are built, great care must be taken to insure that there will be minimal damage to the environment. On the positive side, birders may gain access to some fabulous birding areas in northern Ontario.

Turkey Condor

Ron Pittaway

People say that Turkey Vultures are ugly. Turkey Vultures have an image problem associated with their naked red head and negative name of vulture. Yet they are masters of soaring beauty with a wingspan of 1.8 metres or 6 feet. How would the Turkey Vulture be regarded if it were renamed the Turkey Condor? Palmer (1988) stated, "At least all of the dark Vultures might better be called Condors." Historically, the New World vultures (Cathartidae) and Old World vultures (Acciptridae) were in the same order Falconiformes. Recently, the New World vultures were moved to the order Ciconiiformes (AOU 1998). New World vultures and Old World vultures now are not even in the same order, but they share the name of vulture.

Is it time to change the name to Turkey Condor and Black Vulture to Black Condor? Two OFO members are also members of the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists Union, which is the official Checklist Committee. Perhaps the AOU would consider changing the names to Turkey Condor and Black Condor. Such name changes would be welcomed by birders and the general public, who would take a new interest in these magnificent condors.

Literature Cited

American Ornithologists' Union. 1998. *Check-list of North American Birds*. 7th edition. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

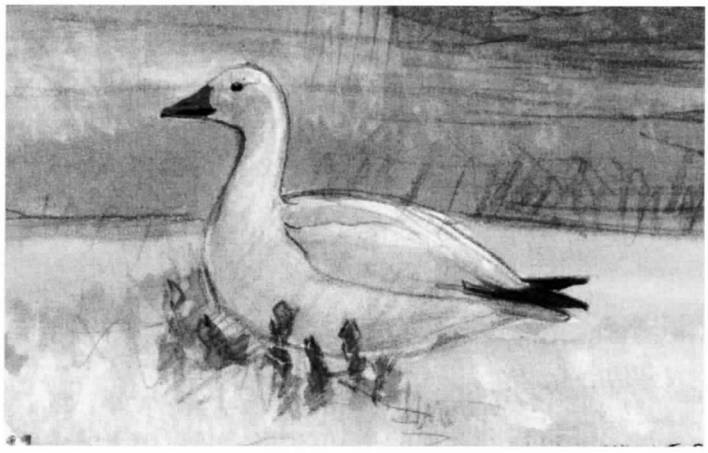
Palmer, R.S. (editor) 1988. *Handbook of North American Birds*. Diurnal Raptors, Volume 4. Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

Greater Snow Geese in Eastern Ontario

Brian Morin

In recent years, birders in eastern Ontario have had an opportunity to observe large numbers of Greater Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens atlantica*) during spring migration. Unlike the smaller Lesser Snow Goose (*C. c. caerulescens*), which occurs in low numbers in southern Ontario because it migrates mainly through the central United States and Canada, the eastern Greater Snow Goose is a newcomer to the province (Pittaway 1992).

In April 2001, flocks of up to several thousand Greaters were seen heading east past Cornwall, Ontario, where I counted a single day peak of 15,000. Flooded fields near Bourget and Riceville, 40 and 60 km east of Ottawa, respectively, hosted more than 10,000 for over a week. The vast majority were Greater Snow Geese, a smaller number were Lessers, and there were six or more Ross's Geese there as well (Mark Gawn, *Ontbirds*).



Greater Snow Goose by *Brenda Carter*

The biggest surprise in the spring of 2001 was that an aerial survey conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) from eastern Ontario past Quebec City on 25 April located a flock of about 40,000 Greater Snow Geese north of Lancaster, Ontario, (Jack Hughes, CWS, pers. comm.). In 2002, there were fewer geese in the region but they still numbered in the thousands. This would now be considered an average spring migration, a significant increase over the 580 individuals Bruce Di Labio (pers. comm.) saw when he found Ontario's first documented Greater Snow Geese at Riceville in 1986 (Pittaway 1992).

There are a number of factors which led to the appearance of Greater Snow Geese in eastern Ontario, not the least of which is that their population has experienced a sizeable increase in recent decades. The birds have also significantly altered their feeding habits. At one time they fed primarily on bulrush but then they began using stubble on agricultural lands. This attraction to farmland is linked to a major alteration in their migration pattern.

Historically, Greater Snow Geese migrated from coastal marshes in the U.S. to Cap Tourmente, east of Quebec City. Then some of the birds began to move westward in spring, reaching as far as Lake Champlain before heading north to Quebec. This pattern continued through the 1990s, with a portion of the birds moving as far as Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in western New York State. This location, south of Lake Ontario near Rochester, is likely the primary source of Ontario's birds (Tracy Gingrich, Montezuma NWR, pers. comm.).

As many as 100,000 Greater Snow Geese have staged at Montezuma before continuing their migration through eastern Ontario and Quebec. Although the annual average at the reserve through the 1990s was about 20,000, marked spikes have occurred in recent years.

The final factor affecting the number of birds seen in Ontario is weather. In years when snow cover is heavy across New York, and waterways and marshes are late opening up, more birds head farther west and overshoot the Lake Champlain area, stopping in the Finger Lakes district where they concentrate at Montezuma NWR.

By late March or early April, the Greater Snow Geese staging there begin heading north again, usually concentrated in several major flights. Thousands are recorded over Derby Hill along the southeastern shore of Lake Ontario (17,000 on 1 April 2001, Bill Purcell, pers. comm.) yet only a few hundred birds are being recorded at Kingston (Ron Weir, pers. comm.). The birds may be heading up the St. Lawrence after reaching the Clayton area (Lee Harper, pers. comm.) and are likely following the U.S. side of the river. Probably because of a lack of reporting observers in the area and the fact that the flight from points in New York appears to be mainly non-stop, they are not reported in numbers until the Massena New York area west of Cornwall. Lee Harper recorded 14,000 on 3 April 2001. Some Greater Snow Geese go north into agricultural lands between the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers but most will follow the St. Lawrence or shadow Highway 401 as they head towards Quebec. For the most part, the geese are not being sighted on the St. Lawrence River in Ontario.

The annual spring migration of thousands of white morph Greater Snow Geese has become a major event in eastern Ontario.

Literature Cited

Pittaway, R. 1992. Subspecies and Morphs of the Snow Goose. *Ontario Birds* 10(2):72-76.

Glossy Ibis Strays

Potential Victim of Botulism

Randy Horvath

On the morning of October 27, 2003, I drove to Holiday Harbour in Wheatley, Ontario, to observe the Glossy Ibis that was discovered there ten days earlier. Happily, it was still present. Unfortunately, lacking a spotting scope, I had to content myself with viewing it through 8 power binoculars from a distance of well over one hundred metres. The bird was foraging in extensive, very wet mud flats, and I was curious about what it was eating. At times, it appeared to extract something akin to a miniature eel or small sausage, which it promptly ingested. I could not imagine what the prey item could be.

I returned later that afternoon with a Swarovski scope graciously lent to me by Mike Malone of Pelee Wings in Leamington. Using a zoom lens, I was treated to much more satisfying looks at the ibis, but I still could not identify the strange creature it periodically consumed.

That evening, I was reading an article on the deaths of Lake Erie waterbirds from Type E botulism poisoning (Timmermans et al. 2003). The report noted that mudpuppies are a major carrier of Type E botulism, that is, the bacterium whose toxins produce the condition. Suddenly it dawned on me that mudpuppies must have been the mystery food source I had seen the Glossy Ibis devouring earlier that day. These salamanders, of the species *Necturus maculosus*, are doubtlessly present in the harbour, as they are relatively common in the Wheatley area (Dean Ware, pers. comm.). The ibis seemed adept at finding them. Perhaps it was one reason for the bird's prolonged stay.

The Glossy Ibis is predominantly an East Coast bird that rarely but regularly wanders inland, chiefly in the spring. Living so far removed from the Great Lakes, it is not a species at risk for Type E botulism poisoning, at least not on the scale that fish eating waterbirds such as loons, grebes and mergansers face, or mussel eating Long-tailed Ducks (Timmermans et al. 2003). But for individuals such as the Wheatley bird that stray to Lake Erie's environs, one has to wonder whether some might join the ranks of imperiled waterbirds doomed to die from Type E botulism. For those that consume large numbers of mudpuppies, the likelihood appears certain.

Literature Cited

Timmermans, S., Craigie E. and J. Robinson. 2003. What will waterbirds face on Lake Erie this fall? *Bird-Watch Canada* 25:9-10.

The Great North American Birding Trivia Game

Hugh Currie

This is a new board game for North American birders. The board has a map of the continental United States and Canada showing many of the best known birding locations. Around the perimeter there are 36 squares like on a monopoly board. One advances around the board by answering questions on one of the 360 double-sided question cards. One can choose from 3 categories ranging from beginner to expert. The questions are often challenging. I found myself able to answer most of the expert questions but definitely not all. The questions are about topics of interest to most birders, e.g. identification, range, nidiology, vocalizations, etc.

Interspersed with the question cards are 30 "life list" cards that send you backwards or forwards at random something like the chance cards in monopoly or the game of snakes and ladders. These cards introduce some luck but there is nothing in the way of strategy in this game. The winning player will almost certainly be the one with the best knowledge of birds.

The questions and answers are interesting and informative. This game would be suitable for games playing birders who are keen about their hobby. It would be the perfect way to spend a bleak winter day when the birding has to be cancelled.

The game contains an instruction sheet, a game board, 360 question cards, 8 playing pieces, and 30 "life list" cards.

The Great North American Birding Trivia Game was created and marketed by Outset Media.

For information, retailers and cost, contact:
http://outsetmedia.com/Pages/Game%20Content/bird.html
Phone: 1-877-592-7374

Your OFO Membership

Please check expiry date on the envelope of your OFO mailing for your membership status.

Send change of postal address, e-mail address and phone numbers to the memberships secretary.

Eleanor Beagan, Membership Secretary
PO Box 455 Station R
Toronto ON M4G 4E1

Phone: 416-423-3535
E-mail: *etbeagan@wiznet.ca*

Great Crested Flycatcher Nest

George and Jean Fairfield

Observations were made by the writer and his wife of the nesting of a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers at Sherwood Park, Toronto in the summer of 2003. From 6 June to 17 July observations were on a daily basis.

The nest box was mounted on a pole fifteen metres from our house at the north end of our backyard and was six metres above the ground. A conical squirrel guard was mounted on the pole one metre below the nest box.

Great Crested Flycatcher at nest box. Photo on 2 July 2003 by *George Fairfield*.

Due to the inaccessibility of the nest all observations were limited to activity outside the nest box. However after the young fledged, the nest box contents were examined.

Because of the similarity of the sexes the references to "he" and "she" and "male" and female" in the following are based upon behaviour characteristics and should be treated with caution. Bent (1942) states that both sexes build the nest, but only the female incubates the eggs. Both parents bring food to the nestlings.

Nest Building

On 28 May we heard Great Crested Flycatchers calling in the tall trees at the back of our yard. We therefore mounted the nest box on its pole and raised the pole to an upright position. We held back raising the box until then to avoid its occupation by starlings.

On 6 June we saw a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers visit the box and on 7 June they began taking nesting material into the box. Later examination of the nest contents showed these materials to be small twigs, plant stems, white pine needles, fresh grass clippings, feathers and small pieces of newspaper. On 14 June we saw the birds bringing finer material which proved to be fox fur, used for lining the nest cup. There had been a die-off of foxes in the Toronto area due to mange and no doubt the dead animals provide birds with a ready supply of nesting material. Snake skins are often reported in Great Crested Flycatcher nests, but there were none in our nest. The depth of the nesting material was 10 centimetres bringing the top of the nest to within two centimetres of the entrance hole.

Incubation

- We saw the pair copulating on 14 June and on 25 June.
- From 15 June until 3 July the female spent most of her time in the box incubating eggs. She left the box from time to time, no doubt to feed and drink. On the morning of 18 June we saw the male take food into the box.
- On 24 June when the temperature reached 27 degrees Celsius and the sun was on the box the female occasionally spent a few minutes perched in the entrance hole with her beak open.
- During the incubation period the male spent most of his time perched on the roof of the box.
- Our first extended watch that convinced us that the female was on the eggs was on 18 June. We saw the parents bring food to the young birds on 3 July. That would give us an incubation period of roughly 15 days. Ehrlich, Dobin and Wheye (1988) report the incubation period to be 13 to 15 days.

Feeding Young

Our first evidence that the eggs had hatched was on 3 July when both adults began bringing food to the nest. We watched the nest box for several extended periods to determine how frequently the adults bought food. The results are set out in the following table.

Date	Time	No of Trips	Trips per hour
8 July	9:12-10:25 a.m.	14	12
12 July	3:15-4:15 p.m.	15	15
14 July	3:15-4:15 p.m.	6	6
15 July	3:20-4:30 p.m.	15	10
17 July	8:00-9:13 p.m.	27	22
17 July	6:25-7:25 p.m.	8	8
17 July	7:25-9:00 p.m.	2	0.75

If we average these results, leaving out the late evening watch on 17 July we get an average of 12 trips per hour. The number of trips no doubt varies with the number of insects available and the distance to the foraging area. On 17 July we noted that for the first half hour the parents hunted close to the nest. When the local supply of insects was depleted they moved farther away, out of our field of vision.

On the evening of 17 July our watch went on until dark (9 p.m.) and there were only 2 trips after 7:25 p.m. We had poor success in identifying the food brought to the nestlings because the insects were usually well hidden in the parents' bills. We recorded the parents bringing butterflies on 3, 8, 12 (3 butterflies), 15 July, and two dragonflies on 17 July. On 12 July we saw one of the parents bring out some butterfly wings from the nest. Wasps may have been an important food item. They are usually abundant on our property but were scarce during the nesting period, no doubt because they were being fed to the Great Crested young. We recorded the removal of fecal sacs on 12 and 15 July.

Since we saw the parents bringing food on July 3 and the young left the nest on 18 July so we assumed a fledgling period of 15 days. Ehrlich, Dobin and Wheye (1988) report the fledging period to be 12 to 21 days.

Fledging

On 18 July at 10:28 a.m. when we began our watch the adults were feeding one young bird perched in the nest hole and a second on a nearby branch. At 10:30 we saw the chick in the nest hole leave the box and fly strongly to our Mountain Ash. A third chick then perched in the entrance hole and was fed by the adults. This chick still had bits of down on the head. At 12:56 it balanced precariously in the hole, then got both wings outside, lost its balance and fluttered down in to the bushes beneath the box. Jean checked to make sure it had not ended up in the neighbor's swimming pool. Although this was the last young bird, the adults came back and checked the box at 1:01, 1:10 and 1:15 p.m.

We watched the parents feeding the young birds for a few minutes to be sure there were only three. When we examined the box later we found two unhatched eggs, so assumed that there had been a clutch of five. Bent (1942) states that clutches of four to eight eggs had been reported, but that five was the commonest number.

On 28 July and 22 August we saw family groups of Great Crested Flycatchers foraging in the trees near the box.

Other Observations

On 20 June while the female was incubating the eggs the male chased off a Blue Jay. On 28 June he stayed on the roof while two grackles flew past the nest twice. On 4 July two grackles watched the nest from a nearby tree branch. The Great Crested Flycatcher did not attack but remained on the box until they left.

A third Great Crested Flycatcher was seen to visit the nest on two occasions. On 3 July a third bird approached the nest and was chased off by one of the parent birds. On July 8 a third bird brought food, entered the box and then left. It is possible that other visits were made by the third bird but were not detected by us. Since our birds were not colour-marked the only times we could be sure that it was a third bird were when we knew the location of both of the parents.

On 6 July at 2:15 p.m. a Great Crested Flycatcher fought its reflection in our kitchen and dining room windows, fluttering against one then the other and back again. We put up curtains on both windows to break up the reflections and did not see this behaviour again.

Literature Cited

Bent, A. C. 1942. *Life Histories of North American Flycatchers, Larks, Swallows, and their Allies*, Smithsonian Institute United States National Museum Bulletin 179, p. 112. Washington, D.C.

Ehrlich, P.R., Dobkin, D.S., and D. Wheye. 1988. *The Birder's Handbook, A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*, p 370. Simon and Schuster Inc. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo.

Whitevale Golf Club Receives OFO Award

Geoff Carpentier presents an OFO Certificate of Appreciation to Whitevale Golf Club for their nature friendly golf course, which was featured in the June 2003 *OFO News*.

Left to right: Mike Dunkley, Geoff Carpentier, Norm Erickson and Brian Sambleson.

Loggerhead Shrikes Find New Home

Pete Read

The Eastern Loggerhead Shrike has been declining drastically in North America, as well as other grassland birds. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) declared the eastern population endangered in Canada in 1991. In 2003, only 30 pairs were located, almost one-third fewer than in 2002. Of these, five were in Manitoba and 25 in Ontario. None remain in Quebec or the Maritimes. For whatever reasons—habitat loss, pesticides, or collisions with vehicles—they are in real decline. And now, West Nile Virus may also be a factor.

Recovery efforts for the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike were initiated in the early 1990s through the collective efforts of Environment Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Manitoba Conservation, Bird Studies Canada, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, the Toronto Zoo and McGill University. In the late 1990s, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and Wildlife Preservation Trust Canada became involved. With continued leadership from Environment Canada, this group has developed a recovery strategy for population and habitat monitoring, landowner contact, communications and marketing material, and initiated a captive propagation and release program.

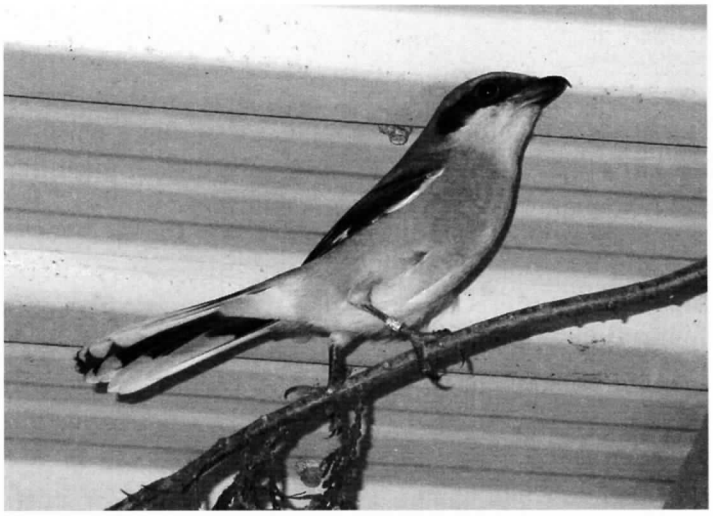
With only 18 breeding pairs located in 1997, 15 nestlings were taken into captivity that year, and another 28 the following year.

Successful breeding has occurred and the population has grown from 43 shrikes to almost 100. Under the management of Environment Canada, there are 61 in Ontario, about half at Ingersoll and half at Toronto Zoo. There are another 38 at McGill University. Wildlife Preservation Trust Canada is responsible for captive management in Ontario.

In 2001, an experimental field program was begun to improve breeding results and experiment with release techniques. Special field aviaries were designed and built to support three pairs of shrikes. This grew to six pairs in 2002 and to 20 pairs at two sites in 2003, the Upper Bruce Peninsula and Smith Falls. Breeding success has increased and the released young shrikes are demonstrating that they have the skills necessary to survive in the wild. Twenty-four healthy young shrikes have been released to date and thus far, none of these birds has been identified in following years.

Shrikes require early successional grassland, occurring naturally as a result of wildfires or heavy grazing, interspersed with nesting trees and perches from which to detect prey and hunt. The Canadian Cattlemen's Association, a principal partner in the recovery program, is helping landowners protect and restore shrike habitat. There are over 5,000 acres of managed shrike habitat and 60 voluntary conservation agreements with private landowners. Most nests are found on these properties.

Since the birds are migrants, winter facilities were needed for the birds involved in the field program. It was thought that good winter accommodations would improve breeding success. I was involved with the construction of these winter cages for 30 of the captive birds. In early fall of 2003 the Wildlife Preservation Trust Canada contacted me to do the job.



Captive Eastern Loggerhead Shrike. Photo by *Jean Iron*

Ross Snider, who has a long history with rehabilitation of birds, particularly hawks and owls, was approached to look after a wintering population. The family farm near Ingersoll, had a large barn, about 20 m by 18 m, which had contained over 100 goats a number of years ago. The facilities seemed ideal for development. With a major cleanup and the addition of cages, the birds could have comfortable quarters. After retrofitting the barn and cage planning in September, the project set in motion. The retrofitting included work with the plumbing, wiring, insulation and heating. Ross, his son Lee, his daughter Karly, and I were mainly responsible for the labour.

I was the project's on-site manager of construction, and I gathered a team of volunteers to help with the building of the cages. About a dozen people joined in and provided help at various times. Jack Mayos, Wayne Smith, and Sue Read gave longtime commitments to the project. Others who gave their time include Dave Martin, Linda Wladarski, Brian and Leta Fieldwick, Kerry White, and Terry Ricker, and Ann Mayos.

The design of the cages was fairly simple. They were rectangular prisms with access doors at the front. Inside the barn, the cages would be floor-to-ceiling, a distance of about 3.5 m. Ross knew that this height allowed the birds to feel relatively safe high above his head as he put food inside the cages. The floor was concrete, but somewhat uneven to allow for drainage, causing each of the 60 or so walls and fronts to be custom made. Each cage has a sliding glass window to allow the birds outside access. Because of the design of the barn, and pertinent structure points, each cage is about 1.5 m wide. Each cage projected about 2.5 m out from the wall. We used wood frame construction, mostly two by fours and two by threes, and heavy welded wire screening. Once we had the cages together, Ross added perches, which were mostly apple and hawthorn branches. Cedar branches were also placed in the cages to provide cover. To prevent the birds from banging into glass on the outside access windows, Ross put strips of masking tape on the windows.

Outside the barn, we built matching cages so that each shrike could be in the fresh air. These cages were slightly different. A width of about 1.5 m was available for each cage, but the height was restricted to 2.5 m. However, to allow for longer flights, we extended the cages to about 3.5 m from the wall. Underneath the barn roof overhang, on top of the cages, we attached recycled metal siding to give the birds a sheltered area to sit under when they were outside. Beyond the cages was an extension or annex, along the length of the end walls, which prevented the birds from escaping into the wild if Ross entered the outside cages.

The inside cages were finished by the first week of October 2003. Then the birds were brought down from their breeding cages and released into our newly constructed winter "condos". Robert Wenting, the head of the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Program for the federal government, and Mark Wiercinski, a contractor with Environment Canada and Wildlife Preservation Trust Canada, delivered the birds from summer breeding cages on the upper Bruce Peninsula, and Elaine Williams of the Wildlife Preservation Trust attended the release. The birds reacted predictably, but soon settled in, and within a few days, one particularly cheerful male regularly "sang" during the day. They fed and drank well soon and all continue to do well.

The birds were eager to get outside once the external cages were finished and fitted with perches. Even in cold, snowy weather you might find the birds in their outdoor pens. Ross says it's hard to get them to come inside some nights.

Food for the birds is purchased locally, and includes mealworms, mice and crickets. The birds use the hawthorn branches to impale their victims and use the prickly perches to tear them apart. After all, they are known as "butcher birds". The 30 shrike eat over 4500 mealworms, 1800 crickets, and over 200 mice a week. What a mouthful!

Environment Canada intends to construct satellite wintering facilities in areas where releases of captive-bred young to the wild can occur. Those specific sites have not been selected as research into this continues.

Those of us who worked on the team that constructed these cages were pleased to help in this project. We hope that what we have done will be helpful in increasing the population of this endangered species. We are sure they are able to cope well with their captivity and while we are sad to think of them as captives, we understand the need for this kind of intervention.

The work has just begun for Ross as he will be providing the shrikes with food, water, and a clean environment in which to thrive. In three years, the Trust plans to build three more winter facilities. And in the spring they want to expand the field breeding program.

We can all do a part, by helping to monitor our sightings of these birds in the wild. Please report any birds you see. (see below) Note that some are banded with colour bands.

If you have Loggerhead Shrikes on your property, contact the Ontario Birds at Risk (OBAR) Coordinator at Bird Studies Canada or the toll-free number of the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Program at 1-866-888-8883.

Also, you could participate in the OBAR program by becoming involved in volunteer surveys of Ontario's core breeding areas. Keep track of sightings of Loggerhead Shrikes and other rare birds in Ontario and report these to OBAR.

OBRC Notes

Bob Curry

The Records Committee's Annual Meeting is fast approaching. On Sunday 28 March at the Royal Ontario Museum, members will endeavour to make final decisions on all reports submitted in 2003. Essentially, this involves discussion about those reports that in earlier circulations did not receive a clear accept or non-accept vote.

Actually the processing of reports is becoming smoother. With the burgeoning of digital cameras and digiscoping we now receive unambiguous documentation for many rarities. Moreover, OBRC members now submit their votes electronically to the secretary. This greatly speeds up the entire voting process. The next step, which is not far off, will be to achieve electronic circulation of all reports. Secretary, Bill Crins is incorporating rarity photos and reports to *Ontbirds* if these reports include details. In addition, it is a relatively simple procedure to visit the OBRC page on the OFO website where you can find review lists, documentation guidelines and then complete a form on-line.

We are considering making 31 December 2004 as the deadline for submissions that are to appear in the 2004 Annual report (published in the Ontario Birds second issue of 2005). Of course reports received after this will be considered and the results published but not necessarily in the 2004 Report.

The 2003 Report promises to be exciting with excellent documentation including photographs of many super rarities like Black-capped Petrel, White-faced Ibis, Band-tailed Pigeon, Gray Flycatcher and many more.

Please continue to send documentation to

William J. Crins, OBRC Secretary
170 Middlefield Road
Peterborough ON K9J 8G1
or
E-mail: *bcrins@cogeco.ca*
or
Use the online OBRC form on the OFO website
http://www.ofo.ca/obrc/
http://www.ofo.ca/obrc/formoutline.htm

OFO Archives

Diane Henderson, OFO archivist, is looking for photos, documents and any memorabilia about OFO and its members from 1982 to the present. If you have material for the archives, please contact

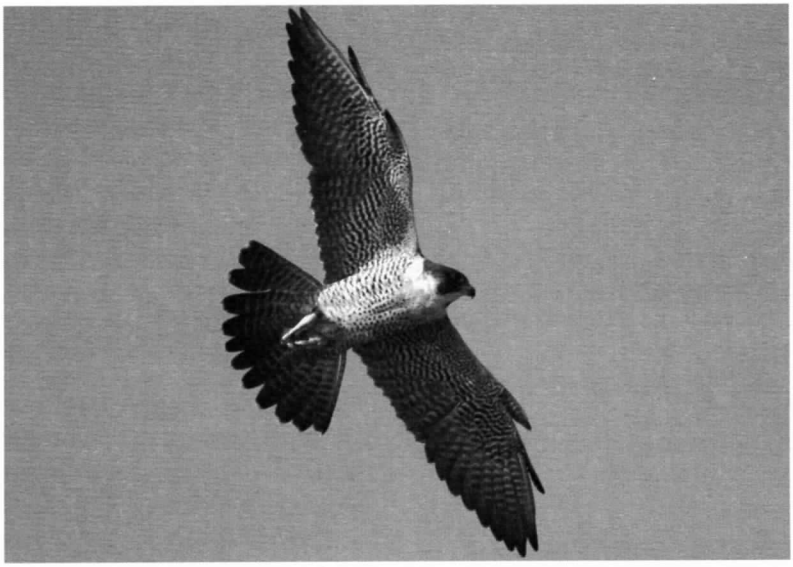
Diane Henderson
74 Chudleigh Avenue
Toronto ON M4R 1T3
E-mail: *hender@fis.utoronto.ca*
Phone: 416-487-9108

A Young Birder and Photographer

Brandon Holden

Before I could even write, I would make scribbles on the top of bird books to identify which birds I believed came to our feeders at home. If birding is a disease, I caught it when I was very young and it appears to be incurable. To this day, I still have not figured out the exact reason I find birds so fascinating, but they still capture my imagination and always find new ways to amaze me.

Although I had always been interested in birds, if it were not for my parents I may never have received the spark I needed to follow this interest more seriously. Every weekend, it was my family tradition to go to a new, local park and take a hike through the woods. One early April day, we ventured out to a place called Beamer Conservation Area and go for a hike. It was a beautiful day, and we happened to catch one of the peak days for Turkey Vulture migration. My interest was quickly grabbed by the sight of these large black birds. After our walk; we decided to stick around for 15 minutes to watch them as they migrated past us. It was a sight that I wouldn't soon forget.



Peregrine Falcon at Cape May, New Jersey on 2 October 2003.
Photo by *Brandon Holden*.

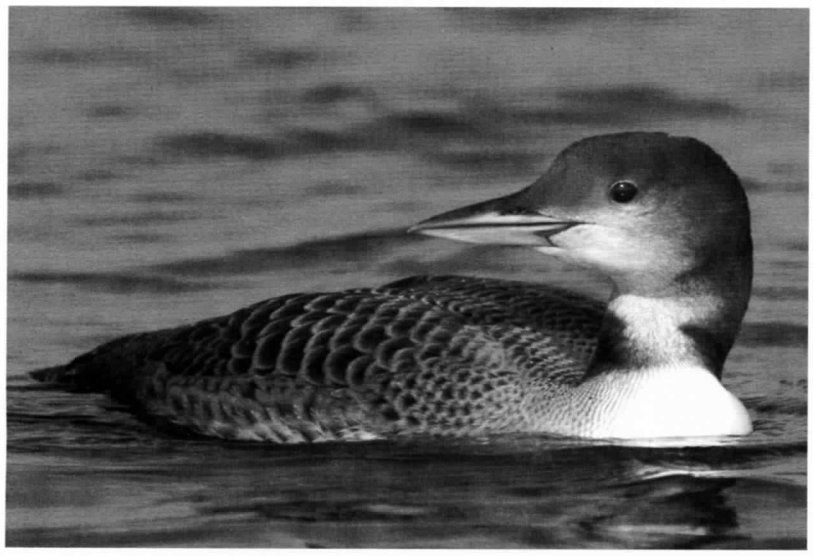
Over the next month or so, we held our weekly hike at Beamer in hopes of seeing more migrating hawks. We were lucky to catch good weather for our following visits and saw good numbers of these birds. On our first visit, we did our walk and stayed for 15 minutes. The second time, we stayed for about 30 minutes. This trend repeated it self over time and soon we had forgotten about the hike, and stayed to try and learn how to identify the many hawks that were passing over us.

After about two or three spring migrations and many hours studying the new bird book I got for my birthday, *An Audubon Handbook, Eastern Birds,* I had learned how to identify almost every hawk that had graced the skies over Beamer. Although it took a while longer, I eventually started to learn about all the different families of birds and how to identify them.

This was the start of my serious birding life. I received new books and sometimes studied them longer than I did for school. This is how I began to learn many other species of birds. We went to places other than Beamer, and I began to see many new species of birds I did not know existed a few years earlier. This was one of the first things I began to enjoy while birding—seeing things I had never witnessed before in my life. Things like finding rare birds was not on my mind, it was things like seeing the number of Long-tailed Ducks on Lake Ontario in the winter that was enough to fascinate me into going birding as often as I could.

To many of the more experienced birders, finding rare or unusual birds is one of the most enjoyable experiences. The first "rare" bird I found on my own was a Northern Gannet that I saw from Millen Road in Hamilton one late November day. This is a thrill of birding that usually requires a lot of work, dedication and patience, but I find is very much worth it. A memorable example of this is finding a second basic California Gull at the control gates above Niagara Falls. It was sitting in with the thousands of gulls in the area. Being able to pick out details on the bird and knowing for sure that it is a California Gull makes it all worth while. Sometimes I find, however that a little bit of luck can produce the same result. During my first visit to Point Pelee in my life, I spotted a Brown Pelican flying over my head while looking at warblers in the woods.

The other aspect of birding that many people find enjoyable is simply watching birds and their behaviour. My favourite bird is the Peregrine Falcon. This is mainly due to the fact I am amazed at how human they appear sometimes. I feel that you can watch a Peregrine and see how aware they are of the world and how aware they are of their own power and magnificence. They are very approachable, and when threatened, very defensive, paying little heed to people. Their speed and agility sets them



Juvenile Common Loon at my cottage on Lake Nosbonsing 23 August 2003. Photo *Brandon Holden*.

apart from people so they know that they can escape any danger. Birds like the Peregrine Falcon are one of the main reasons for my newest aspect of birding, photography.

My family recently purchased a digital camera mainly for photographing birds. I had always enjoyed photography, but this was an interest I was unable to follow while I was younger. Now the interest has not only sparked but turned into a raging fire. Birds make very interesting subjects for pictures and they make photography much more interesting, mainly due to the fact that they are so hard to photograph. Normal photography usually deals with people or landscapes. Although they make for good pictures, there is little difficulty to get a picture of a stationary object. Birds, however, are almost never stationary for a period of more than 30 seconds, and are usually very wary of human presence.

Starting off as a photographer has been a very interesting experience. Having a digital camera has made learning about photography much easier and more enjoyable. Instead of learning how each camera function works by reading about it, you can practice using that function while taking pictures of a common bird. If they do not turn out, you simply delete the picture. I feel that the best part of photography is to be able to capture the image of a bird as you would expect to see it in the wild. I talked earlier about how almost all birders enjoy either finding rare birds or watching a bird's behaviour as being the reason to why they watch birds. With photography you can capture an image of a rare bird, then show it to others. You can even capture an image of a common bird, acting like you would normally see it in the wild and this can be an equally rewarding experience.

Digital photography has both enhanced and hindered my birding. In some cases, I am so focused on getting a photograph of a bird that I am no longer focused on birding. Other times, I see a rare bird and I forget to take a picture of the bird, even when it is only 5 metres away. An example of this is when I saw a Long-tailed Jaeger at Van Wagners Beach. The bird flew past us quite close to shore, but by the time I had identified the bird and taken a good look, it had already flown by.

By taking up photography, birding has taken on an expanded role in my life. I have taken over 6000 pictures in the last 4 months alone. While taking pictures, I have been lucky enough to meet other bird photographers from all over North America. I have also been lucky enough to have some of my pictures published on various web sites and even in a magazine. Birding will continue to fascinate me for a long time to come.

Sixteen-year old Brandon Holden is a grade 11 student at Saltfleet High School in Stoney Creek. He enjoys studying the sciences, geography and history. He plans to go to university to study environmental sciences or biology. Check out Brandon's website:

http://www.peregrineprints.com/

Birds At Risk

COSEWIC Designations

Ron Pittaway

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC, Nov. 2003) designated 10 species as *Endangered*, 3 as *Threatened*, 7 as *Special Concern*, and 28 as *Not At Risk*, in Ontario.

Endangered: Northern Bobwhite, King Rail, Piping Plover, Eskimo Curlew, Barn Owl, Acadian Flycatcher, Loggerhead Shrike, Kirtland's Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Henslow's Sparrow.

Threatened: Least Bittern, "Anatum" Peregrine Falcon, Hooded Warbler.

Special Concern: Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow Rail, Short-eared Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Chat, Cerulean Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush.

Not At Risk: Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Sandhill Crane, Trumpeter Swan, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Merlin, Gyrfalcon, American Coot, Caspian Tern, Common Tern, Black Tern, Eastern Screech-Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Great Gray Owl, Boreal Owl, Eastern Bluebird, Sedge Wren, Prairie Warbler, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

Atlas going well, but we need you more than ever!

Mike Cadman

After three years, the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas is going very well. Thanks to an excellent effort on the part of Ontario's birders, we're on schedule to get the required coverage—as long as we can maintain current levels of involvement and can focus effort on gaps in coverage. So far, atlassers have put in more than 80,000 hours of field work, providing data from over 3800 squares, and have done over 35,000 point counts!

Recent analyses are revealing exactly where we stand in southern Ontario, where our goal is to get adequate coverage of all 1800 10-km squares. In southern Ontario, 33% of squares are at or above the number of species reported during the first atlas, an additional 34% are between 75% and 100% of the first atlas square total, and the remaining 32% are below 75%. That means, generally speaking, that 66% of squares in the south still need some work! And some need quite a lot.

Figure 1 shows the main gaps. If you can help fill these gaps in coverage, please let us know. All told in southern Ontario, there are 117 virgin squares (no species reported so far), and 316 that have less than 50% of the number of species reported during the first atlas. Much of Essex, Kent and Lambton Counties is clearly in need of some serious effort, as is Grey County and southern Bruce. On the shield, there's still a lot to do north of Peterborough to Pembroke and east to Smith's Falls. Parry Sound, Algonquin and the area north of Lake Nipissing still have a long way to go for full coverage. In the north, the boreal forest region north of the road and rail system remains largely untouched at this time, and there are enough gaps across the Hudson Bay Lowland to keep a hoard of avid adventurers busy for the next two summers.

So there is still plenty to do, and a role for all birders from the most experienced to beginners. There are squares in every region that still need attention. Nocturnal and crepuscular species and rails are still perhaps our most underrepresented species. But other species with specific requirements, often the more uncommon or rare species, can still be added to most squares. It's challenging, but enjoyable and rewarding work!

Atlas Regional Coordinators will be rallying the troops for big pushes in 2004. They'll be looking for people to take on specific tasks, such as finding the Upland Sandpiper that just has to be in that square somewhere, filling in missing point counts, or perhaps covering multiple squares for calling woodcock, Whip-poor-wills or owls.

If you would like to know more, contact one of the Atlas' Regional Coordinators, listed on the Atlas web page *www.birdsontario.org*, or contact us at the Atlas office: Toll free phone 1-866-900-7100,
e-mail: *atlas@uoguelph.ca*

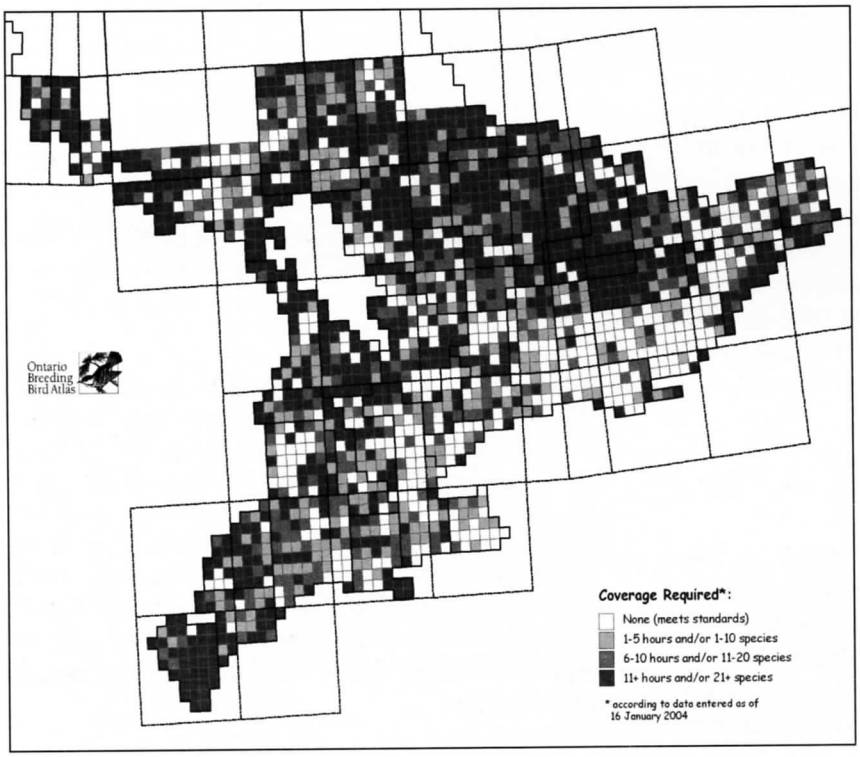


Figure 1. Map of southern Ontario showing the coverage required.

Grassland Birds Declining

Although the second atlas (2001-2005) is by no means complete, the data collected to date allow some interesting comparisons to the first atlas (1981-1985). One such comparison shows how grassland birds have declined markedly since the first atlas (Table 1).

After three years of data collection, the "average" species has been reported in 83% as many squares in the second atlas as it was reported in the first atlas. Table 1 shows that of all the grassland species, only the Savannah Sparrow has been reported in that many squares. All other grassland birds are below the average, and some of them are well below it. The one exception to this rule is the Short-eared Owl, which has increased in the number of squares reported to the second atlas, but the increase has been in the far north, not in southern Ontario.

One explanation for the decline in grassland birds is the decline in grassland in southern

Upland Sandpiper by *Brenda Carter*

Ontario over the past 20 years and throughout much of the past century. There seem to be two main explanations for this: reforestation of poor farmland and intensification of agricultural practices on good soils. Most of southern Ontario was cleared for agriculture in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and much of that agricultural land was pasture and summer fallow suitable for grassland birds. Populations of grassland birds took advantage of this, expanding during the 19th and early 20th centuries to fill in the available habitat. Over time, it turned out that much of that cleared land wasn't really viable agriculturally, and it was abandoned. This land is primarily on and just south and east of the southern Canadian Shield, and across Grey, Dufferin and Bruce Counties. Much of the formerly grassy habitat in these areas has gradually grown back through natural succession from grassland to "old field", then scrub forest, then more mature forest; other areas have been replanted in conifer plantations, or disappeared under urban development. At the same time, in areas of southern Ontario with good soils, agriculture has intensified, converting to row crops, reducing summer fallow, and raising cattle on feed lots instead of in extensive pastures.

Given the decline in their habitat, it's not surprising that grassland birds are declining, but other less apparent factors may also be at work. Loss of wintering habitat and pesticides have also been mentioned as potential threats to grassland birds, and require further investigation.

Table 1 shows that the fewer squares a grassland species was reported in during the first atlas, the larger the proportional decline in number of squares in which it has been reported to date in the second atlas. This may occur because the species that occurred in only a few squares during the first atlas probably occurred in very low numbers within those squares. Therefore, a decline of 20% in the population could, for example, cause a drop of 20% in the number of squares in which a species is reported. Whereas a very common and evenly distributed species might decline by 20% and still be found in the same number of squares.

Of course, there may be other explanations. It may be that the rarer species are more sensitive to the loss of grassland habitat, so are showing a greater proportional decline. We'll be looking into this question once all the atlas data are in. In the meantime, keep doing those point counts because they will provide a better comparison for looking at actual population decline than will the occurrence by square data.

Species	Number of squares in second atlas	Number of squares in first atlas	% Decline in number of squares
Henslow's Sparrow	7	38	82%
Western Meadowlark	19	84	77%
Northern Bobwhite	19	79	76%
Loggerhead Shrike	35	145	76%
Gray Partridge	43	112	62%
Upland Sandpiper	345	709	51%
Brewer's Blackbird	76	144	47%
Ring-necked Pheasant	180	331	46%
Vesper Sparrow	739	1271	42%
Sedge Wren	164	271	39%
Brown-headed Cowbird	1174	1788	34%
Horned Lark	652	948	31%
Grasshopper Sparrow	308	443	30%
Field Sparrow	752	1062	29%
American Kestrel	1273	1767	28%
Bobolink	1102	1520	28%
Northern Harrier	1003	1347	26%
Eastern Meadowlark	983	1291	24%
Savannah Sparrow	1394	1689	17%

Table 1. Changes in grassland birds in Ontario.

Publication Notice

Birds from the Ground: The Record of Archaeology in Ontario. 2003. By Douglas C. Sadler and Howard G. Savage. Trent University Occasional Papers in Anthropology, Number 15.

324 pages, 5 photos, 2 fold out maps. The book is a compilation of archaeological excavations across Ontario, giving the bird species at a large number of archaeological sites.

Cost $20 plus $5 shipping. If shipping to US address, please pay in US funds. Please make cheque payable to Trent University Archaeological Research Centre.

Available from
Department of Anthropology
Trent University
Peterborough ON K9J 7B8
E-mail: anthro@trentu.ca

On the Prowl for Owls

Nicole Kopysh

Owls are a fascinating and fairly mysterious group of birds. Perhaps this is part of their wide-ranging appeal that has endeared them in mythology, art, folklore and modern day stories such as the Harry Potter series. Unfortunately owls tend to be a little studied group, and as a result relatively little is know about the ecology, distribution and population trends of owls in Ontario. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project is making a concerted effort to address this by gathering comprehensive information on owls in Ontario. The first Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (1981-1985) documented breeding evidence for eleven species of owl in Ontario. These included Barn Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Barred Owl, Great Gray Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Boreal Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Snowy Owl. Data collected during the second atlas project (2001- 2005) will increase knowledge of the distribution, relative abundance, status and conservation needs of Ontario's owls.

Barred Owl by *Brenda Carter*

After three field seasons of data collection, nine of the eleven species of owl are recorded in less than 50% as many squares as during the first atlas. Only the Northern Hawk Owl has been found in more squares (23 squares to date compared to 11 during the first atlas), indicating an apparent increase in the number of hawk owls in the province since the first atlas. Some of the more common owls in the province are those that have been reported in the fewest squares to date, relative to the first atlas. One of the most familiar species of owl to breed in Ontario, the Great Horned Owl, has been reported in only 443 squares. This is just 37% as many squares as during the first atlas. Barred Owl has been reported in 50% as many squares, Eastern Screech-Owl in 43%, and Northern Saw-whet Owl in merely 24%.

At first glance, it might appear that these results demonstrate a significant decline in the distribution of owls in Ontario. However, a very plausible explanation is that the low numbers of owls reported are simply a reflection of less effort put into nocturnal surveys to date. Owls can easily be overlooked and underreported as they typically breed earlier than most other species, are nocturnal, and generally roost in concealed locations during the day. In order for the final atlas book and database to present the most complete picture of the current distribution and relative abundance of Ontario's owls we need to ensure that special effort goes into recording owls, and that everyone in Ontario's birding community is contributing!

Atlassing for Owls

Owling can be an enjoyable endeavor and is a great birding activity to break up the long stretch between Christmas Bird Counts, and the onset of spring migration. Consider spending one evening in March or April owling for the Atlas. Owling is simple, straightforward, doesn't take up much time, and the results will make a valuable contribution to the atlas database.

There are two different types of owling you can do for the atlas: Basic owling, and owling using a more standardized methodology.

Basic Owling: recording breeding evidence

Basic owling is collecting information on the presence of owls, and will be used to map breeding distribution. All reports of breeding owls will be of great value to the atlas. If you have a square or two, it is best to get out in 2004, and not leave the owling to the last year. Keen owlers might want to form an owling team for your region, helping to cover multiple squares. But anyone in the province can contribute breeding evidence records of all species, including owls, to the atlas on a "casual" basis, and we encourage you to do so. If you have an owl calling in your yard, in your local park, or at your cottage during breeding season please let us know! Record the location of the owl (using a GPS if you have one), the date(s), the behaviour (singing, a pair) and submit this to the local Atlas Regional Coordinator.

While owls will call spontaneously, using a recorded playback is a much more effective and efficient way to detect the presence of an owl. During the breeding season owls will defend their territory by visually or vocally re-

sponding to intruding owls. Basic owling for the atlas involves heading out on a calm, clear evening in March or April to areas of suitable habitat and playing a recording. It can be quite a thrill to have an owl swoop in, perch overhead and then return a call to your recording. We recommend that you minimize the number of times that you play a recording at one location to avoid agitating or disturbing the owls. Some volunteers have managed to add a number of owl records to the database in one evening by moving onto a new square once a response has been recorded.

Standardized Surveys: recording relative abundance

Using standardized surveys will provide data to map the relative abundance of owls, and a basis for comparison to future atlases so that over time trends in population size may be revealed. This information will enable an examination of landscape features in relation to population numbers and lends itself to numerous conservation and research applications.

To gather the information that is needed to produce contour maps of relative abundance for owls we've developed special standardized owl surveys. The Barred/Boreal survey protocol is based on Bird Studies Canada's nocturnal owl survey and can be throughout northern and central Ontario. In fact, all BSC Nocturnal Owl survey data will be added to the Atlas database. The Eastern Screech-Owl protocol is a new survey, developed specifically for the Atlas. It will also be promoted more widely as the Ontario Screech-Owl Survey. This protocol is recommended for use in southern Ontario. Participating in the standardized survey involves playing a standard atlas playback at 10 stops within one designated 10 km atlas square during an evening in March-April. The survey takes about two and a half to three hours to run.

If you would be interested in owling or completing standardized owling surveys for the Atlas contact the local Regional Coordinator for materials. You will be provided with all necessary materials, including a survey tape or CD, a map of your survey area, an instruction guide, and data forms. You will however need to provide a tape/CD player, and become familiar with the calls of the target owls. A training track is provided on the CD to help familiarize you with these calls, and those of all of Ontario's other owls.

For a list of Regional Coordinators or to volunteer, see *www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html* or contact the Atlas office at Tel: 519-826-2092, Toll free: 1-866-900-7100, e-mail: *atlas@uoguelph*

Cooper's Hawk Attacks Pheasant

Randy Horvath

Like most birders, I enjoy watching raptors, especially when they are hunting for food. Successful attacks can be very exciting. Yet even their failures can enlighten us as we seek to know and understand these aerial predators better.

Late in the afternoon on 18 September 2003, I was birding a creekside trail in the Little River area of east Windsor. Considerable residential development is under way at this site, along with construction of a major thoroughfare, and I happened to be adjacent to a prodigious mound of earth some 6 metres high. As I came upon an opening between the trees, I was surprised to see a small juvenile accipiter roosting on the highest point of the bare earth about 25 metres away. I quickly identified it as a first-year Cooper's Hawk, probably a male, and I was able to study it closely, as it was unaware of my presence.

It soon became clear that this bird was in pursuit of prey, but what? Apart from the occasional Mourning Dove flying overhead, it was pretty quiet. Suddenly the hawk turned and flew off to the right. I stepped out into the open, hoping to see what the prospective dinner item was, and found myself staring at a resplendent male Ring-necked Pheasant sitting motionless midway up this same mound. Aware that I had seen it, the pheasant darted off in search of cover. As it did so, the Cooper's Hawk reappeared and swooped down, narrowly missing it. The pheasant then took flight, with the hawk following closely behind it.

In mere seconds both birds were gone, with my view of the chase obstructed by the man-made mountain of dirt. I ran as fast as I could to reach the place where I might see the conclusion of the matter, but when I got there, there was no sign of either bird. Evidently the pheasant reached nearby cover safely, and the Cooper's Hawk resumed its quest for more suitable prey.

It is hard to imagine any Cooper's Hawk successfully dispatching a healthy, full-grown pheasant. Indeed, the fact that the pheasant never squawked--not even once--suggests it regarded this accipiter as more of a pest than a serious threat.

Doubtless, the Cooper's Hawk must have been terribly hungry for it to attempt to make a pheasant its meal. Moreover, its predatory instincts must have been powerful. But perhaps what this episode illustrates best is how truly difficult it is for young hawks to survive. It is not an easy thing to learn and master the skills needed to hunt prey effectively. Little wonder, then, that mortality rates for juvenile raptors are so high.

Do Some Survive?

Ron Tozer

Birders often see evidence of bird collisions with windows, tall structures, and vehicles on roads. Many of these birds are killed outright, others are injured beyond recovery, and some rest for awhile and then leave the site—most perhaps to die later. Rarely do we have an opportunity to determine the long term survival of birds that recover enough after a collision to depart the scene.

Such an opportunity was presented to me on 11 October 2003, when one of Dan Strickland's colour-banded Gray Jays (OOTLSOKR: orange over light blue left, standard over pink right; a male hatched in the spring of 2003) was hit by a vehicle on the Opeongo Road in Algonquin Provincial Park. Gray Jays are normally pretty good at avoiding such hits, but those living in territories near Highway 60 in the Park have a slightly higher annual mortality rate than jays residing away from the road, undoubtedly due to vehicle collisions (Strickland, unpublished data).

The Gray Jay was lying stunned on the road after the impact, but was still alive when picked up by the driver. He subsequently delivered it to the nearby Algonquin Visitor Centre and "handed" the bird to a staff member at the front desk. It was then brought downstairs, where we placed the jay in a cardboard box and closed the lid to shut out all light, hoping that this would help reduce any further stress. By then it was about 30 minutes after the vehicle hit, and the bird appeared dazed and did not move in the box.

After two hours, I could hear the Gray Jay actively moving around in the darkened box. Not wanting to take a chance on it escaping in the building, I decided to take the jay in its box back up the Opeongo Road for possible release at the site near the Costello Creek culvert where the bird had been hit. There, I opened the box and immediately the Gray Jay flew directly up into a nearby thick spruce, where it perched but still did not look very alert. Another banded Gray Jay, attracted to me as a potential food source, approached the injured bird closely, but it did not move or react in any way. It was late afternoon, and as I left, I wondered whether the bird would recover sufficiently to feed, avoid predation, and withstand the colder temperatures overnight.

However, on 17 October, OOTLSOKR was observed by Dan Strickland along the Opeongo Road and appeared to be perfectly normal. It had survived! The Gray Jay was still alive and well on the Algonquin Christmas Bird Count on 3 January 2004. Here, then, was a rare case where it could be determined with certainty that an injured bird had fully recovered, for the most part on its own.

In a discussion of human-caused bird deaths in the continental United States, Gill (1995) reported the following information. A minimum of 57 million birds are killed by vehicles annually, assuming 15 bird deaths per road mile per year (Hodson and Snow 1965). About 1 million migrating birds are killed annually in collisions with large, lighted buildings and television towers. Collisions with plate glass windows of homes and office buildings kill an estimated 80 million songbirds each year. Systematic monitoring over 1 year registered 61 bird collisions at a house in Illinois and 47 collisions at a house in New York (Klem 1989). Roughly half of the birds that collide with windows die of skull fractures and intracranial hemorrhaging.

As large as these reported numbers of birds killed through collisions with human structures and vehicles are, they probably constitute less than 1 percent of the 10 to 20 billion birds that inhabit the continental United States (Banks 1979).

Literature Cited

Banks, R.C. 1979. Human related mortality of birds in the United States. *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Scientific Report on Wildlife,* No. 215.

Gill, F.B. 1995. *Ornithology*. Second Edition. W.H. Freeman and Company, New York.

Hodson, N.L. and D.W. Snow. 1965. The road deaths enquiry, 1960–61. *Bird Study* 12: 90–99.

Klem, D. 1989. Bird–window collisions. *Wilson Bulletin* 101: 606–620.

OFO Annual Convention & Banquet

Oakville, Ontario

2 and 3 October 2004

Mark your calendars for another exciting weekend of field trips, book sale, exhibits, speakers, and evening banquet. On Saturday and Sunday, experts will lead groups of convention participants to several of the best fall birding locations in the area. We are pleased that expert birder Bruce Mactavish of Newfoundland will be our banquet speaker. Watch for further details and registration in upcoming issues of *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News*.

2004 Ontario Bird Checklist

OFO members receive a complimentary copy of the new 2004 Ontario Bird Checklist with this issue of *OFO News*. White-collared Swift has been added as a new species and Tropical Kingbird replaces Tropical/Couch's Kingbird on the checklist. New names such as Wilson's Snipe and Rock Pigeon appear on the checklist following the most recent Forty-Fourth Supplement to the AOU Check-list of North American Birds. The OFO Checklist is a handy reminder of which birds are reportable to the Ontario Bird Records Committee. The cover and inside illustrations are by Ron Scovell. Additional copies of the checklist cost $1 each plus $0.50 postage. 10 or more cost $0.80 each plus postage. Contact Maris Apse of OFO Sales.

E-mail: *apsemaris@hotmail.com*

Phone: *905-338-0318*

Future OFO Field Trips

Don Barnett, Field Trips Coordinator. Phone 416-588-9724

March 20 (Saturday) Long Point and Area. 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 10 (Saturday) Gore Bay, Manitoulin Island. Leader: Steve Hall.
Sharp-tailed Grouse lek. Cost: $20 per person payable at the site. This trip is limited to 15 participants and you must register by March 1. OFO members receive priority. Accommodation at Gordon's Lodge in Gore Bay can be arranged through Don Barnett. The ferry from Tobermory does not operated in April, so driving is via Sudbury. For more information and/or to register, contact Don Barnett: phone: 416-588-9724
e-mail: *dwb126@yahoo.ca*

April 17 (Saturday) Tiny Marsh Provincial Wildlife Area. Leader: Ron Fleming.
Meet at **8:00 a.m.** at commuter parking lot on southwest side of interchange at Highways 9 and 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.

April 25 (Sunday) Minesing Swamp and Area. Leader: Dave Milsom.
Meet at **8:30** a.m. at Tim Hortons in Angus on Simcoe County Road 90 west of Barrie. Waterfowl and early spring migrants.

May 1 (Saturday) Rondeau Provincial Park
Leaders: Maris Apse and Blake Mann.
Meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the park Visitor Centre. Park entrance fee. Spring migrants.

May 16 (Sunday) Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area.
Leader: Terry Sprague.
Meet at **7 a.m.** at the bird sightings board at the 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, turn left at 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 29 (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 30 (Sunday) Leslie Street Spit, Toronto. Leader: John Carley.**
Meet at **8 a.m.** at the base of the Spit (Tommy Thompson Park) parking lot near the intersection of Leslie Street and Unwin Avenue. Late migrants, breeding birds and butterflies. ***NOTE CHANGE OF DATE.***

June 6 (Sunday) Carden Alvar
Leader: Ron Pittaway
Meet **9 a.m.** in Kirkfield at parking lot of Lady Mackenzie School on right of County Road 6, 500 metres north of County Road 48. Loggerhead Shrike, Sedge Wren, Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper and Clay-colored Sparrows and grassland specialties.

June 18 (Friday) to June 27(Sunday) Northern Algonquin Park *New Trip.
Leaders: Maris Apse, Mike Cadman, Ron Tozer and Reinder Westerhoff.
Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas "square bash", based at Kiosk Campground. Opportunities to learn from experts and atlas by vehicle, canoe or mountain bike. Duration 1 to 10 days. For registration, directions and non-camping accommodation information, contact Reinder Westerhoff: e-mail <r.westerhoff@sympatico.ca>, phone 519-766-4008; or Nicole Kopysh: e-mail <atlas@uoguelph.ca>, phone 519-826-2092, by June 1. Merlin, Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, 15+ species of warblers, and crossbills.

June 19 (Saturday) Long Point Area
Leader: John Miles.
Meet at **6 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. Carolinian specialties and nesting warblers.

June 26 (Saturday) and June 27 (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 include: Brewer's Blackbird, Common Raven, Virginia Rail, Clay-colored Sparrow, Sandhill Crane, Upland Sandpiper, breeding warblers. Also wildflowers and ferns.

Cat-eyed Skimmers Update

Ron Pittaway

In the last *OFO News*, Pittaway (2003) reported that the Black Skimmer can narrow its pupils catlike as an adaptation to protect its eyes (retinas) from bright sunlight and glare. I wondered if the other two species of skimmers in the genus *Rynchops* also could narrow their pupils. Soon after my note, OFO member A.L. (Sandy) Darling of Egypt e-mailed me that he would check the African Skimmer in Uganda in November and the Indian Skimmer in India in December. He missed the African Skimmer, but saw the declining Indian Skimmer which is listed as threatened and numbers about 5000. Sandy Darling e-mailed again that Urban et al (1986) stated that skimmers in the family Rynchopidae have "pupils which become cat-like vertical slits in bright light". Further confirmation comes from de Hoyo et al (1996) that all three species of skimmers can close their pupils to vertical slits, which is a unique adaptation among birds. The slit also allows a greater reduction of the pupil than is possible with a circular one. At the other extreme, skimmers have an unusually large maximum pupil opening, which allows them to feed at night.

Acknowledgements

I thank Sandy Darling, Michel Gosselin, and Ron Tozer for literature information on skimmers.

Literature Cited

de Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., and J. Sargatal. 1996. *Handbook of the Birds of the World.* Volume 3, Hoatzin to Auks. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.

Pittaway, R. 2003. Cat-eyed Bird. *OFO News* 21(3):4.

Urban, E.K., Fry, C.H., and S. Keith. 1986. *The Birds of Africa.* Volume 2. Academic Press.

Publication Notice

The Breeding Birds of Hamilton, Ontario. 2003. By Bob Curry. Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Hamilton. Soft cover and coil bound with six cover photos by Barry Cherriere, 50 pages. This annotated checklist provides up-to-date information on the distribution and abundance of all 176 bird species for which there is confirmed or probable evidence of breeding. It includes the national and provincial status for species designated as significant. Available for $10 plus $1 postage from Bob Curry, 3115 New Street, Unit 30, Burlington ON L7N 3T6

E-mail *curry.slessor@sympatico.ca*

Phone 905-637-2022

What's Inside

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.

To subscribe, send an e-mail to:

majordomo@hwcn.org

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

subscribe ontbirds

Skip another line and type:

end

Send the e-mail. That is all it takes!

Questions: contact Mark Cranford

ontbirds@ofo.ca

OFO Website

www.ofo.ca

E-mail: ofo@ofo.ca

Sandra Eadie - Coordinator

Publications Mail Agreement Number

40046348

Return undelivered mail to:

Ontario Field Ornithologists
Box 455 Station R
Toronto ON M4G 4E1

OFO NEWS Editors

Jean Iron, 9 Lichen Place
Toronto ON M3A 1X3
Phone: 416-445-9297
E-mail: jeaniron@sympatico.ca

Technical Editor: Ron Pittaway

Ontario Field Ornithologists
Box 455 Station R
Toronto ON M4G 4E1

ISSN 1200-1589

Printed by Paragon dpi
Toronto