



# OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

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## Last of the Curlews

Glenn Coady

This month marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Last of the Curlews*, Fred Bodsworth's classic novel detailing a fictional year in the life of the last pair of Eskimo Curlews.

First appearing as a novelette on 15 May 1954 in Maclean's magazine, it generated more reader response than any piece of fiction the magazine had ever run. For an unfinished novel about an obscure species of bird, lacking any human characters or dialogue, the depth and immediacy of public appreciation was as surprising as it was gratifying.

When the completed book appeared in February 1955, Fred's comprehensive research of Eskimo Curlew life history had been distilled into an engaging novel utilizing a concise and vividly descriptive writing style. The blending of his brilliant story with more than 40 peerless scratch board illustrations by Terence Shortt produced the finest piece of natural history based fiction ever written. Its impact in awakening environmental consciousness rivals that of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Continuously in print for 50 years, it has sold over 3,000,000 copies and been translated into over 12 languages.

I learned shorebird identification leaning heavily on books crafted by men named Fuertes, Forbush, Peterson and Godfrey, but fully comprehending them as "minute specks of earthbound flesh challenging an eternity of earth and sky" was a gift bestowed on me by my friend Fred Bodsworth.

Fred, congratulations on the milestone from fellow OFO members.



Eskimo Curlew  
From a painting by Barry Kent MacKay

## Meeting the Challenge

### Ontario's Monumental Atlas Project

Mike Cadman

This is the final and most important year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project. The project has gone extremely well, with over 110,000 hours of at-lasser effort reported to date (that's a lot of birding!), and all atlas goals now within reach. But we still have a lot to do to ensure that all those goals are met. We hope you'll join other OFO members in *Meeting the Challenge* of making the atlas the best it can be as a tool for understanding the distribution, abundance and status of Ontario's birds, and as the basis for bird conservation and research efforts for decades to come.

If you haven't yet participated in the Atlas project, 2005 is your last chance—and it's the time you're needed most. This year, more than ever, atlassers are asked to target specific gaps so that we meet our ambitious goals: finding as many breeding species as possible in every square, including early breeders, crepuscular, nocturnal and hard-to-find species such as rails; getting the required point counts done; and confirming breeding for as many species as possible. There is a role for every birder in the province. We hope you'll join us. You'll enjoy it, and get great satisfaction from being a part of this landmark effort by the province's birders.

See pages 8 to 13 for more on the results of atlas work to date and plans for 2005.

# Cackling Goose, NOT new to Ontario

Ken Abraham, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

When the American Ornithologists' Union published the 45th supplement to the *Check-list of North American Birds* (Banks et al. 2004), one change set in motion a flurry of activity amongst birders and goose biologists and managers. The AOU split the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) into two species, a large-bodied group of seven subspecies that retained the name Canada Goose (*B. canadensis*), and a small-bodied group of four subspecies that gained the name Cackling Goose (*B. hutchinsii*). Studies of mitochondrial DNA, passed to offspring only by females, indicate that these two groups separated about 1,000,000 years ago. The Canada Goose complex, also sometimes called the white-cheeked goose complex (e.g. Aldrich 1946) is among the most studied species of North American birds (Mowbray et al. 2002). Although this is partly because of its significance to waterfowl hunting and the need for sustainable management, it also is due to the great variation in morphology and colour, migration, and behaviour that the birds exhibit. Owen (1980) stated "The Canada Goose remains the supreme example among geese of the adaptation of a single species for a range of environmental conditions, over the whole of the North American continent."

Since the AOU *Check-list* update, birders across the continent have been scrutinizing Canada Goose flocks to find Cackling Geese. This is especially true in eastern North America, where recognition of the small forms of Canada Goose has been a specialized pursuit by a few birders, because their occurrence is much more limited than that of larger forms. In western North America, where three Cackling Goose subspecies are regularly found, birders, hunters and waterfowl managers deal with questions of identification daily (Johnson et al. 1979). Many eastern sightings have been posted to bird listservs, e.g. *Ontbirds*, discussed on chat lines, e.g. ID-Frontiers, and written about on websites, e.g. Ohio Ornithological Society. In general, the content of these postings reflects new or renewed interest in the group, but it also reveals much consternation about the difficulties of identification.

David Sibley has an excellent summary on his website: [www.sibleyguides.com/canada\\_cackling.htm](http://www.sibleyguides.com/canada_cackling.htm) of "what we know" about identification of the two species. I recommend his account as a general starting point for considering the problems of field identification. In particular, I think he's done birders a great service by bringing attention to the high variation of form within each subspecies, as opposed to simply assuming field recognizable distinctiveness. No single characteristic (breast colour, bill size, bill shape, white neck band, throat stripe, voice, etc.) definitively distinguishes among the choices. For a similar



Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) with Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis maxima* or *interior*) near Toronto, Ontario on 6 October 2004. Photo by Jean Iron.

approach to the question of subspeciation, one which stresses overlapping variation, intergradation, and gradual development of modern forms and their distributions, see Ogilvie (1978). Sibley's approach highlights the difficulty of field identification and the caution needed when considering assumptions about subspecies, i.e. that they must be heavily qualified by recognition of this overlapping variation. For recent treatments of geographic distribution, morphological and genetic variation and biology of the white-cheeked goose complex, see Dickson (2000) and Mowbray et al. (2002).

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## What is known about Cackling Geese in Ontario?

Nothing has changed since the AOU *Check-list* update **except the name!** Cackling Geese did not suddenly become more abundant here, they didn't change their migration route to accommodate our life lists, and they don't know that they're being watched more closely. The primary purpose of this article is to bring everyone onto "the same page" about their status in Ontario so that we can enhance our knowledge about this interesting "new species". A secondary purpose is to provide a framework for consideration of field identification of Cackling Geese in Ontario. Information in this article on the new species Cackling Geese is based on a direct information transfer from subspecies of the former small Canada Goose (Dickson 2000 and Mowbray et al. 2002), unless other-

wise specified.

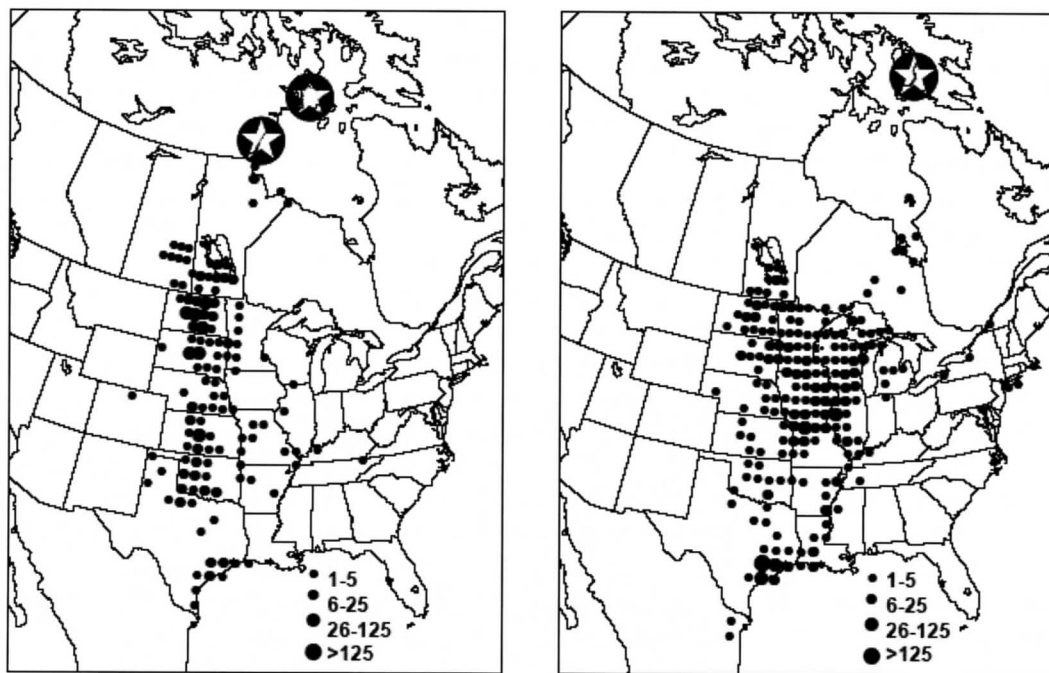
### Published Evidence

First, what do Ontario checklists and other published sources tell us about the status of Cackling Geese? James (1991) listed four subspecies of [then] Canada Goose (*interior*, *parvipes*, *moffitti*=*maxima*, *hutchinsii*) for Ontario, only the last of which is now considered Cackling Goose. Although he lists it as a “rare transient, mainly on the north coast; occasional, rare winter resident in the south”, I provided a revised assessment (Abraham 1997) of *hutchinsii* as a “regular and abundant migrant in northern Ontario in spring and fall” based on published and unpublished

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) and Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) population and harvest survey information. Pittaway (1996) added *B. c. minima*, now the Cackling race of Cackling Goose, to the list for Ontario, but only as an escape from captivity. Although James (1991) listed the subspecies Lesser Canada Goose (*B. c. parvipes*) as “probably a rare transient in the Northwest”, he reported no Ontario specimens, and Pittaway (1996) noted that *parvipes* may occur but has not been recorded. Placed in the large-bodied species based on the genetic analysis, this smallest form of Canada Goose is nevertheless similar in size to the largest small-bodied Cackling Goose.

### Distribution

Next, let us consider where the Cackling Geese subspecies are found nesting, the obvious starting point to answering the question “where do Cackling Geese seen in Ontario originate?” The range descriptions in the AOU *Check-list* update are sparse and do not describe the subspecies ranges. Further, because genetic analysis of specimens from the nesting areas is extremely limited, current descriptions of nesting distribution are based largely on morphometric discrimination and banding studies (Dickson 2000). The nominate subspecies (*B. h. hutchinsii*), formerly Richardson’s Canada Goose, nests in the low to high arctic to the north and northwest of Ontario and Manitoba, on the western Hudson Bay coast, Southampton Island, on southwestern Baffin Island, and probably in tundra areas of the eastern and central Arctic to about 110° W longitude (Victoria Island). Nesting of all



**Figure 1.** Stars at top of maps indicate breeding areas where Cackling Geese (*Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*) were banded in Nunavut during 1987-2001 by the Canadian Wildlife Service. Black dots show recovery distribution for birds banded at west Hudson Bay and Southampton Island (left map) and on Baffin Island (right map). Courtesy of Dale Caswell, Canadian Wildlife Service.

other Cackling Goose subspecies is confined to the extreme western part of North America. Taverner’s (*B. h. taverneri*) nests in northern Alaska and migrates and winters along the Pacific Flyway and coast. Cackling (*B. h. minima*) nests only in southwest Alaska, and Aleutian (*B. h. leucopareia*) nests only in the Aleutians Islands. Migration and wintering of the latter two subspecies are limited to narrow corridors in extreme western North America.

For completeness, we need to consider where the Lesser Canada Goose (*B. c. parvipes*), reportedly nests and migrates, because this small Canada Goose is likely to be confused with Cackling Geese wherever they overlap in range. *B. c. parvipes* nests in forest and taiga west of about 110° W to eastern interior Alaska, and migrates through the prairies west of Manitoba through the US Great Plains states as the Short Grass Prairie Population (MacInnes 1966). Despite the split, there is considerable uncertainty about the distribution, morphology and genetic status of *parvipes*, and the occurrence of hybridization with presumed *hutchinsii* and *taverneri*. However, neither banding nor genetic evidence exists from the vast mainland interior of the continent north of the prairies and west of the Hudson Bay coast as far west as interior Alaska to sort out which forms are present.

### Banding Evidence

Next, let us consider what banding records of Cackling Geese tell us about their occurrence in Ontario. The distribution of recoveries of *B. h. hutchinsii* banded between 1987 and 2001 by the CWS on three important nesting areas (Baffin Island, Southampton Island and western

Hudson Bay coast) is shown in Figure 1. All Ontario recoveries from this banding effort were from birds banded on Baffin Island. The pattern of recoveries suggests a distinct migration route through eastern Hudson Bay, western James Bay, and northcentral Ontario. The absence of any recoveries from the Hudson Bay Lowland west of Cape Henrietta Maria flies in the face of what we know about the commonness of small Canada Geese in spring and fall migration (see below). In fact, recoveries from earlier banding 1959-1971, (MacInnes 1966 and unpublished) show that some Hudson Bay Lowland birds come from both Southampton Island and the McConnell River area. The difference between periods may represent a change in abundance, a shift in migration routes, or different patterns of reporting from the Severn-Winisk communities, or it may indicate that CWS banding from 1987-2001 left some portion of the nesting range of *B. h. hutchinsii* untouched. This presents a challenge to goose banders and managers. Note that birds from Baffin Island were recovered more frequently in eastern North America than birds from the other two areas. Perhaps just as importantly, CWS banding on central and western Arctic nesting areas of *B. h. hutchinsii* and *B. c. parvipes* shows that there were **no recoveries** from Ontario or anywhere east of Saskatchewan in Canada or in the US, east of the Central Flyway (approximately the Missouri River) from over 9000 geese banded between 1975 and 1994 (Hines et al. 2000). Additionally, there are no recoveries in Ontario of *B. h. minima*, *B. h. taverneri* or *B. h. leucopareia* based on banding in their known ranges (USGS/CWS banding database, 2004).

OMNR records from banding during the flightless period (July-August) since 1971, include fewer than 10 "small Canada Geese" among over 200,000 Canada Geese banded in Ontario. Three of these were caught in summer 2004. This underlines the rarity of Cackling Geese in Ontario in summer and eliminates it from the list of regularly breeding species.

### Specimens, Measurements and Other Data

From the banding studies, we can conclude that most or all wild Cackling Geese observed in Ontario are the nominate *B. h. hutchinsii* subspecies. What other evidence is there about Cackling Goose in Ontario and does it support this conclusion? The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) holdings include seven birds identified as Cackling Goose, **all** are referred to *B. h. hutchinsii*. The oldest *hutchinsii* specimens are from "about 1875" from St. Vincent Township, Grey County, from Port Rowan (1896), and from Toronto (1905). All are autumn juvenile birds and because juvenile geese stay with their parents for a year, these specimens indicate that migrant families of Cackling Geese have occurred in Ontario for over a century, thus substantiating the species long-standing presence among Ontario's avifauna. The other ROM specimens include another autumn juvenile from Cockburn

Island, Manitoulin, in 1959, one reproductively immature bird from west of Cape Henrietta Maria in July 1957, and two birds from Eastside River, near Geraldton, in June 1978, presumably migrants. All of this information supports the conclusion based on banding results.

Morphological measurements of hunter-killed birds from the Ft. Severn to Winisk area of the Hudson Bay coast from 1956 to 1962 (H.G. Lumsden, unpublished data) were intermediate between published averages for *B. h. hutchinsii* and *B. c. parvipes*. Measurements by MacInnes (1966) show that McConnell River birds are slightly larger than Southampton Island birds on average, but individuals from both areas occur across the entire range of sizes, forming a single statistical distribution that covers the full range of published measurements for *hutchinsii* and *parvipes*. Recent genetic evidence indicates that birds in those areas are small-bodied *hutchinsii* genotypes. Combined with the banding results these factors strongly indicate the presence of **only** nominate *hutchinsii* in the eastern Arctic and in Ontario.

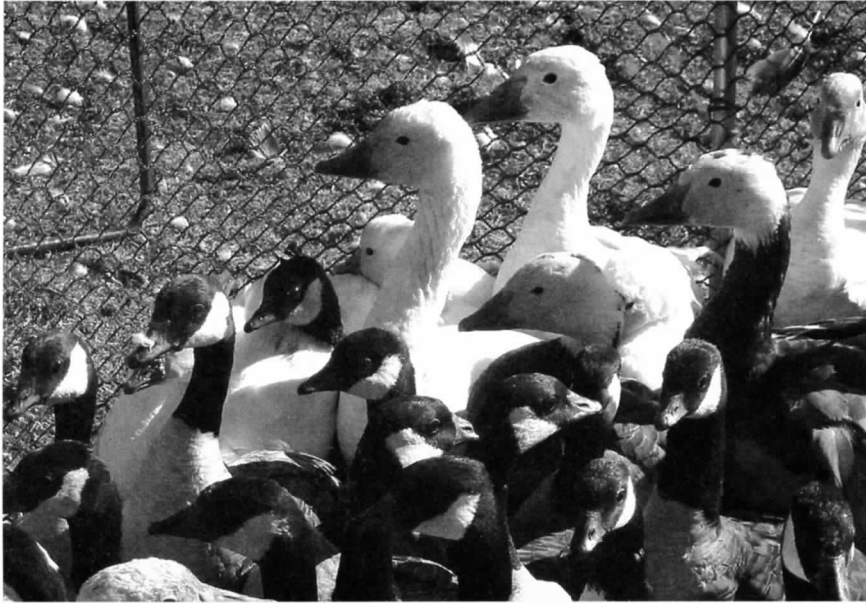
Other kinds of information are available. Aerial surveys of the whole James Bay and Hudson Bay coasts of Ontario in autumn 1979 and 1980 yielded total numbers of staging small Canada Geese of 48,500 and 38,100 (Thomas and Pevett 1982) Additionally, autumn harvest records from Cree goose camps and OMNR check stations and spring harvest records from Cree subsistence harvest surveys document the regularity and commonness of small white-cheeked geese in northern Ontario (Pevett et al. 1983). I observed hundreds during spring migration in May 1983 near Winisk during a stay with Cree hunters, and again in May 1994-1997 on the James Bay coast. From all these sources, it is clear that the species is an abundant spring and fall migrant in northern Ontario. It is interesting to note that the migration route indicated by band recoveries (Figure 1) is similar to that of Lesser Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*) in Ontario (Gauthier et al. 1976) and the two species are often seen migrating in mixed skeins (K. Abraham, pers. obs.).

I know of no comprehensive list of records of small geese in Ontario, but many such records exist from a variety of sources, including observational records, photographs, *Ontbirds* postings, *North American Birds*, *American Birds*, *Audubon Field Notes*, OMNR banding records, and personal correspondence (K. Abraham, H.G. Lumsden, *in litt.*). Outside the Hudson Bay Lowland, more observational records in Ontario occur in the autumn than in spring or winter. For example, Dan Bascello (pers. comm.) reports a steady increase of Richardson's Geese over the past 15 years in the agricultural areas west and south of Thunder Bay, with a peak of about 1500 birds during the autumn 2004 migration period. This coincides with a reported increase in the Tall Grass Prairie Population of *B. h. hutchinsii* (Dickson 2000). Reports on *Ontbirds* show that 1999 was a good year for observations in southern Ontario, equal to 2004 even with its increased

awareness and more deliberate searching. *B. h. minima*, the smallest and darkest form of Cackling Goose, has been reported in Ontario, but these are categorized as escapes from captivity (Ron Pittaway, pers. comm.) and the Ontario Birds Record Committee has not reviewed reports of *minima* in Ontario. This subspecies, because of its uniqueness, is widely held and bred in captivity by avicultural enthusiasts in Ontario and elsewhere (CWS, unpublished data). Angus Wilson (pers. comm.) noted regular reports of *minima* from one location in the Lake Champlain area of New York. The likelihood of cross-continent migration of *minima* is extremely low and so far, undocumented.

### Identification

How should we approach identification of Cackling Geese in Ontario? Some caveats are needed. First, as good and as useful as photographs can be, they can also easily mislead. Thus, we need reference objects or birds in the photos whenever possible. Second, there is a tremendous amount of morphological variation within the white-cheeked geese that we see in Ontario. The



Cackling Geese (*Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*) with white and blue morph Lesser Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*), and one Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*) on 17 August 2004, southwestern Baffin Island, Nunavut. Photo by Kathy Dickson, Canadian Wildlife Service.

temperate breeding stock which has proliferated and been translocated around the province comes from mixed genetic stock (at least *B. c. maxima*, *moffitti*, *interior*, *canadensis*). In any Canada Goose flock at the height of migration, introduced birds plus wild *interior* birds can be present. There is also age and sex variation, e.g. young in their first fall may only be 90% of adult size. Finally, Leafloor et al. (1998) showed that some variation in size within a subspecies can be environmentally induced: *B. c. interior* from Akimiski Island in James Bay are smaller than mainland *interior* birds, consistent with a hypothesis of limited food resources. It should be noted that Akimiski geese (*interior*) are still large-bodied and differ only by millimetres in head length from other *interior* birds from Ontario and from temperate Canada Geese. They are substantially larger than either *parvipes* or *hutchinsii*. Despite being called “runts”, they are too large to be confused with Cackling Geese.

We are left with identifying Cackling Geese based on poorly quantified and often vague descriptions of size, shape and colour. We must rely whenever possible on measurements and photographs of birds from various

Cackling Goose **nesting** areas for comparisons with birds observed in Ontario. Photographs or data from small geese taken elsewhere (e.g. migration or wintering areas) usually should not be considered representative, unless the latter birds were marked on nesting areas. Most Ontario birds will be the nominate form *B. h. hutchinsii* and most (particularly in southern Ontario) will be from Baffin Island, so I would give data and photographs from there greater consideration where uncertainty exists. Photographs and data from nesting areas of other Cackling Goose subspecies should also be sought.

The least likely forms in Ontario are the three Alaskan subspecies. Identification of the most distinct form *minima* should be relatively simple (Johnson et al. 1979). This form is distinctly dark-breasted, a warm grey-brown colour with “a purplish cast” (Johnson et al. 1979), with much less contrast between the back and the breast than *hutchinsii*. *B. c. minima* is the smallest Cackling Goose subspecies and the one that comes close to the oft-repeated but usually unwarranted

description “as small as a mallard” (female *minima* body mass at start of incubation is about 1400 grams compared with female mallards at less than 1300 grams) but the length of the tarsus (the long leg bone) which is a better indication of height, is 78-83 mm for adult *minima* females-males, nearly two times larger than Mallards (44-46 mm). If a suspected *minima* is observed in Ontario, it should be reported immediately on *Ontbirds* and we need photographs in good light showing the bird **in direct comparison** with other well-known bird species. Any hunter-shot birds of probable *minima* should be sought as donations to the ROM. The other two subspecies are equally unlikely to occur wild in Ontario. *B. h. leucopareia* is considerably larger than *minima* with a browner back and a grey-brown breast lacking the purplish tones. *B. h. taverneri* is somewhat larger and paler again than *leucopareia*. All subspecies can have white neck rings and all can have individuals with black throat stripes, so neither are definitive of western subspecies.

For comparison, the juvenal breast plumage of *hutchinsii* is a uniform grey, darker and less notably buff tipped than adults, and lacks the brownish-purplish tones



Cackling Geese (*Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*) with Ross's Geese (*Chen rossii*) and one probable hybrid Snow x Ross's Goose (left) in July 2003 on Southampton Island, Nunavut. Note similar size of Cackling Geese and Ross's Geese. Photo by *Jim Leafloor*, Canadian Wildlife Service.

of *minima*. This plumage begins to molt as soon as goslings reach flight and is likely replaced by the first basic plumage by the time they reach southern Ontario.

### The problem of *Branta canadensis parvipes*

The status of *parvipes* is confusing, making its addition to the Ontario checklist problematic and contentious. Based on its presumed nesting and migration range, *parvipes* may be occasionally found in Ontario and is most likely to be confused with *hutchinsii* in Ontario. While larger than *hutchinsii* on average, overlap in size, bill shapes, breast coloration and other characteristics between *parvipes* and *hutchinsii* make field and photo identification a real problem. Indeed, there is some evidence of genetic intergradation of *parvipes* with two subspecies of the Cackling Goose (*taverneri* and *hutchinsii*) based on analysis of nuclear genes contributed to offspring by both parents (Mowbray et al. 2002). This makes hybrids a possibility (though rare) in Ontario and adds to the dilemma and near impossibility of field identification. The confirmation of *parvipes* or any Cackling Goose subspecies **other than** *hutchinsii* in Ontario is something birders and hunters may be able contribute from well documented photographs and specimens.

We will be in a better position for field identification in Ontario and elsewhere in the east when CWS completes its analysis of morphological data from the full eastern North American nesting range of *B. h. hutchinsii* adding Baffin Island to the series of measurements from McConnell River and Southampton Island (MacInnes 1996; specimens in the Canadian Museum of Nature) and especially when DNA based analysis of distribution becomes available.

### Acknowledgements

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# OBRC Notes

Ron Tozer

Occasionally, I hear birders expressing what I believe are misconceptions or questionable viewpoints concerning the documentation of rare birds and the submission of reports to the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). In this *OBRC Notes*, I would like to express my personal opinion on a few of these subjects. I think these are important matters since they can sometimes be the reasons for reports of rare birds not being submitted, and can thus contribute to a reduction in the overall quality of the permanent repository of Ontario rarity occurrences which the committee seeks to maintain. The following are some examples of statements I have heard.

*"I didn't submit a report. Hundreds of people saw the bird, and I am sure somebody will have sent a report to OBRC."* But, unfortunately, sometimes nobody does. Everybody thinks that somebody else will do it because so many people saw the bird. Or, because the bird has been around for so long, birders assume that a report must have been submitted. I think we should strive to send in reports for all Review List species and recognizable forms that we observe, although I admit to sometimes being guilty of not doing it myself. Multiple reports from different observers on the same bird are of great value to the committee.

*"I wasn't the original finder of the bird, so I didn't want to appear to be trying to steal the glory by submitting a report to OBRC."* The original finders of rare birds (when known) are always clearly identified in the annual OBRC Report that is published in the August issue of *Ontario Birds*, whether they personally submit a report or not. Consequently, you will not be stealing anybody's glory when you send in your own report for any Review List species or recognizable form.

*"Those people kept that bird alive for weeks at their feeder. It wouldn't be right for me to send in a report and get credit for their bird."* As with original finders of birds, the operators of feeders where rarities occur are identified (when their names are available) in the annual OBRC Report. You will not be taking credit for their bird when you submit a report, but rather you will be helping to document the rarity. Feeder operators are often unfamiliar with the need to document rare birds, or even that a committee exists to oversee this function. As an observer of a rare bird at a feeder, you can contribute to a permanent record of the occurrence as well as identifying the feeder operator's role in the event by submitting a report to OBRC.

*"I sent them a good photograph of the bird. They don't need a written report."* OBRC welcomes the submission of photographs of rare birds, which is becoming increasingly common in this age of the digital camera and digiscoping. However, basic information should accompany the photographs, such as date(s) of occurrence, location, cir-

cumstances of finding the bird, description of what the bird was doing, and who saw it.

*"I posted my photographs of the bird on the OFO website. That's all they need."* OFO really appreciates birders posting their photographs of rarities on the website. However, we would also encourage photographers to advise OBRC that their posted photographs of Review List species and recognizable forms may be utilized as a submission to the committee. In such cases, we also need to obtain that basic information about the bird, including date(s) of occurrence, location, circumstances of finding it, description of what the bird was doing, and who saw it. You can email these details of the record, and your permission for the photographs to be utilized as a formal submission, to OBRC Secretary Bill Crins: [bcrins@cogeco.ca](mailto:bcrins@cogeco.ca)

*"Reports that don't describe every feather on a rare bird are never accepted, and I don't have the knowledge or time to do that."* Not necessarily. A clear, concise description of the distinctive field marks that confirm the identity of a bird, and a brief indication of how you excluded the possibility of any other similar species having been seen, can be quite adequate. Relatively brief reports that do this are regularly accepted by the committee. While some rarities do require an extremely detailed description to determine their identity with acceptable certainty, there are many others that can be easily confirmed in a short description.

*"I have never done a rare bird report in my life, and I wouldn't know what to include in one."* This perceived difficulty need not hold you back. Clear instructions on how to prepare a report are readily available on the OFO website: [www.ofo.ca/obrc/formoutline.htm](http://www.ofo.ca/obrc/formoutline.htm). You can submit your report on-line at: [www.ofo.ca/obrc/obrcform.htm](http://www.ofo.ca/obrc/obrcform.htm) or by mail:

Bill Crins, OBRC Secretary  
170 Middlefield Road  
Peterborough ON K9J 8G1

The Annual Meeting of the 2004 OBRC members will take place on April 10 at the Royal Ontario Museum. Topics to be discussed include the processing of yet-to-be-decided records, election of members for 2005, and policy matters.

## OFO Annual Convention

### Point Pelee

10 and 11 September 2005

**Mark your calendars for a weekend of fine fall birding, presentations and banquet at the Roma Club.**

# Meeting the Challenge in 2005

**Mike Cadman, Atlas Coordinator**

For birders, atlassing is challenging and rewarding and that is especially true in 2005, the last year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. This year, our challenges are more sharply defined and our rewards more tangible than at any other stage of the project. In 2001-2004, we've done the background work required to get us within reach of our collective goals, but it's in 2005 that we ice the cake. And we hope that all of Ontario's birders will jump onboard and participate in the process.

The Atlas website contains much detail on how you can help. Regional Coordinators listed on the website can help you fit your skills and schedule to the needs of the project in 2005. Contact the atlas office at

[www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html](http://www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html)

[atlas@uoguelph.ca](mailto:atlas@uoguelph.ca) or toll free at 1-866-900-7100

Our challenges are clear. Targets for number of species and number of hours of coverage (aka birding!) are set for every square in southern Ontario (north to about North Bay and Sault Ste Marie) and a sample of squares in the north. If the square(s) near you have already exceeded that total, there are plenty of others that need help. Check with your Regional Coordinator or look on the atlas web page for squares needing additional work. There is particular need for atlas work in Algonquin Park and surrounding areas in central Ontario. You can work alone, with a few friends, or join in one of the two OFO "Square Bashes" planned for central Ontario in 2005 (see page 11 and the OFO 2005 Trip list or the Atlas website).

If you know birds well by song, there are point counts

required in every region. Most are on roadsides and easy to access. Ask your RC how you can help. Erica Dunn's article below explains more about the importance of the data and how the data can be used.

If you're newer to birding or would like to specialize, surveys using playback tapes provided by the atlas are required for owls and rails in every region. It's fascinating to hear these birds calling back and to sometimes see these elusive species. Crepuscular species, those active around dawn and dusk, fit into this group of birds that are most readily missed in a square. The data are of special value because these elusive birds are easily overlooked. Why not set out to fill in the map for these special birds, and make a clear difference to the atlas.

Atlassing is needed at all seasons, starting now, as explained in Ross James's article. While June is the peak of the atlassing season, many of our resident or short-distance migrant birds breed early, and are more easily found before the leaves are on the trees.

The data you contribute fit together with those from all atlasers to give birders, scientists, and conservationists "the big picture" about birds nesting in Ontario. Pete Blancher's article on page 10 provides details about how the Atlas data are already at work for bird conservation.

So, a huge **thanks** to everyone who has taken part in the project to date. Your efforts are much appreciated. Best of luck to everyone who will get out into the field in 2005. May Henslow's Sparrows, Whip-poor-wills, Golden Eagles and many others greet you at every turn!

## What's the Point of Point Counts?

**Erica Dunn, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa**

An innovation of the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas is the inclusion of 25 point counts within each square. Observers go to pre-selected locations and spend five minutes recording every bird seen or heard, noting whether each was detected within or beyond 100 m of the observer. Many atlasers had never conducted point counts before, and a gratifying number have brushed up on their bird songs and given it a try. The rewards are great on a personal level—once you have learned bird songs, you'll be astonished at how much you were missing before. The data are also extremely valuable for the atlas. To date, more than 48,000 point counts have been completed, allowing us to prepare preliminary maps and begin to draw conclusions about variation in bird abundance across the province. Here are a few examples.

Common and widespread species are reported as



Brad Clements doing point counts at Attawapiskat, James Bay, 23 June 2004. Photo by John Black.



‘Probable’ or ‘Confirmed’ breeders in most squares, so the standard breeding evidence maps do not reflect regional variation in abundance. However, preliminary relative abundance maps reveal important variation in abundance across the province, and document different patterns among species. Breeding evidence maps for Savannah Sparrows and Yellow Warblers indicate breeding in most squares south of a line between Georgian Bay and Ottawa, while Ovenbird is in most squares except in extreme southwestern Ontario. However, patterns of relative abundance, are quite different (Fig. 1-3). Savannah Sparrows are generally most abundant along the eastern side of Lake Huron, whereas Yellow Warblers are concentrated along the northern edges of Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. The abundance map for American Robin (not shown) is similar to that for Yellow Warbler, but with greater concentrations in the area north of Lake Erie than elsewhere. By contrast, the map for Ovenbird (Fig. 3) shows a much more northern centre of abundance, east of Georgian Bay.

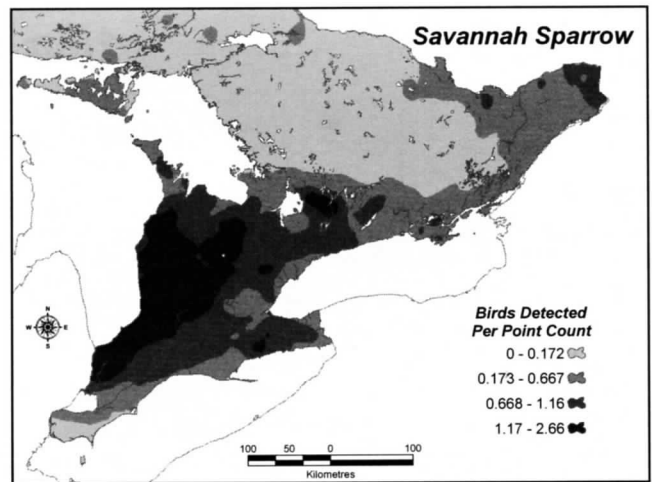


Figure 1: Savannah Sparrow

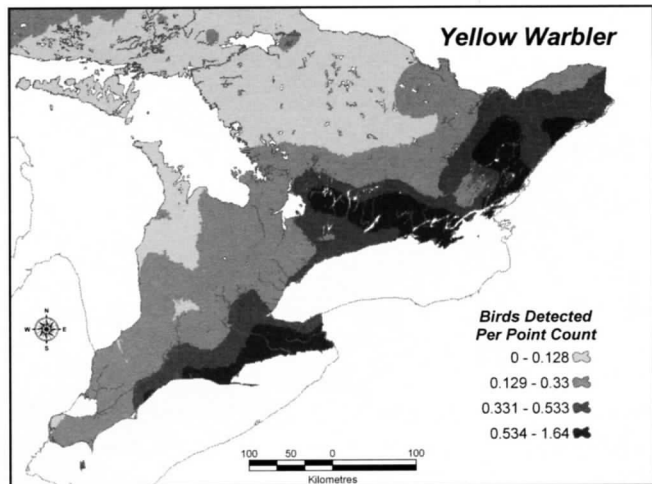


Figure 2: Yellow Warbler

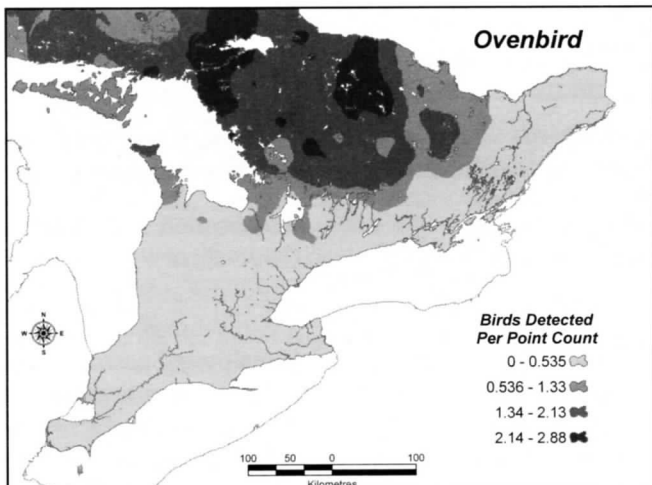


Figure 3: Ovenbird



Ovenbird at Long Point on 23 May 2002  
Photo by Harold Stiver

The distributions illustrated here make sense in terms of known species’ ranges and habitat preferences, but rather than guess at probable centres of abundance, we now have quantitative data to work with. Each count location is exactly known, so remote sensing and other techniques can be used to describe habitat and allow more detailed analysis of bird–habitat relations, response to landscape configuration and a host of other research applications. Also, the point counts provide baseline abundance indices that we can compare with results from future atlases. With breeding evidence maps we detect major shifts in distribution, but only the quantitative data reveals changes in overall density or shifts in centres of abundance.

If you have not yet done point counts, it’s not too late. Warm up your winter by listening to bird song tapes, and help fill in the remaining gaps in coverage! Those of you who have reached coverage targets in your own squares are encouraged to volunteer for point counts in squares that will not otherwise have them—as are birders who may not have been involved in the atlas at all to date.

Visit the Atlas website to find regional coordinator contact information and ask how you can help.

[www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html](http://www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html)

# Landbird Conservation Plans Use Ontario Atlas Data

Peter Blancher, Bird Studies Canada

Ontario atlas data are a tremendous source of information for bird conservation. Currently, Partners in Flight (PIF) Ontario is using atlas data in developing landbird conservation plans for four Bird Conservation Regions that overlap Ontario.

**What is PIF?** Partners in Flight is a North American-wide program that aims to maintain the abundance, diversity and distribution of native landbirds and their habitats. Development of conservation plans, or “flight plans”, with all interested partners is a key first step. The PIF planning approach involves assessing vulnerability of each species, identifying landbirds most in need of conservation attention, setting conservation objectives for these priority species and their habitats, and outlining actions and strategies to meet those objectives. In Ontario, atlas data are being used in each of these planning steps.

**Species Assessment and Landbird Priorities in Ontario.** The second Ontario atlas has progressed far enough to give an indication of change in species distribution over the past two decades, so is used in PIF species assessments. Atlases are particularly good at detecting change in rare and uncommon species that are poorly sampled by surveys like the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), and for detecting change near the edges of range of more common species. Species found in 36% fewer surveyed squares in the current atlas compared to the first (equivalent in rate to a 50% loss over 30 years) were identified as undergoing severe declines. Sixteen landbirds were showing severe declines in southern Ontario after the first three years of the current atlas.

## Landbirds showing severe declines in southern Ontario, according to change between Atlases

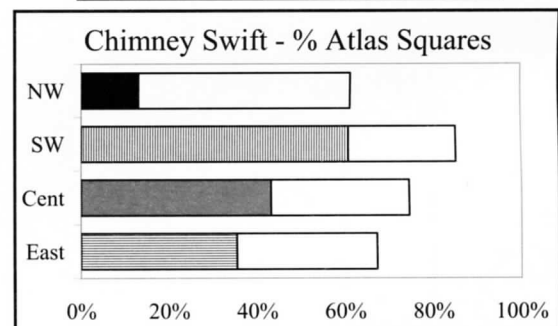
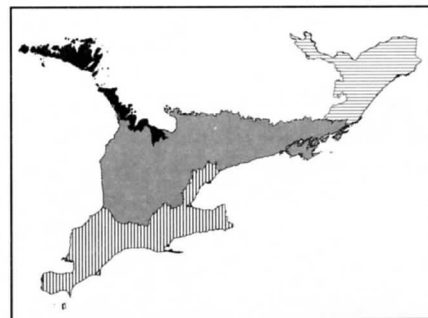
Gray Partridge	Red-headed Woodpecker
Ring-necked Pheasant	Olive-sided Flycatcher
Northern Bobwhite	Loggerhead Shrike
Long-eared Owl	Yellow-breasted Chat
Northern Saw-whet Owl	Henslow's Sparrow
Common Nighthawk	Western Meadowlark
Whip-poor-will	Red Crossbill
Chimney Swift	Pine Siskin

Atlas data have been instrumental in highlighting declines in aerial insectivores (swallows, nighthawks, swifts) over the past 20 years. These birds are declining in each Bird Conservation Region of Ontario according to atlas data so far. As a result, PIF is recognizing this whole foraging guild as needing priority attention.

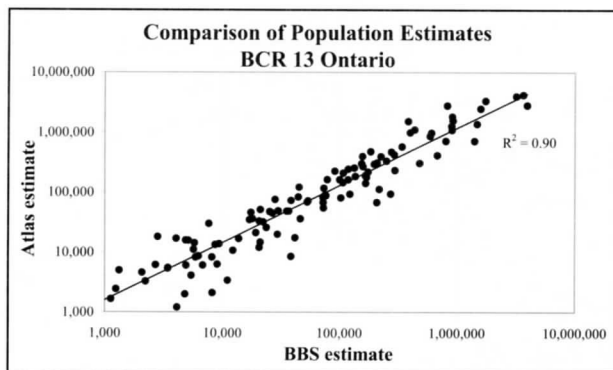


Northern Bobwhite by George K. Peck

**Setting Distribution Objectives.** In southern Ontario, PIF plans will include measurable objectives for the abundance and distribution of priority landbirds. Atlas data are the benchmark for defining distribution goals. For example, the objective for Chimney Swift is to return them to at least the percent of surveyed atlas squares occupied in the first atlas: 61 to 85% across four PIF subregions of southern Ontario (map). This is an ambitious goal. After three years of the second atlas, Chimney Swifts were well below objectives (bar chart: shaded bars indicate proportion of surveyed squares occupied in 2001-03; open bars show objectives based on the first atlas).

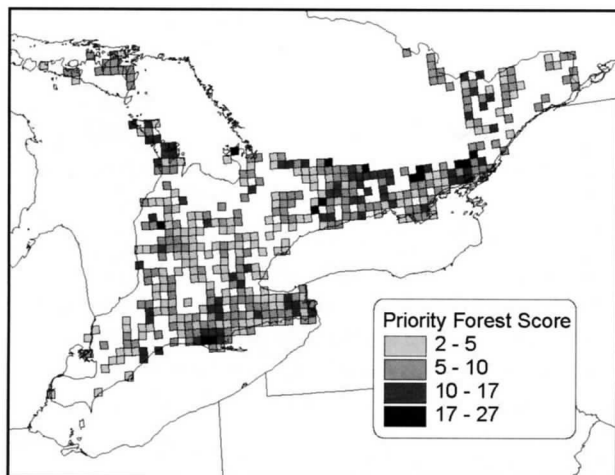


**Population Sizes.** PIF calculates population estimates of priority species to give an idea of the magnitude of population change that has occurred in recent decades, and a sense of how much effort is needed to reach objectives. BBS-based estimates suggest that Bobolink and Savannah Sparrow have each lost over 1 million breeding birds in southern Ontario in the past 3 decades. Atlas point count data provide an independent means to cross-check these population estimates. The graph below compares atlas and BBS-derived estimates for southern Ontario.



**Where to Act to Meet Objectives.** Point count data are particularly useful to show where priority species are most abundant. For example in southern Ontario priority forest birds are most abundant near the shield and north of Lake Erie. The latter reflects current distribution of several priority species that breed in Carolinian forests.

Relative abundance mapping using atlas point counts and habitat data will fill the gaps in maps like these. An important future use of point count analyses is to identify Ontario municipalities, forest management units, and conservation lands with high responsibility for individual species of priority landbirds.



For more on PIF planning in Ontario, see [www.bsc-eoc.org/PIF/PIFOntario.html](http://www.bsc-eoc.org/PIF/PIFOntario.html)



Yellow-breasted Chat at Point Pelee on 18 May 2004  
Photo by Eric Holden



Gray Partridge at Brantford Airport on 28 December 2002.  
Photo by Harold Stiver

### OFO Atlas Square Bashes

**June 17 (Friday) to June 26 (Sunday) Samuel de Champlain Provincial Park \*New Trip\***

**Leaders: Larry Hubble and Nicole Kopysh.**

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas "square bash" based at this beautiful park near North Bay. Local highlights include Sandhill Crane, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, numerous warblers (Tennessee, Northern Parula, Blackburnian and Bay-breasted), Lincoln's Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird. The group will be birding by car, foot, bike, canoe. All birders are encouraged to join in the fun for all or just part of the bash. Camping will be provided at the park for the group. To register contact Nicole Kopysh at 1-866-900-7100 or 519-826-2092, email [atlas@uoguelph.ca](mailto:atlas@uoguelph.ca)

**June 24 (Friday) to July 3 (Sunday) Lake St. Peter Provincial Park \*New Trip\***

**Leaders: Mike Cadman and Reinder Westerhoff**

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas "square bash" based at Lake St. Peter Provincial Park in the southeastern corner of the Algonquin region. Species include Red-breasted Merganser, Red-shouldered Hawk, Black-backed Woodpecker and many warblers. Everyone is welcome to participate for any portion of the trip. To register, contact Reinder Westerhoff 519-766-4008, email [r.westerhoff@sympatico.ca](mailto:r.westerhoff@sympatico.ca)

# Early Birds

Ross James

Rather than dreaming of exotic places to escape winter this year, why not start planning your atlassing for this final year and get out to enjoy the winter here. You can begin any time now. There is plenty to see and do between January and May as the earlier nesters get going. Getting started early can make finding many things much easier, and some species could be missed entirely without an early start. Even if you may not be sure some are still migrating at an early date, you at least know where to look to find out later whether they have established themselves.

Great Horned Owls, and in the southern part of the province Eastern Screech-Owls, can be at-lassed now. Several other owl species are active by early to mid March. March and April are perhaps the best months for owling. Calm, and especially clear nights, seem to be best. Warmer nights above minus 10°C may be better also. Nights with lots of moonlight will make it relatively easy to see what is happening around you. The main caution is for Northern Saw-whet Owl, which is migratory and known to sing on migration. It is important to repeat visits to establish residency for this species.

If you enjoy cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, or just hiking in late winter and spring, it is a good time to search for big stick nests that might later be used by hawks, eagles, and owls, or perhaps herons and egrets. Before the leaves are on the trees the nests are easier to find. Many of the hawks and owls will be sitting before leaf out in April or May and can be seen by careful observing from the ground. Great Blue Herons will be at nests by March in the south to April farther north. Although more nests will be found off road, many can be seen from roadsides. Driving along the less travelled roads of your square where you can go more slowly and stop more easily would be most productive and safer.

Before winter snows are gone crossbills may be nesting. Pine Siskins could also be nesting by March. Listen for long varied series of trills and warbles that may indicate courtship activities. A closer and more prolonged search may reward you with one of the few nests of these

species found to date. Ravens and Gray Jays will be building or refurbishing nests in March. Crows will start nesting by March in southern Ontario. The corvids are generally relatively easy to discover nest building by watching for them carrying nest materials. They will be more secretive near nests, but often obvious when flying in the open toward a nest area. With Gray Jays you can even set out nest materials on the roadside and watch the birds take them.



Gray Jays in Algonquin Park on 7 March 2004.  
Photo by Dan Strickland

Sunny mornings from March to early May is the time to search for Accipiters; Northern Goshawks in March, Cooper's in April, and Sharp-shinned in late April and early May. At this time they will soar for as long as an hour over their territories. By watching from a high place with a clear view over a wooded valley and noting where birds come from and go to, it may be possible to learn the approximate location of a nest that might be found with a more careful search. Confirming nest use may be difficult. Some birds may sit very low and tight, while others depart silently before you arrive. Look for tails protruding, and bits of down adhering to the nest, or fresh droppings on branches or the ground, usually call for closer inspection. (See the atlas website for more details on atlassing for Accipiters.) Red-shouldered Hawks will soar similarly over nesting territories. You may also discover an owl has taken over a nest you found earlier. Searching for one species will often reward you with something entirely different.

Warm sunny spring mornings in March and April are also ideal for locating drumming woodpeckers. Once they get incubating in May they can become very quiet and difficult to find. Also by listening carefully in April and May you can often hear the regular quieter tapping of a woodpecker excavating a nest cavity. A careful approach will usually reveal the location without disturbing the birds. This is also the time to be listening for nuthatches and creepers. Upgrading breeding evidence will be easier later in the year if pairs are located early.

At dusk from late March in the south, you can locate American Woodcock in open uplands near wet woods.

Soon after arrival they are most vocal, and can be hard to find later in the year. Likewise, Wilson's Snipe winnow in the wetlands soon after arrival by early April in the south, but are much quieter once incubating. Repeat visits easily establish territoriality. Remember winnowing and twittering displays are equivalent to territorial song (s) in these species, not mating display behaviour (D).

Many other species are beginning their breeding activities by April in southern Ontario. By the early part of the month Sharp-tailed Grouse will be lekking. Ruffed Grouse will be drumming by mid month. Horned Larks will be establishing territories and beginning to nest. Gulls and cormorants will be returning to colonies. Canada Geese will be nesting. Grebes and American Bittern will start to call, and by month's end Virginia Rails will be calling at night. By early May, if not sooner, other species to look for include Eastern Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike, Black-capped Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch and House Sparrow.

Just driving through your square could reveal promising looking places to visit later, and you might make contact with landowners where you would like to roam at a later date. A real plus for early atlassing is the absence of mosquitoes and black flies. Don't neglect early atlassing. It is essential and rewarding.

## Future OFO Field Trips

Dave Milsom, Coordinator

Phone: 905-857-2235 email: [milsomdave@hotmail.com](mailto:milsomdave@hotmail.com)

Check trip details on the OFO website: [www.ofo.ca](http://www.ofo.ca)

- March 19** (Saturday) Long Point Area. Leader: George Pond.
- April 9-10** (Saturday-Sunday) Gore Bay, Manitoulin Island. Leader: Steve Hall. **TRIP FULL**
- April 23** (Saturday) Algonquin Provincial Park. Leader: Ron Tozer.
- April 24** (Sunday) Tiny Marsh Provincial Wildlife Area. Leader: Ron Fleming.
- April 30** (Saturday) Minesing Swamp Area. Leader: Dave Milsom.
- May 7** (Saturday) Rondeau Provincial Park. Leaders: Maris Apse and Blake Mann.
- May 15** (Sunday) Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area. Leader: Terry Sprague.
- May 28** (Saturday) Opinicon Road Area North of Kingston, and Amherst Island. Leader: Ken Kingdon and Bud Rowe.
- May 29** (Sunday) Leslie Street Spit, Toronto. Leader: John Carley.
- June 3** (Friday) and June 4 (Saturday) Rainy River. Leader: Dave Elder.
- June 5** (Sunday) Carden Alvar. Leader: Ron Pittaway.
- June 17** (Friday) to June 26 (Sunday) Samuel de Champlain Provincial Park. Leaders: Larry Hubble and Nicole Kopysh. \*New Trip\*
- June 18** (Saturday) St. Clair National Wildlife Area and Point Pelee National Park. Leader: John Miles.
- June 24** (Friday) to July 3 (Sunday) Lake St. Peter Provincial Park. Leaders: Mike Cadman & Reinder Westerhoff. \*New Trip\*
- June 25** (Saturday) and June 26 (Sunday) Bruce Peninsula. Leader: John Miles.

## Book Review

Geoff Carpentier

**Reference Atlas to the Birds of North America.** 2003. Edited by Mel M. Baughman, National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C. 20036-4688. Hardcover 480 pages. \$55.00. ISBN 0-7922-3373-5.

In keeping with other recent authoritative publications such as Sibley's *Guide to Bird Life and Behaviour* and Ridgely and Greenfield's *The Birds of Ecuador*, National Geographic has published the *Reference Atlas to the Birds of North America* as a companion to its most recent edition of *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*.

In the style of National Geographic, it is well written, informative and fact-filled. For novice or expert, there are elements of interest and education. The book is structured and designed to give the reader specific reference information.

The book comprises an introduction, followed by an essay on birds from Archeopteryx to Avocets, packed into 11 pages of informative text. Facts about feathers and flight, and beaks and feet cleverly introduce us to the world of birds. The balance of the book focuses on each family of birds found in North America, including range and migration route maps.

At first, I thought the book was geared too much to the novice to be of interest to serious birders, albeit the photographs are excellent and the accounts nicely laid out. However, as I read selected sections, I learned the authors had spent time and effort to provide concise and learned information on virtually every species found in North America. So yes, this is a must read for novice or expert!

Here is a sampling of what's in store. The discussion of the loons and grebes family group starts with an introduction and provides general information about ancestry, flight, mobility, depth of dives, and waterproofing. The author then deals with each family within the group separately and provides myriad facts and anecdotes about classification, structure, plumage, feeding and breeding behaviour, vocalization, breeding and winter ranges, migration, tips on how to identify or find the species in the wild, status and conservation, notes on a representative species for the family, and key characteristics of all the other species in the family, range maps for the family as a whole and species specific range maps. Sidebars for topics of interest are interspersed throughout the text. They do that for each of the 42 family groups and all approximately 900 species known to occur in North America.

Now to whet your appetite, here are a few tidbits to ponder: Why do cormorants have stiff tails? What species of Pelecaniform changes its eye colour seasonally? Which species of birds prefer to eat flying fish? Which North American species starts breeding in January and is represented by at least 21 subspecies? What insectivorous species stomps on the ground to fool soil insects into thinking it's raining and it's time to come to the surface? What is the whitest passerine in North America? Why should you care if "stop over sites" are protected?

I recommend this book because it is filled with thousands of tantalizing tidbits. It's a bargain and well worth the modest price.

# Shivering in the Cold

Ross James

Keeping warm in winter is a challenge for all birds, but even more so for small birds. There is a limit to the number of feathers a small bird can grow or carry, and with relatively greater surface area to volume they are less well insulated than larger birds. They may be able to grow more down feathers in apteria, or winter feathers may be somewhat longer, but small birds do not seem to add much if any more weight of feathers for winter.

Birds are generally somewhat fatter in cold weather, giving them a reserve when poor weather limits or stops feeding. But many do not put on much more than they need for a night or a full day as it is extra weight to carry around. A few birds, notably Black-capped Chickadees, make use of hypothermia, lowering body temperature at night by 7-9 degrees C. This can save 20% or more on energy needs. But it is not useful to larger birds as it requires too much energy to warm up again in the morning. It could also be dangerous at very low temperatures where it could be difficult to warm up and quicker to freeze. Most birds apparently do not use hypothermia, including the tiny Golden-crowned Kinglets.

Methods of keeping warm involve fluffing feathers to increase the depth of insulation, and tucking beaks and legs into feathers for the night. Finding shelter is also critical. A cavity or even dense foliage can conserve as much as 30% of energy needs at night by reducing radiant heat loss and exposure to winds. Roosting with other birds is also helpful. Two birds together can save 20% or more of heat requirements, and with more birds, even greater savings are possible. A mated pair may readily roost together, but "outsiders" are often not as welcome. However, the social flocking, and lack of territoriality in winter, may help to encourage roosting together to enhance winter survival.

But even so, whether roosting or during active foraging hours, survival still depends more than anything else on being able to generate sufficient heat within. While there are changes in the internal metabolic processes to maximize use of energy sources, the main way to generate the necessary heat is apparently through shivering. The

most important muscles involved are the largest, the flight muscles, and to some extent the leg muscles. It is generally believed that to keep the internal fires burning high enough, small birds will essentially shiver all through the subzero winter weather!

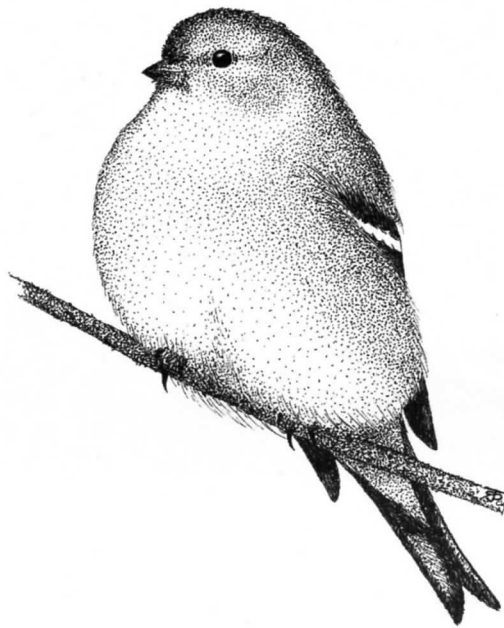
The key to survival then is finding enough food to fuel energy demands. A few birds will cache some food, but many do not. Northern finches will concentrate on high energy foods (seeds), and can operate at very low light intensities of near darkness to get enough time in shortened days. Some, like Golden-crowned Kinglets, are insect eaters and must find up to three times their body weight each day to survive.

With shivering and a good food supply, small birds are able to perform feats of winter survival that makes us look like veritable wimps. Winter adapted American Goldfinches in experimental conditions could maintain their body temperature (40°C) for as long as 6-8 hours at an ambient temperature of -60°C (a temperature differential of 100 degrees C), boosting their basal metabolic rate up to 5.5 times higher than normal. The lower limit of winter tolerance for a Hoary Redpoll is estimated at -

67°C, and for a Common Redpoll at a mere -54°C. At -60°C exposed skin on people would probably freeze in about 30 seconds. Naked humans start shivering when the temperature drops below +23°C.

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American Goldfinch fluffed up in the cold  
Illustration by Ross James

# Hannah's Story

Janice Haines

My story is about a hummingbird that ended up in a city far from home. This tiny bird displayed a strong will to survive and brought much joy to so many people.

A different looking hummingbird presented itself in my backyard on a very hot 2 September 2004. She demonstrated a fondness for the red tubular flowers on the Pineapple Sage but made appearances for nectar in the Lavender, Calamint, Butterfly Bushes, Phlox and Chaste Shrub. Often her head appeared bright yellow due to the flower pollen accumulating as she fed. There were Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in the yard but they soon migrated, leaving only this one.

September gave way to October and as the flowers were dying I hung out more sugar water feeders. Hannah, as a friend of mine named her, loved to visit each new one put up. She was always curious about something different in her territory.

Hannah was very timid around other birds arriving during fall migration. She preferred to be alone and did not associate with the kinglets, vireos, warblers, juncos, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows. She especially did not like the House Sparrows for they continually chased her around the yard.

On 1 November, I noticed Hannah on the feeder closest to the house and not moving. I got my camera for a close up picture knowing she would fly away if I stepped out the door. However, she didn't move so I took a few photos. I thought something was wrong as hummingbirds don't just sit and pose. I glanced to the right and there on top of the evergreen tree were two Merlins. Poor Hannah must have been terrified. I waited 20 minutes until they flew off in pursuit of bigger birds.

By 15 November I became concerned about her well-being. I contacted Dave Woods from Wildbirds Unlimited and he suggested that I increase Hannah's sugar content in her feeder.

With the help of some friends and a bird identification book, I determined that Hannah was *not* a Ruby-throated Hummingbird as I had assumed. She was either a Rufous, Allen's or a Broad-tailed Hummingbird.

Two well known Niagara birders, Kayo Roy and John Black, were contacted and after viewing her for only a few minutes, both confirmed the bird was not a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, a common visitor to this area, but rather one of the genus *Selasphorus*. They posted Hannah's presence to *Ontbirds* and this led to visits by birders from all over Ontario and western New York State. Some came from as far away as Ottawa and Ohio, both five hour drives to Niagara Falls. A couple from Toronto just stepped off a plane from Spain and drove straight down to see her. Hannah was a celebrity. She took her new fame in stride, allowing people to take her picture and never making anyone wait too long to see her.

Hannah seemed to change her personality during this time and became more aggressive. One day she fought off an American Goldfinch as well as a Red-breasted Nuthatch. She seemed to be staking out her territory for some unknown reason.

November turned into December. The days were colder but Hannah was still busy feeding and making her loud chipping noises. Between feedings she favored the branches of the Bittersweet shrub. She enjoyed looking around and kept an eye out for a new predator, the Sharp-shinned Hawk, now a frequent



Hannah on 18 November 2004 by Janice Haines.

visitor to the backyard.

Allen Chartier, a licensed expert hummingbird bander from Michigan, and his assistant Cindy Cartwright were asked to catch, identify and band Hannah.

On 2 December, a large cage with a feeder was set up and she immediately

flew into the trap. Allen took her out and quickly and gently did the testing. For the entire time, Hannah was calm. After this 14 minute process, she was put into my hand and I released her back into the wild. Within 15 minutes she was back at the regular feeders as if nothing had happened.

Hannah was identified as a first year female Rufous Hummingbird, and had likely hatched in Alaska or British Columbia. Somehow in migration she took a wrong turn and ended up in my backyard.

I met so many wonderful people who came great distances to see her, people from birding and nature clubs and birders on field trips with the Ontario Field Ornithologists. At last count there were over 500 signatures in our guest book.

As winter neared, my husband and I set up a Scotch Pine tree with Christmas lights hoping that Hannah would go in it for the night and get warmth. Being the curious one that she had always been, within 5 minutes the tree became her new home for the night. I also noticed a Song Sparrow fly into the same tree and from that day on the two of them slept in it together. Hannah had made her first friend. We also purchased a heating lamp to put near her feeder so the solution would not freeze.

On 16 December, Hannah flew off into the distance. I had never seen her do this, maybe the instinct to fly south had registered. I was hoping this was the case as the last two nights had been below freezing. The next day she was at the feeder at 7 a.m., which had been her habit since she arrived. The feedings that day were limited, as she preferred to sit on the Trumpet Vine branches closer to the ground the entire day. I saw her go into the Christmas tree just after 5 o'clock.

The 18 December proved to be a bit milder than the previous few days. I put up Hannah's feeder early in the morning. A few people arrived to see her but I could not find her. There had been a south wind last night and maybe she had decided to leave. That was not to be the case. I found Hannah shortly before 10 a.m. perched at the top of her tree. She had died through the night even though she had tried so hard to survive.

On Christmas Eve, Hannah was picked up and taken to the Royal Ontario Museum. She is now preserved as a specimen and will be kept at the ROM forever. Future researchers, students and ornithologists will be able to hold her in their hands as they prepare their research papers. A tissue sample was sent to the University of Guelph for genetic studies. Hannah became a star in her very short life.

I miss Hannah very much and will never forget her, but I will always remember the joy she brought me and so many wonderful people who visited us here in Niagara Falls.

# Carden Alvar

## Update on Cameron and Windmill Ranches

Don Barnett

While the purchase of the 2869 acre Cameron Ranch is complete, the closing date for the purchase of the adjoining 1600 acre Windmill Ranch is 31 March 2005. The fundraising has been very encouraging. Both ranches purchased by the Nature Conservancy of Canada will have ownership transferred to Ontario Parks and a subsequent lease-back to the Nature Conservancy until 2008.

The Ontario Field Ornithologists, in partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ontario Parks, The Couchiching Conservancy, Toronto Ornithological Club, Carden Field Naturalists, City of Kawartha Lakes Advisory Committee and Wildlife Preservation Trust Canada are designated partners on the Carden Alvar Advisory Committee and each of these organizations will have input towards the eventual Park Management Plan. At present, the lands are classified as Nature Reserve, a designation which provides the greatest protection for the natural habitat. It is possible that this designation may be reviewed in some sections of the property to allow for management of alvar objectives.

Cattle grazing will be reviewed for the management plan in order to retain the open alvar habitat which is vital to many of the bird species on the alvar. To evaluate this option, Ontario Parks will be conducting a vegetation survey to determine the carrying capacity of the property for cattle grazing and also to evaluate the suitability of different zones for specific management techniques. This evaluation should be complete by April-May 2005.

Last summer, initial surveys documented bird species

on the Cameron Ranch, with some 16 point counts conducted using the protocols of the Breeding Bird Atlas. In 2005, OFO will assist this project by doing some of these point count locations as ongoing monitoring projects. The dates for these surveys are Saturday 28 May and Saturday 18 June from 6:00 to 10:00 a.m. We will meet at the main gate of Cameron Ranch on Kawartha Road 6 (Kirkfield Road). This project will allow OFO members to assume a continuing responsibility for systematic monitoring of point counts on the Cameron Ranch and eventually on the Windmill Ranch which along with financial support from OFO members has protected a world class birding area.

For information about donations to protect the Carden Alvar, please contact Alissa Lee of the Nature Conservancy: Email: [alissa.lee@natureconservancy.ca](mailto:alissa.lee@natureconservancy.ca)  
Toll free: 1-800-465-0029

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**Mark Cranford - Coordinator**

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