



OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

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Atlas Data Collection Completed

Mike Cadman, Atlas Coordinator

Ontario birders did a wonderful job in the final year of data collection for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. The final numbers aren't in yet, but at the time of writing (early September) atlas participants have pushed the total hours of field work up over 142,000 hours for 5 years, which is well ahead of the 124,000 hours contributed to the first atlas. Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the project.

The emphasis in 2005 was on finishing data collection. That involved targeted effort throughout the province, aiming to ensure all the atlas's goals were reached. So far, it looks like we achieved those goals. Thanks to some last minute heroics by atlasers, work has been done in every 10 km square in "southern Ontario" and in every 100 km block in "northern Ontario". We exceeded the number of point counts needed to map the relative abundance of species. And we're doing well in documenting the over 6000 rare species records reported by atlasers.

Some of the remaining gaps in the remote north had to be filled by special trips such as the Muketei River trip on page 4, but much of the work was closer to home. Regional Coordinators spurred on their atlasers to find a few more species, confirm breeding for just one (or two) more, and ensure that the last required point counts were done in each square.

The atlasers responded beautifully, scouring their old squares, visiting new ones, learning more about the birds, their habits and habitats, and contributing new data, which piece by piece expand our knowledge of the distribution and status of Ontario's birds, and make it possible to compare current data with Atlas data from 20 years ago.

What we have accomplished together is amazing. This was a huge task. As you drive across the province, from Windsor to Cornwall, from Fort Erie to Sault Ste Marie (by any route you choose!), think to yourself how every single square you pass though has been covered by atlas-

ers. It's a little mind-boggling, but it's true. Canoe any river in northern Ontario, and atlasers have been there before you, covering that 100 km block. Fly in to any remote community or drop from a helicopter onto any tiny pond on the muskeg, and atlasers have been in that 100 km block, possibly reporting those same birds and swatting at those same bugs! The coverage we've achieved is a reflection of the great spirit of birders willing to devote their special skills to advance science and help ensure there are birds and intact natural areas for future generations to enjoy and benefit from.

So, a huge thank you to everyone who took part in the atlas. I hope you are proud of what you've achieved. We'll certainly be working hard to ensure that the new Atlas book will be worthy of your efforts and commitment. One last reminder: please get any remaining data into the project right away so we can finalize the database and summarize the data for species account authors.

Sabine's Gull Pronunciation

Ron Scovell

The fall of 2005 has seen a record number of Sabine's Gulls migrating through southern Ontario with most birds recorded at Van Wagners Beach in Hamilton. Have you been at a Gull Watch with other birders when a stunning Sabine's Gull appeared? The call goes out as SAY-BINS or SAW-BINS or SAY-BINES or SAW-BINES. What is correct? Information from Elliott Coues (pronounced COWS) in his 1882 update of *The Coues Checklist of North American Birds* indicates that SA-BINS is the correct pronunciation for Sabine's Gull.

2005 Changes to the AOU Check-list of North American Birds

Jim Rising

In the July 2005 issue of the ornithological journal *The Auk*, the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Committee of Classification and Nomenclature published the 46th Supplement to the AOU Check-list of North American birds. These supplements are published annually. This supplement is an annotated list of changes to be made to the Check-list, which generally is accepted as the "official" list of birds from the AOU area (Canada, Mexico, United States including Hawaii, and Central America). As such, the names, sequence of species, and classification of the Check-list generally are used in provincial and state lists, and many field guides, and are also followed by the ABA. The Check-list Committee meets once a year to discuss changes in classification and nomenclature that have been proposed in the literature or that are necessitated by errors in previous lists. In recent years, the members of the Committee have relied more and more on communicating their views about proposed changes via email. This committee is chaired by Dr. Richard Banks of the U.S. Geological Survey and the National Museum of Natural History in Washington. Other members of the committee are: Carla Cicero (Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley), Jon Dunn (Bishop, California), Andrew Kratter (Florida Museum of Natural History), Pamela Rasmussen (Michigan State University Museum), J. V. Remsen, Jr. (Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University), myself (University of Toronto, and Royal Ontario Museum), and Douglas Stotz (Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago).

Jon Dunn is the only member of the committee who is not an avian taxonomist, although he is quite knowledgeable about many taxonomic matters. His special and very important role is to keep the committee informed about the validity of extralimital records and to help track range extensions for the next edition of the Check-list. Other members of the committee are responsible for assessing proposed changes in the taxonomy of specific groups. For example, I am responsible for making the initial assessments of proposed changes in the taxonomy of sparrows, cardinals, finches, tanagers, and blackbirds. Thus, when papers are published on the affinities of any species in these groups, I summarize information in those papers and other relevant papers for the committee, and recommend changes to the Check-list. The committee members then discuss these proposals and vote on the proposed changes. The committee is, and probably needs to be conservative, so unless there is near unanimous sentiment for a change, the status quo is maintained in the list. Below are some of the proposed changes that were published in *The Auk* as the 46th Supplement to the Check-list that may be of interest to Canadian ornithologists and birders.

The only change proposed in the 46th Supplement that affects a Canadian species is the removal of the Crested Myna (*Acridotheres cristatellus*) from the list. This species is native to China and southeastern Asia, and was introduced and seemingly well established in southwestern British Columbia (Vancouver area) from the late 1800s. At one time, individuals from that population were seen on Vancouver Island, where nesting was attempted, and in northwestern Washington, and possibly also Portland, Oregon (in 1922, but this might have been an escaped caged bird). However, mynas became extirpated in February 2003, so the species is moved from the regular list to the appendix, which is a list of species reported from the AOU area without sufficient documentation, birds which have been seen but may have been restrained by humans, and introduced species that have failed to become established. Mynas reported from Florida and Puerto Rico are probably based on escaped birds.

The Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), a Eurasian and African species, was added to the list on the basis of a well substantiated record from the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe.

Recent studies have supported earlier classifications that considered the Gray-headed Dove (*Leptotila plumbeiceps*), of southern Mexico, Central America, and northern South America, and the Gray-fronted Dove (*L. rufaxilla*), of South America, to be different species. This has the effect of adding the Gray-headed Dove to the List, replacing the Gray-fronted Dove, which does not occur in the AOU area.

Similarly, on the basis of differences in habitat, coloration, measurements (size and proportions) Humboldt's Sapphire (*Hylocharis humboldtii*) and the Blue-headed Sapphire (*H. grayi*) are now considered to be different species. Humboldt's Sapphire is the only one found in the AOU area, occurring along the Pacific coast from extreme southeastern Panama to Ecuador.

A Mangrove Swallow (*Tachycineta albilinea*), reported from Brevard County, Florida, 18-25 November 2002, was the first record for the United States.

An analysis of mtDNA sequence data shows that the Socorro Mockingbird (*Mimodes graysoni*), endemic to Socorro Island, off western Mexico, is clearly just a morphologically distinct mockingbird, and is embedded within the genus *Mimus*. Thus, the Socorro Mockingbird becomes (*Mimus graysoni*) and *Mimodes*, as a monotypic genus, is removed.

As a consequence of re-evaluation of evidence, the White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) and the Black-backed

Wagtail (*M. lugens*) are considered to be conspecific, and the latter is removed from the List. A recently published study (Pavlova, *et al.*, *Journal of Avian Biology* 36:322-336, 2005), supports this move, although the committee had not seen this paper at the time they chose to lump these two taxa into a single species.

Lastly, two independent genetic data-sets have shown that the Bananaquit (*Coereba flaveola*), formerly placed in the monotypic family Coerebidae, is embedded in a clade of "island" taxa, most of which were formerly classified as

New World Sparrows. Although its familial placement is yet to be determined, it is untenable to leave it in the Coerebidae, and at present it is placed in Family *Incertae Sedis* (of uncertain taxonomic position).

As you can see, most of the changes put forward this year have no effect on species that most of us usually encounter (although, darn it, I'd seen that wagtail in North America!), but will be of interest to those traveling to Alaska, Panama, or other exotic places.

OBRC Notes

Margaret Bain, 2005 Chair

Summer was a quiet time for the Ontario Bird Records Committee. Most Ontario birders, including most members of the 2005 Committee, spent many hours in the field in this last year of the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, either completing their own squares, helping out in under-serviced areas, or taking adventurous trips to remote parts of the province. The Atlas fieldwork itself will provide a significant number of rare bird reports for the Committee to review—a singing male Northern Wheatear near the Hudson Bay coast, a California Gull in Rainy River, a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers feeding at least three young, also in Rainy River, providing the first nesting record for northern Ontario, and many others.

The members of the 2005 OBRC are: Margaret Bain (Chair), Glenn Coady, Bill Crins (non-voting Secretary), Jean Iron, Colin Jones, Kevin McLaughlin, Mark Peck (non-voting Museum Liaison), Ian Richards, Kayo Roy (non-voting Assistant to the Secretary), and Alan Wormington. No fewer than three members on this list, Jean Iron, Colin Jones, and Ian Richards, are serving on the Committee for the first time, so we have a very good mix of experienced and new members to provide interesting discussions and a large reservoir of expertise.

Almost all reports submitted to the OBRC are now processed electronically, saving a huge amount of time compared with the old snail-mail packages that loitered around the province at the whim of Canada Post or occasionally got buried in the Precambrian layer of a busy desk. Having said this, we do need to remind you all that there is still quite a time lag in the submission of many rarity reports, and all 2005 documentation must be submitted by 31 December or it will not be reviewed by the current committee. Sounds like loads of time? Remember how quickly the summer went? The Review List of species requiring documentation is easily accessed through the OFO website at www.ofo.ca/obrc and is also incorporated into the handy checklist of Ontario birds produced by OFO Publications.

Bill Crins, OBRC Secretary, is to be highly com-

mended on the excellent annual report for 2004 published in the August 2005 issue of *Ontario Birds*. One species, Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*), was added to the official Ontario bird checklist in 2004 through a change from subspecies to full species status by the American Ornithologists' Union, but as this small goose is a common spring and fall migrant in northern Ontario and is also seen in the south of the province in small numbers, it is not an addition to the Review List. The latest AOU Supplement, the 46th, to the *Check-list of North American Birds*, published in July 2005 (*The Auk* 122: 1026-1031), makes no changes pertinent to Ontario birds, though it does reduce the Canadian checklist by one species with Black-backed Wagtail (*Motacilla lugens*) re-lumped with White Wagtail (*M. alba*).

Ontbirds, OFO's very successful listserv, has become a rapid and efficient source of information for Ontario birders. Many more birders are able to get to see rarities than ever before, but unfortunately this does not seem to mean that the OBRC is receiving many more rarity reports than ever before. Kayo Roy has been doing a great job in diplomatically chasing up finders of provincial rarities for which documentation has not been received by the OBRC, and helpful guidelines on documenting a rare bird sighting are included on the OBRC webpages as mentioned above. We urge everyone who finds or subsequently has the good fortune to see a Review List species to submit a report to the Committee. There are several good reasons why birders should become accustomed to writing up reports on a rare bird they see, not the least of which is that it makes for a much more detailed examination of the bird, its structure and plumage features, its behaviour, and its vocalizations, thus improving ID skills, which in turn bring hugely more enjoyable and rewarding birding. But even more importantly, remember that reports not only update current knowledge of Ontario avifauna but also contribute to a long-term, permanent, historical database that will be useful to ornithologists for generations to come.

Atlas Trip on the Muketei River 21 June to 1 July 2005

Judith King, Steven King, John Reaume, Michael Runtz

The Muketei River is a wild wilderness river that cuts through the massive Hudson Bay Lowland about 300 km west of the James Bay coast, and just north of the Attawapiskat River into which it flows. Our atlassing crew flew in from Pickle Lake and began the trip in 16ED, and paddled about 100 km downstream to where the Muketei joins the Attawapiskat. The river is an intimate river, being a mere 50-100 m wide. It is also a fast river as it drops quickly in elevation; we started about 160 m above sea level and ended about 100 m above. The maps showed only 2 rapids—after a dozen we lost count of them! The river must have been low, very low, for on the upper half of the river almost all rapids were rock gardens and had to be lined. Further downstream they were deep enough to be run.

While setting up our first camp at the upstream end of an island, we were serenaded by no fewer than 28 species of birds, including Bay-breasted, Cape May and Tennessee Warblers, White-winged Crossbills, Swainson's Thrush, and Gray Jays. We paddled downstream from this base camp and conducted 25 point counts and more than 40 hours of general atlassing in each of two adjacent squares. In our first square alone we found 64 species of which nine were confirmed breeders. The only sign of human life we found was an abandoned trapper's cabin. What a thrill to be out there with no signs or sounds of humans for 11 days.

At the beginning, the floodplain shoreline was rimmed with a narrow but dense thicket of alders and willows, ideal habitat for the Wilson's Warblers, Philadelphia Vireos and Fox Sparrows that we commonly heard. Most birds were difficult to see, and some such as Orange-crowned Warblers were heard but never seen. This near-impenetrable habitat housed the greatest diversity of birds in those squares.

Just in from the floodplain was a fringe of tall forest comprising mostly Aspen, White Spruce, Black Spruce and Balsam Fir. Here, Ruby-crowned Kinglets sang and Gray Jays chattered incessantly. Farther inland was peatland in an advanced stage of succession where thick sphagnum moss and caribou lichen formed deep carpets underfoot and Black Spruce and Tamarack grew as an open forest. Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, Boreal Chickadees, Lincoln's Sparrow and a few Pine Grosbeaks were found here when-

ever we neared a small pond (there were not many of these). Greater Yellowlegs invariably launched a verbal aerial assault on us.

As we paddled downstream to our next squares, a feat made easy by the river's strong current, the terrain changed dramatically as did the bird life. After lining our canoes through yet another set of rapids, a single Bohemian Waxwing flew over while a Northern Parula sang nearby. As the elevation dropped and the drainage decreased, water began to dominate the landscape. Between this vast wetland and the river lay a dense floodplain of willows, then a narrow fringe of conifers, ranging from a few metres to a half-km in width, and finally an open Black Spruce peatland. In this endless muskeg, myriad ponds and small lakes lay separated by floating peatlands on which carnivorous plants such as Great Sundews and Pitcher Plants thrived. The bogs were the major feature: lots of string bogs, floating bogs, and scrub bush bogs (our terms). The floating bogs were moss and lichen as far as we could see. It was very difficult to do point counts as you could not stand still without sinking. The scrub bush bogs were hummocks of mosses and lichens with small Black Spruce (30-60 cm) and Tamarack dotting the landscape. It was hard traveling

over this, with lots of water holes making it easy to go through the mats. There were also bogs with more and taller trees; at least the mats were thicker here. A compass and GPS were essential as everywhere looked the same. It would be very easy to get lost and never be found. This was part of the awe this area of our province holds for us. Its beauty is in its simplicity.

The birds were difficult to see, but we could sure hear them. The dwarf Black Spruce and Tamaracks were ideal perches for the Lesser Yellowlegs that now joined the Greater in screaming out a welcome whenever we approached. In this open peatland the odd raspy songs of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows rose from sedge fens. From the isolated clumps of spruce, Lincoln's Sparrows and the occasional White-crowned Sparrow sang. However, the most common sparrows were Savannah and they could be heard and seen at most point counts in this habitat. At one point count, a solitary Common Redpoll flew over Michael and John, reinforcing the northern flavour of this region.

Our final square, 16FD18, lay where the Muketei meets



Mike Runtz doing point counts near the Muketei River in northern Ontario on 23 June 2005. Photo by John Reaume.

2005

OFO Certificates of Appreciation

Each year OFO recognizes individuals and organizations for their worthy contributions to the birds and birding community of Ontario. The recipients of the 2005 Certificates of Appreciation are:

Gloria Braithwaite for hosting the large number of visitors who came to see the Varied Thrush that visited her feeder in the winter of 2005.

Allen Chartier for the identification work he did to confirm the identity of the Rufous Hummingbird in Niagara Falls in the autumn of 2004 and his prompt and thorough reporting of his findings through *Ontbirds*.

Mark Cranford for his hard work and diplomacy in maintaining *Ontbirds* as a premier listserv.

Department of National Defence for their continued cooperation with birders to provide access for shorebird viewing at Shirleys Bay on the Ottawa River.

Michel Gosselin of the Canadian Museum of Nature to acknowledge his 15 years of assistance to the editors of *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News*.

Janice and Art Haines for their unfailing hospitality to the hundreds of birders who visited their home in Niagara Falls to see the Rufous Hummingbird in the autumn of 2004.

Karl Jennewein for his constancy in stocking the bird feeders on the paths from Halls Road to Cranberry Marsh.

Doug Lockrey for his assiduous reporting of Great Gray Owls in the Halls Road area during the irruption of winter 2005.

Joanne Reive for hosting visitors to Eagle to view the Pyrrhuloxia on their neighbour's feeder at Christmas 2004.

Diane and Kayo Roy for their assiduous reporting of the Rufous Hummingbird in Niagara Falls in the autumn of 2004.

John and Carol Somerset for their reporting of a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch that visited their bird feeder in Chelmsford in January and February 2005 and for their hospitality to visiting birders.

Martha Sova for hosting the large numbers of visitors who came to see that Harris's Sparrow that visited her feeder near Orillia in the winter of 2005.

Walter Wojek for maintaining the feeders that attracted the Pyrrhuloxia to his home in Eagle at Christmas 2004.

Bob Falconer and Chris Escott coordinate OFO's Certificates of Appreciation.



John Reaume checking GPS coordinates near the Muketei River on 23 June 2005. Photo by Mike Runtz.

the Attawapiskat River. This was an exciting junction. Daily about 20 Arctic Terns, quite likely non-breeders, fed in the river and rested on sandbars. Also a number of Bonaparte's Gulls flew by each evening and a pair of Bald Eagles nested in a poplar on an island across from our campsite.

The trip provided many memorable moments. We had an up close and personal encounter with Sandhill Cranes and their chick walking around our tents.

We encountered lots of beavers, about half a dozen otters, a couple of black bears and six moose. We watched a Boreal Snaketail Dragonfly emerge from its nymph stage on Michael's pack. John and Michael were right there, John with his still camera and Michael with his still and video cameras. Michael also conducted an informal odonate survey, netting 16 species and only catching John once in his net. Michael and John also found 12 species of orchids, one of which, Northern Twayblade, Michael had been looking for 25 years.

Steven did a lot of fishing and caught many northern pike and walleye. Except for one meal, it was catch and release. We had more than enough biting flies and mosquitoes. The mosquitoes seemed to prefer the morning and evening, while the black, deer, moose and other flies preferred the heat of the day. Our only refuge was our tents after we removed the intruders.

The weather was variable. The nights ranged from near freezing to more than 20°C, and the days from 10 to 28°C. We had three days of rain, two of which were travel days, and the third kept us in our tents for the final 24 hours. We camped on four sites, three of which we used as base camps spending several days atlassing the square there. It was nice not moving all the time, especially since it was difficult finding a site. They were few and far between.

All told we spent 11 days on the river, canoed 100 km, surveyed 12 squares, completed a total of 80 point counts and tallied 82 species of birds, 21 of which were confirmed breeding.

Special thanks to Mike Cadman and the Breeding Bird Atlas for getting us to the river and allowing us to enjoy a trip of a lifetime.

Book Review
The Birds of South Asia
Geoff Carpentier

The Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide. Volume 1: Field Guide and Volume 2: Attributes and Status. 2005. Pamela C. Rasmussen and John C. Anderton. National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. in association with Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. Email: lynx@hbw.com. Hardcover Vol. 1: 378 pages and Vol. 2: + 683 pages. 75 Euros (about CAN\$110). ISBN 84-87334-67-9.

The exotic Far East is brought to life in this beautiful two volume set that introduces the reader to the birds of the Indian Subcontinent, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Chagos Archipelago.

Lynx Edicions has partnered with the Smithsonian Institute to produce this latest series, which expands the world coverage of species and adds to the scientific knowledge base of the world's birds. And in keeping with the calibre of books that I have come to expect from Lynx, they provide a book that goes beyond the ordinary and strives to be a world leader. In Volume I, species accounts are offered for 1441 species. All of this is enhanced by 180 plates showing over 3400 plumages and more than 1430 colour maps!

Each species receives extensive coverage that includes a general statement about each family of birds, common and scientific name, a cross reference to Volume 2 where more information on the species can be found, status, field marks, habitat indicators and comparative notes, breeding status, region(s) of occurrence and a colour map showing winter/summer ranges. Colour plates appear opposite each species and show multiple images for each. For example, 17 images are included depicting the two loons and five grebes that might be found in the region. All are excellent quality colour reproductions that show sitting and flying birds and adults and young.

One useful feature is the inclusion of four Plate Keys in Volume 1 that appear inside the front and back covers of the book, which show a colour image of each family of birds and a quick reference to the plate inside the book where more detail can be found.

Volume 2 describes over 2500 taxa, including all 1441 species recorded for the region with introductory chapters that include informative articles about bird topology, geographic coverage for the book, geography and avifauna, moults and plumages, measurements, illustrations, identification tips, vocalisations, taxonomy, maps, records, history of ornithology in South Asia, and conservation.

Each family is prefaced with an introductory paragraph that outlines regional and global status, number of

species and tidbits of interesting information. As an example, the entry on *Aythya* ducks briefly discusses sexual dimorphism, hybrids, eclipse plumages, and voice and time of day they prefer to feed! Each species is then treated individually and detail is provided for common name, scientific name, alternate names if applicable, taxonomic treatments, identifying field marks, size, residency status, abundance, voice and vocalizations, habits and taxonomy. A cross reference to the plates in Volume 1 appear opposite each species account.

Interspersed amongst the species accounts are highlighted entries for 85 Hypothetical and 67 Possible species. The latter are species that occur near the Indian Subcontinent and for which suitable habitat exists in the region, but their presence has not as yet been documented—species to watch for—which is of importance in areas where ornithological study is still emerging. The text includes all accepted species, two species new to science, and over 25 recent species splits.

The volume closes with appendices on hypothetical species and the reasons for their uncertainty, rejected species, taxonomic changes from 1983/1996 publications on the region's birds, a glossary, location finder for locales mentioned in the text with latitude and longitude provided, major birding sites with a low detail map, useful contacts and addresses, regional histories of areas covered by the book, locations of museums or institutions with study skins, threatened species, and references. The inside covers show political and regional habitat zone maps.

If I had to pick one thing, I didn't like about the book, it would be the inclusion of sonograms. About 900 of these are interspersed throughout Volume 2. Maybe it's just me, but I find them of little value, while I accept that others find them most useful. It's my preference to rely on audio sources, rather than the sonograms, to understand bird song. What I do like is the book's readability and clear representations of species supported by excellent maps and volumes of useful and interesting information. The cross referencing between Volume 1 and 2 is done in a useful and informative manner. This is a most welcome addition to my library and I can't wait to field test it—better start saving now for my next adventure.

Ron Tasker
Order of Canada

Congratulations to OFO life member Dr. Ron Tasker, MD, who was named as an Officer to the Order of Canada on 29 June 2005 for his significant work in health care. Ron also is a well known field naturalist who has made important published contributions to birding and the study of butterflies.

Royal Ontario Museum

Ghosts in the Collection

Mark K. Peck and Brad Millen

Outside museum databases, the best place to find a reasonably accurate specimen list of the “big seven” North American endangered or extinct birds listed below is the 1963 Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) Life Science Miscellaneous Publication titled, *Where is that Vanished Bird? An Index to the Known Specimens of the Extinct and near Extinct North American Species*, by Paul Hahn, compiled and edited by ROM Assistant Curator James L. Baillie. In 1957 Paul Hahn, a Toronto businessman, naturalist and Patron of the ROM sent out a questionnaire to museums and universities worldwide requesting details on their extinct and endangered North American holdings. He received more than 1000 responses to his questionnaire. Unfortunately, Mr. Hahn died in 1962 prior to publishing the results of his questionnaire, but the task was completed by Baillie and published in 1963. The book provides information on the history, if available, for each of the following specimens:

Passenger Pigeon	1532 skins and mounts and 16 skeletons
Eskimo Curlew	365 skins and mounts and 2 skeletons
Great Auk	78 skins and mounts and 2 skeletons
Ivory-billed Woodpecker	413 skins and mounts and 5 skeletons
Whooping Crane	309 skins and mounts and 8 skeletons
Carolina Parakeet	720 skins and mounts and 16 skeletons
Labrador Duck	54 skins and mounts and 0 skeletons

The book was a massive undertaking, and results from the questionnaire, well before email, took over five years to filter back to Hahn and Baillie. During that time, the two associates continued their search for extinct specimens they could add to the collections.

When you first enter the Ornithology skin collection at the Royal Ontario Museum there is a large, stand-alone, fire-proof safe evident on the north side of the room. This non-descript mausoleum houses and protects many of the collection’s most famous denizens. Inside are several shelves containing birds of “special significance.” On several shelves there are “type” specimens; the original specimen(s) used to describe a species or subspecies. An-

other shelf contains a Rose-breasted Grosbeak collected by John James Audubon and five specimens collected by Darwin’s compatriot, Alfred R. Wallace. There are also study skins of several North American endangered and extinct species represented in the vault. Bachman’s Warblers share space with Carolina Parakeets, Ivory-billed Woodpeckers and Heath Hens, the extinct eastern subspecies of the Greater Prairie-Chicken.

On the bottom of the vault are mounts of four Canadian extinct species: Eskimo Curlew, Passenger Pigeon, Great Auk, and Labrador Duck. Their addition to the ROM’s collection often involved backdoor deals and considerable negotiations with private collectors and curators patiently persevering behind the scenes to obtain the ghosts of the bird world.

All of the extinct specimens in the ROM’s collection are carefully monitored to protect them from possible insect infestations, humidity and light levels. They are housed in the Ornithology permanent collections and are not usually on display. However, the birds remain accessible to researchers and interested parties, and are occasionally displayed in temporary exhibits and galleries.

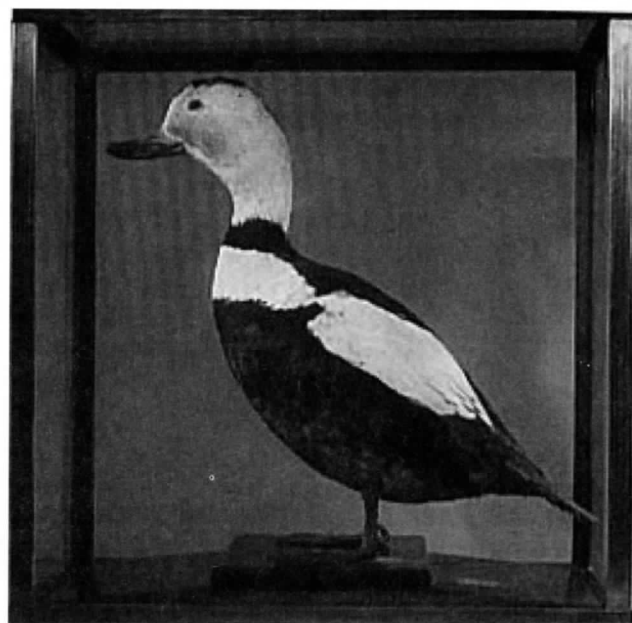


Figure 1. The ROM's Labrador Duck was purchased from Vassar College in 1965. Photo by Ross James©ROM. See page 9.

Ghosts in the Collection *continued*

The Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*

On 1 September 1914, Martha, the last living Passenger Pigeon died in the Cincinnati Zoo and the species became extinct. A year earlier the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology (ROMZ) had opened its doors for the first time and was eager to build its collections. At about the same time, Paul Hahn began his quest to obtain and protect as many mounted specimens of the Passenger Pigeon as he could so that “future generations would know at least how handsome a bird it was.” He was tireless and very successful in his endeavour. By 1957 Paul Hahn had donated or assisted in the donation of 70 Ontario specimens to the Museum. Many of the specimens were bought personally by Mr. Hahn for \$7.50–\$65.00 and then given to the ROM for safe keeping.

Today, with the addition of many other generous donations or bequests—including 20 from J. H. Fleming, a private collector from Toronto who donated close to 32,000 specimens—the ROM now has 151 specimens, the largest collection of Passenger Pigeon in the world. The collection contains 10 eggs/nests, 8 partial skeletons and 133 skins/mounts. Forty-three of the specimens are of unknown origin, 19 originated in the United States, and the rest were collected in Canada with 85 of those coming from Ontario. Many arrived at the Museum with unknown collection dates but the remainders were collected between 1837 and 1898.



Figure 2. Passenger Pigeon collection drawer at ROM with mounts and study skins. Photo by Mark Peck© ROM.

Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis*

The ROM has eight specimens of this shorebird in the collection. All are skins collected, as far as we can determine, prior to 1900. The birds were collected in North and South America, and once again we owe a debt of gratitude to private collectors. Three of the curlews came from J. H. Fleming and another came from Thomas McIlwraith, a well known collector from Hamilton and author of *The Birds of Ontario*, published in 1894. In 1998 the McIlwraith specimen, collected in Hamilton was relaxed and remounted by taxidermist Kevin Hockley and then exhibited as part of *Audubon's Wilderness Palette: The Birds of Canada*, a major exhibit of Audubon's paintings making its inaugural stop at the ROM.

Figure 3. Eskimo Curlew collected in Hamilton prior to 1883 by Thomas McIlwraith. Photo by Mark Peck©ROM.



Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis*

The ROM only has one of the 80 auk specimens mentioned in Paul Hahn's book. It is Number 67, and until 1965, belonged to Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York. In the early 1960s James Baillie began inquiring to see if Vassar College would be amenable to a sale of the specimen and what the price would be, if offered. At the time Canada did not have a specimen of a Great Auk even though Funk Island, just 65 km off the coast of Newfoundland contained one of the largest breeding colonies in the world. The Vassar bird was very interesting for a number of reasons. It had originally been donated to the College in 1867 by J. P. Giraud, Jr. of New York, author of the 1844 *Birds of Long Island*. The bird had been given to Giraud by J. J. Audubon and is reportedly the specimen Audubon used in his original plate of this species but it was unclear if Audubon's bird had been collected off the coast of Newfoundland or bought in London, England.

In early 1921 the specimen was found "dirty and neglected" under a biology laboratory sink at the school. It was given to Dr. Leonard Sandford, a private collector from Connecticut on an indefinite loan in exchange for a painting of Great Auks by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Sandford then sent the specimen to George

Nelson of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, where it was carefully cleaned and remounted. Upon opening the specimen Nelson discovered that the bird had been stuffed with German newspapers. The collection site was no longer in question; the bird was of European origin. By October 1921 the auk made its way to the American Museum of Natural History in New York where it remained until 1965. With help from other sources Baillie was eventually able to persuade Vassar College and the American Museum of Natural History that the ROM would be able to store and properly maintain the specimen for Canada. And, since it would be the only Great Auk specimen in Canada, it would be a national treasure. That summer the Great Auk was sold to the ROM for \$7000 and transported to the ROM by Baillie's son-in-law, Robert Wilson of Toronto.

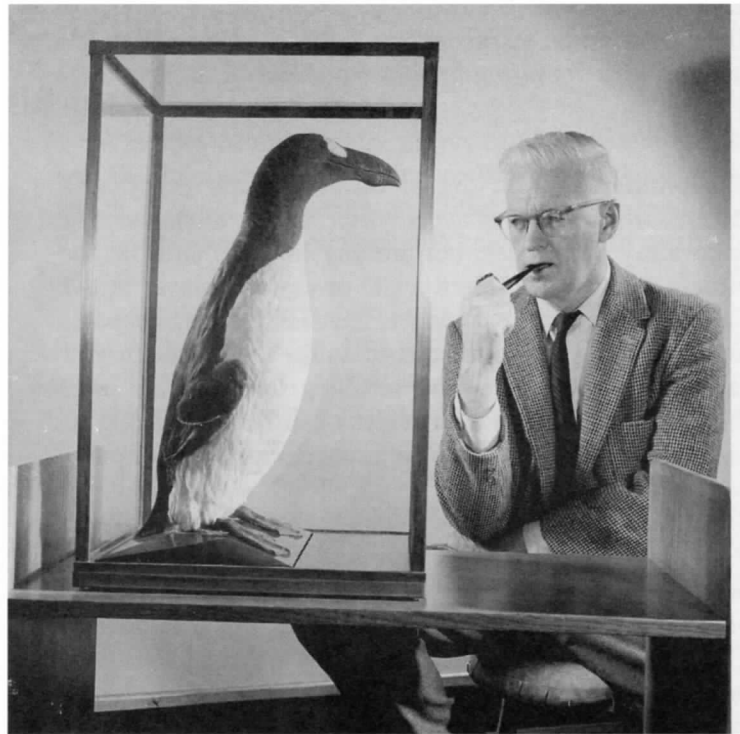


Figure 4. James L. Baillie with the ROM's Great Auk specimen in November 1965. Photo by Leigh Warren©ROM.

Labrador Duck *Camptorhynchus labradorius*

In the vault, next to the Great Auk sits an adult male Labrador Duck. The bird was collected off the coast of Long-Island New York some time between 1840–1842. It arrived at the ROM on the same day as the Great Auk and in the same fashion. Like the auk, the bird came from the collections of J. P. Giraud and had been housed for many years in the American Museum of Natural History on permanent loan from Vassar College. It was part of the package Baillie negotiated after lengthy discussions with Vassar College. The specimen would cost the ROM an additional \$3500. Within one year Jim Baillie was able to obtain two of the rarest North American specimens and add them to the collections.

In 1978 the bird was x-rayed by staff at the ROM to determine potential damage from handling. The x-ray revealed that numerous pins and metal rods had been used during the mounting of the specimen (see Figures 1 and 5).

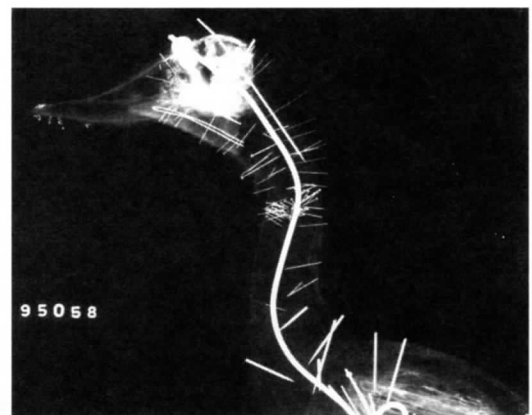


Figure 5. X-ray of Labrador Duck head and neck showing the pins and metal rods used in the preparation of the specimen. Photo by Jim Borack©ROM.

Digital Bird Song Players

Paul Bisson

The proliferations of digital music players, generically referred to as MP3 players, offer music aficionados a wide array of choices, but are any of these suitable for birders wanting to replace a CD or cassette player in the field? Some of the new gadgets have large storage capacities ranging in the thousands of songs and although you can find specific tracks by scrolling through play lists, their sometimes miniscule screens can be challenging to navigate and they do not have speakers for external playback like a cassette player.

But a device such as a Windows Pocket PC or Palm Pilot (Figure 1) offers a larger screen which is readable outdoors, full media playback, and external speaker capability in a form factor that easily fits in your coat pocket. Their tiny speaker designed for alarms and reminders may lack some loudness but with a good quality recording, external playback can rival a standard cassette player at medium volume.

Pocket PCs are typically equipped with an internal SD and/or Compact Flash card reader which allows for storage expansion and the size/price ratio of memory cards is constantly improving. For example a relatively inexpensive 256 MB memory card can store the contents of almost 3 CDs in a MP3 format at a bit rate of 192 kbps (*Kilobytes per second is how the bit rate is measured: the smaller the bit rate, the least amount of space needed. Choose a higher bit rate to improve the sound quality, e.g. use 128 kbps for better than FM radio quality or 192 kbps for low end CD quality*). Bit rates such as 128 kbps are probably adequate for most uses but some of the passerine vocalizations tend to sound better with a rate of 192 kbps or higher. Here are sample sizes from recording a typical CD:

MP3	128 kbps	57 MB	= better than FM quality
WMA	160 kbps	69 MB	= near CD quality
MP3	192 kbps	86 MB	= near CD quality

There is a multitude of competing digital audio formats but the WMA (Windows Media Audio) format is a logical choice if you use Windows and as claimed by Microsoft, the format requires less space for the equivalent quality (a 160 kbps WMA sounds as good as a 192 kbps MP3). Convert the files to a standard MP3 format if you desire maximum compatibility across systems.

Digital bird songs

Some freely available bird songs on the internet are generally recorded with a low bit rate so CDs are probably the best choice at the moment. Although some work is needed to prepare the songs, which consist of creating a track for each bird, removing the bird name announcer,



Figure 1. Paul Bisson's pocket PC with an alphabetical list of audio bird tracks.

and raising the volume level if needed, it's easily accomplished using off the shelf software. (*Note: there are copyright laws governing the use and distribution of digital sound files*).

Audio CDs are divided in tracks with a total limit of 99 tracks per CD. The Stokes series or other bird song collections packaged on multiple CDs require the least amount of editing. On the Stokes series for example, warblers and several other song birds are cut as one song per track, others are at maximum two songs per track. Titles like the Peterson CD do not fully utilize the 99 track limit and you sometimes find ten or more songs on a single track which makes the conversion process cumbersome.

Inserting an audio CD triggers your default multimedia program to start and if you are connected to the internet, the media software searches for information on the CD and automatically names all the tracks. The information contained in the online CD databases is not always perfect so a quick check for spelling is recommended, e.g. Stokes: Common Elder instead of Common Eider, or two Black-throated Warblers instead of Black-throated Green and Black-throated Blue Warbler.

An intermediary step of recording to a "Wave" format is desired to facilitate editing and to preserve as much of the original bits as possible. A WAV file is in a "loseless" format and should reproduce the quality of the original CD audio but it also requires as much space as the original; a typical CD is about 650MB. To save space on your hard disk for the editing step, copy the CD in "mono" mode which cuts the size in half and is not essential for bird songs but keep all other recording options at their original settings (*The bit rate for WAV is ~ 1140 kbps for the PCM 44.100 kHz, 16 Bit, Stereo CD audio standard*).

One other typical default option for music recording that is not needed is the automatic track sound levelling feature which if turned off will keep the original loudness for each track. (Note: Windows Media Player does not offer WAV recording. You will need to use other similar "MP3 ripper" type software such as the freely available Musicmatch Jukebox (www.musicmatch.com) to copy CDs to a WAV format).

Editing files

Removing the human voice from the track can be accomplished by using a free utility like Wavtrim (<http://www.mptrim.com/WavTrim.html>) that supports batch processing of multiple files. Adjust one of the advance trim start options to: "Look for silence in the first 4 seconds of the WAVs" to effectively remove the voice at the beginning of the track. For multiple songs per track, you can split the file in two with a WAV editor.

WAV editors are commonly distributed with sound cards or DVD software bundles and if your home PC does not already have one installed, you can find a suitable editor on any reputable shareware download internet site (e.g. download.com or tucows.com).

An editable sonogram is usually the starting point when opening the WAV file with the editor and distinct sounds are easily identified. For example, the "Yellow Rail-Black Rail.WAV" file from the Stokes CD can be split by highlighting the Yellow Rail portion of the sonogram and doing a cut and paste into a new WAV file and saving the remainder as Black Rail. Look for the flat lines in the sonogram (i.e. 0 db) to use as delimiters for the sound clips. You can also boost the volume by a few decibels in the editor if needed but excessive sound level adjustments can cause sound clipping. Once you are satisfied with the WAV files, convert them to the final compressed format for use on the Pocket PC.

Organizing and synchronizing files

Most music managers recognize either the Pocket PC or the memory card as portable MP3 devices and offer the choice of synchronizing your files with your home PC; the good old copy and paste method also works since memory cards are just like any other disks. It will be easier to find specific birds from a large number of files on the portable device if you group the bird songs in appropriately named folders; by using bird family names for example; or use the Pocket PC media software to create customized play lists to restrict the number of tracks that appear on your screen.

Using a Pocket PC in the field

Most affordable Pocket PCs are targeted for personal and/or business use and are not "ruggedized" (toughened for adverse weather, hard use and being dropped). Unless you want to spend three times as much for an industrial type device then consider using disposable screen protec-

tors (inadvertently dragging a piece of dirt with a stylus can create ugly scratches on the LCD) and a hard shell case such as Rhino" type aluminium cases to minimize the risk of crushing the screen.

Windows Mobile media player can be customized to use the hardware buttons for play/pause, volume, etc. which is easier than using the stylus when trying to manipulate binoculars and Pocket PC as you call in your target bird.

Using recordings to lure birds can be a form of harassment and often raises ethical concerns. Here are some guidelines from the American Birding Association: "To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording or filming. Limit the use of recordings and other methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is threatened, endangered or of special concern, or that is rare in your local area".

Carden Alvar Bluebirds

Herb Furniss

This was the best year Don Parkes and I have ever had in Carden. When we fledged 157 bluebirds three years ago we were sure that was as high as it could go with only 74 boxes. This year Don and I fledged 191 birds from a trail of 69 boxes! We still can't believe our own numbers.

It seems that everything was perfect this year. The weather was warm and there were enough timely rains to maintain grass and insect hatches. Also, and this was no small item, the hawks left us alone this year. Last year we had a Merlin in the area who accounted for five pairs of feeding adults which meant five failed broods.

Editors' Note: Herb Furniss and Don Parkes maintain bluebird boxes, including box 10, along Wylie Road.

Phyllis MacKay

On 8 September 2005, OFO member Phyllis MacKay, mother of Barry Kent MacKay, passed away in Markham, Ontario. Phyllis devoted most of her life to caring for sick and orphaned birds, dogs and other animals. In 2004, she received an OFO Certificate of Appreciation for her pioneering work in wildlife rehabilitation. Phyllis was the first female member of the Toronto Ornithological Club and one of the first female bird banders in Ontario. We send our condolences to Barry, his family and friends.

Book Review
The Big Year
Ted Armstrong

The Big Year. A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession. 2004. By Mark Obasik. Free Press, New York, New York. Hardcover, 268 pages. CAN\$37.50. ISBN 0-7432-4545-8.

The Big Year is already popular among birding circles, and this review is intended for those few unreached birders who have not yet had the pleasure.

The Big Year follows the daily life, trials, tribulations and triumphs of three distinctly different birders as they each independently strive for a big year in the same year, 1998, trying to observe and document the highest number of species of birds ever recorded in North America in one full year. A movie director could not have cast a more diverse and eclectic group of lead actors. Although they varied greatly in financial wealth, profession, humility (or lack thereof), personality, and their rationale for undertaking a Big Year, they all shared a passion and love for birds and birding. To quote from the book, "If you had a year of your life to do anything you wanted, and you could do only that thing for a year, what would you do? These three guys all choose to chase birds."

The book describes the fascinating history of the Big Year, from its origins in the Christmas Day Bird Shoot, through the Christmas Bird Counts, to the Big Day and eventually the Big Year. The Big Year's roots can be traced back to John James Audubon, with Roger Tory Peterson, of field guide fame, being the first to actually undertake what became the precursor to a modern-day Big Year.

Although this book could be dismissed by its title as of interest only to serious, hard-core listers, it is actually very interesting, very well-written, and full of interesting facts, events and anecdotes. I found it to be literally a page-turner, wanting to know who found what birds where, who currently had the most birds, and learning more about the geographic hotspots of birding and the circumstances and personalities of the individual birders.

This fast-paced book contained a surprising amount of interesting and useful birding information. I learned a great deal about some of the premier and diverse birding hotspots in North America: pelagic seabird tours on both the east and west coasts, the remote and almost inaccessible Attu Island on the Aleutian islands chain for Asiatic vagrants, the Sax-Zim bog in Minnesota (famed in the USA for many boreal species we take for granted in northern Ontario), the Brownsville, Texas dump for the Tamaulipas Crow, the Coronado National Forest for Flammulated Owl, the Vancouver Highway underpass for the Crested Mynah (now extirpated), the Dry Tortugas off the coast of Florida, and many others.

Reading the book, I had the impression that the author knew each of these three birders, and had observed and interacted with them throughout the Big Year of birding. This would have been a difficult assignment in itself, as two of the three men were very circumspect and cautious about declaring

their mission for a Big Year. Surprisingly, the author did not know these individuals at the time, but masterfully re-constructed the Big Year story in chronological fashion based upon the field notes of the protagonists and a large number of interviews with many people involved in some way with the Big Year. This was an amazing feat, tracking romances, marriages, MasterCard bills, comparative bird counts, and both individual birding trips and joint trips where the Big Year birders rubbed shoulders with each other. As in any good adventure story, there is also subterfuge and competition in the form of hired guides, high-priced membership for those who could afford to subscribe to exclusive rare bird reports, third parties helping or hindering one of the birders based upon past grievances with a specific, particularly arrogant birder, independent birders in the field slipping in with paid birding tours to see birds that tour members had paid thousands of dollars to view, and the incentive to obtain supporting documentation (witnesses and/or photographs) for all birds seen.

Sandwiched among the stories of birding one-upmanship and birding hotspots, were a number of interesting facts and stories, such as the influence of El Nino on birding fortunes, the whys and wherefores of bird migration (including early theories as to their cause and source), and spring migration fallout. I have to admit that in addition to learning for the first time of many of the rarest Eurasian vagrants that occasionally frequent North America, I also learned of a North American species that I had never previously heard of, the Himalayan Snowcock, introduced decades ago to the Nevada mountains.

The previous Big Year record was 721 species, recorded in 1987. In 1998, these three birders independently logged 745, 715 and 711 bird species respectively. This is a phenomenal total, given that experts consider that there are 675 species that commonly live in North America (continental North America north of the Mexico-USA border and within 200 miles of the coastline). Surprisingly, the only expected North American species that the 1998 winner missed in his big year was one that Ontario birders became very familiar with this past winter, the Great Gray Owl. The author speculates that the new record of 745 may never be beaten, given that it occurred during a year when the strongest El Nino on record coincided with the trip of the century on Attu (chartered trips to this Aleutian island location are apparently no longer available). In addition to the North American Big Year, there seems to be no end to other Big Year possibilities. The book references a Lower 48 (USA) Big Year, an Ohio Big Year—are there Canadian and Ontario Big Year records out there?

This book contains no maps or photographs. While they would have been most interesting, and would help the reader to learn more about birding hotspots across North America, this was not the purpose of the book. The author has skillfully strung many tangential tidbits of information into one coherent, comprehensive and interesting story. This book is not just for the diehard lister, it is a good read for anyone interested in birds and birding.

James Bay Shorebird Survey

Jean Iron

In early August 2005 I volunteered to survey shorebirds for a crew of eight Ontario government biologists and technicians studying climate change along the coast of southern James Bay. Under the direction of research scientist Ken Abraham and research biologist Carrie Sadowski of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), I counted, aged (adult or juvenile) and monitored the movements and habitat use of migrating shorebirds. Our headquarters was the MNR staff house in Moosonee about 20 km from James Bay. Each day we flew by helicopter to the study area along the coast. Figure 1.

James Bay is the southern extension of Hudson Bay. It cuts deeply into central Canada providing a route for tundra and boreal breeding shorebirds. The west coast of James Bay is in Ontario and the east coast is in Quebec, but the islands of James Bay are in Nunavut. Ontario's coast of James Bay is very flat. Its 400 km of north-south tidal flats make James Bay one of the most important staging areas for shorebirds in North America.

The most common shorebird of the nine day survey was the White-rumped Sandpiper with a high count of 7162 molting adults on 9 August. The second commonest shorebird was the Semipalmated Sandpiper with a high count of 4374 (60% juveniles) on 9 August.

The Hudson Bay and James Bay coasts of Ontario are of "hemispheric significance to staging flocks" of southbound Red Knots (Ross et al. 2003), being the fall equivalent to Delaware Bay in spring. My total survey count of Red Knots was only 252 adults. This low number of knots may reflect the big decline reported from Delaware Bay. The Canadian Wildlife Service is preparing a status report on the Red Knot, which will guide the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada in designating the Red Knot as Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern, or Not At Risk. In addition, an international group of ornithologists from Canada, United States, Brazil, Argentina and Chile is studying the Red Knot.

I saw Marbled Godwits on several days including five fresh juveniles on 9 August. An isolated breeding population of perhaps a few thousand Marbled Godwits breeds in the coastal prairie-like wet grasslands of James Bay (Ross et al. 2003). Very little is known about this remote breeding population, which is mainly in Ontario and on Nunavut's Akimiski Island (largest James Bay island, see Figure 1) with a few in Quebec. I also saw Hudsonian Godwits on most days with a high count of 158 molting adults on 5 August. Thousands stage and fatten along the west coast of James Bay before most fly non-stop to South America. Other shorebirds seen during the survey were Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover,

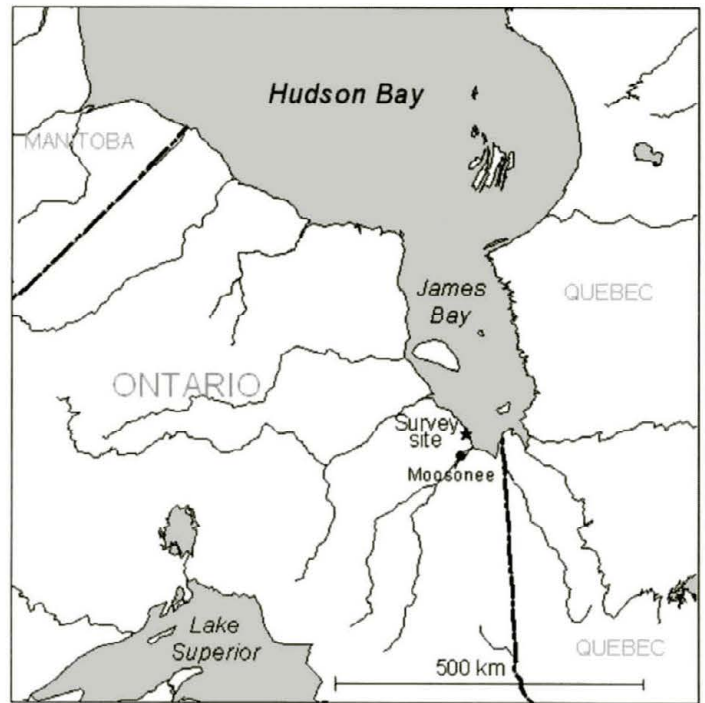


Figure 1. Shorebird survey site and Moosonee located at southwest end of James Bay. Akimiski Island is the largest island in James Bay. Map by Andrew Jano.

Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Dunlin, and Wilson's Snipe.

Apart from the survey crew, I saw no humans, no pollution and no flotsam typical of coastal areas, while breathing the fresh salt air of Canada's huge inland sea. One day I saw footprints of a bear in the tidal mud, which turned out to be made by a Black Bear. It was comforting to know that the nearest Polar Bears (about 50) were summering about 200 km farther north on Akimiski Island.

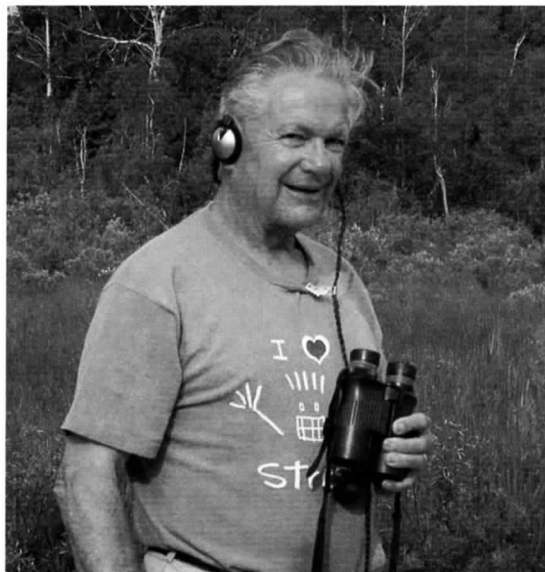
Noteworthy birds and other animals seen during surveys were Sandhill Cranes, one Rough-legged Hawk, Arctic Terns, many Yellow Rails (still actively singing) including two dark young, many singing Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows of the James Bay subspecies, *Ammodramus nelsoni alterus*, singing Le Conte's Sparrows, a juvenile Northern Shrike, and Rusty Blackbirds. We also saw three Belugas (white whales) at the mouth of the Moose River, many American Toads of the colourful Hudson Bay subspecies, *Bufo americanus copei*, and butterflies such as a Painted Lady that had wandered north.

You can see my shorebird and shorebird habitat photos of James Bay at <http://jeaniron.ca>

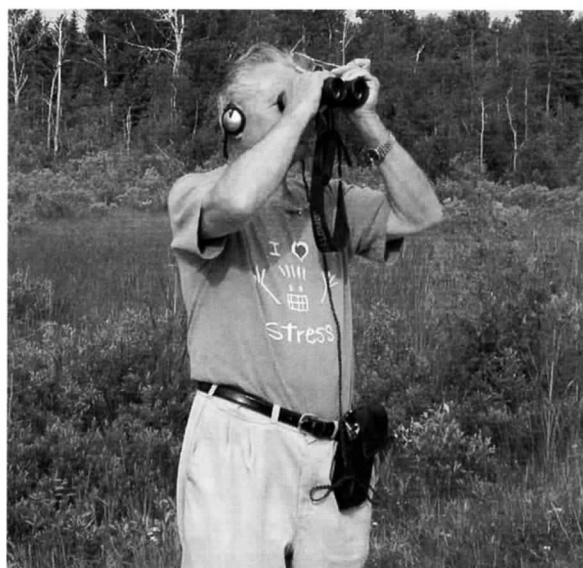
Literature Cited: Ross, K., K. Abraham, B. Clay, B. Collins, J. Iron, R. James, D. McLachlin, and R. Weeber. 2003. *Ontario Shorebird Conservation Plan*. Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada. Cat No. 0-662-33933-9. Hard copies of this plan are free by emailing <wildlife.ontario@eg.gc.ca>. Please include your name and postal address.

My New Ears

George Pond



George Pond wears his new hearing device: earphones and an audio unit clipped to his waist. Photos by Jean Iron.



"It's singing," I said to Barry Jones as we walked along a sandy road to a known Golden-winged Warbler territory in the South Walsingham sand plain. "I can't hear it," he replied, as we moved closer to a little aspen grove by the side of a small creek. "There it is, but I can just barely make it out."

We were birding in late May, trying to add a few more species to our yearly lists. The Golden-winged Warbler was one that Barry had missed during the earlier spring migration and I was happy to help find this elusive beauty. To most birders, that would be no big deal, but to me it was a momentous moment, for here was a bird that I can't hear. I've lost the ability to hear the higher pitched bird songs and for me that means nearly all the warblers: Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Black-and-white, Black-burnian, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Blackpoll, and Nashville. Even the louder warblers such as Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow, Northern and Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded, and Mourning must be very close, or I miss them altogether.

But now I was wearing my new bird *SongFinder*, a digital hearing device developed specifically for birders by Nature Sound Electronics at 63 Besemer Hill Road, Ithaca NY 14850 USA. Phone: 607-330-0811, email: info@nselec.com This *SongFinder* is not a traditional hearing aid that simply amplifies sounds; this device works by lowering the frequency or pitch of bird songs into a range where the user has normal hearing. It is an amazing device that allows me to hear virtually all of the bird songs that are beyond my normal range.

For those interested, check the website of Nature Sound Electronics at <http://www.nselec.com/headset.html>.

This explains in better detail how the *SongFinder* works and why it is so much better than most hearing aids.

Frankly I know very little about high frequency levels and hertz Hz (cycles per second) other than the fact that the higher the pitch of a bird, the more difficult it is for me to hear. I have learned that as children most of us could normally hear as high as 20,000 Hz. As we grow older, especially we men over the age of fifty, we lose the higher range, 10,000 to 20,000 Hz, and some of us have moderate hearing loss in the 4,000 to 10,000 Hz range. By the time we reach sixty years, moderate to severe hearing loss above 4,000 to 5,000 Hz becomes the norm.

The average frequency of the songs of songbirds is about 4,000 Hz, or about the same pitch as the highest note on a piano, which I can hear reasonably well. Robins, cardinals, Blue Jays, orioles, Carolina Wrens, etc. come in loud and clear. But many birds: warblers, sparrows, waxwings, kinglets and others produce sounds that reach 8,000 Hz and higher, which I can't hear or must be within a metre to even catch a whisper of sound.

Traditional hearing aids work on the principle of amplification. This works well with speech perception (usually below 3,000 Hz) but generally creates problems with bird songs, especially those above 5,000 Hz. Feedback with too much amplification and the amplification of extraneous sounds such as walking, talking, wind, leaves rustling, and a host of others are the most noticeable. If one has lost the ability to hear at a particular frequency it seems to me that no amount of amplification will allow that person to hear that frequency (2×0 still equals 0).

The *SongFinder* that I have works on a whole different principle. It takes sounds above 3,500 Hz, converts

them into digital signals and then lowers them to one-half, one-third or one-quarter of their original frequency. Thus high bird sounds are lowered into a frequency range that I can hear. I tend to use the one-half setting and turn the volume control up fairly high.

The nice thing about this device is that it responds only to high frequency sounds above 3,500 Hz. Therefore, many sounds such as people talking are unaffected and remain the same. The sound of feet walking along a path or roadway remain the same, although if one is walking in dried leaves it is a nuisance. For example, if we are walking along a roadway and people are talking there is no particular amplification of sounds and I can join in on the conversation as normal. However, if a Blue-winged Warbler sings or a Broad-winged Hawk calls (two sounds I don't hear) then the *SongFinder* goes to work. It reduces the sound of the bird to a frequency that I can hear and the sound comes into my ears loud and clear. It is absolutely fantastic.

The biggest problem is that by lowering the frequency of a song, the sound of the song is changed to a lower pitch and slower speed. For birds that I haven't heard in years or birds I have never heard, it's no big deal. I have an idea what the bird sounds like, and when I hear it, even though it has been altered, it sounds enough like what I am expecting so I can soon learn it. However, it is confusing for birds that I can hear and am familiar with, and whose songs are somewhat over the 3,500 Hz range such as robins, orioles, tanagers and more. I can simply turn off the *SongFinder*, identify the bird and then turn the *SongFinder* back on.

The *SongFinder* has a headset with braided wires that lead to the processing unit, which can be carried in a shirt pocket or clipped onto a belt. I use both methods. The headset wires can be hidden under a shirt to keep them from catching on branches and objects. The processing unit has switches for turning on and off and for changing the frequency reduction. It does not interfere with using binoculars.

Barry and I walked through Backus Woods. An Acadian Flycatcher sang loudly as we approached its territory. We heard at least four different Hooded Warblers, a loud warbler, but one to which I must be very close. They were coming in loud and clear with my new ears. We walked through a demonstration plot and heard the song of a Prairie Warbler. Then I heard a different song. "What's that?" I asked. "It's a Robin," said Barry. It was time to go home.

Loggerhead Shrikes 2005

Elaine Williams of Habitat Preservation Canada reported 14 wild pairs of Loggerhead Shrikes located on the Carden Alvar in 2005, the same number as in 2004. Nest success was lower this year compared to 2004 and 2003. A female captive-bred shrike released at Dyer's Bay on the Bruce in 2004 was found on 30 May 2005 in Carden tending a nest with 6 young. This captive raised female fledged 6 young in June and all 6 young were doing well in early August. This was the largest successful brood produced in Carden in 2005. There were 11 pairs on the Napanee Alvar, down from 12 pairs in 2004. Six of the Napanee pairs produced 27 fledglings. The release of captive-bred Loggerhead Shrikes continued this year to supplement the wild population and in the hope of establishing new breeding areas.

Future OFO Field Trips

Dave Milsom, Coordinator

Phone: 905-857-2235

Email: milsomdave@hotmail.com

Check trip details on the OFO website

www.ofo.ca

2005

October 22 (Saturday) Hawk Cliff and Area, Southwest of London

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

November 27 (Sunday) Niagara River Gull Watch

Leaders: Ron Tozer and Jean Iron. Meet 9 a.m. at Sir Adam Beck Generating Station Overlook on the Niagara River Parkway south of the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge to USA. Take the QEW to Highway 405. Continue on 405 but you MUST exit at STANLEY AVENUE, the first exit off the 405. Take Stanley Avenue (south right), cross Portage Road (about 1/2 km), and turn left on next road which is Whirlpool Road just before the railway tracks. This road turns at the Niagara River Parkway, sign-posted River Road. Turn left and go north to Adam Beck. Iceland, Thayer's, Glaucous, Lesser Black-backed and other gulls.

2006

January 1 (Sunday) Peterborough and Area

Leaders: Dave Milsom, Gerry Ball. Meet 8.30 a.m. at Peterborough Zoo parking area. From Peterborough, go north on County Road 28 towards Trent University. Bald Eagle, Common Raven, winter finches, possible Bohemian Waxwings.

February 4 (Saturday) Fisherville Area, Haldimand-Norfolk County

Leader: John Miles. Meet 9 a.m. in parking lot of the high school at the north end of Cayuga on County Road 54. Hawks, owls, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, sparrows.

March 18 (Saturday) Long Point Area

Leaders: George Pond, Barry Jones, Jim Heslop, Bob Stamp. Meet 9 a.m. at main parking lot of St. Williams Forestry Station on County Road 24 west of intersection with County Road 16. Waterfowl, Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes, early spring migrants.

Maris Apse Retires



Maris Apse on the Long Point trip in March 2005.
Photo by Jean Iron.

In September 2005 after seven years of dedicated service to OFO, Maris Apse retired from the Board of Directors. Elected to the board in 1998, Maris took over OFO Sales. Loading his van with the latest sweatshirts, tee-shirts, bucket hats, caps, toques, decals, pins, and checklists bearing the OFO logo, he attended OFO trips and events and got to know the members. OFO Sales took off and its steady expansion contributed financially to the organization.

For 14 years Maris also raised money for OFO by doing Birdathons. In 2001, he received an OFO Certificate of Appreciation for completing 10 consecutive Birdathons, and in 2002, Maris was our Celebrity Birder. For three years, he led OFO trips to Rondeau Provincial Park. Maris says that his

most enjoyable memories are of meeting so many members and being part of OFO's success.

In 2005, Maris and his wife Penny moved from Mississauga to their new home near Grand Bend. We are sorry to see Maris leave the Board, but happy that he will lead a new OFO trip in November 2006 to the Grand Bend area and will continue OFO Sales for a few months until a new coordinator takes over. We wish Maris every success now that he has more time to watch birds and travel.

Welcome Wendy Hunter

Wendy Hunter of Toronto was elected to the OFO Board of Directors at the 2005 Annual Convention. She has been an OFO member since 1984, the same year she went to Churchill with Jim Rising's birding field course. Wendy is a founding member of FLAP (Fatal Light Awareness), and she volunteers with Canadian Peregrine Foundation since her recent retirement from the Toronto Humane Society.

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Mark Cranford - Coordinator

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