



OFO News

NEWSLETTER OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

Favourite Birding Hotspots The Niagara River

By Kayo J. Roy

Winter adult California Gull (top left), Niagara River, February 2012. Photo by Jim Pawlicki

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Ontario Field Ornithologists

Box 116 Station F
Toronto ON M4Y 2L4
OFO Website: www.ofo.ca
Email: of@ofo.ca

Birding along the Niagara River is most rewarding from mid-November to mid-January when it is one of the very best areas in North America, and perhaps in the world, to view large numbers and a great variety of gulls.

Veteran Ontario birders know where to stop along the Niagara River to look for gulls. However, since many OFO members are relatively new or have only been on guided trips, this outline of the River's major birding hotspots for gull observation may help them on future trips to the Niagara River.

To date, 19 gull species have been observed on the River. Bonaparte's, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls are abundant, Great Black-backed Gull, formerly very common, is still pretty easy to find. Little, Iceland, Glaucous, Thayer's and Lesser Black-backed Gulls are found on most days. Black-legged Kittiwake, Franklin's, Black-headed and Sabine's Gulls make brief annual visits. Laughing and Mew

Gulls are occasional and California Gulls have become almost annual, although sightings of the latter have become much fewer in recent years. Slaty-backed Gull was first found in 1992 and has returned in six other years. Incredibly, from 12 November 1995 to 1 January 1996 a winter adult Ross's Gull (deemed to be the same individual) was observed along the Niagara River from Fort Erie to Queenston. In succeeding years 2002, 2008 and 2012 three additional Ross's Gulls have been discovered along the River. There are four records of Ivory Gull 1924, 1934, 1973 and 1980. On one occasion, keen observers found 14 gull species in the Niagara River on a single day.



Juvenile/First winter Kumlien's Iceland Gull,
Niagara River, January 2010.
Photo by Jim Pawlicki



Niagara River Birding Hotspots. Map by Judie Shore

The Common Gull seen along the River south of the Adam Beck overlook on 6 January 2010 will become number 20 should this species be split as a separate species from Mew Gull by the American Ornithologists' Union.

With open water throughout the year, the Niagara River is a good source of food for gulls. Small fish such as alewives, gizzard shad, shiners and smelt are abundant in early winter and attract gulls to the area. As well, fish sucked into the hydro turbines add more food for gull consumption.

1. Niagara-on-the-Lake – Queens Royal Park

Located on Ricardo Street, this small park offers an excellent view of Lake Ontario and the mouth of the Niagara River. It is a great place to view gulls and waterfowl on the lake during the winter months. Hundreds of Long-tailed Duck can usually be seen as well as other ducks, loons, grebes, scoters, and irregularly jaegers. King Eiders can occasionally be seen here. In 1982, 1985, 2006 and 2011 birders were rewarded with excellent views of a Razorbill.

2. Niagara-on-the-Lake – Niagara River Mouth

At sunset from November to February, there is a flyby of gulls heading out to roost on Lake Ontario. On peak days thousands of Bonaparte's Gulls pass by, challenging the birder to spot other gull species in the flocks. South of the marina off Ricardo Street are several laneways that lead to the River from where one can observe the gulls as they fly by. Perhaps the best location to watch the flyby is from the Navy Hall Historic Site parking lot on Ricardo Street. From mid-March to mid-April sightings of Little Gull at this location are almost guaranteed. Northern Gannet (mostly juveniles) now considered extremely rare has been an occasional visitor to the River mouth and the Niagara River.

3. Queenston Boat Launch Ramp

Accessed off Princess Street, there is a lower and upper parking area. Park in the upper lot and walk down the path to the lower lot. Here you are at water level and can observe the gulls feeding over the River. This is one of the best areas to find Little Gull amongst the thousands of Bonaparte's. Both Franklin's and Sabine's Gulls are possible. Return to the upper

lot and walk the path heading south along the River. About half way to the visible Queenston-Lewiston Bridge, you will arrive at a clearing between the path and the River. In the 1980s this was a favourite area for one or two Black-headed Gulls and remains perhaps the best place to look for the species. A juvenile Northern Gannet spent considerable time in this area in December 1990. In December 2010 four Black Vultures were discovered at this location. This represented the beginning of a substantial increase in the number of over-wintering Black Vultures as well as Turkey Vultures in the area. They chose to roost just across the River in Lewiston, New York and over the past five or six years have steadily increased in numbers. While they sometimes feed in the Lewiston landfill site, they often fly across the River to rest in trees along the gorge of the Niagara River Parkway and are often seen flying in the vicinity.

4. Niagara Falls

– Sir Adam Beck Hydro Overlook

From the Niagara River Parkway directly above the generating stations birders look straight down into the gorge offering both challenge and seminar in wing and tail patterns as the gulls forage below. This is the best place on the River to look for the white-winged gulls – Glaucous, Thayer's and Iceland (*kumlieni* is far more frequent, but the nominate *glaucoides* is possible). Lesser Black-backed Gull is regular and Franklin's occasional. Since the 1990s, Mew Gull has occurred several times and in January 2010 the European nominate subspecies (*L. c. canus*) known as Common Gull was identified at this location. California Gull was first found here in November 1992 and has been present almost every year since. In 1995 the rare Ross's Gull delighted birders here.

5. Niagara Falls – Hydro Reservoir

This 740 acre reservoir stores vast quantities of water for periods of high power demand and is no longer open to birders.

6. Niagara Falls – Whirlpool Rapids Overlook

A stop here is worth the time for the view alone. Mingling with the many feeding Bonaparte's Gulls may be an occasional loon or scoter or Red-necked Grebe, Little, Franklin's or Sabine's Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake or something really different like the 1995 Ross's Gull.

7. Niagara Falls – Niagara River Gorge

Many waterbirds gather under the Falls to feed on materials swept into the boiling rapids and deposited in quieter eddies. Among the common gulls look for Little, Glaucous, Lesser Black-backed, Iceland, and Thayer's Gulls and many species of ducks. Sabine's and Franklin's Gulls, and Black-legged Kittiwake are occasional visitors and two of the four records of Ivory Gull were from the gorge. Common Loon is regular, and a Pacific Loon made a brief visit in 1995. In December of 2002 a Ross's Gull was observed in flight at the base of the Horseshoe Falls.

8. Niagara Falls

– Immediately above the Horseshoe Falls

The Niagara Parks Commission have constructed a new walkway and viewing area along the Niagara Parkway directly opposite the old Canadian Niagara Power Company. From this new walkway area birders will have unobstructed views of the hundreds of gulls in flight over and at rest on the mass of rocks in the River as well as close by views of numerous duck species feeding among the rapids and calmer eddies.

– The Old Toronto Hydro Building

The overlooks north and south of this building located above the Falls opposite the Niagara Parks Commission Horticulture Greenhouse (parking in winter and rest rooms) provide a wide array of birds. Glaucous, Iceland, Little and Lesser Black-backed Gulls can often be found feeding or

resting on rocks in the rapids. Rarities have included Purple Sandpiper, Harlequin Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Red-necked and Red Phalaropes. Slaty-backed Gulls were observed in the River from this location in December 2010, December 2011 and January 2013. In recent years Harlequin Ducks have been seen from here, at a distance in the rapids or resting on rocks. This is generally now the best place to look for Purple Sandpipers, especially from the south side of this old hydro building. Many are sometimes discovered and a few usually over winter. Beware of confusion with Dunlin which can also be found here in November and December.

9. Niagara Falls

– The Old Pump House Building

The overlook behind this small building just south of the Old Toronto Hydro Building provides a broader view of the rapids and a further opportunity to look for gulls. Look for several species of ducks in the quieter waters close to shore. In December 2008 and 2013 adult Slaty-backed Gulls were observed from this location resting on the rocks in the Niagara River above the Falls. In August 2005, two Tricolored Herons were found here along the shoreline of the River. In July 2013 a Brown Pelican was reported in flight over the Niagara River heading for Dufferin Island.

Adult Slaty-backed Gull, Niagara River, Goat Island, December 2011. Photo by Jim Pawlicki





Two Tricoloured Heron adults, Niagara Falls, August 2006. Photo by Sam Barone



Adult Ross's Gull, January 2008. Photo by Mike Harvey

10. Niagara Falls – The Control Structure

This structure is a series of gates that allows Hydro One to control the amount of water flowing over the Horseshoe Falls. Almost any gull can be seen here. On the north (downriver) side, Little Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Lesser Black-backed, Sabine's and the white-winged gulls may be mixed in with large numbers of Bonaparte's Gulls. Lesser Black-backed Gulls can be easily distinguished by size from Great Black-backed Gulls as they rest together on the concrete breakwall located just off-shore. The first for Ontario adult Slaty-backed Gull on 24 November 1992 was enjoyed by many as it sat on the breakwall and on 3 December 2011, a second adult Slaty-backed Gull was discovered on this same breakwall. California Gull has also been reported from this location. In January 2008, a dazzling winter adult Ross's Gull was discovered from

here as it rested on an ice covered rock in the River. Large numbers of diving ducks feed in the rapids, and a female King Eider spent over a month here in the winter of 1989. Harlequin Duck has been reported here several times. A keen observer may find Purple Sandpipers feeding on the small islands. On the south side of the control structure gulls rest and feed in the waters off the breakwall. Included are a large number of scaup and Canvasback and among them are usually a few Redheads and Ring-necked Ducks. Less common sightings have included Eared Grebe, Parasitic Jaeger, Red-necked Phalarope and Snowy Owl.

11. Fort Erie

The drive from Niagara Falls to Fort Erie along the very picturesque Niagara River Parkway allows close views of many duck species. Canvasback, Redhead, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, American Black Duck, American Wigeon, Greater Scaup (often with a few Lesser

Scaup) and others will be evident. Incredibly, a female Smew occurred in this stretch of the river in February 1960. A male Common Eider initially found in the Niagara River at Bakers Creek in December 1969 moved to the mouth of the Welland River in Chippawa where it remained for 18 months last seen in January 1971. In Fort Erie and west to Jaeger Rocks just south of Old Fort Erie, the open waters, shorelines and even the grassy lawns collect birds that have drifted or were blown down Lake Erie, especially on westerly gales. Many birders remember exciting days here in September 1996 watching Black-capped Petrels, Sooty Terns, jaegers of all three species and Laughing Gulls in the aftermath of Hurricane Fran. Most years Franklin's and Sabine's Gulls appear in September and October. In December and January, Little Gull can usually be found, and sometimes a Black-legged Kittiwake or even a Black-headed Gull. In 1994 a pair of Harlequin Ducks wintered on the River at the foot of Bertie Street and the species is still seen occasionally in the area. In mid-November 1995 a very pink Ross's Gull drew a large number of birders in search of this rare Arctic specialty and in November 2012 another Ross's Gull was located off Waverley Beach in Fort Erie. Two new rare and first for Ontario sightings at Fort Erie drew considerable excitement for birders. On 7 October 2013 a female Brown Booby was found in flight over the Niagara River off Mather Park followed unbelievably the next month, on 24 November when an Elegant Tern was discovered on the Niagara River shoreline at the foot of Gilmore Road.

Acknowledgements

I thank Bob Curry for his valuable suggestions and for his assistance in editing this article from a larger one so as to be more suitable for an international community of birders and Willie D'Anna for reviewing and offering his thoughtful comments on this up-dated version of my 1998 article. I am indebted to Jim Pawlicki, Sam Barone and Michael Harvey for allowing me the use of their superb bird images.

Kayo Roy, a resident of the Niagara area for 41 years, is a past president of the Niagara Falls Nature Club, a former board and executive member of the FON (now Ontario Nature) and has compiled the Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count for the past 32 years. He also served on the Ontario Bird Records Committee from 1999 to 2004.

President's Message

To quote David Bowie, there are a few "ch-ch-ch-changes" happening at OFO

This year's convention was a great success, exceptionally well attended with entertaining and informative speakers, a fun interactive quiz that kept everyone entertained and a great selection of field trips. Thanks to organizer Mike Burrell and all the excellent trip leaders, our MCs Richard Pope and Ron Tozer and our speakers: Mark Read, Mike Runtz and Mike Burrell.

Next year's convention is September 22-24 in the Long Point area with the evening events at Port Dover. Mark it in your calendar now!

OFO News

Please welcome our new editors, Paul Nicholson and Ian Shanahan and our copy editor, Sofia A. Shanahan to the *OFO News* team. We are lucky to have such accomplished birders, writers and editors joining us. You can read their bios in this issue.

Board Changes

Jeff Harrison, Brandon Holden and Claire Nelson recently stepped down from the Board. I'd like to thank them both for their tremendous service. Jeff as Secretary rose to the challenge of making sense of our Board meetings and he coordinated OFO's Great Canadian Birdathon – no easy task. Brandon represented the OBRC and brought expertise, calm

wisdom and pragmatism to our meetings. Claire, who managed Publicity and Advertising is someone who always considers the birding community. Her warmth and depth of experience in organizing community events was a great help. Claire will continue to work behind the scenes for OFO organizing the annual Gull Workshop, liaising with advertisers and getting all of the prizes for the convention.

The election of Kevin Seymour and Sarah Rupert to the Board was ratified at the AGM. Kevin Seymour serves as Secretary and brings a wealth of Board experience having been a past President of the Toronto Ornithological Club. Sarah works at Point Pelee National Park and is instrumental in organizing birding events such as the Festival of Birds. She is also an accomplished artist. Sarah will be handling Publicity and Advertising and will continue to moderate the OFO Facebook page.

We currently have one opening on the Board. (The OFO bylaws stipulate that the Board must be between 8-10 OFO members). If you would like to submit a nomination, please write to me at president@ofoc.ca. We will consider nominations at our next Board meeting in December.

Membership

The Board has decided to raise annual membership fees by five dollars to \$40 per year starting in 2017. We held off raising rates as long as we could but it has been almost a decade since OFO membership fees have gone up and the cost of keeping OFO running has increased over that time. We hope that you will understand and support the increase in rates.

Lastly, with your 2017 renewal you will notice that we ask for the names and emails of all OFO members at the same address. OFO memberships are effectively household memberships and with the increased use of email it has become important to know the emails of all of our members. I thank you in advance for your patience and support as we transition our membership system.

Hope to see you at the Gull Workshop and Gull Field Trip in December.

Good Birding,

Lynne Freeman, OFO President
president@ofoc.ca

OFO Gull Weekend

3-4 December 2016*
Workshop on Saturday
Field Trip on Sunday

WORKSHOP

Saturday 3 December. 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.
LaMarsh Room, Niagara Falls Public Library on Victoria Avenue, Niagara Falls, Ontario. Free parking off Buckley Avenue (1 block east of Victoria Avenue via Morrison St.) 5 minutes from Hampton Inn Riverside at Whirlpool Bridge, Niagara Falls, Ontario.

NEW: Gull ID Quiz with Mark Peck and Jean Iron

Tune up your gull identification skills with this informative, challenging and fun quiz.

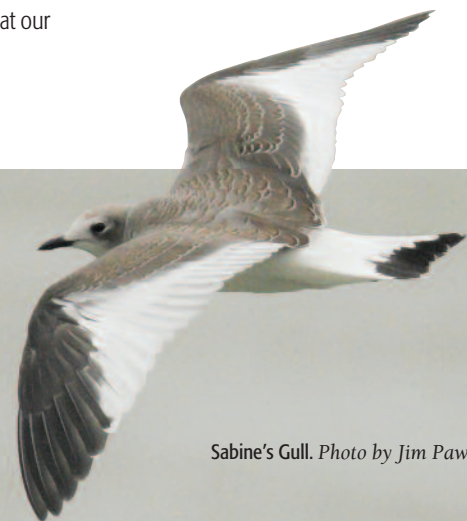
Everyone Welcome, Pre-registration Required:

Please register on the OFO website www.ofoc.ca so that we know how many will attend. No charge for this event.

OFO GULL FIELD TRIP

Sunday 4 December. 9:00 a.m. Meet leaders Ron Tozer and Jean Iron at Sir Adam Beck Lookout on the Niagara Parkway.

*Note Date Change



Sabine's Gull. Photo by Jim Pawlicki

Staying Over?

A group hotel rate for the OFO Gull Weekend has been arranged at Hampton Inn Riverside at the Whirlpool Bridge, Niagara Falls, Ontario. 905-358-5555. Say you are with the OFO Birding Group and request special rates. Book early to avoid disappointment. Rooms go fast.

Rates: Thursday Night, 1 Dec. to Sunday Night, 4 Dec: \$60 each night. Note: The Hampton Inn is in the process of changing hands and will NO longer offer a full breakfast. However, a coffee/tea station with assorted baked goods will be available. For more information about the hotel, please contact Claire Nelson: Email: mcnelson@rogers.com



White-winged Crossbill: This crossbill prefers White Spruce cones and bumper crops trigger nesting.

Photo by Jean Iron

2016-2017 Winter Finch Forecast

By Ron Pittaway

General Forecast

Cone crops average poor in Southern Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada, New York, Vermont and New Hampshire, but crops are generally good to bumper in Northern Ontario, Western Canada and Alaska. The dividing line is roughly James Bay south along the Ontario-Quebec border. White-winged Crossbills and often Pine Siskins prefer to move east or west rather than go south in search of cone crops. Many crossbills and some siskins may have already relocated to northern Ontario and across the boreal forest to Yukon where spruce cone crops are abundant. Purple Finches in the East are currently moving south in numbers.

Many birds will have a difficult time finding natural food sources this winter in Southern Ontario and the Northeast.

Individual Forecasts

Forecasts apply mainly to Ontario and adjacent provinces and states. Three irruptive non-finch passerines, whose movements are often linked to finches, are also discussed. Follow finch wanderings this fall and winter on eBird.

Red Crossbill: A scattering of Red Crossbills will likely wander widely in the Northeast this winter. Listen and watch for them on large-coned ornamental pines and spruces. Red Crossbills comprise at least 10 “call types” in North America. Most types are impossible to identify without analyzing recordings of their flight calls. Matt Young (may6 at cornell.edu) at The Cornell Lab of Ornithology will identify types if you email him recordings.

White-winged Crossbill: This crossbill irrupts south only in years of widespread cone crop failures. Many eastern crossbills have probably moved to northern Ontario and to abundant spruce cone crops in western Canada. However, expect some

White-winged Crossbills to be scattered across southern Canada and the north-eastern USA. Both crossbill species increasingly use feeders with black oil sunflower seeds when conifer seeds are scarce.

Common Redpoll: Last fall and winter’s large irruptive southward flight was unexpectedly halted north of latitude 45 degrees by a bumper seed crop on Balsam Fir. If redpolls move south this year, they will likely continue to southern Canada and the northern states because birch seed crops are generally low across the Northeast. In redpoll flocks, check for larger and darker “Greater” Common Redpolls (subspecies *rostrata*) from Baffin Island (Nunavut) and Greenland. Redpolls prefer nyger seeds in silo feeders with or without perches.

Hoary Redpoll: Watch for Hoaries in flocks of Common Redpolls. The “Southern” Hoary Redpoll (nominant subspecies *exilipes*) breeds south to northern Ontario and is the subspecies usually seen in southern Canada and northern USA. However, “Hornemann’s” Hoary Redpoll (nominant *hornemanni*) which was formerly considered a great rarity south of the tundra is now reported more often likely because its ID features are better known. See link #2 at end of page 7 for photos and identification marks of Common and Hoary Redpoll subspecies.

Pine Siskin: Some will irrupt south because cone crops in the Northeast are generally poor. Siskins were moving south in mid-September at the Observatoire d’oiseaux de Tadoussac in Quebec. However, some eastern siskins have likely relocated to abundant spruce crops in western Canada. Siskins prefer nyger seeds in silo feeders. See link #4 which discusses siskin irruptions related to climate variability.

Purple Finch: Eastern Purple Finches were moving in early September at the Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac in Quebec. The poor seed crops on most coniferous and deciduous trees indicate that Purple Finches will leave northern breeding areas. Purples prefer black oil sunflower seeds at feeders.

Pine Grosbeak: Most should stay in the north because native Mountain-ash berry crops are good to bumper (some poor areas) across the boreal forest. A few may wander to southern Ontario where they like European Mountain-ash berries and small ornamental crabapples. At feeders they prefer black oil sunflower seeds.

Evening Grosbeak: The Evening Grosbeak is the world's most spectacular winter finch. Its breeding populations continue to increase in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick due to increasing outbreaks of spruce budworm. Watch for them in Algonquin Park, Adirondacks and northern New England. A few are likely at feeders in southern Ontario where they prefer black oil sunflower seeds.

Three Irruptive Passerines

Movements of these three passerines are often linked to the boreal finches.

Blue Jay: Expect a much larger than usual flight of jays from mid-September to mid-October along the north shorelines of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The acorn, beechnut, hazelnut crops were generally poor but variable in central and southern Ontario. Drought has damaged many seed crops.

Bohemian Waxwing: Very few Bohemians breed east of James Bay in Canada. Most Bohemians will likely stay in northern Ontario and western Canada because native Mountain-ash berry crops are good to bumper (some poor areas) across the boreal forest. In recent winters, however, Bohemians have been coming south regularly every winter possibly due to reliable annual crops of abundant Buckthorn (*Rhamnus*) berries.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: An early southward movement began in early summer and continues as this forecast is posted. This widespread movement is evidence of poor cone crops in the Northeast. It indicates that Purple Finches, White-winged Crossbills and Pine Siskins are on the move too.

Where to see Finches

Algonquin Park is an exciting winter experience about a 3.5 hour drive north of Toronto. Most cone crops are poor (good on White Cedar) in the park so crossbills and siskins will be very scarce or absent. However, feeders at the Visitor Centre (km 43) should attract Common Redpolls (watch for Hoaries), Evening and Pine Grosbeaks. The Visitor Centre and restaurant are open weekends in winter. On winter weekdays, the facility is open, but with limited services (no restaurant, but snacks and drinks are available for purchase). Birders can call ahead to make arrangements to view feeders on weekdays by phoning 613-637-2828.

The bookstore has one of the best selections of natural history books anywhere. Be sure to get *Birds of Algonquin Park* (2012) by retired park naturalist Ron Tozer. It is one of the finest regional bird books ever published. The nearby Spruce Bog Trail at km 42.5 and Opeongo Road at km 44.5 are the best spots for finches and other species such as Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Spruce Grouse and Black-backed Woodpecker.

Bohemian Waxwing: This nomadic northerner often irrupts in the same years as winter finches.

Photo by Jean Iron

Acknowledgements

I thank staff of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and the many birders/naturalists whose tree seed reports allow me to make annual forecasts: Alexandre Ancil (Chibougamau, Quebec), Christian Artuso (Manitoba), Dennis Barry (Durham Region and Kawartha Lakes), Angus Baptiste (Grand lac Victoria, Quebec), Eleanor Beagan (Prince Edward Island), Peter Burke, (Georgian Bay, Ontario), Joan Collins (Adirondacks and northern New York State), Pascal Cote (Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac, Quebec), Bruce Di Labio (Eastern Ontario), Charity Dobbs (Ontario Tree Seed Plant), Carole Eady (Dryden, Ontario), Cameron Eckert (Southern Yukon), Dave Elder (Atikokan, Ontario), Bruce Falls (Brodie Club, Toronto), Walter Fisher (Rosetta McClain Gardens Raptor Watch, Toronto), Marcel Gahbauer (Eastern Ontario), Terry Gauthier (PEI), Michel Gosselin (Canadian Museum of Nature), David Govatski (New Hampshire and Vermont), Leo Heyens (Kenora, Ontario), Tyler Hoar (Southern Ontario), Kris Ito (French River, Ontario), Jean Iron (James Bay and Northeastern Ontario), Hilde Johansen (Chibougamau, Quebec), Gordon Kayahara (Timmins, Ontario), Dan McAskill (PEI), Bruce Mactavish (St. John's, Newfoundland), David McCorquodale (Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia), Stacy McNulty (Adirondacks NY), Brian Naylor (Nipissing District, Ontario), Stephen O'Donnell (Parry Sound District), Justin Peter (Algonquin Park, Ontario, Gatineau Park, Quebec), Fred Pinto (Nipissing District, Ontario), Brian Ratcliff (Thunder Bay District Ontario), Rosamund and Jim Pojar (Central British Columbia), Harvey and Brenda Schmidt (Creighton, Saskatchewan), Michael Runtz, (Algonquin Park), Don Sutherland (Southern James Bay and Nova Scotia), Doug Tate (Northwest Territories), Ron Tozer (Algonquin Park), Declan Troy (Alaska), Mike Turner (Haliburton Highlands, Ontario), Richard Welsman (Rosetta McClain Gardens, Toronto), the late Alan Wormington (Point Pelee, Ontario), Matt Young (New York State). Jean Iron made many helpful comments and hosts the forecast on her website.

FINCH INFORMATION LINKS

- #1. Finch Facts, Seed Crops and Irruptions.
<http://www.jeaniron.ca/2012/winterfinches.htm>
- #2. Subspecies of Common and Hoary Redpolls – ID Tips and Photos.
<http://www.jeaniron.ca/2015/redpollsRP.htm>
- #3. Interview with Ron Pittaway in *OFO News* 34(1):1-3, 2016.
<http://jeaniron.ca/articles/FinchForecasterFe2016.pdf>
- #4. Climatic dipoles drive two principal modes of North American boreal bird irruption.
<http://bit.ly/1UrmTsl>



OFO Convention 2016

By Bob Cermak

The OFO Annual Convention at Kingston this year (23-25 September) was a great success. 256 birders enjoyed informative evening presentations and birding during interesting field trips with excellent trip leaders.

Birds & Beers

The increasingly popular Friday evening *Birds & Beers* was enjoyed by over 180 people. MC Richard Pope provided entertaining introductions for guest speakers Michael Runtz and Mark Read who spoke about their perspectives on birding. Sarah Rupert (with some answers/questions provided by Justin Peter) once again hosted an interactive Jeopardy style birding quiz which kept everyone involved.

Saturday Evening

The banquet was opened by Kingston Field Naturalists President Alexandra Simmons who welcomed OFO to Kingston and provided information about birding in the area. MC Ron Tozer provided a summary of the bird species found during the convention (see next page). Bob Curry spoke in memory of Alan Wormington – his thirty five years of birding, his meticulous sighting reports and articles, the seven bird species Alan added to the Ontario list and how for Alan birding was both a sport and a passion. More information about events honoring Alan will be provided in the future. President Lynne Freeman conducted the AGM noting that membership increased 10% this year. Ken Burrell awarded this year's OFO Certificates of Appreciation (see page 10).

Ken Abraham presented the Distinguished Ornithologist Award to Jean Iron. He noted her outstanding contribution to OFO over the last 25 years saying that “OFO and Jean Iron are synonymous.” Jean was President of OFO from 1995 through 2004 and has provided an enormous contribution to OFO publications. He talked about her “unceasing efforts to educate others about birding and bird life in Ontario.” In her thanks, Jean mentioned that receiving the award was “the moment of my life” and that she was “thrilled and honoured for receiving recognition for loving birds.” Congratulations Jean!

Barb Charlton introduced keynote speaker Mike Burrell who gave a thought-provoking presentation entitled *Birding with a Purpose*. He talked about our “awesome hobby” and suggested that we could do better fighting for our rights as birders. He encouraged more people to get involved in advocacy. Mike talked about the rapid worldwide growth of eBird and provided an amazing array of facts and figures about it. Doug McRae thanked Mike saying that we should all “focus on the many achievements of the birding community.”

Reflections on the Convention

The convention was a weekend filled with birds, friends, camaraderie and laughter. Birders from across the province delighted in discovering the wonderful birding around Kingston. OFO thanks the many volunteers, trip leaders, vendors and participants who made this convention so memorable.

Convention Prize Donors

OFO sincerely thanks the many donors of raffle prizes and all who purchased tickets and generously contributed \$1857 to the organization.

We appreciate the efforts of Pat Tozer, Mike Nelson, Marcie Jacklin, Penny Apse and Neeltje VanderLaan for selling tickets. Special thanks to Claire Nelson for her hard work finding prize donors and organizing the raffle.

Essex Region Conservation Authority
- Danielle Breault Stuebing
Friends of Point Pelee - Debbie Ware
Point Pelee National Park
- Karen Linauskas, Superintendent
Pelee Wings Nature Store - Mike Malone
Cindy's Home & Garden Store, Kingsville
Friends of Algonquin Park
Sandy and Ross Mackintosh
Nature Canada - Ted Cheskey
Ritchie Feed & Seed, Ottawa - Jim Tutton
Bowman Feed & Supply, Wheatley
Friends of Presqu'ile Park
Eagle Optics/Vortex Canada - Paul Grant
Jean Iron
Joan Winearls
Bob Curry
Flora & Fauna Field Tours - Dave Milsom
Bob Cermak
Quest Nature Tours - Justin Peter
Art by Pelee Girl - Sarah Rupert
Stephen Cullen
Kingston Field Naturalists
Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory
Brian Hobbs
Michael and Marion Grant
Martin and Kathy Parker
Wilderness Places Paintings - Paul Harpley



Jean Iron, Caroline Biel, Doug McRae, Henrique Pacheco and Isabel Apkarian. Photo by Ron Pittaway; Chris Risley with the special 100th issue of *Ontario Birds*. Photo by Jean Iron

Convention Field Trips

By Ron Tozer

One of the nice things about attending an OFO Convention is that you get to go on great field trips with experienced leaders and explore locations where you may never have birded before. The Kingston Convention featured 31 field trips to 14 different locations over the three days. The trips were at birding sites from Presqu'île Provincial Park in the west to Charleston Lake Provincial Park in the east, and included Prince Edward County, Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory, Napanee Plain, Big Sandy Bay, Amherst Island, Wolfe Island, Howe Island, Amherstview Sewage Lagoons, Lemoine Point, Marshlands Conservation Area, Kingston Area hotspots, and the Thousand Islands.

There were an amazing 181 species reported at the Kingston Convention. This total is the second highest recorded at an OFO convention. The highest total was the 184 species observed last year at Point Pelee. In third place now are the 178 species reported at Presqu'île in 2012 and at Point Pelee in 2013. For a complete species list see the Events section at www.ofo.ca

Several factors appear to have combined to produce the remarkable number of birds seen at the Kingston Convention. The weather over the three-day weekend was conducive to a large influx of migrants. An unusually warm September had encouraged many species to linger later than usual. The large number of attendees (256 registered for the Convention) meant that many good birders were out there searching for birds



Convention birders, Prince Edward County. Photo by Neeltje VanderLaan

on all of the field trips. And perhaps most importantly, the birding expertise and knowledge of the areas exhibited by all the trip leaders contributed significantly to the species count.

Noteworthy birds included: Eurasian Wigeon, Golden Eagle, Little Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Hooded Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow and Nelson's Sparrow. Total species reported for the following groups are shown in parentheses: waterfowl (26), shorebirds (18), warblers (23) gulls (6), and sparrows (11).

Thank you Mike Burrell for arranging a great selection of field trips to a wide variety of habitat/locations, with excellent trip leaders. Thank you to each of the 25 trip leaders who did a great job accommodating often large groups of trip participants.

Feedback on the Convention

Convention attendees were asked to fill out a survey about the convention and OFO. The Board is delighted that 99 attendees did so.

Most people thought the variety of convention hikes was just right. A number of people asked for maps and more precise field trip start locations. These will be provided at future conventions. While a majority of attendees enjoyed the evening programs many commented that the quality and quantity of food was inadequate. OFO will work with the caterer at next year's venue to provide good food and lots of it for a reasonable price. Some noted that there were fewer vendors this year than at previous conventions.

Feedback on OFO

Feedback was extremely positive about OFO and its services. Thank you! OFO is considering switching to electronic publication of *OFO News* at some point and members were asked to weigh in on this. Reactions were split. Be assured that OFO will consider any changes carefully.



Young birders outing to Wolfe Island at Big Sandy Bay. Photo by Barb Charlton

OFO Certificates of Appreciation

By Ken Burrell

OFO Certificates of Appreciation Coordinator

Each year, OFO recognizes individuals and organizations for their contribution to the birds and birding community of Ontario. Again this year we have very worthy recipients. Whenever you are aware of a member of the public providing access to a rare bird or in some other way assisting birders, please send your nomination to the OFO website.

Recipients of the 2015-2016 awards

Georgette and Larry Cornelis, for graciously hosting birders on Georgette's property while a Vermilion Flycatcher visited in December 2015 and 1 January 2016.

Ray Holland, for monitoring and providing updates to the Ontario birding community regarding the Bullock's Oriole in Pakenham, November 2015 to January 2016.

Lisa Stansel, for monitoring and helping birders view the Ruff at the Brighton Constructed Wetland and providing permits for accessing the wetland, May 2016.

Thames Talbot Land Trust, for their commitment to bird conservation in the acquisition of the Hawk Cliff Woods property and Mosa Forest.

Plover Lovers Committee, for their commitment to public education and to citizen science regarding the Piping Plovers nesting at Sauble Beach.

Wasaga Beach Piping Plover Guardians, for their commitment to public education and to citizen science regarding the Piping Plovers nesting at Wasaga Beach.

Darlington Provincial Park Piping Plover Guardians, for their commitment to public education and to citizen science regarding the Piping Plovers nesting at Darlington Provincial Park.

Coordinator: Glenn Coady

Volunteers: Charmaine Anderson, Rosalind Chaundy, Marianne Chaundy-Smart, Kim Clark, Robert Coady, Hugh Currie, Jeff Daley, Don Docherty, Julianne Dominski, Karin Fawthrop, Larry Fawthrop, Christel Floegel, Yogi Floegel, Derek Gillette, Lois Gillette, Tyler Hoar, Jean Iron, Norbert Kuehn, Tim Logan, Diane McCurdy, Jim McKnight, Andrew Messerschmidt, Randy Parisien, Bruce Parker, Helma Parker, Satu Pernanen, Sonja Persram, Otto Peter, Diane Peter, Ron Pittaway, Winnie Poon, Rayfield Pye, Martha Robinson, Bob Russell, Betsy Smith, Roy Smith, John Stirrat, Tim Thorington, Dianne Witzell, Dave Worthington, Mary Beth Worthington

Presqu'île Provincial Park Piping Plover Guardians, for their commitment to public education and to citizen science regarding the Piping Plovers nesting at Sauble Beach.

Coordinators: Elizabeth Steadman and David Bree

Volunteers: Leslie Abram, Dave and Sheila Aspinwall, Sharon and John Blaney, Debbie Bontje, Lynda Burke, Jess Chambers, Liz Chatten, Yvette Chilcott, Rob and June Cleave, Connie Corbett, Anja

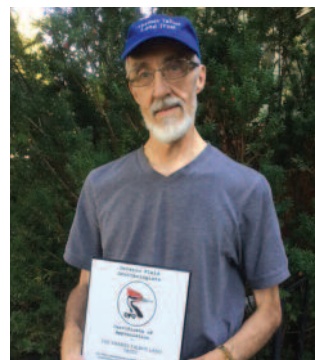
Croes, Brian and Gloria Durrell, Don and Jo Gray, Margaret, Whether, and Vernon Goodwin, Judith Goulin, Lesley Hollick, Cathy Lake, Deanna MacDonald, Helen Mason, Keith Matthien, Barb McCuaig, Krista Neilly, Bruce Parker, Pamela Perrault, Patricia Peterson, Mary Pickford, Maureen Riggs, Martha Robinson, Linda Rumpf, Joan Selwood, Laura Simova, Cecile Yarrow, David and Margo Impey, Marco Chu, Lorie Easton, Shelley Galloway, Janette Johnston, Karen Anderson, Doug McRae, and Karen Brummell.

Certificate of Appreciation to Durham Region Works and Finance Department

Over the past 14 years, Durham Region has cooperated with the local birding community to put a permit system in place that allows birders access to the Nonquon lagoons during spring, summer and fall and to enhance wildlife opportunities at the lagoons. The Finance Department initiated an online, in person option for permit acquisition that will make it much easier for out of town birders to get a permit.

This year, Durham Region Works initiated an extensive expansion of the sewage treatment facilities and consulted with Geoff Carpentier and Margaret Bain during the Environmental Assessment process to advise the Region on how the project might impact birds both during and after construction. Earlier this year there was an incident where new power lines were installed on one of the berms of the lagoons. When the Works Department was told that the wires might pose a threat to waterfowl, terns and shorebirds they immediately undertook a project to assess the potential impact. Finally, as part of their sewage management operations they started flooding the south lagoon where most of the shorebirds were and as soon as they were advised that this was critical habitat and very unfortunate timing, they immediately stopped and used another lagoon for their sewage storage.

Geoff Carpentier



Left: Ray Holland accepting the award from Bob Cermak. Photo by Lorraine Potter
Right: Dave Wake, President of the Talbot Trust Land Trust. Photo by Pete Read

Little Egret, Ottawa, June 2015.
Photo by Geoff Carpentier

Social Media and How We Bird

By Geoff Carpentier

Brrring, brrring, brrring “Hi Harry. What’s up? Wow, a Fork-tailed Flycatcher – where?” When I started bird-watching that was how we knew that a rarity had been found. Life was pretty simple. If you were fortunate enough to be part of a rare bird hotline, someone would call you and report that something rare had been found. It was then your responsibility to pass this information on to those below you in the “phone tree”. All across North America, this early, effective and fast form of social media existed. With the advent of email and cellular phones, texting and emailing became the preferred means of reporting. Dedicated resources such as OFO’s OntBirds Listserv ensured that everyone who wanted to hear about a rarity could do so instantly.

Before writing this article, I sought input from the birding community using two social media forums: *Ontario Birds* and *OntBirds*. The numerous responses I received were thoughtful, well stated and

together represented a cross section of age and experience. Herein I’ll report on what they said, without judgement and without revealing my sources. These are individual opinions, not meant to criticize or diminish anyone’s use of social media.

So let’s answer the primary question first. Has social media changed how we bird and report birds? Yes, absolutely! Now is that a good or a bad thing?

According to the online resource *Business-Dictionary* (www.businessdictionary.com), social media, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Google+, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Reddit, Tumblr, Instagram, Skype, Youtube, ListServs and eBird, utilizes “primarily internet or cellular phone based applications and tools to share information among people. It involves blogging and forums and any aspect of an interactive presence which allows individuals the ability to engage in conversations with one another...”

The Downside

Early social media technology was simple. Hotlines were slow and if you missed the call, you would not hear about the sighting until much later. When the cellular phone era was upon us, people turned off their phones to save money and one might not hear about the sighting in time. Listservs worked well but were cluttered with too many reports of “common” stuff.

As technology developed, online resources became increasingly available. eBird arose from a need to coordinate billions of bits of data and to make it available for analysis and interpretation by both amateurs and experts. Online usage has increased dramatically, particularly since the advent of a phone app where sightings can be logged in the field. However, eBird is not designed to be a tool to report up-to-the-minute rare bird sightings but still many users are using it exclusively for that purpose, ignoring traditional reporting mechanisms. Gone now is the instant notification that an *OntBirds* email would provide. Instead, users have to rely either on waiting until they get home or checking their phone throughout the day to see what is around. And what of those who don’t subscribe to eBird? They have no easy way of finding out what’s being seen. Even as a subscriber to eBird, one still has to sign up to receive hourly or daily alerts of sightings for specified locales. The more zealous birders might get hundreds of emails daily reporting sightings.

Then along came Facebook... and with it specialty groups of focussed individuals with like interests. In Ontario, there are many such Facebook groups, e.g. *Ontario Birds*. Now this is where it gets a bit sensitive as respondents to my query had some very candid opinions about its success. Several indicated that these sites are cluttered with a lot of information that has little value. In this sense, they refer to a posting of a photo of a common bird, from an unspecified location, with no indication of when it was photographed or why. Others felt that posters didn’t make enough of an

effort to identify species when seeking help and simply relied on the expertise of the group to identify their birds. We all know that learning is reduced if users rely solely on others rather than learning field marks and calls themselves through experience. One respondent offered: “Social media hasn’t changed anything; it’s digital photography that’s made the difference. In

Those who resist technology are at a disadvantage. For example, the sightings book at Pelee used to be an invaluable source of information – up-to-date and relatively accurate. As people migrate to using eBird and texting to share sightings, the novice birders or the technophobes are not finding out about the sightings as in the past.

the “old days”, there would be many birds that one could not ID. Digital photography allows us to take a record for the very reason that we don’t know what something is. It’s just human nature to ask for help.”

One user opined that many new birders have not been adequately educated in birding etiquette. If you’ve never been instructed about the risk of approaching wildlife too closely or disturbing their behaviour, you won’t intuitively understand the negative impacts of your actions. Recent posts on social media that report “this is the closest I’ve ever gotten to this species” support this misconception of impact. There are also ethical problems with overzealous birders and photographers using social media to find rare birds. Arising out of this is a movement to “hide” certain reports, e.g. owls, as the impacts on the birds can be very negative. This of course may lead to conflicts in the field. Moderators of social media sites and field birders are increasingly put in positions where they feel compelled to challenge an observer for infringing on the well-being of the birds. Social media provides information so quickly that a rare bird sighting is shared almost instantly and large numbers of birders can arrive at the site very quickly. Park staff may be at a disadvantage if they try to protect a rare bird or habitat because the birders get there first.

Overall the most frequent complaint is that there are too many social media sites doing the same thing. So what’s the big deal? Simple – we used to have one source of information – OntBirds. Now, for example, if I was planning to go to Hamilton, I’d check eBird and OntBirds, call my contacts, or check one of the Hamilton area Facebook pages. If I was doing a travelling route ending in Windsor, I might have to check eight to 10 sources to get a good picture of what’s around.

The Upside

Today, urgency persists in society that wasn’t there when I was a youth. But that’s not necessarily a bad

thing. The use of social media to find, identify and share bird sightings is an excellent transition from years past. Data can now instantly be shared with a wide and informed audience, arising in accelerated learning, new contacts and networks. Access to expert resources, photo-sharing, instructional videos, mapping, geo-referencing, image management software and electronic field guides are all positive benefits of this emerging technology. Nature clubs that had difficulty reaching this focussed audience now have easy access and local projects can garner support with minimal effort.

More people are entering the sport of birdwatching and are learning faster than ever, partly because they have so much online support. Information about birding sites is also enhanced as interactive websites are available in the field to help find trails, points of interest and links to other resources such as transportation routes, restaurants and hotels. With the advent of this technology comes rapid access to rare or uncommon species, which can be both a good and a bad thing.

Researchers have benefited greatly from social media as calls for information are shared widely. Databases, such as eBird, attract millions of users and billions of pieces of data that can be instantly shared around the world, mined for data by

researchers, analysed, dissected and utilized in myriad fashions. Citizen Science projects are more fulsome as many more respondents can be found with little effort and data is freely shared and easily linked via social media, making the data even more valuable.

For the travelling birdwatcher, information about local sites and potential species is readily available. Resources such as BirdingPal are likewise easily accessed and guides can be found with little effort. Where and when to go can be analysed and trips and itineraries planned.

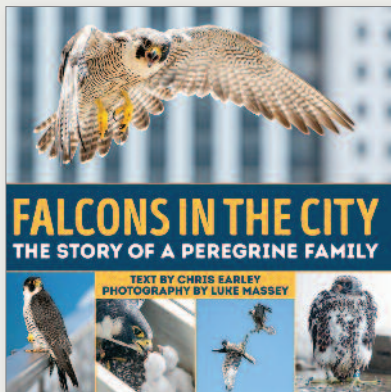
Where do we go from here?

The road ahead is uncertain, but it is clear that for the moment at least, a multitude of forums for learning exist and will continue to be developed. One respondent wrote “I was hoping that social media would lend itself to discussion/learning of trickier ID challenges...” Well it has but you have to look in the right places. On most Facebook pages, few observers post details such as numbers or behavioural observations. Fortunately others are making the effort to teach and inform. This is a good thing that I would suggest needs to be enhanced and fostered.

The Code of Ethics of birding (see www.ofo.ca) has to be explained to all users of social media and the moderators have to be diligent in monitoring what is being posted and why.

For me, I think Ontario needs a dedicated Rare Bird Facebook page to satisfy the needs of the growing birding population. This allows those who want to use a more casual approach to continue to post their personal observations on Ontario Birds Facebook page, but those that want to learn more or see the “good stuff” can use this new page without sifting through hundreds of posts that don’t satisfy their needs. Thank-you so much to all who took the time to share their thoughts and ideas with me.

Book Reviews



Falcons in the City: The Story of a Peregrine Family. 2016 Chris Earley with photography by Luke Massey. Firefly Books, Richmond Hill, Canada. Softcover 48 pages. \$9.95 (ISBN: 9781770858046)

The story of Steve and Linda is a compelling page-turner, but this modern urban drama isn't a typical intergenerational family saga. Set in Chicago, this is a tale of two Peregrine Falcons that successfully nested on the balcony of a 28th floor condominium. *Falcons in the City: The Story of a Peregrine Family* was written by Chris Earley and it is beautifully illustrated with dozens of stunning images shot by British photographer Luke Massey. It was published by Firefly Books in September 2016.



Steve and Linda will captivate young readers

The book was created for pre-teen readers. Kids are drawn to raptors just as many adults are. Think of the owls in *Harry Potter*. Raptors, in this case the Peregrines, really do make us sit up and take notice. Earley does an excellent job of describing for the reader the remarkable summer of these birds starting with the birds discovering an ideal location for nesting on Chicago condo owner Dacey Arashiba's balcony, where he soon realizes he had some uninvited company.

Through twenty short chapters, we learn everything about the Peregrines from courtship and nesting to their hunting and playful interactions with each other. Sidebars are periodically used to compare and contrast the Peregrines with other species and to shed light on bird science.

Earley has written other nature-themed children's books for Firefly and many Ontario Field Ornithologists members would know him for his four-book *Birds of the Great Lakes & Eastern North America* series. Earley, an OFO member himself, is a biologist and education coordinator at the University of Guelph's arboretum. He has also led international birding tours for Quest Nature Tours since 1999.

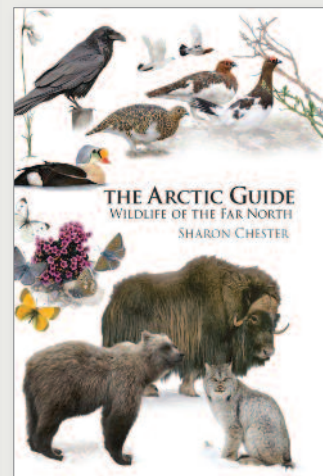
"Peregrines are great ambassadors for species recovery efforts and now they can impress people right in downtown urban centres." Earley recently told *OFO News*. "It is amazing that a kid can be walking along a city street and look up and see the fastest animal on the planet fly overhead. It's magic!"

If you have a youngster on a gift giving list, *Falcons in the City* is a book that will definitely captivate him or her.

Paul Nicholson

The Arctic Guide – Wildlife of the Far North. 2016. Sharon Chester. Princeton University Press. Softcover 542 pages. \$27.95 USD (ISBN 978-0-691-13975-3)

I have had the good fortune to travel across most of the Arctic in both Europe and North America and have seen a great deal of the wildlife and flora it has to offer, but I've often struggled in identifying some of the less obvious inhabitants of this vast ecosystem. Birds and mammals have been relative easy for several books cover them admirably, but the insects and flora have been more challenging. Generally one is compelled to own several plant books and I don't even think there's a dedicated volume out there for fish, herps, insects, and other invertebrates. Even the birds are generally covered under several titles since the region is so big. Europe is best covered by European titles and Canada/USA by ones we've written here. Well that was until now. Chester has brought all this information under one cover in this new publication.



While *OFO News* is all about birds, please indulge me for a moment as I share a quick insight into the other components of the book. Chester gives a surprisingly complete account for 107 mammals, 41 fish, 4 herptiles, 42 Lepidoptera and highlights of the 2200 plant species found in the Arctic, including excellent accounts for most of the flowering plants one might encounter. Remember this book covers the entire Arctic, *i.e.* Canada, Alaska, Russia, Scandinavia, Iceland and Greenland, so the diversity in this region is impressive.

The birds (376 species in total) are covered in 245 pages of text and each species is illustrated with superb artwork and is well described with details on range (with an accompanying map), habits, identification, status and alternate names in several languages. Every family and genus represented is described and notes on characteristics, diagnostic features, breeding and migration are offered in most cases. The artwork, as mentioned, is incredible – detailed, accurate, eye-catching and useful as birds are set in their natural habitats where possible. I really liked most of the species accounts, but as in other publications I think some problematic ones could have been better described. For example, the treatment of Common vs. Hoary Redpoll is cursory and really doesn't do justice to the difficulty one might encounter when trying to distinguish species and subspecies. Chester could take lessons from Jean Iron and Ron Pittaway when describing the complexity of the plumages of these species (see www.jeaniron.ca). It appears that a few species might have been overlooked, but that may arise as a factor of which authority one uses to define speciation. For example, the author doesn't mention Lesser Redpoll, yet many authorities do. She has however done a good job of being current with most other species, incorporating much of the recent taxonomic work available to date. Scoters are well described as are the gulls and so many more families. I liked her treatment of some subspecies, where she captured information on the Greenland Mallard.

In addition to the good treatment of the birds in general, she carried this level of excellence to all the other faunal and floral species covered in the book. Additionally, she has provided interesting information and sidebars throughout that talk about topography, geomorphology, oceans, currents, ice and marine habitats.

So bottom line. Wow! Loved it. I wish I had owned it when I travelled to the Arctic in the past – it would have made my trip so much more fulsome.

Geoffrey Carpentier
www.avocetnatureservices.com

Piping Plover. Photo by Ann Brokelman



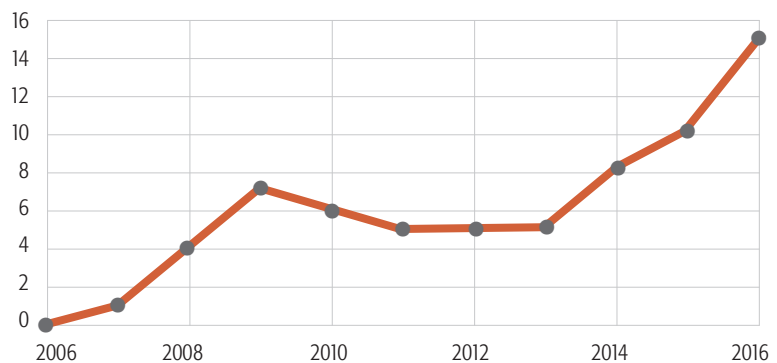
Return of the Piping Plover to the Ontario Great Lakes

Piping Plovers are slowly rebuilding their numbers along the shores of the Great Lakes. Although estimates of historical numbers vary widely, the Ontario recovery strategy says “Historically, they nested at 24 locations on all Great Lakes in Ontario with perhaps 70 to 90 pairs.”

The table shows the number of the breeding pairs in Ontario (Great Lakes population only) since the return of breeding birds to Sauble Beach in 2007. The plover's success would not have been possible without the countless hours devoted to monitoring, outreach, and conservation by tireless volunteers.

Find out more about Piping Plovers in the upcoming December issue of *Ontario Birds* where John Brett of the Canadian Wildlife Service writes about the recovery of the Piping Plover population in Ontario.

**Number of breeding pairs of Piping Plovers¹
 Ontario Great Lakes population**



Data courtesy of John Brett, CWS

¹ If a nest is lost or abandoned and an individual pairs with a new partner that is counted as an additional pair.

Just like gulls and shorebirds, brown ducks are the bane of many a field birder.

Photo Quiz

By Jon Ruddy

Our particular quiz bird does not need to provide a view of only a portion of its body, or strike a pose at a weird angle in order to test our identification skillsets. It simply has to slowly coast by on the water right in front of us in order to present its challenge. Just like gulls and shorebirds, brown ducks are the bane of many a field birder. Superficially, it seems that in some ways, they truly do all look the same. Before beginning our deductive analyses, let's provide for ourselves some framework from which to work. One clue that I am happy to provide is that this photo was taken in mid-November. Knowing this, we know we're not dealing with a juvenile or a male in eclipse plumage, and by the sheer plainness of our quiz bird we can safely deduce that it is not an adult male in definitive basic plumage. Therefore, with this in mind we now know that our quiz bird must be a female. With our field guides open, we will begin our discussion and our process of deduction as I endeavour to elucidate the often subtle differences between the many similar-looking species of female ducks.

Looking at our quiz bird, we see that it is a warm, mottled brown throughout and its contour feathers are scalloped with broad buff edges. From its head to its tail we can see that it is quite uniform in colour, with its darker scapulars and tertials setting off mild contrast with the other areas of its body. Its face is very plain, almost lacking field marks altogether, which in and of itself is of course a field mark. With these observations in mind, we begin to browse the waterfowl section in our field guides. I believe it's



safe to say that the bulk of the *OFO News* readership will correctly deduce this species of duck to its proper group: the dabblers. That being said, this now leaves us with females of 12 possibilities as options: Wood Duck, Mottled Duck, American Black Duck, Mallard, American Wigeon, Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Garganey, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal and Cinnamon Teal.

Wood Duck is eliminated by its compact build and white teardrop around the eye. Mottled Duck has a darker brown body and a sharply delineated paler neck and head, which is not what we see with the mottled, warm brown appearance of our quiz bird. Next up is American Black Duck which is quickly ruled out due to the fact that it is simply too dark to be our quiz bird. Our next consideration of female Mallard does cause us to pause a little longer than our previous prospects but we consider that a Mallard typically shows a dark brown eyeline and an orangish bill with dark brown internal patterning. We also consider that the sides of a Mallard's tail are white, unlike our quiz bird. Moving along to the wigeons, we recall that both American and Eurasian Wigeon have an unpatterned wash of orange to reddish-orange throughout the flanks and significantly smaller bills which are blue-gray with a black nail to the tip.

Gadwall is eliminated as a possibility by its much steeper forehead and by its thinner bill which is typically blackish throughout with broad orangish restricted to the sides. As well, often visible on a female Gadwall is the stark white speculum beneath grayish tertials; both of which are features not seen on our quiz bird. Female Northern Pintails are similar in appearance to our quiz bird in that they are quite plain-faced and buffy-brown throughout. A fundamental difference, however, is the overall GISS (General Impression of Size and Shape) of our quiz bird compared to that of a pintail. Pintails have a lean, lengthy body; a profile which is attributed to their long necks and long, attenuated rears. This look simply is not found in our quiz bird's sturdy, thick build. Next up is Northern Shoveler, whose massive, orangish, spatulate bill immediately sets it apart from our quiz bird. Further to its unique look is the broad upper mandible with drooped 'flanges' to its distal portion, concealing the lower mandible altogether; the lower mandible being only visible near its base, where the upper mandible is sharply pinched in width. Moving along to Garganey, we find a quick elimination due to the high contrast facial pattern of its whitish supercilium and dark eyeline, both of which are features not present on our quiz bird.

This leaves us with Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal and Cinnamon Teal as possibilities. Green-winged Teal is eliminated by looking at the rear of our quiz bird and noting the absence of the whitish-buff stripe to the sides of the undertail coverts, a very consistent Green-winged Teal field mark. Also of note, the build of a Green-winged Teal is quite different than that of our quiz bird in that it is noticeably compact and has, proportionately, a much smaller bill. Next up on our review list is Blue-winged Teal. The ground colour to the cheek of a Blue-winged is typically a light grayish-brown and there tends to be a contrasting dark brown eyeline 'cutting through' more conspicuous, pale eye arcs. Typically also, there averages a vague whitish area near the base of the bill, extending from the top of the bill through to the throat. This subtly contrasting suite of features differs from the plain, warm-toned face of our quiz bird.

With all other possibilities eliminated this then leaves us with one remaining option:

Cinnamon Teal. Comparing Cinnamon Teal to its closest congener, the Blue-winged Teal, we note that its bill length averages slightly longer and is slightly more spatulate in shape. Further examination of its bill reveals a subtle character and one that is best expressed as being that of an average difference between the two species. We note the 'flange' drooping below the lower edge of the bill. These flanges along the distal portion of the upper mandible are typically more apparent on Cinnamon Teal than on Blue-winged Teal. Undoubtedly this species is overlooked throughout our province. This is especially true of females and eclipse males adorning their sneaky 'cryptic' plumages. Careful scanning through flocks of migrant Blue-winged Teal from mid to late April and again in September through to mid-October could possibly yield this highly-prized find. This female Cinnamon Teal was photographed by Lisa Williams at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont, California on 13 November 2011.



OFO News
ofonews@ofo.ca

Interim Editor
Lynne Freeman

Editors (February 2017)
Paul Nicholson
Ian Shanahan

Editorial Assistants
Geoff Carpentier, Jean Iron,
and Ron Pittaway

Layout and Design
Judie Shore judieshore@bell.net

Copy Editor (February 2017)
Sofia A. Shanahan

Contributing Editors
Mike Burrell
mike.burrell.on@gmail.com
Jon Ruddy, Photo Quiz
eontbird@gmail.com
Christian Friis
friis.christian@gmail.com
Allen Woodliffe
awoodliffe@hotmail.com
Cindy Cartwright
pom@bmts.com

Articles and notes are welcome. Contributors should check the OFO website under publications for deadlines and submission guidelines.

OFO Website www.ofo.ca
Doug Woods, Coordinator
Email: ofo@ofo.ca

Ontbirds
Mark Cranford – Coordinator
Ontbirds, with over 3000 subscribers, is OFO's successful listserv for reporting rare bird sightings. Now the largest birding listserv in North America, Ontbirds has become an integral part of the Ontario birding community. Follow the instructions on the OFO website to subscribe to Ontbirds. Email: ontbirds@ofo.ca

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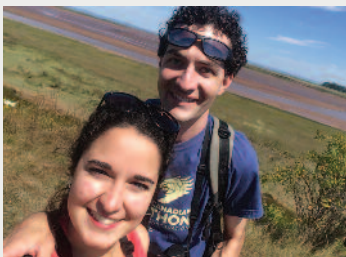
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New editors joining team in 2017



Paul Nicholson is joining the *OFO News* team as one of our co-editors for a two-year term. He has written a weekly bird watching column for the *London Free Press* and other Postmedia newspapers since 2011. Paul, a lifelong birder, is active in the London nature community, leading birding hikes, speaking about birds, and teaching bird watching for the City of London.

Ian Shanahan is the other half of the *OFO News* co-editors partnership for the next two years. He has lived and birded throughout south-central Ontario from early childhood, always with a sketchbook in tow. His nature and travel writing has appeared in various publications across Canada. Ian leads nature tours independently and with Quest Nature Tours.



Paul Nicholson. Photo by Mich MacDougall
Sofia and Ian Shanahan.

Sofia A. Shanahan is joining the *OFO News* team as our copy editor for the next two years. Growing up in Caracas, Venezuela, she enjoyed the wonders of many tropical birds, waking up every day with the sounds of troupals and sights of Blue-and-yellow Macaws flying over the city. Since she arrived in Canada three years ago, she has been on a non-stop exploration of Ontario's beautiful nature. Sofia's background in publishing for books, magazines and websites will be an asset in putting together our upcoming issues.