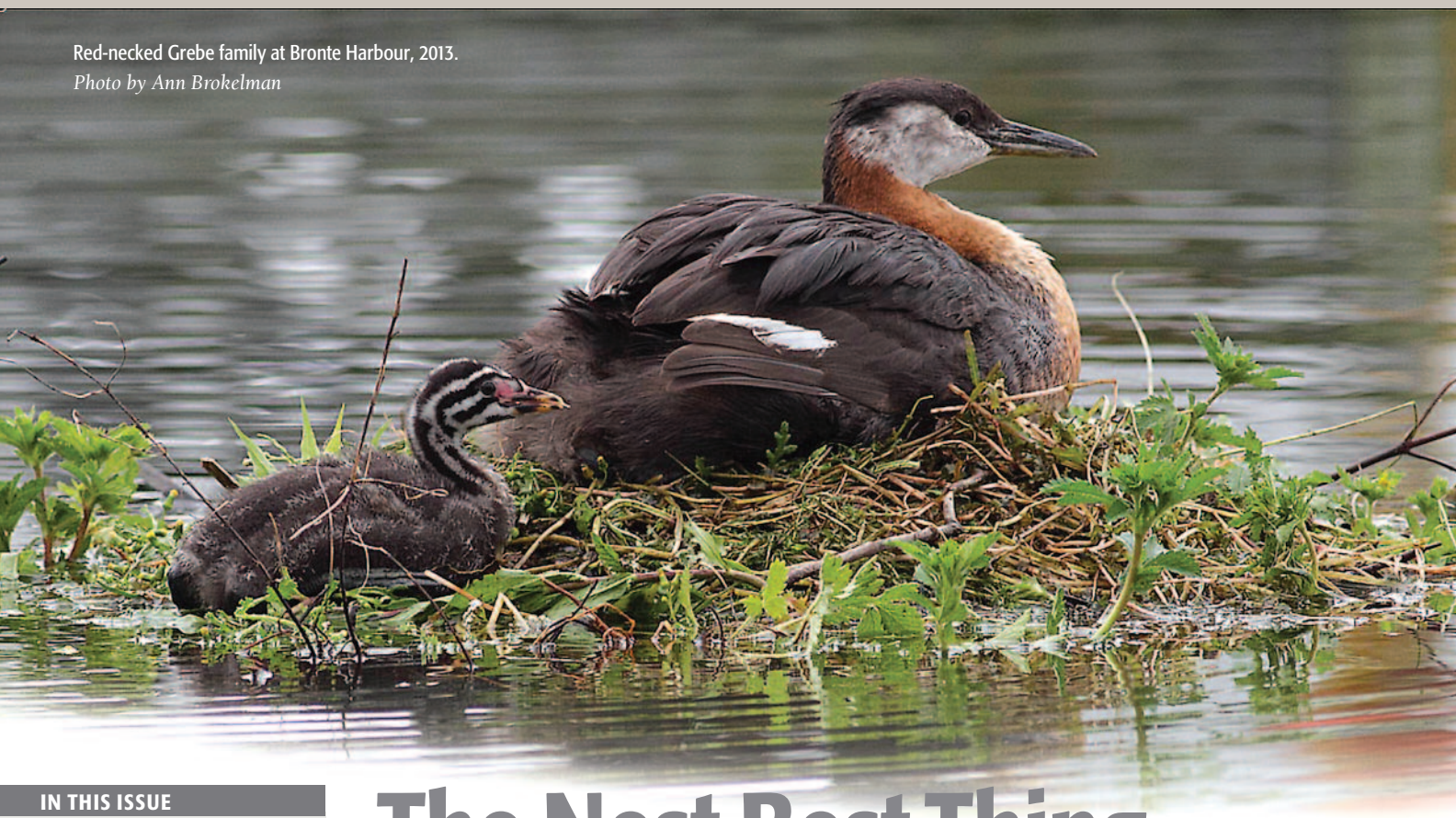
VOLUME 34 NUMBER 2 JUNE 2016

OFO News

NEWSLETTER OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS



Red-necked Grebe family at Bronte Harbour, 2013.
Photo by Ann Brokelman

IN THIS ISSUE

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The Nest Best Thing
Observing Breeding Birds

By Lynne Freeman

Every birder loves migration — the anticipation, the thrill of the chase and seeing birds that you may not see again for another year. For many of us, summer is the doldrums of the birding year. But think again...

OBSERVING BREEDING BIRDS requires patience, skill, stealth and luck just as much as birding during migration.

Observing breeding birds is challenging and will exponentially increase your understanding of the birds around you. You'll be rewarded with better observation skills and the pleasure of discovering a new way of enjoying birds. Over time, you'll be able to see how habitat changes affect the birds who breed in your area. Plus you'll be ready when the next Ontario breeding bird atlas project begins.

Provincial nest records schemes have collected nest records in Canada since the 1950s "but have added records that date back to the late 1800s."

Nest records are used to understand population trends, habitat changes and conservation challenges. Recently Project NestWatch, a North American wide citizen science initiative has unified the provincial nest records schemes, including the Ontario Nest Records Scheme (see sidebar). In Canada, Project NestWatch is managed by Bird Studies Canada.

A Brown Cowbird nestling in a Yellow Warbler nest. The baby cowbird has crowded out the warbler young and the adult warbler continues to feed it.

Yellow Warblers have been known to recognize the cowbird egg as different. Subsequently they occasionally rebuild their nests on top of the existing eggs and lay a new clutch.

Photos by Saul Bocian

Finding breeding birds

In Ontario, the breeding season runs from around February for owls and raptors and finishes as late as September for birds which nest more than once. However, most species nest between April and early July with notable late nesters Cedar Waxwings and American Goldfinch completing their breeding cycle near the end of August.

Each species' nesting habits are unique and the type and placement of nests are genetically determined. It is helpful to get to know the different types of nests and the preferences of each species. For example, did you know that Song Sparrows usually build their nest on the ground, Wood Ducks nest in trees, robins' nests usually have grasses and twigs hanging from the bottom and catbirds often weave strips of plastic into their nests?

Nests are usually well hidden. It is easiest to find nests early in the season while birds are carrying nesting material and foliage is not completely leafed out. If you are patient, birds will lead you to their nests by their behavior. If you see a bird carrying nesting material or food, slow down and watch the bird carefully. Back away if the bird appears to be disturbed by your presence. Birds rarely approach a nest directly and will perch and look out for predators several times before stealthily flying or hopping to the nest.

You can also use your ears to locate nests. Many birds call softly when approaching a nest to alert its mate or young to its return. Some adult birds like Warbling Vireo sometimes sing while on the nest and young such as Baltimore Orioles are noisy when being fed.

Pay special attention to the sidebar "Preventing Harm to Breeding Birds". It cannot be stated strongly enough that you should minimize disturbance to nests, incubating birds and nestlings. Ensuring the breeding success of the bird is far more important than collecting data.

Congratulations! You've found a nest. Now what?

Once you have found a nest, jot down your observations on the Project NestWatch form or in a notebook. Make note of the date and time, the species and the UTM or latitude and longitude of the nest using a GPS, Google Maps or a smart phone app. If you don't know the exact location make note of the postal code. You will find relocating nests surprisingly difficult unless you make a note of its exact location.

Observe the habitat and the placement of the nest, the stage of nest building and what the male and female birds are doing, e.g. building the nest, incubating eggs or carrying food to young. Note whether or not there are eggs, live or dead young and the presence of cowbird eggs or nestlings. Also watch for recently fledged young who often will perch near the nest for a few days where they are fed by their parents.

Monitoring the nest

Keep track of all of the nests you find. Make an effort to visit each nest every three to- four days to monitor its progress until you can confirm its success or failure. Nesting sites of rare birds, once found, can often be viewed and checked from a safe distance, once a week, to determine success or failure. (This includes "Species at Risk" in the categories Endangered, Threatened or Special Concern).

Successful nests are those where young have fledged. The main indicator of a successful nest is an adult carrying food to young. Unsuccessful nests are those where young did not fledge. Often there are clues to why nesting was not successful such as damaged, dislodged or abandoned nests. Keep track of all of these observations to record on Project NestWatch.

Recording your observations

Record all of your observations online in the Project NestWatch database. Before submitting your data you need to sign up for your free Project NestWatch ID at: http://www.birdscanada.org/dataentry/nw_register.jsp? lang= EN. Once you are registered, enter the data for each nest you found and subsequent observations throughout the season.

Left: Great Blue Heron nest.
Below: American Redstart nest.
Photos by Saul Bocian

Below left: Red-winged Blackbird fledgling with adult.
Photo by Ann Brokelman

Preventing Harm to Breeding Birds

It is vitally important to ensure that your actions do not endanger the birds you are observing. Experts have differing opinions on whether collecting breeding bird data is harmful. It is wise to err on the side of caution and follow the Project NestWatch Nest Monitoring Code of Conduct.

Searching for nests

1. Be careful of your movements
2. Be aware of potential predators
3. Be observant of bird behaviour

Monitoring nests

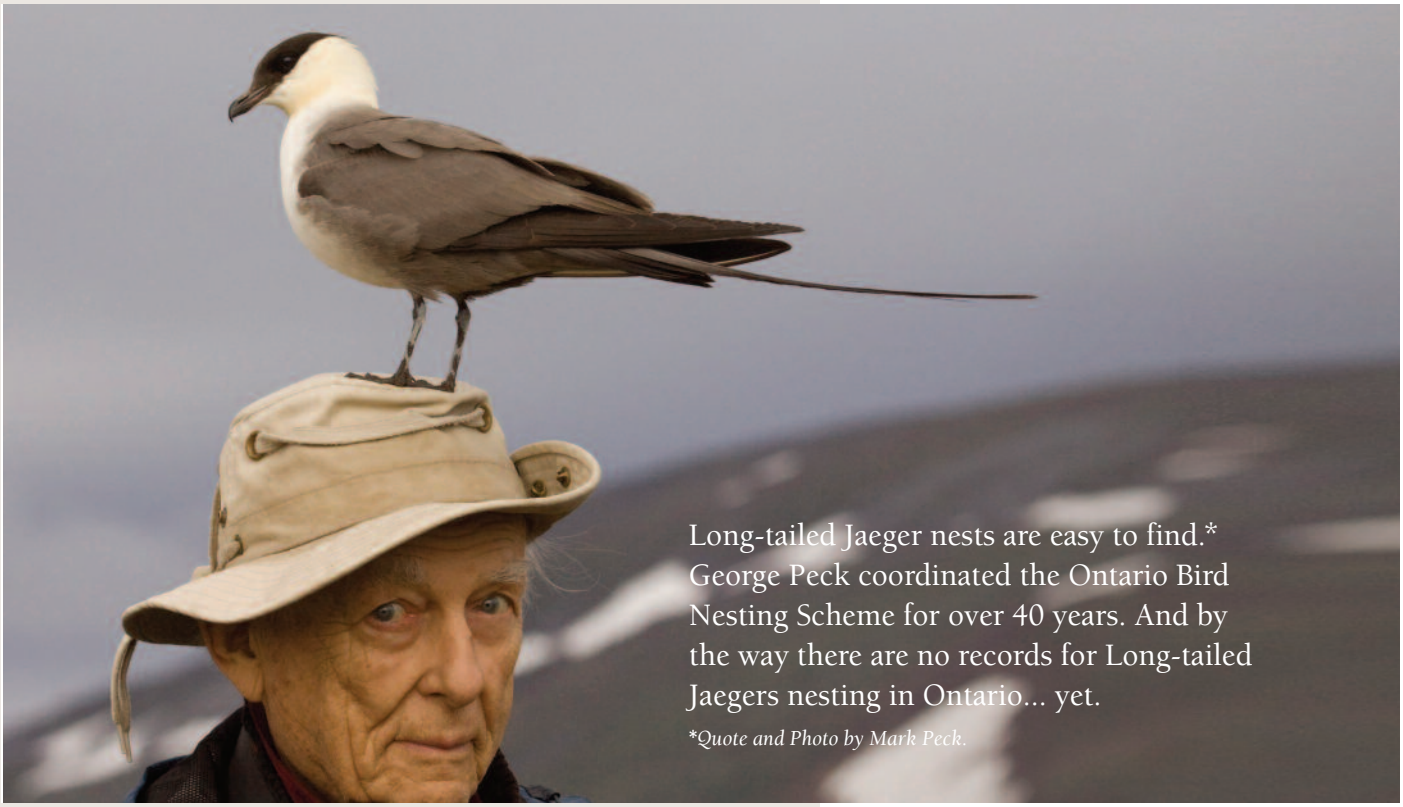
1. Choose an appropriate time to visit
2. Watch for predators
3. Observe from a distance first
4. Minimize the length of your visit
5. Minimize disturbance at the nest site
6. Do not leave a dead-end trail
7. Do not handle eggs or young
8. Respect private land

Keep in mind

Do not publicize new nest locations for Species at Risk on Ontbirds, eBird, Facebook or by any other means.

If you're uncertain about whether you're causing disturbance to a nest, please err on the side of caution. Do not collect data at the expense of the birds.

For more information on monitoring breeding birds safely go to: http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pnw/index.jsp?targetpg=nwcode



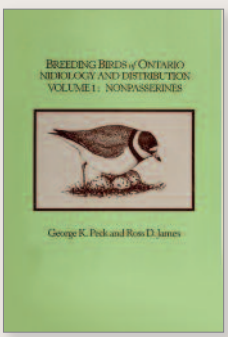
Long-tailed Jaeger nests are easy to find.* George Peck coordinated the Ontario Bird Nesting Scheme for over 40 years. And by the way there are no records for Long-tailed Jaegers nesting in Ontario... yet.

**Quote and Photo by Mark Peck.*

The Ontario Nest Records Scheme

Begun in 1956 by George Francis and James Woodford, the Ontario Nest Records Scheme (ONRS) was based at the Royal Ontario Museum and later became a joint project with Bird Studies Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Over the years hundreds of volunteers submitted thousands of nest record cards. Historical records, published and unpublished accounts were also transcribed and by 2005, according to its 37th report an incredible 4,500,000 Ontario nest records had been entered into the database and over 130,000 nest records cards had been received.



The nesting records were summarized into two books written by George Peck and Ross D. James and published by the ROM: *Breeding Birds of Ontario: Nidiology and Distribution, Volume 1: Nonpasserines*(1983) and *Volume 2: Passerines* (1987). Revisions to the books, published in *Ontario Birds*, are available at http://www.birdsontario.org/onrs/nidiology.html.

Sixty years of nest records (and counting) provide an unmatched record of the status of birds in Ontario and population changes over the years. Innumerable field naturalists and professional ornithologists have contributed to the scheme but for many of us, the ONRS is synonymous with George Peck who coordinated the ONRS for over 40 years. In 1981, he was named OFO's Distinguished Ornithologist to honour his immense contribution.

All record collection is now done through Project NestWatch. Although the ONRS no longer collects separate records, the spirit of the Ontario Nest Records Scheme lives on and "field data cards" are still available from markp@rom.on.ca

Conclusion

The most thrilling element of breeding bird observation is becoming aware of a whole new area of birding. You'll learn about the most private parts of a bird's life and deepen your knowledge of your local patch. Once you become aware of breeding birds you'll quickly find that you see nests everywhere. It's very rewarding — for you and for science.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Don Johnston, Mark Peck, Emily Rondel, Ian Sturdee and Paul Xamin for their expert commentary and feedback on the article.

References

Project Nest Watch: http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pnw/index.jsp?targetpg =index
Ontario Nest Record Scheme: http://www.birdsontario.org/onrs/onrsmain.html

Right: A Killdeer guards her young.
Photo by Ann Brokelman

Barn Swallow Nesting Project

Barn Swallow numbers are declining and Bird Studies Canada is spearheading a project to collect data on Barn Swallow nesting. Check the site to find out more. http://www.birds canada.org/volunteer/pnw/index. jsp?targetpg=barsmonitor

Barn Swallow nest. *Photo by Sandra and Frank Horvath.*
Adult Barn Swallow feeding young. *Photos by Ann Brokelman.*

Kirtland's Warblers Breeding in Ontario

By Ron Pittaway

KIRTLAND'S WARBLERS ARE DISPERSING from their core breeding range in Michigan where the population is currently more than 4000 birds. They now breed in small numbers in Wisconsin and occasionally in Ontario.

Kirtland's Warblers have been present on Garrison Petawawa (Canadian Forces Base) adjacent Algonquin Park every year since 2006 according to the Canadian Wildlife Service (Aird 2016). Counts are listed below. Richard (2008) documented the first nesting at Petawawa in 2007 where Kirtland's probably nested historically in young stands of Jack Pine. There is no public access to the military base.

Researchers are surveying other areas such as Algoma and Chapleau which have extensive stands of Jack Pine.

2006 – 3 males
2007 – 2 males, 1 female, 2 fledged young
2008 – 3 males, 1 female, 4 fledged young
2009 – 2 males, 2 females, 3 fledged young
2010 – 3 males, 2 females, some fledged young
2011 – 2 males, 1 female, 2 fledged young
2012 – 4 males, 1 female
2013 – 3 males, 1 female
2014 – 1 male
2015 – 2 males

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Kirtland's Warbler at Point Pelee National Park on 9 May 2016. *Photo by Jean Iron.*

Two Common Loons flying with open bills in Toronto on 27 May 2013.
Photo by Garth Riley

Common Loons Flying with Open Bills

By Jean Iron

RECENTLY I BECAME AWARE that Common Loons often fly with their bills open. In late May 2014, at the Whimbrel Watch in Toronto, we observed large numbers of northbound migrating Common Loons and decided to count them. *See Table 1.* We were surprised that every Common Loon we consciously watched was flying with its bill open. On 27 May, we counted 181 Common Loons and all had their bills open. It was then that I realized the significance of our observations.

Wondering why they fly with open bills and how frequent it is, I checked the literature but found very little information. For example, in the Birds of North America Online, a photo shows a breeding-plumaged Common Loon flying with its bill open with no reference in the text to this behaviour. However, a Google internet search produced some positive results, and several birders who watch loons responded to my request for sightings.

Frequency

"Characteristic" is how several websites and books describe loons flying with their bills open. Dave Martin and Linda Wladarski have been counting migrating Common Loons on Lake Erie at Port Stanley for many years. Dave reported: "we see lots, if not most, flying with their beaks open." John Carley also counts Common Loons on northbound migration from his home overlooking the Humber River in Toronto and noticed some flying with open bills.

Ron Tozer has observed Common Loons flying with their bills open on several occasions in Algonquin Park, but it is infrequent. Most sightings were during the breeding season, and are probably mainly adults returning to their home territorial lake after visiting another lake to feed. He rarely sees loons that are obviously migrating.

Behrens and Cox (2013) describe the Common Loon's bill as often held open in flight, particularly on warm days, a distinctive trait that is surprisingly obvious, and a photo depicting one with its bill open is on page 253.

Two Explanations

There are two explanations why Common Loons fly with bills open: 1. to intake more fresh air and 2. to thermoregulate or keep their body temperature stable.

1. Intake more fresh air to power their body in flight

Donald Collins at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina proposes that Common Loons fly with their mouths open to increase intake of air to their lungs in order to power their bodies in flight.

Common Loons are heavy-bodied with many dense bones such as the long bones, whereas most birds have hollow bones (*Hinterland Who's Who;* Michigan Department of Natural Resources). Their wings are short relative to the length and weight of their bodies. In order to lift such a heavy body into the air, loons require a long runway up to 200 metres, preferably heading into the wind. Their wings beat rapidly up to 250 times a minute and their feet patter along the top of the water to gain enough speed for take-off. Once airborne, their strong swift flight reaches 120 km/h during migration (Evers *et al.* 2010). Because they do not soar or glide like other large birds, Common Loons must flap their wings continuously to remain aloft. Heavy bones reduce buoyancy and are a perfect adaptation for diving, but add weight for take-off and flight.

Consider also the demands of take-off and flight on the lungs of Common Loons. Birds have different lung physiology from mammals. "To provide more efficient absorption of oxygen to satisfy the large energy demands for flight, the air passes through birds' lungs in only one direction. In contrast mammals have a "tidal" in-out breathing mechanism — the air exits the lungs through the same bronchial tube through which the air enters." (Collins 2011).

Table1. Dates, numbers, mean temperature and watch time of Common Loons at Colonel Sam Smith Park in Toronto.

Date 2014	No. Common Loons	Mean Temperature	Times
May 22	54	15.6*	5:45 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 23	12	13.7	5:45 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 24	18	17.5*	5:45 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 25	25	19.1*	5:45 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 26	83	20.2	5:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
May 27	181	18.3	5:30 a.m. -12 noon
May 28	26	15.1	5:45 a.m. - 12 noon
May 29	3	13.1	
May 30	5	16.9	

Temperature source: Government of Canada Daily Data Report for Toronto Island Airport. * Indicates Toronto Pearson Airport.

In this way, birds, including Common Loons, always have a continuous supply of fresh air.

2. Thermoregulation

Ken Abraham referred me to Graham Scott, professor of Comparative & Evolutionary Physiology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. "It is possible that Common Loons open their mouths to breath more for gas exchange, just like we do when running, but it could also be useful for getting rid of heat. Birds will pant to rid heat by evaporative cooling when they get hot, and they have to keep their mouths open while doing so in order for all the moist surfaces to be exposed to the rapid flow of air. This wouldn't work while breathing through the nose, because there are extremely effective countercurrent exchangers in the nasal passages that minimize heat and water loss."

Common Loons are often seen on the nest with their bills open. "The open mouth and breathing heavily on the nest is a way for the loon to control body temperature while incubating the eggs, in the same way that a dog or cat will "pant" during warmer temperatures." (Minnesota Bound). On a hot day, Michael Runtz observed a loon flying with an open bill at Presqu'ile Provincial Park, "trying to cool down its flight engine?"

Discussion

Both reasons why loons hold their bills open seem valid depending on the circumstances. Because of the demands of a long strenuous flight migrating Common Loons probably fly with open bills more so than those on breeding territory where they take shorter flights between lakes. Also, they may get hot in spite of cool air temperatures. Regulating body temperature is a physiological challenge for all migratory birds, and their strategies for maintaining body temperature are manifested in various ways.

Behrens and Cox (2013) reported from East Coast seawatches that when Common Loons migrate on warm days they often "pant" with open bills. There is a relationship between warm temperatures and Common Loons flying with their bills open, but do they need to thermoregulate in this way when it is cooler? Most loons we saw leaving Lake Ontario in late May were migrating in cool morning air temperatures, and lake waters were still cold. On 11 August 2014 on James Bay, I observed a Common Loon flying with its bill open and noted that the temperature was about 14°C. In Iceland in early July 2015, I watched a Common Loon flying with its bill open when the temperature was about 12°C.

Summary

After learning about how heavy Common Loons are and the energy demands of flight and migration, and observing them do this in cool temperatures, it is understandable why Common Loons fly with their bills open. Dave Martin (pers. comm.) sums it up well, "for maximum air intake to power their strong flights."

If you too wondered why Common Loons fly with their bills open, I hope my short article has stimulated your interest in this flight strategy. It appears not to be a well-studied aspect of Common Loon flight. Follow-up observations in the fall, on the breeding grounds and wintering grounds relative to the air and water temperatures may give more insights into this behaviour. Please watch for this behaviour and report your results to me. Email: jean.iron@sympatico.ca

Acknowledgements

I thank Don Barnett, Adam Capparelli, Jan Doherty, Bruce Ferry, Kris Ito, Margaret Kelch, Tim McCarthy, Garth Riley, Henrique Pacheco, Ron Pittaway, David Pryor, Wayne Renaud, Howard Shapiro and many others for helping to count Common Loons at the Whimbrel Watch in Toronto. Dave Martin, John Carley, Ken Abraham and Michael Runtz provided more information. Ron Pittaway gave helpful comments. I thank Garth Riley for use of his photo.

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OFO Code of Birding Ethics

Birders can and should lead by example as ambassadors of birding and environmental stewardship

Photo by Jean Iron

Who is the code for?

This Code of Birding Ethics is for all of those who observe or photograph birds. It was adopted in 1994 and updated in 2016. Please follow this code. Distribute it and teach it to others. It is up to you to help promote respect toward wildlife, wildlife habitat, the environment, and other people.

Why is a Code of Ethics necessary?

As the number of birders increases, we must all, no matter what our interest in birds, make every effort to act in a positive and responsible way to protect birds and their habitat. We must also be considerate of other birders and non-birders who may be affected by our activities. Birders can and should lead by example as ambassadors of birding and environmental stewardship.

The welfare of birds comes first

Whatever your interest, from scientific study to sound recording to photography to listing, always consider the impact of your activity on the bird. Respect bird protection laws and abide by them at all times.

Protect habitat

Use trails, pathways and roadsides to avoid trampling vegetation. Do not alter habitat or nesting sites for better viewing or photographic opportunities. Support the protection of important bird habitat.

Keep disturbance of birds to a minimum

Although some birds can tolerate human activity, this varies from species to species and from season to season. Always assume that a bird is sensitive to your presence.

To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming. Migrants may be tired and hungry and should not be kept from resting or feeding.

Do not deliberately flush birds

Limit the use of playbacks or other methods of attracting birds. Never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Endangered, Threatened or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area.

Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites Use flash or artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups and in situations where there are many photographers.

Be cautious about advertising the presence of rare birds

Before advertising the presence of a rare bird, evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area, and proceed only if access can be controlled, disturbance minimized, and permission has been obtained from private landowners. Ask the landowner for a list of do's and don'ts, for example, where people may stand to get a good view and what restrictions there may be on time of day. Also ask which areas are off limit. If you decide to release the news, give precise directions and any restrictions noted by landowners. If you discover the nest of a rare breeding bird, divulge the location only to the proper local or regional conservation authority.

Respect the rights of landowners

Do not enter private property without the owner's explicit permission.

Follow the rules regarding public areas

Be aware of the rules about access to conservation authorities, national and provincial parks, and regional authorities. Follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing use of roads and public areas.

Be considerate of others

Try not to disrupt other birders' activities or flush the birds they may be watching. Be helpful to beginners — they will thank you for it. Many other people enjoy the outdoors; do not interfere with their activities. If you see people obviously disturbing birds or significantly damaging habitat, explain to them the effect of their actions but be courteous, they may not be aware of the effect they are having. Your exemplary behavior will generate goodwill with birders and non-birders alike.

Increase our knowledge about birds

Keep detailed notes of your sightings, enter your sightings on eBird and submit them to relevant authority (e.g. area/regional bird record compiler, or local naturalist club). Submit your reports of review list species to the Secretary, Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC).

Bird responsibly in other countries, provinces or regions

Respect all local codes of ethics or any special rules.

Questions or comments?
Email: info@ofo.ca

In Memoriam
Maris Apse

By Blake A. Mann

MARIS PETERIS APSE was a man who loved life and had a passion for nature and bird watching. He shared that passion and knowledge through the many organizations of which he was a member. Maris led an interesting life which included a great deal of travel.

Maris was born in Latvia on 2 November 1942 to Arvids and Gaida (Avotins) Apse. When he was about two years of age, he and his family were forced off their land and they moved to Germany for a period of time. Later, the family resided in England, and eventually they moved to Canada. Early on, he was an accomplished rugby player, playing for the Eastern Canada Team and the Toronto Wanderers and Nomads. In time, Maris found his calling as a physical education teacher with the Toronto District School Board, a position he held for 30 years. His interest in nature took him on many canoe trips, and in fact at one point, he was the president and an instructor with the Ontario Recreational Canoe Association.

Maris joined the Ontario Field Ornithologists and became actively involved. He was on the board of directors of OFO for many years and took care of OFO Sales. He faithfully attended many of the field trips, selling OFO merchandise out of the back of his van. He was also an enthusiastic leader for several OFO field trips, and was keen on helping participants find new birds.

Maris Apse at the Holiday Beach hawkwatching tower. *Photo by Jean Iron*

In recent years Maris lead three trips for OFO: Rondeau Provincial Park in May, Lake Huron in September, and Grand Bend, Pinery Provincial Park, Kettle Point in October. For many years, Maris participated in the Baillie Birdathon and directed a portion of the money raised towards OFO. In 2001, Maris received an OFO Certificate of Appreciation for completing 10 consecutive years of Baillie Birdathon, raising over $9000 of which $3000 came back to OFO. Again in 2014, Maris received a Certificate of Appreciation for 25 years of fundraising on behalf of OFO. During the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas data-gathering period, Maris took part in several canoe trips or excursions in the north to document the breeding birds.

After retirement, Maris and his wife moved to Grand Bend to start a new chapter in their lives. Maris Apse died unexpectedly but peacefully 8 March 2016 leaving his wife Penelope ("Penny") and two daughters, Amber (husband Darrel Houlahan) and Emily.

President's Message

During the summer some birders switch to golf but I urge you to keep birding

SPRING MIGRATION IS MOSTLY DONE and birds will be on breeding territory. During the summer some birders switch to golf but I urge you to keep birding and to explore the fascinating world of breeding birds. You will get to know your local patch like never before and by entering your observations in Project NestWatch you'll be contributing to the ongoing efforts to conserve birds and their habitat.

We recently updated our Code of Ethics which outlines responsible behavior for all birders no matter what their activity – birding with binoculars, a camera or a notebook. It is published on our website at http://www.ofo.ca/site/ page/view/aboutus.ethics and included in this newsletter. I hope we all agree that the welfare of birds is paramount and that our actions should not harm birds or habitat. There is much discussion on the amount of harm caused by activities like baiting owls or crowding a rare bird. Our approach is to err on the side of caution. We welcome your feedback.

Looking forward to seeing you at our Annual Convention, 23 – 25 September in Kingston.

Good Birding,

Lynne Freeman, OFO President

president@ofo.ca

Spring Plovers Abound in the Province's Southwest

By Christian Friis

Alternate plumage Black-bellied Plovers.
Photo by Mark Peck

WHEN I STARTED WORKING for the Canadian Wildlife Service with a focus on shorebirds, I sent out an email to "shorebirdy types" looking for their help. I wanted to expand a program I had inherited, the Ontario Shorebird Survey (OSS), which surveys shorebird stop-over sites in Ontario during spring and fall migration. Shortly after, a fellow named Dave Martin contacted me and we spoke. He was frank, and in so many words asked what I was doing about Black-bellied Plovers. Did I know that in the order of 16,000 individual plovers had been recorded in a single day in spring in southwestern Ontario? I was embarrassed to say that I did not. We spoke on a number of occasions after this, and I delighted in getting his insight. The more I thought about migrant shorebird use of agricultural fields in southwestern Ontario as an important stopover area, the more it struck me that Mr. Martin was right: I should be doing something. So I did. In the spring of 2010, I ran some pilot work to see what kind of effort would be needed to survey the area between Rondeau, Point Pelee and Lake St. Clair (about 1,200 km^2 in total — see map of study area). Though not outrageous, the effort was significant and would require a coordinated team of people to do the job well.

> We found a total of 17 shorebird species uses the area in spring

At the time I was running OSS sites along the Great Lakes between Pelee and Rondeau, so was in the area and would regularly encounter flocks of plovers along highway 3 east of Wheatley and west of Rondeau. Working with my colleague Ross Wood over the winter of 2013, we dug into the numbers a little more. Based on eBird records, Ontario stood out as the jurisdiction with the highest single-day count at any one site. Looking at the timing of movements through eastern North America, peaks in New Jersey were followed by peaks in Ontario, usually a week or so later.

In 2014 I was able to get support to conduct the plover work in earnest. Every 10 days the study area would be surveyed from the roadside, species identified by habitat, and two one-day "blitzes" of the entire study area were conducted (15 and 22 May) to coincide with peak movements of plovers through the province. We based

the timing of these on eBird reports in New Jersey. With this, we set out to confirm what Mr. Martin had told me: significant numbers of plovers stopover in southwestern Ontario. What we wanted to learn was where were the concentrations, if any and what kinds of habitat were they using. Moreover, little is known about the importance of inland habitats to shorebird in eastern North America and this work could help on that front.

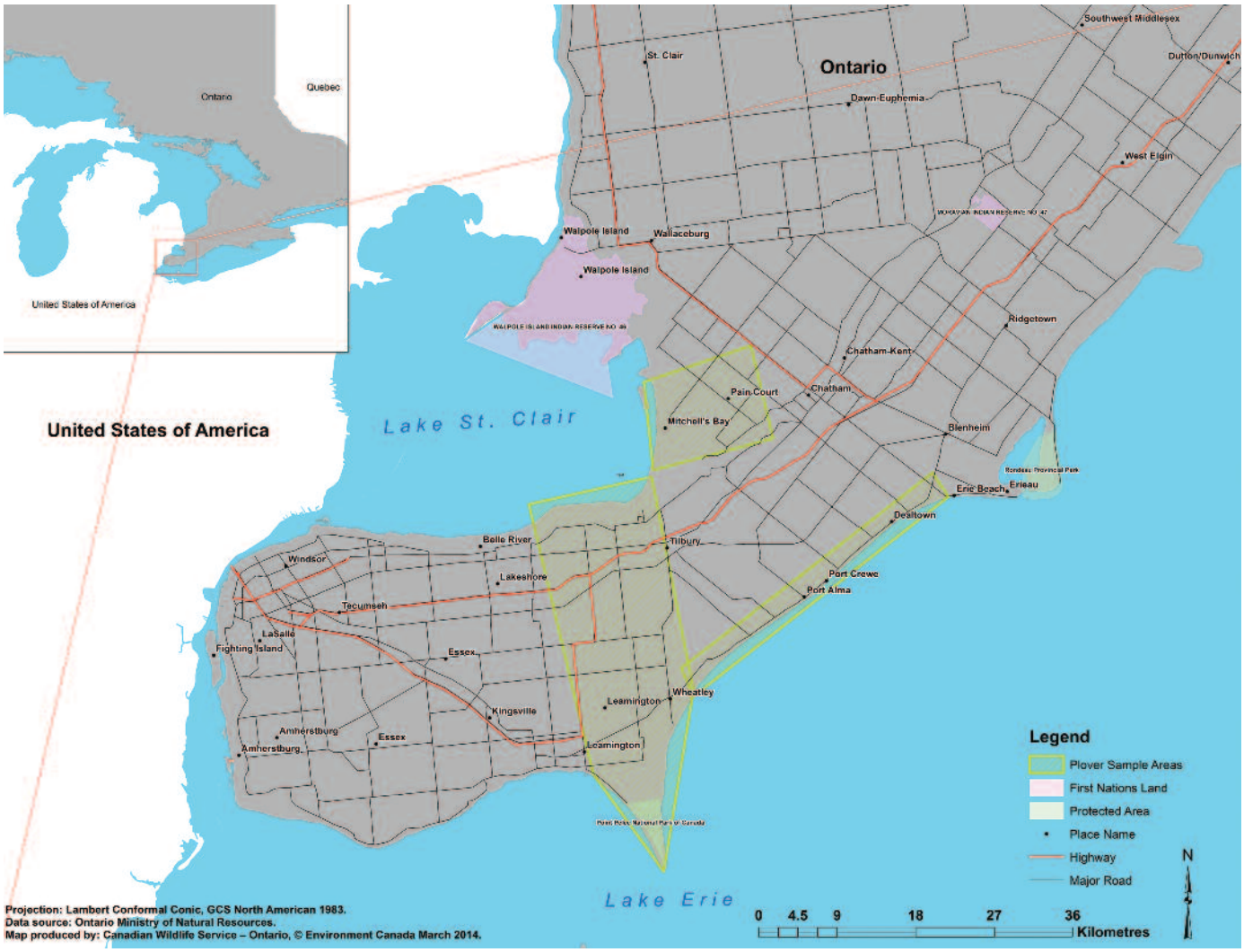
We found a total of 17 shorebird species uses the area in spring. The second blitz in May recorded a count of more than 11,000 Black-bellied Plovers within the study area. This represents among the highest recorded density of the species in North America (3.2 to 9.9 birds/ha). In addition to Black-bellies, one-day counts of Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitcher, and Ruddy Turnstone were significant. These results suggest that the area is a significant stopover for shorebirds, within a Site of Regional Importance under Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network selection criteria.

Black-bellied Plover molting into alternate plumage.
Photo by Mark Peck

We documented 28 habitat types used by shorebirds within the study area. The most frequently used were harvested soybean fields and flooded soybean fields. Further study is needed to determine the habitat features that are important to migrant shorebirds and to understand interannual variation in areas of concentration, to aid conservation of these species in this heavily human-influenced landscape.

If you are interested in participating in shorebird surveys, or want to know more about shorebirds, please contact me at christian.friis@canada.ca.

Study area for 2014 shorebird surveys, with an emphasis on Black-bellied Plovers.



Ontario hits One Million eBird Checklists

By Mike Burrell

The popularity of eBird Canada (www.ebird.ca) in Ontario continues to grow and on 25 March 2016 Allen Woodliffe submitted the one millionth eBird checklist for Ontario.

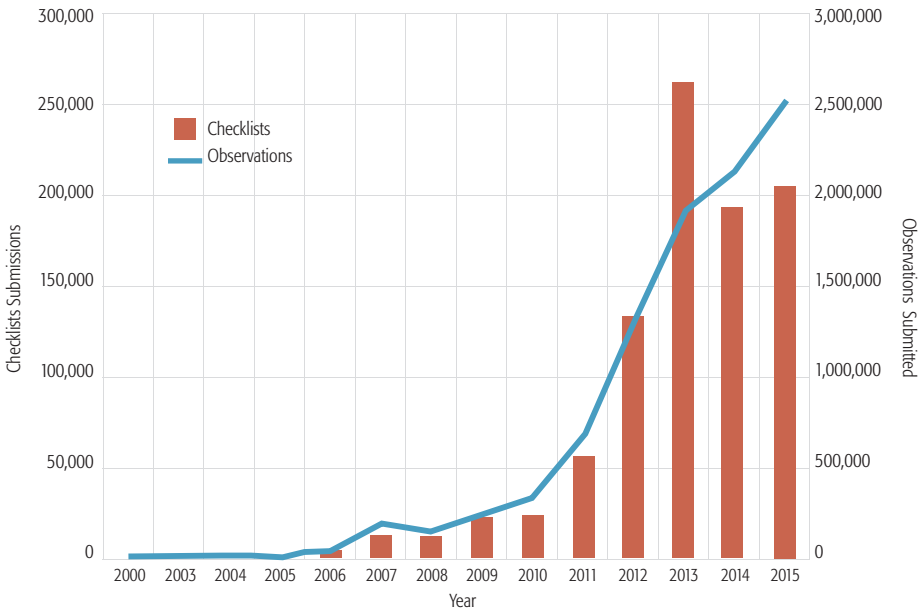
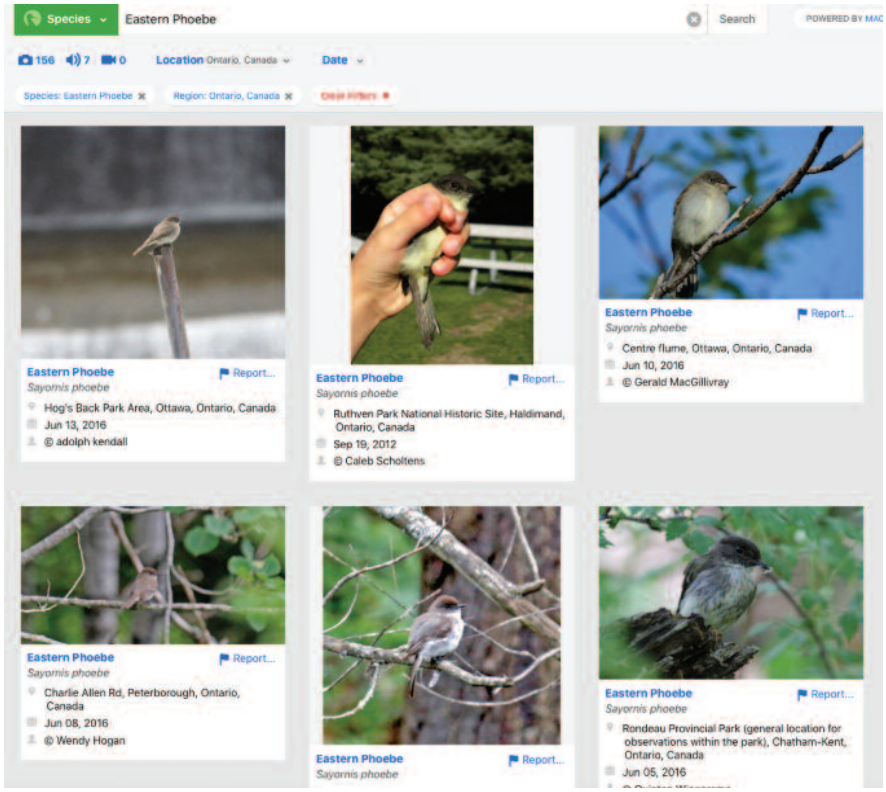


Figure 1: Checklists and observations submitted to eBird for Ontario by year from 2002 to 2015.



CHECK OUT THE GROWTH IN EBIRD checklists and observations (each species report on a checklist equals one observation. See Figure 1). Also incredible, those million checklists were submitted by 14,877 different eBird users. That's especially impressive when you consider that the second Ontario breeding bird atlas had contributions from only 3,417 different people.

eBird 'how to' articles on OFO website

There are now a series of "how-to" articles to help you get started and learn some tricks when using eBird. These are posted on the OFO website and can be found under the "Using eBird" menu on the home page.

Media Search tool

To build upon the previous item, you can now search eBird/Macaulay library for digital media. This is an incredibly useful tool for studying geographic or annual variations in bird plumages and in general for learning bird identification. Check out Figure 2 to see how this new tool looks.

Upload photos and audio directly to eBird checklists

In fall of 2015, eBird partnered with the Macaulay Library to add the ability to directly upload and archive photos and audio. This has quickly become an invaluable tool for sharing and storing digital media related to birds. As of March 2016, over 500,000 photos had already been uploaded.

Mobile app updated for Android and iPhone

There is an all new, free eBird app for Android and iPhone users. The app is designed to streamline entering checklists directly from the field.

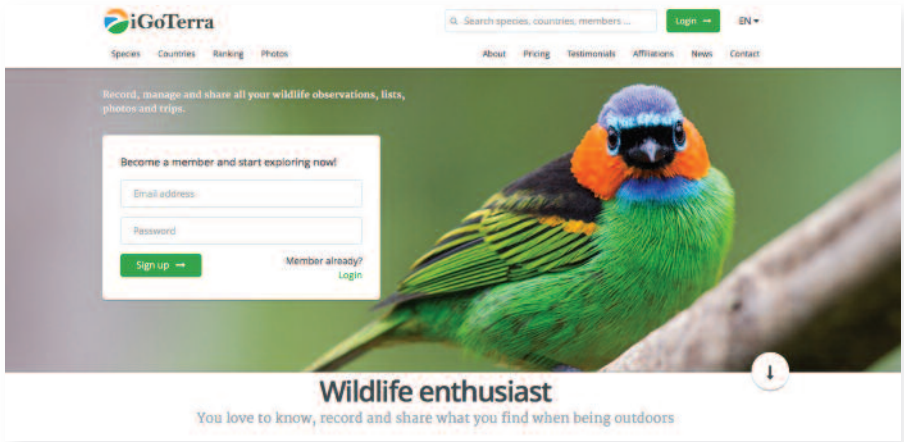
Coming soon: photographed birds lists

With the addition of the Macaulay Library partnership, eBird will be able to offer several new tools which will be of interest to birders and bird photographers. One of the most exciting will be the ability to explore your life/year/month lists related to birds photographed or otherwise documented. Look for this feature soon.

Figure 2: The new explore media tool, showing Eastern Phoebe photos from Ontario. You can filter the results by species, date, and location.

iGoTerra.com
Your Records on the Web

By John Earle Black



FOR YEARS, I USED A BIRDING software called AviSys to keep track of my bird sightings. On learning it would no longer be supported, I searched out alternatives and found iGoTerra, a site that allows you to record, manage, and share your sightings.

iGoTerra is not a substitute for ebird, a web site which I use for entering Ontario sightings. I use iGoTerra to keep track of birds seen (and not seen) in the world. With IOC and Clements checklists for over 200 countries iGoTerra is ideal for this purpose.

Transferring records from eBird, AviSys, or BirdBase to iGoTerra is simple. If you have any problems doing this, the managers of the site are extremely helpful.

Once you have entered your records, you can add new records by using checklists. Many of the subspecies are listed. Photographs of birds are often available when you bring up the checklist.

You can also compare and share your lists with other users of iGoTerra by marking your checklists as public. You can even print out a list of families or genera that you have not seen and where you can find them.

iGoTerra is much more than a site for bird records. You can add records of butterflies, plants, fungi, and other taxa. You can then compare and share all your lists, even your list of "all taxa". At the time of writing this article, one iGoTerra member had seen 12,128 species of all taxa.

There are other site features I have not explored. An integrated set of tools for wildlife tour businesses will help to plan and administer tours. iGoTerra is also interested in assisting the set up of citizen science projects.

iGoTerra is very much a work in progress. Photographs are needed for some species. Lists of some taxa in some countries are incomplete. There is no country checklist administrator for Canada at this time, and very few Canadians are presently on the site. All these factors make the site one to watch over the next few years.

All my bird records are now on iGoTerra, and I am very satisfied with the results. I strongly recommend you sign in to iGoTerra and have a look at its many features.

OFO Gull Weekend on the Niagara River

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

**Note Date Change*

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.ofo.ca so that we know how many will attend. No charge for this event.

Sabine's Gull. *Photo by Jim Pawlicki.*

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.

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

Book Reviews

Bird Families of the World. 2015. David W. Winkler, Shawn M. Billerman and Irby J. Lovette. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. E-mail: lynx@hbw.com. Hardcover 599 pages. $97.00 USD (ISBN 978-84-941892-0-3)

LYNX HAS TEAMED UP WITH the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to produce this new book that describes all the families of birds that occur globally. For some, seeing all the world's bird families is a passion. For others, such as myself, learning more about the characteristics of these families and how they relate taxonomically to other families is of primary interest. Either way, this book satisfies the need.

In keeping with what I now expect of Lynx, the paper and binding quality are excellent, the layout eye-pleasing and the content superb. The inside covers present a quick reference to the families and where in the book one might look for more information. The introduction is almost 20 pages long and leads the reader through myriad facts on topics ranging from exploring the diversity of birds, bird classification, taxonomic ranking, and faunal regions and endemism.

The balance of the book simply deals with the families — 243 to be exact. The structure of the accounts is simple, the families are divided based on the order to which they belong. In the introduction of each order, relevant details are offered and interesting information about evolving taxonomy or other issues are presented. Within each order, the characteristics of each family are detailed. Each account offers information on genera, habitat, food preferences, breeding, conservation and relationships with other families. For example, under the Struthionidae, the ostriches are compared to rheas, tinamous, emus, cassowaries, and kiwis. A very readable range map is included as is information on how many genera and species are represented within the family. A sample spread shows the detail and the scope of the information. One can readily see that the layout is excellent and is enhanced by high-quality graphics and photos.

Dealing with larger families (e.g. Procellariidae — 16 genera and 93 species) is challenging, but the authors seem to clearly represent the features of the family. They have added in some cases paintings of a representative of each genus so better reflect the characteristics and diversity, rather than trying to insert pages of text to accomplish the same goal. Never one to skimp, when dealing with the hummingbird complex (e.g. 363 species in 104 genera), the authors dedicate seven and a half pages of plates to demonstrate the diversity within the family.

As one works through the book, one sees things that surprise and amuse. Although I do a lot of reading, I wasn't aware that the buttonquails are now deemed to be in the same sub-order as terns, gulls and puffins. This seems bizarre as the former seems more like quails than terns. Understanding why is certainly enlightening. The genesis of this relationship lies in recent molecular phylogenic work that has shown the relationship to be highly supportable.

So bottom line — is this book for you? Well, if you are student of behaviour or want to better understand the families and how they inter-relate or you simply like to read very interesting books, then yes. I know I will refer back to this book many times in the years to come as will you if you choose to buy it.

Geoffrey Carpentier
www.avocetnatureservices.com

Photo Quiz

By Jon Ruddy

Photo by Glenn T. Adams

IT'S EARLY IN THE MORNING, the sun is shining, the birds are singing and you've just arrived at your favourite spot along your favourite nature trail. You set your thermos down on the ground and pull out your smart phone to quickly double check the latest eBird Alerts for the area. After a few thumb scrolls, you hear a chip note you don't recognize and glance up to find yourself face-to-face with a small songbird foraging in the thicket only five metres away. You carefully grasp your binoculars, raise them, and glass the bird. Within a few seconds, your hands start to shake and you're breathing out of your mouth. You realize that you must be on a good one because the ID isn't coming to you! You manage to take a few photos of the bird before it begins to make its way deeper into cover.

Your first overall impression of the bird is that it is small and portly in build and has a small but stout bill. It is relatively colourful and appears to be completely at home gleaning small insects from the foliage. You note a distinctive shade of colour to its upperparts, rather aquamarine. The underparts have a greenish-yellow blush and the sides of its breast bear broad, indistinct streaks. You notice a conspicuous arching supercilium, which expands and flares near the bird's nuchal (i.e. nape) region. With these collective observations in mind you deduce that your mystery bird is either a species of wood warbler or a vireo.

Though you noted that the bird has a rather stout bill, suggestive of a species of vireo, you recall that vireos can be eliminated as possibilities by examining the tip of the bill; in the vireos, the tip is hooked. On your mystery bird, at least from your current viewing angle, the bill tip does not appear to be hooked.

You're off to a smooth start in the determination of your mystery bird, until you consider Philadelphia Vireo as a possibility. The GISS ("General Impression of Size and Shape") and bill size and shape appear excellent for Philadelphia Vireo. A moment after these initial considerations, however, you observe two features that eliminate Philadelphia Vireo from the list of possibilities: the presence of the broad, indistinct streaking to the sides of the breast and the presence of two white wing bars. OK, back on track!

A revisit of the overall impression of your mystery bird: small, rather portly build; appears neckless from your viewing angle; has a stout bill lacking a hooked tip; quite a deep, 'pot' belly; proportionately long wings; and a noticeably short tail. So, you've managed to eliminate vireos and are left with wood warblers as possibilities.

Using your field guide, you begin your search for the identity of your mystery warbler. To simplify your search, you decide on an apples-to-apples comparison of your bird versus options in your field guide in the particular pose in which you photographed the bird. A few seconds of leafing later, you decide that there's a quicker method of elimination (actually, there's going to have to be one: you're getting remorselessly attacked by mosquitos).

First, you decide to eliminate the warblers that have extensive yellow to the underside: Prothonotary, Blue-winged, Nashville, Kentucky, Mourning, MacGillivray's, Magnolia, Hooded, Kirtland's, Yellow, Prairie, Wilson's, Canada and male Pine. Next you decide to snip the ones with a heavily-streaked underside: Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-and-white Warbler and Cape May.

The next bulk elimination is for those that do not have the two white wing bars present on your mystery warbler: Swainson's, Orange-crowned, Tennessee, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Black-throated Blue, Palm, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

Your mystery warbler has a soft, low-contrast facial expression. With this in mind, in addition to that gently arching and flared supercilium, you study the 'face' of your remaining list of possibilities and eliminate the warblers with high-contrast facial patterns: Golden-winged, Black-throated Gray, Black-throated Green, Townsend's, Golden-cheeked, Chestnut-sided, Grace's, Yellow-throated and males of Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Bay-breasted and Yellow-rumped. You decide to eliminate Hermit Warbler for the opposite reason, a very bland, low contrast face.

With your list of possibilities narrowed significantly, you investigate your remaining options: Northern Parula, Cerulean and females of Bay-breasted, Pine, Yellow-rumped and Blackburnian.

Northern Parula is eliminated as a possibility by the absence of the well-developed white eye-arcs typical of the species and the presence of an arched and flaring supercilium. After examining the bill and throat in detail, your mystery warbler lacks the yellow lower mandible and yellow throat typical of both sexes of Northern Parula.

Male Cerulean is eliminated by the absence of cerulean-blue tones to the upperside and dark breast band to the underside. Female Bay-breasted is eliminated by the presence of the thick streaking to the sides of the breast and the absence of the bay-toned flanks typical of Bay-breasted. Pine Warbler is eliminated by the presence of an arched, flaring pale supercilium. Female Yellow-rumped is also eliminated by the presence of an arched, flaring pale supercilium and also by noting your bird's lack of a contrasting white throat and dark-streaked breast sides. Female Blackburnian is eliminated by the absence of a light, yellow-orange supercilium and throat, collectively enclosing a contrasting dark auricular wedge, and by the absence of blackish 'peppering' throughout the lateral crown stripes of your mystery warbler.

So there you stand on the trail, with all possible warblers eliminated as the mosquitos buzz right next to your ear and voraciously nip away at your exposed skin. As you begin to backtrack through your list of possibilities, you realize you forgot to eliminate both the male and female of one species in particular: Cerulean Warbler.

The males have azure blue upperparts and have a dark breast band as we've already established, but the females have a much more subtle expression and you note that the beautiful aquamarine coloration to the female Cerulean's upperparts in your field guide corresponds with that of your mystery warbler. From the combined observations of your bird's size, shape and plumage detail, you deduce that it must be a **female Cerulean Warbler**. This female Cerulean Warbler was photographed at Firehouse Woods in Greece, New York by *Glenn T. Adams* on 11 May 2015.

The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Project

By Garth Riley

IN THE ARTICLE "The Nest Best Thing – Observing Breeding Birds", Lynne Freeman refers to the next Ontario breeding bird atlas project. Those OFO members who are relatively new to birding, having only started say within the last ten years, may not be familiar with this project.

The intent of the atlas project is to get a more complete understanding of the distribution of breeding birds in Ontario. The data collected to date have proved invaluable for understanding which bird species are at risk, how populations of our breeding birds vary over time, and how developmental changes to our lands are impacting a species' success or failure.

The first Ontario breeding bird atlas project started in 1981 and was completed in 1985, the second project started in 2001 and was completed in 2005, and next project is scheduled for the five year period 2021 – 2025.

The project and the resulting publications *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* 1981 – 1985 and 2001 – 2015 were the result of a partnership among Bird Studies Canada, the Ontario Field Ornithologists, Environment Canada, Ontario Nature and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

For more information about the Ontario breeding bird atlas project see: http://www.birdsontario.org/atlas

OFO Ontario Field Ornithologists

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Publications Mail Agreement Number 40046348
ISSN 1200-1589 © *OFO News* 2016

Printed by Paragon DPI, Toronto