



OFO News

NEWSLETTER OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS



SANDHILL CRANES of Ontario and Beyond

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By Everett E. Hanna

I vividly remember the first time I saw a Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*). It was the autumn of 2000. I was 14 years old. The setting was a sunny early October morning in a flooded hay field on a farm atop the West Bluff of Gore Bay on Manitoulin Island. It was the family farm of my father's best friend. Of course, at that time I couldn't have ever realized just how appropriate that inaugural sighting would later become. For almost an hour I watched the pair of large, gangly birds dance about as if somehow attempting to convince me of their true elegance — mission accomplished. As anyone who has watched a pair of cranes dance and call can attest, the sight truly is a marvelous one. The air is flooded with almost prehistoric sounds as they use their beaks to pick and throw any nearby object to impress their audience. This elaborate social behaviour display is but one of many fascinating characteristics that belong to the *Grus* genus.

Dancing Sandhill Cranes. Joanne Redwood

It would be almost 10 years before the significance of that first sighting would become particularly poignant. In 2009, as a student of applied fish and wildlife biology specializing in waterfowl biology and having studied and worked with ducks and doves in the prairies of Canada and the US for the prior three years, it was by pure chance that I approached a supervisor who would ultimately provide me with an opportunity to study something with webless feet for a change. I started my MSc degree at Western University in London, ON in August 2009 and officially transferred to the PhD program in July 2011, all the while studying the migratory and foraging habits of, you guessed it, the cranes of Manitoulin Island. During the following five years of study, I learned a lot about the species, and I would love to share some of the information that I have learned over those years.

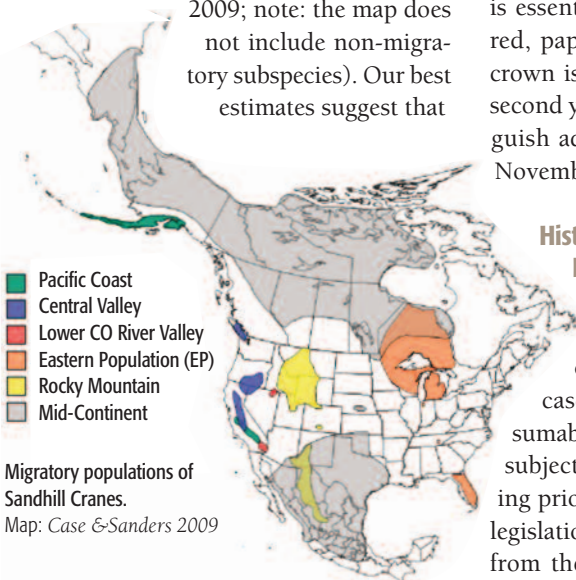


Janice Melendez

North American Crane Subspecies and Populations

In North America, we have six subspecies of Sandhill Crane — three are non-migratory and three are migratory. The non-migratory subspecies are the Florida (*G. c. pratensis*), Mississippi (*G. c. pulla*), and Cuban (*G. c. nesiotis*). The migratory subspecies include the Lesser (*G. c. canadensis*), Canadian (*G. c. rowani*), and Greater (*G. c. tabida*). The three migratory subspecies are further separated into six migratory populations: the Pacific Coast, Central Valley, Lower Colorado River Valley, Rocky Mountain, Mid-Continent (MCP), and Eastern Populations (see the map below from Case & Sanders

2009; note: the map does not include non-migratory subspecies). Our best estimates suggest that



Migratory populations of Sandhill Cranes.
Map: Case & Sanders 2009

Ontario is mainly inhabited by Eastern Population (EP) cranes. The EP is thought to be composed only of the Greater subspecies — the largest of all six. In contrast, the MCP includes all three migratory subspecies.

In the field, the trained eye can distinguish comparatively between male and female within subspecies by stature alone. However, when attempting to compare between subspecies, the task becomes much more challenging — especially in a large, volatile flock setting. Most easy to distinguish are female Lessers from male Greaters — the former appearing almost half the size of the latter in some instances. Beyond stature, the plumage of adult birds is essentially identical. The characteristic red, papillose skin (not feathers) on the crown is developed between the first and second year of life and thus helps to distinguish adults from juveniles up until late November/early December in most cases.

Historical, Current and Future Population Trends

In general, all migratory crane populations suffered similar fates over the last 100 years. As was the case with many abundant and consumable species of wildlife, cranes were subjected to overharvest via market hunting prior to modern wildlife management legislation. In fact, EP cranes were absent from the entire province of Ontario just

within the last century. However, following protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in the US and Canada, populations were able to slowly recover. The first cranes breeding in Ontario following their extirpation were documented by one of my scientific mentor's graduate students in the late 1980s after almost 80 years of absence. However, that research only documented one to two dozen breeding pairs along the North Shore of Lake Huron. Roll the clock ahead 30 years or so and compare those numbers with our contemporary estimates of at least 12,000 – 15,000 during autumn 2009 – 2012 in Ontario alone. Furthermore, current US Fish and Wildlife Service annual fall estimates for the EP indicate at least 85,000 – 100,000 individuals. In population biology terms that increase is nearly exponential — a feat that is particularly impressive in light of the species' relatively low reproductive potential. That is to say, cranes have the lowest fecundity (ability to reproduce) of any game bird in North America. Females lay 1 to 3 eggs per year, with 2 eggs being most common. Fledging rates vary widely but are somewhere around 1.2 colts per pair. Cranes typically do not reach sexual maturity until their third year. Successful reproduction often does not occur until five to seven years of age. These life history characteristics make the species' recent resurgence all the more impressive. Scientists speculate that cranes

repopulated the Ontario side of the Great Lakes from a surviving source population in southwestern Michigan and Wisconsin, but that question remains officially unanswered to date. No reintroduction efforts were undertaken in Ontario.

The Chronology of Autumn Eastern Population Crane Migration

Cranes eat a lot of grain during autumn staging and migration to acquire fat stores to fuel migration. As such, one might simply speculate that cranes time their autumn migration in accordance with availability of grain. In part, that would be a true statement but, as is the case with most things in nature, there appears to be more to the equation than first meets the eye. First and foremost, one must consider where the cranes have travelled from, not simply where they are travelling to. Unfortunately this question is often extremely difficult for scientists to answer. The breeding grounds of a large portion of EP cranes are in remote, forested habitats that are not easily accessible to humans.

Second, the age of the cranes in question dictates the required nutritional regime. Adults have completed growth of long bones and muscle and are therefore able to focus mostly on acquiring carbohydrate-rich foods (e.g., grain) to put on fat. Conversely, juveniles are still growing long bones and building muscles, especially during early autumn, so they must also search and consume protein sources (e.g., invertebrates). Finally, it is simple to say



Everett E. Hanna

adults need grain and juveniles need grain and protein, but, as any experienced parent knows, you eat at the restaurant your kids will eat at, not the one you and your partner might select say for its atmosphere and fine dining. The same is the case with cranes. Long-term parental care extending into autumn migration (and often to the following spring migration) means that adult cranes with offspring are limited by the nutritional requirements of their young. As a result, it is the bachelor and failed breeder demographic that appears to arrive at and depart from the autumn staging grounds prior to family units. These assumptions have been tested using age-ratio data (i.e., the number of juvenile cranes relative to adults at a given time during staging/ migration) at a multitude of key staging areas along various migratory routes .

The Future of the Eastern Population Cranes

For now at least, it seems as though the EP has regained a secure hold on what is thought to be its historic, pre-settlement range and beyond. Historic accounts are somewhat difficult to interpret because early settlers used the terms crane and heron interchangeably, though it would most certainly be rather odd to find a few hundred herons in a cut corn field in late September. In fact, both the states of Tennessee and Kentucky now allow regulated recreational harvest of EP cranes during autumn and early winter. The primary motivation of these hunting seasons is often cited as mitigation for crop depredation, but that argument does not carry far when one compares the allowable harvest of cranes to the size of the population (e.g., 1,200 permits compared to 50,000 – 60,000 cranes in TN). That is to say, even if hunters had 100% success rates (not likely; closer to 10% in 2013), they would be removing but a very small portion of the population.

Cranes are here to stay for the foreseeable future so grab your binoculars, spotting scope, and whatever else you might like and head to the field. In Ontario, there is simply no better place to view cranes during autumn migration than on central eastern Manitoulin Island near the towns of Gore Bay, Spring Bay, and Mindemoya. September is the best month for viewing but good numbers often persist through to Thanksgiving in some years . If you're more inclined to search southern Ontario for cranes, try some of the cut small grain fields along the Bruce Peninsula or farther south in the abundant cut corn fields near Long Point. Peak viewing times on the Bruce are late September and early October whereas mid to late October usually sees the peak in numbers at Long Point.



Everett E. Hanna

Checklists vs. Supplements

What's the difference?

Every summer the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) publishes their annual supplement to the AOU Checklist of North American birds, an event that many birders eagerly look forward to.

By Walter Wehtje



In 2010, the AOU split the Whip-poor-will into Eastern Whip-poor-will and Mexican Whip-poor-will based on differences in vocalizations, DNA, morphology and egg colour. Eastern Whip-poor-will. Photo: Jean Iron

Older birders might hope for the resurrection of previously lumped species (I want my Myrtle Warbler back!), while others await any long-anticipated split that will retroactively increase their life list.

However, the checklist and supplements have a more important function than providing us with entertainment. As the official source on the taxonomy of North American birds, the AOU's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature reviews and publishes the names, taxonomic position and distributional status of all birds found in North America, Central America, the Caribbean and many eastern Pacific islands. If you want to know what bird species have been found in North America and where to find them, this is the most authoritative source possible.

The latest checklist (7th edition) was published in 1998. The result of more than ten years of work by a large group of dedicated ornithologists, this 829-page book remains the most comprehensive source for understanding the taxonomic status and distribution of the more than 2,000 bird species that have been observed north of Colombia. However, much has changed in the study of ornithology in the last 20 years (the 7th edition didn't include data published after 1996). Advances in molecular biology have greatly increased our understanding of the taxonomic relationships between and within avian families, while new sightings continue to increase our knowledge of changes in species distributions. To incorporate new information to the existing checklist, the committee published a supplement to the 7th edition

checklist in 2000, another in 2002 and annually since 2003.

So what does mean for us, the average birder? Well, it confirms that science is a way to make sense of what we see around us, resulting in changes to this understanding when the evidence warrants it. In ornithology, molecular techniques have made huge strides in our understanding of the age of different taxa as well as how they are related with each other. While older North American field guides placed loons first on the taxonomic list, more recent guides (following the AOU checklist) put waterfowl first, followed by gallinaceous birds and then loons and grebes. This is also why longspurs now precede warblers in the latest Sibley guide, rather than following sparrows as they did in the older Peterson guides.

As species expand their ranges, they are also included in field guides as possibilities, rather than wishful thinking. The latest supplement added seven new species to the AOU checklist, including Egyptian Goose and Waved Albatross. The Egyptian Goose is an introduced species now breeding in Florida, while the Waved Albatross is accidental off the Pacific Coast of Panama.

Much of the change that the annual supplement ushers in is due to the efforts of academics using differences in nuclear and mitochondrial DNA to unravel the genetic relationships between different groups of birds. However, the distributional information relies upon sightings from a variety of sources, including many birders. It's important to know that the AOU doesn't use eBird to map species occurrences, especially of rare and vagrant birds. Instead, they rely on published reports, including those published by North American Birds or the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) in *Ontario Birds*.

So, if you want to do your part to increase our understanding of the status and distribution of the birds of North America, write down a description of the next rare bird that you see and send it to the regional editor for North American Birds or the OBRC. While it may take a little time and effort, your contributions add to our understanding of the avifauna of North America.

The 56th American Ornithologists' Union Annual Supplement

By Cindy Cartwright

In the past, the annual supplements to the American Ornithologist Union's Checklist have rarely caused the order of the 64 families on the Ontario list to be rearranged and birders could use outdated field guides for years without much confusion. Most changes then were related to splits and lumps, or scientific and common names. This ended with, as mentioned in "Checklists vs. Supplements" the use of genetics and DNA to establish relationships among families. Now an outdated edition of a field guide can cause havoc

to birders, particularly new ones, trying to find a species among the unfamiliar family orders.

On 1 July 2015 the 56th Supplement to the AOU checklist was published. While there are no changes to the order of families affecting the Ontario checklist with this newly released supplement, there are two changes that have an impact on the list.

The first is a re-ordering of the hawks. Raptor species seem to have been doing a great deal of moving up and down the checklist order and it has happened again

with this supplement. Affecting the Ontario list, Ferruginous Hawk is now placed below Rough-legged Hawk instead of above.

The second change that has an impact on the Ontario checklist is the new genus for the American Tree Sparrow. The scientific name has been changed from *Spizella arborea* to *Spizelloides arborea* to recognize that genetic data has shown this species is related to a group which includes Fox Sparrow and juncos, not the *Spizella* sparrows as previously believed.

This colour-coded chart helps to show the rearrangement of the families in recent years.

2002	2006	2012	2013
Loons (Gaviidae)	Ducks, Geese, and Swans (Anatidae)	Ducks, Geese, and Swans (Anatidae)	Ducks, Geese, and Swans (Anatidae)
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	Partridges, Grouse, Turkeys, and Old World Quail (Phasianidae)	New World Quail (Odontophoridae)	New World Quail (Odontophoridae)
Albatrosses (Diomedidae)	New World Quail (Odontophoridae)	Partridges, Grouse, Turkeys, and Old World Quail (Phasianidae)	Partridges, Grouse, Turkeys, and Old World Quail (Phasianidae)
Shearwaters and Petrels (Procellariidae)	Loons (Gaviidae)	Loons (Gaviidae)	Loons (Gaviidae)
Storm-Petrels (Hydrobatidae)	Grebes (Podicipedidae)	Grebes (Podicipedidae)	Grebes (Podicipedidae)
Frigatebirds (Fregatidae)	Albatrosses (Diomedidae)	Albatrosses (Diomedidae)	Albatrosses (Diomedidae)
Boobies and Gannets (Sulidae)	Shearwaters and Petrels (Procellariidae)	Shearwaters and Petrels (Procellariidae)	Shearwaters and Petrels (Procellariidae)
Pelicans (Pelecanidae)	Storm-Petrels (Hydrobatidae)	Storm-Petrels (Hydrobatidae)	Storm-Petrels (Hydrobatidae)
Darters (Anhingidae)	Frigatebirds (Fregatidae)	Storks (Ciconiidae)	Storks (Ciconiidae)
Cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae)	Boobies and Gannets (Sulidae)	Frigatebirds (Fregatidae)	Frigatebirds (Fregatidae)
Bitterns, Herons, Egrets	Pelicans (Pelecanidae)	Boobies and Gannets (Sulidae)	Boobies and Gannets (Sulidae)
Storks (Ciconiidae)	Darters (Anhingidae)	Cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae)	Cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae)
Ducks, Geese, and Swans (Anatidae)	Cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae)	Darters (Anhingidae)	Darters (Anhingidae)
New World Vultures (Cathartidae)	Bitterns, Herons, and Allies (Ardeidae)	Pelicans (Pelecanidae)	Pelicans (Pelecanidae)
Hawks, Kites, Eagles	Storks (Ciconiidae)	Bitterns, Herons, and Allies (Ardeidae)	Bitterns, Herons, and Allies (Ardeidae)
Caracaras, Falcons	Ibises and Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	Ibises and Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	Ibises and Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)
Partridges, Grouse, Turkeys	New World Vultures (Cathartidae)	New World Vultures (Cathartidae)	New World Vultures (Cathartidae)
New World Quail (Odontophoridae)	Hawks, Kites, Eagles, and Allies (Accipitridae)	Ospreys (Pandionidae)	Ospreys (Pandionidae)

2002	2006	2012	2013
Rails, Gallinules, and Coots (Rallidae)	Caracaras, Falcons	Hawks, Kites, Eagles, and Allies (Accipitridae)	Hawks, Kites, Eagles, and Allies (Accipitridae)
Cranes (Gruidae)	Rails, Gallinules, and Coots (Rallidae)	Rails, Gallinules, and Coots (Rallidae)	Rails, Gallinules, and Coots (Rallidae)
Lapwings and Plovers (Charadriidae)	Cranes (Gruidae)		
Jacanas (Jacanidae)	Lapwings and Plovers (Charadriidae)	Cranes (Gruidae)	Cranes (Gruidae)
Stilts and Avocets (Recurvirostridae)	Stilts and Avocets (Recurvirostridae)	Lapwings and Plovers (Charadriidae)	Stilts and Avocets (Recurvirostridae)
Sandpipers, Phalaropes, and Allies (Scolopacidae)	Sandpipers, Phalaropes, and Allies (Scolopacidae)	Stilts and Avocets (Recurvirostridae)	Lapwings and Plovers (Charadriidae)
Skuas, Gulls, Terns, Skimmers	Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers (Laridae)	Sandpipers, Phalaropes, and Allies (Scolopacidae)	Sandpipers, Phalaropes, and Allies (Scolopacidae)
Auks, Murres, and Puffins (Alcidae)	Skuas and Jaegers (Stercorariidae)	Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers (Laridae)	Skuas and Jaegers (Stercorariidae)
Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae)	Auks, Murres, and Puffins (Alcidae)	Skuas and Jaegers (Stercorariidae)	Auks, Murres, and Puffins (Alcidae)
Cuckoos, Roadrunners, and Anis (Cuculidae)	Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae)	Auks, Murres, and Puffins (Alcidae)	Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers (Laridae)
Owls	Cuckoos, Roadrunners, and Anis (Cuculidae)	Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae)	Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae)
Nightjars	Barn Owls (Tytonidae)	Cuckoos, Roadrunners, and Anis (Cuculidae)	Cuckoos, Roadrunners, and Anis (Cuculidae)
Swifts (Apodidae)	Typical Owls (Strigidae)	Barn Owls (Tytonidae)	Barn Owls (Tytonidae)
Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)	Goatsuckers (Caprimulgidae)	Typical Owls (Strigidae)	Typical Owls (Strigidae)
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	Swifts (Apodidae)	Goatsuckers (Caprimulgidae)	Goatsuckers (Caprimulgidae)
Woodpeckers and Allies (Picidae)	Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)	Swifts (Apodidae)	Swifts (Apodidae)
Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)	Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)	Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)
Shrikes (Laniidae)	Woodpeckers and Allies (Picidae)	Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)
Vireos (Vireonidae)	Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)	Woodpeckers and Allies (Picidae)	Woodpeckers and Allies (Picidae)
Jays, Crows, Magpies	Shrikes (Laniidae)	Caracaras and Falcons (Falconidae)	Caracaras and Falcons (Falconidae)
Larks (Alaudidae)	Vireos (Vireonidae)	Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)	Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)
Swallows (Hirundinidae)	Jays and Crows (Corvidae)	Shrikes (Laniidae)	Shrikes (Laniidae)
Chickadees and Titmice (Paridae)	Larks (Alaudidae)	Vireos (Vireonidae)	Vireos (Vireonidae)
Creepers (Certhiidae)	Swallows (Hirundinidae)	Jays and Crows (Corvidae)	Jays and Crows (Corvidae)
Nuthatches (Sittidae)	Chickadees and Titmice (Paridae)	Larks (Alaudidae)	Larks (Alaudidae)
Wrens (Troglodytidae)	Creepers (Certhiidae)	Swallows (Hirundinidae)	Swallows (Hirundinidae)
Kinglets (Regulidae)	Nuthatches (Sittidae)	Chickadees and Titmice (Paridae)	Chickadees and Titmice (Paridae)
Old World Warblers	Wrens (Troglodytidae)	Nuthatches (Sittidae)	Nuthatches (Sittidae)
Gnatcatchers	Kinglets (Regulidae)	Creepers (Certhiidae)	Creepers (Certhiidae)
Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	Gnatcatchers and Gnatwrens (Poliophtilidae)	Wrens (Troglodytidae)	Wrens (Troglodytidae)
Thrushes (Turdidae)	Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	Gnatcatchers and Gnatwrens (Poliophtilidae)	Gnatcatchers and Gnatwrens (Poliophtilidae)
Mockingbirds and Thrashers (Mimidae)	Thrushes (Turdidae)	Kinglets (Regulidae)	Kinglets (Regulidae)
Starlings (Sturnidae)	Mockingbirds and Thrashers (Mimidae)	Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)

2002	2006	2012	2013
Wagtails and Pipits (Motacillidae)	Starlings (Sturnidae)	Thrushes (Turdidae)	Thrushes (Turdidae)
Waxwings (Bombycillidae)	Accentors (Prunellidae)	Mockingbirds and Thrashers (Mimidae)	Mockingbirds and Thrashers (Mimidae)
Silky-flycatchers (Ptilonotidae)	Wagtails and Pipits (Motacillidae)	Starlings (Sturnidae)	Starlings (Sturnidae)
Wood-Warblers (Parulidae)	Waxwings (Bombycillidae)	Wagtails and Pipits (Motacillidae)	Wagtails and Pipits (Motacillidae)
Tanagers (Thraupidae)	Silky-flycatchers (Ptilonotidae)	Waxwings (Bombycillidae)	Waxwings (Bombycillidae)
Towhees, Sparrows, Longspurs	Wood-Warblers (Parulidae)	Silky-flycatchers (Ptilonotidae)	Silky-flycatchers (Ptilonotidae)
Cardinals, Grosbeaks, Passerina Buntings	Tanagers (Thraupidae)	Longspurs and Snow Buntings (Calcariidae)	Longspurs and Snow Buntings (Calcariidae)
Blackbirds, Orioles	Emberizids (Emberizidae)	Wood-Warblers (Parulidae)	Wood-Warblers (Parulidae)
Finches	Cardinals, Piranga Tanagers and Allies (Cardinalidae)	Tanagers (Thraupidae)	Tanagers (Thraupidae)
Old World Sparrows (Passeridae)	Blackbirds (Icteridae)	Emberizids (Emberizidae)	Emberizids (Emberizidae)
	Fringilline and Cardueline Finches and Allies (Fringillidae)	Cardinals, Piranga Tanagers and Allies (Cardinalidae)	Cardinals, Piranga Tanagers and Allies (Cardinalidae)
	Old World Sparrows (Passeridae)	Blackbirds (Icteridae)	Blackbirds (Icteridae)
		Fringilline and Cardueline Finches and Allies (Fringillidae)	Fringilline and Cardueline Finches and Allies (Fringillidae)
<i>Table compiled by Todd Pepper</i>		Old World Sparrows (Passeridae)	Old World Sparrows (Passeridae)

OFO Thanks You

As a non profit organization, OFO is grateful to all the organizations, companies, businesses and individuals who kindly donated prizes for our 2015 Convention fundraiser. Our sincere and heartfelt thanks to each and everyone of you.

Our donors are as follows:

Art and Janice Haines
 Art by Pelee Girl – Sarah Rupert
 Bird Studies Canada – Jody Allair
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 Swarovski – Clay Taylor
 TSC Stores, Leamington
 Thames Talbot Land Trust – Bernie VanDenBelt
 Two J's Bird Seed
 Viewpointe Estate Winery

American Tree Sparrow
 Photo: Claude King





Birders at the Tip of Point Pelee. Photo by Jean Iron

The OFO Annual Convention at Point Pelee this year (2-4 October) was an outstanding success. Over 245 birders enjoyed great birding, excellent food, entertaining evening presentations and lots of socializing.

By Bob Cermak and Ron Tozer

Important factors in finding birds include identification skills, knowledge of the area, the weather and luck. All of these were in evidence this year as a record-high 184 species were reported. The previous highest species count at an OFO Convention was 178, at Presqu'île in 2012 and at Point Pelee in 2013.

Our expert leaders and participants discovered the following (with number of species in brackets) during the three-day convention: waterfowl (25), grebes (4), birds of prey (15), shorebirds (21), gulls (9), swallows (5), warblers (21) and sparrows (10). Noteworthy species included: Cackling Goose (Harrow Lagoons), Eared Grebe (south of Pelee Wings), Golden Eagle (Holiday Beach), Willet (Blenheim Lagoons), Hudsonian Godwit (Mersea Road 2 field pond), Stilt Sandpiper (Mersea Road 2 field pond), Long-billed Dowitcher (Blenheim Lagoons), Red-necked Phalarope (Blenheim Lagoons, Mersea Road 2 field pond), Black-legged Kittiwake (Point Pelee Tip), Sabine's Gull (Point Pelee Tip, Mersea Road 2 field pond),

Laughing Gull (Wheatley Harbour), Lesser Black-backed Gull (Leamington Beach), Black Tern (Kingsville Harbour), Pomarine Jaeger and Parasitic Jaeger (Point Pelee Tip), Hooded Warbler (Two Creeks Conservation Area), and Nelson's Sparrow (Blenheim Lagoons). A complete species list is available on the OFO website (www.ofo.ca).

The high number of species recorded was attributable in part to a couple of factors. The abnormally warm temperatures in September likely encouraged many species to linger later than usual. And the gale force east winds on Friday and Saturday brought many birds to shore and inland to seek shelter and food. A prime example of the latter was the flooded field at the junction of Mersea Roads 21 and 2 due to water from Lake Erie surging over the nearby lake shore. This pond attracted many birds including several Little Gull, Sabine's Gull and Red-necked Phalarope on Saturday, plus Hudsonian Godwit and Stilt Sandpiper on Sunday.

Of course, the strong winds also resulted in the downing of large trees and power lines on the main road in Point Pelee National Park which prevented birders going south of Blue Heron for several hours on Saturday morning.

Unfortunately, three kayak trips in the Pelee Marsh had to be canceled due to the wind, as well. The Tip of Point Pelee was transformed by the storm, with many trees uprooted and foundations of old structures there exposed for the first time in decades.

Field trips were undertaken at Point Pelee National Park and nearby areas, Blenheim Lagoons, Rondeau Provincial Park, Holiday Beach Conservation Area, Two Creeks Conservation Area, Ojibway Nature Centre, Windsor hotspots and Harrow Lagoons. Twenty-five leaders conducted 19 field trips, two youth field trips and three workshops (two nature photography and one drawing birds in the field), and we thank them all for doing such a great job.

The Friday evening Birds and Beers event at the Portuguese Club was much enjoyed by over 160 people. MC Richard Pope provided a very entertaining introduction for Dr. David Bird who spoke to us about Drones and Bird Research. Sarah Rupert (with assistance from Justin Peter) returned again with a fun Bird Quiz in the Jeopardy format that tested our knowledge and memories!

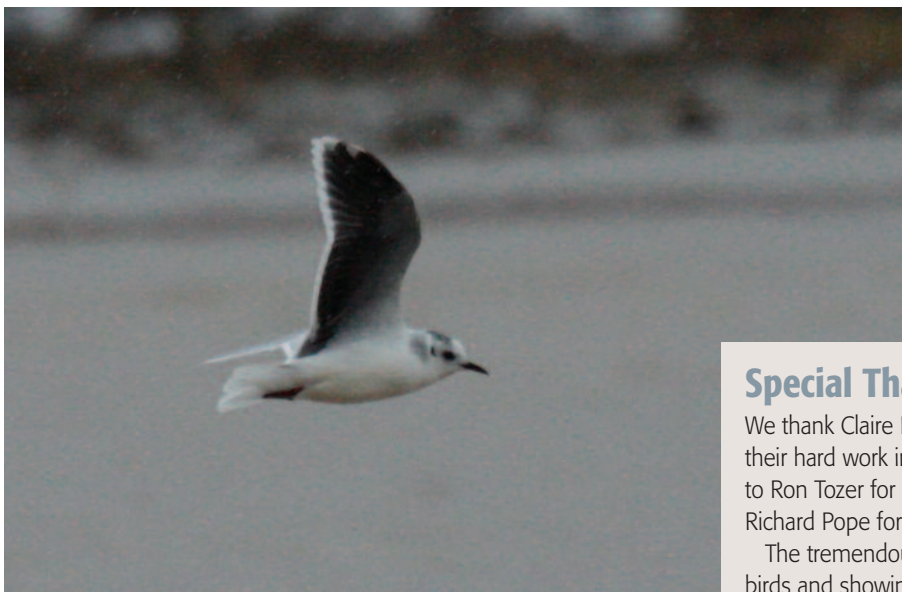
The Saturday evening banquet, displays, vendors and raffle, again at the Portuguese Club, was a great success. The keynote speaker Dr. David Bird gave an

entertaining and informative presentation about "How Birds Do It." Dave Moore presented Chip Weseloh with the Distinguished Ornithologist Award and Ken Burrell presented OFO Certificates of Appreciation to a number of worthy recipients.

OFO sincerely thanks the many donors of raffle prizes and all who purchased tickets and generously contributed over \$1700 to the organization. We appreciated the stalwart efforts of Pat Tozer and Janice Haines in selling the raffle tickets. Special thanks to Claire Nelson for all her hard work making arrangements at the

Portuguese Club, finding donors, organizing the raffle and arranging for the display and vendors tables Friday and Saturday nights.

At the convention the Board provided a questionnaire and asked for members feedback. The Board is delighted that 78 members and three non members did so. Fourteen were attending their first convention. Their reasons for attending the convention (multiple choices were encouraged) were: 73 came to go birding, 42 to learn about new birding locations, 66 to socialize and 52 wanted to improve their birding skills. Sixty-three thought that the variety of hikes and workshops were just about right and seven thought there were too few.



Left: Little Gull north of Hillman Marsh.

Photo by Bruce Di Labio

Below: Sabine's Gull was the star bird of the field trips.

Photo by Jean Iron

Special Thanks

We thank Claire Nelson and Ross Mackintosh (field trips) for all their hard work in organizing the 2015 OFO Convention. Thanks to Ron Tozer for once again being the MC at the Banquet and to Richard Pope for introducing the speaker Friday night.

The tremendous contribution of the many trip leaders in finding birds and showing them to participants was a big part of the convention's success, and we appreciate their effort very much.

By Lynne Freeman





Laughing Gull at Wheatley Harbour. Photos by Bruce Di Labio

There were suggestions on how we could improve our hikes, especially those which involve convoying and many were interested in birding by ear and photographing birds workshops. There were suggestions for other workshops. There were a significant number of suggestions on how we might change or improve the Friday night Birds and Beers program which was attended by over 160 people. Ninety-nine percent indicated that the

Saturday night banquet program and speaker were just right. We asked what future keynote speaker topics would be of interest and 39 favored something academic/scientific while 28 favored a humorous presentation. We asked for and received suggestions for 26 possible keynote speakers.

The Board appreciates and will be considering the feedback that was provided.

President's Message

I am writing this after the OFO Convention and what a great convention it was. Despite the gale force winds, the rain, the fallen trees and power outages we found great birds and enjoyed each other's company.

Thanks go to the many volunteers who made this convention happen — the organizers, the Friends of Point Pelee, Park Superintendent Karen Linauskas and her staff, Mike Malone and Pelee Wings and the amazing trip leaders who share their expertise with so many of us. Next year's convention is 23-25 September in Kingston. Mark it in your calendar now!

OFO's next big event is the Gull Weekend in Niagara Falls, 28-29 November. On Saturday 28 November, Mike Burrell and Jean Iron will be giving a presentation on gulls at the Niagara Falls Public Library from 4:00 – 6:00 pm. Space is limited. Please reserve your spot on the OFO website at www.ofo.ca. On Sunday, Jean Iron and Ron Tozer will lead the annual Gull Field Trip where we may see up to 11 species of gulls.

The fall is a fantastic time to be birding. Most of us will be spending every chance we get in the field watching raptors, shorebirds and songbirds migrate. We can look forward to winter finches, owls, raptors and waterfowl moving in for the winter and hope to see the rarities which fall and winter always bring.

As always, the Board is here to serve the needs of OFO members and Ontario birders. Please send me your ideas and feedback so we can make OFO even better for you.

By Lynne Freeman
OFO President
president@ofoc.ca

**Mark your calendar
now to attend
next year's
OFO Convention
23-25 September 2016
in Kingston**

OFO Certificates of APPRECIATION

Each year, OFO recognizes individuals and organizations for their contribution to the birds and birding community of Ontario. *By Ken Burrell*

Again this year we have some very worthy recipients, but the list could be even longer. Please, whenever you are aware of a member of the public providing access to a rare bird or in some other way assisting birders, send in your nomination through the OFO website or via email to kenneth.gd.burrell@gmail.com.

The recipients of the 2015 awards are:

- **George Arevalo** (Director of Golf) and the **Carruther's Creek Golf and Country Club**, for hosting birders on their property over several days while a Cattle Egret visited in November 2014.
- **Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall**, in Oakville for allowing birders to park in their parking lot, to gain access to Sedgewick Park in the winter of 2014-15.

- **Kathryn and Craig Corcoran**, of Niagara-on-the-Lake for welcoming several hundred birders to their residence to view the Eurasian Tree-Sparrow over a four week period in November-December 2014, .
- **Geoff Carpentier, Margaret Bain, the Region of Durham and CH2M-Hill**. To Margaret Bain and Geoff Carpentier for engaging the Region of Durham and their consultants; and to the Region of Durham and CH2M-Hill for their willingness to incorporate elements into the operation of the Nonquon sewage lagoons that will enhance their value as migrant shorebird habitat.
- **The residents of Arkendo Drive, Oakville**, for hosting several hundred birders viewing the long-staying Painted Bunting in the winter of 2014-15.

- **Sarah Rupert**, for her long-standing effort in summarizing the Ontario section of the Christmas Bird Count.
- **Rita and Ron Christie**, for hosting birders viewing a Blue Grosbeak in April 2014.
- **Lianne, Ken, Ryan, and Ryley Atwood**, for hosting birders viewing the Painted Bunting near Huntsville in April 2014.
- **Vic Rizzo**, for hosting birders viewing the Brambling in North Bay in November 2014.
- **Miranda O'Hara**, for keeping alive a Cape May Warbler at her feeder during the winter of 2014-2015, in Markham.
- **Bill Gilmour**, for going above and beyond, helping with the 2015 OFO Birdathon. Bill scouted locations, helped with the planning and provided his backyard for the weekend to the young birders camping.
- **Bruce Di Labio and Michael Tate**, for providing and helping coordinate ongoing searches for the Little Egret in Ottawa, in June 2015.
- **Michael Williamson**, for coordinating the Iroquois Shoreline Raptor Watch for the past 15 years, while making a huge contribution to the understanding of raptor migration throughout Ontario and the GTA.

Left to right: Sarah Rupert, Ken Burrell, Rita Christie, Michael Tate, Bruce Di Labio, Michael Williamson and Henrique Pacheco on behalf of Bill Gilmour. Photo: Jean Iron



Identifying Dark Buteos

Autumn is here and the annual ritual of raptor migration is about to unfold in the skies over Ontario.

By Matt Mills, Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch

Birders flock to their favourite hawk watching sites beginning in late August and continuing through into December to witness one of nature's most spectacular marvels. The shorelines of the Great Lakes act as natural leading lines and concentrate migrating hawks. With 15 regular species and several rare migrants each fall, this topography affords the keen observer the opportunity to see good numbers of multiple species in a single day.

These good numbers also bring dark morph raptors. Two common migrants occur as dark morphs. The Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) and the Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*).



Red-tailed Hawk,
dark morph.
Jean Iron

Both species are buteos — medium sized birds of prey with relatively long broad wings and broad tails known for soaring flight. These incredibly striking birds are highly sought after and draw 'oohs' and 'aahs' from the crowd when seen at close range and in good light. However, challenging viewing conditions and confusion with other dark birds can allow dark morph birds to slip by undetected. How do we prevent this? What are the rules of thumb? First we must familiarize ourselves with the birds we hope to see.

So what makes a dark morph? A dark morph is a distinct plumage maintained throughout seasonal moults for the duration of a bird's life regardless of age or gender. In contrast with a light morph they exhibit somewhat uniform dark brown, rufous or blackish body feathers and wing linings, and are frequently darker above as well. Variations in colour are sometimes referred to as 'Intermediate morph' but for simplicity, we will refer to them all as dark. Dark Swainson's and Broad-winged Hawks can and do occur but their extreme rarity as well as their absence late in the season, when Red-tails and Rough-legs are passing in good numbers, is enough to exclude them here.

The Red-tailed Hawk is perhaps our most familiar hawk. Its red tail, dark belly band and pale underparts are a common sight over open fields across Ontario. Dark birds are much more prevalent among western subspecies but occur as rare but



Rough-legged Hawk,
dark morph.
Harold Stiver

annual fall migrants in the province. To keep things simple here we will avoid an in depth discussion of subspecies. Dark adults range from rufous to dark brown to black below with dark wing tips, paler flight feathers with a dark trailing edge and a red tail. The dark patagials and belly band are still visible on all save the darkest birds.

Dark Rough-legged Hawks have a more predictable pattern of occurrence. During peak migration several may be seen daily. Adults are gorgeous, often jet black above and below with inky dark wing tips and silvery flight feathers.

With such distinction where is the possible confusion? Wouldn't a dark buteo be obvious? The short answer is often yes, but distant viewing conditions and similar species are all causes for confusion.

When a large dark bird is seen approaching a fall hawk watch we begin with three basic questions:

- 1) Is it a raptor?
- 2) If so, is it a 'big black bird'?
- 3) Or is it a dark buteo?

Is it a raptor?

Most hawk watches are located close to the shorelines of the Great Lakes. These act as leading lines for many other migrants as well as providing habitat for waterbirds. Cormorants, young gulls, herons, cranes and crows are all large dark and commonly encountered in the skies over Ontario

hawk watches. All may occur singly or in groups. Look for extended legs and necks, flight styles, and patterns of light and dark to differentiate these species. In most conditions raptors appear steady and muscular, having a distinct 'presence' in the sky even at great distances. Cormorants, herons and cranes may approximate this steadiness but all exhibit long necks or trailing legs with dark flight feathers. Remember, dark morph buteos have light flight feathers. Gulls and crows will eventually flap, showing a distinct disparity in their power when compared to a buteo.

If it is not a non-raptor species, is it a 'big black bird'?

The four 'big black birds' are potential sources of confusion. The eagles — Golden and Bald, and the Vultures — Turkey and Black may all be confused with dark buteos. Sifting through the hordes of Turkey Vultures for buteos and other big black birds is an important skill to master.

Major clues to differentiate these species include timing, relative size, proportion, flight style, and patterns of light and dark.

Timing may be the least important factor though several distinct peaks occur. Bald Eagles, especially juveniles, are common September migrants while most Golden Eagles pass during the last week of October and first week of November.

Turkey Vulture numbers build gradually through the last week of September before flooding through en masse after October's first cold front. Strong flights of vultures continue until late October and rapidly taper off just as the Golden Eagle flight gains momentum. Black Vultures are very rare migrants through September and October. During October, timing is a non-factor as all species may occur in a single day.

Big black birds are all larger than buteos and when seen together, this comparison is easy to make. Eagles are especially massive. Heavy, long-winged and dark they always appear large. It may be difficult to gauge size on a lone eagle but relative size is the key here — they will dwarf buteos if seen in a mixed kettle.

Each species has a characteristic proportional tell. The headless look of Turkey Vultures or the massive head on a Bald Eagle gives them away. A small headed, long-tailed Golden Eagle with muscular



Turkey Vulture. Janice Melendez



Subadult Bald Eagle. Ann Brokelman

bulges in its wings looks like an oversized buteo.

Flight style is important as both dark buteos, Golden Eagles and Turkey Vultures all fly with a dihedral. Look for steady birds amongst streams of tipsy turvy Turkey Vultures rocking in flight. Eagles have deep, ponderous wing beats but often do not flap at all.

Field marks, especially patterns of light and dark, are crucial to learn in combination with details of proportion. Remember, dark buteos have dark body feathers, light flight feathers and dark wing tips and trailing edges. Black Vultures are all dark with



Golden Eagle. Barry Cherriere

bright white primary patches visible at great distances. Turkey Vultures are black with silvery flight feathers that may look bright over snow or as they catch the light. However, they do not have a dark trailing edge.

The buteo-like Golden Eagle can be told by the all dark flight feathers of adults and the discrete white patches on the wings and tail of young birds. Bald Eagles are the most diverse plumage wise ranging from dark juveniles to patchy white subadults to the familiar white head and tail of adults. Visible at great distances, a dark buteo would never show white on the head or body.



Red-tailed Hawk, dark morph.
Tom Thomas



Rough-legged Hawk, dark morph.
Harold Stiver

Is it a dark buteo?

Once we've jumped through the hoops and settled on buteo there are only two remaining questions? Is it actually a dark bird? And which is it? In low light or overcast conditions many buteos may initially appear dark. Watch for a light breast if the bird wheels in flight. Visible at great distances this is often enough to eliminate dark birds from consideration. Finally, we must decide if it's a Red-tailed or Rough-legged Hawk. Luckily, many of the same clues apply here: timing, relative size, proportion, flight style, and plumage.

Red-tailed Hawks are common to abundant October and early November migrants. Rough-legged Hawks are arctic breeders and generally don't appear in numbers until late October.

Similar in size, the Rough-leg appears longer-winged, longer-tailed and slimmer. Red-tailed Hawks, especially the adults, are compact and stocky.

Both species show a pronounced dihedral but the Rough-leg tends to flatten out its 'hands' in comparison to the shallow uniform 'V' of a soaring Red-tailed Hawk. Flight style is often the biggest clue as Rough-legs appear lanky, though deliberate, when engaged in powered flight — reminiscent of a Northern Harrier with cleaner edges.

Finally, field marks are diagnostic even on distant birds. Adult dark Red-tailed Hawks will show the familiar red tail, though often with dark barring. Look for dark patagial bars and belly bands in browner birds. Dark Rough-legged Hawks will always show dark in the tail. Juveniles have a diffuse dark terminal band while adults will always have one to several bold dark bars across the tail. Often a thick black terminal or subterminal band followed by several thinner dark bands are visible on a whitish tail. Some dark Rough-legs are blacker than night but look for darker, contrasting carpal patches on browner birds.

These species are especially striking over snow so if you miss them during the fall migration bundle up and find them staking out a snowy field this winter!

eBird Canada

the basics for getting started

By Mike Burrell

Here in Canada, eBird is coordinated by Bird Studies Canada. By now you will no doubt have heard about it — the online bird sightings database that over 7000 different people have contributed sightings to in Ontario alone. It does a lot of things: keeps personal lists, stats and records, acts as a repository of information about bird distribution and abundance around the world, and is a powerful data dissemination tool to the public, researchers, and government.

But if you haven't taken the plunge and started keeping your bird records in eBird here is a quick guide to get you started. To learn more, check out the excellent eBird help file.

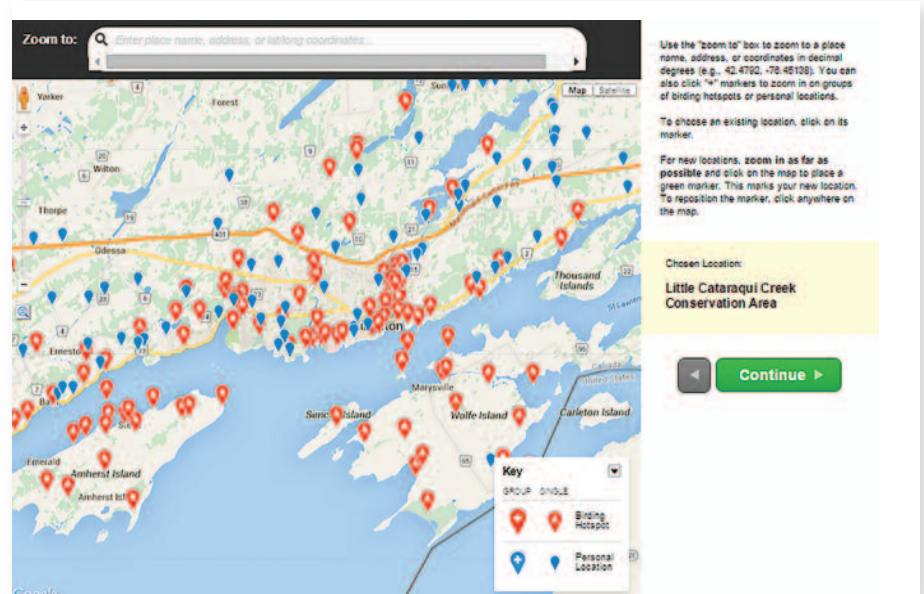
Register for eBird

The first thing you'll have to do is navigate your web browser to eBird Canada (www.ebird.ca). Note that there are many regional eBird portals (e.g. eBird.org, eBird Central America etc.) — it doesn't really matter which one you use as all of the data goes to the same place but using eBird Canada will optimize the experience for you as a Canadian.

If you have already registered for eBird or the Great Backyard Bird Count you can use your existing login information — if you've forgotten it, you can use your email address to recover your credentials. Otherwise, you'll have to register as a new user before moving on. Note that when you register you are given lots of options for privacy — you can change those settings at any time in the future.

Once you are logged in, you'll see five tabs along the top of the screen: Home, Submit, Explore, My eBird, and Help. Each of those takes you to a different part of eBird.

Submitting data to eBird is centered on the idea of a checklist. Each checklist represents a list of birds from a specific location and date. Submitting a checklist is



Step One:: Using the map to choose your location

quick and easy and gets simpler each time you do it. There are three steps to submitting a checklist. The first step to submitting an eBird checklist is to tell eBird where you were. There are a few different ways you can do this:

STEP ONE: Where did you Bird?

My Locations List: If you've submitted a checklist in the past from a location it will appear in the dropdown list of "my locations" — this is the simplest option to use.

Find it on a Map: The next easiest option, and probably the one that gets the most use, is the "Find it on a map" option. This option will take you to a map where you can plot your location. Before you get to the map you'll be asked to at least specify which state or province you were in and then the map will automatically zoom to that area. Shown above is an example where the map has been zoomed in towards the City of Kingston.

As you navigate the map you'll see pushpins that are orange and you might see some that are blue. Orange markers represent "eBird hotspots" — these are locations that are likely to be used by several different birders; they could be city parks, conservation areas, sewage lagoons, etc. Take advantage of the hotspots because someone else has already gone through the trouble of plotting and naming the location. The blue markers are your "personal" locations — locations that you might use (your

yard, roads you regularly drive, etc.) but that are unlikely to have many other people submitting information for. If there is already a marker for the location you want, click it and the name will show up to the right (above the green "continue" button).

If there is no marker yet for your location, zoom in as close as possible and then click the map where the marker should be. A green pushpin will appear and the box to the right (above the green "continue" button) will open up for you to give your location a meaningful name. Once you've plotted a location once it will appear on the map and in your list of "my locations" in the future.

Use Latitude/Longitude: If you know the coordinates of the location you visited you can just enter that directly using this option.

Select an entire city, county, or state: It is possible to submit eBird information at a coarser level than an exact location, though it really makes the information much less valuable. However, this option is often useful for older records that lack the required level of detail to use an exact location. Note that if you are recording a large travelling count (like a whole day driving around Frontenac County) this is a good option to use. Otherwise, it is best to use one of the other options.

STEP TWO: Date and Effort

Once you've told eBird where you were, it's time to give some information about what you were doing.

Observation Date: pick the date of the observation using the dropdown menus. You can currently pick any date from 1 January 1800 to present. You have to specify an exact date.

Observation Type: There are four options to choose from here. Basically you are telling eBird what you were doing when you were out birding. We'll ignore the "other" category for now. The other three are quite straightforward and are your main choices. There is a description of what they mean beside them and if that's not enough there is also a "More info" button that you can click to get a full description. Depending on the protocol you choose you'll be required to enter more or less information. For example, if you choose "Travelling" you'll be required to enter how long and how far you travelled. The most basic option is "Incidental" for which you aren't required to input any further information.

Once you've chosen your observation type a comments box will appear. This is referred to as the "checklist comments." This is a good space to record any notes about the outing such as the route/trails you were on, names of other people in your party, what the occasion was, the weather, or interesting aspects about the birds you saw. By default, the checklist comments remains private but this can be changed in your preferences.

Once you've entered all of your Date and Effort information you can click the green "continue" button to move on to the last step.

Step Three: What did you see and hear; the final stage of data submission

STEP THREE: What did you see or hear?

The final step of entering a checklist is the best part — it's your actual list. Here you can go through the list and enter the number seen or heard (or an "x" if you didn't count or estimate the number) on your outing. You'll see a list of expected species and hybrids (and "spuhs" [e.g. warbler sp.; to be used if you had a warbler but weren't sure which one] and "slashes" [e.g. American Black Duck/Mallard; to be used if you saw a duck that was one of the two species but you weren't sure which one]) based on the location and date you specified earlier.

As you go through the list you might notice that a species you observed is missing; keep in mind that the default is to show only the expected species for that location and time of year. If there is a species missing try click the "Show Rarities" checkbox in the right-hand margin. If you still can't find the species (should only happen for really rare species) try clicking the "Add Species" button in the top right of the screen.

Once you've finished your list you need to answer one question for eBird — "Are you submitting a complete checklist of the birds you were able to identify?" Basically this is eBird's way of asking you if you are only submitting a partial list (e.g. just the highlights) or a full list of everything from starlings to King Eiders. Choose your answer above the green "Submit" button and then click "Submit" to finish up.

If you entered a count that eBird considers is high or a species that eBird considers rare for that location/date then you'll be asked to confirm what you saw and include some details (this acts as a good way to catch typos but also to encourage more details for less expected sightings).

Once you've finished that up you're done your first checklist and are ready to do it again!

Still have questions? Contact Mike Burrell (mburrell@birdscanada.org) at Bird Studies Canada and check out the series of eBird tutorials on the OFO website.

Hummingbirds Late Departures



Traditionally it was believed that adult male Ruby-throated Hummingbirds leave the breeding grounds beginning in July and that any still remaining in August or September are migrants from areas further north. Banding and colour marking research has shown that this is not true of all adult males. Some individuals, banded and marked on their breeding territories in late May and early June in Ontario, remain on these territories to the end of August or into September each year. The latest date that an adult male has been documented on territory in Ontario is 9 September and this male remained late in each subsequent year that he was recaptured. Research in southern Illinois has shown that some adult males there also remain until early September.

By Cindy Cartwright

Editor's note

When I accepted the position of *OFO News* Editor, I intended to continue in this volunteer position for at least 5 years. Completing each issue over the past 18 months has been interesting and challenging, and I've enjoyed working with the contributors and editorial team. There have been many positive comments on the last four issues from *OFO* members across Ontario, in BC and Ohio, and birders far afield. I thank everyone who has taken a moment to express them.

The lead editor's job is not easy. From initiating ideas to sourcing contributors, through editing, and then following each issue until it is sent to the mailing house, it takes a lot of time and energy. Geoff, Jean and Ron, and Roger have been excellent editorial assistants as well as supportive friends and I could not have done the job without them — thank you! Allen, Christian and Mike had their own busy schedules but helped when they could and their efforts were greatly appreciated. Thanks also to Willie D'Anna for providing an interesting and relevant photo quiz on time for every issue.

Contributing authors are the heart of *OFO News*, writing interesting and informative articles, and every issue has been full to overflowing. Ontario birders have a wealth of knowledge — comments and suggestions for future articles are always welcome.

Resolutions passed by the *OFO* Board have changed the submission deadlines, altering the editing schedule and mailing dates. Unfortunately these changes are not compatible with my schedule during the spring migration in May/early June and the fall hawk watching season. By the time you read this, I will have resigned and returned to my position as contributing editor. A new lead editor will be in place in time for the February issue and I look forward to working with them.

Good birding,
Cindy Cartwright

Your *OFO* Membership expires 31 December 2015

Please check your expiry date on your mailing label.

To renew, please go online at www.ofo.ca or send your cheque to Ontario Field Ornithologists, Box 116, Station F, Toronto ON M4Y 2L4

App Review The Warbler Guide

Scott Whittle & Tom Stephenson, Princeton University Press

Full migration is upon us and with that, the world of confusing fall warblers. If you're looking for a tool to assist in field identification, The Warbler Guide App has a lot to offer. Released in early 2015, The Warbler Guide App is a companion to the Warbler Guide book published in 2013. The comprehensive guide has a wealth of information and the app is equally packed.

The interface is not as intuitive as some of the birding apps on the market. However once you master the selection menu, you can tailor the information to your location, desired attributes of the birds, and group the species in a way that works for you.

One of the biggest challenges I found with the print guide was that it was in alphabetical order vs. taxonomic order and birds that are normally grouped together in a guide were often very separate. The app allows you to sort the birds in three different ways — by colour, by taxonomic order or by alphabetical order, all of which can be useful in different situations.

You can choose your region, which will narrow the list of warblers offered to you in the gallery view. Unfortunately, the selections only include the continental US but most of Ontario is covered by the North East selection option. The range maps for each individual species include Canada are quite detailed and included main and fringe ranges for breeding and overwintering grounds, major migration ranges and year-round status where applicable. The maps are easy to read and the colour selections for the ranges provide enough contrast to be easily distinguished.

The best features of the app are the ability to select between spring/summer and fall/winter plumages and the type of view you would like for your gallery of species. You can select from side view, face view, 3D, 45°, underside or undertail. This allows for a great deal of variation in how you are able to view the gallery. It also allows you to pick the view closest to what you are seeing in the field. All of the gallery views are photographs, with the exception of the undertail, which are illustrations.

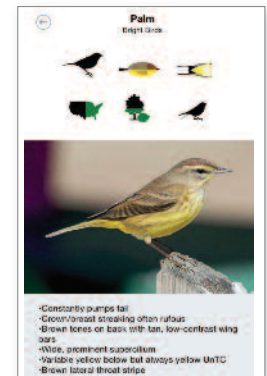
The 3D view is by far the most fun part of the app. Being able to rotate the bird into any possible position allows you to get views of the bird from angles that traditional guides and apps don't offer. And when you are comparing species this feature becomes an even more useful tool.

When you have personalized your gallery view, you can explore each species. You are provided with similar species, and an overview including iconographs that demonstrate the main colours, habitat preference and behaviour. Similar warbler species are also listed and features allow for side-by-side comparison of species. Each species also included an extensive list of songs, including chip notes and flight calls, shows a spectrogram of each song when played and provides a list of similar sounding warbler songs for reference.

In all, The Warbler Guide App is packed with information and is another valuable tool to add to our birding toolboxes. Once you get used to the interface, you will find that there is a lot of great information that you can use in the field. This app is focused on field identification — if you are looking for more detailed information about life history, conservation status etc., there are other apps that will better suit your need.

Currently, *The Warbler Guide App* is only available on the Apple platform. The app retails in Canada for \$14.99. For more information and video tutorials to use the app, visit www.thewarblerguide.com.

By Sarah Rupert

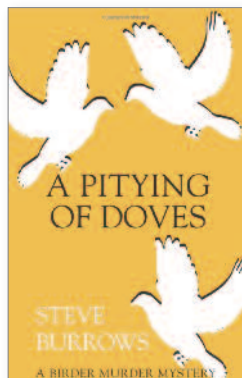


Book Review

A Pitying of Doves. 2015.
Steve Burrows. Softcover
364 pages. \$15.99 CND.
(ISBN 978-1-4597-31066).

Steve has written his second novel — another Birder Murder Mystery — and dare I say it is better than the first? Well, before I proceed, let me advise you dear readers that Steve was awarded the Arthur Ellis Award given by the Crime Writers of Canada for the Best First Novel for his book *A Siege of Bitterns*. So you kind of get the idea. His second effort is as good as or better than the first — it simply is excellent. As a writer myself I envy his easy style, where he tells a story through the eyes of multiple characters — each with a different personality and a different agenda. The result is a book that leaves you wanting more than any single page can offer.

So let's see. What do two Socorro Doves, a vain university professor, a red-necked thug (or is he?), an ambitious, erudite grad student (now deceased), a lovely widow, a sensuous former colleague, a distracted sleuth and a dead Mexican have in common? Well a pitying of doves of course!



Burrows weaves a mysterious web based on fact and amazingly accurate guesswork that leads the reader from an aviary with a young woman's body impaled on a branch, through the moors of Britain to far off Burkina Faso and into the lives of several people, all of whom have motive and opportunity. One by one they are eliminated as suspects until the obvious emerges.

I encourage you to be patient for, unless you are much brighter than me (and that may not be too hard a challenge), you won't even understand how the doves really have anything to do with the plot until page 285! Until then they were just turtle doves in a cage with dead people. At this point, you will declare, without doubt "Aha, I get it!" And you will be wrong!

As I read the book, I kept looking for errors in the bird lore that was shared. I must say I'm impressed. I really couldn't find anything that was blatantly incorrect. Burrows cited information about a range of little known or species from remote regions of the world and in every case his context and facts were correct — damn! I learned more about Canadian culture and birders in these pages than I have in my entire life. Somehow he seems to understand how very different birders are from

'real' people and how British birders are different still — and it all makes sense. He understands the gizz of a non-birder, exemplified when he states that Lindy gave away her lack of birding interest simply by looking into Traz's eyes when he spoke rather than scanning the sky over his shoulder for birds. How true. Think about it: a birder can talk to you and rarely will look at you if there is the possibility of a bird nearby. Burrows captures the essence of the passions of birders in this one statement deep in the book.

Now back to the plot. As the complex set of facts and of course the ones that Burrows holds back to mete out when he sees fit to help us solve the mystery unfold, we clearly see the path to the solution to these murders. A confession brings us relief as we determine that once again we were correct. We successfully followed the path that Burrows wove and ended up at the wrong subway stop! Yes, you were wrong again. The murderer and the reason for the murders will remain unknown until almost the last page of the book! And so it is!

Suffice to say, this is a very well-written book that keeps you turning page after page until there are none left, and only then will you know the answer. Burrows is slated to write more books. I, for one, can't wait!

Geoffrey Carpentier
www.avocetnatureservices.com

OFO Gull Weekend at Niagara

Workshop on Saturday and Field Trip on Sunday 28-29 November 2015

**WORKSHOP: Saturday 28 November
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.

**Gulls of the Niagara River IBA
by Mike Burrell**

Hear about the importance of the Niagara River Important Bird Area to the global conservation of gulls.

**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 for the workshop on the OFO website: www.ofo.ca so that we know how many will attend. No charge for this event.

**OFO GULL FIELD TRIP:
Sunday 29 November**

Meet leaders Ron Tozer and Jean Iron at 9:00 a.m. at Sir Adam Beck Lookout.

STAYING OVER?

A group hotel rate for the OFO Gull Trip 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.

Rates (including breakfast):

Thursday Night, 26 Nov. to Sunday Night, 29 Nov: \$55 each night. For more information about the hotel, please contact **Claire Nelson**: mcnelson@rogers.com

**NIAGARA RIVER CORRIDOR
IBA SURVEY BLITZ
Saturday 28 November**

The Ontario Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) Program is seeking volunteers to cover parts of the Niagara River and count gulls and other waterbirds on the second annual survey blitz. Volunteers will be assigned a stretch of the river that can be covered in about an hour. For more information or to sign-up, contact **Mike Burrell**: mburrell@birdscanada.org or 1-888-448-BIRD(2473) x 167.



Adult Glaucous Gull. Jean Iron

Photo Quiz

By Willie D'Anna

It's spring at Point Pelee and you have found a yellow bird in the mid canopy of the trees. What is it?

Since there are so many options for a yellow bird, it may be better to start with shape in this case. I see a short stout bill, a short neck, and a moderately long tail. The shape suggests a songbird — the birds in the second half of most field guides.

A yellow songbird may bring to mind a warbler but the bill is far too heavy for any warbler. Even the relatively large-billed Yellow-breasted Chat would show some dark color, unlike the all pale bill on the quiz bird. Most finches have a conical shaped bill somewhat similar to the quiz bird so let's consider them next. Finches with yellow include Evening Grosbeak, both Red and White-winged Crossbill, goldfinches, and Pine Siskin. The bill of an Evening Grosbeak is much too large and that of a Pine Siskin or the goldfinches is too small. In a poor view, one might not notice the crossed mandibles of a crossbill but we can see the bill quite clearly here and thus can rule out that option also. Bill size, shape, and color also eliminate sparrows, blackbirds and orioles, towhees, and everything in the field guide before the warblers. If you think that some of these birds might have somewhat similar bills, you need only look at the yellow plumage on our bird to convince yourself that there is no good match. None of the buntings have a bill this large and all differ in plumage color and pattern. Several of the cardinals, gros-



Photo: Willie D'Anna

beaks, and Dickcissel have a somewhat similar stout bill but differ markedly in plumage. Now we are left with the tanagers.

Except for the crown and nape, most of the upperparts of the quiz bird are not visible. We can see only a little bit of one wing but we can see the underside of the bird quite well, even with the branch across the lower belly. The underside appears to be entirely yellow, as does the head and nape. The bit of wing that we see is enough to indicate that there are no obvious wing bars, which rules out a Western Tanager. Hepatic Tanager has never been recorded in Ontario and is never this yellow. That leaves only two species to consider — Summer and Scarlet Tanagers.

It might be tempting to look at the yellow breast and belly and say that it is not bright enough for a Summer Tanager. Although that species often shows a strong mustard tone in parts of its plumage that is not evident here, the lack of it could be due to individual variation or the light conditions under which the

bird was photographed. Unfortunately, the underside of the tail is blocked by leaves so we cannot use that field mark — grayish in Scarlet and brownish or yellowish in Summer. A dark line on the lores is a character for Summer Tanager noted by Sibley in his field guide and one is not evident in the photo. However, that is a subtle feature which can disappear depending on how the feathers are arranged (compressed, fluffed, wet, etc.) or if the lighting is not just right. Perhaps the best known feature for separating female Summer and Scarlet Tanagers is the wings — uniform with the back in Summer and contrastingly darker in Scarlet. Although we cannot see the back very well, the wings appear rather uniform with the belly, which would not be expected in Scarlet.

Summer Tanager is a rare bird in Ontario, unlike Scarlet Tanager which is quite common. We cannot claim finding a rare bird based on a poorly shown field mark. We need more evidence. Another look at the photo shows a strong mustard mark on the forehead, which would be

very unusual for a Scarlet Tanager but not at all for a Summer. Let's go back to the bill once more, which may provide the most compelling evidence for the identification. It appears to me to be too large for a Scarlet Tanager. To summarize, we have three field marks to support the identification of a **Summer Tanager**, although all of them are rather subtle. When I photographed this bird at Point Pelee National Park on May 13, 2015, I also had a better view of the wings, which were clearly not darker than the back and helped to rule out a Scarlet Tanager.

More of my photos can be seen at the following web address: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/107683885@N07/>

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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*.
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Publications Mail Agreement Number 40046348
ISSN 1200-1589 © OFO News 2015

Printed by Paragon DPI, Toronto



New Shorebird ID Sign at Hillman Marsh

By Jean Iron

Mounted in the viewing shelter at Hillman Marsh Shorebird Cell near Point Pelee is a beautiful new shorebird identification sign. Each species recorded at Hillman Marsh in spring is shown with a photo in breeding plumage together with key identification points. The Ontario Field Ornithologists contributed to the sign financially and with shorebird identification expertise. Jeremy Bensette, Cherise Charron, Barry Cheriére, Frank and Sandra Horvath, Jean Iron, Dave Milsom and Mark Peck provided photos, many of which were taken at Hillman Marsh and Point Pelee. Hillman Marsh Shorebird Cell is recognized for its importance to northbound migrating shorebirds in spring.

Shown above: The new interpretive sign was unveiled at a ceremony on 1 May 2015. In attendance left to right, Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) general manager Richard Wyma, ERCA chairperson Ed Steiman, Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) member Jean Iron, Pelee Wings Nature Store owner Mike Malone, OFO director Dave Milsom, and Tourism Windsor-Essex-Pelee Island CEO Gordon Orr. We thank ERCA's Director of Conservation Services Kevin Money, and ERCA's Director of Community Outreach Services Danielle Stuebing for supporting the production of this sign.

Photos: Danielle Stuebing

