

# ONTARIO BIRDS

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## ARTICLES

### Notes on feeding and nesting behaviour of Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*), and its status in the vicinity of Wawa, Ontario.

*Michael Patrikeev*



Figure 1: Northern Saw-whet Owl with immature Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus gracilis*).

Although the Northern Saw-whet Owl is one of the most common owls in forested habitats of Canada and the northern United States, much remains to be learned about its behaviour and breeding biology (Cannings 1993). Published information on the breeding season diet of this species was mostly determined from the analysis of pellets and prey remains recovered from nests

(Cannings 1987, 1993, Marks and Doremus 1988). Skulls found in pellets are usually crushed, and dentaries are often the most useful clue to prey identification (Swengel and Swengel 1992, Cannings 1993, Holt and Leraux 1996). In the present note, I report on the results of a photographic study of feeding behaviour of this species in Algonoma District, northeastern Ontario.

A nest of the Northern Saw-whet Owl was found on 4 April 1999 in a clearing south-east of Wawa (N 47° 59'24", W 084°46'34") in a cavity at ca. 4m above the ground in a paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) snag. Although clear-cut logging is widespread throughout the Northern Saw-whet Owl's range in northern and central Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 2001) no other nests of this species were reported from clearings in this province or in Quebec (Sleep 2005, P. Drapeau, pers. comm., L. Imbeau, pers. comm.).

In this study, I photographed prey brought by the male to feed the female and the young. Observations were carried out for a total of 29 hours and 20 minutes (3 hours 40 minutes per night on average) on 19, 22, 26-29 May, and 3 and 4 June 1999, typically between 2130 and 0130 hours. Every owl visit to the nest with or without prey was logged, and an attempt to photograph every prey delivery was made. During my observations, food was delivered 47 times, and on 26 occasions photographed prey was identifiable (Figures 1-10).

### Methods

A 3.5 m tower built of wooden 2" x 4"s was fitted with a fabric blind on top. The tower was moved to the vicinity of the nest (about 5 m away) on 12 May after the young had hatched. A dead sapling was planted about 3 m from the cavity to provide an obvious perch. A Nikon F90X camera fitted with Sigma



Figure 2: Northern Saw-whet Owl with adult Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus gracilis*).



Figure 3: Northern Saw-whet Owl with Meadow Vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*).



Figure 4: Northern Saw-whet Owl with Southern Red-backed Vole (*Clethrionomys gapperi*).

APO 170-500mm lens and 2 Metz flashes were used, with Fujichrome Provia film (400 ASA). A small 4.8v flashlight with a sawed-off reflector, run by a 12v battery, was placed between the tower and the nest to provide just enough light to see the arriving owl and to focus. Most of the time, the lens was pre-focused on the cavity entrance or the perch. This technique was modified from Pukinski (1976).

### Prey Items

Woodland Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus gracilis*), both immature and adults, made up 30.8% of all prey (Table 1) as it would be expected (Catling 1972, Cannings 1987, Swengel and Swengel 1992, Holt and Leraux 1996). Other frequent prey included shrews (mostly Masked Shrew *Sorex*

*cinereus*) 23.1%, jumping mice (mostly Woodland Jumping Mouse (*Napaeozapus insignis*) 15.4%, Meadow Voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) 19.2%, and birds (White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) and Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) 7.7%. Smoky Shrew (*Sorex fumeus*), Woodland Jumping Mouse and Black-and-white Warbler apparently have not been recorded among prey of Northern Saw-whet Owl, although related species were. According to Hayward and Garton (1988) and Cannings, (1993) prey selection in this owl is influenced by habitat selection. In the present study, most hunting had likely been done within the clearing because all mammal species recorded in this study are known to occur along shrub-by forest edges and in wet meadows (Banfield 1977).

Identification of small mammals from photographs may appear controversial. Indeed, in areas that may harbour several species of *Peromyscus*, *Microtus* or *Sorex*, this technique is unlikely to produce positive identification beyond genus. However, north-eastern Ontario supports a relatively impoverished fauna of small mammals, e.g., 2-3 species of *Sorex*, 1 *Microtus*, 1 *Peromyscus*, 1 *Clethrionomys*, etc. (Banfield 1977, Dobbyn 1994). In this study, I based identification on good personal knowledge of small mammals of Ontario: all mammal species detected during this study (Table 1) were previously caught, kept, observed and pho-

Common Name	Scientific Name	Number of Prey Items
Woodland Deer Mouse	<i>Peromyscus maniculatus gracilis</i>	8
Immature	<i>(Peromyscus maniculatus gracilis)</i>	(4)
Adult	<i>(Peromyscus maniculatus gracilis)</i>	(3)
Unaged	<i>(Peromyscus maniculatus gracilis)</i>	(1)
Masked Shrew	<i>Sorex cinereus</i>	5
Meadow Vole	<i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i>	5
Woodland Jumping Mouse	<i>Napaeozapus insignis</i>	5
Meadow Jumping Mouse	<i>Zapus hudsonius</i>	1
Southern Red-backed Vole	<i>Clethrionomys gapperi</i>	1
Smoky Shrew	<i>Sorex fumeus</i>	1
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	1
Black-and-White Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>26</b>

Table 1: Prey items delivered by male Northern Saw-whet Owl to the nest under observation. (Identified from photographs)



Figure 5: Northern Saw-whet Owl with Woodland Jumping Mouse (*Napaeozapus insignis*).



Figure 6: Northern Saw-whet Owl with Meadow Jumping Mouse (*Zapus hudsonius*).



Figure 7: Northern Saw-whet Owl with Masked Shrew (*Sorex cinereus*).

tographed by me. Every image obtained during photo sessions at the owl nest was compared to those kept in my personal photo library.

### Feeding and Nesting Behaviour

The male Northern Saw-whet Owl always announced its arrival with food "with a series of whistled notes, similar to the advertising song" (Johns *et al.* 1978, Cannings 1993). Earliest calls were heard at 2130 hours. Sometimes the male called for 30 seconds or longer prior to arrival, and on one occasion (3 June) he called for about 5 minutes after delivering food to the nest. On many occasions, the male first flew to a perch holding prey in its talons, and there transferred prey to his beak and then flew to the nest cavity. The male usually passed food to the female or the young without entering the cavity. The female usually left the nest between 2117 and 2156 hours, and returned in 5-6 minutes. According to Cannings (1993), the females use this time to defecate and cough up a pellet. On 27 and 29 May, the female left the nest and returned at least three times, possibly hunting and providing food. However, on two occasions the female was seen removing an uneaten rodent carcass from the nest, and she might have used this time to feed away from large young or she simply removed excess carcasses from the nest. According to Cannings (1993), nesting duties in this species are strictly divided; males provide



Figure 8: Northern Saw-whet Owl with Smoky Shrew (*Sorex fumeus*).



Figure 9: Northern Saw-whet Owl with White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*).





Figure 10: Northern Saw-whet Owl with Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*).

almost all of the food for the female and young, while females incubate the eggs and brood the young until the youngest nestling is about 18 days old. Thus, it is safe to assume that the owl that emerged from the nest cavity shortly after dark and quickly returning to the nest was the female, and another one that arrived with food was the male. The Northern Saw-whet Owl is known to store uneaten food on tree branches during winter (Bondrup-Nielsen 1977), and Cannings (1993), reported that males often bring an excess of food to the nest, especially during egg laying. My observations suggest that males may store food from a previous night or perhaps store at least one item on the same night before bringing food to the nest. On 26 May,

the male delivered two prey items (a White-crowned Sparrow and a Black-and-white Warbler) to the nest within one minute (2210), and on 27 May, two small mammals were brought in quick succession at 2206 hours. Although it is possible that the male detected, caught and brought two prey items from the immediate vicinity of the nest within a minute, it is more probable that at least one prey item was caught previously and stored by the male.

Collected information on frequency of feeding rates revealed that feeding was most intensive during 26-29 May (1.6 visits/hour), and was reduced to 0.6-0.8 visits/hour during 3-4 June. The male fed the female and young most frequently between 2201 and 2300 hours ( $2.4 \pm 1.6$  feedings) (Figure 11). When the same analysis was done by 30 minutes intervals, highest feeding frequency fell within 2201-2230 hours ( $1.750 \pm 1.035$ ) and 0001-0030 hours ( $1.125 \pm 0.835$ ) (Figure 12). Time intervals between male visits varied from 13.0 minutes on 19 May to 36.7 minutes on 3 June. Interestingly, longer intervals between visits (28.7 and 34.2 minutes) were recorded on 28 and 29 May when the overall number of visits was equal to those on 26 and 27 May (8 visits per observation period). The male fed young less frequently on 4 June when the female possibly was not present at the nest.

Loud peeping of the young was heard on 27 May, and they were look-

ing out of the nest cavity and snapping beaks at mosquitos swarming at the entrance on 3 - 4 June. When the cavity was examined on 6 June, it was filled with 4 large young; only 2 remained in the nest on 8 June, and no further visits were made.

## Status of Northern Saw-whet Owl in the Wawa Area

In 1999, Northern Saw-whet Owls were relatively common in the general area around Wawa: at least 11-12 calling males along High Falls, Surluga, Tikamaganda, Paint Lake, Firesand

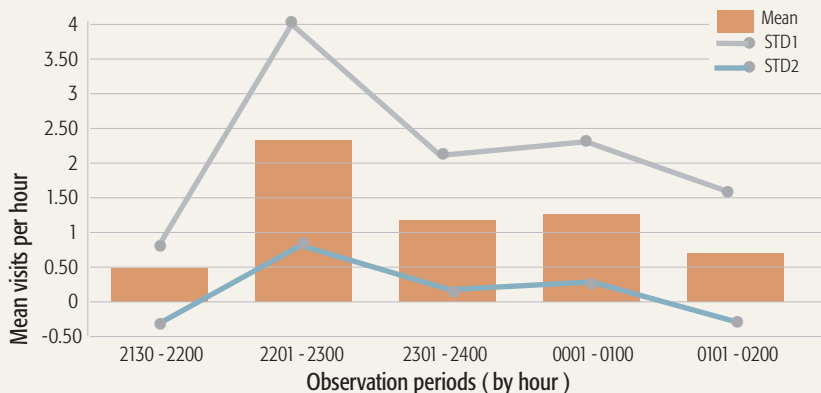


Figure 11: Feeding rates by hour (coloured bars represent mean frequency of visits per hour, and solid lines show upper and lower limits of standard deviation).

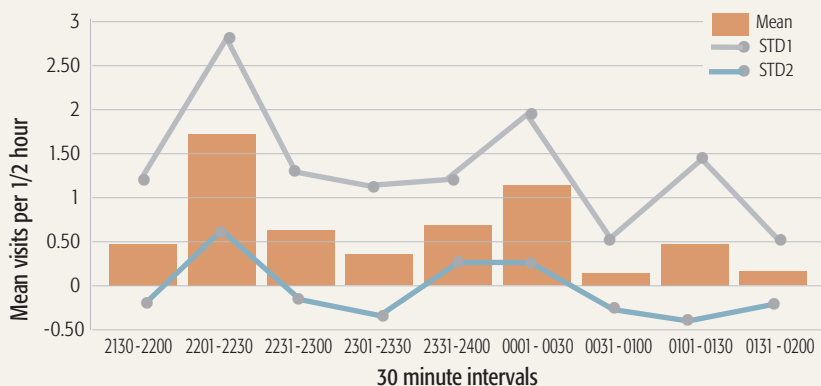


Figure 12: Feeding rates by 1/2 hour (coloured bars represent mean frequency of visits per half hour, and solid lines show upper and lower limits of standard deviation).

Creek and Mijininunshing roads (total length 68 km, *i.e.*, 0.16-0.18 calling males/km). However, the following winter probably had a profound effect on this species. During the entire nesting season of 2000 only one male was heard calling along Tikamaganda Road and none elsewhere. The winter of 2000 had seen the most unusual weather in north-eastern Ontario. During 21-27 February temperature remained above freezing in the afternoons reaching +11.5°C, and the snow mostly melted. This thaw was followed by a freeze on the 28th, but on the 29th temperatures rose to +8.5°C and 30 mm of rain fell. The warming trend with above freezing temperatures (up to +15.7°C) and rain in the afternoons, and below freezing temperatures at night continued into March (Meteorological Service of Canada 2006). This weather either caused mortality among small mammals in the area or formed a crust that prevented Saw-whet Owls from reaching and capturing their mammalian prey. It is possible that the majority of Northern Saw-whet Owls did not breed in the vicinity of Wawa in that year or moved away or perished prior to the nesting season. Their numbers did not recover in the subsequent years (2002-2005). None were recorded along Paint Lake Road in 2002-2005 and no owls at all along Tikamaganda Road in 2005 (S. Debreceeni, *in litt.*). Such effects of the climate change on productivity and

survivorship of the Northern Saw-whet Owl (and perhaps other mice-eating owls) may occur throughout its range in Ontario, and should be investigated.

### Acknowledgments

Jack Eitniear (San Antonio, Texas) provided access to literature and provided comments on the manuscript; Richard Cannings (Naramata, British Columbia) and Richard Knapton (Edmonton, Alberta) commented on the manuscript; Richard Knapton, and also Mark Peck and Fiona Reid (Royal Ontario Museum) provided expertise on some photographed prey items; Jay Malcolm (University of Toronto, Ontario) and Ian Thompson (Natural Resources Canada, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario) alerted me to recent studies of forest owls in Ontario and Québec; Pierre Drapeau (Institut des Sciences de l'environnement, Québec) and Louis Imbeau (Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Québec) reported some unpublished information from their studies; Darren Sleep (University of Guelph, Ontario) allowed me to read his unpublished thesis; Susan Debreceeni and Audrey Heagy (Bird Studies Canada, Port Rowan, Ontario) provided owl survey data from the vicinity of Wawa for 2001-05; Gord Eason, Marcel Pellegrini, Joel Cooper (Ministry of Natural Resources, Wawa, Ontario) and Carol Dersch (Lake Superior Provincial Park, Ontario) were my companions on some owl surveys around Wawa and provided additional information. Finally, my late mentor, Yuri Pukinski (formerly of St. Petersburg, Russia), inspired my interest in owls and owl photography.

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*Michael Patrikeev*, 3 Helen Street,  
Dundas, Ontario, L9H 1N2



## Barred Owl Snow-plunging in an Open Field in Daylight

Ross D. James

Photo by George K. Peck

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### Introduction

In typical habitat, Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) are considered to be “restricted to forested areas”, “preferrably large unfragmented blocks, and old forest with a closed canopy” (Mazur and James 2000). Large contiguous forests of mature and old-growth timber are considered essential for the maintenance of healthy Barred Owl populations (Bosakowski *et al.* 1987). They are typically found as far from human habitation and potential disturbance as possible (Bosakowski *et al.* 1987).

Barred Owls are usually resident year-round in their territories, but during times of prey scarcity during the colder months of the year they may move in search of prey (Powell 1984, Weir 1984, Carpenter 1987, Mazur and James 2000). At such times they may often end up in atypical habitats, even residential areas (Elody and Slown 1985, Campbell *et al.* 1990). But, even in less typical habitat, they usually seek out tree cover for concealment during the day. Barred Owls are considered to be hunters only in semi-darkness or darkness (Johnsgard 1986) and are rarely seen out in daylight (Mazur and James 2000). Nero (1993) reports seeing them only 6 times in 20 years of winter Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*) banding activity. Daytime hunting in exposed situations could prove fatal as they may be targeted by the larger, more aggressive Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) (Bosakowski *et al.* 1987).

This note presents observations of a Barred Owl hunting in an open field during the late afternoon, and recounts several instances of snow-plunging hunting behaviour, something apparently rarely seen in this species.

## Observations

The following observations were made about 2.5km northeast of the town of Sunderland, Durham R.M., Ontario. I first became aware of a large raptor flying into an open field about 1700 h on 5 March 2006, about an hour before-sunset. It flew low into view and perched on top of a nest box about 2m above the ground. A check with binoculars quickly identified it as a Barred Owl. Over the next 25 minutes it was watched moving about the field, perching in 14 different places. The perches were the tops of nest boxes or the posts holding them, and a couple other somewhat taller posts, all in the open field from 150 to 30m away from any tree cover. The owl would perch for 30 seconds to 3–4 minutes at each site, scanning the ground below, and quickly turning its head as if it had heard something. Twice it was seen dropping into the snow near a perch, neither attempt apparently producing anything.

After about half an hour it disappeared behind some pines, but moving toward an area of scattered trees on a fairly open hillside. Ten minutes later it flew back into the field where it had originally been seen. For the next 10

minutes it again moved to seven different perches before being lost to sight once more. This time also it was seen twice dropping to the snow, apparently unsuccessfully.

A Barred Owl, presumably the same one, returned next day, and perched in the open on top of a structure in the front lawn about 20m from the house. This time it was first seen about 10 minutes after sunset, and remained there for half an hour.

Two days later it was again seen briefly in the late afternoon in the same field, as I departed the property.

## Snow-Plunging Behaviour

Only once was it possible to see the snow surface as the owl dropped. At that place it had obviously plunged its head into the snow. Following the plunge it struggled briefly to get itself upright again. On this and the other three drops to the snow it went down head first, but apparently extended its feet at the last moment, to hit the snow with its feet as well as its head. This is apparently what typically happens with Great Gray Owls, as described by Nero (1980, 1993). The depressions in the snow examined later indicated that this is what happened.

## Snow Conditions and Plunge Marks

All the snow at this time had a substantial crust after an earlier night of rain on the accumulated winter snow. Much

of the time that crust would support my weight in the open fields. In the nearby woodland there was somewhat less crust, but food there may have been less available in the deeper snow. In the open field, snow depth was 15 – 25cm. The crust may have been somewhat softened by the all day sunshine, and temperatures just below freezing at mid day. However, the owl still appeared to have trouble penetrating the crust. A later check of the sites where the owl went down showed the deepest plunge penetrated only about 12 cm of a 22cm depth at that point. Two other plunge marks only went 8 and 10cm into a depth of 20 cm of snow. Such plunges would have been inadequate to catch prey under the snow. Prey would have had to be tunneling within the snow to be reached, something that is often possible.

## Discussion

It is probable that hunger had induced this bird to hunt in atypical habitat, even coming close to an occupied house, and during a time of day when it would normally be roosting. The hard snow conditions, that would have been widespread in this part of the province, no doubt inhibited any owl from hunting subnival prey at this time.

Snow-plunging as a means of prey capture by Barred Owls has been considered uncommon, and very rarely seen (Nero 1993). In more than 20 years of owl studies he and Herb Copland had

only three indications of this activity, and had never witnessed it. A couple of other owl researchers with whom he corresponded had also never seen the behaviour, although they had seen indications of it on rare occasion. A local person had conveyed the only eye-witness account. That had also occurred in daylight, but along a wooded edge of a field.

Nero was able in one instance to see an imprint of the owl's face showing the bill, just as seen numerous times for Great Gray Owl plunge holes. But, the imprint was the size of a Barred Owl face (Nero 1993). Unfortunately, the crusty snow conditions present during my observations did not leave a very definite imprint. The lower part of the hole was disturbed, as if by the owl's talons, but the hole was larger than would have been made by feet alone. The hole was more the size of the owl's head, and the head was certainly down as the plunging owl neared the snow surface. On the first plunge seen, the head was definitely down into the snow.

The owl observed was dropping from only 2–3m in height, perhaps not high enough to penetrate more deeply given the snow conditions. While a plunge from higher might have helped, it might also have been a much harder landing than desired. The Barred Owl once was observed to fly up somewhat higher, as if to plunge from a greater height, but then checked its decent and landed softly feet first.

Snow-plunging is a method of obtaining food under deep snow conditions, and its use may be more frequent in Barred Owls than assumed. While they are typically hunting in dense forests, they presumably also must deal with considerable snow depth most winters throughout their northern forest range. The fact that they are seldom seen at all in winter would limit the possibility of seeing snow-plunging. It is obviously an effective way of hunting in deep snow, commonly used by the Great Gray Owl. In deep or hard to penetrate snow, it would seem an effective method for the Barred Owl also, even though it is about one-third lighter. They are obviously capable of performing the activity. Even the much smaller Boreal Owl has been seen using this method of hunting (Nero 1993).

### Acknowledgements

I thank Bob Nero and Chip Weseloh for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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*Ross D. James, R.R. #3, S1480, Conc. 7, Sunderland, Ontario L0C 1H0*



# First Documented Nest Records of Ross's Goose in Ontario

Glenn Coady, Donald A. Sutherland, Colin D. Jones,  
Mark K. Peck and Gerry Binsfeld



## Introduction

The diminutive Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*) is the smallest of the three forms of white geese that breed in North America (along with the Lesser Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens caerulescens* and Greater Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens atlantica*). It was first reported and well described by Hudson's Bay Company explorer Samuel Hearne as the "Horned Wavy", in the journal he kept during his epic overland travels between Churchill, Manitoba and the mouth of the Coppermine River, between 1769 and 1771. Hearne noted that his superior at Prince of Wales Fort (Churchill), Governor Moses Norton, had failed to include an available specimen of Ross's Goose, taken nearby, among a collection of 17 bird specimens sent to the Hudson's Bay Company in London in 1771 (Hearne 1795, Houston *et al.* 2003). Ross's Goose was, therefore, not formally described to science until nearly a full century later, by John Cassin, who named it for

Figure 1: The 2005 Burntpoint Creek, Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas team at the tip of Cape Henrietta Maria, 17 June 2005. *Left to right:* Colin Jones, Glenn Coady, Mark Peck, Don Sutherland and Gerry Binsfeld.  
*Photo by Dan Steckly.*



Figure 2: Aerial view of the habitat. The periphery of the Cape Henrietta Maria Snow Goose colony, 15 June 2005.

*Photo by Mark Peck*

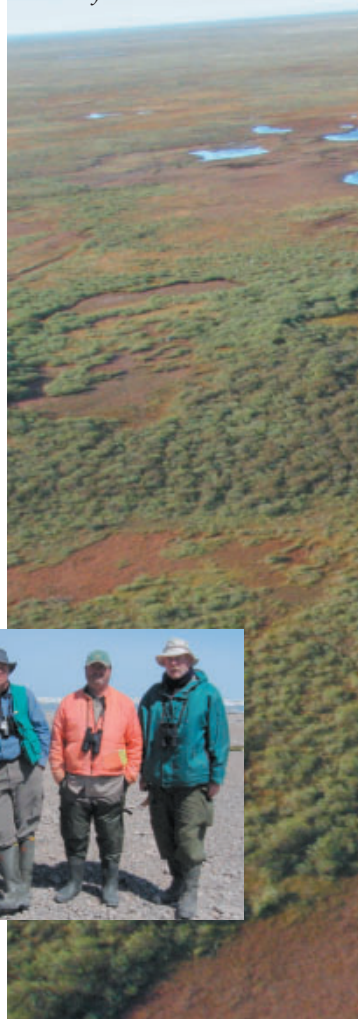




Figure 3: Nest and eggs of  
Ross's Goose, 15 June 2005.  
*Photo by Don Sutherland*

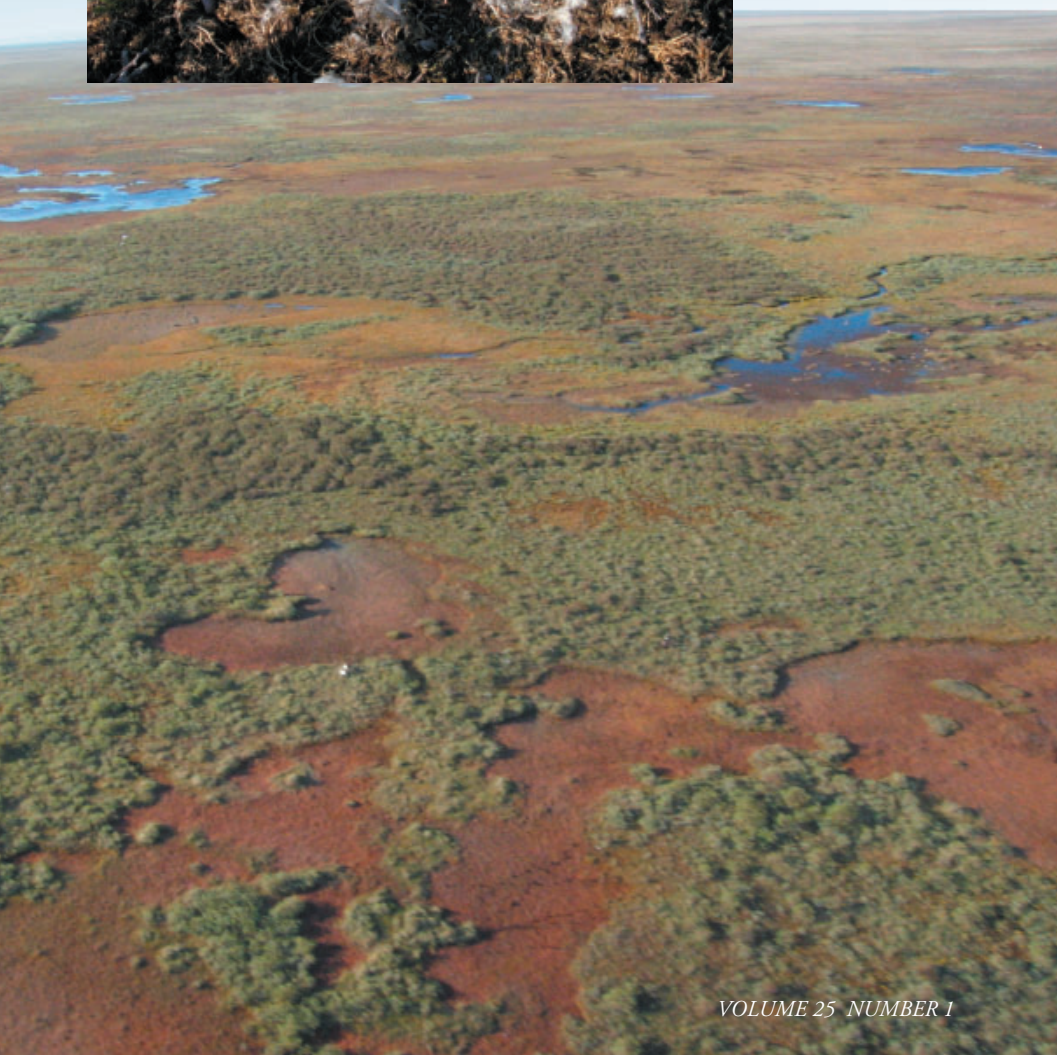


Figure 4: Pair of Ross's Geese in flight over their nesting area, 15 June 2005.  
*Photo by Colin Jones*



Bernard Rogan Ross, a Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, who had sent him specimens from Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake (Cassin 1861).

Ross's Goose was at one time thought to be the rarest breeding North American goose species, and possibly in danger of extinction (Grinnel *et al.* 1918, Lloyd 1952), reaching an estimated low of approximately 2,000 birds in 1949 (Hanson *et al.* 1956). Remarkably, its breeding grounds eluded discovery until 1 July 1940, when Hudson's Bay Company officials Angus Gavin and Ernest Donovan reported the first nesting colonies on a lake near a tributary of the Perry River, about 80 km north of the Arctic Circle (Cartwright 1940, Gavin 1940, Taverner 1940, 1941). Gavin (1947) later revised this account to reveal he had previously discovered a Ross's

Goose nest on a lake near the Perry River in June of 1938. Its breeding range was formerly restricted to the central Canadian Arctic in a limited area around the Perry River delta in the Queen Maud Gulf lowlands, and it once wintered exclusively in the interior valleys of California (Kortright 1943, Delacour 1954).

By the 1950s and 1960s the breeding range of Ross's Goose had expanded, and it was discovered breeding among widespread Snow Goose colonies away from the traditional Perry River area, from Banks Island in the west (Barry 1960), to Southampton Island and the McConnell River in the east (Cooch 1954, Barry and Eisenhart 1958, MacInnes and Cooch 1963). Further range expansion was documented from the late 1960s to the 1990s (Ryder 1969, Kerbes *et al.* 1983, Alisauskas and Boyd 1994, Kerbes

1994), extending westward to Alaska (Johnson and Troy 1987), and eastward to Arviat, Nunavut (Ryder and Alisauskas 1995), La Pérouse Bay in Manitoba (Ryder and Cooke 1973), the Cape Henrietta Maria area of Ontario (Prett and Johnson 1977), Akimiski Island in James Bay (Prett 1987) and southwestern Baffin Island (Ryder and Alisauskas 1995).

The range expansion has continued concomitantly with a dramatic increase in its total population (like that of the Lesser Snow Goose) to this day. From a low of about 2,000 birds in the late 1940s, the population has continuously increased to an estimated minimum of 542,000 breeding adult Ross's Geese in the central and eastern Arctic, and ca. 800,000 birds overall, as of the spring of 1998 (Hanson *et al.* 1956, Ryder 1969, Prett and MacInnes 1972, Kerbes 1994, Kelley *et al.* 2001, Kerbes *et al.* 2006).

Ross's Goose now breeds throughout the central and eastern Arctic and sub-Arctic south to northern James Bay, in the majority of sites where Lesser Snow Goose colonies occur, yet approximately 90% of the population still breeds in the Queen Maud Gulf lowlands. It still winters predominantly in the Central Valley of California, and increasingly in New Mexico, the north-central highlands of Mexico, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana, with

the mid-continent wintering population now estimated to exceed 100,000 birds (Ryder and Alisauskas 1995, Kelley *et al.* 2001).

The first record of Ross's Goose in the Hudson Bay Lowlands of Ontario involved an adult female, shot at the mouth of the Harricanaw River in southern James Bay (51°10' N, 79°47' W), by a Cree hunter, in October 1953. It was with an adult male blue morph Lesser Snow Goose and a family group of juveniles appearing to be blue morph Lesser Snow Geese (Cooch 1954). A second specimen was taken slightly further to the northwest in Hannah Bay (51°15' N, 79°50' W) in early May 1954 (Cooch 1955). The establishment of Ross's Goose as a breeding bird on Ontario's tundra coast has been a long process. On 29 July 1975, among a total of 1850 flightless Lesser Snow Geese, captured for banding at the mouth of the Brant River (55°10' N, 82°52' W), J.P. Prett and F.C. Johnson discovered a family group consisting of an adult



Figure 5: Habitat around the nesting area of Ross's Goose, 15 June 2005. Photo by Colin Jones

male Ross's Goose with 3 juveniles (1m,2f), 5-6 weeks old, and a larger female appearing to be a hybrid between Ross's Goose and Lesser Snow Goose (Prevett and Johnson 1977). This provided the basis for the inclusion of Ross's Goose on the list of breeding birds for Ontario (Peck and James 1983, Wormington and James 1984).

During the first Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (1981-1985), breeding was confirmed on nearby Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories (present-day Nunavut), in James Bay, when an adult male Ross's Goose and two goslings were captured by an Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) team in a banding roundup of 50 geese on the north shore of the island, on 13 July 1984 (Prevett 1987). In the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (2001-2005), numbers of both adult and juvenile Ross's Geese have been captured annually in OMNR goose banding operations in the Cape Henrietta Maria area, but they have accounted for fewer than 1% of over 20,000 *Chen* geese handled (Abraham 2002 and unpublished).

Although breeding by Ross's Goose has long been clearly established in Ontario, no nests of Ross's Goose had been documented for the province before 2005 (Peck 2005). The purpose of this paper is to document the first nests of this species in Ontario, found by the authors during field work in the Cape Henrietta Maria area in June

2005 on behalf of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (Peck and Peck 2006, Sutherland 2006).

## Observations

Between 7 and 21 June 2005, the authors (Figure 1) atlassed areas of Ontario's Hudson Bay Lowlands between Peawanuck and Cape Henrietta Maria (Figure 2). The main purpose of the field work was to complete basic atlas coverage, perform a requisite number of standardized point counts, and upgrade levels of breeding evidence for as many species as possible in atlas blocks LA, LB and MB within Polar Bear Provincial Park.

It was arranged for us to be stationed at the OMNR Burntpoint Creek goose research camp, located near the Hudson Bay coast, about 85km ENE of Peawanuck, with access to an OMNR helicopter and pilot, to cover the area with maximum efficiency. An account from this expedition has been published previously (Sutherland 2006).

On the morning of 15 June 2005 we set out by helicopter from our Burntpoint Creek headquarters with the intention of having two groups doing point counts in widely separated areas: Coady, Jones and Sutherland within the large Snow Goose colony between the Brant and Black Duck rivers, in atlas square 17MB00 (Figure 2); and Binsfeld and Peck at the base of



Figure 6: Ross's Goose nest and immediate surrounding area, 15 June 2005. *Photo by Colin Jones*

Cape Henrietta Maria, in square 17MB10. We arrived over a particularly dense portion of the goose colony at 0647h and randomly selected a suitable site to put the helicopter down to let our first team out to start point counts. What occurred next served to reinforce the often heard axiom that it is sometimes better to be lucky than good. Our first team (Coady, Jones, Sutherland) had just exited the helicopter, and while collecting equipment and watching our pilot, Dan Steckly, prepare the helicopter at 0652h for taking off with our other team, bound for the base of Cape Henrietta Maria in the next square, Coady noticed that the nearest white goose was a Ross's Goose! A second later we saw another Ross's Goose stand up from a nearby

nest at the adjacent pond's edge (Figure 3). In the very extensive and dense colony of Lesser Snow Geese, we had improbably landed our helicopter immediately beside Ontario's first discovered Ross's Goose nest (Nest location: 17U 404751 6106447 North American Datum 1983; 55°05'44.15" N, 82° 29'33.38" W).

We had a very good look at both adult Ross's Geese before they flew a short distance away when we approached to examine the nest (Figures 4 and 5). The nearest available Snow Geese for comparison were a mere 20m away, with many additional birds nearby, due to the helicopter disturbance.

Both birds were very small, about Mallard size, and their plumage was

entirely white except for their black primaries. In their alert posture, they appeared very short-necked, with a very dainty and quite rounded all-white head profile. They had very short, pink bills that were clearly lacking the thick black tomia with exaggerated arches (the so-called “grinning patches”) evident on both Snow Goose and Snow Goose x Ross’s Goose hybrids. These short, pink bills of both birds were decidedly bluish at the base of the maxilla between the nostril and the feather border, and showed the characteristic warty protuberances found in Ross’s Goose. On both birds, the area of contact between the base of the maxilla and the facial feathering around the lores was straight and vertical. Neither bird showed any indication of the published characters of hybridization with Snow Geese (Trauger *et al.* 1971). Both birds had noticeably smaller and slimmer bodies than nearby Snow Geese. Their legs were shorter and thinner, and tended more toward bubblegum pink rather than the deep reddish-pink legs of the Snow Geese. In the air, they showed a definitely narrower wing profile than the Snow Geese and their nasal grunting calls were obviously higher pitched than those of adjacent Snow Geese, making them stand out simply by call alone.

As we were examining and photographing the nest, a flock of 24 calling Ross’s Geese flew directly overhead. It is unfortunate that we did not have calipers with us for egg measurements,

especially because a method for egg discrimination between Ross’s Goose and Lesser Snow Goose has been refined (Ryder 1971, Alisauskas *et al.* 1998). The nest and eggs of this Ross’s Goose pair were noticeably much smaller than any of the several hundred Snow Geese nests and eggs collectively examined that morning.

The nest and eggs were placed in a shallow hollow on a 30 cm mossy hummock lightly covered with dwarf birch (*Betula nana*) and low-lying willow (*Salix sp.*) scrub, 3m from the edge of a small tundra pond (Figures 6 and 7). It was situated about 20m from the nearest Snow Goose nest, with several additional Snow Geese nests visible around some of the larger willow thickets at nearby ponds. The nest was neatly lined with down and contained 4 subelliptical white eggs with minimal gloss or brown staining.

As our priority was to split up and perform point counts along three separate planned transects through the colony, en route to a pre-arranged rendezvous point with our helicopter, limited time prevented a further search of this specific area for additional Ross’s Goose nests. However, Sutherland located a second area with 6 adult Ross’s Geese (about 2km south of Hudson Bay and 12km west of the base of Cape Henrietta Maria), and flushed a second pair of Ross’s Geese from a very similar nest containing 3 eggs (Nest location: 17U 405654 6105081 NAD83; 55° 05' 00.59" N, 82° 28' 40.83" W). In the



Figure 7: Colin Jones inspecting a Ross's Goose nest, 15 June 2005. *Photo by Don Sutherland*

five hours in which we walked through this impressive Snow Goose colony, these were the only areas where we found evidence of breeding Ross's Geese.

## Discussion

Ross's Goose may possibly be breeding in all the Ontario Snow Goose colonies. As it is quite difficult to separate Ross's Goose and Lesser Snow Goose from each other with aerial survey methods, an accurate assessment of the current and future population of Ross's Goose in Ontario may require well-timed intensive ground searches during the incubation period. Given that it appears they are not uniformly distributed within the Cape Henrietta Maria Snow Goose colony, a logical first place to build on our knowledge of their

population in Ontario will be more thorough ground surveys in the areas where these first two nests have been located.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the following people and organizations for their support in making our atlas expedition to Polar Bear Provincial Park a success: Mike Cadman (Canadian Wildlife Service [CWS]-Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas) and Ken Abraham (OMNR Peterborough), for making the trip a reality and providing their consistent encouragement, and for their extensive planning and logistical support to our efforts, without which our trip would not have been possible; to OMNR, CWS-Ontario Region, Ontario Nature and the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund for Bird Research and Preservation, of Bird Studies Canada, for financial support; to Lyle Walton (OMNR Northeast Regional Waterfowl Specialist) for much appreciated advice, planning and logistical support; to



Ken Ross and Don Fillman (CWS-Ontario Region) for their assistance in opening up our Burntpoint Creek Camp; and to Dan Steckly and Mary Ellen Pauli, our MNR helicopter pilots, whose efforts helped ensure both our safety and efficiency in working on Ontario's tundra coast. We thank Ken Abraham for reviewing and suggesting improvements to earlier versions of the manuscript.

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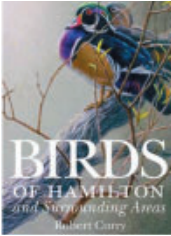
Glenn Coady, 604 – 60 Mountview Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario M6P 2L4

Donald A. Sutherland and Colin D. Jones,  
Natural Heritage Information Centre,  
Biodiversity Section, Fish and Wildlife Branch,  
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 300  
Water St., Peterborough, Ontario K9J 8M5

Mark K. Peck, Ornithology, Department of  
Natural History, Royal Ontario Museum,  
100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C6

Gerry Binsfeld, 165 Hambly Avenue,  
King City, Ontario L7B 1J2

## BOOK REVIEWS



**Birds of Hamilton and Surrounding Areas.** 2006. *Robert Curry and the Hamilton Naturalists Club.* Publ. by the Hamilton Naturalists Club.

Hardcover, 690 pages, frontpiece and 32 colour plates, 178 black and white photos, drawings and paintings, 12 maps, 22 x 28cm. \$70 Canadian. ISBN 0-9732488-8-2.

The Hamilton area is a part of the province with a wide variety of habitats, many remaining significant natural areas, including a large section of the Niagara Escarpment, and a long history of active birding. Indeed, it has "the most detailed evidence of the status of birds over the past 150 years in Ontario". This is a welcome and long awaited addition to the literature on the avifauna of the province, and I looked forward to an informative and detailed compilation about the Hamilton area. I was not disappointed.

The book begins with a foreword by Fred Bodsworth; an overview of the history and relevance of the birding activity of the area, and some background on the principal author of the book and

some of his predecessors. Then, Lois Evans provides a historical overview of "birding" in the Hamilton area. This begins with the earliest archaeological evidence for birds, and the earliest written records. It contains information on the first early serious recorders, to present day activities, and many of the fascinating persons involved along the way.

A detailed section on birding hotspots in and around Hamilton is compiled by Rob Dobos. This section is nicely complimented by maps, easily accessed inside the back cover of the book. An overview of the movements and activities of birds through the calendar year follows by Bob Curry, along with information on the average temperatures and rainfall/snowfall for each month. In another chapter Curry presents the changing environment of the Hamilton study area and the various species that have been, and continue to be influenced by ongoing alterations in the name of progress. Lists of the most obviously affected species and some of the reasons for the increases and declines are given.

The bulk of the book (366 pages) is concerned with the 389 species accounts prepared by Bob Curry. For

each account there is a summary of the occurrence and abundance for each appropriate season, set apart from the text, for a very useful quick reference. This summary also includes the number of records for rarer species, breeding status, record high counts, and extreme dates of occurrence where appropriate. The large volume of data available over many years has allowed the author to provide 12 categories to indicate the occurrence status of birds. I suspect many will find this an overly fine division to try to remember. For abundance status and breeding distribution status a more manageable five categories are used.

For all but permanent residents there is also a summary of occurrence dates for each account. Set clearly apart from the body of the text this provides median and extreme arrival and departure dates where appropriate.

The information on the seasonal occurrence of all species together is also summarized in seasonal bar graph form, prepared by Sheldon McGregor. These graphs are located at the back of the book, for ease of access. Breeding and distribution status are also included with the graphs, overall a most useful addition to the book.

The text of the species accounts begin with some interesting items gleaned from various literature sources, and may summarize the wider range of the species. The status for each is described through various time periods:

archaeological evidence if available, the late 19th century, the early, and late 20th century. For migratory species greater detail of the passage is presented, and for breeding species, atlas and nesting information compliments a discussion of breeding status. For rarer species details of some or all of the occurrences are presented. Maps inside both the front and back covers help locate places mentioned in the text. More detail on one or more on these maps, however, would have been helpful in locating some of the places referred to in various accounts.

The decision to include or exclude any particular species or record is the decision of the author. His decisions have been made after consultation with other knowledgeable persons, and consideration of the available evidence. His reasons for inclusion or exclusion have been explained. They are generally conservative and reasonable decisions. The accounts seemed carefully researched and filled with interesting and useful information.

Following the species accounts, the activities of the Hamilton Naturalists Club are further highlighted by 16 additional chapters. Bruce Duncan recounts Bald Eagle hacking to assist in the restoration efforts in southern Ontario. Brian Wylie looks at more than 50 years of a Wood Duck nest box program. Bill Read gives a history of the Eastern Bluebird populations in the area.

Don Wills and Kim Barrett discuss efforts on behalf of the endangered Prothonotary Warbler. Bev Kingdon outlines Hamilton area activities contributing to the Trumpeter Swan reintroduction to Ontario. Audrey Gamble and Mike Street celebrate the efforts to reintroduce Peregrine Falcons, and provide key details of the successes in Hamilton. Mike Street outlines the history of the Grimsby Hawkwatch, and provides the statistics for 30 years of counting.

Ralph Morris presents the history and details of many university studies undertaken with colonial waterbirds nesting in the Hamilton Harbour over 35 years. Chip Weseloh further explores the effects of contaminants on population levels of waterbirds in the harbour from government funded studies over 35 years. The effects of these complimentary studies give considerable cause for concern to the human population living in the harbour area.

The Hamilton Fall Bird Count is outlined by Bill Lamond, with results and highlights from those counts. The data from the Hamilton Christmas Bird Counts since 1921 are presented by Ian Richards. Mark Chojnacki covers the Peel-Halton section of Christmas Bird Counts since 1963. The Midwinter Waterfowl Census is discussed by George Naylor. George Bryant reviews the situation with Lake Ontario pelagic species. Phil Waggett presents a nostalgic look at some egg collecting. And finally, David Brewer

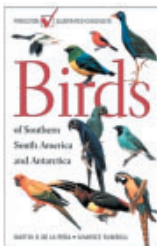
and John Miles detail the efforts and results of bird-banding, mainly since 1957.

The book cover and a frontpiece are from a fine painting by Robert Bateman. There are two groups of colour plates: The first 16 (27 photos, a map and a painting) are selected habitats and some birding highlights. These are superb photos from several sources. The second 16 (82 photos) illustrate some of the rare and uncommon birds of the Hamilton area. While I found the placement of the plates somewhat awkward, within the text of chapters, they are a beautiful addition to the book. The numerous black and white photos, drawings, and paintings that compliment the text through the book are also a very pleasing addition. Short biographies of the contributors, an index to species accounts, and the latest addition to the Hamilton area bird list conclude the book.

The Birds of Hamilton is a monument to a huge cooperative effort by a dedicated group of birding enthusiasts. It is an achievement that deserves to be on the shelves of all people interested in birds of Hamilton and the wider provincial scene.

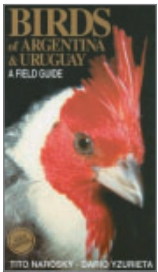
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*Ross D. James*, R.R.#3, S1480,  
Conc. 7, Sunderland, ON. L0C 1H0



**Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica.** 1998.

*Martin R. de la Peña.*  
Princeton University Press. 304 pages,  
19 x 12.5 cm. \$29.95 US.  
ISBN 0-691-09035-1.



**Birds of Argentina & Uruguay: A Field Guide.** 2003.

*Tito Narosky – Dario Yzurieta.* 15th edition,  
Vazquez Mazzini Editores. 346 pages,  
23 x 12 cm. \$43.25.  
ISBN 987-9132-05-X.

Argentina provides a good introduction to South America, because the bird list is varied but not overwhelming, the infrastructure is good, and after the devaluations a few years ago, accommodation and food are very cheap.

Two guides derived from original works in Spanish are available and both are portable for use in the field. De la Peña's guide is derived from a more extensive work that included information about nest, eggs and other material, but the birds included have been extended to include birds from surrounding countries in the southern cone. It is similar in format to other Princeton/Collins guides of the 1990s with descriptions on the pages that face the plates, followed by black-and-white plates of raptors in flight, and distribu-

tion maps collected at the back. This separation of information makes the guide harder to use, particularly for visitors who need to check distribution carefully.

Narosky's guide is a translation of the original Spanish version, and in the 15th "golden edition" the guide has been reworked, although most of the drawings are those of the late Dario Yzurieta. Descriptions, illustrations and distribution maps appear together, which facilitates use once a possible identification has been made. Finding families of birds, however, is made difficult by an index that alphabetizes using the first part of the common name rather than family name. There is an excellent section on the ornithogeographic zones of Argentina that provides a map, description of zones and the types of birds one may expect to find in each. Similarly there is a section that provides short descriptions of families, their usual behavior and habitat, and a sketch of their shape. Both of these sections are valuable for the first-time visitor. Of less value, because of its brevity, is a map and list of 100 localities for bird-watching.

The illustrations in de la Peña are cleaner and generally more useful, although the shading often appears darker than the observed bird. In the depiction of the Lineated Woodpecker, for example, the red malar stripe and the face and throat markings are clearly shown, whereas they are unclear in Narosky. The illustrations in Narosky

are more muted in color, although in the case of the ovenbirds and allies, they are often closer to what one sees. The sea and shore-birds in de la Peña are shown in flight, but most others are shown perched or standing, whereas Narosky often shows birds both in environment and flying. This is clearly an advantage for species such as the White-eyed Parrot, which shows red shoulders and underwing coverts in flight, and the black-tyrants and the siskins, which have distinctive wing patterns in flight.

The descriptions in de la Peña are more complete, whereas Narosky focuses on supplementing the drawings and this frees up space for characteristic features that might not appear in a traditional description. For example, under Scaly Parrot he notes “Flapping from body line downward, with wings nearly touching”; this was indeed the only parrot we saw flying in that manner.

Both guides use common names that may not be universally recognized; both refer to Bay-winged Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*), which is more familiar to North American birders as Harris’s Hawk. Some species may have different common names; *Cinclodes comechingonus* appears as Sierran Cinclodes in Narosky and Chestnut-winged Cinclodes in de la Peña. Splits and lumping of species vary also; Olog’s and Gray-flanked Cinclodes in Narosky appear as only Gray-flanked Cinclodes in de la Peña. This means

that one needs to check the final list of sightings against the standard world list one normally uses.

The two guides complement each other, and ideally one should have both on a trip. If forced to choose one, I would select de la Peña for its illustrations and complete descriptions. An option for those wishing to save money would be to buy de la Peña in advance and buy Narosky in Argentina, where it was on sale at the airport and in downtown Buenos Aires at a lower price than one would pay here.

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*Alexander L. (Sandy) Darling,*  
414 Rock Chapel Rd., R.R. #2,  
Dundas, Ontario L9H 5E2



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## IN MEMORIAM

### John Keith Reynolds (1919–2006)

*John D. Reynolds and Ronald G. Tozer*

J. KEITH REYNOLDS was a strong supporter of OFO, whose varied career ranged from prominent amateur naturalist in London, Ontario, to Secretary to the Ontario Cabinet and Deputy Minister of Natural Resources. As he scaled the ladder of his career, he never lost his passion for birding, and used his connections to inspire those around him to work toward effective conservation of birds and their habitats. He passed away in Toronto on 8 January 2006.

Keith was born in London, Ontario, on 29 September 1919, the son of English immigrants. His father put in 12-hour days shovelling coal at an enamel factory before eventually teaching himself refrigeration technology and working as an engineer for Labatts. Keith's grade 3 teacher, W. D. Sutton, happened to be the leader of the local Boy Scout troop, and he encouraged Keith to identify trees, plants, insects and birds. When Keith decided to aim for a Bird Warden Badge, Don Sutton called in one of Canada's foremost birders and naturalists, W. E. Saunders, to test him! Keith



**Keith Reynolds during an ice fishing trip near Haliburton**

dutifully identified a set of study skins in Saunders' home, and aside from mispronouncing "Blackburnian Warbler", passed with flying colours.

Saunders brought Keith into London's McIlwraith Ornithological Club (now McIlwraith Field Naturalists), and introduced him to a wider circle of prominent naturalists, including staff at the Royal Ontario Museum, who became lifelong acquaintances and mentors: Jim Baillie, L. L. Snyder, Terry Shortt, Cliff Hope, and J. R. Dymond. Keith's book collection from his teenage years in the 1930s includes



many volumes on mammals, birds and plants, with inscriptions from his parents, as well as Saunders and Baillie. Keith saved up his money to buy an entire collection of Bent's seminal "Life Histories" of North American birds.

Those were the days when birding was done with a shotgun. Accordingly, an online search today of Canadian museum holdings reveals 337 birds collected by Keith from the London area, as well as a number of bats and rodents. The bird specimens include a Yellow Rail from Denfield, Middlesex County, on 6 September 1937; single Piping Plovers from Ipperwash Beach, Lambton County, on 23 May 1936 and 24 May 1937; and single Baird's Sandpipers from Denfield on 6 September 1937 and Ipperwash Beach on 20 September 1937. There is even a specimen of a Swainson's Thrush from Long Point credited to his sister Ruth.

When it came time to consider university, Keith stuck to his local London roots and chose the University of Western Ontario, where he enrolled in Biology. However, World War II put an end to that almost immediately, as Keith and his brother George volunteered for the Canadian Air Force in 1940. Keith hadn't told his parents beforehand of his intentions. He simply signed up one day, and told them about it over dinner. In due course, he was sent overseas with the 418 Squadron, where he flew numerous missions from bases in East Anglia, serving as navigator and Squadron Leader. Few of

his friends survived, and Keith himself had a night-time crash into the North Sea in which his pilot was killed. Keith couldn't climb into his life-raft because his back was broken, but he attracted the attention of fishing boats by blowing a whistle. He was surprised anyone heard him over the appalling weather, and wondered why the masts on their boats were broken. He was informed that they'd lost their masts when his plane had flown through them! Fifty years later, nerve damage sustained during that crash would put an increasing limp into Keith's gait as he marched along the trails of Pelee or Thickson's Woods in search of his first warblers of the spring.

At the end of the war, Keith met his future wife Maudie while she was a military nurse stationed in Nova Scotia. They returned to London, where contemporaries recall the sense of relief felt by the old-timers in the McIlwraith Club that Keith had survived. W. E. Saunders had died while Keith was overseas, and Keith was asked in 1946 to take over the weekly column that Saunders had written in the London Free Press, which Keith turned into *Mostly Birds*. He continued to write this column until 1963.

In the meantime, Keith was back into his undergraduate degree at Western. One summer he worked for Harold E. Hitchcock, one of the founding fathers of scientific studies of bats. They explored numerous caves in southern Ontario, collecting specimens

and tagging individuals for studies of roosting site fidelity. Keith went on to obtain his MSc in one year, followed immediately by a PhD in only two years. This was while Keith and Maudie were raising their first two children, Jane and Brian! Both of Keith's theses concerned the population biology of European hares. To say that Keith brought his work home with him would be an understatement. His children recall batteries of cages in the yard, a constant stream of baby hares bouncing around the house, and a rather unfortunate incident involving a botched attempt to remove the scent gland from an anaesthetized skunk, with disastrously odoriferous consequences.

After graduation, Keith went to work for the Ontario government all his life. His early days were with Lands and Forests (now Natural Resources), where he was both a district biologist and a qualified enforcement officer — a rare combination.

His mentors were C. H. D. Clarke, the distinguished wildlife biologist and administrator, and Frank MacDougall, the famous "flying superintendent" of Algonquin Park (1931-1941), nicknamed for his introduction of bush planes for detecting forest fires. MacDougall, who by then had become Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests, encouraged Keith to consider succeeding him some day. This seemed a far-off pipe dream to a young district biologist, whose postings took his family

to Maple, Sault Ste. Marie, and Aylmer, where their third child John was born.

In 1963, a position with the Fish and Wildlife Branch at Queen's Park brought the family to Toronto. The following year Keith was appointed by Premier John Robarts as Chief Executive Officer in the Department of the Premier, and in 1969 he became Secretary to the Cabinet. We are not sure how, in one year, Keith managed to jump from Fish and Wildlife Branch to becoming the most senior civil servant in the provincial government. But this was followed by an appointment as Deputy Provincial Secretary for Resources Development from 1972-1974, then Directorship of the Committee on Government Productivity and of Task Force Hydro. John Robarts and Keith became very close friends, never missing an excuse to fly off to remote northern Ontario lakes to go fishing. Their pretext was that they needed to bring the full attention of the Ontario government to the local people — who just happened to be guides and outfitters.

In 1974, Keith became Deputy Minister of Natural Resources under Premier Bill Davis, thereby returning to the department in which he had begun his career 25 years earlier. When his appointment was announced in the MNR newsletter *Aski*, the article featured a photograph of Keith as a teenager wearing a Lands and Forests uniform, weighing Ring-necked Pheasants

on Pelee Island. This was indeed a homecoming, which led to family vacations travelling to parks throughout the province, re-connecting with old friends. Of course, he always had his binoculars and fishing rod.

Although Keith's natural history hobbies mixed deeply with his professional commitments, he also displayed an amazing ability to compartmentalize. On one holiday at a cottage at Long Point, Keith was fishing from the dock when he was called to the phone. It was forest fire season, and he needed frequent updates. Twenty minutes later he returned, mentioned casually that he'd just gotten \$10 million from the Ontario Cabinet to fight a fire, and then switched his focus

entirely to trying to catch a large-mouth bass.

Long-time friends Bruce and Ann Falls recalled that "in his administrative positions, Keith often got results through his many contacts within and outside the government. Although he remained in the background, he had a powerful influence in defusing difficult situations and encouraging positive results for conservation. For example, as the premier's right-hand man, he was able to defuse local opposition to wolf research in Algonquin Park. On another occasion, his discussions with executives at General Motors helped to pave the way for preservation of the Second Marsh in Oshawa."

Keith's retirement in 1980 kept him



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busier than ever. He formed Alafin Consultants with close friends and served on numerous committees and boards, including a consultancy with the World Health Organization in Greece and Turkey, and chairmanship of the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws from York University in 1982. Most importantly, his “retirement” years gave him time to do a lot more birding, and also to contribute his time and political savvy to various conservation organizations. He was a founding life member of OFO, a member of the Brodie Club, and chaired the finance committee of Long Point Bird Observatory. The latter position was another return to his roots, as he had also served as treasurer for London’s McIlwraith Club 50 years earlier.

Maudie passed away in 1997, 52 years after they had been married. Keith remained active and independent well into his 80s before Alzheimer’s disease confined him to a veterans’ home, where his cheerful nature and wry sense of humour stayed with him until the end.

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*John D. Reynolds*, 4152 Marine Avenue,  
Belcarra, British Columbia V3H 4P9  
e-mail: Reynolds@sfu.ca

*Ronald G. Tozer*, 1017 Spring Lake Road,  
R.R. 1, Dwight, Ontario P0A 1H0  
e-mail: rtozer@vianet.on.ca

## IN MEMORIAM

Bruce William Duncan (1946 – 2006)

*Robert Curry*

ON 11 NOVEMBER 2006 Bruce Duncan died of injuries resulting from an automobile collision the evening before, as he drove home to Paris, Ontario. The Ontario conservation community, the birding community, his myriad friends, and indeed all of nature, lost a great champion and suffered an irreplaceable loss.

Bruce was born on 13 January 1946 in Woking, Surrey, England, to an English mother and a Scottish-born member of the Canadian army medical corps. His family immigrated to Canada, and Bruce grew up mainly in Orillia.

He graduated with a psychology degree from Wilfrid Laurier University (1972). From 1974-1976 he worked at Quetico Provincial Park for the Voyageur Wilderness Program. The experience was life-changing and Bruce returned to the University of Waterloo to study biology. Subsequently Bruce worked for 11 years for the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) as a resource interpreter at Taquanyah Nature Centre west of Cayuga.



It was at this time that Bruce joined the Hamilton Naturalists' Club (HNC). His first submission to the Noteworthy Bird Records was of a Blue-headed Vireo—then, Solitary Vireo—on 4 May 1977 at Taquanyah. He soon immersed himself in the conservation activities of the HNC, as conservation director from 1979 until 1984 and then as its president from 1984 to 1986. In 1986 and 1987 Bruce organized a huge team of volunteers and released four young Bald Eagles at Taquanyah. In 1988, under his direction

and with his full participation, the Hamilton Peregrine Falcon Re-introduction Project successfully reared and released six juvenile Peregrines from the roof of Mohawk College in Hamilton. Subsequently he banded each year the young Peregrines raised by their parents on the roof of the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Hamilton — great publicity for the HNC and the hotel.

Although Bruce was a complete naturalist, his passion and his renowned skill was for diurnal birds of prey. He

was a self-confessed hawk nut. He frequently spoke about hawk migration and hawk identification to naturalists clubs and other groups across southern Ontario and in the United States, some 35 presentations in all. Most often on such occasions he was accompanied by his close friend Barry Cheriére who, as Ontario Birds readers are well aware is a skilled bird photographer, provided his excellent slides of diurnal raptors. They spoke to such organizations and in such places as the Buffalo Ornithological Society (1985), the Michigan Bird Banding Association (Livonia, MI, 1987), Ellicottville, NY, HMANA Conference (1986), Cincinnati, OH and Cape May, NJ. Bruce rarely used notes but instead memorized and rehearsed his talks — a rarity in today's PowerPoint era. Always, he would relate examples using people in his audience so that all were drawn in.

Bruce was an active member and leader in the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). In April 1988 Bruce and Barry were the keynote speakers at the HMANA conference in Cape May, New Jersey. In May 1997 HMANA presented Bruce with the Maurice Broun award for his commitment and outstanding service to further hawk migration and study.

Seeking a more intimate relationship and at the same time a more scientific understanding of birds of prey, Bruce turned to banding. He main-

tained a banding station at Hawk Cliff near Port Stanley for 17 years, banding more than 7000 raptors. This weekend passion took a more scientific turn as Bruce joined the Ontario Bird Banding Association, then served on its board for many years and as president from 1985 to 1988. During this period he edited the OBBA newsletter and journal and authored or co-authored 19 papers on raptor analysis, station reports and book reviews.

Ontario Birds readers also were the beneficiaries of Bruce's identification and writing skills. There, in a series of papers between 1983 and 1990, he wrote papers about the identification and Ontario status of nine species of raptors and vultures.

Bruce was a teacher and a leader. Noting that Hamilton birders lacked focus he instituted the Bird Study Group of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club. From its inaugural meeting on 21 September 1987, until meeting #77 in February 1996, Bruce was the study group leader responsible for the program. His legacy is the dynamic group that exists today and which regularly hosts professional and amateur speakers on all bird topics and with attendance close to 100 on average.

Similarly, Bruce was one of the original small group that gave organizational structure and international status to the Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch at Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) in Grimsby.



The wider birding and naturalists' community, in Ontario and beyond, have all been recipients of his vision and creativity, and are richer for his life and contributions.

Although local and visiting birders had watched hawks migrate up the peninsula since the 1950s, and had established daily coverage beginning in 1977, Bruce, as its first president from 1990 – 1994, and the rest of the executive, formalized reporting and really put Beamer “on the map” of North American hawk migration monitoring sites. He was a director until 2003 and host of the annual Beamer Open House on Good Friday, when he would often bring and release a raptor to the delight and edification of hundreds of the general public.

It was at Hawk Cliff that Bruce and Janet Snaith were married on a sunny Saturday, September the 26th, in 1992.

As Peter Whelan wrote in his *Globe and Mail* column, the bride, groom, minister and guests wore binoculars. Earlier that day Bruce caught and ringed his first ever Peregrine Falcon, remarking to Barry that putting on the band was a special highlight. Barry reminded him that he would be putting a gold band (not aluminum) on a very significant catch, later that afternoon. In the next several years came two children, James and Katie. Subsequently, the joys of family and the demands of work curtailed his involvement in several organizations. It seemed, however, that this was Bruce's role. His vision and energy gave birth to organizations. Then after they were fully functional

and thriving he passed the torch to others and moved on to other projects. As birders and naturalists, Bruce was our man in the formal halls, office and structures of conservation in Ontario. After 11 years with the GRCA he moved to the Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA) in 1988, first as resource interpreter, then staff ecologist in 1992, and director of watershed planning and engineering in 2002. In January 2004 Bruce was appointed as general manager and chief administrative officer. Most recently he directed and coordinated the gift of 180 acres of land in upper Stoney Creek in east Hamilton from the province of Ontario to the city of Hamilton. This property contained the Eramosa Karst Formation, a complex of sinkholes and caverns identified as an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest. Then he orchestrated a \$1.5 million donation from the Heritage Green Community Trust to the Hamilton Conservation foundation to develop these karst lands as a conservation area. This is a landmark property and will be part of Bruce's legacy.

In recognition of his conservation work Bruce received many honours, including Hamilton's Environmentalist of the Year Award in 1992 and the Canada 125 Award for Environmental Service to the Community.

On a personal note, Bruce was the biggest booster of Birds of Hamilton. He always urged the production com-

mittee and me to aim high and to produce the best book possible. Conversely, I encouraged Bruce to take some time and write about his beloved Taquanyah eagles. This he did in typical eloquent style. His conclusion to that account reveals the essence of Bruce Duncan as a naturalist, conservationist and writer.

*"Bald Eagles remain a potent symbol of North American wildlife and are worth saving and bringing back to their former numbers. This part of Ontario is poorer when it has few Bald Eagles, just as it is poorer when it has few Prothonotary Warblers or few Eastern Bluebirds. When we work together to help, not only does our area become richer in eagles, we do as well — in our deepest essence as part of this natural world."*

It is a deep privilege to have known Bruce Duncan. Bruce was a gift to the city and people of Hamilton. In addition the wider birding and naturalists' community, in Ontario and beyond, have all been recipients of his vision and creativity, and are richer for his life and contributions.

Our deepest sympathies are extended to Janet, James and Katie, and the rest of Bruce's family.



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\*Not including the 19 papers published in Ontario Bird banding between 1981 and 1992.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Barry Cherriere, Bill Read and Janet Snaith for information and for their comments on earlier drafts.

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# A TRIBUTE TO OUR OUTGOING EDITORS

*Chip Weseloh*



Ron Pittaway, Ron Tozer  
and Bill Crins

WELCOME TO CHAPTER 5 in the editorial history of *Ontario Birds*. With the immediate last issue of *Ontario Birds* (December 2006, Volume 24, No. 3, 68 pp), Bill Crins, Ron Pittaway and Ron Tozer closed Chapter 4, the longest chapter in the editorship of our journal. And it is truly amazing what they have accomplished and the transformation they have produced. Natural history journals, like *Ontario Birds*, may be a breed of journals unto themselves. Nearly always edited and put together by volunteers, they are almost always also in a state of evolution. In the early days of any such journal, the biggest job is usually finding the material to publish. Editors are always on the lookout for new material, new authors and, often, writing material themselves. As the question of securing material becomes less of a challenge, new questions crop up. Are we happy with the way our journal looks? Should we accept (or solicit) advertising? Should we include photos? Who is going to design the next cover? Etc...etc.

When Bill, Ron and Ron took over the journal, OFO membership stood at 488; today it is 1,067. Therefore, more than half of the current membership may not have seen *Ontario Birds* in its pre-Crins, Pittaway and Tozer days. The first issues of *Ontario Birds* were in black and white only, and Volume 1, No. 1 consisted of 40 pages. The first full volume was two issues (numbers) and totalled 76 pages. Our three editors took over *Ontario Birds* in April 1991, from then-editor Al Sandilands.

In 1990, Al had produced 3 issues totalling 118 pages and had begun a series on site-guides to birding in Ontario. Site-guides were a logical evolutionary progression for *Ontario Birds*. In 1991, the new editors continued the production of 3 issues and the site guide but they also instituted two new features: Recognizable Forms and the Photo Quiz. In their last issue, December 2006, they had their 48th Photo Quiz, never having missed a single issue! They also did a wonderful job of keeping readers abreast of current ornithological literature with regularly appearing book reviews, also averaging nearly one/issue over their 48 issues.

When they took over the editorship in 1991, OFO was going through a low period, membership was declining and the future of OFO and *Ontario Birds* was in doubt. In taking over the editorship, they acknowledged, "Our priorities were content and appearance. We sought articles from our many contacts in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Canadian Wildlife Service, universities, the Royal Ontario Museum, Canadian Museum of Nature, and among OFO members."

In following their priorities, the new editors lost little time in putting their own stamp on the physical appearance of *Ontario Birds*. With their first issue, Vol. 9(1), the format of having a narrow line border around the four edges of each page of the journal was dropped in favour of a more professional borderless page. Issue 11(2) saw the placement

of advertising on the back cover. With issue 12(1), a whiter cover stock was introduced, and with issue 13(3), the narrow line border on the cover was deleted. These may not seem like very noticeable changes but they are all part of the evolution of a more professional looking journal. If you carefully page through the journal from issue 14(1) to 20(1), you'll notice a host of other changes and new items: the first advertisement inside the journal itself (more revenue), the change to red letters for the title, glossier cover stock and colour photos inside, coloured Photo Quiz, entire colour format for the inside and outside (front and back) cover pages and the movement of the Table of Contents to the first inside page. By Volume 20(1), we have the journal pretty much the way we see it today.

During the Crins-Pittaway-Tozer tenure, the journal increased in size from an average of 116 pages/yr during their first 4 years to 165 pages/yr during their last 4 years. They produced 2,284 journal pages or an average of about 143/year and 48 per issue. Interestingly enough, the growth did not result from an increase in the number of contributions but rather from an increase in the length of contributions. In their first four years (Volumes 9-12), there was a total of 124 contributions listed in the Tables of Contents, for an average of 3.7 pages per contribution. In their last four years (Volumes 21-24), there was a total of 96 contributions for an average of 6.9 pages per contribution. The lengthy

OBRC report remained relatively unchanged between those two periods, averaging 21.0 and 21.8 pages, respectively.

Since colour photos started with 18(1), they have averaged approximately 12 photos/per issue which translates into about 6.5 pages of photos/issue. So, some of the increased length of the contributions has resulted from the inclusion of more photographs, which makes the journal more pleasurable and interesting to read. Another obvious contribution that the three editors have made to *Ontario Birds* is their writing. As editors are wont to do, if material is lacking, they simply put pen to paper. By my count, Ron Pittaway made exactly 48 contributions during his 48 issue joint-editorship. Together, the three editors made at least 92 contributions to the journal.

The editors also instituted many intangible qualities to the editorship of *Ontario Birds*. Through their encouragement, mentoring and tutelage, they developed a productive “stable” of regular contributors as well as new writers. New writers are often reluctant to put pen to paper, thinking that they can not really make a contribution. Or, that their observations are not really of note. The editors worked tirelessly to show the new writer that that was not the case. They spent a large part of their time helping writers improve their manuscripts, providing literature references and getting outside reviewers to develop and maintain the high quality

journal we have today. So, the change in physical appearance of *Ontario Birds* tells some of the story of the editors’ tenure but not all of it. The extent to which we see contributors from the last 16 years continuing to provide material to *Ontario Birds* will tell another side. It will tell of the legacy that Bill, Ron and Ron have left among OFO members and journal contributors. So, Chapter 4 in the history of *Ontario Birds* comes to a close, and a very significant and wonderful chapter it has been. The birders of Ontario can be mighty proud of their journal...and we all owe the outgoing editors... and the design and production workers...a huge THANK YOU for the wonderful job they have done in bringing *Ontario Birds* to the forefront of provincial natural history journals in Canada; Jon Dunn says to the forefront of such publications in North America! As new editors, we look forward to carrying on their tradition in as smooth a manner as possible... but what large pairs of shoes we have to fill!

Luckily, our retired editors have offered to give us a helping hand as we start Chapter 5 and, hopefully, we haven’t heard the last from them.

### Acknowledgements

I am appreciative of the constructive comments of Ross James and Glenn Coady on an earlier version of this paper. Bill Crins, Ron Pittaway and Ron Tozer provided background information on their years as editors as well as comments on a previous draft.

# **Nikon** PHOTO QUIZ

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FOR THIS PHOTO QUIZ, we are dealing with a small passerine that we see fairly well. It is probably fair to say that most birders, on first glance, would quickly realize they were looking at either a wood-warbler or similar appearing vireo.

We are afforded a nice look at the bill, and it is clear that this bird lacks the thick, hooked tip to the bill that we would expect to see if this bird was a vireo. Having quickly ruled out any of the vireos, we therefore know we are dealing with one of the 44 species of wood-warblers on the Ontario checklist.

Looking at the leaves in the field of view, their advanced state of growth suggests this is likely not a spring migrant. The amount of leaf damage from insects point to this being a summer photo, suggesting our bird is either a summer resident or a fall migrant. The fairly drab, yellow-olive plumage suggests it is one of a number of our similarly plumaged fall migrants that bring beginning birders despair as a suite of birds disdainfully regarded as “confusing fall warblers”.

The bird is clearly not a Yellow-breasted Chat, lacking its large size, heavy and thick bill and long tail. Its lack of prominent streaking on the breast, belly or flanks, rules out Black-and-white Warbler, Northern Water-

thrush, Louisiana Waterthrush and Ovenbird.

Two very important considerations when identifying warblers are very well seen in the view that we have here: colour and pattern of the undertail and undertail coverts; and extent of tail projection beyond the undertail coverts. This will be very useful in narrowing down our list of candidates. Note that our quiz bird has a white belly, and undertail coverts, and an undertail that is centrally white with darker corners. This easily observed combination of features allows us to eliminate a large number of Ontario wood-warblers from further consideration, including: those that have yellow undertail coverts (Common Yellowthroat, Wilson’s Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Mourning Warbler, MacGillivray’s Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Virginia’s Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Palm Warbler and Prairie Warbler); those that have a uniformly dark, unpatterned undertail beyond the coverts (Canada Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Virginia’s Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Mourning Warbler, MacGillivray’s Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Wilson’s Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler and Swainson’s Warbler); those that have patterned under-

tail coverts (Painted Redstart); those with strikingly patterned bi-coloured tails (Magnolia Warbler and American Redstart); those with a strong contrast between the colour of the belly and flanks versus the undertail coverts (Canada Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler and Prothonotary Warbler); and those with exceptionally short tails (Cerulean Warbler).

Our bird also lacks the strong facial pattern found in all plumages of Golden-winged Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Townsend's Warbler and Blackburnian Warbler. Its head is not a bright enough yellow for any plumage of Hermit Warbler. It has very obvious white wing-bars, which rules out

Black-throated Blue Warbler and Tennessee Warbler. Our bird does not have any strong contrast between the throat and the rest of the head, ruling out both Yellow-rumped Warbler and Kirtland's Warbler in all plumages. Its lack of a yellow mandible rules out Northern Parula. It lacks the grayish side to the head, white eye-ring and yellowish wing-bars of Chestnut-sided Warbler. Unlike this bird, Cape May Warbler shows extensive ventral streaking in all plumages. In summary, all other Ontario warblers are quite easily ruled out except for a group of three abundant warbler species often mistaken for each other in fall: Pine Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler and Black-poll Warbler. Pine Warbler is easily

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separated from the other two by its unstreaked upperparts, as all plumages of both Blackpoll Warbler and Bay-breasted Warbler show streaked backs. Unfortunately, we have an inadequate view of the back to make this distinction useful. Fortunately, we have an exceptional view of another useful character for analysis. Pine Warbler has short undertail coverts and very long tail projection beyond the undertail coverts, whereas both Bay-breasted Warbler and Blackpoll Warbler have very long undertail coverts that leave them both with very short tail projection beyond the coverts. Our quiz bird clearly shows the latter pattern, allowing us to rule out Pine Warbler.

We are thus left with a choice between Blackpoll Warbler and Bay-breasted Warbler, one of the most common fall warbler misidentification problems for Ontario observers, particularly with very similar first fall females. Most Bay-breasted Warblers in fall show a distinctive bay-coloured flank patch, making separation from Blackpoll Warbler simple. However, many first fall Bay-breasted Warblers lack any bay colour in the flanks, thus leaving that feature unreliable for separating the two species. There are a few features that we can see here which provide more reliable separation of the two species. Bay-breasted Warbler usually shows a distinct cream or yellow wash to the undertail coverts, whereas Blackpoll Warbler usually

shows immaculate white undertail coverts (occasionally, some show a very light yellow wash). Bay-breasted Warblers show dark legs, whereas fall Blackpoll Warblers have legs that are yellow posteriorly, with decidedly yellowish soles to the feet. Bay-breasted Warbler usually lacks streaking about the breast, whereas all plumages of Blackpoll Warbler tend to show some (often blurry) streaking at the sides of the breast. Bay-breasted Warbler often lacks, or has a very indistinct, trans-ocular line, whereas Blackpoll Warbler in all plumages has a very distinct trans-ocular line.

In our photo, we can clearly see that our quiz bird has immaculate white undertail coverts, has some blurry dark streaking about the breast, has pale yellowish posterior colour up the back of the legs, and shows brighter yellow soles to the feet. It shows quite a distinct trans-ocular line, particularly behind the eye. All of these features are consistently more in keeping with the identification of this bird as a **Blackpoll Warbler**.

This Blackpoll Warbler was photographed on 9 September 2006 at Point Pelee National Park, by Tadao (Ted) Shimba.

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*Glenn Coady*, 604 – 60 Mountview Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario M6P 2L4





## ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

**President:** Chris Escott, 1 Shouldice Court, Toronto, Ontario M2L 2S3 (416) 444-8055 E-mail: [chris@escott.ca](mailto:chris@escott.ca)

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*Editorial Assistance:* Ron Tozer,  
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*Ornithology Consultants:* Michel Gosselin,  
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