

# ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

OFO NEWSLETTER NUMBER 28

Volume 11 March 1993



Finally, it's March and we're over the hump! It has been a really exciting winter period, particularly in the Toronto area, with Laughing Gull, Veery, Townsend's Solitaire, Northern Oriole, Grasshopper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Harlequin Duck, Tufted Duck, King Eider and Barrow's Golden-eye, to name a few, delighting many observers ... and to tantalize the staunch birders ... is "Bob the Crow" really a Chihuahuan Raven? The spring migration has begun already. I hope you all have a successful and scientifically productive season. Good Birding!

## **For those of you who may have forgotten:**

Your membership dues are now payable. If you received a renewal notice with your last Newsletter and forgot to forward your payment to us, please do so right away. And of course, if you know any friends who are delinquent or who should be members, remember it's up to you to help us build and keep our membership strong!

## **The Annual General Meeting:**

What already? You bet! Start planning now ... the date is October 16, 1993 at Erindale College. We're already working on the program, but if you've got any great ideas or want to help, let us know. And lest I forget ... we'll be running the Swish Maintenance Photo Contest again this year, so get out your cameras and snap a few.

A late note about last year's AGM ... Thanks go out to Margaret Bain who donated the proceeds of the sale of her books to OFO. Marg has run the Photo Salon for several years now, and will be retiring effective immediately. Sincere thanks go out to Marg for her efforts and dedication to this project. John and Victoria Carley will be undertaking the task for 1993.

### **In the News and Other Stuff:**

- 1) At long last, we have a few copies of the famous and out of print "Blue Issue" of Ontario Birds [Volume 5, Number 2, Aug. 1987] available. Copies may be obtained by sending \$5.00 to OFO. First come first served.
- 2) The YWCA of Metropolitan Toronto operates the Tapawingo Outdoor Centre near Parry Sound on Georgian Bay. This facility, located on 150 acres features beaches, canoeing opportunities, beaver meadows, a mine site, waterfalls, and boundless nature opportunities. Staff are dedicated to catering to individuals or groups with interests in the out-of-doors. For information, contact the YWCA Camping Department, 800 Woodlawn Avenue East, Bongard House, Toronto, Ontario, M4T 1C1.
- 3) The Long Point Bird Observatory is seeking a Project Co-ordinator/Biologist for the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey. For salary details and qualifications please contact the LPBO, Executive Director, Box 160, Port Rowan, Ont., N0E 1M0.

- 4) The Long Point Biosphere Reserve is one of six Canadian Reserves, and is administered by nineteen government agencies. Although "seed" money has been raised to facilitate the implementation of the project, no "parent" has been found! This reserve, of international significance, is looking for financial support through memberships, to further its causes. An attractive brochure and more information is available by writing to the Long Point Biosphere Reserve c/o General Delivery, Port Rowan, Ont., N0E 1M0.
- 5) The LPBO is sponsoring a Young Ornithologists' Workshop from July 4 to July 11, 1993 aimed at high school students with an interest in birds. For information on the details for application, contact the LPBO at the address listed under item 3.
- 6) In December 1992, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists [FON] published its first edition of "Around Ontario", a quarterly newsletter for Nature Clubs - a medium to publicize the accomplishments and/or projects of these organizations. Contact the FON at 355 Lesmill Road, Don Mills, Ontario, M3B 2W8.
- 7) The LPBO recently released the results of the 1992 Baillie Birdathon, an annual fund-raising event to assist naturalists in protecting our birds. Sixty-two clubs and 338 individuals raised \$130,493.22 - a new record! Congratulations to the organizers.

The "Misfits" (George Pond, and John, Steven and

James Miles) raised almost \$7000 for the Heart and Stroke Foundation and were the top team.

The OFO Trophy was awarded to (1) Doug McRae for the most money raised by an individual and (2) Dave Fidler for seeing the highest percentage of birds in his home territory [151 species = 49% of the Bruce County list].

- 8) The LPBO has announced it is offering grants to individuals or groups working on bird projects, using Birdathon funds. If you're interested in applying, contact the LPBO at the address above.
- 9) C. Paul Gellatly, 249 Bellehaven Dr., Waterloo, Ontario, N2J 3L5, is compiling the annual Yearbook for the Horticultural Society in Waterloo. He is looking for articles for publication.
- 10) Dan Paleczny of R.R.#3, Cochrane, Ontario, P0L 1C0, is preparing a checklist of the birds of the Cochrane area. Available data is weak, so any information on sightings would be appreciated.
- 11) Don't forget to read and **respond to** [please] the enclosed flyer on the 1993 Birdathon.
- 12) Donald Davis sent an interesting and eye-opening letter on the status of the Presqu'ile Provincial Park Management Plan. Despite the fact that the park is a Class 1 Wetland, an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest, a potential site for the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and a

potential Canadian Ramsar site, the Management Plan is still delayed, although it was undertaken in 1979! According to Mr. Davis, the problem rests with the need for a decision with respect to the annual waterfowl hunt. For a full report on the project and information regarding how you can help, contact Mr. Davis at 3815 Bathurst Street, Apt. 2, Downsview, Ont., M3H 3N1.

- 13) The Canadian Chapter of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) has published the Vulnerable Canadian Species Update Number 8, December 1992, which discusses the current status of birds, projects and issues related to birds. For more information, contact Dr. Martin McNicholl at 218 First Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M4M 1X4.
- 14) Algonquin Provincial Park has two seasonal jobs available as Park Naturalist and Museum Technician. Contact the Park Naturalist, Ministry of Natural Resources, Box 219, Whitney, Ontario, K0J 2M0.

### **Field Trips:**

- 1) Petroglyphs: The January trip, despite the inclement weather was very successful, with 54 members participating. Highlights included six Bald Eagles, a Gray Jay, several White-winged Crossbills, a Hawk Owl and a Pied-billed Grebe.
- 2) The Fisherville trip in February attracted over fifty participants as well. Many exciting finds included

Gray Catbird, Short-eared and Long-eared Owls, 50 meadowlarks, and two Mockingbirds.

### **Short and Tweet:**

- 1) Ron Scovell reports that on November 7, 1992, while birding at Niagara, he watched a Herring Gull catching large snowflakes and attempting to eat them. After several minutes, adjacent Ring-billed Gulls mimicked his behaviour. All the birds continued this endeavour for several minutes.
  
- 2) And from the I can't believe I saw this category: While I was doing the Christmas Bird Count at Presqu'ile in late December, my group was returning from the Three-toed Woodpecker roost, after successfully recording it for the count. We bumped into several groups of birders heading for the tree, and they continued onward even when told that it had already gone to roost for the night. Finally, a single, well-known local birder was also encountered enroute to the tree. I asked him why he was going to the spot when he knew that the bird had gone to roost, and experience had shown that once it was in the tree cavity, it did not emerge until the next day. He explained in a rather aggressive manner that he had been monitoring the bird's habits for several days and believed that he deserved the "honour" of recording it for the bird count. I asked him what he intended to do to guarantee his sighting. He explained that if necessary, he would pound on the tree to bring the bird out. I find it amazing that this individual, who

incidentally is a good birder and excellent observer, would hold the bird's well being in such low regard, and his own personal needs so much more important. Incidentally, he did see the bird, but how he did so remains a mystery. I'd rather not know!

## **Beginner's Column:**

### **Who Gives a Hoot?**

A light snow has fallen earlier today, but the cloud cleared by nightfall and the moon rose full and bright. It's early March and it's time to mate ... that is if you are an owl! The formerly quiet night woods are resonant with the hoots and squawks of these amorous birds.

Too often, I hear "I have never heard or seen an owl". Well, really, owls are quite common in southern Ontario. Several species are year round residents or migrants hereabouts. To help you in your endeavours, here is a quick guide to owl calls:

Great Horned Owl - four to five hoots [hoo hoo hoo-hoo hoo] is the typical male call, while the female responds 'hoo hoo hoo-hoo-hoo hoo hoo'. The call is essentially monotone, with the female calling on a slightly higher pitch. This is the commonest owl call heard in Central Ontario. The Great Horned also emits a variety of squawks, screeches, grunts and dog-like howls, so don't be fooled!

Barred Owl - this species invariably gives two four note calls, followed by an undignified 'burp'. The song has been

described as "Who cooks for you, who cooks for you, all". Birds also produce a variety of screams, chuckles, grunts and slurred trembling sounds however. These birds like mixed, mature woods, with Hemlocks present.

Eastern Screech-owl - the most frequently heard call is a rather plaintive, unowllike call, best described as a long series of tremulous whistles on the same pitch, reminiscent of a trill. It also does a whistled whinny, that starts on a rising pitch and quickly descends to a distinct wavering call, followed by the trill described above. These birds favour mature hardwood stands.

Northern Saw-whet Owl - this tiny owl gives a monotonous series of metallic notes on the same or a rising pitch [too-too-too-too]. The series can be very lengthy, with two or three notes per second. The best place to listen for this species is in coniferous wet woods.

Long-eared Owl - this species seldom calls, but when it does, you are likely to think that you are listening to a dove or a dog! It does give a soft 'hoo', but you are more likely to hear it grunt, bark, yap, whine, meow, coo or shriek. They are reported to give a sharp 'weck-weck-weck' call as well when alarmed. They are most frequently encountered in wet coniferous woods.

Well, good owling, and remember that you should only use a bird tape for learning an owl's call, not for attracting them.