

# OFO



# ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

OFO NEWSLETTER NUMBER 23

FEBRUARY 1991

1991 is well under way as I put my two educated fingers to the keyboard to produce another literary treatise. For me, I'm very excited about some planned changes to the operation of OFO this year. Generally, OFO is well run and a benefit to our members, through its sponsored field trips and special services, such as our two publications. However, as I'm sure you know, we have had some difficulty with meeting deadlines in the past. The Executive have fretted over this dilemma for many hours in recent months, and now feel confident that we can resolve the issue over the next short while. We have decided to hire a new typesetter and printer to publish Ontario Birds. Of course, this means little without a revamping of the production of the publication. To this end, Bill Crins, Ron Tozer, Ron Pittaway and hopefully Dan Strickland will form a new editorial board that is charged with the responsibility of producing Ontario Birds. This change coupled with exciting new features such as detailed site guides and a new dedication to the project should produce a noticeable change in our public perception and more importantly to the service we offer you, our members.

There are some things that you can do to help us as well. Firstly, we have been faced with a continual shortage of articles for publication. Are you working on or do you have a completed manuscript that you would like published? Send it to us and we'll take care of the rest to lead you to the road of fame and glory. Secondly, our membership has dropped drastically in recent months. If each of you solicited just one new member or reinstated an old member, we would top 1000 members very quickly. We need a strong financial base in order to survive. Your help is needed now. That's not too much to ask! Please do your part and help where you can. And finally, our sincerest thanks go out to all of you who have stayed with us during the growing years and consequent growing pains. With your help and our conviction, OFO will become a strong influence on the birding community of Ontario once again.

Well, there's lots of news, so "let's get busy"!

**Bird-a-thon 1990:** Lasts year's Bird-a-thon is now complete, and it was more successful than ever. Almost \$126,000 was raised. Everyone involved is to be commended for all their efforts, and especially Doug McRae for the work he did! But let's not be complacent! for the 1991 bird-a-thon is about to begin! OFO will

P.O. BOX 1204, STATION B, BURLINGTON, ONTARIO L7P 3S9

once again field a pseudo-celebrity team comprised of several of the Executive members, including Margaret Bain, Bill Crins, Ron Scovell, Gerry Shemilt and the local favourite (at least in my house) Geoff Carpentier. If you would like to sponsor any of these intrepid souls, please send your pledge in now! Don't be the last kid on the block to jump on the OFO bandwagon. Sid Hadlington of Brighton (613-475-0160) will be co-ordinating the project for OFO this year. Save your bucks and save our birds!

**In the News:**

- (1) Black Tern Survey - The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and the Ontario Rare Breeding Bird Program (ORBBP) are undertaking a survey of rare colonial birds nesting in wetlands along the shores of the Great Lakes and adjacent areas. From 1989 to 1990, the CWS surveyed Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, Double-crested Cormorants and Common and Caspian Terns. In 1991, they will complete the survey with the help of Ontario birders (read OFO members). The focus will be on Great and Cattle Egrets, Black and Yellow-crowned Night Herons and Black and Forster's Terns. Details of the survey area can be attained by contacting the co-ordinators of the project. Since most of the species are very rare, the survey will concentrate on documenting and locating Black Tern colonies primarily. Field work will take place mainly in June, covering all of these sites and will require extensive co-operation and coordination between the CWS and the Regional Co-ordinators of the ORBBP. For further information contact Mike Cadman at the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, 355 Lesmill Road, Don Mills, Ontario, M3B 2W8.
- (2) The Royal Ontario Museum exhibition "Wildlife: Images in Painting and Sculpture" will run until March 24, 1991. Each work tells an entire story about the subject species, from its environment to its relationship to other species. Images of playful Bobcats, soaring birds of prey and Elephants lazily roaming the African plains will capture your imagination. While there enjoy the Sportsmen's Shows Gallery of Birds, a stunning in situ display of birds of the world.
- (3) New Brunswick has developed a new Birder's Hotline (506-450-DUCK). As a nice start, the first bird on the tape was a Fieldfare - the province's first!
- (4) A Birding Guide to the Long Point Area (including a Seasonal Checklist of the Birds of the Long Point Area) has recently been written by Jeff Skevington, Bev Collier and Terrie Woodrow and published by the LPBO. To order, send \$5.95, plus \$1.00 P&H, to Birding Guide, Long Point Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario, NOE 1M0.

- (5) LPBO has positions available as volunteer field biologists for 1991. Up to 12 long-term (minimum one month) volunteers are needed to work on a variety of projects. Contact LPBO at the above address for details.
- (6) Amendments to the Migratory Birds Convention: There is a problem in northern Canada and Alaska that needs your attention. Apparently, many northerners are hunting birds illegally in the spring in particular. The number of hunters involved and the number of birds taken is unknown, because it is completely unregulated. The Canadian Nature Federation (CNF) is addressing the issue with the International Committee for Bird Preservation and the Canadian Wildlife Service to try to solve the problem. If you would like more information on the problem and how you can help, contact the CNF at 453 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6Z4.
- (7) The Ministry of Natural Resources is seeking applicants for seasonal employment at Algonquin Provincial Park this summer as a Park Naturalist and a Museum Technician. For further information contact The Park Naturalist at the Ministry of Natural Resources, P.O. Box 219, Whitney, Ontario, K0J 2M0.
- (8) Field Mark Publications has announced the release of "Birding at Point Pelee National Park" - field mark identification game. The cost is \$25.00 U.S. plus \$3.50 S&H and remittances or inquirers should be sent to Field Mark Publications, P.O. Box 51177, Livonia, Mi., USA, 48150.
- (9) The Nature Conservancy of Canada has announced a new program to help preserve Canadian endangered species and habitats. Please contact them at 794A Broadview Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M4K 2P7 to learn more about how you can become involved, and what they are trying to do for our wildlife.
- (10) TVOntario has developed a new kid's environment program that airs every Thursday at 10:45 a.m. and repeats at 2:15 p.m. on the following Monday. If you have a Club item of interest that you would like published thereon, please contact them at TVO, P.O. Box 200, Station Q, Toronto, Ontario, M4T 2T1 (416-484-2185 ext. 2185).

**Short and Tweet:**

- (1) The Peninsula Naturalists Bulletin reported the following item (Spring 1990) - Feather swallowing occurs primarily in fish-eating birds, such as grebes, whose gizzards are not efficient enough to crush the bones of fish. The feathers, when swallowed, act as cushioning in the stomach so that

sharp bones do not puncture the stomach lining. They also help slow down the digestive process, so bones are dissolved and do not pass straight through the intestines. It has been reported that up to 50% of the stomach contents of the Pied-billed Grebe may at any time be feathers. This is comparable to parrots, budgies, turkeys and other gallinaceous birds swallowing grit to aid in their digestion.

- (2) On January 7, 1991, while searching for the elusive Mew Gull at Grenadier pond in Toronto, I noticed seven (five male, two female) Northern Shovelers feeding in the small patch of open water by Ellis Avenue. Unlike the other puddle ducks, who merely dabbled and tipped up in the water, the Shovelers swam beak to tail in a tight circle with their individual heads underwater most of the time. Presumably the swirling motion of the rapid (always counterclockwise) movement of the birds dislodged small food items from the bottom which were carried by the vortex to the surface for retrieval by the Shovelers. At one point a male Mallard became caught up in the excitement and joined the frenzy, but it soon lost interest. And yes, I eventually did see the gull!
- (3) I spent part of January 22, 1991 at Amherst Island near Kingston, looking for the ever evasive owls. At mid-day, near the south central part of the island, I watched Mourning Doves feeding on the ground. Suddenly, a Northern Shrike flew into the flock and attacked one of the doves. The bird flew off with the shrike in hot pursuit, dive-bombing and actually hitting the bird. Eventually, the shrike gave up and the dove went on about its business, apparently unharmed. Now, that's one hungry shrike!
- (4) I have noticed in late winter that Cedar Waxwings, in particular, will "drink snow" with some regularity. On February 10, 1991, I watched about ten birds doing this near my home in Peterborough. Essentially, they sit on the snow and pick up small mouthfuls of loose snow, or, as was the case this year, small granules of the crusty snow. The reason for this is unknown to me, but I suspect it has something to do with the food the birds are eating. Earlier in the winter, berries are still somewhat moisture laden and succulent. As the season progresses, they desiccate gradually, to the point that they are essentially dried fruit late in the winter. By February or late January, the birds simply get "thirsty" after eating the berries, and turn to snow as the only available water source. Any better ideas?

**Field Trips: Old and New:**

The Petroglyphs outing on February 3, 1991 was attended by 30 members. The weather was great and the birding good. Although only 25 species were recorded, the quality was great. The male Barrow's Golden-eye at Lakefield cooperated as usual. About twenty Red Crossbills, a Pileated Woodpecker, two Gray Jays and a Sharp-shinned Hawk worked the woods around the park. On the "ridge", we were treated to long and excellent looks at at least four Bald Eagles (One adult and three juveniles) and two juvenile Golden Eagles. Needless to say everyone went home happy with the outcome.

The Pelee Camping Weekend is slated for May 18-20, 1991. We have reserved several sites (16) on your behalf, that are available on a first come first serve basis. The cost is \$6.00/person/night. Book now through the OFO mailbox as space is limited.

**Correction:** The trip to Beamer Point slated for April will be held on the 7th, not the 27th as previously reported.

Information sheets for all of the 1991 field trips are available free to members so requesting them. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope with your request.

The Annual General Meeting is slated for October 19, 1991. It will be held at Erindale College if we can get in. Many more details will follow, but book the date now, as it promises to be another exciting adventure.

**Membership Renewal:**

If you haven't yet renewed your membership, do so now. The rate for 1991 will remain at \$20.00. OFO hasn't raised the rate in two years despite inflation and increased postage rates. Remember GST does not apply to your membership. As stated before please try to hustle one new member each and help OFO to help you and all of wildlife.

**Birder's Etiquette:**

From time to time things happen that make one disappointed in one's fellow man. Recently, two of these were brought to my attention.

As many of you know, a Hawk Owl set up residence near Brighton for several weeks this winter. Most of the birders who went to see it seemed to be truly concerned for its well being,

and didn't chase it too much in pursuit of the perfect photo. However, one group or individual took it upon himself/themselves to use food to lure the bird closer. This in itself may not be so bad, but it is reported that the mice were placed on the roadway, so that no obstructions would be visible in the final photo. The bird quickly learned to swoop over the road to get food. Eventually, the bird was killed by car on Highway 30. Are the two incidents related? I'm not sure, but surely a good photo is not worth a bird's life. Why not put the same mice in an open field if it must be done at all? Of course even the act of encouraging the bird to trust man is often fatal in itself. Perhaps patiently waiting for the bird to naturally pose for a nice picture would have been a better choice, certainly for the bird's sake.

The Nepton Ridge is becoming a favourite birding spot due to the potential to see eagles. As most birders know, the property is privately owned. This year new owners made it very clear they didn't want birders there. However, we've been working with them to show that we're harmless, and the record is scientifically beneficial. Despite pleas to individuals and groups (I feel like an environment cop), many birders went up onto the ridge regardless. The security staff there are hard to locate, so these individuals, if they tried to contact them at all, took it upon themselves to trespass without permission when they couldn't find the security staff. This is illegal entry! Why do they think that they have the right to use anybody's property as if it was their own, just because they feel they have the right to view birds. I personally am very disappointed in those individuals who entered without permission. Trying and failing to contact the security staff does not give you the right to enter.

We spend a lot of time worrying about our image. Stop blaming the other guy for problems you are creating. If we keep it up we won't have any access to the ridge, and to other wildlife areas. Remember the "Cuts" at Long Point!

**Finally:**

Ross Thompson, Superintendent of Pelee National Park, wrote to express thanks to all birders who co-operated in obeying use restrictions on seasonal trails. They are expanding the restricted area to include the area south of Delaurier Trail in 1991. Reusable orange or red flagging will mark seasonal trails. Your continued co-operation is encouraged. Some areas, such as East Beach Road, are now totally inaccessible to visitors! Comments should be directed to the Park, preferably in writing.

Newsletter Editor, Geoff Carpentier, 964 Weller St.,  
Peterborough, Ontario, K9J 4Y2.