



# OFO News

NEWSLETTER OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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*Boreal Owl/ Alex Hudel Photography*

## The Other Boreal Visitors

*By Seabrooke Leckie*

It's hard to deny that once the Yellow-rumped Warblers and Hermit Thrushes depart at the end of the fall, birding in most of Ontario slows down considerably. Instead of the potentially 100+ species one might record in an average day of birding mid-migration, it's considered an excellent day out to finish with a tally above 30 or 40, in most areas. Although the birds become harder to locate, and there's less variety among what

you do find, that doesn't mean birding comes to a standstill during the winter months. Far from it!

Here in Ontario we are lucky to have the pleasure of experiencing regular irruptions of species that many of our fellow birders south of the border may hope to see once or twice a decade. In fact, it seems that every winter we have something to look forward to. This year we have White-winged Crossbills. Their movement south this year is on the scale of a once-in-a-decade event. For states such as Pennsylvania and West Virginia, the species is being reported to eBird.org with a frequency that hasn't been seen since the site was started in 2002. For many birders, this is THE bird of the winter.

Overlooked in all the crossbill fervour have been the Boreal Owls who have quietly slipped into southern Ontario. The owl's population levels closely reflect the abundance of their primary rodent prey, with years of high prey abundance resulting in large numbers of successfully fledged young. These summers of high abundance are usually followed by population crashes as the rodents exceed the carrying capacity of their environment. The result is an irruption southward as the reduced rodent population is unable to sustain the increased owl numbers through the winter. This year happens to be one of those years.

Boreal Owls breed from the Lake Nipissing region north through much of boreal Ontario and Quebec, but their secretive habits make them difficult to detect. For the same reason, they likely often go overlooked when they wander south. Chances are that the individuals that are reported to Ontbirds and other birding listservs are just a portion of those that are actually around.

Owl irruptions, at least of the smaller species, are often best monitored by dedicated banding programs. There are several such stations in Ontario and neighbouring regions. Whitefish Point Bird Observatory in northern Michigan often provides a glimpse of what to expect for the coming winter. This past fall they captured and banded 24 Boreal Owls in their regular monitoring program. Although far from their busiest season for the little owl — they caught nearly 160 in 2000, and 170 in 1996 — it is an above-average total for the observatory. In both 2006 and 2007, no Boreals at all were caught. The long term trends for this site show an approximately four–five year periodicity in the number of owls captured each fall.

**Figure 1. Boreal Owl captures per year at Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac, Quebec, showing four-year periodicity.** Data courtesy of <http://explos-nature.qc.ca/oot/>



**This Boreal Owl, found west of Ottawa on March Valley Road, was observed for three days before being found dead and severely emaciated. The bird's fluffed-up feathers may be a sign of its condition.** Photo by Don Wigle, Ottawa.

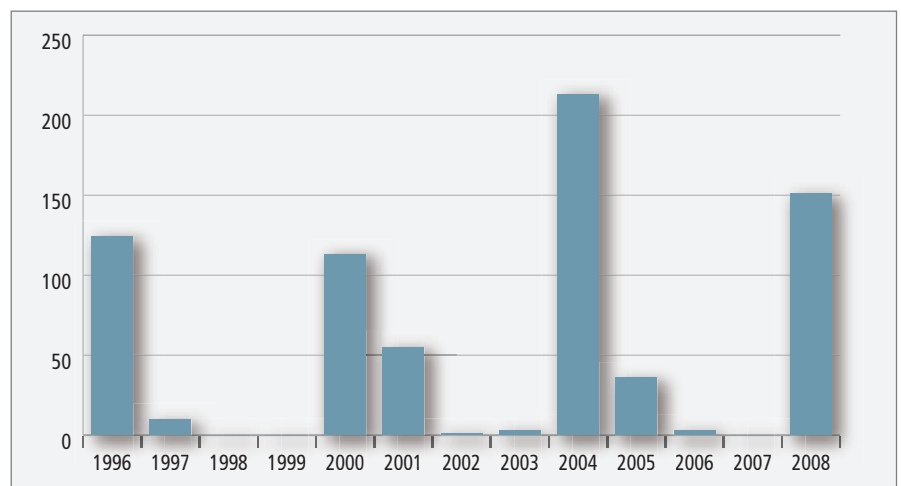
The Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac (OOT), at the mouth of the Saguenay River along the St. Lawrence, also encounters high numbers of Boreal Owls in irruption years. The birds there show a distinct and reliable four-year cycle, with the previous peak in 2004, when an impressive 213 owls were banded. As of their final newsletter, OOT had banded 151 Boreal Owls this fall, their second highest total, behind only the 2004 count (Figure 1).

There have been several reports and regular sightings of Boreal Owls in southern Ontario this winter. It comes as no surprise that among the regulars were at least three individuals who

opted to shore up for the season in Amherst Island's well-known Owl Woods. The woods have developed a reputation for playing host to all sorts of owls, concentrated in a small patch of woods as a result of limited available habitat once these southbound migrants hit the lakeshore. The fact that most of Amherst Island is open land of the sort favoured by small rodents helps in providing this overabundance of owls with enough food to go around.

More unpredictable, however, have been the locations of the other individuals to turn up. While birds that reach the lake are necessarily limited to what patches of habitat exist along there, inland the habitat is so extensive as to make looking for a Boreal Owl (or any bird, for that matter) akin to searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack, and sightings are often by chance.

Such was the case with this winter's other well-documented individual, on March Valley Road west of Ottawa. Serendipitously spotted as it snoozed in a tree at the side of the road, the owl was observed for three days before being found dead. The bird was severely emaciated when it was found, suggesting that, even though it was observed feeding on a rodent a couple of days earlier, it was having trouble finding enough to eat. Photos taken of this individual showed it with its feathers fluffed out away from its body, while those of birds elsewhere, such as on Amherst Island, do not show this behaviour. Often, birds that sit with their feathers fluffed up for most of the day are sick or in trouble,





rather than simply cold. A bird that was not finding enough to eat would need to maximize its insulation to minimize energy waste through heat loss.

It's easy to forget, when watching these charming birds, just why they're here in the first place. These birds have traveled a considerable distance, often hundreds of kilometres, in search of food. As predators, food is always more difficult to obtain than it is for other birds, since not only do they need to locate the prey, but catch it as well. Although we may occasionally see the

owls with a rodent, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are having great success hunting. This is especially true in years when snow cover is deep and rodents tend to remain farther under the surface. Because of the high proportion of first-year birds during irruption years, many of these visitors are also young or inexperienced foragers. The best thing we can do for them may be to simply observe quickly and then let them resume their normal activities.

At least 12 Boreal Owls have been reported to OntBirds this winter. Of

these, three were on Amherst Island, and four were in the Sault Ste. Marie area. The rest were found and reported as individuals, but interestingly, all 12 of the birds were located in eastern or north-central Ontario. All of the eastern Ontario owls have eventually succumbed to starvation, were killed by predation or collision with vehicles, or have simply disappeared, fate unknown. It's a tough life for these little birds. We're fortunate to be offered a small glimpse of it while they're here.



Nesting Great Black-backed Gull on Strachan Island, 2008. Photo by Clive Hodder

## The rise and fall of the Great Black-backed Gull on the Great Lakes

By Dave Moore

**T**he Great Black-backed Gull is one of our most recognizable gulls, with its distinctive, black mantle and large size. In North America, it breeds on the Atlantic coast from Labrador to North Carolina, on the St. Lawrence River and estuary and in the Great Lakes region. Prior to the early 1930s, it was considered a rare or uncommon

multiple nesting of this species was recorded, on Little Galloo Island (New York, starting in 1981) and Pigeon Island (starting in 1987-89), both located in eastern Lake Ontario. Breeding numbers increased steadily at these two sites thereafter. The number of Great Black-backed Gull nests continued to increase during the 1990s (153 nests recorded at 27 sites).

winter visitor/resident on the lower Great Lakes. After this time, the numbers of black-backed gulls reported in winter increased greatly, especially on Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron. Data from Christmas Bird Counts reflect this general pattern (see Figure 1). From banding data, we know that at least some of the Great Black-backed Gulls that migrate into the Great Lakes in the autumn and winter originate from the lower St. Lawrence River and the Atlantic coast. Other birds are year-round residents of the Great Lakes.

The Great Black-backed Gull was first recorded nesting on the Great Lakes in 1954, on Little Haystack Island, located off the west coast of the Bruce Peninsula on Lake Huron. Over the next half century, there was a gradual increase in the number of Great Black-backed Gull pairs breeding in the Great Lakes region. The following data were compiled mainly by Chip Weseloh, Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). During the 1960s and 1970s, single Great Black-backed Gull nests were found irregularly on two islands in eastern Lake Ontario: Gull Island, part of Presqu'île Provincial Park, and Pigeon Island, off the southwest tip of Wolfe Island near Kingston. During the 1980s, at least 53 nesting attempts were recorded at 6 islands on Lake Ontario, four islands on Lake Huron and three islands on the upper St. Lawrence River. It was also during this period that the first annually re-occurring, mul-

Most nests were found on Lake Ontario (121 nests at seven islands; 79% of all nests during this period), followed by Lake Huron (16 nests at 12 islands; 10%) and the upper St. Lawrence River (eight nests at four islands; 5%). During this period, Great Black-backed Gulls also colonized two new water bodies. On Lake Erie, single pairs nested sporadically on Mohawk Island (near Dunnville, ON) and the breakwall at Port Colborne, ON from 1993 to 1999. On Lake Michigan, from 1994 to 1998, single nests were discovered on Spider and Gravelly islands, both located near the tip of the Door Peninsula, which separates Green Bay from the main body of Lake Michigan. Great Black-backed Gulls currently breed or have bred on all of the Great Lakes except Lake Superior, with the greatest number of nests occurring in eastern Lake Ontario.

At approximately ten-year intervals, joint surveys of all colonial waterbirds breeding on the Great Lakes are conducted by the CWS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and their partners. The results of these surveys show a dramatic increase in the total number of Great Black-backed Gull nests over the past three decades: no nests were recorded in 1976-77, 23 nests were found in 1989-90 and there were 51 active nests in 1998-2000. Around the time of the last Great Lakes census (late-1990s), the breeding population on Lake Ontario appeared to have reached a peak. For example, in 2001, 18 nests were found on Pigeon Island and 16 pairs nested on Little Galloo Island. More recently, the breeding population has declined rapidly. By 2006, there was no nesting on Lake Erie and only four nests occurred on Lake Ontario: three on Little Galloo Island and one on Snake Island (near Kingston, Ontario). During the fourth Great Lakes-wide survey (2007-present; complete for the lower lakes) there were only 6 nests recorded on the St. Lawrence River and one on Little Galloo Island. The Christmas Bird Count index for Ontario show a similar trend for over-wintering black-backed gulls as that observed for breeding birds: a rapid increase



Great Black-backed Gull at a nest on McNair Island, 2008. Photo by Clive Hodder

from the mid-1980s to the late-1990s, followed by a rapid decline to present (Figure 1).

This dramatic reversal of fortune for Great Black-backed Gulls in the region coincides with the emergence of Type E Botulism as a significant cause of waterbird mortality on the Great Lakes. Avian botulism is a paralytic disease which occurs when birds consume a neurotoxin produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*, which is commonly found in lake and wetland sediments. The bacteria normally occur as spores and only produce the toxin under warm, oxygen-depleted conditions that frequently occur in late summer. Fish-eating birds may be exposed to the toxin directly, through the consumption of contaminated fish or invertebrates, or by scavenging dead, botulinum-exposed fish or birds. Symptoms of avian botulism include progressive paralysis of the wings, legs, and eventually, neck muscles, producing a condition known as “limber-neck” in which the bird cannot support its head. If untreated, botulism poisoning is usually fatal.

The first Type E Botulism outbreak on the Great Lakes that was associated with a large-scale die-off of birds occurred in 1963. Over the intervening three decades, additional, smaller-scale outbreaks (100s –1,000s of dead birds) occurred sporadically on Lakes Michigan and Huron. During the past decade, botulism-related mortality has become a more widespread and frequent occurrence on the Great Lakes. Major die-offs of waterfowl have been documented regularly along the shorelines of Lakes Erie and Huron since 1999, Lake Ontario since 2002 and Lake Michigan since 2006. The species most commonly affected include: Common Loons, Long-tailed Ducks, White-winged Scoters, gulls, Double-crested Cormorants, Red-breasted and Common Mergansers, and Red-necked and Horned Grebes. Currently across the Great Lakes, annual mortality estimates run in the order of tens of thousands of birds.

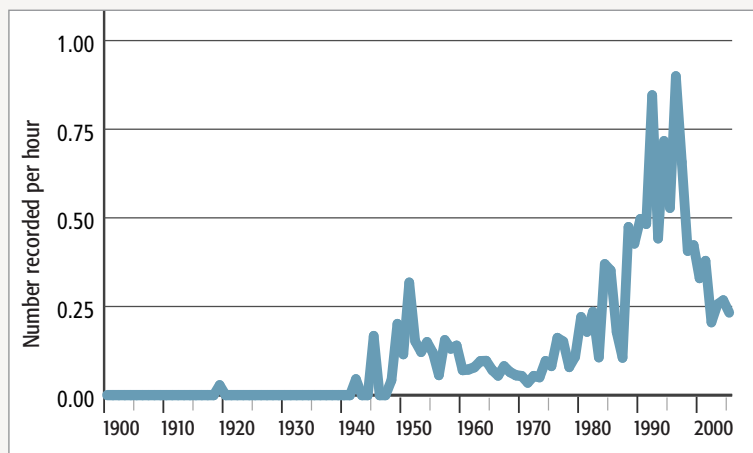


Figure 1: Christmas Bird Count data for Great Black-backed Gulls in Ontario, 1900-2006. (Source: National Audubon Society (2002). *The Christmas Bird Count Historical Results [Online]*. Available at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc> [25 January 2008].)



Although the reasons behind the spread and increased frequency of avian botulism are poorly understood, recent changes in the Great Lakes ecosystem have been implicated. Researchers are currently investigating the links between introduced zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) and Round Gobies (*Apollonia melanostoma*) as a potential pathway / biomagnifier of the botulinum toxin, as well as, the impact of large-scale algal blooms on creating the anoxic conditions associated with toxin production.

Since 2004, Chip Weseloh and Laird Shutt of the Canadian Wildlife Service have recorded 6,200 dead waterbirds at six islands in eastern Lake Ontario. One of their findings is that Great Black-backed Gulls are disproportionately represented among the dead, compared to other waterbird species. The increased impact of botulism on Great Black-backed Gulls may be due to the fact that they are relatively recent arrivals to the Great Lakes, and therefore, have not had sufficient time to co-evolve with the *C. botulinum* bacteria. More than likely, these gulls are simply subjected to an increased level of exposure to the toxin as a function of occupying the top trophic level in the aquatic environment. Whatever the explanation, it is clear that the disease has had a devastating impact on this species: Great Black-backed Gulls have been particularly hard hit on Lake Ontario, their traditional stronghold, and as a result, have nearly been extirpated as a breeding species from the Great Lakes. Only time will tell if this species will be able to re-establish its former range and breeding population.

## Erratum

Two images in the previous issue of *OFO News* (Vol. 26, No. 3) were labelled with the incorrect photographer's credit. The Laughing Gull (page 3) and Franklin's Gull (page 5) were taken by Barry Cheriére, and not Jim Richards as indicated. The editors of *OFO News* offer their apology for the confusion.

# What do Pileated Woodpeckers and Hydro One have in common?

By Christine Vance

**The answer to this question is that both the power company and the birds share an interest in utility poles — much to Hydro One's chagrin.**

Photos courtesy of  
Hydro One

In most of Ontario, it's not uncommon to find a hydro pole with an excavation in it, and generally, these are large feeding cavities created by Pileated Woodpeckers. Replacing these weakened structures can cost anywhere from \$3,000 to \$6,000, according to Glen Bowman, Senior Advisor for Health Safety & Environment, at Hydro One. This is why the power utility has put a concerted effort into discouraging the birds from choosing the poles as a foraging or nesting target.



In eastern Ontario, the company has nailed metal woodpecker decoys to new poles in an attempt to discourage the birds. The decoys are intended to persuade the birds to dine elsewhere, because Pileated Woodpeckers are highly territorial and individuals don't normally use the same tree or pole. Fake owls have been unsuccessful, according to Hydro One, but the large steel woodpeckers, made by Swedish company Hammarprodukter and originally put to use in Europe, have been successful in deterring some birds. There are currently several hundred such decoys on utility poles throughout Ontario. But in many cases, the woodpeckers aren't fooled.

Hydro One has also attempted to cover up their attractive real estate by wrapping poles in black plastic, and in rare cases using poles constructed of steel (which the birds are unable to grasp to climb). Elsewhere in North America, researchers are experimenting with different composite materials to make poles out of, so that Pileateds are permanently discouraged.

Recently, Hydro One has been trying a new strategy — when a cavity is found, the original pole is cut to a smaller length and bolted adjacent to the new pole at the same height (see picture). In order to keep any potential contents of the nest safe, this procedure is completed with the pole still held vertical, and at its original height. This solution preserves the new hydro pole while maintaining habitat for the birds.

You might see these structures in various places in Ontario. This one comes from the corner of Hwy 7 and 15 in Carleton Place. The jury is still out on the effectiveness of this design, but Hydro One would appreciate hearing your observations if you happen to witness something at the poles (send them to Christine Vance, ccvance@gmail.com). Regardless of the success, Hydro One's efforts to help Pileated Woodpeckers in an eco-friendly manner are commendable and appreciated both by the Woodpeckers and the birders who enjoy them.

# Green Birding

By Christine Vance

**Increased knowledge of climate change has made me, like so many others, ask what I can do to reduce carbon emissions and help reverse this potentially devastating global trend.**

I've made a few little changes in the past few years; in my house I've replaced incandescent light bulbs with energy efficient compact fluorescents, I carpool to work most days, I air dry my laundry instead of using the drier and I buy my fruits and veggies from local sources as much as possible. Even though my efforts may be small scale, reducing my carbon footprint has become one of my life mottos; it's difficult NOT to think about it now.

So a couple of years ago, when my friends were contemplating entering the Carden Challenge birdathon around the Kirkfield area, I couldn't suppress the nagging voice in my head about the carbon we would be emitting simply for a bit of fun. When I mentioned my hesitation, one of my friends replied "Why don't we do it on bike?" To my horror, everyone thought this was a great idea.

Now truthfully, 'horror' may be a strong choice of words. A couple of years earlier I had participated in the Pelee Island birdathon, a bicycle-only event, and although I did manage to survive, the landscape was quite different. The island is extremely flat and fairly small, there's barely a car to speak of, and there are birds everywhere. Spending a day on a bike looking for birds was not difficult to do. But by the end of the day I was

exhausted and had a very sore seat (true to the name of our team, "the Swollen-rumped Warblers") but I was also exhilarated. The birding was fantastic, the fresh air and exercise were invigorating and there were bonus sightings, like ametre and a half long Fox Snake, along the way.

For me to agree with my already eager friends (none of whom, I might add, had yet done a birdathon on bike), it took more convincing than I care to admit. My hesitation was for a few reasons; in my mind the area seemed in stark contrast to Pelee Island — a vast area with rolling hills, highways and traffic, and habitats spread to each end. Not as welcoming for biking at all. In the end, we compromised; the evening portion we would do by car (for safety reasons primarily, but also to reach spots that we wouldn't be able to get to unless we trained with Lance Armstrong prior to the event), and the rest, all day Saturday — the bulk of the event, we would do by bike.



Carden Challenge birdathon participants. left to right: Julie Simard, Martha Allen, Alissa Sugar and Christine Vance (June 2007). Photo by Martha Allen

It wasn't a big surprise when we showed up the day of the event that we were the only team planning on using two-wheels primarily instead of four. Aside from being on bikes, we knew we were at a disadvantage competitively as none of us had thoroughly birded the area before. Oh, and we were also lacking a spotting scope due to some miscommunication. Nonetheless, we were optimistic — we thought while vehicles covered more area, we could pick up species that others would miss from being outside more.

To my surprise, biking around the Carden Alvar was not as difficult as I anticipated. We made multiple stops throughout the day, we stayed on side roads as much as possible so the traffic didn't bother us and got to travel down trails that cars couldn't. On top of the birding, we enjoyed some great wildflowers that we likely wouldn't have stopped for otherwise. By the end of the event, we covered 30 km on our bikes but our total wasn't near what we wanted it to be; a meager 82 species (the winning team had 122 species that day). We were determined to prove we could do better, and have a smaller carbon footprint at the same time, and so vowed to participate again the following year.

Armed with knowledge of the hot spots in the area, experience with the time it takes to bike, a better plan how to cover the area and equipped with a spotting scope, last year we covered over 40 km by bike and increased our total to 101 species — only 17 species shy of the winning team's total. Did I mention that it poured rain for half the day? Surely in good weather our list will lengthen, but we will have to wait for another year to find out.

By no means are we pioneers in trying to reduce our carbon footprint while birding. I mentioned the Pelee Island Birdathon already, a bike-only event, and I have read of numerous others who have chosen two wheels over four, some who have been doing so for dozens of years. Richard Gregson, of Baie d'Urfé, Québec, created BIGBY — the Big Green Big Year — to promote a culture of birding with a very minimal carbon footprint. Participants in the BIGBY initiative sign up at his website (<http://www.sparroworks.ca/greenbirding/index.html>) and share results of their efforts to find birds using carbon-neutral transportation methods. It's encouraging that so many are thinking about innovative ways of reducing their carbon footprint while birding.

Birdathons are valuable fund-raising events for conservation organizations. Figuring out alternatives to burning excessive fossil fuels will go a long way to keeping people participating, to keeping events viewed in a positive light and most importantly — to keeping funds rolling in for those organizations. If a human-propelled event is not possible, an alternative may be for participants to rent hybrid vehicles for the day. Organizers could also promote “green birding” by introducing new categories or rules around a kilometer limit if you’re in a vehicle, or rewarding the team with the greatest number of birds per kilometre. Changes like these may seem small, but can have rippling impacts, and cumulatively, these changes will amount to substantial differences in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

# Say What?

## Pronouncing Difficult Bird Names

by Rob Maciver

**Bird names are sometimes difficult to pronounce, especially when they are read from the field guide for the first time**

**M**ore particularly I am referring to the common North American bird names (although the scientific Latin names can be difficult too). I recall the first time I identified a Bobolink from the field guide and called it a BOE-BOE-link instead of the correct pronunciation of BAH-bo-link. Sometimes the common names are derived from the person who first described the bird or in honour of a notable ornithologist. Other times a bird name will simply include words that are novel or unfamiliar to us. On other occasions, there is an absence of consensus about the pronunciation of a bird name, although passions may ignite over some particular individual’s preference.

It is not necessary to be strict about correct pronunciation, and I cannot improve on Shakespeare’s Juliet who said: “that which we call a rose By any other name would smell as sweet”. Nevertheless there is a certain empowerment in pronouncing a bird name correctly, or where there is no consensus in the knowledge that various alternatives are recognized. The pronunciations are a part of the culture of birdwatching. To some extent, correctness of pronunciation is simply a consensus of informed practice. Be that as it may, in a majority of instances a consensus pronunciation has been reached that can be verified etymologically. What follows is an account of the pronunciation of some of the trickier of North American bird names. Some of the species mentioned occur regularly in Ontario, while others do not, but all of them you may have an occasion to utter at some point in time.

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### A key to pronouncing difficult North American bird names

**BACHMAN’S** (e.g., Bachman’s Sparrow) *BACK-man’s* (incorrect: *BOCK-man’s*). Named in honour of the Rev. John Bachman of South Carolina.

**BEWICK’S** (e.g., Bewicks Wren) *BYEW-iks* (incorrect: *BEE-wicks*). Like the Buick car company.

**CALLIOPE** (e.g., Calliope Hummingbird) *keh-LIE-eh-pee*. McGowan suggests that *KAL-ee-ope* is also accepted, but rarely used.

**GYRFALCON** *JURR-fal-kehn* or *JURR-faal-kehn* (incorrect: *JEER-fal-kehn*, *GIRE-fal-ken*). From a German word meaning “greedy”.

**JACANA** (e.g., Northern Jacana) *zhah-sah-NAH*. Derived from transcriptions of the Tupi-Guarani (South American Indian) name. Although technically correct, *zhah-sah-NAH* is becoming obsolete in favour of pronunciations such as *jah-KA-nah*.

**JAEGER** (e.g., Parasitic Jaeger) *YAY-gehr* or *JAY-gehr*, although the first is preferred.

**LE CONTE’S** (e.g., Le Conte’s Sparrow) *le-KONTS*. French. Rhymes with “don’t”. Named by J.J. Audubon after his friend, Dr. John Le Conte.

**MURRE** (e.g., Common Murre) *MUR*. Rhymes with “fur”.

**PARULA** (e.g., Northern Parula) *PA-ruh-lah* or *PAR-you-lah* (incorrect: *pa-ROO-lah*). From the diminutive of *Parus*, a genus of Tit (e.g., little Tit).

**PILEATED** (e.g., Pileated Woodpecker) *PIE-lee-ate-ed* or *PILL-ee-ate-ed*. The word refers to the crest or pileum (*PIE-lee-um*).

**PLOVER** (e.g., Piping Plover) *PLUH-ver* or *PLO-ver*. The first is more British, the second more North American.

**PROTHONOTARY** (e.g., Prothonotary Warbler) *pra-THON-ah-tary* or *pro-THON-ah-tary*. A prothonotary was an official in certain courts of law who wore robes similar in coloration.

**SABINE’S** (e.g., Sabine’s Gull) *SAB-inz* (incorrect: *SAY-binz*, *seh-BEENS*). Named by Sir Edward Sabine, British physicist, who collected this gull in the arctic.

**VAUX’S** (e.g., Vaux’s Swift) *VAWKS-iz*. Named after William S. Vaux, member of the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.



# A Christmas Bird Count Day

## The Wallaceburg/Walpole Island Christmas Bird Count

by P. Allen Woodliffe  
Chatham, ON  
27 December 2008



Snowy Owl / P. Allen Woodliffe

The Wallaceburg/Walpole Island Christmas Bird Count began in 1986. Chip Weseloh and I, among others, had been doing biological field work on Walpole Island earlier in 1986 and after a few discussions realizing that there was not bird count to cover this area, took it upon ourselves to begin one. As is typical of most counts, they start out small but gradually gain a sustainable interest. It didn't take long for the local Sydenham Field Naturalists to take over this count.

My area in recent years has included a large portion of the St. Clair River, north of Walpole Island, to the north boundary of the count circle. There is also a fair chunk of inland area with scattered woodland, virtually all private, with a significant amount of that being part of the greater Sarnia chemical valley industrial lands.

I left my home in nearby Chatham at approximately 0615h, anticipating arriving at a couple of woodlots at the south end of my territory in time for some owling. The temperature was very mild for the season, several degrees above freezing, and very little wind. The surrounding landscape was completely blanketed by snow from a series of storms in the previous few days. Hmmmm.....snow cover, mild temperatures and very little wind. It wasn't too far down the roadway that I realized that fog was going to be a factor in the success of this day.

As I approached my first stop along a quiet gravel road, trying for owls, I realized that the roads, which up until now had been snow covered, were now a virtual and rutted skating rink with the above freezing temperatures. Driving slowly and carefully was the only way to proceed. The Eastern Screech Owls were not cooperative at either of the woodlots, in spite of what I thought was some enticing descending, whistling and trilling.

By daybreak I arrived at the St. Clair River, ready to tally lots of ducks, geese and gulls. But with the dense fog, it was not going to be easy. Occasionally there were slight, temporary gaps in the fog, allowing me to count a few Mallards here, a few Black Ducks there, and a handful of Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye and Canvas-back somewhere else for added variety. The farther north I went along the river, the denser the fog became. One normally reliable location for viewing the river was Cathcart Park. I parked my car and walked the few hundred metres to the waterfront.

I could hear a handful of Tundra Swans, but could not see any, so no numbers to tally. Approaching the steel breakwall, I startled half a dozen Hooded Mergansers, which eventually became 14, from the quiet edges of the river. They flew or swam out, and quickly disappeared into the fog. Off to my left, downstream, I could plainly hear the giant engines of a lake freighter plying its way upstream.



Over the sound of the engines, I could hear the whistling wings of Common Goldeneye. How many I could not tell, of course, but there had to be dozens stirred up by the freighter. Flocks of Common Mergansers had also been stirred up, as several small flocks were restlessly circling the area through the fog, looking for a less disturbed spot to land.

One of the large towers of a coal-fired electric plant is usually good for a wintering Peregrine Falcon. The large number of gulls, waterfowl and Rock Pigeon in the area as food make it a reliable spot to find this species. Not today, however, with the thick fog. I couldn't even see the tower.

Inland was no better, and with the icy roads, was quite treacherous. The woodlots seemed extra quiet, as if everything was waiting for the return of visibility. Wild Turkeys are normally prowling the edges of woodlots, and perhaps they were, but they were likely enjoying the extra seclusion of the low visibility, so I was not able to add any to my list.

I gradually returned towards the south end of my territory, hoping that the fog was lifting and that I could add to my species list. It did improve somewhat, but only temporarily. A large grassy waterway gave me my first Rough-legged Hawk of the day, as well as two more Northern Harriers. But the best bird was yet to come. While driving slowly along the foggy road at the end of the day, a shape materialized at the top of a hydro pole. Red-tailed Hawk, I first thought, but as I drew nearer I realized the head was wrong. The fog cleared enough for me to realize it was a Snowy Owl! I managed to pull off the road and, since I had my camera on the seat beside me, quickly opened the window, waited for the fog to clear a bit and snapped a couple of photos. Definitely a highlight, and as it turned out, was the only Snowy seen for the count. A final personal tally of 40 species, certainly lower than usual, but a great ending to an unusual day.

# Kenora Christmas Bird Count

By Leo E. Heyens

**T**he clock radio startles me awake. It's 7:00 a.m. on 20 December. Oh yes — now I remember — it's time to start the 29th Christmas Bird Count for Kenora, the most westerly count location in the province.

A quick glance out the window and a check of the digital thermometer shows that it's -25 Celcius out with a significant wind chill factor making it feel more like -37. The skies are overcast and a light snow is falling and the wind is blowing snow off the evergreens. This is what I call a blustery day and likely not that great for finding birds because many of them hide in heavy conifer cover during these conditions. Better dress warmly today.

I put the coffee on and rouse my son Mitchell, home for the holidays from university. He has agreed to be the official tally person and an extra



Pine Grosbeaks / Leo E. Heyens

set of sharp eyes for our field count route. I clean the snow off the platform feeder and top up the bird seed for the hungry flock of Pine Grosbeaks while I wait for my son to become fully awake and organized. This takes some time but we are finally off around 9:00 a.m. after breakfast and with our parkas, gloves, boots, toques, and a thermos of coffee in hand. We look a bit like Doug and Bob McKenzie.

Our first stop is the open water area off the Miller Rapids Road. This area is actually part of the outflow from Lake

of the Woods into the Winnipeg River and stays clear of ice all winter because of the moving water. Someone had reported a loon and Common Mergansers from this area the week before. We quickly spot about 45 or so Common Goldeneye but no loons and no mergansers. We are close to giving up when my son spots the loon near the ice edge and we have an excellent view of a Common Loon in winter plumage. Two adult Bald Eagles scream and chase each other across the channel as we watch. No mergansers, but not a bad start for the field count.

Next it is off to the Kenora waste transfer station on Barsky's Hill. The staff at the station had called me a few was seen earlier but flew back into the bush on the north side of the site. We slog around in the knee high snow for a few minutes before we find the turkey roosting and cackling in a Jack Pine. What do you know. Sure looks like a Wild Turkey. More likely a captive-reared bird that has managed to escape and is finding sufficient food and shelter at the transfer station. Wild Turkeys are not known to breed in the Kenora area. A few more Bald Eagles are sighted, along with a group of starlings and about 400 Common Ravens before we leave the station.

It is now noon and time to hit Tim Hortons for soup and a biscuit. Our next stop is the Canadian Pacific railway station to count Rock Pigeons and House Sparrows. We head for the CP overhead walkway to get a good view of the roof tops in town. Rock Pigeons are huddled around many of the chimney vents trying to stay warm. No House Sparrows. We finish our route looking for Bohemian Waxwings around the ornamental crab apples trees on the harbour front and for any more waterfowl near the open water around Husky the Musky — our city's mascot. No luck. Time to head home to man the phones. The 60 or so volunteer feeder counters and six other field route participants will start calling in their count results soon and I need to get ready.

When I tally the results, we get 28 species consisting of 3,044 individual birds this year. Not too bad for a blustery day.

*Leo is the count compiler for the Kenora Christmas Bird Count and has coordinated this count since 1992.*

# Dunrobin Christmas Bird Count

By Bruce Di Labio  
3 January 2009



Great Gray Owl / Bruce Di Labio

It was 10:00 p.m, 2 January, and I was laying out all of the gear ready for the big day: binoculars, scopes, layers of clothing, on-the-run breakfast and a warm lunch. The beginning of the 28th Annual CBC was only hours away and I was starting to get the same anxious feeling I get prior to any birding event. With the alarm clock set for 1:30 a.m., my son, Ben (age 11), and I were more than mentally ready to begin the count. Nothing had changed, since my first bird count, 38 years earlier when I participated on the Ottawa Christmas Bird Count when I was under the leadership of one of my mentors, Ron Pittaway. Pure excitement!

After packing the car, we were on the road by 2:00 a.m., and started listening

for local owls. We checked a number of owl sites that had been successful on previous years, but came up empty. We tried imitating owl calls, both vocally and by CD, but struck out. Though the conditions were good for owling, after two hours of searching, it became apparent that our efforts would not be rewarded.

At dawn, the first finches and Snow Buntings were heard passing over. Then my cell phone rang. Paul Lagasi, a participant on the count, informed me of a Great Gray Owl hunting off of Kinburn Side Road. Only minutes away, we made a detour and see the owl. It put on a great show, hunting and plunging into the snow in search of meadow voles.

We finally had to leave to head over to our own Constance Bay sector. With a combination of walking and driving, we covered part of the area in a few hours. We found lots of Black-capped Chickadees, Blue Jays, a few Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers and one Pileated Woodpecker. We also did a few feeder checks in the area before noon and were able to record good numbers of Pine



Ben Di Labio, age 11, acts as the compiler for the 28th Dunrobin CBC. Photo by Bruce Di Labio

Siskin, Common Redpoll and American Goldfinch.

At the lunchtime sector meeting, we reviewed our combined lists to determine what was needed. We used the afternoon hours looking for Barred Owl, Northern Goshawk, Northern Shrike and a few other species. By

sunset we had added a few more species to the day list including Bald Eagle, Bohemian Waxwing and Northern Shrike. The supper compilation was held at my house in Carp. Thirty participants came for an enjoyable evening of food and birding stories. A total of 46 species was recorded for the 28th Dunrobin CBC. Highlights for the count were two Great Gray Owls, one Red-shouldered Hawk, record highs of Bohemian Waxwing and Pine Grosbeak — and a great time that was had by all.



## We're looking for submissions

### An interesting birding event happening in your town? Have you noted an unusual bird behaviour recently?

Know of a bird conservation project that deserves highlighting? Both *OFO News* and *Ontario Birds* are interested in receiving submissions from our members. If you think you have something to share with other OFO members, we'd like to hear from you!

Please send us an email query first, with a brief description of your subject, anticipated length and whether or not you have photos, so we can confirm that it's a good fit for the publication, and that we still have room in the next issue, as space is limited.

Articles on human interest stories, bird conservation projects or initiatives, birding events and similar should be directed to *OFO News*. Subjects covering scientific research projects and results, observations of unusual bird behaviour, or noteworthy records should be sent to *Ontario Birds*.

*OFO News* – Seabrooke Leckie Sanderling@symbiotic.ca

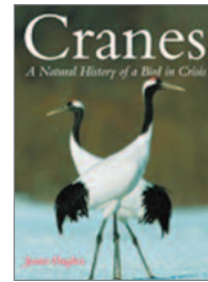
*Ontario Birds* – Ross James rossjoann.james@sympatico.ca



## Certificates of Appreciation

Wendy Hunter (OFO Director of sales), presented certificates of appreciation to Mayor Cal Patterson and Park Superintendent John Fisher at the Wasaga Beach Council Chamber on 27 November 2008. The certificates recognized Mayor Cal Patterson and the Town Council of Wasaga Beach, and John Fisher and the staff of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, for their strong support and important efforts on behalf of the Piping Plovers that nested at Wasaga Beach during 2008.

# Book Reviews



### **Cranes: A Natural History of a Bird in Crisis**

Janice M. Hughes, 2008.

Firefly Books Ltd.,

Richmond Hill, ON

256 pages, 22 x 28 cm,

\$45.00

ISBN 978-1-55407-343-6

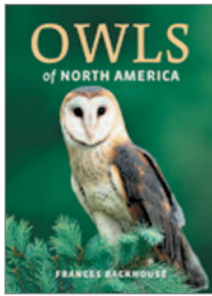
Notwithstanding the title, the majority of this book (154 pages) is devoted to the story of the decline and subsequent recovery of the Whooping Crane in North America. In the first part of the book, the author takes us through the evolution, general biology, anatomy and general ecology of the 15 species of cranes found throughout the world. Being large and therefore obvious, cranes have had a long-standing relationship with humans. Initially a food item, cranes have found their way into human culture throughout the world as have few other birds. Unfortunately, by direct and indirect activity, the world's cranes are facing serious challenges to their continued existence. Portions of the book which describe this situation are thus somewhat alarming.

In 2006 the icon of North American conservation efforts, the Whooping Crane, reached 500 wild and captive individuals; this from a population low of less than two dozen in 1941. Author Hughes details the reasons for decline, the struggle to establish and preserve breeding and wintering habitats and the amazing and at times frustrating ground-breaking methods developed and used in the recovery effort. The most fascinating was the use of ultra-light aircraft to lead captive-raised birds on migration from Wisconsin to Florida in a successful effort to establish a separate migratory flock from the Wood Buffalo National Park – Aransas National Wildlife Refuge flock.

The final section of the book is a very concise but information-packed summary and status of the 15 crane species of the world.

If you are a "craneophile", you will enjoy the great amount of current information contained in this book. The photographs are excellent and appropriately located throughout the volume. Typographic errors are few. Enjoy this book.

David H. Elder



## Owls of North America

Francis Backhouse,  
2008.  
Firefly Books Ltd.  
216 pages, 8.5 x 11",  
\$34.95  
ISBN 1554073421  
hardcover with jacket

An easy to read and splendidly illustrated account of life histories of North American owls by Francis Backhouse. The book describes 23 species of owls found in Canada, the United States, and Mexico north of the Tropic of Cancer. Such interpretation of the North American (Nearctic) Realm has allowed the author to include several Neotropical species such as Mottled, Stygian, and Vermiculated Owls.

The book contains eight large chapters (Owls and Humans, Who's Who, Built for the Night Shift, Feeding Habits, Communication, The Matin Game, Life's Journey, At Rest and on the Move) and also species profiles for the all twenty three species. The chapters contain relatively detailed overview of all aspects of the owl life cycle including morphological adaptations for hunting in the dark, calls and display, hunting techniques, nesting habits, rearing of the young, dispersal and migration. Overall, the book delivers all that a non-specialist may want to know about owls of North America. The species accounts are arranged in alphabetic rather than systematic order, and each account is preceded with an anecdote, although some information from such anecdote is often repeated in the account proper. The style of the book allows for no references in the text. Although the author sometimes refers to a person(s) who made a certain discovery or observation, some statements are unsubstantiated, and leave one wondering whether that is the author's own opinion or someone else's. Maps provided in the book have been reproduced from *The Birds of North America* with permission from Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The book has a few potential shortcomings. Owl aerial displays (e.g., those of Short-eared Owls) are described in words, and not illustrated by either drawings or photographs. Also, for some reason the author separates "displays" from "mating games". Contrary to the author's statement the Northern Hawk Owl does not nest exclusively in woodpecker cavities (this

# Baillie Birdathon 2008: The Results Are In

## The contributions have been tallied and 2008 was another record setting year for the Baillie Birdathon

long-time OFO members. John and Victoria have an abundance of birding experience, and will conduct their Birdathon in Toronto.

Circulated with this issue of *OFO News* you will find a pledge form for this year's Birdathon. As in years past, pledges can be made according to the number of species observed, or any flat rate that you wish to choose. OFO and our Celebrity Birders would be pleased to receive your pledge, and the dollars that we raise provide much needed support for both the birds, and our organization.

**We need and appreciate your support.**

species shows a preference for dead hollow stubs, e.g., see Duncan and Duncan 1998). Some inconsistencies are also present. For example, the author suggests that kangaroo rats are the favorite prey of the Long-eared Owl in some areas, but then elsewhere writes that they are very rarely taken by that owl species. The author sometimes gets sloppy with words, and sequences such as "lizards and skinks" or "rodents, squirrels and pocket gophers" are not uncommon. I also found information presented in species accounts very sketchy.

Backhouse has chosen to expand the scope of her book into the Neotropics, but has not allocated much space to the systematics of pygmy-owls found in the area. For example, the *gnoma* pygmy-owl complex, which is sometimes split into three different species, Northern, Mountain, and Baja Pygmy-Owls (e.g., see Howell and Webb 1995), did not receive much discussion. The Tamaulipan Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium sanchezi*), that ranges north of the Tropic of Cancer, is mentioned once, and was not assigned a species account.

In general, my feeling is that *Owls of North America* by F. Backhouse does not add any-

A total of \$227,365.58 was raised by Bird Studies Canada which surpassed the previous record of \$209,000.00. Through pledges made to last year's OFO Celebrity Birdathon team of the "Grippers" (Ian Platt, Pete Read, Rob Read and Gavin Platt), together with funds raised by Maris Apse, Geoff Carpentier and Ron and Lynda Valentine, OFO contributed over \$5,922.10 to that total. Some of these funds have been redirected to OFO for our activities and the balance goes to support bird research and conservation through Bird Studies Canada grants and programs.

With plans for Birdathon 2009 already underway, we are pleased to announce that this year's OFO Celebrity Birders will be John and Victoria Carley, both of whom are

thing new to such books as *North American Owls, Biology and Natural History* by P. A. Johnsgard (2003), *Owls of the World: Their Lives, Behavior and Survival* by J. R. Duncan (2003), *Hawks and Owls of Eastern North America* by D. S. Heintzelman (2004), *Owls of the United States and Canada, A Complete*

*Guide to their Biology and Behavior* by W. Lynch (2007), and *Owls of the World* by C. König and F. Weick (2008). However, a reader unfamiliar with owls, and who doesn't own any of the titles from the list above, may find this book informative and interesting.

### Literature Cited

**Duncan, J. R., and P. A. Duncan.** 1998. Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

**Howell, S. N. G., and S. Webb.** 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford University Press.

Michael Patrikeev



# OBRC Notes

February 2009 by Jean Iron, Chair

The Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) will hold its Annual Meeting at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) on 4 April 2009 to finalize voting on rare bird reports for 2008 and to elect two new voting members to begin three year terms in 2009 to replace Jean Iron and Mark Peck, who retire at the end of their three year terms. However, Mark will continue as ROM Liaison, which is non-voting position. Ian Richards, Secretary, and the 2008 Committee are still responsible for the completion of the 2008 OBRC Annual Report, which will be published in the August 2009 issue of *Ontario Birds*. Ian Richards is also retiring as secretary and a new Secretary will be elected at our spring meeting for the 2009 voting year.

As of late January, the 2008 Committee has voted on 110 reports. Some reports will require a second or third circulation if two or more members voted not to accept. Finally, some reports will be discussed and voted on at the Annual Meeting. Committee members vote electronically after viewing reports and photographs posted by the Secretary on a secure website. This process saves paper, postage and time.

## Committee Members

The 2008 Committee comprises Bill Crins, Rob Dobos, Jean Iron (Chair), Blake Mann, Mark Peck (also ROM Liaison), Ian Richards (non-voting Secretary), Ron Tozer, and Alan Wormington (Assistant Secretary). Voting members are elected for a three year term, after which they must retire for one year before being considered for re-election to the Committee. A very informative OBRC membership chart since 1982, first done in pen and paper by the late Dennis Rupert, was revised by Ron Pittaway and published in the June 2001 *OFO News* 19(2):11. This chart shows past and current OBRC members and their positions and is now updated

annually and can be viewed on the OFO website: [www.ofo.ca/obrc/obrc.php](http://www.ofo.ca/obrc/obrc.php)

## OBRC Secretary

Ian Richard's job as Secretary is huge. He receives rare bird reports and photographs, and encourages finders, observers and photographers to document provincial rarities. Most reports and photographs come by email and through the Rare Bird Report Form on the OFO website. Ian scans hard copies of reports and photos sent by regular mail to digitalize them. Then reports and photographs are posted on the secure website for voting members to examine. Ian tabulates the votes and prepares recirculations when needed. The Secretary compiles the OBRC Annual Report, with considerable input from Committee members and Assistant Secretary.

## Role of Photographs

More and more provincial rarities are now photographed. This helps Committee members evaluate the occurrence of a rare bird. In earlier times, a specimen was required to document a first record for the province. Today, photographs showing diagnostic field marks have replaced specimens in most cases. To complement a photo, we also request written documentation such as the full date, location, finder, observers, and detailed description and how similar species were eliminated.

The OFO Photo Page provides OBRC with many photographs of species on the review lists and we appreciate the help of Frank and Sandra Horvath, Photo Page Coordinators.

## What to Report

Northern and Southern Ontario have different review lists. These are on the OFO website: the North at [www.ofo.ca/checklist/north.php](http://www.ofo.ca/checklist/north.php) and the South at [www.ofo.ca/checklist/south.php](http://www.ofo.ca/checklist/south.php). Also on the OFO website is the Review List of

Recognizable Forms. Reportable species for the North and South are also indicated on the 2008 *Ontario Bird Checklist*. Please document new species to the province, new species for the North or South Regions, new subspecies for the province, and new breeding species for the province.

A rare bird report form is on the OFO website: <http://www.ofo.ca/obrc/reportform.php> and can be submitted electronically. Or, please send your rare bird report and photos to Ian Richards, OBRC Secretary, 2230 Heidi Ave, Burlington ON L7M 3W4, phone: 905-631-0740, Email: [ianrichards@cogeco.ca](mailto:ianrichards@cogeco.ca)

## Northern Ontario

We thank OFO members who report from the North, including John Woodcock, Program Coordinator, Thunder Cape Bird Observatory on Lake Superior, who maintains excellent contact with the OBRC. Reports from the North give southern Ontario birders a taste of the fine birding opportunities in northern Ontario.

## Importance of OBRC Data

Records published in the OBRC Annual Reports are used extensively by the public and private sectors. Three examples are (1) the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) who relies on OBRC published records when revising the status and distribution of birds in Ontario for the AOU Check-list; (2) the Natural Heritage Information Centre, Ministry of Natural Resources, uses OBRC records as the authority for its provincial bird list and often uses our data in its Species At Risk assessments; (3) new and revised field guides use OBRC records when updating their distribution maps.

## Comments Welcome

If you have questions or comments or you would like to nominate a person to serve on the OBRC, please contact me, Jean Iron, by email at [jeaniron@sympatico.ca](mailto:jeaniron@sympatico.ca) or phone 416-445-9297.

# Nikon Photo Quiz

Sponsored by Nikon Canada By Glenn Coady

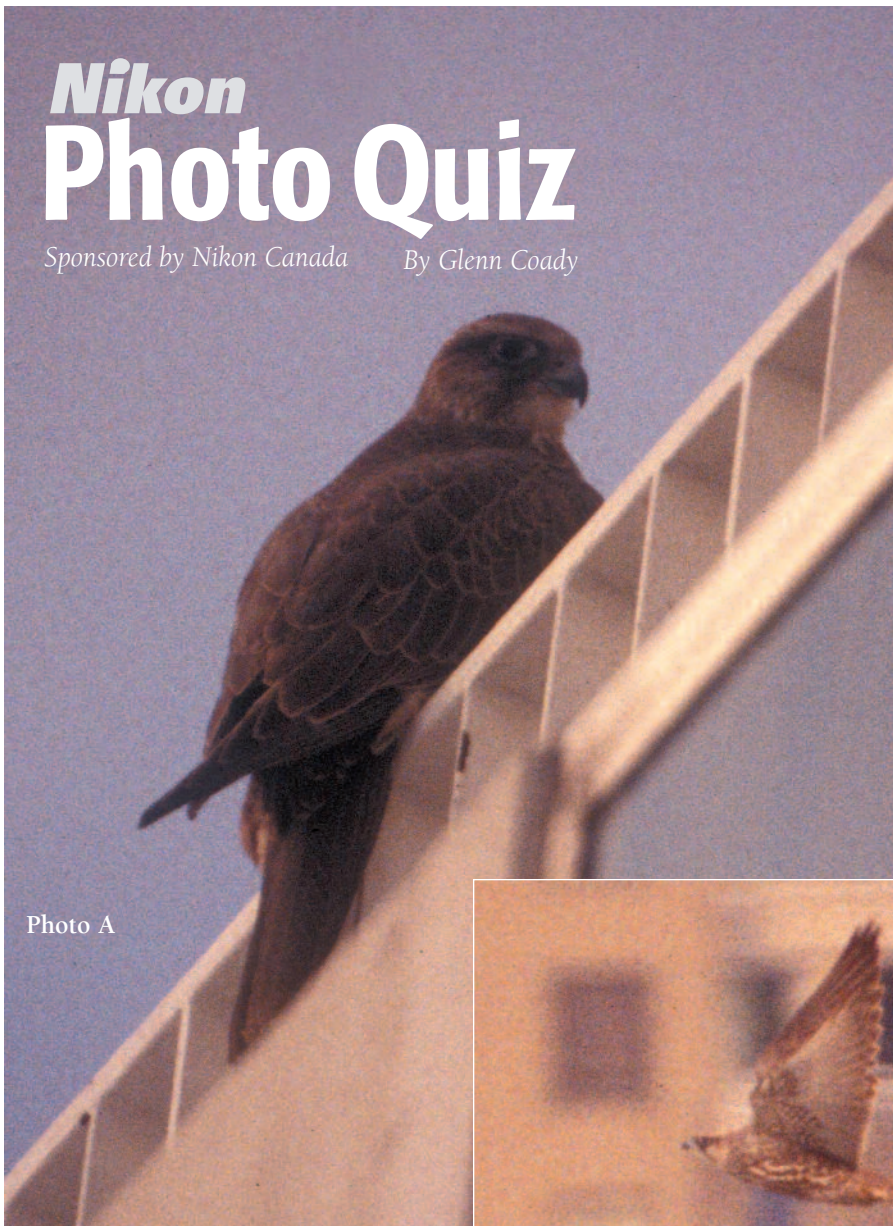


Photo A

**Welcome to the new incarnation of the Nikon Photo Quiz. The respective editors of *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News* have jointly decided to move the photo quiz here, in order to take full advantage of the larger page format of *OFO News*. We hope that this feature continues to be fun and informative for the *OFO* membership.**



Photo B

**T**his photo quiz features a bird with a powerful looking bill that has a very pronounced and hooked tip, clearly indicating that this is a diurnal raptor. The bird appears to be in an urban setting.

Many of Ontario's members of the Falconiformes are quickly eliminated by very basic attributes of size, plumage, colour and structure. Several groups, such as vultures and caracara, can be eliminated immediately simply based on shape. Perhaps almost as easy to rule out are the two species of eagles, both of which have much longer and more

powerful and broadly-based bills than this bird. Eagles also have proportionally much larger heads (particularly in comparison to their body size) than this bird. Likewise, this bird has a very rounded head that clearly lacks any hint of the owl-like facial disks that should be apparent on a Northern Harrier. It is also clearly not an Osprey, as it lacks the marked contrast between the mostly white head and the dark post-ocular stripe that is typical for an Osprey at all ages.

Kites can be eliminated from consideration based on their long wings which project as far as the tail when folded. Although the angle of this photograph makes length hard to judge, the wings still appear considerably shorter than the tail. The Swallow-tailed Kite also has a pale head and forked tail as both a juvenile and adult, which this bird clearly doesn't. The Mississippi Kite is all gray as an adult, and juveniles, while browner, have white edges to their flight feathers, which this bird doesn't show.

This bird also appears not to be a species of *Buteo*, as they are very chunky birds with their heads appearing to be quite large on their bodies. This bird seems to have a fairly small head for its apparent body size. Also, most *buteos* have very short tails relative to their wings and bodies, whereas this bird has a proportionally rather long tail. Many also have very strongly contrasting bars on the tail, even in juvenile plumage, that this bird doesn't show. Most species also show a small amount of mottling on the back and shoulders.



Of the *buteos*, only dark morph individuals would be likely to be confused with our uniformly dark brownish quiz bird. The species we might expect here that show dark-morph variations include Red-tailed, Rough-legged, Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks. Aside from the head proportions, both Rough-legged and Swainson's Hawks have a fairly short tail and exceptionally long wings, such that the folded wings extend out to or beyond the tip of the tail. Red-tailed and Broad-winged can also be eliminated by the pale chin and supercilium that this bird shows.

Looking at this bird in flight (photo B), we can also rule out the *Buteo* species due to its much more pointed wings. All *buteos* would be expected to have a much more rounded shape to the wing tips. Although it shows distinct contrast between the darker wing linings and the lighter remiges, the pattern is nowhere near as highly contrasting as we would expect in any of the dark morph *buteos*.

In photo B, this bird's wing tips are also too pointed for any of the *Accipiter* species, even though this group shows a more pointed wing shape than do the *buteos*. Note, though, that Northern Goshawks can be quite confusing, with respect to wing shape, when in a soaring posture. Even when perched we can use some features to rule out the *accipiters*. Adults of all species are grey, but even though the juveniles are brown they would all still be expected to show strong barring on the tail. This bird also lacks the extensively white undertail coverts (which are visible in photo B) that form a striking contrast with the belly and tail of *accipiters*. It shows a weak moustachial stripe in both photos, a feature not consistent with either of the larger species of *accipiter*. Finally, all juvenile *accipiters* should show yellow irises, while this bird's iris is brown.

This leaves the falcons. Five species of falcon can be found in Ontario: Merlin,

American Kestrel, Prairie Falcon, Peregrine Falcon and Gyrfalcon. Size can be hard to judge from photos, as well as in life when the bird is at a distance. This bird does, however, look to be fairly large and robust-chested in comparison to the railing on which it is perched. This would suggest that the two smaller falcons, the Merlin and the kestrel, could be eliminated. The plumage is much too brown and uniform for a kestrel anyway, but does resemble that of a female Merlin, which are uniformly brown on the back (males are grey). However, the proportions aren't right. A Merlin would appear much slimmer than this bird, with a small, delicate-looking bill, and its head would appear much larger in proportion to its body. In flight, the Merlin would show less definition between the underwing coverts and the flight feathers.

The Prairie Falcon is easily eliminated by our bird's lack of highly contrasting black barring in the underwing coverts and axillaries. Our quiz bird is proportioned more robustly in the chest and consequently has a more 'pin-headed' appearance than a Prairie Falcon. At rest, a Prairie would also show bold white cheeks and dark markings under the eyes, characteristic of many falcons but which our bird does not exhibit.

That leaves just the Peregrine Falcon and Gyrfalcon. The same facial pattern that eliminated Prairie also points against Peregrine. The wingtips tend to reach the tail tip on a Peregrine Falcon, but the tail is always significantly longer than the wings on a Gyrfalcon. The underwing coverts show greater contrast with the flight feathers in a Gyrfalcon than in a Peregrine Falcon. In flight, the primaries of a Peregrine Falcon tend to appear less plainly gray and more obviously barred (at any distance) than the primaries in a Gyrfalcon. The wingtips in a Gyrfalcon are a little more rounded than those of a Peregrine Falcon, with the outermost pri-

mary clearly shorter than the next primary in — a feature that can clearly be seen on our quiz bird in photo B. In some postures, particularly when soaring, the blunt tips of the Gyrfalcon's wings might even be mistaken for a Northern Goshawk or long-winged *buteo*.

Clearly all of these features favour the identification of this bird as a juvenile gray morph **Gyrfalcon**. Note the rather pointed, saw-tooth trailing edge to the wing, often a good indicator for aging juvenile hawks.

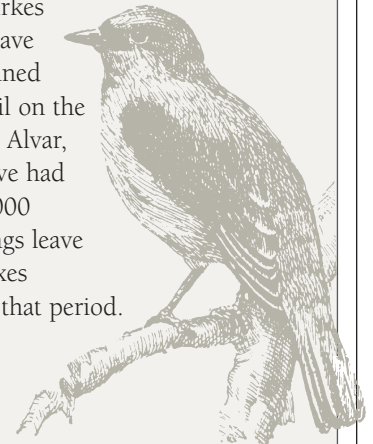
This bird was seen by many hundreds of Ontario birders when it spent much of the winter of 1995-96 roosting in the unused silos at the foot of Bathurst Street on the Toronto waterfront. I photographed this Gyrfalcon at Toronto's Spadina Quay on 20 January 1996.

## Carden Bluebirds in 2008

by Herb Furniss

Although it started poorly, 2008 was a good year for Eastern Bluebirds on the Carden Alvar. We lost 50 young during the cold period in May, but the birds recovered quickly with a second nesting attempt.

A total of 190 young were fledged from our trail of 75 boxes. This has proven to be a perfect habitat for the Eastern Bluebird. In 21 years, Don Parkes and I have maintained this trail on the Carden Alvar, and have had over 2000 fledglings leave our boxes during that period.



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# Changes to the OFO Board and Committees

## Welcome to the OFO Board

We are pleased to welcome to the OFO Board Rob Maciver, who was made a director at the 2008 OFO Convention in Hamilton and Brian Gibbon who became a director and our new Treasurer effective 1 January 2009 upon the retirement of Eileen Beagan.

We also welcome our two new Photo Editors. After four years of hard work, Carol Horner has handed over the duties of the OFO Photo Page to Sandra and Frank Horvath.

### Rob Maciver

Rob first developed an interest in birds while volunteering with a bird rehabilitation centre near his home town of Bowmanville and during a summer position with Ontario Parks. His interest deepened during subsequent employment with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Smithsonian Environmental Research Centre. Rob has been involved in several citizen science initiatives including the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network, the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario*, the Marsh Monitoring Program, the Ontario Nocturnal Owl Survey and the Christmas Bird Count. Rob is a municipal lawyer.

### Brian Gibbon

Brian grew up in Northeastern Ontario, where his father taught him and his brother a love and respect for nature. He and his wife, Lynne, have lived in the Barrie area for thirty-five years. Once their two girls were out on their own he and Lynne became involved with the Brereton Field Naturalists' Club and have slowly been developing their birding skills. They enjoy traveling to various parks and nature reserves, not only to pursue birds but to just observe nature. Within the Club he has held various positions, including vice-president, president, editor of the *Blue Heron* newsletter as well as being an active member of the Conservation Committee. For the past thirty-five years he has run his own accounting practice specializing in small business.

### Sandra and Frank Horvath

While raising their family and teaching school, the outdoors has always influenced Sandra and Frank's activities. After retiring they both became passionate about birding and bird photography, finding it always a challenge, always a joy. They have enjoyed con-

tributing photographs to the Ontario Field Ornithologists web site, Robert Curry's *Birds of the Hamilton and Surrounding Areas*, the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario*, Cornell University and Bird Studies Canada. They find nothing more enjoyable than spending time outdoors, studying all that this embraces.

## Thanks to the Outgoing Members

OFO owes a huge debt of gratitude to Eileen Beagan and to Carol Horner for their years of hard work on behalf of the organization.



### Eileen Beagan

In December 2008, after seven years of dedicated service to OFO, Eileen Beagan retired from the Board of Directors. Eileen has served as OFO Treasurer for the past seven years.

She brought thirty-six years of banking experience to the position of Treasurer. Eileen worked diligently to oversee OFO's interests in all aspects of the job. She helped secure a solid financial future for OFO by investing wisely. Advertising revenue is important to OFO because it helps to pay for *Ontario Birds*. Eileen was passionate about maintaining a positive rapport with advertisers and paid all OFO invoices expeditiously.

Eileen plans to spend more time enjoying the many joys of nature: bird watching, gardening, decorating her new home, and especially, following the career and travels of her son, Dan.

OFO extends many thanks to Eileen for her dedicated contribution to helping make our organization a great success.

### Carol Horner

Carol's interest in birds was inherited from her mother, who is an avid gardener and backyard birdwatcher. A course in birding offered by Durham College in 1997 introduced her to the idea of actually going in search of birds, and when she saw her first warbler, she was hooked. Her interest grew, and by the year 2000, Carol was a lister and had discovered the thrill of chasing rarities. In 2002 Carol took up digiscoping and then digital SLR photography, and she maintains a website of her nature photographs. With her friends Carol has traveled to Florida, California, Arizona, Newfoundland and Ecuador for birding and photography.

Carol has served on the Boards of the Pickering Naturalists and OFO and is a member of the TOC. She involved herself in fundraising by doing Mayrathons for the Meadow at Thicksen's Woods and currently serves on the Board of the Thicksen's Woods Land Trust. From 2004-2008 Carol was the editor of the Rare Bird Photo Page on the OFO website.



## OFO News

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### OFO Membership

Annual membership: Canada: \$35.00  
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Publications Mail Agreement Number  
40046348

ISSN 1200-1589 © OFO News 2009