



OFO News

NEWSLETTER OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

Birding the St. Clair River

From Walpole Island north to Sarnia, the St. Clair River is a popular birding spot in winter

Blake A. Mann



In This Issue

- 1 Birding the St. Clair River
- 3 Wintering Waterbirds Abandon the Great Lakes
- 6 Waterfowl Grounded in Bruce County
- 7 Recent Changes in the Taxonomy and Nomenclature of Birds of the ABA Area
- 8 Cats – An Unhealthy Addition to the World's Fauna
- 11 Piping Plovers Nest in Saugeen Shores
- 12 Shorebird Nights at Hillman Marsh
OFO Certificate of Appreciation – Friends of Point Pelee
- 13 Young Birders Enjoy Presqu'île
Alan Wormington Receives OFO Certificate of Appreciation
- 14 Book Review
UPDATE: Rondeau Yellow-throated Warblers
- 15 Photo Quiz

Ontario Field Ornithologists

Box 116 Station F
Toronto ON M4Y 2L4
OFO Website: www.ofo.ca
Email: ofo@ofo.ca

Glaucous Gull. *Allen Woodliffe*
Redhead. *Ann Brokelman*



Gulls and waterfowl from the north concentrate here as the lakes freeze over. Late December to late February is the best time, and colder years tend to be more productive when there is an abundance of ice, while the outflows of power plants and industries will prevent a total freeze. This article identifies good vantage points along the St. Clair River, species seen in winter, and birds seen in the lower stretches of the river in early summer.

Long ago before industrial outflows contributed to a warmer water temperature, the river often froze over entirely creating a smooth surface. Winters were consistently colder then and vehicles could traverse the frozen river at border crossings on routes marked with Christmas trees. Fleets of ice boats raced down the icy surface and there were few ducks and gulls to be seen.

In my time, the river has never frozen smooth and loose, "brash ice" can build up very high. However,

some open areas of water will hold large rafts of ducks. Canvasback and Redhead can be seen numbering in the tens of thousands in good years. Many other species are mixed in and it is fun to try and pick out something that may be unusual.

Regarding gulls, colder years with lots of ice attract a larger number. In January 2013, many gulls made use of the St. Clair River. Herring Gulls topped the list but Great Black-backed and Ring-billed were in good numbers. Usually Ring-billed Gulls are rare on the river during winter and Bonaparte's are almost non-existent. A few Lesser Black-backed, Thayer's and Iceland Gulls were found as well as an astounding number of Glaucous. 2013 was my best year ever for Glaucous and one early February morning I counted at least 60 of various ages from Sombra to Sarnia.



Besides gulls, wintering Common Loons, Double-crested Cormorants, American Coots, and Horned and Red-necked Grebes are sometimes picked out. And in recent years, Bald Eagles have increased in numbers and can be found searching for fish. The winter of 2013-2014 saw record numbers of this species on the river, especially at Corunna — close to 30 were counted one day.

A few selected highlights from the past not already mentioned include Tufted Duck at Sombra (winter 1994), Red-throated Loon (early December 2005) near Seager Park, and Western Grebe (13 January 2013) at Sombra.

Unlike its Michigan counterpart, the Ontario side of the river has many excellent viewing spots. Several parks are maintained by St. Clair Township and the St. Clair Parkway follows the river's edge for most of its length affording endless viewing opportunities.

One of the better locations for birds is at the Sombra/Fawn Island area where waterfowl favour congregating near the island. Good viewing spots are at the McKeough Floodway Outlet Park and Reagan Park at the very south end of Sombra village. The Sombra ferry dock area is worth checking as the downstream side of the causeway

almost never freezes. Local people feed ducks here so many species can be seen. In 2000, a Harlequin Duck spent a couple of weeks here.

At the north end of the village, ducks will gather in the shallows of Sombra Bay. Farther up is Branton-Cundick Park, a wider point in the river where one can scope for birds.

Continuing north, birders can reach Cathcart Park, a premier spot for ducks and gulls. This site used to be a provincial park dating back to the 1940s. The water here is shallow at the mouth of Clay Creek. This, coupled with the industrial outflow from just upriver, keeps the water fairly open.

The next little park, called Seager, is often sparse for birds but a cozy spot to stop for a look. It is the location where I found an Ivory Gull, one of the rarest birds on the river in recent times, on 23 December 1995. It stayed for three days, attracted hundreds of birders, and was later seen off the outflow of the fertilizer plant just north of Stanley Line where the water is almost always open.



Ivory Gull. Steve Pike

Willow Park, just upriver from Seager, is in front of the Lambton Generating Station. The station is now shut down and no longer provides the warm water outflow to attract ducks and gulls hunting small fish.

Every winter large rafts of ducks are found mid-river off Courtright. The village park and its dock are good spots to scope the rafts for less common species. White-winged Scoters, rather uncommon for the river, are often found there.

Guthrie Park and the Shell Refinery outflow at Talfourd Creek attract many birds. This site is at the north end of Corunna opposite the head of Stag Island. One can sit here for hours if there are lots of ducks and gulls. Large numbers of Long-tailed Ducks, Common Goldeneye and Bufflehead will be seen.

Within the city of Sarnia, Sarnia Bay and harbour are a must. When the bay is not frozen in early winter, gulls and ducks congregate here in good variety and numbers. White-winged Gulls are almost a guarantee. The harbour's Government Dock area, beside the grain elevator, is often open and is worth a look. It is here that Dennis Rupert found the Ross's Gull on 21 February 1992.



Kumlien's Gull. Allen Woodliffe Duck Raft. Blake Mann



Under the Bluewater Bridges at Sarnia, ducks drift in the swift current from Lake Huron. Every so often a Harlequin or two is found working the edge, usually on the Michigan side. In the harsh winter of 2013-2014, a build-up of Long-tailed Ducks was noted early on. Numbers continued to grow while most bodies of water in the province froze solid. But the St. Clair River remained relatively open, and by the week of 10 February, thousands of this species were present.

On 16 February, I counted from the mouth of Lake Huron to downtown Sarnia/Port Huron and estimated more than 35,000 Long-tailed Ducks — an unprecedented number in this part of Ontario.

Each winter is different and birding certainly depends on weather. Colder years tend to be better but there is the odd winter that very little is seen on the St. Clair.

Summer offers less, as one would expect. Boat traffic is high but in the “flats” or delta area of the river from Walpole Island south, accessible by boat on the Ontario side, marsh birds and aerial foragers can be found. Redhead ducks breed here and are often seen in the lower stretches of the river beside Squirrel and Bassett Islands. With luck, Canvasback may also make an appearance.

Forster's and Black Terns nest in the delta area and even an occasional summering Caspian Tern can be found. Tern numbers have dwindled drastically in recent years, especially for the Black Tern. Common Loons have been seen in early summer where the river meets Lake St. Clair. But birding the St. Clair River pays off in any season.



Wintering Waterbirds Abandon the Great Lakes

Dave Milsom

The winter of 2013/2014 was remarkable for many reasons including the extremely cold temperatures and the amount of snowfall.



Long-tailed Duck. *Ann Brokelman*

The Great Lakes of Superior, Huron, Michigan, Erie and Ontario are huge bodies of water that rarely freeze over. But last winter the effects of the lasting cold temperatures and the Polar Vortex contributed to a major freeze-up of these great water bodies.

From 1973 to 2010 annual ice cover on the Great Lakes showed a decline of 71 per cent. In 2011-2012 the ice cover maximum was about five per cent (Michigan State University Extension, 29 January 2014). However, this past winter the lakes were iced over more than any time in the past 20 years according to an article written in the *Peterborough Examiner* on 15 February 2014. As of that date, 88.4 per cent of the lakes were frozen: Lake Superior was 94 per cent ice-covered, Michigan 81 per cent, Huron 95 per cent and Erie 96 per cent. Lake Ontario was only frozen at its eastern end but in January ice stretched 400 metres offshore all along its north shore.

Usually, Lake Ontario does not freeze because it is farther south and contains some very deep sections. Lake Erie, on the other hand, is by far the most shallow of these lakes so freezes it more regularly.

The result of this major freeze-up was a significant movement of ducks, loons and grebes off the lakes onto open water in the interior. In London, for example, White-winged Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, scaup, Horned and Red-necked Grebes and two

Red-throated Loons arrived on the Thames River (Read, P. ONTBIRDS, 12 February 2014). Not one of these birds is usually seen there in winter. In fact, no Red-throated Loon had been seen there in winter since 1898.

Similar events occurred on the Otonabee River between Peterborough and Lakefield, a waterway always partially open even in the coldest winters due to the force of the water cascading around the Trent-Severn lock gates along it linking Lake Ontario with Georgian Bay.

White-winged Scoters were discovered in February at Gannon Narrows at the entrance to Pigeon Lake, on the Otonabee, and at Lock 19 just south of Lansdowne Street in Peterborough. Doug Sadler noted in the 1983 edition of *Our Heritage of Birds* that this species is a “very rare spring migrant” and not seen in winter.

Long-tailed Duck was found in many spots on the Otonabee this winter, normally a “very rare” visitor in this season.

At Lock 19 another very rare visitor, a male Bufflehead, was found on 16 February. Nearby was a Horned Grebe, which according to Sadler is an “uncommon species found every year in spring migration... arriving late March and early April.”



Red-breasted Merganser on the Otonabee River. Dave Milsom

Red-necked Grebes “occasionally seen on the Otonabee River during migration” (J. L. McKeever, *A Checklist of the Birds of Peterborough County*, April 1958) also arrived here in February: four in Lakefield (eBird, Iain Rayner, 17 February 2014) and at least two farther south on the river were feeding on Green and Leopard frogs and Brown Bullheads (eBird, Donald Sutherland, 17

February 2014). Red-necked Grebes were also seen in February on the Gananoque River in Kingston and on the Speed River near Guelph. They can survive easily on such shallow rivers where the bird can dive to the bottom for “frogsicles” and small fish.

Two male Hooded Mergansers and a pair together at Lock 19 over-wintered on the Otonabee.



Lake Ontario off Thickson's Woods during maximum ice coverage. Glenn Coady

Far more unexpected has been the recent influx of Red-breasted Mergansers on this river. Classified as a “very rare spring migrant” (P.S. Burke, C.D. Jones *et al.*, *Peterborough County Natural History Summary*, March 1999), these sightings were recorded in eBird:

- Five at Lock 19, and two at Little Lake (I. Rayner, 20 February 2014);
- Six at Millennium Park on the Otonabee (Ken Abraham, 19 February 2014);
- Five near Peterborough Zoo (Martin Parker, 18 February 2014);
- Two near Lock 25 (Susan Sauve, 15 February 2014);
- Two near Lakefield (Luke Berg, 18 February 2014);
- Five in Lakefield (Travis Cameron, 16 February 2014);
- Three at Young’s Point (Donald Sutherland, 17 February 2014);
- Two at Gannon Narrows (Donald Sutherland, 17 February 2014).

Meanwhile on 20 February in Fort Erie where the Niagara River flows into Lake Erie, 570 Red-breasted Mergansers, 118 White-winged Scoters, 143 Long-tailed Ducks, and 880 Buffleheads were among the rafts of ducks (Watson, W. 2014. 20 February 2014).

All these inland waterway sightings were the result of the Great Lakes freeze, not early migration of waterbirds from their southern wintering grounds in the Atlantic Ocean off Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas. Migrating birds would have returned north at the end of winter, in mid to late March.



Hooded Merganser Male at Lock 19. Dave Milsom



Christmas Bird Count

This November, a list of Ontario Christmas Bird Count dates will be available on www.brucegreybirds.wordpress.com. Compilers are asked to check the list and make sure that information about their count is correct.

Red-bellied Woodpecker. Ann Brokelman

Membership Renewal on OFO Members’ Page

Christian Friis

Many of you use the members’ page to renew and manage your account, which is convenient, quick and secure. For those of you wondering how to renew online or manage your account, here a few pointers.

Login

Point your browser to <http://member.ofo.ca>. Your username is your email address and if you have forgotten your password, you may have it reset and emailed to you by clicking the icon with the “?” on its shoulder.

Login

Username

.....

LOGIN

Your email address

Click to reset your password

STATUS

Your current subscription: Annual Membership (Canada) **expired**. Renew Now

Click here to see expiry date and invoices or to upgrade or make a donation.

Click to renew

Account Management

Once logged in you can manage your account. Your membership subscription details are listed under Status.

To renew, click the “Renew Now” and follow the prompts for payment. You may pay online with a credit card, via PayPal. You don’t need a PayPal account to use this secure payment option. Once you click “Pay Now”, you’ll be taken to another site to process payment; just click the “Don’t have a PayPal account” link at the bottom to continue without a PayPal account.



Waterfowl Grounded in Bruce County

Cindy Cartwright

In Ontario, waterbirds were unable to find open water in some locations during the winter of 2014.

In Bruce County, hundreds were stranded on roadways and open fields as they moved inland searching for open water. Some simply needed assistance getting up in the air again, while others were iced up and needed thawing before release.

In one instance, a Red-breasted Merganser was unable to become airborne in the deep, fluffy snow where it had landed. A local snowplow operator rescued the bird, placed it in a plastic storage bin, and transported it to open water a few kilometres away. The merganser was successfully released on a riverbank and was able to plow the last few metres through the remaining snow to safety in the water.

Red-breasted Merganser plows through the last few metres of snow to safety in the water. Photos: Karen Punnett (*picsbymeKarenlee*)



Recent Changes in the Taxonomy and Nomenclature of Birds of the ABA Area

Jim Rising

This summary of changes was suggested by the AOU Committee on Taxonomy and Nomenclature (2013, 2014). The Committee consists of 12 members (avian taxonomists from Canada, Mexico, and USA), most of whom are associated with the major systematic collections of North America, and chaired by Dr. Terry Chesser at the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C. In recent years the Committee most-ly communicates electronically, and when possible at major ornithological conferences. Generally, the committee only considers proposed changes that are based on newly published information, or that have been specifically submitted for their consideration.

This is a summary of changes that would most affect Canadian birders, not reflecting changes that are only of scientific names that have been published in the two most recent supplements to *The Auk* (Chesser *et al.* 2013; 2014). Changes in the classification of Hawaiian species and South American groups, represented in Central America by a single taxon are not covered in this article.

Changes published in the 54th Supplement (Chesser *et al.* 2013)

The Providence Petrel (*Petrodroma solandri*) has been added to the list. It breeds primarily on Lord Howe Island off Australia and has recently been confirmed off Attu in the Aleutian Islands.

Fea's Petrel (*P. feae*) has been added. It breeds on the Cape Verde Islands and other places, and now is considered to be rare, but regular in western Atlantic waters off North America; most records are from late spring off the coast of North Carolina, but it has been recorded north to Nova Scotia and south to Georgia.

Barolo Shearwater (*Puffinus baroli*) is now considered to be a species separate from the Little Shearwater (*P. assimilis*). It breeds on islands in the eastern Atlantic and is casual or accidental off the coast of Nova Scotia and the Carolinas. This replaces the Little Shearwater records in North America.

The Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) of the Old World is confirmed as accidental in the Aleutian Islands.

The Rosy-faced Lovebird (*Agapornis roseicollis*) is now considered established as a wild species in the Phoenix area of Arizona.

The Nanday Parakeet (*Aratinga nenday*) has been introduced and is now established in Peninsular Florida, especially in central Gulf Coast region (Pineallis County). The generic name was moved from *Nanday* to *Aratinga* in the 55th Supplement.

The "Sage Sparrow complex" has been split into two species. The population found in the Great Basin is now called the Sagebrush Sparrow (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) and the Pacific Coastal and Mojave Desert living populations are now called Bell's Sparrow (*A. belli*). The Mojave Desert populations are themselves distinctive, and perhaps soon shall be recognized as a third species. The sage sparrows were formerly placed in the genus *Amphispiza*, but were considered to be distinctive enough to be placed in a genus of their own.

The Asian Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte arctoa*) is now considered as species accidental in the AOU/ABA area on the basis of a bird photographed on Adak Island, Aleutian Islands, Alaska, 30 December 2012). This species normally breeds in the mountains of Asia.

Changes published in the 55th Supplement (Chesser *et al.* 2014)

As a consequence of a taxonomic change, Salvin's Albatross (*Thalassarche salvini*), which breeds on islands off the coast of New Zealand and in the Indian Ocean, is now considered accidental in Hawaii (Midway Atoll, 8 April 2003) and the coast of Alaska (near Kasatochi Island, Aleutians, 4 August 2003). This was formerly considered conspecific with the Shy Albatross (*T. cauta*).

The Maguari Stork (*Ciconia maguari*) has been added to the list on the basis of photos of a bird taken in Puntarenas Province, Costa Rica, 16 September 2013.

The classification of the large rails of the King/Clapper complex has been revised. There are now four species recognized in the AOU/ABA area: Ridgway's Rail (*Rallus obsoletus*), Aztec Rail (*R. tenuirostris*), Clapper Rail (*R. crepitans*), and the King Rail (*R. elegans*). Formerly, *obsoletus* was considered conspecific with the South American *longirostris* (the Mangrove Rail which does not occur in our area). These rails are now

considered to be separate on the basis of strong, but incomplete, reproductive isolation among them, in spite of large areas of distributional overlap between *crepitans* and *elegans*. There are also morphological and genetic differences among other members of the group. The Aztec Rail is also known as the Mexican Rail, and is found in freshwater marshes of central Mexico; this has often been considered to be in the King Rail group. Ridgway's Rail – also known as the Western Clapper Rail, and sometimes considered to be a subspecies of the King Rail – is found in salt and brackish marshes, mostly in the Imperial and lower Colorado River valleys, and in freshwater marshes.

The Northern Boobook (*Ninox japonica*), a species that breeds in western Asia, is considered accidental on the basis of photographs taken in Alaska, on St. Paul Island, Pribilof Islands, 27 August–3 September 2005, and Kiska Island, Aleutian Islands, 1 August 2008. This species was formerly considered conspecific with the Brown Hawk-Owl, but is now treated as a different species on the basis of vocal differences. The group name is changed from Hawk-Owl to Boobook to conform to general usage for this species.

The Common Chiffchaff (*Sylvia collybita*) is added to the list on the basis of a photograph of a bird taken on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, 6-7 June 2012. The species normally occurs in Europe, west to central Russia, and is casual in Japan and Thailand.

The Kamchatka Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus examinandus*) is added, as casual in the Aleutians (Attu, Chemya, Amchitka, during spring migration). It was formerly included in *P. borealis*, the Arctic Warbler.

The Lined Seedeater (*Sporophila lineola*) is now considered to be accidental in Costa Rica, on the basis of photos taken 5-7 October 2013.

Sporophila corvina, Variable Seedeater, is now considered to be a species different from *S. americana*, and replaces it in the check-list.

The Guadalupe Junco (*Junco insularis*), endemic on Guadalupe Island, off Baja California, Mexico, is now accepted as a species separate from other juncos.

References:

- Chesser, R. Terry, Banks, Richard C., Barker, F. Keith., Cicero, Carla, Dunn, Jon L., Kratter, A. W., Lovette, I. J., Rasamussen, Pamela C., Rensen, Jr., J. V., Rising, James D., Stotz, Douglas F., and Winker, Kevin. 2013. Fifty-fourth Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds. *The Auk* 130:558-571.
- Chesser, R. Terry, Banks, Richard C., Cicero, Carla, Dunn, Jon L., Kratter, Andrew W., Lovette, Irby L., Navarro-Sigüenza, Adolfo G., Rasmussen, Pamela C., Rensen, Jr., J. V., Rising, James D., Stotz, Douglas F., and Winker, Kevin. 2014. Fifty-fifth Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds. *The Auk* Ornithological Advances 131.

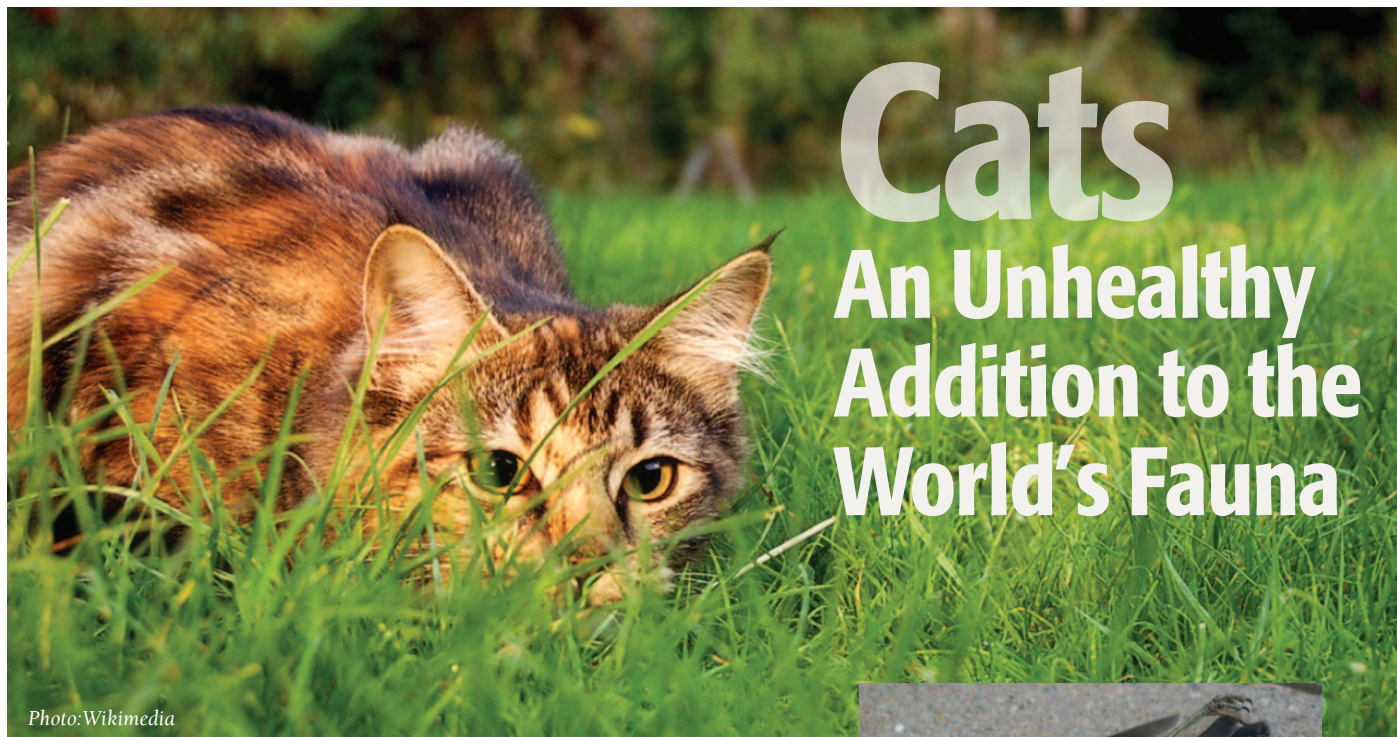


Photo:Wikimedia

Cats

An Unhealthy Addition to the World's Fauna

Each year about five per cent of Canadian birds are killed by cats – 269 million birds out of an estimated population of 10 billion

Geoff Carpentier



Red-winged Blackbird killed by cat. Geoff Carpentier

What a lovely sight! Look at Patches as she heads out for her morning jaunt in the fields near her home. How cute is she as she tiptoes through the dew-drenched grass, trying her best to keep her paws dry, but to no avail.

Everyday millions of cats do exactly this and the outcome is always devastating for myriad wildlife and sometimes for the cat as well. Each year about five per cent of Canadian birds are killed by cats — 269 million birds out of an estimated population of 10 billion — to be exact. Free-roaming cats live an average of five years, compared to seventeen for indoor cats, but during those five years they can do irreparable damage to local wildlife. Many predators are out there and would happily snap up an unwary cat for dinner — coyotes, in particular, seem to actually hunt cats in many urban centres, as cats are plentiful and generally less wary than most wild prey.

But what of the animals your sweet little kitten hunts? Surprisingly I have several friends who are devout naturalists that

willingly let their cats out, knowing the harm they do. This always puzzles me — if you cherish wildlife, why would you let your cat roam and kill wild things?

But let's get back to the story as this isn't about emotion but rather learning the facts. Well, actually it is about emotion. There are two distinct camps when it comes to this issue — those that let their cats out, because “cats need to roam and exercise their hunting instincts” and those that know it is wrong and want to protect wildlife. Around the world this debate rages and has done so for many decades.

In 1916, in his report to the Canadian Commission of Conservation, W.E. Saunders of the McIlwraith Ornithological Club of London wrote:

The cat, I think, comes fairly under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission. I wish it would appoint me Cat Ranger. If that were done, I can assure you the number of cats would suffer a very serious diminution every year because, as

you know, every cat spends most of its time in an effort to kill. It kills not only the mice but every bird it can possibly catch and, as I look at it, each insectivorous bird killed by a cat is worth more than the cat itself. I have proved that there are some uses for cats. Buried under apple trees I have eaten them as apples, buried under rose bushes I have picked them in the form of roses. That is a very satisfactory way of disposing of cats.

Recently many landmark studies have been undertaken around the world trying to determine what impacts the estimated 600 million pet cats have on wildlife. This number includes (a) feral (i.e. born in the wild), (b) escaped or released and now living wild and (c) those kept as pets but are free-roaming. Everyone agrees that the impact is significant and far-reaching and for the ease of analyzing data, most scientists lump the feral and escaped/released cats into one category, as these have a demonstrated greater impact on wildlife than free-roaming pets.

Around the world, domestic cats are recognized as a threat to global biodiversity and are known to have significantly contributed to the extinction of 33 species. The impacts are so great that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) now lists domestic cats as one of the world's worst non-native invasive species.

Research around the world

Outside North America, the number of kills is immense: According to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 27 million birds are killed annually in Great Britain by the 7.2 million cats UK residents keep as pets. The data from another study, conducted by M. Woods, R. A. McDonald and S. Harris, estimates that the impacts in Great Britain may be as high as 150 million birds. In Switzerland, it is estimated that 100,000-300,000 birds are killed annually by cats. In Australia the problem is equally severe and based on the estimated 14.6 million cats (free-roaming and feral) found there, numbers are again staggering. The 2.6 million free-roaming Australian pet cats alone take an estimated 3.8 million animals with about 25 per cent of those being birds. Add the superior hunting feral cats to the mix (estimated to be 2.3-3 times as efficient as free-roaming cats) and the numbers likely approaches 41-54 million animals, including about 10-13 million birds. In 1996, C.R. Dickman presented a report to the Australian Nature Conservation and the Institute of Wildlife Research in Sydney, Australia regarding the Stephen's Island Wren. This flightless, nocturnal, wren from New Zealand, which went extinct about 1900, was never observed alive in the wild. Interestingly and sadly, most of the known museum specimens were collected by a single cat. An unscientific New Zealand study reported that an estimated 1.4 million free-roaming cats kill 19 million animals annually, including approximately 1.1 million birds.

In North America, recent studies concerning the impact of the estimated 30-80 million feral and 33.6 – 58.8 million free-roaming cats support these figures. Studies by various scientists estimate the average kill rate for each free-roaming cat to in the United States, to be between 4 and 54 birds per year, depending on location and degree

of urbanization. An article by Scott Loss, Tom Will and Peter Marra in *Nature Communications* (2013) "The Impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife in the United States", created a media frenzy as hundreds of articles ensued summarizing and critiquing their data. The original article, as published, contained some incorrect estimates of the number of animals killed by free-ranging domestic cats, and was re-issued in December 2013. Scott Loss was kind enough to send me a copy of the updated article (pers. comm.) and the summary presented here reflects the revised interpretation of the data.

In their paper, the authors state in part,

We estimate that free-ranging domestic cats kill 1.3-4.0 billion birds and 6.3-22.3 billion mammals annually. Un-owned cats, as opposed to owned pets, cause the majority of this mortality. Our findings suggest that free-ranging cats cause substantially greater wildlife mortality than previously thought and are likely the single greatest source of anthropogenic mortality for US birds and mammals.

Un-owned cats are defined to include farm/barn cats, strays that are fed by humans but not granted access to habitation, cats in subsidized colonies and cats that are feral. Sixty-nine percent of the mortality is attributed to non-owned cats, showing their superior prowess and efficiency as hunters. Their study also showed that between 6.3 and 22.3 billion mammals are killed annually by cats. Free-roaming pet cats were responsible for 221 million to 1.7 billion bird deaths and 512 million to 2.8 billion mammalian deaths. They go on to conclude that between 228 to 871 million reptiles and 86 and 320 million amphibians could be killed by cats in the contiguous United States each year. Other studies support these disturbing conclusions. The authors of a Wisconsin study report that 39 million birds are killed annually in that state alone and in a Michigan study, 800 to 3100 cats killed between 16,000 and 47,000 birds during one breeding season. A Wedge-tailed Shearwater colony in Hawaii exhibited total reproductive failure and almost all the adult shearwaters at this site were apparently killed by cats.

Canadian Cat Predation Studies

In Canada, similar studies by Environment Canada conclude that cats appear to kill as many birds as all other anthropogenic (i.e. human induced) impacts combined.

Feral and pet cats are believed to kill more than 100 million birds per year in Canada, with an estimated 60% of those killed by feral cats. Collisions with electricity transmission and distribution lines have been identified as the second largest human-caused source of bird mortality in Canada, with 10-41 million birds killed annually. Collisions with buildings are responsible for the death of an estimated 16-42 million birds annually and approximately 13.8 million birds are killed in collisions with vehicles.

A study by P. Blancher (2013) entitled "Estimated number of birds killed by house cats (*Felis catus*) in Canada", published in *Avian Conservation and Ecology*, concludes that cats are estimated to kill between 105 and 348 million birds per year in Canada, with the majority likely to be killed by feral cats. This conclusion was based on an estimated 8.5 million pet cats and 1.4 to 4.2 million feral cats. These estimates suggest that between two and seven per cent of all the birds in southern Canada are killed by cats every year. They reference previous Canadian studies where Guthrie, B.B. in *Nature Spring* (2009) estimated that 165 million birds were killed annually, Dunn and Tessaglia, in the *Journal of Field Ornithology* (1994), attributed 29 per cent of bird kills to cats and the Rithet's Bog Conservation Society (2011) reported that 22 per cent of all attacks on Song Sparrows were generated by cats. Guthrie went on to analyze which species and families might be more susceptible to cat predation and concluded that insular species (i.e. both those living on islands and those living in artificially isolated and/or fragmented habitats such as those surrounded by subdivisions for example) were most prone, while interior forest species were less likely to be predated. Free-roaming pet cats were more likely to take small songbirds at feeders, while feral cats generally took larger birds.

Twenty-three species at risk in Canada (COSEWIC 2012) are among the potentially vulnerable species identified. Among COSEWIC listed ground-nesting species, three of 11 prairie-nesting species and three of four species of grass and scrub-nesting species are at risk from cat predation.

Cats are the only predators that typically stalk adult healthy birds by choice, rather than taking fledglings and weakened birds.

Study after study reaches the same conclusion, whether it is about Gray Catbirds suffering 79 per cent mortality primarily due to cats, seabird populations being wiped out on sub-Antarctic islands, or California Quail and Thrasher extirpated in a park where cats hunted. Even more interesting is that the cats were choosing to kill birds and native mammals but avoided non-native mammals, such as rats, such that the number of rats in the cat-infested area was nine times higher than in the cat-free zone.

Other impacts

Why should we care? Well beyond the obvious impacts on wild populations of birds, mammals and herptiles, there is a secondary impact on avian and mammalian predators. If the cats kill most of the prey, what is left for the native predators? Studies in Maryland showed that the loss of native prey (i.e. chipmunks) to cats resulted in the Cooper's Hawks choosing alternate prey and subsequently having a much reduced reproductive success rate. Native predators tend to be in balance with their prey — fewer prey species lead to fewer predators. But this is not the case with cats — pets have it all — food, shelter and protection. The pressures that control natural predators do not affect them the same way and their populations burgeon unchecked. Unlike natural predators, cats typically kill prey whether they intend to eat it or not, further decimating wild prey populations. Cats tend to be active in daylight hours when birds are least suspecting, since their natural predators are mostly nocturnal. This again artificially raises the kill rate and hunting success of the cats. Finally, cats are the only predators that typically stalk adult healthy birds by choice, rather than taking fledglings and weakened birds.

There is another emerging issue of concern. Free-roaming cats, both domestic and feral, act as reservoirs and vectors for many diseases and parasites that may jeopardize wildlife, such as feline leukemia and feline

parvovirus. But most importantly, cats play an integral role in the life cycle of the protozoan parasite *Toxoplasmosis gondii*, where the cat is a definitive host. *T. gondii* has infected more than 50 bird species worldwide. The parasite is shed in the feces of infected cats and a broad range of animals (including humans) may act as intermediate hosts and may develop clinical disease as a result of this infection. Add to this that cats appear to be selectively avoiding rats as prey, should we not be more concerned about vector spread diseases as rat populations increase due to reduced predator pressure? Additionally, all dogs are vaccinated for rabies — is this true of cats? Many are but likely most, particularly feral cats, are not. Cats may therefore inadvertently become a reservoir for the rabies virus in some instances.

What can be done?

The trap-neuter-release or trap-neuter-return (TNR) movement is well-funded and entrenched as part of the solution for cat problems. It advocates opposition to the use of euthanasia to control cat populations, while promoting feeding and sterilization programs. Evidence suggests that TNR is not the solution to the problem as the sterilization efforts can never be widespread enough to offset the breeding success of non-neutered individuals. On the contrary, TNR often leads to perpetual colony maintenance, huge costs, magnified volunteer efforts and sometimes even an increase in cat populations as the cats are well-fed and protected by the cat guardians, as witnessed by one TNR program in

Hawaii which grew from about 100 to over 1000 cats. On the moral side of the question, many veterinary and animal rights and welfare professionals deem TNR to be inhumane, since it may encourage pet abandonment, as owners of unwanted pets are assured their cat will be well taken care of when released. Clearly, the rights of the wild animals are never factored in when TNR is implemented as hundreds of thousands of wild animals die when these cats persist.

Cat owners need to accept responsibility for the actions of their cats. It is not sufficient to simply say that “cats have a right to run free and if they hunt and kill, so be it — that’s what cats do.” Some municipalities such as Ajax, Burlington, Oshawa and London have bylaws prohibiting cats at large. Kingston’s bylaw prohibits urban cat owners from allowing their cats to trespass. Other municipalities clearly put the responsibility on cat owners to control the actions of their cats as they impact other residents, but most fail to address the devastating environmental impacts these cats cause. This is not an exhaustive list of what Ontario municipalities are doing about cats, but rather a sampling of their efforts. For you, the reader, please encourage your Council to enact a cats at large bylaw and ask local newspapers to continue to educate the public about the impacts of cats at large. The current research, summarized herein, shows the impacts of cats, both feral and domestic, but also provides information to help you help our wild animals. There is much still to be done to assist wildlife, but the ground swell has clearly started.

What should you do?

Each person has to weigh the facts and decide for themselves. For me, it has always been easy. I have a fourteen year old cat that has never been out of the house (except to go to the vet for her shots annually) and she is a happy, pleasant and content cat. She knows what birds are as she will look out the window at them but never attempts to catch them. The hunting instinct is there but the opportunity is not. She seems satisfied just knowing she can do it, without necessarily killing something. Cats can be leash-trained despite popular thought and if one still insists they must be allowed to be outside, an enclosure can be built for them, much as one would for a dog.

We will not solve the conflict here, but each time someone chooses Nature over his/her cat’s freedom, many wild things will survive for generations to come.



Illustration: Edward Howe Forbush (1858-1929)



Male Piping Plover on the Port Elgin nest. Don Kennedy

PIPING PLOVERS

Nest in Saugeen Shores

Cindy Cartwright

Seven years ago, Piping Plovers nested in Bruce County at Sauble Beach for the first time in 35 years.* Piping Plovers have returned to Sauble every year since and in 2014 there were four nesting pairs.

In early May 2014, a female that had nested at Sauble in 2013, returned and paired with a male that had arrived in late April. Over the next week the male dug at least four nest scrapes, all of which were rejected by the female as inadequate. Mating and egg laying did not occur. On 18 May it was reported that the male was observed paired with a new female and the first female had disappeared.

It wasn't until the end of May that she was potentially relocated. Local resident Aaron Jex, who is not a birder, had discovered a Piping Plover nest with eggs in Saugeen Shores on the Port Elgin Main Beach. As sometimes happens, it wasn't until he mentioned the birds to another local resident, whose wife is a birder, that the sighting was reported to the Ministry of Natural Resources and the process to protect the nest was initiated. A few local birders immediately suspected that this was the missing female from Sauble based on dates but it took some time to correctly read the colour combination on her leg bands and confirm that she was indeed the missing plover from Sauble.

It is believed that this female left Sauble Beach sometime between 16 May and 18 May. On 1 June, 2014 there were four eggs in the nest at Port Elgin. Piping Plovers are known to lay one egg every other day. In order for there to be four eggs on 1 June, egg laying would have begun on 26 May or earlier. Allowing time for courtship, the digging of nest scrapes and mating, it appears that the female found a new mate in Port Elgin fairly quickly after leaving Sauble. Her new mate was a male that had hatched at Sauble in 2013 and was banded on 19 July 2013 (based on the colour combination of his leg bands).

This is the first known nest record for Saugeen Shores – the former municipalities of Southampton, Saugeen Township and Port Elgin prior to amalgamation. Over the years there have been documented sightings of Piping Plovers on the beaches in Saugeen Shores but historical records of nests have not been found. However, a few local residents over the age of 70 years report memories of the birds nesting on area beaches in their childhood.

Local birders immediately rallied to protect the nesting plovers from disturbance while waiting for the MNR to set up a perimeter and enclosure. Staff in Saugeen Shores were quick to help with protecting the area, including removing swings and volley ball nets in the vicinity of the nest. Interestingly, the plovers chose a location only 15 metres from where town staff had fenced off a Killdeer nest a few years earlier to protect it from beachgoers. This location is a heavily used part of the main beach, close to a busy breakwall. With over 20 kilometres of beach to choose from in Saugeen Shores, there must be something different about this particular corner of the beach that attracts shorebirds.

The nesting was successful and between noon and 4:30 pm on 23 June, all four eggs hatched. Three of the chicks were banded on 4 July 2014. The Ministry of Natural Resources team was unable to capture the fourth chick for banding. The four chicks were frequently observed actively feeding and practicing their flying skills throughout the remainder of July and into August under the careful watch of the male before beginning their first migration. On 3 August the birds vacated the main beach and they were last reported to be doing well at Gobles Grove, another beach further south in Saugeen Shores.

*(Cartwright, C. 2007. *OFO News* Vol. 25(2), June 2007)



Jean Iron

Shorebird Nights at Hillman Marsh

The second year of OFO Shorebird Nights at Hillman Marsh Shorebird Cell was wonderfully received by the birding public in general throughout May.

Dave Milsom

Our expert OFO shorebird volunteers were on hand in good numbers on six nights to assist birders with identification, give specific information about each species, migration routes travelled by the birds, and to answer any bird-related questions posed to them. A staunch supporter of shorebirds, Jean Iron was on hand for all the public sessions to offer her expertise and assistance to numerous birders and beginners.

OFO is proud to have contributed major funds to the building of the Hillman shorebird blind used by so many birders annually. Essex Regional Conservation Authority should be commended for their dedication to the maintaining of suitable water levels in the cell, the construction of the shorebird blind, and for providing personnel to enable the numerous birders to park easily and to obtain season passes to Hillman Marsh at the gate. Mike Malone at Pelee Wings continually supported the endeavour as well as providing substantial funds for the building of the shorebird blind plus the additions erected over the winter months. At Point Pelee National Park, Sarah Rupert was a strong proponent of the shorebird nights and enabled the events to be advertised throughout the park, as well as being one of the volunteers herself at several of the shorebird nights.

Many thanks to our OFO Shorebird Volunteers without whom this event would not be possible:

Jeremy Bensette	Mike Nelson
John Carley	Alfred Raab
Bob Cermak	Pete Read
Bob Curry	Sarah Rupert
Lynne Freeman	John Schmelefske
Mark and Joanie Hubinger	Dave Sked
Jean Iron	Ellen Smout
Kevin McLaughlin	Gary and Candy Stephey
Marvin and Janet Medelko	Mike Tate
Dave Milsom	Tom Thomas
Justin Peter	Ron Tozer
	Ivor Williams

Next year we hope to provide more signage in the cell area and the blind to enable birders to understand the main migratory routes as well as to identify the predominant species being seen at the marsh. It will also be necessary to extend this program even further with additional nights, including weekends to enable the large contingent of new and more experienced birders to attend more sessions.

OFO Certificate of Appreciation Friends of Point Pelee



OFO's Dave Milsom and Debbie Ware of Friends of Point Pelee.

How many birders have stood shivering at the tip of Point Pelee on May mornings looking forward to the coffee and birdseed cookies at the Birder Breakfast or enjoyed the BBQ lunch after hours spent chasing rarities in the park? Year after year the Friends of Point Pelee cheerfully serve birders during the Festival of Birds, forgoing birding themselves. The Friends also help with the OFO Convention when it is held at Point Pelee every two years.

At this year's Festival of Birds, Dave Milsom, OFO Director presented Debbie Ware, General Manager of the Friends of Point Pelee with a well deserved OFO Certificate of Appreciation to thank the Friends for their years of service to the birding community and many more years to come.

Young Birders Enjoy Presqu'île

Adam Capparelli

On Saturday, 29 March 2014, 17 young birders between the ages of 9 and 17 met at Presqu'île Provincial Park for a day of birding and workshops. Doug McRae, Peter Burke, and Bill Gilmour generously volunteered their time to share their extensive expertise in identifying birds, preparing study skins, and field sketching.

Our first stop was Calf Pasture Point where we all had an opportunity to identify the many waterfowl species in the bay. We learned key identification features, how to count large numbers of birds, and how to use a spotting scope for both viewing and photography. The highlight was spotting a hybrid Common x Barrow's Goldeneye. We then proceeded to the Government Dock and were able to pick out a few Lesser Scaup among the many Greater Scaup. After this, we walked to Bill Gilmour's house where we were treated to a Common Raven harassing a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Our last stop of the morning was the lighthouse where we added White-winged Scoter to our list. This concluded the field portion of our day.

Cold and hungry, we were thankful for the hot drinks and pizza lunch provided. Once our appetites were sated, we split into two groups: one group watching Doug McRae prepare a study skin, while the other learned about



Young birders watch Doug McRae preparing a study skin. Gillian Shields

eBird and field sketching. Preparing a study skin requires attention to detail, a steady hand, and patience. The result is an excellent tool for studying bird topography, as well as providing an invaluable resource for artists. In addition, we were able to study the internal anatomy of the bird and even determine a possible cause of death. Far from being gory, the whole experience was fascinating and educational. Field sketching also requires attention to detail in order to draw the bird in a life-like pose and with proper proportions. Peter is a gifted artist who has illustrated field guides. He is also an enthusiastic promoter of eBird and shared a checklist of the day's sightings with us.

The day was enjoyable, informative and a great bonding experience for all the young birders present. We are grateful to OFO and Lynne Freeman for organizing rewarding experiences for young birders and look forward to the next event.



Claire Nelson and Alan Wormington. Jean Iron

A group of Ontario birders at Point Pelee this past spring held their annual potluck supper on 6 May at White Pines Picnic Area. Although this gathering is always the social highlight of May at Point Pelee, it was made extra special this year with the awarding of an OFO Certificate of Appreciation to long-time Ontario birder and field ornithologist Alan Wormington.

Speaking to about 60 birders, OFO board members Bob Cermak and Claire Nelson made the presentation, pointing out that it is awarded to both members and non-

Alan Wormington Receives OFO Certificate of Appreciation

Bob Curry

members who have made a significant contribution to birds and bird study in the province; Bob Curry outlined just how significant Alan's contributions have been.

Although he is a fixture at Point Pelee, Alan has not always lived there. He grew up in West Hamilton and haunted its fields and woodlots. Such was his dedication to birds and butterflies, neither his parents nor his principal could keep him in school. However, the skills he acquired in this way and his natural organizational and writing skills have benefited OFO immeasurably. He is a founding member of the Ontario Bird Records Committee and has served as member and secretary for most of its 34 years.

His attention to detail began the tradition of the highly accurate OBRC Annual Report that is published in *Ontario Birds*. Alan has written numerous articles for our publications and also for other journals. The

common denominator is that articles are meticulously researched and now constitute part of the ornithological history of Ontario.

Alan works as a professional field biologist for environmental consulting firms all over the province. Away from Point Pelee, Alan loves northern Ontario where the vast spaces provide the solitude he so enjoys and the challenges of discovery he so successfully meets.

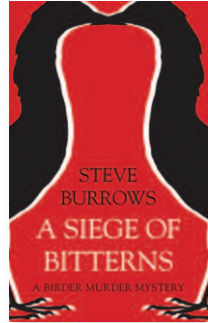
The gathering of birders certainly appreciated Alan as the consummate discoverer of rare birds. Alan loves the rarity quest whether it is a butterfly or bird. Many of those gathered have seen several life birds or life Ontario birds as a consequence of Alan's indefatigable energy and identification skills. Of course we birders are never satisfied and count on Alan to pull yet more rarities out of Point Pelee's hat for us to chase in the years ahead. Thanks Alan!

Book Review

A Siege of Bitterns. 2014. Steve Burrows. Dundurn Press, Toronto ON. Softcover 352 pages. \$15.99 CND. ISBN 978-1-4597-08433

Terrie Smith read this book before I did and offered some insights that I think will help the reader in understanding the concept and focus of the novel.

Terrie writes: “Of the 3,100 books I have read over the last 44 years, this is the first one that deals with crime and birding I have come across. It is an interesting blending of the two genres.” Since this is the first in a series, I find it exciting to envision the complex plots that may arise as the stories are woven in subsequent novels. Terrie goes on to say “I more or less found the novel more of a character study than one dealing with murder, a cover-up of an environmental disaster and the wilful contamination of a local marsh.” The plot of the story is enhanced by the forward thinking investigative techniques, simple sleuthing, biological vignettes and an introduction to the intricacies and complications of being a birder.



Terrie adds “We have Detective Chief Inspector Domenic Jejeune — a thorough investigator who possesses a laid-back demeanour as a police officer, who seems to be distracted by also being a birder.” Somehow though the reader is drawn in and, after a few pages, anticipates and even expects that Jejeune will somehow use birds and biology to solve the mystery. Terrie says he enjoyed Jejeune’s conversations with the outspoken MP Brennan and especially with his supervisor, Deputy Chief Supervisor Shepherd, as they often were pointed and probing, while somehow remained respectful. Jejeune’s sidekick is Sergeant Maik, who fails to understand Jejeune’s fascination with birds and, try as he might, can’t seem to grasp what Jejeune is doing or thinking most of the time. But ever dutiful he does his job well and helps with the tedious background work that ultimately leads to the solving of the crimes — yes, crimes — and you thought murder was the only thing going on here. Sergeant Maik is an aggressive, slightly less than courteous officer serving under Jejeune, who must contend with the latter’s sometimes eccentric birding pre-occupations even while

investigating the crime. Other characters add flavour and colour to the book. I liked the interactions between Jejeune’s girlfriend Lindy and Senior, a grizzled, odd and certainly eccentric (see a pattern here) birder and an expert on salt marsh ecology. Lindy will never be a birder but she tolerates Senior’s good natured and quite humorous prodding as she tries to understand Jejeune’s passions for birds and the impacts on their lives and his moods.

Well, I think I’m going to let you hang here as there’s no way I’m going to give away the plot any further. Suffice to say, this is very well-written and very pleasing to read. The plots are intricate, the characters are definitely characters and the insights Burrows shares will have each of you thinking about yourself and/or one of your friends as you compare yours and their eccentricities to Jejeune’s. The plot is well developed and has twists that will surprise any reader. The ultimate surprise comes near the end where he solves the murder (of course!) but how he does it will have you saying — “Wow! Makes sense.” But rest assured, you will never solve it before Burrows tells you who did it and how Jejeune figured it out. Enjoy this book. There’s more to come and I intend to be a faithful reader.

Geoff Carpentier and Terrie Smith



Yellow-throated Warbler. P. Allen Woodliffe

UPDATE: Rondeau Yellow-throated Warblers

P. Allen Woodliffe

Readers of the previous issue of *OFO News* may be curious about how the 2014 breeding season unfolded for Yellow-throated Warbler at Rondeau. A single bird in 2011, and two adults in 2012 and 2013, had arrived at Rondeau by mid to late April. The birds spent much of their time in the pine-oak habitat along the eastern side of the park and were often seen at feeders at

the Visitor Centre and a nearby cottage, or somewhere in between. The latter two spring seasons looked especially promising to confirm the first breeding record for Ontario. The adults exhibited breeding behaviour and in 2013, at least one adult was present into August. Efforts to find conclusive breeding evidence that year were unsuccessful.

Yellow-throated Warblers typically arrive at their northern breeding grounds in April, yet the long cold winter and delay of spring at this latitude this year may have affected the species’ northward migration. Or as is sometimes the case, not all birds survive several migration events.

Alas, in spite of careful observation, 2014 did not bode well for that conclusive breeding evidence either. The species was not located at Rondeau in April. There were two occurrences of this species but the first one was not until 2 May right at the extreme northeast corner of the park, and at least 4 kilometres from where they had appeared during the previous three years. Another report came from the southeast end of the park on 9 May. Both observations were for one day only.

Elsewhere in southern Ontario, there were a few scattered records during May, and even one in eastern Ontario. But based on the few reports during 2014 to date, it appears that for the moment, we are back to the widely scattered and brief appearances of this attractive wood warbler in Ontario as was the case prior to 2011.

Photo Quiz

Willie D'Anna

Identifying Recognizable Forms and eBird

For experienced birders, it should be pretty easy to identify the species in our photo quiz. Identifying the subspecies, however, will make this a little more challenging.



Brandon Holden

right: Purple Grackle
below: Bronzed Grackle.
Bill Hubick
(www.billhubick.com)



These six birds in flight appear to be blackbirds with very pale eyes and a long tail that seems to be wedge-shaped on most of the birds. The only options are the grackles. None of these birds has the longer, larger more keel-shaped tail of a Boat-tailed or Great-tailed Grackle so we are left with Common Grackle, an abundant widespread breeder and migrant throughout all but northern Ontario.

Common Grackles come in essentially two forms – the “Bronzed Grackle” of the interior and the “Purple Grackle” of the southeastern US and coastal regions, which at one time were considered separate species. Unless proven otherwise, all grackles in Ontario are assumed to be Bronzed Grackles. As with most subspecies, the differences are somewhat subtle and subject to regional and individual variation. However, with a good view, many can be identified. Purple Grackles may have purple mixed in with the blue head and neck and various colors mixed in with the bronze-colored body plumage. Good lighting is necessary to perceive these differences. Of the six birds in our photo quiz, I think we can only be certain of the one in the middle of the photo, second from the bottom. That bird shows a strong uniform bronze color throughout the back and most of the near wing, indicating that it is a Bronzed Grackle.

Although the others are most likely also of this subspecies, the view is inconclusive in my opinion. So, the question now is, how would you report this to eBird? Would you record six “Common Grackle (Bronzed)” [note, this is how this subspecies appears on the eBird checklist] or just one “Common Grackle (Bronzed)” plus five Common Grackle?

Before you answer that question, let's take a hypothetical example. You are birding at Point Pelee and six Common Grackles fly over. You watch them land in a tree, perhaps 300 meters away (or, more realistically, you stopped watching them as soon as you identified them as Common Grackles). You pull out your iPhone with your eBird checklist, ignore the plain old Common Grackle, and record six "Common Grackle (Bronzed)." Meanwhile, a birder is standing right next to the tree where the Grackles landed and she watches them fly to the ground to feed near her in perfect lighting. She is struck by a slight purple iridescence on the nape of two individuals that extends onto the back and decides that she better photograph them. Later, when she shows her excellent photographs to some of the Point Pelee experts, they notice the same purple colour, as well as a lack of the typical uniform bronze body plumage shown by a Bronzed Grackle. "Those are Purple Grackles!" they exclaim. Later, when word filters out about this surprising discovery, you wonder if you could have seen them but overlooked them. You will never know, however, as the birds are now long gone, continuing on their migration.

In truth, if you never change your eBird entry, the massive eBird database is not harmed by your error, swallowed up by the vast numbers of correctly-identified Bronzed Grackles. But what if this is the start of a trend. Perhaps due to climate change or whatever, Purple Grackles are now breeding much farther north than they did just a few years ago. They are common within their range and may be expected to occur in Ontario. Requiring some effort to identify, most birders will not bother to make sure that many of the Bronzed Grackles they are reporting are really of that subspecies. As a result, a few more errors will creep into the eBird database. Perhaps the change in breeding range is rapid and dramatic with the Purple Grackle soon making regular appearances in Ontario. Again, since the identification requires close study, good

light, and probably a good camera to convince others, most sightings of Purple Grackle will not be given serious consideration. At some point, Ontario's keenest birders will eventually discover and document a few Purple Grackles and stimulate closer scrutiny by many other birders. Suddenly, Purple Grackles are popping up all over the place and everyone realizes that this subspecies is no longer unexpected. At this point, perhaps, a significant proportion of grackles in southern Ontario are now Purple Grackles. Researchers will be asking, when did this remarkable change take place? And how could it have taken place without our even noticing it?

The answer to the last question is simple—we assumed the status quo. That is, Bronzed Grackles were the expected subspecies so we assumed that any grackle we saw, no matter how well, was a Bronzed Grackle. Although this example is hypothetical, it's really not that far-fetched. I would urge birders who use eBird to continue to report "Common Grackles (Bronzed)" but only when they have carefully identified them. Don't make an assumption about the subspecies. The same goes for all the other recognizable forms that occur regularly in Ontario. Roger Tory Peterson, in the appendix to one of the old versions of his bird field guide, quotes the famed ornithologist and bird artist, George Miksh Sutton, who was writing about his own ornithology students:

... They all were willing to take someone else's word on the subspecies — to use the name that seemed to fit geographically, to employ what I call fake accuracy... Indeed, you are not being more accurate by naming the subspecies, when you have not carefully made the identification. Instead, you are simply playing the odds.

This fine photo of Common Grackles in flight, which includes at least one Bronzed Grackle, was taken by Brandon Holden at Point Pelee on 11 May 2014. I thank Brandon and also Ron Pittaway, who made very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.



OFO News

Editor

Cindy Cartwright
pom@bmts.com

Contributing Editors

Mike Burrell
mike.burrell.on@gmail.com
Willie D'Anna, Photo Quiz
dannapotter@roadrunner.com
Christian Friis
friis.christian@gmail.com
Allen Woodliffe
awoodliffe@hotmail.com

Editorial Assistants

Geoff Carpentier, Jean Iron,
Ron Pittaway and Roger Bird

OFO News Layout and Design

Judie Shore judieshore@bell.net

Articles and notes are welcome.

Contributors should check the OFO website under publications for deadlines and submission guidelines.

OFO Website www.ofo.ca

Doug Woods, Coordinator
Email: ofo@ofa.ca

Ontbirds

Mark Cranford – Coordinator
Ontbirds, with over 3000 subscribers, is OFO's successful listserv for reporting rare bird sightings. Now the largest birding listserv in North America, *Ontbirds* has become an integral part of the Ontario birding community. Follow the instructions on the OFO website to subscribe to *Ontbirds*.
Email: ontbirds@ofa.ca

OFO Membership

Annual membership: Canada: \$35.00
For information please contact the OFO Membership Secretary, Christian Friis: ofo@ofa.ca or check our website: www.ofa.ca

Return undelivered mail to:

Ontario Field Ornithologists
PO Box 116 Station F
Toronto ON M4Y 2L4

© OFO Pileated Woodpecker logo is a copyright registered with the Government of Canada. The OFO logo and material published in *OFO News* may not be reproduced without permission.

Publications Mail Agreement Number 40046348
ISSN 1200-1589 © OFO News 2014



OFO Gull Weekend at Niagara

29-30 November 2014

Gulls of Niagara by Jean Iron – Gull ID Workshop
OFO Gull Trip

For information please see the OFO website: www.ofa.ca

Printed by Paragon DPI, Toronto