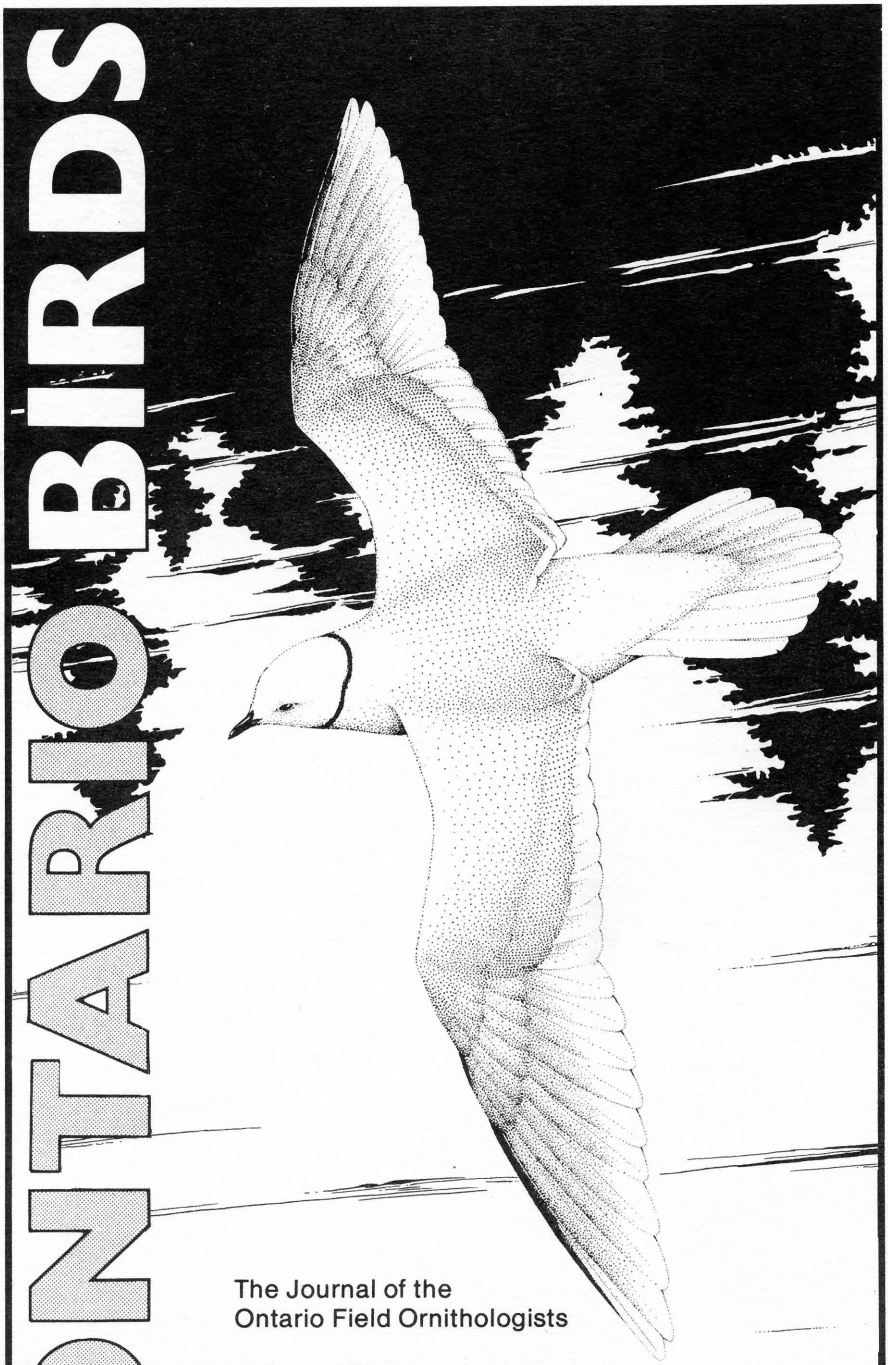
# ONTARIO BIRDS

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## Ontario Birds

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Material should be double-spaced and type-written if possible.

# Editorial Policy

*Ontario Birds* is the journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Its aim is to provide a vehicle for the documentation of the birds of Ontario. We encourage the submission of full length articles or short notes on the status of bird species in Ontario, significant provincial or county distributional records, tips on bird identification, behavioural observations of birds in Ontario, location guides to significant birdwatching areas in Ontario, book reviews and similar material of interest on Ontario birds. We do not accept submissions dealing with "listing" and we discourage Seasonal Reports of bird sightings as these are covered by *Bird Finding in Canada* and *American Birds,* respectively. Distributional records of species for which the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) requires documentation must be accepted by them before they can be published in *Ontario Birds*.

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Cover Illustration: Ross' Gull, a new bird for Ontario by Ian Jones.

# Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,
I note that 'we' do not encourage articles dealing with 'listing', so as not to compete with *Birdfinding in Canada*. I also see that we do not encourage articles on 'seasonal distribution' as they are covered in *American Birds*, etc., and I conclude that we also wish to keep our journal as professional as possible. In other words . . . no playing of games vis à vis *Birding* (Am. Birding Assoc.). So, unless I have misread the full intent of OFO, I must make comment (with all due respect to the author, M. Cadman) that I feel the 'Atlas Mystery Map' game/quiz really does not belong in *Ontario Birds*. I do not mean to be a stickler about this, but it is shades of *Birding*, and while I subscribe to and enjoy their journal, I don't think ours should mirror (in any way) their publication. If Cadman would submit an article on the distribution of the bird in question, it would serve greater purpose than a quiz. Likewise, if he wishes to pique the interest of OFO members in the Atlas project, he should simply do an article or place a display ad. I for one am in opposition to the quiz aspect in our journal.

Sincerely
Jim Richards
Orono, Ontario

**Eds. Comment:** Jim's points are well taken and we feel a short reply is in order. In designing the contents of *Ontario Birds*, we are constantly on the lookout for new ideas: ideas from members, other journals and a few of our own. Just because a feature may have originated with or come from another journal is not cause to disregard it. We consider each idea on its own merit, on how useful it will be to our members, the opinions of the Executive and our own views as Editors.

Articles on 'Listing' and 'Seasonal Summaries' have the disadvantage of being lengthy contributions and items to which entire journals already are devoted. The Birding Site Guides, Atlas Mystery Maps and inclusion of our journal name and issues at the bottom of each page were ideas 'taken' from other journals but ones which we felt improved *Ontario Birds*. The Mystery Map idea came from Mike Cadman and we accepted it knowing how successful it had been in *British Birds*, several years before *Birding* ever thought of it.

Dear Editors,
Today I got the most recent issue of *Ontario Birds* in the mail, and I must say, I was truly impressed! This is a top notch journal! The Henslow's Sparrow article by Richard Knapton was top notch, and Mr. Fraser's review of the "new" *Birds of North America*, first rate! Keep up the good work!

Mark Gawn
Ottawa, Ontario

A GUEST EDITORIAL

# On Writing Observational Notes

by

Martin K. McNicholl

A glance through the first issues of *Ontario Birds* shows relatively few notes on bird behaviour or ecology, notes that I shall term "observational", as opposed to distributional. By not commenting on the desirability of short distributional (including seasonal) notes in the following remarks, I do not wish to belittle them (I have written several myself), but rather I am assuming that their value will be self-evident to any person whose interests would compel him or her to join OFO and subscribe to the journal. The first two volumes of *Ontario Birds* contain observational notes on Boreal Owls feeding on flying squirrels, hummingbird migration, a crepuscular flight of woodcock and a note on a crow roost. All other notes to date have been distributional in scope with the exception of two editorials on bird names. Your editors would like to see more notes on behaviour, ecological relationships, and similar topics—essentially what used to be lumped under "life history."

The champion journal of observational notes must be *British Birds.* A glance through one issue selected at random (Vol. 75, number 2, 1982) shows a typical range of topics: Turnstone feeding on gull excrement, unusual upperwing pattern of Little Gull, second-winter Common Gull with prominent tail band, apparent bigamy by Black Redstart, feeding association between male and juvenile Song Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher catching and eating large butterflies, Chough attracted to burnt areas for food, and first autumn Reed Bunting in song, with an additional comment by one of the editors on feeding associations between male and juvenile birds.

A reader may well ask, "why bother?" Some may even suggest that writing short notes runs counter to the recent trend of promoting long-term studies (e.g. Wiens 1984). I have personally

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advocated the long-term approach frequently, and my own Ph.D. thesis on Blue Grouse constituted a contribution to a much longer term study of this species. However, short behavioural notes also have a role to play in ornithological literature, with three main functions: they supply information that might otherwise never appear in print; they contribute data to show general patterns; and they correct or modify previously accepted views or dogma. In the following paragraphs, I shall use a few examples to illustrate each of these roles.

In preparing her classic studies on Song Sparrows for publication, Nice (1937, 1943) relied extensively on short notes to compile information on many aspects of the life history of this very common and frequently studied bird. When I investigated a much less studied species, Forster's Tern (McNicholl 1971), I found that most previous information was either in short observational notes or buried in distributional notes. Moreover, when Nice turned to comparing Song Sparrows to other sparrows, other passerines, or birds in general, and when I wanted to compare Forster's Terns with other terns or larids, we both found that the bulk of information for most species was available only in the form of short observational notes. A glance through accounts of both common and rare species in Bent's series on life histories of North American birds or through more recent compilations will show a similar dearth of information on many aspects of bird biology unless they have appeared somewhere in a short note. The reason for this is simply that birds are highly mobile creatures that often dash about in and out of sight before the observer can follow a sequence of events from start to finish. Also, they are in many cases adaptable creatures that respond differentially to different situations and/or places.

Filling information gaps on a particular species is of interest in itself, but takes on greater significance when some biologist tries to look at a broader picture, reviewing a behavioural pattern, anatomical feature, etc. in some bird family, order or other taxonomic level. For example, Friedmann (1929, 1963, 1971 and other papers) relied heavily on short notes in compiling lists of hosts and host reactions to various cowbird species. Each of his compilations in turn stimulated additional notes or comments that contributed to the next review. Explanations for some behaviour patterns and anatomical features are poorly described and little understood,and

reviewers rely again on material that often appears only in brief notes. A review of the occurrence and timing of egg-teeth in birds (Clark 1961) that was based on a combination of the author's examination of specimens and published notes stimulated considerable response (Parkes and Clark 1964) and also additional analysis. Jehl (1968) was stimulated to examine bill shape of shorebirds in relation to presence or absence of egg-teeth on the lower mandible. His finding that these structures were present on species that hatched with elongated bills but not those in which the upper mandible overhung the lower, led to his conclusion that the lower mandible egg-tooth functioned primarily in protection from abrasion, and also to a similar analysis for alcids (Sealy 1970), with similar conclusions. This series of reviews and reinterpretation would have been hampered or impossible without many of the short notes on which they were based.

Like all sciences, dogmatic "truisms" sometimes creep into ornithology. Readers of *Ontario Birds* will be familiar with many examples of "safe" identification features which turn out to be less reliable than once thought. Similarly, views on particular behaviour patterns can become entrenched. Comments in a paper by Sauer and Sauer (1967) as to why birds may not yawn became dogma. However those comments stimulated Harrison (1968) to publish a brief note on a captive Greenfinch that clearly differentiated yawning from bill stretching. Similar notes help sort out truth from long-held assumptions.

Short observational notes, then, are important in filling in data gaps, in supplying the building blocks for review topics, and in dispelling myths. This does not mean, however, that all observations should be rushed into print. We all know that waxwings eat berries. Parkes (1969) commented that ornithologists seem to have a "compulsion to place every albino or white-spotted bird on record," and placed birds with crossed mandibles as a close second in over documentation. This does not mean that nobody should ever again write papers on albinism, crossed mandibles, or waxwings eating berries, but rather that some selectivity is required in what is worth publishing. Waxwings may eat certain berries more than others or more in one place than another, and some birds may be more susceptible to crossed bills than other species or populations (see Tweit *et al.* 1983). New information on well known phenomena still provides new insights.

How then, does an observer decide whether an observation is significant? The answer is neither simple nor precise; merely that one must go through the same sort of literature review that would be necessary for a longer paper. The Bent series, though dated, provides a good starting point for any North American species, and there are numerous more recent books on various families or orders on a World or North American scale. General topics can be researched through general ornithology texts

or the journal literature. The bird dictionary (Thomson 1964) is probably the single most comprehensive source. There are also a growing number of bibliographies and review volumes that can help those willing to put in the effort. If you are completely at a loss as to where to look, write or call someone who knows the literature for a few general leads.

Finally, one must always keep in mind that appearances can be deceiving. Some species may seem to be seldom parasitized by cowbirds not because cowbirds do not lay in their nests, but because their eggs roll out of the nest (McNicholl 1968) or are actively rejected by the intended host (Rothstein 1971). Newly hatched birds may appear to have no lower mandible egg-tooth because they lose it very early (McNicholl 1981).

I hope this essay stimulates readers to consider placing their observations on record, after suitable research in the library and reflection on the observation. Even if your efforts suggest that what you saw was in fact already well known for the species in question, the exercise will result in your knowing the species better and help sharpen your observational skills.

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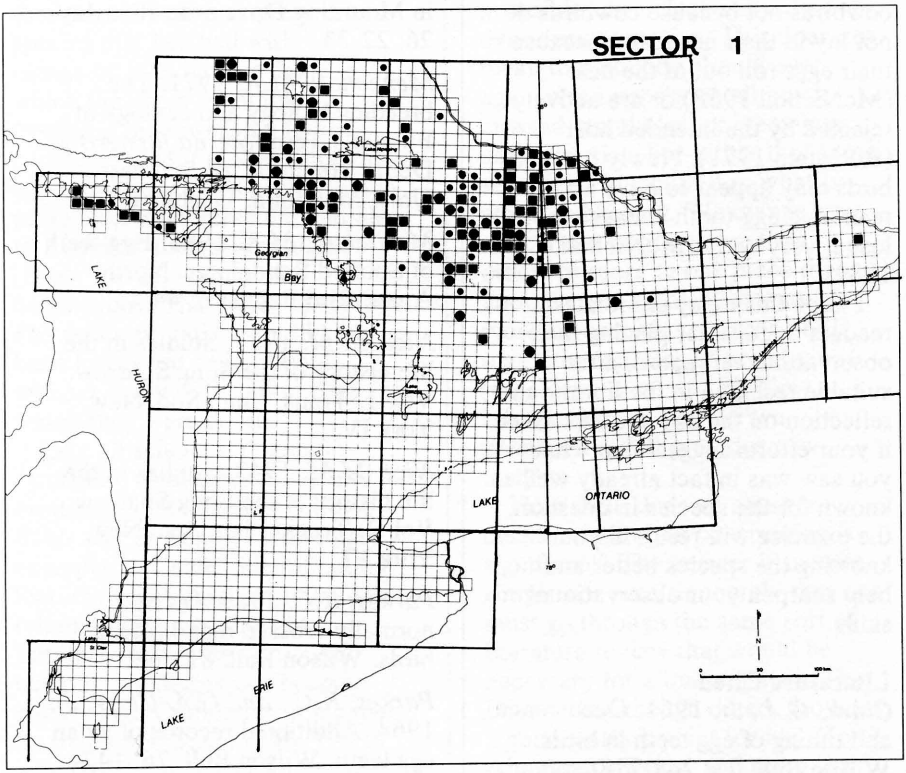
# Atlas Mystery Map




Guesses to last issue's Mystery Map included House Finch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Acadian Flycatcher. Only one person, Jim Richards, Orono, correctly guessed Orchard Oriole. Guesses for this issue's Mystery Map (above) are due immediately.

Mike Cadman, 355 Lesmill Rd., Don Mills Ontario M3B 2W8

# The Status and Distribution of the Prairie Warbler in Ontario

by
Anne B. Lambert and Roy B.H. Smith

The Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*) has been considered a relatively rare breeding species in Ontario, but one whose exact status was rather poorly known. This led the Nongame Program of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to commission a study of its status in Canada, and early in 1984 a report was prepared (Lambert and Smith 1984). The Status Report detailed information available up to 1983, based on the literature and communications with knowledgeable birders, while this paper summarizes those data. Additional information obtained during the 1984 season has also been included, when available.

**Overview**

In Canada, the Prairie Warbler has been reported in five provinces but has been proved to breed only in Ontario. It is a very rare spring migrant in Quebec (7 or 8 records), and a rare but regular fall migrant in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (mainly on offshore islands), where over one hundred have been recorded. There are also three fall records from Newfoundland.

In Ontario, the Prairie Warbler was first recorded in 1900 (Samuel 1900; Ames 1901) and was first proved to breed in the province in 1922 (Harrington 1922). Historically, breeding has been confirmed in ten Counties/Districts (Lambton, Haldimand-Norfolk, Waterloo, Dufferin, Bruce, Simcoe, Muskoka, Parry Sound, Peterborough, Frontenac) and suspected in six more (Middlesex, Manitoulin, Hastings, Prince Edward, Leeds and Grenville, Lanark). Presently, however, breeding occurs on a regular basis in only six Counties or Districts (Lambton, Simcoe, Muskoka, Parry Sound, Peterborough, and Frontenac). The main stronghold of the Ontario population is concentrated along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay in the Districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, with smaller numbers in Frontenac and

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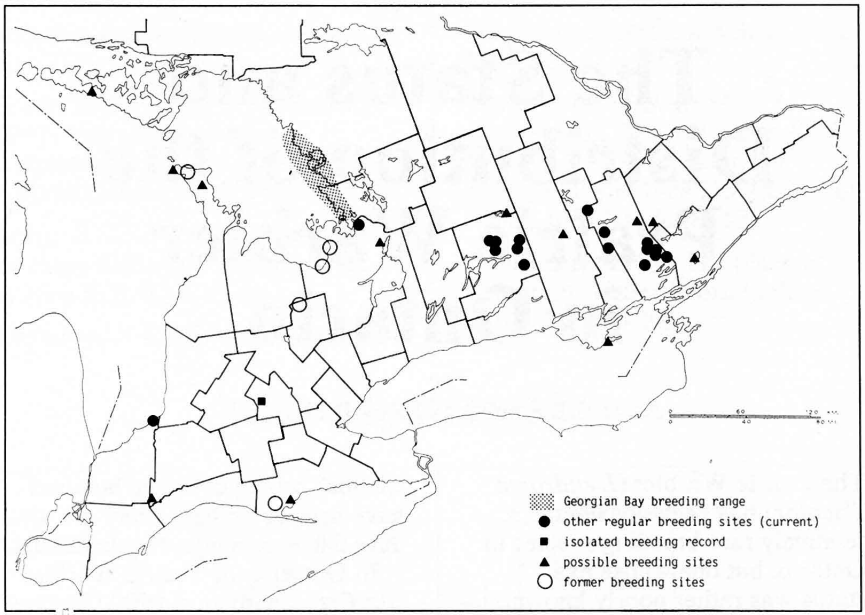



*Figure 1.* Breeding distribution of the Prairie Warbler in Ontario: 1900–1984.

Peterborough (Fig. 1). In these areas the population appears to be stable, although a slight increase may have occurred in Frontenac. However, in Simcoe and Lambton Counties substantial declines have been documented.

**Breeding Habitats**

At least three distinct habitat types have been occupied in Ontario, all characterized by open, scrubby vegetation and usually zeric conditions. The most important habitat is the pine-oak-juniper scrub found along the Georgian Bay shoreline and at scattered locations along the southern edge of the Canadian Shield (e.g. in Peterborough and Frontenac Counties). This open, rocky habitat (often only 50% vegetated) is typically dominated by mature but stunted white pine *(Pinus strobus)*, white and red oak *(Quercus alba, Q. rubra)*, and by patches of common juniper *(Juniperus communis* var. *depressa)*. Prairie Warblers most frequently select these low junipers for nest sites (Lord 1955; D.A. Sutherland, pers. comm.). Recently, use of a similar habitat along some hydro line rights-of-way in Frontenac Co. has also been reported (R.D. Weir, pers. comm.).

The second important Ontario habitat is a sand dune habitat exemplified by the Lake Huron dunes at Pinery Prov. Park (Lambton Co.) and, formerly, at Wasaga Beach (Simcoe Co.), once the site of a large 'colony'. At the

Pinery, the 'interdunal meadows' frequented by Prairie Warblers comprise a fairly open habitat with "scattered mature black oak; low shrubs of juniper, fragrant sumac, wild grape, choke cherry and red cedar—all low vegetation with clumping evident" (T. Crabe, pers. comm.). A detailed description of this habitat has been provided by Sparling (1965).

In the Turkey Point/St. Williams area (Haldimand-Norfolk R.M.), sandy plains with planted pines and/or deciduous scrub comprise a third habitat type. This open, successional habitat typically includes pin cherry *(Prunus pensylvanica)*, sapling oaks (*Quercus* spp.) and other deciduous species. The plantations only remain suitable as nesting habitat for 10 to 20 years (A. Wormington, pers. comm.), but sequential plantings by the Provincial Forestry Station have provided a virtually continuous supply of habitat since the early 1930s. Second growth deciduous scrub is used much more frequently within the Prairie Warbler's United States range, the only other Ontario examples being a single case of breeding in Waterloo R.M. in 1982 and one of possible breeding in Middlesex Co. in 1983. An instance of possible breeding has also been recorded in old fields regenerating to red cedar *(Juniperus virginiana)* in Prince Edward Co. in 1979.

**Detailed Breeding Distribution**

**Lambton County.** Prairie Warblers were first recorded at Port Franks in 1915, and during the 1930s at least 26 singing males were noted over an 8 km length of dunes (Saunders 1934, *in litt.*). At this density there could have been 50 pairs or more in the entire area of habitat between Ipperwash and Grand Bend. Indeed, after the Royal Ontario Museum's collecting trip to the area in 1935, Snyder was said to have described the Prairie Warblers there as "positively abundant" (J.L. Baillie notes, *ex* ROM files). However, cottage development has probably contributed to a decline in the population since the 1930s, and within Pinery Prov. Park the planting of pines on some secondary and tertiary dunes during the 1950s may have led to some reduction in habitat (J.D. McCauley, pers. comm.). In recent years, increasing visitor pressures could also have had some effect (T. Crabe, pers. comm.).

In 1969 the population was estimated at 17-22 males (J. Lamey, *fide* T. Crabe, pers. comm.), but since then there appears to have been a slow decline. Figures for some intervening years are not available, but from 1977 onwards the numbers of singing males were estimated as follows: 1977 - 10 to 20; 1978 - 11+; 1979 - 7?; 1980 - between 4 and 8, probably 6; 1981 - between 6 and 8, probably 8; 1982 - 5+; and 1983 - 5 (T. Crabe, pers. comm.; J.D. McCauley, pers. comm.). The present Pinery population seems to be stable at between 5 and 8 singing males, and the total

population for the entire area between Grand Bend and Kettle Point has been estimated at 10 pairs (T. Crabe, pers. comm.).

**Middlesex County.** The Prairie Warbler has never been proved to breed in Middlesex, but two summer records in the London area in 1930 and 1931 raised the possibility that breeding might have occurred (Saunders and Dale 1933). More recently, a singing male was observed in the 'Skunk's Misery' area, Mosa Twp. on 1, 4 and 14 July 1983, again suggesting the possibility of breeding. This bird was occupying a successional habitat described as a mixture of low pines, birch and aspen, interspersed with clearings (S. Connop, pers. comm.).

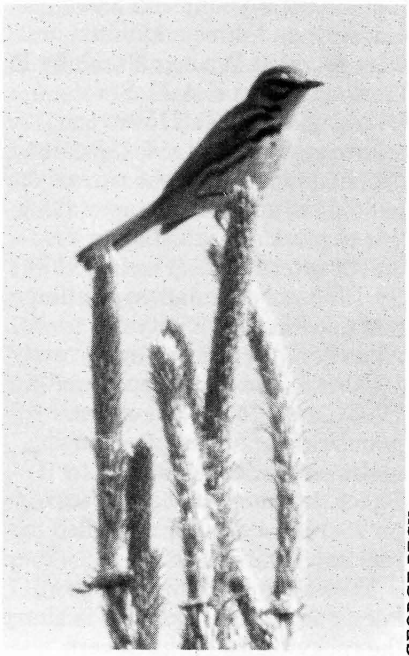
**Haldimand-Norfolk Regional Municipality.** Published and unpublished records indicate that in the early 1930s a small breeding population was discovered in the Turkey Point-St. Williams area, in pine plantations established by the St. Williams Forestry Station. In 1936 a 'colony' of six males was reported at Turkey Point by G.W. North (Toronto Ornithological Club records, *per* ROM files) and breeding was confirmed on 15 July 1942, when a nest with three young was found in South Walsingham (now Norfolk) Twp. (F. North 1943, *in. litt.*). A small population persisted in the St. Williams Forestry Station through the next few decades as phased plantings kept a supply of suitable habitat available for about 50 years, but by 1971 it was noted that suitable habitat was disappearing (Goodwin and Rosche 1971). Although complete counts or censuses were not conducted, the numbers involved were probably quite small. The highest recorded count of eight singing males was made in 1972 (A. Wormington, pers. comm.), and the slow decline since that time can be attributed to the increasing maturity of the pine plantations. The last year in which singing males (2 or 3) were recorded was 1979 (R.J. Curry, pers. comm.; C.J. Risley, pers. comm.), but in 1984 a pair and an additional singing male were located by the authors at a site near Turkey Point. Although breeding was not confirmed, this find suggests that the Prairie Warbler may yet persist as a breeding species in Haldimand-Norfolk R.M.

**Waterloo Regional Municipality.** There is a single, unprecedented breeding record from 1982, when a nest with eggs was found near Bamberg, Wilmot Twp. by R. Pickering (P.F.J. Eagles, pers. comm.). The habitat was described as "second growth forest with nesting Golden-winged Warblers as well".

**Dufferin County.** The single record concerns a nest with 5 eggs found on 11 June 1927 on Shrigley Creek, Melancthon Twp. by Dr. P. Harrington (Ontario Nest Record Scheme – hereafter ONRS). The nest was located in juniper, but it is not known

whether appropriate habitat exists in this area today.

**Bruce County.** Observations of singing males suggest that breeding may have occurred at the following locations: near Cameron Lake, St. Edmunds Twp. in 1905 (Saunders 1906); at Colpoy's Bay, Albemarle Twp. in 1908 and 1909 (Klugh 1909, 1910); at McVicar, St. Edmunds Twp. in 1928, 1930 and 1934, at Stokes Bay, Eastnor Twp. in 1928, and at Oliphant, Amabel Twp. in 1933 (J.L. Baillie notes, *ex* ROM files). Collectively, these records suggest that small breeding populations may have been present along the Bruce Peninsula; but it was not until 1953 that breeding was confirmed. Previously unpublished information supplied by B. Krug (pers. comm.) indicates that he located a 'colony' of about 8 pairs in St. Edmunds Twp. in 1952. In 1953 he found a nest with young, but there were fewer breeding pairs, and in the following years the colony continued to decline, finally disappearing after 1958.



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More recently, the late George North is reported to have seen Prairie Warblers at Miller Lake, Lindsay Twp. in the 1950s and 1960s (J. Miles, pers. comm.), while occasional sightings of singing males have occurred during the years 1975 to 1982 (near Cape Hurd, St. Edmunds Twp.; Chief's Point Indian Reserve; and Red Bay, Amabel Twp.). Although 1981-1983 Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas fieldwork has failed to provide any records (M. Parker, pers. comm.), areas of apparently suitable habitat still exist, particularly along the western side of the peninsula (T. Cheskey, pers. comm.; D.A. Sutherland, pers. comm.). Hence the possibility remains that the occasional pair may yet be found breeding on the Bruce Peninsula.

**Manitoulin District.** Confirmed breeding records are lacking, but two instances of singing males in June and July have indicated the possibility of breeding. In 1970, two singing males were present in Burpee Twp., 29 June to 16 July, while in 1974 three singing males were noted in suitable habitat at Belanger Bay (Dawson Twp.) on 22 May. However, these birds had moved away by the following week (Goodwin and Rosche 1974; Nicholson 1981). In addition to these records on Manitoulin

GEORGE PECK

Island, there are three spring records (2 in 1978; 1 in 1979) of single males elsewhere in the District. However, these probably represent 'overshooting' spring migrants, and none have been reported during 1981-1983 Atlas fieldwork (D. Ferguson, pers. comm.).

**Simcoe County.** In 1915 a large 'colony' of Prairie Warblers was found amongst the sand dunes with scattered oaks, pines and juniper bordering Nottawasaga Bay (Wasaga Beach). "Upwards of 200 birds" were seen by Dr. P. Harrington (J.L. Baillie notes, *ex* ROM files), while in 1919 it was estimated that 150 pairs were occupying the three miles from Oakview to the mouth of the Nottawasaga River (Devitt 1967). In 1921, it was found that the birds "were localized and followed the shoreline for about 15 miles, never further than 200 yards inland" (Harrington 1922), hence there could have been considerably more than 150 pairs. Whatever its exact size, this population must have represented the largest and most concentrated group of breeding Prairie Warblers ever known in Ontario.

On 19 June 1922, the first Prairie Warbler nest for Canada (containing 2 young and a young cowbird) and three additional nests were found at Wasaga Beach by P. Harrington and F.A.E. Starr (Harrington 1922). However, following World War I, the colony declined rapidly as "the extensive building of summer cottages along this beach encroached upon its breeding territory" (Devitt 1967). By 1933 only a small population remained in the vicinity of Allenwood Beach and by the early 1940s this too had disappeared. In 1948 Devitt found a remnant population of at least five singing males at the nearby Bluewater Beach, but in a subsequent survey on 23 June 1967, Devitt failed to find any Prairie Warblers.

Two other breeding sites are known in Simcoe Co. One is along the rocky banks of the Severn

River in Matchedash Twp., where in June 1938 "many singing males were observed from Hydro Glen, near the entrance of Sparrow Lake down to Tea Lake", a distance of 14 km (Devitt 1967). The other is at Burrows Bay on Gloucester Pool, where Mr. and Mrs. A.G. McVicar (pers. comm.) have observed two or three pairs of Prairie Warblers annually for the last 10 or 15 years, and have found several nests.

Another possible breeding site is located 2 km west of Lake Couchiching in Orillia Twp., where W.E. Cattley (pers. comm.) has found singing male Prairie Warblers during the breeding season. The site is a small area of limestone outcropping, and common juniper is the dominant vegetation.

**Muskoka District Municipality.** The earliest known locations are Go Home Bay, where an immature male was collected on 1 August 1904; Beausoleil Island, where six birds were observed on 12 August 1929 (Dingman 1929, *in litt.*); and Honey Harbour, where two were collected in June 1931. P. Saniford (1933, *in litt.*) wrote of having seen pairs of Prairie Warblers at Go Home Bay "during the last 20 years", and J.B. Armstrong confirmed breeding there in 1933, 1934 and 1936 (D.M. Fraser, pers. comm.).

It was not until 1955, however, that any observations concerning the Georgian Bay population were published (Lord 1955). Later, the Gibson River became known as another possible breeding location, and directions to this site, where "up to a dozen" singing males have been observed, were given by Brewer (1972). The north shore of McCrae Lake was also identified as a breeding site (Brewer 1972; Hanna 1979), while Mills (1981) added Go Home Lake to the list of published Muskoka breeding sites. In addition, extensive but unpublished personal data, representing a compilation of about 15 years' observations, were made available by D.A. Sutherland and D.M. Fraser (pers. comm.). Based on these data (as opposed to specific counts or censuses), the present coastal Muskoka population was estimated at around 152 singing males. The birds seem to prefer sites close to water (often on islands, peninsulas and bays), but even in these preferred areas, Prairie Warblers are absent from some areas of apparently suitable habitat, and there are often gaps between individual territories (D.A. Sutherland, pers. comm.).

In the southern sector of Muskoka, the range indicated by Sutherland and Fraser extends from Honey Harbour and the north end of Beausoleil Island, north amongst the islands (e.g. Minnicognashene Island, Maxwell Island) to Franceville and Hangdog Islands, with 51 singing males being estimated in this sector. In the Go Home Bay area, which extends from High Rock Island north to the Tadenac Peninsula and as far east as Go Home Chute, 80 singing males were estimated. Another two birds were noted at O'Donnell Point, but the only known 'inland' sites were at Go Home Lake, McCrae Lake, Gibson River and Baxter

Lake (together accounting for another 27 singing males). However, additional birds (about 7 singing males) were found in 1984 at previously unreported sites on Twelve Mile Bay and near Moon River in Georgian Bay Twp. (H. Currie, pers. comm.).

In summary, recent estimates indicate a present population of about 167 territorial males in Muskoka D.M. In the Go Home Lake Area, J.B. Falls (pers. comm.) considered that there had been a slow decline since the late 1950s/early 1960s, but elsewhere the population appears to be stable (D.A. Sutherland, pers. comm.).

**Parry Sound District.** The situation in Parry Sound is much less well known than in Muskoka, but breeding populations extend north to at least Franklin Island and possibly as far as Pointe au Baril. The first record occurred on 6 June 1918, when W.E. Saunders observed 3 singing males at Snug Island, northwest of Parry Sound, but most present information on the species comes from a biological study of the Blackstone Harbour-Moon Island Provincial Park Reserve (Simpson and Simpson 1973). This extensive area is situated southwest of the town of Parry Sound, in Archipelago Twp., and extends from Woods Bay, Moon River Bay and the south end of Moon Island northwards to include Spider and Cowper Lakes. The Simpsons found a substantial population of Prairie Warblers in this region, and identified extensive areas of potential habitat.

Other known locations for Prairie Warblers include Loon Island (off Twelve Mile Bay); Ouimet Point and Davey Island in Killbear Prov. Park; Franklin Island; and Oastler Lake (Mills 1981); while R.L. Bowles (pers. comm.) added Crane Lake and the area "as far east as Hwy 69 around Lake Joseph".

The status in northern Parry Sound District, i.e. northwest of the town of Parry Sound, is still poorly known. The most northerly location where breeding has been confirmed is in 10 km square 17NA44, located northwest of Brooks Landing (M.D. Cadman, pers. comm.), but there is also a June 1933 record from Frank's Bay on Lake Nipissing (Ricker and Clarke 1939). Hence it is possible that additional fieldwork could extend the known range in this area, perhaps even as far north as the "French River Study Area" (between Killarney Prov. Park and Lake Nipissing), where Brunton (1979) noted "excellent habitat" and felt that the species "should be looked for". However, during summer 1984, brief checks of several areas from Pointe au Baril northwards (Bayfield Harbour, Byng Inlet, Key Inlet, French River Station and Pickerel River) yielded negative results (D.A. Sutherland, pers. comm.).

As regards numbers, D.A. Sutherland and D.M. Fraser (pers. comm.) estimated 37 singing males in southern Parry Sound District, south of a line from Wreck Island to the southern end of Moon Island. Most were concentrated around Loon Island and the north side of the entrance to Twelve Mile Bay. For the Blackstone

Harbour-Moon Island area, Simpson and Simpson (1973) estimated 200 pairs, but based on the amount of habitat they identified, and extrapolation from known Muskoka areas, we obtained revised estimates of between 62 and 162 pairs. In areas north of Parry Sound we arrived at tentative estimates of 53 to 159 pairs, after examining 1:50,000 topographic maps.

When the known and estimated figures are combined, a provisional estimate of somewhere between 150 and 360 pairs is obtained for the total Parry Sound population. Additional fieldwork is essential in order to refine this estimate.

**Peterborough County.** The Prairie Warbler does not seem to have been reported from Peterborough County prior to 1947, when a nest was found at Kashabog Lake (Burleigh Twp., ONRS). Since then, however, breeding sites have been found at Long Lake (near Apsley), Cox Lake, Coon Lake and Stoplog Lake (all in Burleigh and Anstruther Twp.); and Methuen Lake, Kashabog Lake and Round Lake in Belmont and Methuen Twp. (D. Sadler, pers. comm.). The Long Lake colony is probably the best known, and was described as thriving in 1964 (Goodwin 1964). On 28 June 1979, G. Carpentier (pers. comm.) counted 10 singing males there, while other estimates range from 5 to 15, "depending upon time of year and day" (R.D. McRae, pers. comm.). Specific counts for the other sites are not available, but we have estimated a Peterborough population of at least 20 pairs, perhaps as high as 40-60.

**Hastings County.** A possible breeding site exists at Mt. Moriah, Elzevir and Grimsthorpe Twp., where a singing male was located in June of both 1982 and 1983. These are the only records for

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Hastings Co., where suitable habitat seems to be very limited (R.D. James, pers. comm.).

**Prince Edward County.** Although there are no confirmed breeding records for the County, in July 1979 singing males were located at two sites 15 km west of Prince Edward Point. "Singing occurred throughut July with 5 males at one site and at least one male at the other" and the birds occupied a regenerating field "overgrown with small red cedar and, at one site, interspersed with aspen" (T. Sprague, pers. comm.). It is not certain whether these birds were breeders, non-breeders or failed breeders (R.D. McRae, pers. comm.), and the sites were not occupied in subsequent years.

**Frontenac County.** Breeding was first confirmed in 1933 when a small colony was found at Cross Lake, Kennebec Twp., by R.V. Lindsay. Another nest was found there in 1947 and yet another in 1953 (ONRS), but in the meantime other breeding locations for Prairie Warbler were being discovered in the southern part of the County (Quilliam 1973). In northern Frontenac, summering birds were noted near Ompah in the 1950s (H.G. Lumsden, pers. comm.), and a colony was discovered at Mazinaw Lake, Bon Echo Prov. Park in 1971 (Goodwin and Rosche 1971). More recently, 1981-1983 Atlas fieldwork has yielded further records in the southern part of the county including the previously unreported finding that hydro rights-of-way were being utilized in some areas (R.D. Weir, pers. comm.). In the northern part of the county, another hydro line site was found near Ompah in 1984 (P. Taylor, pers. comm.).

In addition to the sites mentioned above, known localities now include Devil Lake, Canoe Lake (for directions to this site see Goodwin 1982), Clear Lake, and Lake Opinicon (all in Bedford Twp.), while smaller numbers have been found in 10 km squares 18UE72 (Gould Lake), 18UE44 (Puzzle Lake), and 18UE74 (Fermoy). In total, Weir (pers. comm.) estimated between 35 and 50 breeding pairs of Prairie Warblers in southern Frontenac Co. in 1983. When the northern part of the county is included, we consider that the total Frontenac population could amount to 50-65 pairs, with the possibility of yet more being discovered in remote areas. For example, there may be areas of suitable habitat along the Mississippi River (D.A. Sutherland, pers. comm.).

**The United Counties of Leeds and Grenville.** Just two records of singing males suggest the possibility of breeding. In summer 1976 a singing male was present throughout May and June at the Slim Bay Peninsula on Charleston Lake, in Charleston Lake Prov. Park (Bell 1977). It was not found in 1978, but in that year one was located at the nearby Killingbeck Lake, where the habitat is probably marginal (D.A. Sutherland, pers. comm.). However, there may be other areas of potential habitat in this county and additional fieldwork could still

yield new discoveries.

**Lanark County.** The first records for this county were obtained during 1984 Atlas fieldwork, when 3 or 4 singing males were found along railroad tracks north of Christie Lake (P. Taylor, pers. comm.). The open, rocky, juniper-type habitat was similar to that used at other Shield edge locations.

**Migrant Records**

Throughout southern Ontario, the Prairie Warbler is considered to be a rare or very rare migrant in both spring and fall. Most records have occurred at known concentration points such as Point Pelee, Rondeau and Long Point on Lake Erie, or Presqu'ile and Prince Edward Point on eastern Lake Ontario. The heavily populated areas of Hamilton, Toronto and Durham R.M. have also yielded a number of records. Among these sites, Point Pelee is pre-eminent for spring migrants, and at all sites except Long Point and Durham R.M., spring records greatly outnumber those in fall. This is probably because in spring, birds are easier to locate and there is more birding activity. In fact, Long Point data indicate that similar numbers are recorded in both seasons (averaging 2 per year in recent years). Over the last 20 years, the Long Point Bird Observatory has trapped 2.7 Prairie Warblers for every 10,000 warblers (all species) banded, which provides some measure of the species' rarity as a migrant.

Most records of migrants involve single individuals, but at Point Pelee a maximum count of four was recorded on 9 May 1953. There are also records of three on 24 April 1977, 11 May 1979, and 15 May 1980 (A. Wormington, pers. comm.).

Normal spring migration dates at Point Pelee fall between 1 and 23 May, with record early and late dates of 16 April (1982) and 29 May (1979), respectively. These dates reflect the pattern throughout southern Ontario, although a few early June dates have been recorded (latest 6 June 1967 at Hamilton, apart from a 16 June 1969 date at Presqu'ile Prov. Park). The earliest dates of arrival on the breeding grounds are 2 May (1965) at Clear Lake, Frontenac, and 5 May (1981) at Beausoleil Island, Muskoka, but the average date of arrival on the Frontenac breeding grounds (based on 13 years' data) is 12 May (Quilliam 1973).

Fall dates at Point Pelee range from 10 August to 20 September, while elsewhere in Ontario the earliest fall date seems to be 7 August 1977, at Long Point. Probably, most have departed by early September (A. Wormington, pers. comm.). The latest documented date is 12 October 1975 at Mississagi Light, Manitoulin (Nicholson 1981), but only four October records have been located. Full details concerning these and other migrant records have been provided in the Status Report (Lambert and Smith 1984).

**Discussion**

As outlined in the preceding sections, present day breeding

populations of Prairie Warblers in Ontario are concentrated in areas of Muskoka and Parry Sound fringing Georgian Bay, and in Peterborough and Frontenac Counties. Together, these areas account for over 90 per cent of the population. In total, there was in 1984 a known Ontario population of between 321 and 336 pairs (see Table 1), but the figure could amount to between 450 and 700 approximately, if allowance is made for those possibly present in poorly known areas (e.g. northern Parry Sound District). However, we believe that the lower estimate is more likely: hence in round figures the Ontario population probably does not exceed 500 pairs.

Preliminary data from the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (Fig. 2) indicate that the present (1981-1984) distribution does not differ greatly from the known historic range (Fig. 1), except, possibly, in Bruce Co. To date, Prairie Warblers have been reported in the breeding season from 38 ten

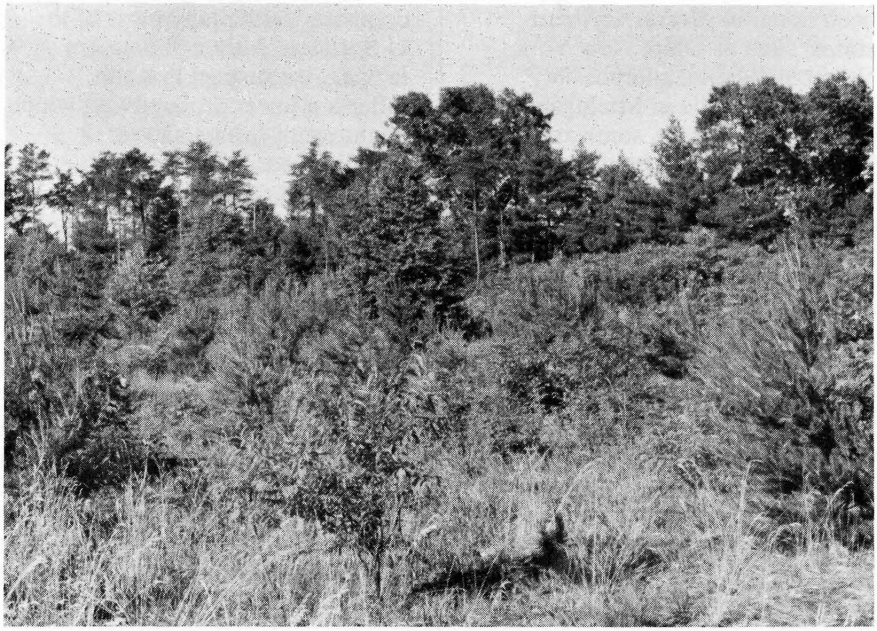
Table 1: Estimated numbers of Prairie Warblers (pairs or singing males) presently breeding in Ontario (data to 1984).

| County/District | Known as of 1983/84 | Estimated additional | Estimated total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lambton | 10 | – | 10 |
| Middlesex | – | 1 | 1 |
| Haldimand-Norfolk | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Waterloo | – | 1 | 1 |
| Bruce | – | 5 | 5 |
| Simcoe | 3 | 10 | 13 |
| Muskoka | 167 | 8 | 175 |
| Parry Sound | 67 | 85–291 | 152–358 |
| Peterborough | 20 | 20–40 | 40–60 |
| Hastings | – | 1 | 1 |
| Prince Edward | – | – | – |
| Frontenac | 50–65 | 10 | 60–75 |
| Leeds & Grenville | – | 2 | 2 |
| Lanark | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Manitoulin | – | 2 | 2 |
| Total: | 321–336 | 147–373 | 468–709 |

km squares in Sector 1, with confirmed breeding in 7 squares, and probable and possible breeding in 15 and 16 squares, respectively. However, a concerted effort during the last year of Atlas fieldwork might relocate the species in some former haunts, including the following 10 km squares with historic summer records but still lacking Atlas records: Region 4: 17MT54; Region 5: 17NT42; Region 8: 17MA40, 17MA50, 17MA60, 17MV69, 17MV85; Region 9: 17NU59; Region 13: 17NV96, 17PV07, 17PV25; Region 16: 17QV14, 17QV15, 17QV24, 18TE64; Region 18: 17NA60, 17NA80, 17NV98, 17PV16; Region 20: 18UD36; Region 25: 18UE45; Region 28: 17NA52, 17NA81; Region 33: 17LA47. Birders are encouraged to check these areas in 1985.

For the most part Prairie Warblers in Ontario have utilized natural rather than man-altered habitats. Presumably they have bred for centuries in rocky scrub areas bordering Georgian Bay and the southern fringe of the Canadian Shield and in the dunal habitats bordering Lake Huron. Apart from Wasaga Beach and the Pinery area, significant threats to these habitats have not been identified; hence the present situation is one of relative stability and security.

By contrast, man-altered environments have been used to a much greater extent in the United States (Nolan 1978), and as a consequence there has been a considerable expansion during this century in the U.S. breeding range (which includes parts of about 31 states east of the Great Plains). Recent range expansions have



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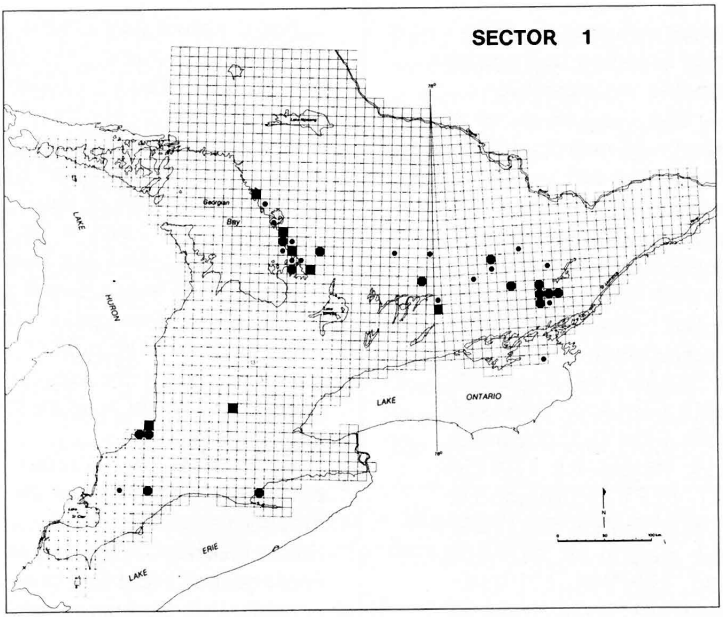


*Figure 2:* Breeding distribution of the Prairie Warbler in Ontario, based on preliminary (1981–1984) data from the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Within 10 km squares: square=confirmed breeding; large circle=probable breeding; small circle=possible breeding.

been noted in several northern states, such as Ohio, New York, Vermont, Maine, and possibly Wisconsin; while in Michigan, range expansions in some areas have been offset by contractions in other areas, hence the overall situation remains dynamic (Walkinshaw 1959; Payne 1983). Newly exploited habitats include regenerating old fields, logged areas, power line rights-of-way, strip-mined areas and young conifer plantations. In Ontario, however, these habitats have rarely been used, apart from the three cases mentioned previously.

In much of the Ontario range, habitats that appear suitable seem to be under-utilized, and breeding densities are generally very low compared with many parts of the U.S. range. Although data are lacking, we suspect that this reflects a lower productivity, which might result from a shorter breeding season, a harsher climate/microclimate, possibly greater effects of cowbird parasitism, or other factors.

While the Prairie Warbler's future on its Ontario breeding range seems secure, the situation in the Caribbean wintering areas is more difficult to assess. In winter, Prairie Warblers appear to be most abundant on the Bahamas, fairly numerous on the Greater Antilles and much less common in the Lesser Antilles. However, destruction of the various scrub forest habitats used by wintering

birds is an ongoing process, particularly in the Greater Antilles, and its effects on the Prairie Warbler are largely unknown.

In conclusion, the Prairie Warbler is not endangered, threatened or rare in many parts of its range. Nonetheless, the Ontario population is small, localized and peripheral to the main breeding range, and the Prairie Warbler warrants designation as a 'rare' species in Ontario (and Canada).

**Acknowledgements**

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# Ross' Gull: New to Ontario

by
Kenneth F. Abraham

On 14 May 1983, approximately 14:30 E.S.T., Steve Anderson and I were driving alongside the Moose River in Moosonee, Cochrane District, when I noticed a small white-headed larid flying along the edge of ice blocks piled against the river's bank. The bird was about 50 m from our vehicle and 10 m from the river bank and was hovering and dipping for food items which it pecked from the water's surface. I observed the bird from that distance for a few minutes using 9 x 36 binoculars and noted pink colouration on the undersides, a white head with a black ring encircling the neck, a black bill, red legs and a completely white tail. From this initial view, I identified the bird as a Ross' Gull *(Rhodostethia rosea)*.

At the point, SA remained to monitor the bird's movements while I went to notify others of its presence and to get my camera and spotting scope. Diana Abraham went immediately to the river and was able to observe the bird, which was still feeding alone, for about 10 minutes at a distance of less than 25 m. She noted the same characters I had and confirmed that the bird was a Ross' Gull. The gull joined a small group of feeding Bonaparte's Gulls *(Larus philadelphia)* and flew upstream towards the mouth of a small tributary, Store Creek, then settled on a sandbar in the Moose River where Ring-billed Gulls *(L. delawarensis)* and Herring Gulls *(L. argentatus)* were resting. From 15:00 to 16:30, at least 10 people kept the gull under constant observation from the river bank. Three of us (myself, John Kirk and John Thompson) went out to the sandbar in a freighter canoe and I took several photographs of the Ross' Gull resting near Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. It was disturbed by this activity and returned to the river bank location where it had originally been observed. We followed and I was able to obtain several more photographs of it in flight and feeding (photographs are on file with the Ontario Bird Records Committee). During most of this observation period, the gull was actively feeding along the edge of the ice, and was usually alone, hovering and dipping to peck food items from the water's surface.

I returned to the original sighting

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location at 17:45, relocated the bird feeding with 15 Bonaparte's Gulls (of which there were then nearly 150 in the vicinity) and observed it until 18:45. Bonaparte's Gulls had first been observed at Moosonee on the preceding day (13 May), and in subsequent discussions a neighbour, Shirley Bent, described a bird she had seen on 13 May which may have been a Ross' Gull.

On 15 May, the bird was observed from 12:45 to 14:00 and from 15:30 to 16:30. It spent the majority of that time at the junction of Store Creek and the Moose River, and in the first 100 m of the creek. It associated with Bonaparte's Gulls and all foraged throughout the period, mainly by the hover-dip method. They also fed by surface seizing, whereby the Ross' Gull and several Bonaparte's Gulls landed on the river near the junction with the creek and then floated downstream on the current, all the time pecking at items at or just below the water's surface and sometimes spinning around in the manner of phalaropes. After floating up to 200 m, they flew back upstream to the starting point and repeated the procedure.

On 16 May, the Ross' Gull was observed from 08:00 to 08:45, at which time it was resting on cakes of ice piled up on a sandbar 150 m from the river bank location where it was first seen. It was with several Bonaparte's and Ring-billed Gulls. I left Moosonee on that morning and did not return in time to see the gull again. However, between 16 May and 23 May, a number of people found

and watched the gull. According to them it continued to associate with Bonaparte's Gulls and also with Little Gulls *(L. minutus)* of which about 12 were present. (A. Wormington, pers. comm.)

Observations of the gull throughout the 10 days (14-23 May) occurred along a 2 km stretch of the Moose River, from Maidman's Island to Butler Creek, the favoured areas being the junction of Stone Creek with the Moose River, the first 100 m of Store Creek, and the sandbars in the river. At no time were there conflicting reports of the bird's location nor were there any other indications that more than a single bird was in the area.

Examination of the photographs show that the black neck ring was entire but narrow (Figure 1) and that there is a black smudge behind the eye. These characters suggest that the gull was an adult not quite in full breeding plumage.

This is the first record of Ross' Gull in Ontario. The species has a circumpolar distribution, with the main nesting area being in northeastern Siberia. Known Canadian nesting areas include only the Cheyne Islands, Penny Strait in the arctic archipelago (Macey 1981) and Churchill, Manitoba (Chartier and Cooke 1980). The species apparently winters in open water and broken pack ice areas of the Arctic Ocean but is rarely observed at this season. During fall migration thousands of Ross' Gulls are observed regularly passing east at Point Barrow, Alaska, to winter (presumably) in the Canadian Arctic (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

Besides the Moosonee Ross' Gull, extralimital records in North America have occurred continent-wide. The nine records comprise three fall transients, four spring transients and two wintering birds as follows:

9 Nov. 1966, Victoria, B.C. (Roberson 1980)
7 Dec. 1974 – 6 May 1975, Newburyport, Mass. (Miliotis and Buckley 1975)
18 Dec. 1976, Fogo Is., Newfoundland (Vickery 1977)
19 Nov. – 1 Dec. 1978, Chicago, Ill. (Balch *et al.* 1979)
20 Apr. 1981, Newburyport, Mass, (Vickery 1981)
28 Apr. – 7 May 1983, Julesburg, Colo. (Kingery 1983)
4 – 13 Apr. 1984, Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge, Minn. (Mattson 1984)
Spring 1984, Connecticut (A. Wormington, pers. comm.)
3 Dec. 1984, Newburyport, Mass. (A. Wormington, pers. comm)

Thus the disjunct nature of these records does not present an easily-defined pattern to clearly indicate the sources and movements of Ross' Gulls south of the normal range. The date of the Moosonee sighting (mid-May at the peak of spring break up) and the Ross' Gull's coincident arrival and regular association with Bonaparte's Gulls strongly suggest that it may have wintered and migrated with Bonaparte's Gulls, perhaps those using the Great Lakes or St. Lawrence River systems.

This sighting excited speculation that the Ross' Gull was returning to an as yet unknown nesting location in the Hudson Bay Lowland of Ontario, where much suitable habitat exists, or that it was connected with the nesting birds at Churchill, Manitoba.

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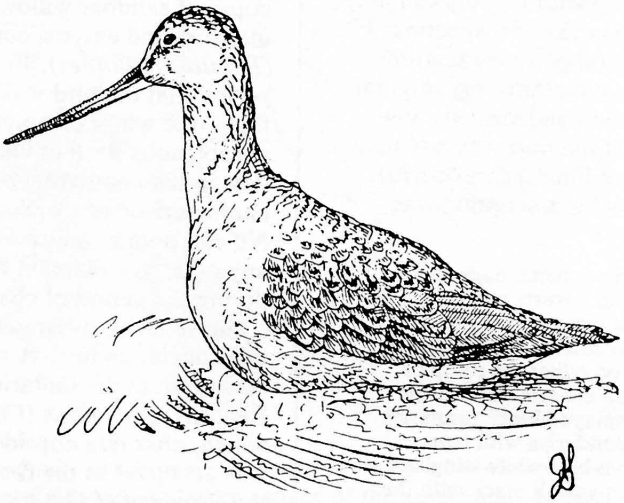

# Lesser Goldfinch *(Carduelis psaltria)* at Toronto: Ontario's First Record

by
Donald M. Fraser

On the morning of 10 August 1982, while conducting a shorebird census on the Eastern Headland, Toronto, York R.M., I observed a small *Carduelis* finch on the edge of an exposed mudflat. I initially considered the bird to be a female American Goldfinch *(C. tristis),* since large flocks frequent the area in late summer. The bird was drinking water and as it was facing away from me, allowed approach to within approximately 10 m. Upon closer inspection, I noted several plumage features which ran counter to my original identification and strongly suggested that the bird was a female Lesser Goldfinch *(C. psaltria)*. The following description was obtained:

> The crown, nape, back and upper tail coverts were a uniform greenish-grey to olive-green in colour. No white was visible on either the rump or undertail coverts. At rest the bird displayed black primaries and secondaries with two indistinct buff-white wingbars. The tail was all black with the exception of two distinct white crescents on the inner webs of the outer rectrices. These white crescents did not extend to either the base or tip of the tail. The entire underparts from the base of the bill to the undertail-coverts were a uniform canary-yellow tinted with an olive wash on the flanks. The bill and legs were dark pink, the iris black.

After approximately 30 seconds of careful scrutiny, my presence was detected and the bird flushed and disappeared over a dense copse of sandbar willows *(Salix interior)* and eastern cottonwoods *(Populus deltoides)*. For the brief period that the bird was viewed in flight, the wings displayed a conspicuous flash of white. It also flew in the undulating manner characteristic of *Carduelis* finches. No call note was uttered, nor was any other vocalization heard during the period of observation.

Subsequent investigation failed to relocate the bird. A report was submitted to the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) which, after due consideration, was accepted as the first record for the Province of Ontario (James 1983). At that time it was not

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granted inclusion to the Ontario checklist pending the acceptance of a second report for this species. As a result of changes to the OBRC's criteria for acceptance of a single report sight record, Lesser Goldfinch was officially added to the provincial checklist in 1984 (Wormington and James 1984).

Two subspecies of Lesser Goldfinch are recognized, the green-backed form, subspecies *hesperophilus,* and the black-backed form, nominate *psaltria* (A.O.U. 1957). Differences in back colour are manifested in male birds; females of both forms are indistinguishable in the field. The species is resident from south-western Washington, northern California, northern Colorado, northwestern Oklahoma and central Texas south through Mexico and Central America to Columbia, Venezuela and Peru (A.O.U. 1983; Fig. 1). Green-backed males are typically found in the western portion of the range, from southern Oregon and Utah to southern California, Arizona and Sonora, Mexico, while those from Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas are usually of the black-backed form (Bent 1968). Throughout much of its range, the Lesser Goldfinch is sedentary, although

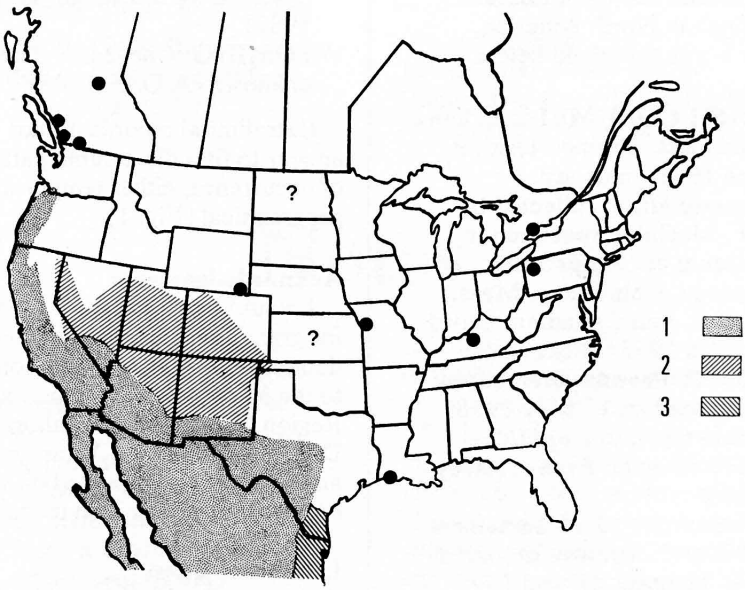


Figure 1. Breeding and wintering ranges of the subspecies of the Lesser Goldfinch in North America. 1. Year-round range of *C.p. hesperophilus,* 2. Breeding range of *C.p. psaltria,* and 3. Winter range of *C.p. psaltria.* Extralimital records are indicated with solid dots, except where specific locations are not known(?).

the eastern form is quite extensively migratory. In all likelihood the Toronto bird is referable to nominate *psaltria.*

According to Linsdale (1957) this species wanders widely in search of food. Since their diet consists mainly of buds and developing fruits, birds apparently require large amounts of water to facilitate the ingestion of seeds. As a result, they concentrate at streams and springs. That the Toronto bird was observed drinking water is all the more noteworthy, in light of the species' oft described penchant for engaging in this activity (Woods 1925; Linsdale 1957).

There are at least 12 extralimital records of Lesser Goldfinch in North America. These are summarized below:

**BRITISH COLUMBIA:** Indian-point Lake, Cariboo Dist., 9 June 1931, male ssp. *hesperophilus,* collected by T.T. McCabe, specimen in Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.; 1st B.C. and Canadian record (Brooks 1942; Dickinson 1953; R. Paynter, *pers. comm.*)
: Huntingdon, 17 May 1958, female ssp. *hesperophilus,* collected by K. Racey (Racey 1958).
: Vancouver, 15-16 September 1983, sex unknown, observed by B. Kautesk, H. and J. Mackenzie (Hunn and Mattocks 1984).
: Sechelt, 22-23 October 1983, sex unknown, observed by T. Greenfield and K. Angermeyer (Hunn and Mattocks 1984).

**KANSAS:** Location and date unknown (A.O.U. 1983).

**KENTUCKY:** Elizabethtown, 5-7 December 1980, male ssp. *psaltria*, photographed at feeder (Peterjohn 1981).

**LOUISIANA:** Cameron Parish, 17 April 1954, female collected by J. Gee (Lowery 1955).

**MISSOURI:** Kansas City, date unknown (A.O.U. 1983).

**NORTH DAKOTA:** Location and date unknown (Stewart 1970).

**ONTARIO:** Toronto, 10 August 1982, adult female observed by D.M. Fraser; 1st Ontario record (James 1983).

**PENNSYLVANIA:** Meadville, 3 February 1982, sex unknown, observed by S. Flaugh (Hall 1982).

**WYOMING:** Cheyenne, date unknown (A.O.U. 1983).

Extralimital records do not appear to fit a discernible pattern of occurrence, either temporal or geographical (Fig. 1).

**Acknowledgements**

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# Notes

**Eds. Comment:** One aspect of *Ontario Birds* with which we, as Editors, are disappointed is the Notes section. We would like to see more Notes submitted to *Ontario Birds.* Notes make an important contribution to provincial ornithology, are relatively easy to write and are usually very interesting—often more so than longer articles. In this issue's Guest Editorial, Martin McNicholl, the author of dozens of notes, has commented on their value. We would like to try to further stimulate our readers to contribute to the Notes section. Toward this end we will be designating a "Topic of Note" for each of the three issues of *Ontario Birds* in 1985. The Topic of Note will be a bird related subject which we hope will help our members focus their attention on a specific topic when trying to recall or when searching their field notes for a particular observation. As well, the Topic of Note will be a subject such that members can go out into the field looking for observational material.

Because the deadline for submissions for the April 1985 issue of *Ontario Birds* will be fast approaching by the time most of you receive this issue we are announcing Topics of Note for the next two issues. They are 1) for April: Unusual Nesting Holes, Behaviour and/or Damage Caused by Woodpeckers and 2) for October: Interactions Between Snakes and Birds. If you have made interesting or unusual observations on either of these topics, please write them up in note form and send them to us. Be sure to include date and location of observation (or as close as possible), what the observation was, who saw it and whatever other details seem appropriate. Notes need not be long, a paragraph or two will suffice for most and they need not be typed, though we would prefer them that way. If you miss the deadline for any given topic, submit it anyway and we will consider it for the next issue. Of course, we still welcome Notes on all other topics as well.

# Two Incidents of Small Passerine Entanglement in Spider Webs

by
W.J. Crins, J.D. Reynolds, M.J. Oldham,
M.W.P. Runtz and R.D. McRae

Interactions between birds and spiders generally culminate with birds as the clear victors, with spiders included as a small but regular percentage of the many invertebrates that comprise the diets of many species of birds (e.g., flycatchers, Bent 1942; warblers, Bent 1953; sparrows, Judd 1901, Bent 1968). However, we have made two observations which suggest that the tables are occasionally turned.

The first incident involved an adult male Golden-winged Warbler *(Vermivora chrysoptera)* along the Woodland Nature Trail in Point Pelee National Park, Essex County, Ontario. On 16 May 1982, WJC, MJO and MWPR observed this warbler sitting in a small spicebush *(Lindera benzoin)*, when it suddenly dropped from its perch into a web and became suspended by one wing. It hung motionless for at least 15 seconds before struggling and breaking free as the three observers approached it. It flew to a nearby bush where it preened its wing for about one minute before flying off without any noticeable ill effects.

The second case involved an after-hatch-year male Golden-crowned Kinglet *(Regulus satrapa)*.

On 10 October 1983, JDR and RDM noticed the kinglet struggling on the ground at the base of a large Norway spruce *(Picea abies)* at the edge of a thicket between the Visitor's Centre and the lighthouse in Presqu'ile Provincial Park, Northumberland County, Ontario. All of the primaries and a few secondaries of its left wing were tangled and matted in sticky web material. A few tail feathers were also entangled, pulling the tail toward the left wing, and the left foot was pulled forward and immobilized against the primaries by web material. The web also contained spruce needles, insects, and other detritus. The kinglet was photographed and the web was removed from it, whereupon the bird flew away fairly strongly.

Other kinglets were seen hovering and flitting about near the base of the spruce, where several large webs were suspended. This is consistent with a report by Hespenheide (1962) of opportunistic foraging by a Ruby-crowned Kinglet *(Regulus calendula)*. Hespenheide observed a kinglet flitting along the base of a wall, jabbing its bill into recesses in the stonework, and perching on the rough surface as it explored depressions. Some of these recesses contained spider webs in which there were the remains of insects. The kinglet also had bits of web on its feet and face.

Most reports of spiders killing birds come from the tropics. Large spiders, mainly in the family *Theraphosidae,* which includes the North American "tarantulas", have been known to take hummingbirds (Savory 1928). Theraphosids are cursorial predators which pounce directly upon their prey, rather than netting them in webs (Cloudsley-Thompson 1968). In addition to theraphosids, web-producing spiders have also been known to prey upon hummingbirds (Skutch 1973).

In Illinois, Coale (1912) reported a case of a Yellow warbler *(Dendroica petechia)* being captured in the web of a garden spider *(Argiope* sp., *Araneidae)*. The spider was successful in binding the bird with silken strands, and it appears the spider would have eaten it had it not been for human intervention. Terres (1980) states that hummingbirds, bushtits, kinglets, sparrows, goldfinches, and other small birds have been accidentally caught in webs.

It is difficult to assess the overall importance of spiders as hazards to birds in temperate North America. The silk draglines of some spiders, such as *Araneus diadematus* (a common orb-weaver) can support almost as much weight as high-tenacity nylon fibres of the same mass, and are twice as extensible (Witt *et al.* 1968). Webs may therefore constitute reasonably efficient mist-nets to small birds under some circumstances, particularly during the kind of opportunistic foraging noted for kinglets. However, most webs would be destroyed when birds collided with them, so actual predation by spiders is likely very rare.

Since reports of this phenomenon are scarce, particularly in temperate regions, we encourage anyone with related observation to

submit them to the editors of *Ontario Birds.*

**Acknowledgement:**
We thank Dan Brunton of Ottawa for bringing certain references to our attention.

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# Unusual Feeding Behaviour of Ruby-crowned Kinglet

On the afternoon of 14 October 1984, while sailing on Lake Ontario about 2.5 km south of Bonnibrae Point, Oshawa, Durham R.M., we observed a small bird fluttering apparently helplessly close to the surface of the water. It was an overcast, humid

day with little wind and we were able to approach the bird at a slow speed. It became obvious that the bird, far from consigning itself to a watery grave, was actively feeding on clouds of tiny flying insects hanging in the still air. The bird was fluttering constantly, sometimes very low but sometimes as much as five metres above the water, and for several brief moments it rested on the rigging of the sailboat, where it was clearly seen to be a Ruby-crowned Kinglet *(Regulus calendula)*.

No other passerines were observed on the lake that day, but on more than one occasion previously I have observed a Ruby-crowned Kinglet reaching the north shore of Lake Ontario in an almost exhausted state, having obviously flown directly across the lake in migration. I would assume that this southbound bird had delayed its journey to profit by an easy food supply or had encountered the insects en route. Its jerky, active, fluttering flight continued unabated as we lost sight of it some ten to fifteen minutes later.

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# Book Review

***Toronto Region Bird Chart.*** 1983. By *Bruce D. Parker.* Toronto Field Naturalists, 83 Joicey Blvd., Toronto M5M 2T4. ii & 30 pp. $2.00 & $0.50 postage.

The *Toronto Region Bird Chart* represents a compilation of a large amount of data on the occurrence of birds within 48 kilometres of the Royal Ontario Museum in downtown Toronto. I have found similar charts to be very useful for indicating what birds to expect when visiting new areas, and I expect that this chart will serve the same function for visitors to the Toronto region. Unfortunately, the introductory section preceding the actual chart, is very brief. There is a very limited section dealing with the location and some general features of the Toronto region. However, a visitor unfamiliar with the region would gain virtually nothing from this section. At the very least, a map showing the location of the region, along with some of the major features in it, should have been included here. The other introductory sections, dealing with notekeeping and birding ethics, are useful for both visitors and residents of the region. It is important that we document our records properly, and we must continually remind ourselves about respecting the property rights of others. The section on notekeeping should have acknowledged the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project, from which the breeding

evidence categories were taken, and more emphasis should have been placed on documenting unusual birds thoroughly, rather than simply stating "... a brief note describing the bird and what it is doing."

The bulk of this publication is composed of the bird chart. It attempts to summarize all of the bird records for the Toronto region with bar graphs. The lines and symbols on the graph provide an indication of status in every month of the year. In addition to the bar graphs, assessments of breeding status, changes in status over the last 25 years, and winter status (based on the Toronto Regional Christmas Bird Counts) are provided. This chart is generally very well done. In a few cases, however, the symbols are not clear. For example, the symbols indicating that a Great Cormorant had occurred in the region from early December to late March are not clearly visible throughout that period. The thickness of the bars varies in some cases, because they were hand-drawn with a pen (see, for example, the bar for Canada Goose). This can be misleading with regard to status, since bar thickness is related to seasonal abundance. If the production of this graph had been done more carefully, perhaps using *Letraset* lines of constant thickness, this problem could have been avoided. The bordering and other chart lines are not always aligned properly, giving the impression of messiness in some parts of the chart.

One can always quibble with the status of certain species in charts such as these. I don't want to belabour the point, but surely some shorebirds are abundant during the peak of migration. The only shorebird listed as abundant at any time is Killdeer!

Following the chart are lists of accidentals and their dates of occurrence, extirpated species, and extinct species. These are interesting and fascinating additions to this publication. I might point out, however, that there is convincing evidence of the continued existence of Eskimo Curlew in very low numbers (it isn't extinct yet!).

In this review, I have noted a few content and production deficiencies and omissions which tend to reduce the potential usefulness of the publication. Nevertheless, the chart does provide a very useful summary of a lot of data, and it should give bird-watchers some idea of what to expect at any time of the year in the Toronto region.

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**Corrections**

In Ontario Birds Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 72, the breeding distribution of Henslow's Sparrow in the Ottawa area was inadvertantly omitted in Figure 1.

# Ontario Field Ornithologists

The Ontario Field Ornithologists is an organization dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It was formed to unify the ever growing numbers of field ornithologists (birders/birdwatchers) across the province and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among its members. The Ontario Field Ornithologists officially oversees the activities of the *Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC),* publishes a newsletter and a journal, *Ontario Birds,* hosts field trips throughout Ontario and holds an Annual General Meeting.

All persons interested in bird study, regardless of their level of expertise, are invited to become members of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Membership dues are $13.00 Annual Member or $260.00 Life Member. All members receive *Ontario Birds,* the official publication of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Please send memberships to: Ontario Field Ornithologists, P.O. Box 1204, Station B, Burlington, Ontario L7P 3S9.

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