

# OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

Volume 13, Number One February 1995

We are all familiar with the house cat that regularly returns to the doorstep with a mouse or bird in its mouth, looking quite pleased with its offering. Reactions among the general public range from horror to congratulatory. In the past I have shrugged this off as being in the cat's nature. However, if we give the situation some thought, a terrifying picture emerges.

## Cat-Birds

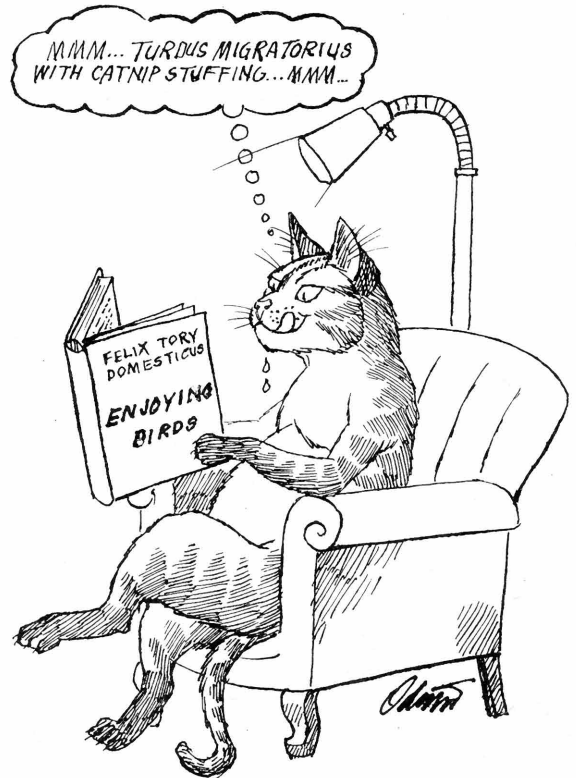
by Jim Coey

According to Statistics Canada there are over 12 million households in Canada. Let us suppose that there is one cat in every tenth

household. This means there are over 1.2 million cats in the country, probably well short of the true numbers.

A recent study in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 21(4) 1993 by Coleman and Temple of feral and farm cats in Wisconsin estimated an average density of 10-14 cats per square kilometre or 1.7 million free-ranging rural cats in Wisconsin. These cats are encouraged to live in barns and farm buildings, and while not exactly wild they are not pets either. Another study in Illinois found the mean number of rural cats to be 5.6 per residence.

Coleman and Temple (1993) cite pet food industry studies in the United States which show a huge increase in domestic cats in the last 20 years, from about 30 million in 1970 to 60 million in 1990. Numbers for Canada likely show similar increases.



by Anker Odum

So back to our 1.2 million cats in Canada. Let us say each cat kills one bird a week in the summer months. The total number of kills would go down in winter because there are not as many birds, and cats probably do not go out as often. From May to October there are 24 weeks, and if each cat kills once a week, a total of 28.8 million birds are killed each summer in Canada by domestic cats alone. I am sure that this is a very conservative estimate. 28.8 million birds killed by cats in Canada in one summer is alarming! To think it may be higher is incredible. With all the pressures on bird populations, it is a wonder we have any birds to watch.

**Further reading:** Rich Stallcup, in *A Reversible Catastrophe Cats: A Heavy Toll on Songbirds*, in the June 1992 issue of *Winging It*, estimated that in the United States in 1990, domestic cats hunting in marshes, fields, gardens, ravines, empty lots and forests, caught about 4.4 million songbirds per day!

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## Loggerhead Shrike Update

Surveys by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and Long Point Bird Observatory (LPBO) in 1994 indicate a continuing decline—down 20 to 25 percent from 1993. Ontario is the last stronghold of the critically endangered "Migrant" subspecies *Lanius ludovicianus migrans*.

# Favourite Birding Hotspots

## Sarnia Waterworks

by Dennis Rupert

**General Description.** Located at the mouth of the St. Clair River at the extreme south end of Lake Huron, this site is probably the best place in southern Ontario (or Michigan) to see pelagic species such as jaegers, kittiwakes and Sabine's Gulls. The location has also been called the "Point Edward Lighthouse", an obvious misnomer since the site is actually in the City of Sarnia, and the "lighthouse" is in fact a navigational beacon used by southbound ships entering the river. The only real lighthouse in the area is across the river at the coast guard station in Port Huron.

To reach the **Waterworks**, exit Highway 402 at Front St. and proceed north (left) on Front past the traffic lights at St. Clair/Lite St. to the stop sign at Michigan Ave. Proceed across Michigan, turning west (left) onto Victoria Ave. Noting the stop sign at Alfred, proceed on Victoria to Fort St., the last street before Victoria ends at Livingstone. Drive north (right) on Fort, passing between the Waterworks plant and the Sarnia Yacht Club, and turn left into the parking lot overlooking the rivermouth. The location is also a favourite among trout-fishermen and this parking area can be quite busy. Additional parking is located on the west side of the Waterworks with an access road on the south.

**Time of Year.** The Waterworks location is useful mainly for observing the fall migration of waterbirds down Lake Huron, and to a lesser extent, that of landbirds along the shoreline. The area is best during passage of cold fronts when strong winds blow from the N or NW. Under the "best" conditions, most birders remain in their vehicles, braving the elements only when necessary. It is best to park at a slight angle to the wind so that the leeward windows can be opened for viewing without receiving a faceful of rain or snow.

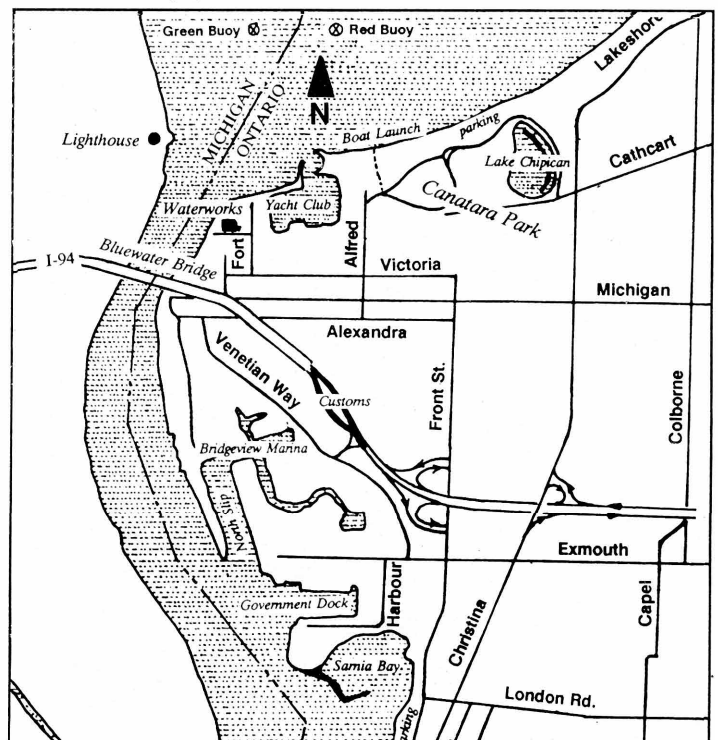
**Style of Birding.** At this location, birders simply sit (or stand) and wait for the birds to come. It is a style of birding with which many are not comfortable, preferring to be on the move. For these birders, side-trips to nearby birding spots such as Canatara Park or Sarnia Bay may be of interest. Depending on the weather, rafts of waterfowl can usually be found either off the boat-launch ramp or beach parking areas at Canatara Park, on Lake Chipican, or in Sarnia Bay. Canatara Park also offers a nature trail through the wooded areas along Christina St. for landbirds, and distributes a checklist for the Birds of Sarnia (300+) species. The checklist can be obtained at the Information Building at the west end of Cathcart Blvd. on Sundays, or at the Ontario Tourist Information Centre on Seaway Drive. During "nice" weather, I prefer to get some exercise by walking to the top of the hill behind the parking lot for a spectacular view of the Lake and to watch for flocks of landbirds crossing into Michigan. The pines at the top of the hill frequently harbour late passerines which attract the occasional Cooper's Hawk, Merlin or Peregrine Falcon.

**The Birds.** The jaeger season extends from late August through mid-January. Over the past 18 years, the total of all jaegers has

averaged 25 per year, averaging 17 Parasitic, 3 Pomarine and 5 unidentified per year. There have been only 3 reports of **Long-tailed**, two juveniles in early September and one adult in early October. **Parasitic Jaegers** have been reported from Aug. 27 to Dec. 27, and while a minor peak occurs in mid-September, 78% of all reports occur in October and November with the peak period from Oct. 23 to Nov. 11. About one-third of the birds are adults, with pale-phase outnumbering dark-phase about 10:1. Reports of **Pomarine Jaegers** cover a similar span, but tend to be later, with 76% of all reports occurring in November and December. About one-fifth of the birds are adults, all being pale-phase birds. Identification of jaegers can be extremely difficult, particularly when the distinctive elongated central tail retrices are lacking, and subjective characteristics such as size and bulk must be used. Under these conditions experience is essential, and while that experience is being gained many jaegers will be left unidentified. My percentage of unidentifieds has averaged 20% over the past 18 years, but during the early years was much higher, reaching a full 100% in 1977.

**Black-legged Kittiwakes** have been monitored at this location for the past 17 years, with an average of 14 per year reported. While there are 3 reports from late September and another 3 in mid-January, all other reports are from Oct. 11 to Dec. 25. November is the best month with 66% of reports, and the peak occurs from Nov. 4-11. About 94% of the kittiwakes have been in first winter plumage, but reports have included two second winter birds and 12 adults. **Sabine's Gulls** have

Continued on page 3



# Profile of an Artist Ron Ridout

by  
Jon McCracken

*This issue of OFO NEWS is illustrated by Ron Ridout*

Like all good wildlife artists, Ron has been literally pursuing his subject matter for most of his life, ever since he was knee-high to a Grasshopper Sparrow. You can tell when an artist really knows and understands his or her subject matter; this familiarity is readily apparent in Ron's drawings and paintings.

Ron's pencil and pen-and-ink drawings have appeared in numerous newsletters, magazines and journals (including *Ontario Birds*). His work is quite graphic without sacrificing important detail. The compositions have a strong yet simple sense of design.

Ron studied applied photography at Sheridan College, graduating in 1977. Afterwards, he served as an assistant to Robert Bateman over a five-year period. This experience no doubt helped hone his technical skills, particularly in the acrylic medium.

Ron is well travelled, having spent considerable time birding through Costa Rica, Cuba and Ecuador. He now works for the Long Point Bird Observatory where he is kept busy coordinating Birdathon and other projects.

Ron is known to members for being OFO's first president.

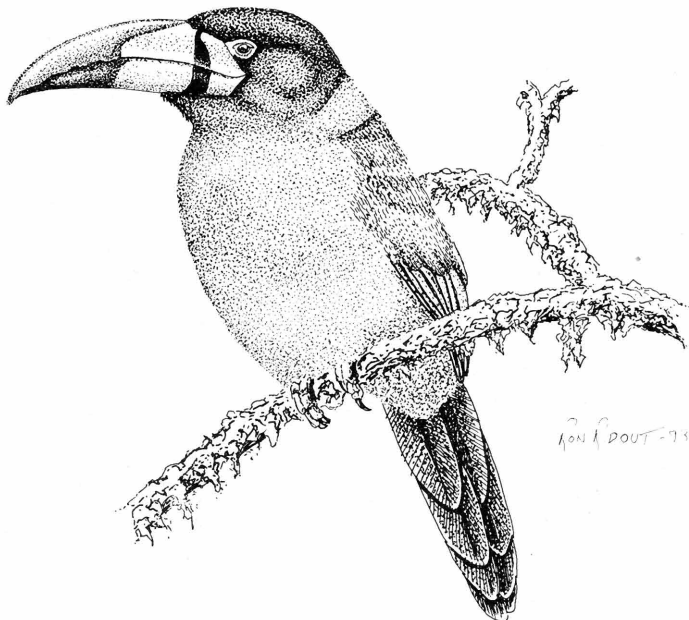
## Sarnia cont.....

averaged 2 per year over the same span, with nine reports in September, 16 in October and three in November. One individual remained in the harbour area for three weeks during 1991.

Large numbers of other waterbirds also move down Lake Huron with many resting in large flocks offshore. Among those seen regularly are Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Snow Goose, Brant, King Eider and Harlequin Duck. Franklin's Gulls and Little Gulls are included among the gulls that stream past, and an occasional Short-eared Owl is seen migrating down the centre of the lake. The more unusual sightings have included Pacific Loon, Eared Grebe, Northern Gannet, Magnificent Frigatebird, Common Eider, Gyrfalcon, Sandhill Crane, Mew Gull, Red Phalarope, and Common Raven. Sarnia harbour also produced an adult Ross's Gull in February 1992.

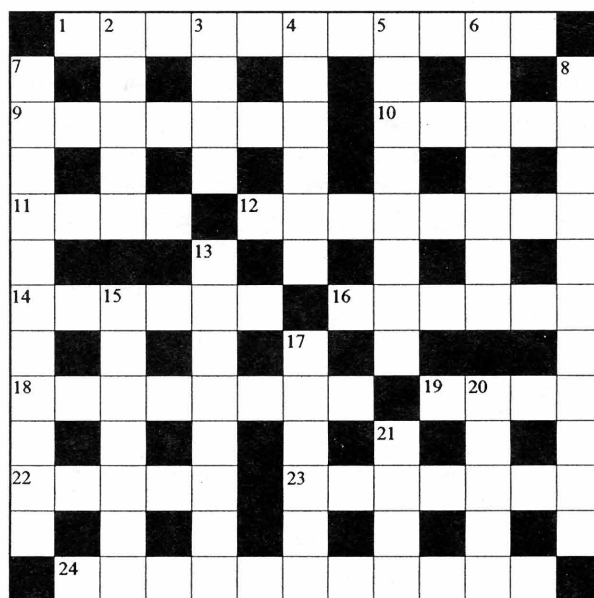
### Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch

Beamer Conservation Area from March 1 to mid-May. Experienced counters needed. Contact Mary Ellen Hebb (905) 937-7671. Open House Good Friday April 14, 1995. Directions: Christie St. exit from QEW in Grimsby, go south and continue up the escarpment on Mountain St. At the top take the first right onto Ridge Rd. W. Follow the park signs to Quarry Rd. and the park entrance.



Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan

## Crossbird Puzzle by Gerry Bennett



### Across

- Nocturnal virtuoso
- Prairie slough waders
- Arboreal songster
- Turn sharply in flight
- Most happy
- Greet with respect
- What the Bubo did
- Not just ordinary
- In a bird's neck
- Uniform colour
- These trigger activities
- What disagreeing shrieks may be at

### Down

- Amo (2 words)
- Shades
- Part of a foot
- Top man in some states
- Of all birds, ostriches are
- Some *Aythya*
- Binocular feature (2 words)
- Black bird not a blackbird
- Not recently (2 words)
- Old World sparrow
- Having no corners
- Grebes do

Answers page 7.

# Plumage, Molt and Age Terminology

by  
Ron Pittaway

A knowledge of plumages, molts and ageing is now essential to the modern birder. The identification of a rare gull or shorebird may hinge on knowing its plumage and age. Determining a bird's plumage and age is an identification challenge which can add new fun to your birding!

In what follows, I define some "key terms" of plumage and molt, and I compare two plumage and molt terminologies, the one used by the **National Geographic Guide** (Scott 1987) with **Humphrey and Parkes** (1959).

## One Molt or Two?

Knowing whether a bird molts once a year or twice a year will help determine its plumage and age. For example, birds that molt once a year have only one adult plumage. Birds that molt twice a year have two adult plumages: adult winter (nonbreeding) and adult breeding, which is usually more colourful in the male.

**Two Molts:** For your reference, I list the Ontario birds from the 1994 FONVOFO Checklist having two molts and therefore two plumages a year. The following treatment is based mainly on Oberholser (1974): loons; grebes; Northern Gannet; pelicans; cormorants; Anhinga; herons; egrets; bitterns; ibises; Wood Stork; ducks *except whistling ducks*; ptarmigan; Northern Bobwhite; rails; Purple Gallinule; Common Moorhen; American Coot; shorebirds; jaegers; gulls; terns; Black Skimmer; alcids; cuckoos; Groove-billed Ani; Common Nighthawk; Chimney Swift; hummingbirds (first prebreeding molt only); tyrant flycatchers *except Olive-sided Flycatcher, pewees and phoebes*; Sedge Wren; Marsh Wren; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; pipits; shrikes; warblers *except Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Yellow-throated, Pine, American Redstart* (first prebreeding molt only), *Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Swainson's, waterthrushes, Hooded, Canada, Painted Redstart and Yellow-breasted Chat*; tanagers; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Black-headed Grosbeak; Lazuli Bunting; Indigo Bunting; Dickcissel; Green-tailed Towhee; sparrows *except Vesper and Black-throated*; Lark Bunting; longspurs; Bobolink; orioles (mainly first prebreeding molt); and goldfinches.

Omitted from the above are some passerines whose prebreeding molt is so limited (e.g. a few head feathers) or even absent that little or no detectible change by molting occurs. For more information see Pyle et al. (1987).

**One Molt:** Most Ontario birds *not* listed above have only one molt and therefore only one adult plumage a year. Any changes in appearance are caused by wear (loss of feather fringes). In a few species the change in appearance between fresh and worn plumage is striking, *but these are not separate plumages*. Compare the "fall" and "breeding" appearances of European Starlings on page 347 in the **National Geographic Guide**.

## National Geographic Guide Terminology

This is the most comprehensive and popular field guide. I have expanded and modified the Guide's definitions.

**Immature:** A collective term that includes juvenile, first winter, and subsequent plumages until adult plumage is attained.

**Juvenile:** The first covering of true contour feathers following the natal down. Same as juvenal below. The juvenile plumage is worn briefly in most passerines, but longer in hawks, shorebirds, etc. Note that juvenile has a precise meaning; it is the first immature plumage.

**First Year:** This plumage follows the postjuvenile molt in birds having only one plumage a year. It is retained until the first postbreeding molt. These birds do *not* have separate first winter and first summer plumages. First year plumage is adult-like in many species, especially passerines. Many breed in this plumage. Also, first year can be used as a general term to include birds in juvenile, first winter and first summer plumages.

**First Winter:** This plumage follows the postjuvenile molt in birds having two plumages a year. It is retained until the first prebreeding molt. It is adult-like in some species. Some birds such as large gulls have recognizable second and third winter plumages.

**First Summer:** Does *not* refer to birds in the summer of their hatching year. Rather, it refers to that plumage following the first winter plumage in birds having two plumages a year. It is acquired by the first prebreeding molt and retained until the first postbreeding molt. First summer plumage is adult-like in many species, especially passerines. Many breed in this plumage. Some birds such as large gulls have recognizable second and third summer plumages.

**Adult:** A bird is adult when it attains its final or definitive plumage. Birds that molt once a year have only one adult plumage. Birds that molt twice a year have two adult plumages: adult winter (nonbreeding) and adult breeding.

**Eclipse:** Female-like plumage worn briefly by male ducks in summer. Eclipse is really the basic or winter plumage, but is worn in summer.

## Humphrey and Parkes Terminology

The **Humphrey and Parkes** molts and plumages terminology is widely used by North American ornithologists in the professional literature, e.g. Palmer (1962, 1976, 1988) in the *Handbook of North American Birds*. Recently the American Birding Association adopted **Humphrey and Parkes** as the standard in its journal *Birding* (Wilds 1989). The **Humphrey and Parkes** system can be used anywhere in the world because it is not linked to the seasons or breeding cycle. It is a joy to use once mastered.

**Plumages:** Plumages are named juvenal, basic, alternate and supplemental. A new plumage can only be acquired by a molt, not by wear.

**Juvenal:** The first covering of true contour feathers following the natal down. Same as juvenile above.

**Basic:** The basic plumage always follows the juvenal plumage. In species that molt once a year, the basic plumage is repeated as the only plumage. In birds that molt twice a year, the basic plumage is one of two plumages, basic and alternate. Basic equals winter plumage *only* in birds that molt twice a year.

**Alternate:** Species that molt twice a year have two plumages after the juvenal: basic and alternate. The alternate plumage is the second plumage after the juvenal. The sequence is **juvenal molt basic molt alternate molt basic molt alternate**, etc. Alternate equals summer or breeding plumage.

**Supplemental:** Name of the third plumage when there are three molts per year. The supplemental plumage either precedes or follows the alternate, depending on the species. It occurs in the Oldsquaw, Willow Ptarmigan and a few other species. Note that the American White Pelican and Brown Pelican labelled "chick-feeding adult" on page 41 in the **National Geographic Guide** are in definitive supplemental plumage. This uncommon plumage is not treated in the comparison chart below.

**Definitive:** Definitive describes adult plumages. It is an adjective: definitive basic, definitive alternate, definitive sup-

plemental. It is incorrect to mix terminologies, e.g. adult alternate or adult basic or adult in basic plumage.

**Molts:** Molts are named in terms of the incoming plumage: prebasic molt, prealternate molt and presupplemental molt. It is incorrect to say a bird is in its prebasic plumage or prealternate plumage because these terms refer to molts not plumages.

The H&P system also can be used with Roman numerals but capitals must be used, e.g. Prebasic I molt, Alternate II plumage, etc. As well, the terms can be abbreviated but must be capitalized, e.g. Def. Basic, Def. Alt., Def. Suppl., Alt. I.

#### References:

- Humphrey, P.S. and K.C. Parkes.** 1959. An approach to the study of molts and plumages. *Auk* 76: 1-31.
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- Pyle, P., S.N.G. Howell, R.P. Yumick, and D.F. DeSante.** 1987. *Identification Guide to North American Passerines*. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, California.
- Scott, S.L. (ed.)** 1987. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.
- Wilds, C.** 1989. The terminology of plumage and molt. *Birding* 21: 148-154.

I especially thank Earl Godfrey, Michel Gosselin, Jean Iron, Phill Holder and Ron Tozer for their valuable assistance.

I hope readers will retain this as a handy reference and please contact me if you have any questions. Ron Pittaway, Box 619, Minden ON K0M 2K0 or (705) 286-3471.

### Comparison of Plumage and Molt Terminologies

This chart compares the names of the plumages and molts in the **National Geographic Guide** with **Humphrey and Parkes**, both slightly modified in some cases.

#### National Geographic Guide

Sequence of plumages for birds that molt once a year.  
juvenile plumage  
*postjuvenile molt*  
first year plumage  
*adult postbreeding molt*  
adult plumage

Sequence of plumages for birds that molt twice a year.  
juvenile plumage  
*postjuvenile molt*  
first winter plumage  
*first prebreeding molt*  
first summer plumage  
*adult postbreeding molt*  
adult winter plumage  
*adult prebreeding molt*  
adult breeding (summer) plumage

#### Humphrey and Parkes

juvenal plumage  
*first prebasic molt*  
first basic plumage  
*definitive prebasic molt*  
definitive basic plumage

juvenal plumage  
*first prebasic molt*  
first basic plumage  
*first prealternate molt*  
first alternate plumage  
*definitive prebasic molt*  
definitive basic plumage  
*definitive prealternate molt*  
definitive alternate plumage

Most Ontario birds attain adult or definitive plumage in late summer of their second year, when they are just over a year old. Adult plumages are repeated for the life of the bird. Additional molts and plumages can be inserted into the above sequences for species that take longer to mature.

# Unfamiliar Sounds from Familiar Birds

by Monty Brigham

Monty Brigham is well-known for his preparation of *Bird Sounds of Canada, Volumes 1-3*, a set of audio tapes and CDs which follow the arrangement of Earl Godfrey's *The Birds of Canada*. This is the second of three articles by Monty. Many sounds discussed in these articles have the corresponding CD track number to help you.

## Owls

At sometime every birder will be out listening for owls and it is easy to make mistakes. Everyone is familiar with the "hoot" of the Great Horned Owl; but the young don't "hoot" they screech, and their calls can be confused with Long-eared Owls. You can hear this sound on Vol 1 CD #2 Track 50.2. Now compare the calls of the Long-eared with that of the Short-eared on the same tape; they sound identical. Weird and strange sounds that cannot be attributed to a known owl species are

often misidentified as Long-eared Owls!

Even though Ernest Seton heard a Boreal Owl giving a "ting-ting-ting" courtship call from the Athabasca River, I don't think this is the common call for this species. The samples (Vol 1 CD #2 Track 55) are from three different localities in Canada and they all have the same basic "Woo-Woo-Woo-Woo" quality. This call can be compared to the "winnowing" sound of the Common Snipe and in fact snipe can be mistaken for Boreal Owls. Many field guides still describe the song of the Boreal Owl as Seton heard it, but I think the hollow "Woo" is a more accurate description.

The Northern Saw-whet Owl is named after the sound it utters, similar to the screech made when sharpening a saw with a whetstone. Yet the common sound heard is a loud emphatic "toot" repeated *ad nauseam* (Vol 1 CD #2 Track 56.1). The second and third examples (Vol 1 CD #2 Track 56.2-56.3) are of the screeching variety. I was astounded by the array of

sounds Saw-whets make and I always wait until the owl starts to "toot" before confirming its identity.

*In the next issue I will discuss meadowlarks and mimicry in some bird species.*



Boreal Owl

## NWT Curlew Nest Now Thought to be Whimbrel

by Fred Bodsworth

The curlew nest found and photographed by geologist Ken Reading in the Northwest Territories in 1992, at first widely believed to have been an Eskimo Curlew, is now thought to be that of a Whimbrel.

NWT biologist Joachim Obst and field assistant A. Spaulding spent five weeks in late May and June 1994, at the site and searched a 140 square-kilometre area around it. They found no Eskimo Curlew, but they did find two Whimbrel nests in the immediate vicinity of Reading's 1992 nest, and a dense population of more than 100 Whimbrels, including 42 territorial pairs in the search area.

Reading's brief view of the bird he flushed from the nest in 1992 led him to think it was too small to be a Whimbrel, but the main reasons for feeling there was a good chance it was an Eskimo Curlew were his pictures of the eggs. The ground colour of Whimbrel eggs is dark olive-green, that of Eskimo Curlew a light buff, and Reading's three egg pictures showed light-coloured eggs that were thought to be highly suggestive of Eskimo Curlew. Also, Whimbrel eggs are distinctly conical or pear-shaped, Eskimo Curlew eggs are much more oval, and Reading's photos showed no indication of the conical shape to be expected of Whimbrel eggs. Largely on the basis of these egg characteristics in the photos, the 1994 expedition and search was launched.

Obst and Spaulding made a detailed study of the variation in their Whimbrel eggs and they took 72 pictures of Whimbrel nests and eggs with different cameras, lens, film, exposures, and

at different light conditions, distances and angles. These were compared with Reading's photos. They found that under some conditions Whimbrel eggs could assume the Eskimo Curlew resemblances that occur in the Reading pictures. The conical shape of the Whimbrel eggs, especially, can be obscured in angle shots and, in fact, becomes obvious only in pictures from straight above.

"We conclude," Obst and Spaulding report, "that the [1992] eggs and sighting were those of a Whimbrel....Nest site fidelity is characteristic of Whimbrel, so we expect that Whimbrels were present in 1992....The territorial behaviour of the aggressive and larger Whimbrel leaves little opportunity for pairs of the smaller Eskimo Curlew to nest among them....If the Eskimo Curlew was nesting in the discussed area, we would expect more than one pair. Otherwise it is unlikely that this species would have been able to find mates, reproduce, and survive on an extremely low population level for a period of almost 100 years."

They conclude: "The investigation was conducted with great effort and hope. The results were somewhat disappointing for the involved parties. The experience and useful information gained from this project, however, may be helpful for future investigations and searches. We will continue to encourage people to report their observations of possible Eskimo Curlew sightings. The success of the Eskimo Curlew Recovery Plan depends on the people working in and reporting from the field."

Northwest Territories and Canadian Wildlife Service personnel will continue the search for Eskimo Curlew in its formerly known breeding grounds. Future searches will depend on the availability of funding, sponsors and volunteers. Address inquiries to Dr. Robert G. Bromley, Wildlife Management Division, Department of Renewable Resources, GNWT, Yellowknife, NWT X1A 3S8.

## OFO trips

### Niagara Gull Watch 1994

On 27 November, 21 OFO members braved the blustery weather to meet leader Bob Yukich for the annual Niagara River Gull Watch. The group saw 3 Little, 2 Thayer's, 3 Glaucous and 4 Lesser Black-backed among the thousands of Bonaparte's. There was a tagged Bald Eagle over the river and the Tufted Titmice and Red-bellied Woodpecker were in residence on Shakespeare Avenue. Many thanks Bob.

Jerry Guild, Field Trips Coordinator.

### Future Field Trips

**April 22, Saturday. Algonquin Park.**

Meet at the WEST gate at 9:00 a.m.

Leader: Ron Tozer.

**May 26-27, Friday & Saturday. Rainy River.**

Meet at the junction of Worthington Rd. #3 and Hwy 11 which is about 10 km east of Rainy River at 7:00 a.m. local time.

Leader: Dave Elder, Box 252, Atikokan ON POT 1C0. (807) 597-2008. Register with Dave prior to May 1 if you plan to go.

**June 4, Sunday. Carden Alvar.**

Meet at the parking lot of the Kirkfield Lift Lock on Hwy 503, just north of the village at 9:00 a.m. Leader: Ron Pittaway.

**June 10, Saturday. Owen Sound.**

From Springmount (west of Owen Sound) go 4 km on Hwy 21 to Jackson. Turn right (north) and go 2 km to a T intersection. Turn left (west) & go 1 km to first road on right. Turn right (north). At 1 km see sign "Fidlers" on left. Meet at 8:00 a.m. Leader: Dave Fidler. (519) 371-2919. \*NEW TRIP\*

### Answers to Crossbird Puzzle

**Across:** 1. Nightingale 9. Avocets 10. Vireo 11. Veer 12. Merriest 14. Salute 16. Hooted 18. Abnormal 19. Crop 22. Khaki 23. Stimuli 24. Loggerheads  
**Down:** 2. I love 3. Hues 4. Instep 5. Governor 6. Largest 7. Canvasbacks 8. Coated Optic 13. Starling 15. Long ago 17. Passer 20. Round 21. Dive

Hawk Migration Association  
of North America Conference V11  
*Wings Across the Borders*  
4-7 May 1995 Ramada Inn Windsor:  
For information contact John Barker,  
Ontario's HMANA representative,  
37 Elmsthorpe Avenue, Toronto,  
ON M5P 2L5 (416) 483-8118

## Cosmopolitan Caspian

by Jean Iron

There is good news around the Great Lakes for the world's largest tern; its population is increasing. Cosmopolitan in distribution, the Caspian Tern occurs in North America, the Baltic, the Caspian Sea (first specimen hence the name), the Persian Gulf, Siberia, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Interestingly, even though populations are geographically isolated, the Caspian Tern is considered monotypic (no subspecies) by most authorities.

The North American population is by far the largest, with the Great Lakes accounting for one third of this total. These numbers have at least doubled since the late 1970s. In 1991, 6800 active nests were counted. A recent report by the Canadian Wildlife Service (Ewins et al. 1994) suggests that a drop in contaminant levels such as DDT and PCBs, and an abundance of forage fish account for these increases. "The Great Lakes...were among the most heavily contaminated of the world's fresh-water ecosystems during the 1960s and 1970s." Contaminants affected reproduction in birds like Caspian Terns whose population plummeted. Typical signs were reproductive impairment, thinning of egg shells, poisoning, deformities and wasting syndrome (lethargic and emaciated chicks, with ample food and attended by parents, die for no apparent reason). Contamination still exists but at reduced levels, and most colonies now seem healthy.

Caspian Terns prefer to nest on small rocky islands or shingle bars up to 15 km from the mainland.

They are often in close proximity to Ring-billed Gulls

and Double-crested Cormorants

which may exert pressure on tern

populations, especially during high water years when land for nesting is reduced. Islands in Georgian Bay, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan and Lake Ontario are ideal because mammalian predation and human disturbance of vulnerable eggs and young are limited. They do not nest on Lake Erie or Lake Superior.

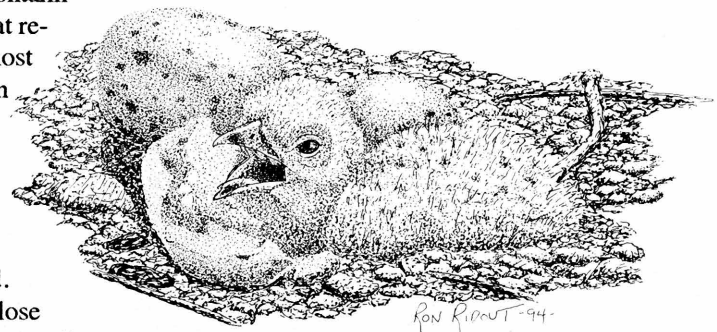
Caspian Terns are a joy to watch. Almost Herring Gull size, they have all the tern-like qualities of their smaller relatives: graceful flight, hovering and plunging head first for fish. In mid to late summer, birders in southern Ontario are familiar with the raspy, raucous croak "Kaaa" of adult Caspian Terns being followed by a juvenile emitting its squeaky call. In other species this could be evidence of local breeding, but not necessarily in Caspians. Once the young are flying, adult birds accompanied by dependent juveniles head for traditional feeding grounds where they remain for about one month before migrating to Colombia, Venezuela or the Caribbean. Both sexes care for the young, feeding them up to eight months after fledging, and even at this age a young bird's fishing success can be poor. This is the longest parental care known for terns.

In Ontario, we see Caspian Terns mostly in adult and juvenile plumages because one and two year old birds generally remain south of their breeding range in summer.

The outlook for Caspian Terns on the Great Lakes appears to be good. Critical nest areas free of disturbance must be maintained.

### Literature cited:

Ewins, P.J., D.V. Weseloh, R.J. Norstrom, K. Legierse, H.J. Auman, and J.P. Ludwig. 1994. Caspian Terns on the Great Lakes: organochlorine contamination, reproduction, diet, and population changes, 1972-1991. Occasional Paper No. 85. Canadian Wildlife Service. Available free: Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Ottawa, ON K1A 0H3 (819) 997-1095.



Caspian Tern Chick

## Thank You

OFO gratefully acknowledges the following donors:

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## OFO Certificate of Appreciation

January 1995

OFO Certificates of Appreciation were awarded to the following people for their courtesy, hospitality and helpfulness to the Ontario birding community.

*PLEASE NOTE: The award is for hospitality and does not endorse the identity of a bird. Acceptance for the official record is determined by the Ontario Bird Records Committee, published in Ontario Birds.*

### Peter Chapman

Arkona  
Brambling, January 1994

### Sharri & Jerry Wright

Pat & Herb Martin  
Leamington  
Bewick's Wren, May 1994

### Sherrie & Glen Neiman

Haliburton  
Black-chinned Hummingbird  
July 1994

### John Haggeman

St. Clair Nat. Wildlife Refuge  
Vermilion Flycatcher  
November 1994

### Officer-in-Charge and Staff

Coast Guard, Port Weller  
Ancient Murrelet  
13 November 1994

### Margaret & Ian Ferguson

Picton  
Say's Phoebe, December 1994

## Building Your Bird library—Free!

Birders can add valuable reference material to their birding libraries free of charge by contacting The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), which produces excellent status reports on most species of bird shown on COSEWIC's *List of Canadian Species at Risk*. These reports contain a wealth of information. Each is an in-depth treatment of the status of a particular species with the causes for decline, if known. An extensive bibliography is also provided. Reports have been done on about 50 species of bird occurring in Canada. To give you an idea of the available reports, here is a sample of titles: Northern Hawk Owl, Tundra Peregrine Falcon, Louisiana Waterthrush, Least Bittern, Black Tern, Gyrfalcon, Golden Eagle, American White Pelican, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Sage Thrasher, Canyon Wren, Gray Flycatcher, White-headed Woodpecker, Burrowing Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Harlequin Duck. You may ask for specific COSEWIC Status Reports. We suggest you ask for all reports on birds and request to be on the mailing list for subsequent reports as they are published. Contact: Coordinator, Secretariat Services, COSEWIC, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Ottawa ON K1A 0H3

## Notes from the OBRC by Bob Curry

The Committee is sorry to announce the resignation of Ron Pittaway as records secretary effective after the OBRC Annual Meeting in March and the completion of the 1994 Rare Bird Report. Most readers will, quite naturally, not realize the enormous time and work put in by the OBRC secretary. Before becoming secretary, Ron was a voting member for seven years over two terms and chairman for three of those years. OFO members owe him a debt of gratitude. Readers will, of course, continue to see the excellent results of Ron's indefatigable efforts in *Ontario Birds* and *OFO NEWS*.

We are very pleased to announce that Rob Dobos of Waterloo has accepted the position of records secretary beginning with the 1995 year. Rob works for Environment Canada as Environmental Assessment Officer, Ontario Region. Rob is extremely active in both the Hamilton Naturalists' Club and Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists and has served as bird records secretary for the HNC for several years and reports for those regions for *Birders Journal*. None of these duties detracts Rob from fieldwork as he is the most active field observer in the Hamilton region and is well known as a consummate finder of rarities such as the 1989 Mimico Rock Wren and (with others) the recent ill-fated Port Weller Ross's Gull.

We are also pleased to announce that Don Sutherland of Peterborough and Long Point will begin a term as voting member in 1995. Don was an original voting member of OBRC and served from 1982 to 1983. Recognized as one of Ontario's very finest naturalists, Don is staff zoologist with the Ontario Natural Heritage Information Centre.

OBRC members for 1995 are: Margaret Bain, Bob Curry (chair), Rob Dobos (records secretary), Ross James, Kevin McLaughlin, Dennis Rupert, Don Sutherland, and Alan Wormington.

We received a gratifying number of rarity reports for 1994 (over 150 at last count) and are pleased that we now have two years of Pelee area reports thanks to the collating efforts of Tom Hince.

## Baillie Birdathon 1994

Many thanks to the OFO members who participated in the 1994 Baillie Birdathon by doing the Birdathon for OFO and by supporting an OFO member. The following members birded for OFO: Maris Apse, Valerie Brown, Geoff Carpentier, Keegan Corcoran, Jean Iron, Don Kerr, John Schmelefske and Bryan Wyatt. OFO's "Celebrity Birder", Geoff Carpentier, raised \$1771.50 of the grand total, \$4580.41. The Birdathon benefits OFO because we received \$1308.15 to help fund club projects. The balance went to Long Point for bird conservation. Congratulations everyone!

OFO President Gerry Shemilt, 51 Montessor Drive, North York, Ontario M2P 1Z3

OFO NEWS Editor: Jean Iron

Send Newsletter correspondence to: Jean Iron, 9 Lichen Place, Don Mills, Ontario M3A 1X3 (416) 445-9297