



Bicknell's Thrush and the AOU

Be sure to mark Saturday, October 19, 1996 on your calendar. Dr. Henri Ouellet, Canadian ornithologist whose studies led to the recognition of Bicknell's Thrush as a distinct species, will be the main speaker at our Annual General Meeting (AGM). Henri will discuss the taxonomy and identification of Bicknell's Thrush and other *Catharus* thrushes in North America. Also, Dr. Ouellet is the only Canadian member of the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list Committee. We will have the opportunity to find out more about proposed splits and lumps. Plan to attend the 1996 AGM at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters, Burlington, near the Skyway. More in the June 1996 *OFO NEWS*.

Baillie Birdathon

OFO thanks everyone who made the 1995 Baillie Birdathon such a success. The money raised helps bird conservation through the work of Long Point Bird Observatory and the Baillie Fund. It also benefits OFO, as a percentage of the funds returns to our club. OFO members raised \$5529.55, of which \$1789 came back to us.

Many thanks to celebrity birder **Mike Runtz** and all who supported Mike with donations totalling over \$2150.00.

We would also like to recognize the following members who did their own birdathon and named OFO as their club: Don Kerr, Maris Apse, Ted Cheskey, Geoff Carpentier, John Schmelefske, Jean Iron and Jim Coey.

Please support Birdathon 1996 and Bruce Di Labio

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OFO NEWS

Newsletter of the Ontario Field Ornithologists

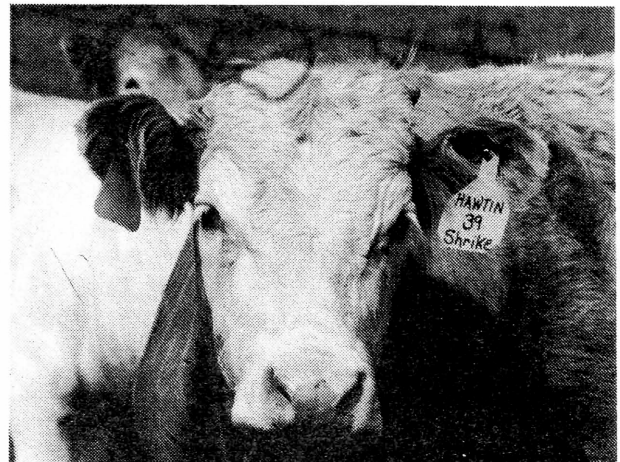
Volume 14 Number 1

February 1996

Shrikes and Grazers

by
Ron Pittaway

Surveys in 1995 indicate a continuing decline of Loggerhead Shrikes in Ontario. The population may now be as low as 30 pairs plus a few unmated individuals. Changing habitat is a factor, but losses due to collisions with vehicles, particularly during migration and winter, may be a major cause of the decline in the East where roads are far more numerous than in the West.



On the Carden Alvar, all breeding pairs are in areas actively grazed by cattle. The photo above is of a cow named "Shrike" belonging to a farmer in Carden. It was taken on last year's OFO trip, less than 100 metres from an active shrike's nest. Ungrazed areas quickly become unsuitable breeding habitat because they overgrow with thick vegetation, shrubs and trees.

Like the effort to save the *anatum* subspecies of the Peregrine Falcon, the National Recovery Team for the Loggerhead Shrike is developing a protocol for the capture, breeding and release of Ontario's rapidly dwindling population.

Shrikes breed readily in captivity. We must act soon to preserve the genetic variability of Ontario's Loggerhead Shrikes, and to have a supply of captive birds for release programs—before it is too late.

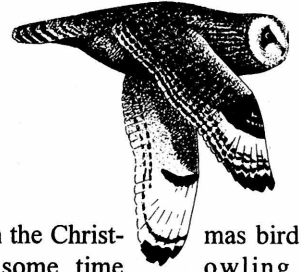
OFO Membership

Please give the enclosed OFO brochure to a birding friend and tell other birders about OFO and all it has to offer.

Fisherville's Short-eared Owls

Favourite Birding Hotspots

by John Miles



The area south of the Niagara Escarpment to Lake Erie from Hamilton to Port Dover and east to the Niagara River supports a regular concentration of wintering raptors, including Short-eared Owls. The western limit of this concentration appears to be where the Norfolk sand plain meets the Haldimand clay.

On the sand plain, there is intensive agriculture of crops such as tobacco, corn, soybeans and tomatoes, with very few idle grassy fields. However, in most springs, the clay plain is difficult to work for planting as it is too wet, and some years it is not workable until July when it is too late to plant! Crop production of corn is very poor with average yields in the 80 bushels per acre range. Normal corn production in the province is 100 bushels per acre or more. The best crops are hay or other forage crops such as Red Clover.

Consequently, many fields are idle or used for pasture. Year after year, many others are used as hay fields only. The lack of plowing results in undisturbed fields and the meadow voles multiply, providing a ready food supply for raptors. During dry springs, which we have had the past three years, the farmers have plowed more fields than they have for several years. This has reduced the number of idle fields in the Haldimand area for raptors, but things will change if the springs are wet.

At night, owls replace the hawks that hunt over the fields during the day. At dusk you will see Great Horned Owls sitting in the tree or on the telephone post where a Red-tailed or Rough-legged Hawk was during the day. Likewise, the Eastern Screech-Owl replaces the American Kestrel. The proportion of hawks to the number of replacement owls seems

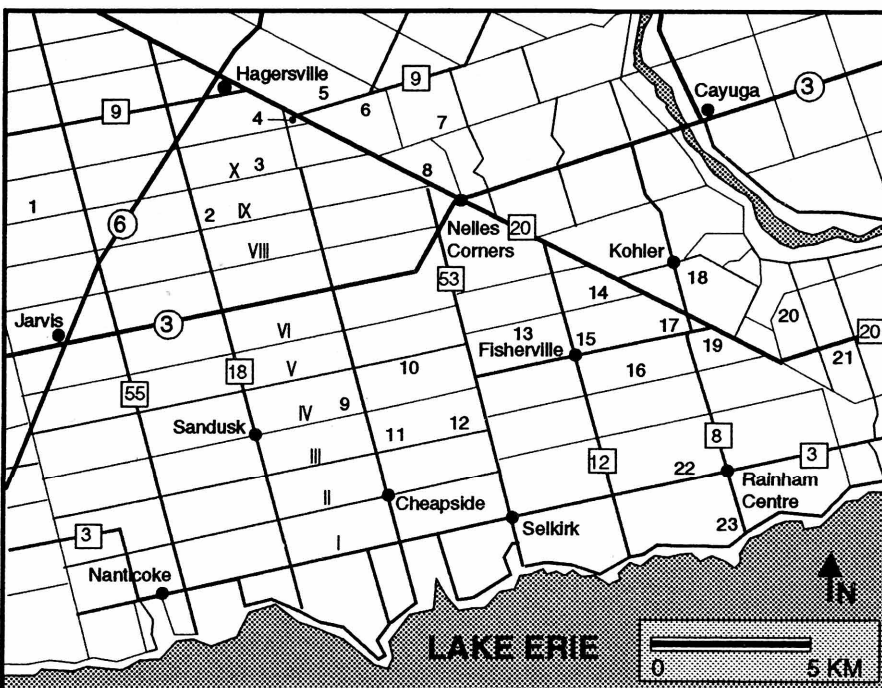
very similar. This is noticeable on the Christmas Bird Counts when observers spend some time owl-watching. Where you find a concentration of Northern Harriers in the winter daytime, you will usually find them replaced by a concentration of Short-eared Owls in the evening.

Short-eared Owls disperse from their communal roosts about 10 to 20 minutes after sundown in the winter, but if there is little or no snowcover, they may not fly at this time. In periods of heavy snow cover, the owls will sometimes fly during the day and it is possible to find 30 to 40 birds over a good field at 1:00 or 2:00 p.m., especially on overcast days.

The first major Short-eared Owl roost I ever found was in Hamilton in December 1960. Looking out over the fields from the corner of Ottawa and Limeridge Road towards the northeast was what appeared to be a large number of moths flying over the fields in the mid-afternoon. These birds were roosting in an old apple orchard. The orchard was full of owls, in the trees and on the ground. The Christmas Bird Count held a week later recorded 61 Short-eared Owls at this location, which was an Ontario CBC high count for 30 years.

I moved to Cayuga in January 1989 and since then have observed Short-eared Owls in the Haldimand area in many locations. Some spots are used by wintering Short-eared Owls year after year. Other spots seem to be used for only one year. The birds are in some spots one year and not the next, but they return the year after. Also, more locations are found every year as it is impossible to be at every field during the 10 to 20 minute window when the birds disperse.

The numbers on the Fisherville area map are Short-eared Owl locations that I have found.



Drawing and Map by Michael King

1.* The south side of the Hagersville Army Camp on the 10th Concession in some years has a good number of roosting Short-eareds with over 20 birds found on the Woodhouse CBC. I have also observed 30 to 40 Northern Harriers coming to roost in the grass. At dusk, the harriers stoop on the owls and the owls stoop on the harriers.

2.* On the east side of Sandusk Road between the 9th and 10th Concession is a pine plantation of relatively small trees where 20 to 30 birds often winter.

3. On the 10th Concession between Sandusk Road and Cheapside Road are several fields where Short-eareds are often found in the evening.

4. The old stand-by for several years has been the auto wreckers yard east of Hagersville. The birds roost in the wrecked autos and disperse over the fields to the south and west.

5.* Just east of Regional Road 20 on Regional Road 9 (turn east at the Hagersville Auto Wreckers) is a large field on the north side. This field often has 10 to 20 Short-eareds at dusk and 10 to 15 Northern Harriers.

6. At the corner of McKenzie Road and Regional Road 9, the birds appear at dusk, coming from the hayfields to the south.

7. Short-eared Owls sometimes fly north over the town line at dusk at this spot.

8. In the evening, Short-eareds often cross Regional Road 20 in front of the Cayuga Speedway,

9. The 4th Concession, especially just west of Cheapside Road, often will produce 10 to 15 birds.

10. Between Cheapside Road and Selkirk Road on the 5th Concession are large grassy fields on the south side of the road, opposite the large woodlot where it comes out to the road. These fields often have Short-eareds in the evening.

11. Just east of Cheapside Road on the 3rd Concession watch for Short-eareds over the fields at dusk especially on the north side of the road.

12. Less than 1 km west of Selkirk Road on the 3rd Concession watch for Short-eareds at dusk, especially on the north side of the road.

13.* One road north of Fisherville often has Short-eared Owls and has produced up to 30 birds on Christmas counts.

14. I have seen Short-eareds at this location.

15. Between 10 and 15 Short-eared Owls have been seen in the fields just south and just north of Fisherville on several occasions at dusk.

16.* One road south of Fisherville, at 1.9 km is a plantation of small spruce. Usually 20 to 30 Short-eareds have roosted on the ground for many years.

17. The corner of Kohler Road and Regional Road 20 often has Short-eareds sitting on the fence posts at dusk.

18. The back end of the Cayuga Drag Strip often has 10 to 20 Short-eared Owls.

19. Southeast of Kohler Road on Regional Road 20, before it does a 135° turn to the east, are several large grassy fields on the south side. Short-eareds often cross the highway between these fields and the brushy field to the north.

20.* Wilson Road south of Meadows Road becomes a "mud road", **impassable when wet, icy or snowy**. This has been one of the better spots with up to 45 owls at one time. At times of heavy snow cover, I have seen up to 30 birds between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. when it has been overcast, but the birds also have been out in full sunlight. However, the best time is dusk.

21.* Suter Road south of Regional Road 20 also becomes a "mud road". **impassable when wet, icy or snowy**. This has been an extremely good location. One winter about 30 birds roosted in the small pines around the house on the southwest corner and you could drive up and park about 4 metres from the roosting birds. When disturbed, they would fly up onto the roofs of the nearby houses or sit on top of the fences.

22. On the north side of Regional Road 3, less than 1 km west of Kohler Road are several grassy fields where 10 to 15 Short-eareds have been seen.

23. Just north of the cottages along Lakeshore Road, the Kohler Road has been good for about 10 to 15 owls.

The above are some of the locations where I have seen Short-eared Owls, but any grassy field in the evening from late November to late March in this area could have Short-eared Owls. A star * marks spots with owls in December 1995. Good owling!

Owls (and all other birds) should not be harassed. These birds can be seen well from public roads so there is no need to trespass on private land.

Notes from the OBRC by Bob Curry

As the year closes, the Committee has examined about 150 records some of which are still in circulation. Nevertheless, secretary Rob Dobos informs me that several prominent rarities, seen by multiple observers, have not been documented with reports to the Committee. To cite one example, if you were among the 100 or so (my estimate) who observed the Black-throated Gray Warbler near Arkell this past April, please submit a report. Of course, we are anxious to receive documentation on occurrences of lesser rarities from the Review List.

It is important to Ontario's avifaunal history to keep on file documentation of rarity sightings. Henri Ouellet who is a member of the AOU Check-list Committee informs us that state and provincial annual reports substantiated by documentation on file are used to describe the ranges of species in the forthcoming Seventh Edition of the Check-list.

As most readers are aware, the AOU will grant species status to several birds that have been regarded as subspecies group (see *OFO NEWS* 13: 2). Those of most interest to us are Bullock's Oriole and Spotted Towhee. Again, the OBRC invites old reports of these species. Some that come to mind are the April 4, 1980 Bullock's Oriole in Willowdale, the other that wintered in Port Dover in 1980-81, and the Spotted Towhee at the late Harold Axtell's feeder in Fort Erie in December 1976.

In March, there will be some changes to the Committee. The following three members have reached the end of their three-year term: Ross James who has served a total of 8 years since the Committee's inception; Dennis Rupert (9 years); and Bob Curry (12 years). Their hard work is gratefully acknowledged. The three replacement members are: David Brewer of Puslinch, Peter Burke of Lakefield and Nick Escott of Thunder Bay.

The next meeting of the Committee to complete decisions affecting the 1995 Annual Report will be on Saturday March 2, 1996.

*Send your rare bird reports to: Rob Dobos, OBRC Secretary, 178 Cedarbrae Avenue, Waterloo ON N2L 4S3
Email: rob.dobos@cciw.ca*

Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch Open House Friday April 5 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, Ridge Road, Grimsby
Migrating hawks, ID sessions, nature displays and the OFO display Rain Date April 6

Pishing, Squeaking and Hooting

a guide to attracting birds

by
Mike Runtz

Do you ever become completely frustrated with birding? Despite all your efforts, you never succeed in getting even a glimpse of certain shy and elusive species. Or you repeatedly stumble across some strange bundle of feathers that refuses to stay in view long enough for you to decipher its identity. Well, if you've been considering trading in your binoculars for a set of lawn darts, fret no more. There are several simple tricks you can use that will enhance your birding to the point where the problem is having birds come in *too* close. And the best part is that these tools of the trade are completely free!

But first I must give credit where credit is due. When I was but an annoying kid (now I am an annoying adult) I met the great birding icon Ron Pittaway. Besides being more than eager to teach this star-struck brat how to separate female Barrow's from female Common Goldeneyes, Ron was also generous enough to instruct me in the fine art of calling birds. With great patience he taught me how to "pish" and "squeak". These two techniques that I learned from the master have over the years not only greatly enhanced my enjoyment of birds but that of nature in general.

Pishing

As long as you have two lips and a bit of wind, you too, can become an expert "pisher". Simply make the sound "shshshsh" (the sound you make when trying to silence someone) and then put a "p" in front of it. The resulting "pshshshsh" (or "pish") works magic on small birds. Chickadees, wrens, nuthatches, kinglets, thrushes, vireos, warblers, orioles, finches, sparrows—virtually all passerines are attracted by this call. Pishing simulates the alarm calls of certain birds (reputedly wrens) which are given when the birds are scolding a predator. Birds try to drive away small owls and other predators by flocking around them and calling incessantly. These alarm calls attract other birds and the mob soon grows in size. By simulating the distress calls of mobbing birds, pishing attracts birds in exactly the same manner. I guess you might say that this technique works by getting the birds "pished off"!

Experienced pishers vary the length and intensity of their pishes, and often insert a few "chttts" (a short version of the drum roll you produce with the tip of your tongue loosely

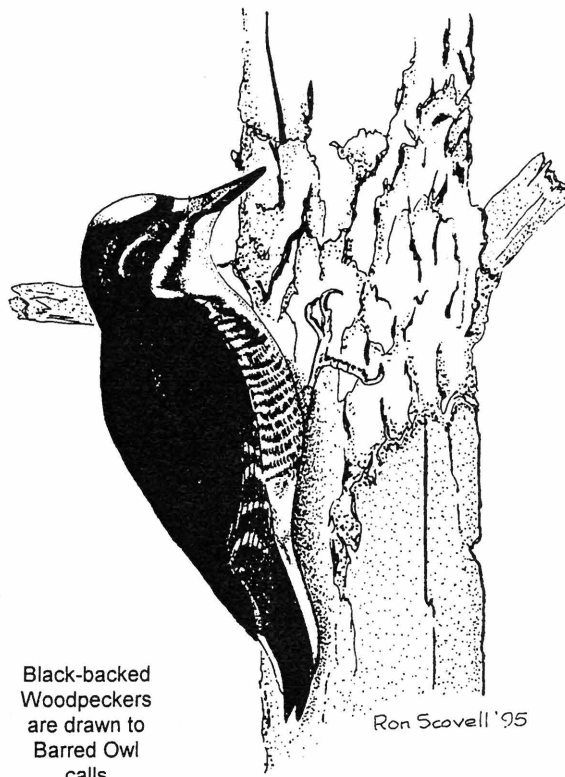
flapping against the roof of your mouth) between them. Advanced pishers also include a few Eastern Screech-Owl whinnies or Northern Saw-whet Owl toots in their routines. These sounds help further the illusion that a predator is present.

Squeaking

"Squeaking" is another method used to attract birds. While it will draw in small birds, squeaking is particularly effective in attracting elusive birds of prey. Squeaking is performed by pursing your lips against the knuckles of your index and middle fingers (which are squeezed together), and noisily kissing them as if you were giving a "smacker". Some people use the back of their hand, but I always prefer a couple of fingers to a backhand. In my opinion, the finger method allows better control of the quality of the squeak. A superior squeak is produced by moistening (licking) the knuckles first. By varying the angle and pressure of your lips on the knuckles, and by changing the intensity of the kiss, you can achieve a particularly piercing and prolonged squeal, one that will suck predators out of the woodwork. Most hawks, including Northern Goshawks, Northern and Loggerhead Shrikes, and virtually all owls, including Great Horned and Barred Owls, are drawn to this sound. Squeaking simulates the

squeals made by an injured animal such as a hare or rabbit. Being opportunists, predators quickly key in on an injured prey for it is a much easier meal to capture. The results achieved with squeaking can be quite dramatic. Regardless of how many times I have experienced it, the sudden explosion of a Northern Goshawk bursting out of a spruce thicket, lured by my squeaks, always produces an incomparable rush of adrenalin.

Squeaking not only attracts birds of prey. Foxes, weasels (including Fisher, Marten, and Mink), Coyotes, and other predatory mammals are also readily attracted. I'll never forget the time when, at the tender age of eleven, I was squeaking along a grassy river edge. Suddenly the grasses began to sway and, just like Jaw's wake on the ocean's surface, a mysterious rippling swath rapidly approached me. To my complete astonishment a tiny Short-tailed Weasel emerged from the grasses and stood on my shoe, looking for the source



Black-backed
Woodpeckers
are drawn to
Barred Owl
calls

of the squeals. Needless to say, I was hooked on squeaking!

Hooting

The third type of call is one that I alluded to in the discussion on pishing. The use of owl calls, either in conjunction with pishing or on their own, is a powerful means of attracting birds. Eastern Screech-Owl calls readily attract small passerines.

Northern Saw-whet Owl whistles also work well, and may be the best call to use for Boreal Chickadees, anomalous birds that usually ignore pishing and squeaking. But my favourite owl call is that of the Barred Owl. There is absolutely no better way of attracting a woodpecker of any species. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Black-backed Woodpeckers are drawn to a Barred Owl call just like steel is drawn to a magnet! But Hairy, Downy, Northern Flickers, and even Pileated Woodpeckers are also readily attracted. On many a Big Day, the only time I encounter Downy Woodpeckers and White-breasted Nuthatches is when I am doing my Barred Owl call. And on more than one occasion a Barred Owl itself made a surprise appearance during a mid-day calling session!

Although all three types of calls work at any time of day, there are certain conditions and periods when they are most effective. Squeaking works best shortly after dawn and in late afternoon, times when predatory birds are especially active. Pishing is particularly effective along woodland edges where shrubs and other dense vegetation offer great cover for skulkers. In winter, calls are most productive near coniferous woods because this is where the majority of birds will be found. And all three calls, including hooting, work best under calm conditions. But be patient. It may take several minutes of continuous calling before a response is achieved.

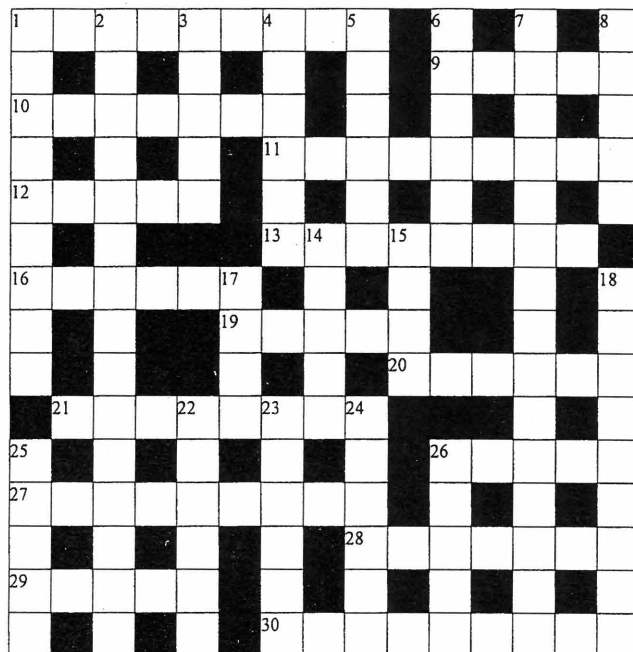
Ethics

It is far more gratifying and far less intrusive to attract birds with your own calls than with taped playbacks or mechanical squeakers. Mechanical squeakers keep your hands off your binoculars (which pishing never does), must be purchased, can be lost, and do wear down. Tape recordings place undue stress on nesting birds, and repeated playbacks can keep a bird anxious for long periods of time. On the other hand, songbirds usually lose interest in pishing rather quickly and soon wander off. When attracted by squeaking, predatory birds usually make one quick appearance and then vanish. And unlike those needed for tape recorders, human batteries seldom wear down. But despite the innocuous nature of human-produced calls, a short comment on etiquette is still prudent. Never use these calls to repeatedly disturb nesting birds. Once an adequate response has been achieved it is best to shut down the calls.

I also feel that a warning should be issued about a certain hazard inherent with at least one of the calls. In cities and other residential districts, birders often frequent parks and other public areas. Joggers, strollers, and other non-birders are predictably mystified by your behaviour and calls, and may question your activity by yelling out, "What are you doing over there?" For fear of being misunderstood, never, never, never call back "just pishing". Simply say that you are calling birds. And tell them that Ron Pittaway sent you!

Crossbird Puzzle

by Gerry Bennett



Across

1. Florida bird—could be purple
9. Promising rookie
10. Sheds (hyphenated)
11. Mariner's nemesis
12. Neotropical Nyctibiid
13. Bob hair or trouble
16. Junglefowl genus
19. First letter in Athens
20. Lip-like
21. Migration trap, island off Scottish coast (2 words)
26. Not so bold
27. Man-(or woman) drawn vehicles
28. Bridled or tufted
29. Type of fatty ester
30. Diving fish-eater

Answers page 6

Down

1. Darwin found finches here, and tortioses
2. Said to be the smallest Empidonax
3. Lead-in prefix
4. Tacit
5. Son of chaos; dark as hell
6. Dark diving duck
7. Things you can't do
8. Lapwing feature
14. Push
15. Little surface duck
17. Hindu garment
18. Arctic mammal (2 words)
22. The lark is _____
23. Ski event
24. Religious feast or island
25. Antarctic Ocean bird
26. Nuthatch genus

Letters...Kestrel's Behaviour

I am suggesting an explanation for the unusual behaviour of the kestrel reported in the last *OFO NEWS*.

In June, the female would be dominated by her hormonal program, even if she does not have an active nest. This would include certain responses to (whitish) nestlings. A paper towel could well act as a trigger.

The indifference of the male seems to reinforce this theory. Female hawks almost always assume the departments of housekeeper, childcare and dietician, the male being relegated to those of commissariat and defence, as well as nurse's aide. For the male to share the strong responses of the female would only lead to time-wasting domestic squabbles.

Doug Sadler, RR 1, Peterborough ON K9J 6X5

David Bird, an expert on kestrels, told OFO NEWS that Doug Sadler's explanation was very plausible.

Black Tern in Ontario

by
Erica Dunn

As co-author of the recent *Birds of North America* account for the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*, I had to immerse myself in the literature of this attractive but elusive marsh-nesting species. Here I offer some comments on the conservation of Black Terns in Ontario. Black Terns in Ontario are concentrated in productive marshes along the edge of the Canadian Shield and margins of the Great Lakes, but there are also a few sites in northwestern Ontario and on James Bay. Populations have declined over the past 20 years, according to Breeding Bird Survey and other evidence, but there were undoubtedly earlier declines resulting from habitat loss. Ornithologist Percy Taverner wrote in 1934 that "no extensive expanse of watery marsh in southern Ontario was lacking Black Terns". Since pre-settlement times, an estimated 70% of this region's wetlands have been lost, largely to agricultural uses (Austen & Cadman 1994).

Because of the historic and known recent declines over most of its range, the Black Tern has been ranked highly for conservation concern. Little effort has gone into active management though, and has gone mainly into preservation or restoration of wetlands to the state preferred by nesting terns, and to the building of artificial nest platforms. But are these the right things to do? What do Black Terns really need?

Nest marshes usually have 50-75% of the surface dotted with emergent vegetation, with nests commonly placed in vegetation adjacent to small open pools.

Studies show that nests are usually built on floating boards or mats of dead vegetation, typically amidst vegetation in water about one metre deep. There is a great deal of variation, however, in water depth, type of vegetation and its density, and in nest substrate. Two characteristics do appear to be particularly important: degree of emergent vegetation and wetland size. Nest marshes usually have 50-75% of the surface dotted with emergent vegetation, with nests commonly placed in vegetation adjacent to small open pools. Next, there is a preference for marshes (or complexes of smaller marshes) that cover 20 hectares or more.

Marshes are dynamic ecosystems, and Black Terns often abandon sites that grow in too densely or are scoured out in winter storms. They display none of the strong site fidelity of many other tern species, moving as necessary to find better sites. Indeed, many observers who have noted local declines in Black Terns feel there is plenty of suitable habitat remaining so perhaps this is not the main problem. Maybe we should be paying more attention to other needs of the species.

The possible impact of pesticides and of disturbance



by boaters has been reviewed and seems not to be significant. Nest success is low but this appears to be normal. Most nests are lost to storms and fluctuations of water levels, and the birds readily re-nest. On the other hand, little is known about food availability, or about conditions on migration routes or on the wintering grounds.

The primary summer foods are small fish (where available) and insects (sometimes exclusively). Historic accounts mention Black Terns feeding on "clouds" of dragonflies or other large insects, or on "carpets" of minnows in shallow bays. In an age of altered aquatic ecosystems and extensive control of insects, Black Terns may now face a drastically lowered food base. This could reduce nesting success and might especially impact survival of migrating terns, who must search for food in unfamiliar stopover sites as they move through the central US and Caribbean. Food supplies on the mainly marine wintering grounds (in Pacific waters off Central America) may also be diminished. Panama's anchovy fishery collapsed in 1972, about the same time that Black Tern populations declined most strongly, and has not fully recovered since.

We do not know if changing food supplies figure in Black Tern population decline and could not do a lot about it anyway. However, knowing the answer might help us decide what conservation actions are most appropriate in Ontario.

References

Austen, M.J.W. and M.D. Cadman. 1994. The status of the Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) in Ontario. Unpublished report by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and Long Point Bird Observatory (Ontario Rare Breeding Bird Program) for Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 29 pp.

Several OFO members have written species accounts for The Birds of North America series. In the October 1995 OFO NEWS, we featured Bruce Falls and the White-throated Sparrow. Erica Dunn, who co-authored the Black Tern account with OFO member David Agro, has written this update on the Black Tern in Ontario. Dan Strickland will be writing about the Gray Jay for the June OFO NEWS.

Answers to Crossbird Puzzle

Across: 1.Gallinule 2.Comer 10.Lean-tos 11.Albatross 12.Potoo 13.Distress 16.Gallus 19.Alpha 20.Labial 21.Fair Isle 26.Shier 27.Rickshaws 28.Titnices 29.Olein 30.Merganser
Down: 1.Galapagos 2.Least Flycatcher 3.Intro 4.Unsaid 5.Erebus 6.Scoter 7.Impossibilities 8.Crest 14.Impel 15.Teal 17.Sari 18.Polar Bear 22.Rising 23.Slalom 24.Easter 25.Prion 26.Sitta

OFO trips

Petroglyphs 1996 by Geoff Carpentier

Spectacular winter weather attracted 28 OFO birders to Petroglyphs Provincial Park. The group was rewarded with good views of 12 Red Crossbills, a large flock of Evening Grosbeaks, a Pileated Woodpecker and many Common Ravens. Two distant Bald Eagles were seen from Nepton Mines. Winter finches and Black-capped Chickadees are generally in short supply in the northern woods this winter.

OFO Pelagic

To everyone's dismay, high winds were forecast for Lake Ontario and the much anticipated 1995 Pelagic was cancelled. The **1996 Pelagic** will be on **Sunday September 22**. Registration information will follow in the April *Ontario Birds*.

Future Field Trips

March 2 (Saturday) **NEW DATE**

Kingston Area Winter Birding.

Leader: Bruce Di Labio. Group size limited
Call Bruce by February 14 for information and to register (613) 599-8733. ***NEW TRIP***

April 27 (Saturday) Algonquin

Leader: Ron Tozer. Meet at the WEST GATE of the park at 9:00 a.m.

May 4 (Saturday) Rondeau Provincial Park.

Leader: Allen Woodliffe. Meet at the Visitors Centre at 8:00 a.m. Call Allen by April 29 (519) 351-7884. ***NEW TRIP***

May 24-25 (Friday-Saturday) Rainy River.

Leader: Dave Elder. (807) 597-2008, or Box 252 Atikokan, ON P0T 1C0. Call Dave before May 1 to confirm. Meet at the junction of Worthington Rd. #3 and Highway 11 which is about 10 km east of Rainy River (3 sideroads east of town), 7:00 a.m. **local time.**

June 2 (Sunday) Owen Sound.

Leader: Dave Fidler. From Springmount (west of Owen Sound) go 4 km on Hwy 21 to Jackson. Turn right (north) & 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. Tel: (519) 371-2919.

June 9 (Sunday) Carden Alvar.

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

June 15 (Saturday) St. Clair Wildlife Reserve and Pelee. **Leader: John Miles.**

(519) 587-5223. Meet at the gates of the St. Clair Wildlife Reserve at 7:00 a.m. Breeding Birds: Yellow-headed Blackbird, Least Bittern, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, rails, etc.

***NEW TRIP* JUST ADDED**

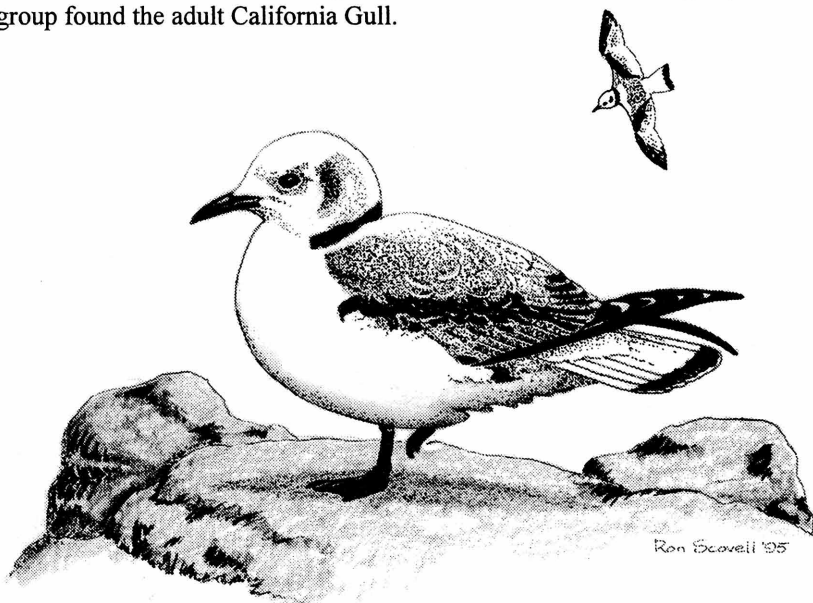
Niagara's Gulls by Jerry Guild

On November 26, a large group of OFO birders met leader Ron Scovell at Niagara-on-the-Lake. The first stop at Sir Adam Beck produced a first winter Franklin's Gull, an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull, an adult Thayer's Gull and an adult Kumlien's Iceland Gull. Down the Hydro access road we had better views of the Franklin's Gull perched on the rocks.

At the Whirlpool, the adult Ross's Gull was not seen all day. The consolation was a first winter Black-legged Kittiwake and a small flock of Common Redpolls feeding on the seeds of birch catkins.

In the gorge below the Falls, we had great views of a juvenile Sabine's Gull (the only gull in juvenile plumage at this time of year), and another first winter Black-legged Kittiwake in front of the American Falls. Also below the Falls were a first winter Iceland Gull and a first winter Glaucous Gull. Above the Falls, a Peregrine Falcon perched in the willows after spooking thousands of gulls.

In the afternoon, one group saw the Franklin's Gull again, and a later group found the adult California Gull.



First winter Black-legged Kittiwake

Still anticipating spotting the Ross's Gull, about 36 people went to the famous fly-by at Niagara-on-the-Lake. Birders can observe thousands of gulls leaving the Niagara River to roost on Lake Ontario. Amongst the departing Bonaparte's, a Little Gull and a Franklin's Gull were picked out, but no Ross's Gull.

Niagara is the best place in the world to see gulls in November. This year's group saw 12 species, more than one quarter of the world's gull species!

Cornwall Dam by Bruce DiLabio

OFO's first field trip to the Cornwall Dam attracted 26 birders on September 30, 1995. A sunny and warm day kept us comfortable but was not the best weather for finding a rare seabird at this eastern Ontario/Upstate New York hotspot on the St. Lawrence River.

On the American side, the observation deck of the Moses-Saunders Power Dam allows fabulous views of the St. Lawrence River above and below the dam. Our best birds were an adult winter and a second winter Little Gull among the scattering of Bonaparte's and one lingering Common Tern.

Next year's trip will be on November 16. The later date will improve our chances for seeing gulls and rarities. I look forward to seeing you there.

Profile of an Artist

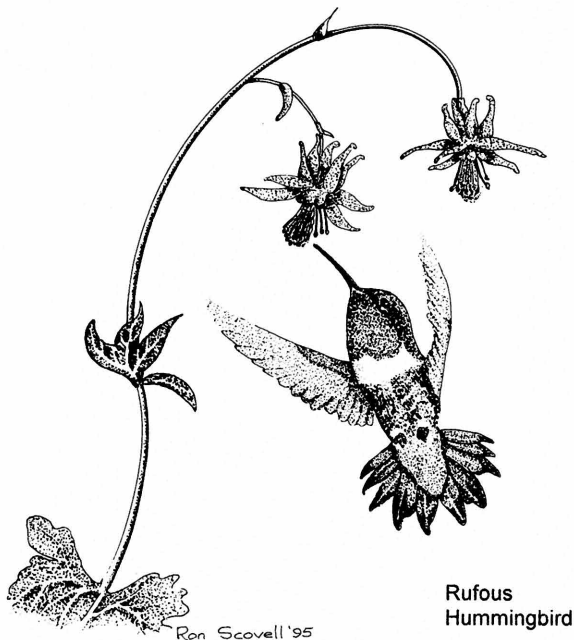
Ron Scovell

by Lou Marsh

This issue of OFO NEWS is illustrated by Ron Scovell.

Birds (and literally everything about birds, including observing, feeding, chasing, ticking, collecting books and drawing) became a major force in Ron's life at age thirteen. His older brother Doug reluctantly dragged him along on Sunday birding excursions only when he had no one else to go birding. Reading Jim Baillie's column *In Birdland* in the Telegram each Saturday became a ritual, and trying to copy Terry Shortt's beautiful sketches of the 'bird-of-the-week' was the birth of an interest in bird art for Ron.

Ron attended the Ontario College of Art to pursue a career in nature illustration where he was influenced greatly by Carl Schaefer and Charles Comfort. His future as an artist came to an abrupt end during his second year when his teacher/



Rufous
Hummingbird

counsellor, Frederick Hagen, asked him what field of art he intended to pursue. When Ron replied "Wildlife Art", Hagen's reply was simple, blunt and destructive. "Great hobby; what are you going to do for a living?" He then walked away, leaving a bewildered student to ponder his future. A talk with Terry Shortt confirmed Hagen's assessment, and Ron left OCA, entered U of T to major in biology, and later McMaster, for a degree in physical education. After graduation, he entered teaching, retiring in 1988 to pursue his hobbies of birding, tour leading, collecting bird books and bird art, and looking after his bird feeders which feed as many as 500+ at one time.

His love for natural history art was a wonderful diversion from teaching, and Ron's art graced the covers of *The Birds of Simcoe County*, *Ontario Field Biologist* and *Ontario Birds*.

Ron's major love is the avifauna of Tropical America. He has studied birdlife in Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Suriname, Brazil and Costa Rica.

Ron, a past OFO president, served on the OFO Executive from 1986 to 1993.

Thank You

OFO thanks the following members for their generous donations:

Jack Alvo	Dave Elder	T.R. Murray
Peter Andrews	Marshall Fields	Judith Nancekivell
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Jim Dowall	Barbara & Bill Mann	Peter Webb
Bruce Duncan	Barry Mitchell	Toronto Field Naturalists

What to Know when Buying Binoculars

by Vitus Schilling of Leica Camera

Third in a series for birders considering buying new binoculars

Binoculars and Eyeglass Wearers

Eyeglass wearers were at a disadvantage with older binoculars because the raised eyecups forced the binoculars away from the eyes. This resulted in a narrow field of view and many birds were missed. Removing one's eyeglasses each time to look at a bird was time-consuming. Some birders screwed off the eyecups or filed them down to allow a wider field of view while wearing their eyeglasses!

Today's binoculars come with practical sliding down eyecups (as on the new top-of-the-line Leicas), or roll-down rubber eyecups. However, having these eyecups does not always guarantee a wide enough field of view.

To test whether you are seeing the full field of view, first look through the binoculars with your glasses off, noting the field of view. Then roll down the eyecups and compare the view with your glasses on. Also look through binoculars with the eyecups up, then compare with them down. If you feel you are not getting an adequate field of view, try another model or brand.

It is amazing how many people who wear eyeglasses do not know about lowering the eyecups on their binoculars!

An informative brochure is available free from Leica Camera (905) 940-9262.

Next issue: Twilight Performance

Salt Poisoning?

Ted Armstrong alerted *OFO NEWS* to a report in the *Wildlife Health Centre Newsletter* 3(2): 6. White-winged Crossbills in Quebec were suspected of dying from eating too much road salt. Has anyone noted this possibility in Ontario's winter finches?

OFO NEWS Editor

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