

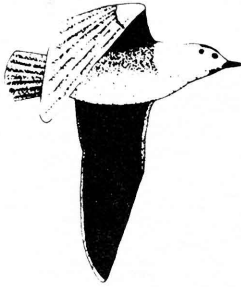
# ONTARIO BIRDS

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Ontario Field Ornithologists

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Ronald Scovell  
1985



## Ontario Birds

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## 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*.

**Table of Contents**

Letters to the Editor	41
<b>Articles</b>	
The Bulletin of the Great Lakes Ornithological Club, 1905-1909 / <i>Jack Cranmer-Byng</i>	45
The Distribution of the American Crow in Ontario in Early Winter / <i>D.V. Chip Weseloh</i>	55
Winter Records of Swainson's Thrushes in Ontario / <i>Martin K. McNicholl</i>	64
<b>Notes</b>	
Winter Records of Blue-gray Gnatcatcher / <i>Ted Cheskey</i>	68
Interaction of Two Snowy Owls in Burlington, Ontario / <i>Rob Cheskey and Ted Cheskey</i>	69
Early Nesting Record for European Starling in Southern Ontario / <i>S.C. Lougheed and D.W. Graham</i>	70
Food Gathering for Nestlings by a Male Black-backed Woodpecker ( <i>Picoides arcticus</i> ) / <i>William J. Crins</i>	71
<b>Topic of Note</b>	
Yellow Warbler Nestling Predation by Eastern Fox Snake / <i>Reid Wilson</i>	73
Migrant Warblers Scold an Eastern Fox Snake / <i>Victoria Lister Carley</i>	75
Further Observations on Structural Damage to Buildings by Woodpeckers / <i>A. Geoffrey Carpentier</i>	76
<b>Book Review</b>	
Birds of North America, Eastern Region / reviewed by <i>Peter Thoem</i>	78
<b>New Titles /</b>	
<i>William J. Crins</i>	67
<b>OFO Announcements /</b>	
	79
Cover Illustration: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher with chickadees by Ron Scovell.	

## Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors:

Point Pelee National Park, without question, is deserving of its status as a Mecca for spring birders. But I question whether it is the most appropriate location for the spring field meeting of the OFO.

Unwilling to put up with the human hordes that overrun Pelee on May weekends, I planned my visit for a few weekdays immediately following the spring meeting. But I found that this offered no escape. The fact is that Pelee in May has just about reached the limit of its capacity to absorb the rapidly growing numbers of birders. "Operation Spread Out" was implemented to tackle the problem, but this voice of reason is barely audible over the din and clamour of the carnival atmosphere.

It is, of course, encouraging to see so many people sharing a common enthusiasm for birds. But, unfortunately, Pelee's reputation has outgrown its ability to deliver. Unrealistic expectations now draw crowds of once-a-year birders who would probably see just about the same variety of bird life in their own back yards if they only looked. What was a birder's paradise is fast being overtaken by a phenomenon most worthy of an anthropologist's investigation.

I certainly didn't mind being asked repeatedly to name the singing Tennessee Warblers which were everywhere, but seemed to have stumbled every second group I encountered. And I politely kept

my chuckles muffled when I overheard an elderly woman challenging the judgement of a staff naturalist who had just given the obvious explanation of her sighting of "a black bird with a yellow bill, poking its head out of a nesting hole." But finding "Catbird" entered in the Unusual Sightings Book was really too much. I suddenly felt as though I was on the wrong side of the bars in a zoo (Do the birds flock to Pelee to watch the antics of the humans?); I had to get out!

There are many other fine spring birding locations around Ontario. Rondeau, Long Point and Presqu'île might even rival Pelee's long list of rarities if they received as much attention. I think it behooves the OFO to help focus attention on these "under-birded" parks while at the same time relieving some of the pressure on Point Pelee. This can readily be accomplished by holding the annual spring meeting at an alternate site. And I, for one, will make a point of attending instead of staying away, as I did this spring.

Virgil Martin  
Maryhill, Ont.

Dear Editors:

A minor alteration of my Guest Editorial in *Ontario Birds* 2:94-98, 1984 may leave perceptive readers puzzled as to how statements made in 1967

could become so engrained as to qualify as dogma and yet be refuted by the next year. In fact, the pioneer ethologist, O. Heinroth stated in a German publication in 1930 that birds do not yawn and his influence on the study of birds was so great that nobody questioned the statement. Even Konrad Lorenz commented on the taxonomic importance of the "fact" that neither birds nor reptiles yawn. This view held so firmly that the Sauers had a paper complete with documentary photographs on yawning in *Sylvia* warblers rejected. It was their discussion of the rigidity of this prevailing view that led Harrison to publish his evidence differentiating yawning from bill-stretching in the Greenfinch.

This, of course, does not alter the theme discussed in the editorial.

Martin K. McNicholl  
Port Rowan, Ontario

Dear Editors:

I should like the opportunity to reply to Ron Ridout's review in Vol. 3, No. 1 (1985) of *Our Heritage of Birds: Peterborough County in the Kawarthas*. This is not in the role of a bear defending her whelps. I feel the review was honest. But some matters of deeper import are involved, and these may affect others in a similar situation.

The book was sponsored by the Peterborough Field Naturalists, whose members gave invaluable input. I was allowed very wide powers of decision, and the onus is on me. Indeed, I walked deliberately with wide-open eyes into the situations which have concerned Mr. Ridout.

I believe very strongly that the purpose of the publication was only partly to contribute to the academic knowledge of an elite group of bird students. Perhaps more important was its role in reaching and indoctrinating the general public, since continuance of our natural 'heritage' largely depends on this. An attractive format, a semi-popular style, a variety of treatment and background material, and a low selling price were all part of this approach. An ambitious 3500 copies were printed of which around 3000 have been sold to date.

I knew at the time that this policy would induce some academics to dismiss the book as lightweight and superficial ("for the novice birder"). Fashion rules in these things, and we buck the trend at our peril. So I understand the somewhat patronizing conclusions of your reviewer.

However, I must rebut the implied charge of factual carelessness, a serious and damaging matter, as was pointed out. *A great deal of research, checking and heart-searching went into every entry*. Here again a policy decision had to be made—whether to omit everything not documented or approved by an 'official' body. Anyone who has taken part in the current Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project for the past five years has confirmed that the books and the experts were woefully inadequate. At first, anything which did not fit the accepted body of knowledge or opinion was often rejected or downgraded ("Must be a migrant

or non-breeder"). We have all, I suppose, been guilty at some time of prejudging the facts and dismissing what does not fit our theories.

Yet there always remains the question of reliability, and it is not a clean, open-and-shut one. Many data were in fact rejected in preparing the book. But in other cases I felt that I should not be the one to reject arbitrarily what might well be a fact, albeit an inadequately supported one. Some of us remember the time when Jim Baillie was (rightly) rejecting all of the steady stream of Blue Grosbeak reports for Ontario. I felt then that the cumulative effect of these might prove significant (as it did) and should not be denied the light of day. Some of the earlier observations were almost certainly accurate. They were not decisive but they were useful in directing attention to possibilities. Bird study is rarely an exact matter, but rather one of informed but wary judgement.

When I felt it would be presumptuous on my part to drop an entry (although the evidence was less than 100% convincing), I decided to include it, while indicating the level of support behind it. The reader was then free to take it on its merits. Mr. Ridout has made this point in his review. I think we do this with any publication of this sort, however impressive. None is perfect. (In my extensive correspondence with Ross James he acknowledged this very point, in connection with the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario*).

The February Scarlet Tanager

was apparently submitted by the observer to a previous record committee. Dr. James (in litt. April 13, 1983) wondered why I would question it, so it was included.

With regard to the Western Tanager entry, the *timing* of this observation by two experienced observers independently was unfortunate. But it appeared from any information I could gather at the time to fulfill criteria for this species, even though other possibilities have been raised since. Indeed, it is still a legitimate possibility, as has been acknowledged.

I agree with Mr. Ridout that the use of a combination of weeks and days in the individual species summaries has proved confusing. The usage was explained, but I should have remembered that few people read instructions! I must question whether use of specific dates would have been 'more accurate'. In many cases the body of available data would not have supported such a statement. Peterborough has historically been a rather neglected area ornithologically.

Future authors of local bird books may wish to consider the pitfalls I have pointed out, and make their own informed decisions. I hope they will not dismiss my work as trivial, careless or unconsidered.

Doug Sadler  
Peterborough, Ontario

Dear Editors:

Ron Ridout's comments on use of the term "hypothetical" in his review of Doug Sadler's book on the birds of the Peterborough area (*Ont. Birds* 3:37-38, 1985) embrace two separate issues— inclusion of unsubstantiated records and the use of the term itself.

Most state, provincial and regional works contain either a "hypothetical" list or include "hypothetical" species in brackets, smaller print, or some other manner differentiated from substantiated records. Some compilations include *all* species for which reports exist even if no details are available, while others include only records by reputable observers who provide documentary detail, but who were unable to obtain substantiating evidence or have other observers verify their sighting. Such probable, but unverified records may prove useful in future compilations, and outright rejection of them may obscure some pattern of range expansion not recognized until later. Species for which no details are available should certainly be rejected, but if the records have been published or cataloged elsewhere, a separate section or appendix indicating that these records have been rejected, similar to that used in the annual report of the Ontario Bird Records Committee, will save future researchers from unnecessary duplication of effort.

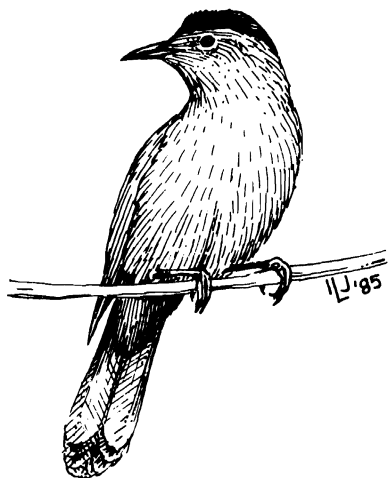
The term "hypothetical" in itself has long seemed inappropriate to me, as dictionaries characterize it in terms of supposition or

conjecture, and a few regional bird works use it in that sense. *Birds of Pacific Rim National Park* by Hatler *et al.* is one exception, where "hypothetical" species included those whose known range in surrounding areas suggested that they should occur locally. Except in the case of species currently undergoing a range expansion in the direction of the area in question, such speculation strikes me as out of place in such books.

In short, I feel that there is a place for probable, unsubstantiated records in regional works, provided that they are so labelled.

"Unsubstantiated" or some similar term would be better than "hypothetical" in labelling such records.

Martin K. McNicholl  
Port Rowan, Ontario



# The Bulletin of the Great Lakes Ornithological Club, 1905-1909

by  
Jack Cranmer-Byng

The Great Lakes Ornithological Club (GLOC) was the name chosen by a few naturalists living in the region between Toronto and Detroit for a 'club' which they started in 1905. An account of the origin and early years of this club has appeared in *Ontario Birds*<sup>1</sup>. The object of the present paper is to throw more light on the nature of the 'Bulletin' which members wrote and circulated among themselves.

The need for closer co-operation among a small group of ornithologists living in the Great Lakes region had been recognized from the first years of the twentieth century. This need was expressed in correspondence between J.H. Fleming and P.A. Taverner in 1904 concerning the possibility of making a survey of the birds of the Great Lakes region and the need to have a meeting with those who would be interested in taking part in such a survey. As Fleming wrote on 3 December:

"There is a lot I very much want to talk over, particularly before I go to any meeting or commit myself in any way. A survey of

the Great Lakes has been present in my mind for a very long time. I feel it is a matter that one man alone must revise. A number of observers is absolutely necessary but the whole thing must be edited by one man who can judge of the identifications, know his men and be able to fill in the gaps. For instance it frequently occurs that a collector is only in a position to record the smaller birds and has no facilities for getting the hawks and water birds on which a very great depends and the records of which are poor and often wrong."<sup>2</sup>

Taverner replied at length on 7 December:

"You speak of the lack of material for a survey of the Great Lakes. Now it is just to gather such material that we want to start a new club. . . . The object of the club would not be so much the final work of a survey at first as the gathering of material and the keeping up of interest."<sup>3</sup>

The problem of keeping in touch with each other regularly and thus of keeping up interest in the work of observation and record-keeping



was crucial, because those actively engaged in ornithology were very few and lived scattered over a large area (Table 1).

In the same letter Taverner proposed a tentative solution:

“An organization of a correspondence type covering the ground from the maritime provinces to the prairie land and confined to the Provinces and States bordering on the Great Lakes. Active membership to be strictly confined to workers of known ability and governed on much the same lines as the A.O.U. (American Ornithological Union) that the policy can be guided along strict scientific lines.”

Taverner continued his suggestions for another four pages in

considerable detail, giving reasons why the Michigan Ornithological Club would not be suitable as a medium for their project (“the club is a club of boys”), but raising the possibility of publishing material in the *Wilson Bulletin*.<sup>4</sup>

Fleming responded to these suggestions with a number of reservations, among which was a query about A.B. Klugh's reliability as an ornithologist.<sup>5</sup> Taverner met some of Fleming's points, including his own assessment of Klugh's ability and personality, and also discussed the need to get ideas from all who might be involved before deciding how to organize such a “correspondence club”. He summarized his own position at

*Table 1. Members of the GLOC, 1905-1909*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Profession</b>
James H. Fleming	Toronto	Businessman and ornithologist
Dr. Lynds Jones	Oberlin College, Ohio	Associate Professor of Zoology
J.E. Keays	London	Businessman and birding companion of Saunders
A. Brooker Klugh	Guelph	Instructor at Agricultural College (moved to Queen's University in 1906)
William E. Saunders	London	Businessman and all round naturalist
Bradshaw H. Swales	Detroit	Lawyer and ornithologist
James S. Wallace	Toronto	Businessman and naturalist (member from 1907)
Percy A. Taverner	Detroit	Architectural draughtsman and ornithologist
Dr. William Brodie	Toronto	Corresponding member (d. 1909)

that point when he wrote:

“Perhaps the best thing to do is to form a club without officers or organization.”<sup>6</sup>

During January and February 1905 there was a regular exchange of letters between Taverner and Fleming about the projected “club”. Eventually Taverner, Swales and Klugh had a weekend meeting with Saunders at his home in London at the end of February. The only thing decided was to start a bird club with the name “The Great Lakes Ornithological Club” with Saunders as secretary – the only officer at that point. However, the club could not function without some regulations and Klugh undertook to write the first draft of a constitution. This was set out, in seven clauses, in the first issue of the club’s organ, the *Bulletin*, dated 22 March 1905.<sup>7</sup> Only one clause caused any dissent and this concerned the method by which the *Bulletin* should be conducted. The gist of Klugh’s suggestion was as follows:

Any member who had a contribution for the *Bulletin* should send it to the Secretary, Saunders. When enough material had been received the Secretary should send out a *Bulletin* for circulation. Each member had the right to add comments, under his initials, on any of the contributions, after which he should forward the *Bulletin* to the next member on the list. Eventually, when a member’s contribution, together with various comments, reached him again he should detach it from the *Bulletin*, add any further comments, and then send it to the secretary to keep. All contributions, together

with the comments they generated, would be available for members to refer to at any time on request.

This system was favoured by Saunders, who commented on the value of preserving all the contributions as a complete record of each issue. He argued as follows:

“For example suppose I send out a query on a certain species, it goes around the circuit, is annotated with each member experiences, is it not a complete record for that species in the localities in which we have members? In case the growth of the Club demands an Annual there will be good material at hand to insert. In case each member detaches his contributions the record will be destroyed.”

The idea of having a circulating bulletin composed of brief ‘papers’, notes and queries, and comments on contributions in order to keep members informed on each other’s observations in matters such as migration, breeding records, range extensions and other topics was an excellent one in theory, but in practice it ran into difficulties.

Early in 1906 Fleming, who distrusted leaving his own contributions permanently among the Club’s records, put forward the following amendment to the Constitution:

“I propose that the Constitution of the Great Lakes Ornithological Club be amended so that the member who originates a paper can retain it, instead of leaving it in the hands of the Secretary and that each member if he so wishes can detach his contribution from the bulletin after it has been circulated once.”

He justified it by the following arguments:

"I think it is unwise and unfair to the individual to have his opinions of today lying in manuscript where they can be quoted, ten years hence, as his opinions by others who have had ten years advance of knowledge to help them. On the other hand if any opinions of today are published today they are judged by what has been printed up to today, and will be so judged ten years hence. . . . A freedom of expression that is the useful part of our bulletin must be lessened by a knowledge that the written word has gone beyond recall."

Taverner felt that the greatest value of the Bulletin was its informality:

"One can advance tentative ideas without the scrupulous care necessary to a . . . paper for publication. Things can be discussed pro and con without fear that some day some ghost of our past work will rise up and smite us. It is a medium for gathering material and not for the publication of final work."

Saunders made another attempt to persuade members to let their papers, with the comments attached to them, remain in the keeping of the Club. He pointed out that often the person who wrote the original paper did not contribute the most important part; this derived from the comments of others on the topic. The paper without the comments on it would be of little value. Saunders moved an amendment to annul Fleming's amendment. When a vote was taken in the December 1906 issue of the Bulletin, Saunders' amendment was defeated by a vote of four to three. Fleming, Taverner,

Swales and Klugh voted against the amendment; Saunders, Jones and Keays in favour of it.

In retrospect we may feel that this was unfortunate because it deprived us of a full record of what several outstanding ornithologists were discussing among themselves in relation to the Great Lakes region during the decade 1900-1910. But the Bulletin was never intended to be a scientific journal of natural science. The issues were circulated at irregular intervals (between three and five per year), some contributions were typed, others were not. The contributions, referred to as 'papers', were actually short statements on an interesting problem or an observation, but usually not more than a few pages in length. Many contributions were in the form of brief notes, or comments and criticisms of the 'papers' which had originated a discussion (Figure 1). This was long before the days of photocopying, and none of the members had secretarial help, so almost no copies of contributions were made. For instance, the only 'paper' in the first issue of the Bulletin of March 1905 was by W.E. Saunders on "The winter occurrence and spring migrations of the Goldfinch at London". While it circulated among members, Fleming attached the following comment:

"The Goldfinch paper is one of the most important things I have read for a long time. It exactly illustrates the need of such an exchange of ideas as is going on and the importance of overlooking nothing. I have birds taken at Emsdale in Parry Sound District, Ont. in January . . . There is not enough

## SNOWY OWLS

Look out for Snowy owls: Ruthven Beane writes me from Chicago that it looks like another big flight this winter. He saw one Nov. 17 th. and has word from a Boston taxidermist that he so far has received about twenty. Campion got one in to mount the first week in Nov. Since then in his and Appingers shops there have been about half a dozen brought in up to Dec. 3rd.

E. L. Mosely tells me that between Nov. 21 and 25 there have been about eight shot in the vicinity of Sandusky.

*P. A. Laverney*

I have reports from Thos. M. Earl, a taxidermist of Columbus, Ohio, to the effect that six of these owls have been brought to him to be mounted, all from localities south of Columbus. I have been unable to find any in this vicinity, and no reports of them have come in.

L. J.

*The Toronto records are as follows  
1905 Nov 13-18-23 Dec 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> There has been no  
unusual flight here or elsewhere in Ontario as far as  
I can judge J. H. T.*

*I have a report of 1 Snowy Owl from Mt  
Forest, Ont. Jan. 1906.*

*One at Hyde Park in December seen by J. A. Saunders  
J. E. R.*

*2 or 3 stuffed locally by taxidermists  
this winter. The great numbers heard of was  
a Wisconsin taxidermist has mounted 15  
specimens this winter all taken in the vicinity.  
H. B. Bordin*

Figure 1. An example of a discussion page from an issue of the Bulletin.

attention paid to resident birds.”

One might hope to find this contribution among the records of the club but, ironically, it is not there because Fleming's amendment to the constitution resulted in members removing nearly all of

the ‘papers’ they wrote for the Bulletin. If Saunders had had his way they would have all been preserved – his own Goldfinch paper among them.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of the removal of material from the secretary's file,

enough has survived to provide a sampling of the kind of topics they were discussing, the quality of their observations and the state of their ornithological knowledge as it relates to the Great Lakes. Some of the 'papers' first discussed in the Bulletin were written up with notes and references and eventually published in journals (See Table 2).

As an example of the way in which a typical piece of information was quickly circulated in the Bulletin, we can take the report by Saunders of a large bird kill which took place in October 1906. In the December issue, he explained what had happened

under the title "A Migration Disaster". There was a sudden drop in temperature on the night of 10 October to freezing, and on the night of 11 October it was down to 28°F. Between Goderich and Sarnia more than a foot of snow fell. A heavy migration of birds across Lake Huron must have taken place on those nights since hundreds of dead birds were found on the lakeshore. Saunders went to Grand Bend and saw the devastation for himself. In a letter to B.H. Swales in Detroit, he wrote:

"Had a great walk (20 miles) sorry you weren't there. Birds

*Table 2.* Topics discussed in the GLOC Bulletin and articles subsequently published elsewhere.

Topic in Bulletin	Author	Title of Publication	Journal
Ornithology of Lake Erie Islands. Jan. 1906.	Lynds Jones	A study of the avifauna of the Lake Erie islands	<i>Wilson Bulletin</i> , 24:6-18, 95-108, 142-153, 171-186 (1912)
A migration disaster. Dec. 1906.	W.E. Saunders	A migration disaster in Western Ontario	<i>Auk</i> , 24:108-110 (Jan. 1907)
Ring-billed Gull. June 1906	W.E. Saunders	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Wilson Bulletin</i> , 19:73-74 (1907)
Tagging of Birds. May 1905	P.A. Taverner	Tagging Migrants	<i>Auk</i> , 23:232 (1906)
Tagging of Birds. Jan. 1906	P.A. Taverner	A Tagged Flicker	<i>Wilson Bulletin</i> , 18:21-22 (1906)
Subspecies. March 1906	P.A. Taverner	Trinomials	<i>Ontario Natural Science Bulletin</i> , 2:16-17 (1906)
Point Pelee Birds. (various dates)	P.A. Taverner and B.H. Swales	The Birds of Point Pelee	<i>Wilson Bulletin</i> , 19(2):37-54 (June 1907), 19(3): 82-99 (Sept. 1907), 19(4): 133-153 (Dec. 1907) 20(2): 79-129 (June 1908)

appeared on the beach three or four miles below Grand Bend, and I began my census. They were usually much too far gone for specimens, but it tells you exactly what was migrating then. I counted for two miles (2½ hours) and then left nearly a mile uncounted. Beyond the river there were miles more!"

Saunders then listed the numbers of birds, by species, that he had found, among which were: 22 Brown Creepers, 24 Saw-whet Owls, 100 Winter Wrens, 131 Golden-crowned Kinglets and 1 Yellow Rail. The grand total was 1,484 birds. He finished his letter with a dig at Swales for not joining him when notified:

"This was a unique experience that ones [sic] lifetime may not expect. Moral - learn to make up your mind quickly and *let business slide* - (When necessary)"<sup>9</sup>.

While the above account was circulating, Dr. William Brodie added his comment, congratulating Saunders on his valuable contribution to the literature of bird migration in Ontario, and saying it was fortunate that he was prepared to visit the locality in time to make identification certain. Brodie, however, was sorry that a more extensive search was not continued for a greater distance along the shoreline north and south of the area covered by Saunders, as this might have determined the direction and extent of the flight more fully. A revised version of Saunders' paper was published in *The Auk*.<sup>10</sup>

A different kind of topic was introduced by Taverner who reported what to him was a new

phenomenon, witnessed at Point Pelee in October, 1906:

"Near the base of the Point I saw a Coot in the ditch that runs along the dyke. When I first noticed it it was swimming high but as soon as it saw that it was discovered it gradually sank to the water's level, and then lower until only its head was out and then even that disappeared and all that could be seen was its white outstretched bill sticking up and cutting the water like a knife leaving but the faintest ripple behind it."

He called to Swales to come and look, but by then even the tip of the bill had gone. In reporting the incident in the October Bulletin, Taverner suggested that a bird such as a coot or grebe must sink or rise through altering its specific gravity. While this issue was circulating, Fleming, Brodie, Klugh, Saunders and Lynds Jones offered explanations or observations. Lynds Jones' was particularly interesting:

"I want to add a bit of observation to the question of the birds' gradual sinking in the water. Klugh states that the birds are not *completely* submerged, and that therefore they can sufficiently decrease their specific gravity by the inhalation of air. I have stood upon an overhanging tree trunk directly over a pied-billed grebe which had so sunk. It was perfectly clear water so that everything could be plainly seen to the bottom of the five foot pond. When I first saw the bird it was riding in the water as grebes will when undisturbed. Upon my approaching it it gradually sank, and when I reached the tree it was resting on the bottom. It was clearly watching me, as the movements

of the head and eyes proved [sic]. I stood perfectly still leaning against the perpendicular branch, and had the satisfaction of seeing the bird (rise) slowly to the surface just beneath where I stood. I could see no motion of the feet or wings, neither did the water seem disturbed either at the bottom or in the course of the rising bird. Arriving at the surface and apparently seeing me more clearly, the bird sank again and again rose. Clearly this bird could not have obtained air when it began to rise from the bottom. With Saunders, I give it up."

Taverner then summarized the explanations put forward and pointed to the conclusion that both body and plumage cavities are used in the process, but that plumage cavities are of the greater importance.<sup>11</sup>

Sufficient material has survived from quite a number of other discussions to give an idea of the wide range of topics included in the Bulletin. For example:

A note by Taverner on "The tagging of birds and the use of a bird trap" appeared in the May 1905 issue. This is interesting because the banding of birds in North America had only just begun, and Taverner was one of the first to use bands in a systematic way. This note encouraged members of the Club to use some of Taverner's bands themselves. Fleming was the first person to band a Toronto bird, an American Robin, which he caught in the garden of his home at 267 Rusholme Road in September, 1905.<sup>12</sup> A further note by Taverner in the Bulletin in January 1906 announced his first successful

return of a banded bird. This was a Northern Flicker which had been banded in Iowa and recovered about 650 miles away in Louisiana.

A series of notes appeared on chickadees in relation to migration. Saunders initiated debate with the observation:

"We suppose (do we?) that this bird is more or less migratory. Possibly it may be. Last winter (1905-06) it did not appear in London - why? All the other migrants to whom the city offers a suitable route appeared. It usually - perhaps I should say often - roams to town in winter and feeds at my chickadee table, but not last winter."

Lynds Jones at Oberlin and Taverner in Detroit responded that the population appeared to remain the same throughout the year. Fleming in Toronto and Swales from his experience in south-eastern Michigan regarded it as a common migrant and winter resident; Klugh in Guelph considered it a permanent resident. Since opinion seemed divided Taverner made a practical proposal, namely that members of the Club should band young chickadees in order to see if any firm proof of migration could be obtained.<sup>13</sup>

The Bulletin of the GLOC petered out in the period 1910-1911, although no explanation for this can be found in the Club's records. Members still continued to visit Point Pelee and to keep ornithological notes, but by 1910 some members were committed to other concerns. Taverner was in the running for an appointment at the Victoria Memorial Museum being completed in Ottawa (in

1927 officially named the National Museum of Canada). Fleming was also involved during this period in the setting up of a new museum in Toronto which was to become the Royal Ontario Museum. Klugh was established at Queen's University and had turned his research towards botany. Saunders appears to have written most of the contributions between 1910 and 1911, but even his enthusiasm could not sustain the Bulletin.

The GLOC was a grandiose name for eight active ornithologists and one corresponding member. The only meetings they held were in the field whenever two or three members arranged to meet at Point Pelee for a few days or weeks. Otherwise, they kept in touch through circulating a Bulletin, issued at irregular intervals. Contributions were usually brief and handwritten, in a "colloquial" style suited more to verbal discussion than scientific exposition, and were not weighed down by notes and references. By agreement, these contributions were intended to be rather ephemeral; first thoughts to test an hypothesis or put forward a question. They were not intended for publication as they stood, but were the raw material out of which a member might develop a note or article for publication in *Auk*, *Wilson Bulletin*, *Ottawa Naturalist*, *Bulletin of the Michigan Ornithological Club*, or *Ontario Natural Science Bulletin*. From today's perspective it is a great pity that all the material written for the Bulletin was not copied and preserved permanently. W.E. Saunders, who acted as compiler

for the Bulletin, strongly urged that this should be done but was outvoted. Perhaps it was too much to expect members to contribute their first, uninhibited thoughts if they knew that these would be preserved for posterity. Instead, what we see is a small but very active and dedicated group of ornithologists educating each other by their interchange of ornithological information and ideas for a brief but exciting period. Saunders, Fleming, Jones, Taverner and Swales published useful notes and articles during these years, and continued to publish more in volume and maturity in the future. Although shortlived, the Bulletin of GLOC provided them with an excellent forum in which to develop as ornithologists at an important juncture in their careers.

#### Note

Fleming used very few punctuation marks in his correspondence, while Taverner's spelling was very erratic. To make quotations from their writings easier to understand at first reading punctuation marks have been added and spelling has been standardized.

#### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Cranmer-Byng, J.L.* 1984. The Great Lakes Ornithological Club: the origin and early years, 1905-1911. *Ontario Birds* 2:4-12.
- <sup>2</sup> Letter from J.H. Fleming to P.A. Taverner, 3 December 1904. Fleming Papers, Royal Ontario Museum (ROM).
- <sup>3</sup> Letter from P.A. Taverner to J.H. Fleming, 7 December 1904. Taverner Papers, ROM.



- <sup>4</sup> Edited from Oberlin College, Ohio, by Lynds Jones.
- <sup>5</sup> Alfred Brooker Klugh had recently emigrated to Canada from Britain and was studying natural science at the Agricultural College, Guelph. Fleming had reservations about Klugh, believing him to be too cocksure for a man of only 22.
- <sup>6</sup> Letter from P.A. Taverner to J.H. Fleming, 29 December 1904. Taverner, at the age of 29, was very much the pragmatist, a trait which remained with him throughout his life. See also letter from J.H. Fleming to P.A. Taverner, 2 February 1905, and P.A. Taverner to J.H. Fleming, 10 February 1905.
- <sup>7</sup> Great Lakes Ornithological Club records, ROM.
- <sup>8</sup> Even the contents of issues are sometimes uncertain. George M. Stirrett, when he was gathering material in the 1960s for a history of the GLOC, attempted to "reconstruct" hypothetical contents lists from "internal" evidence where it existed, and even compiled a typed "Index to the Circulating Bulletin". Unfortunately, his lists do not always agree with the material currently preserved in the ROM archives. I have been unable to find any reference to Saunders' Goldfinch paper as a publication in any journal. The full title of the paper was only preserved in Taverner's "Journal of Bird Observations", 22 March 1905, Taverner Papers, ROM.
- <sup>9</sup> Letter from W.E. Saunders to B.H. Swales, 22 October 1906. Taverner Papers, "Journal of Bird Observations", ROM.
- <sup>10</sup> Saunders, W.E. 1907. *Auk* 24:108-110.
- <sup>11</sup> Taverner preserved the full discussion on "The sinking of birds without visible effort" in his "Journal of Bird Observations" for October, 1906. Taverner Papers, ROM.
- <sup>12</sup> J.H. Fleming, "Journal", 24 September 1905, Fleming Papers, ROM Fleming recorded using band number 1 on a young American Robin. The major problem that prospective banders faced at this time was 'how to capture your bird', so Taverner suggested that young birds should be used.
- <sup>13</sup> Bulletin, January 1906. Great Lakes Ornithological Club records, ROM.



**Try a different kind of field trip. See p. 79.**

# The Distribution of the American Crow in Ontario in Early Winter

by  
D.V. Chip Weseloh

Data obtained from Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) are an excellent source of information on the distribution of birds in Ontario in early winter. However, in Ontario, with some exceptions (Goodwin *et al.* 1977, Middleton 1977, Angehrn *et al.* 1979, Freedman and Riley 1980), birdwatchers appear to make little systematic use of these data, though they are easy to obtain and analyze. One of the purposes of the present study is to illustrate the type of data which are available from CBCs and a practical means of making use of them. Hopefully this analysis will stimulate others to study CBC data for a species or locale of their choice and *Ontario Birds* may become a regular outlet for such studies.

A second purpose of this article is to determine the distribution of the American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) in Ontario in early winter and identify areas which harbour large crow populations. Recently, there has been a definite interest shown in crow roosts in Ontario (Lamoureux and Lamoureux 1980, Weseloh 1983, Knapton and Maturi 1984,) and I reasoned that

if the crow's winter distribution was better known, it might stimulate further work on documenting crow roosts in other parts of the province. For, as this study will show, areas with large crow populations (as determined by CBCs) also appear to have large crow roosts. This is not to suggest that small wintering populations or small roosts are of less importance (they are just more difficult to locate), for it is only by comparing the behaviour of variously sized roosting populations that the roosting behaviour of the species as a whole will be better understood.

## Methods

Christmas Bird Count data for Ontario for the nine-year period, 1975-1983, were examined as published in the journal *American Birds*. When comparing CBC data from one count to another or from one year to another, one must be careful to allow for the different levels of effort (numbers of participants, party-hours, etc.) in each count (Arbib 1967, Bystrak 1971, Raynor 1975), i.e., the data must be normalized. This is not a difficult procedure and usually

involves dividing the number of individuals of each species recorded by one of several possible factors which reflect effort (see Raynor 1975 for a complete discussion). One of the most often used effort factors is the number of party-hours, hence I calculated the number of crows recorded per party-hour for each Ontario CBC location during each of the years for the nine-year period. To arrive at a single (average) value for the number of crows recorded per party-hour for each count location, I divided the total number of crows recorded by the total number of party-hours recorded during the count years. I included data from years when no crows were seen but did not include any data from years when no count was reported.

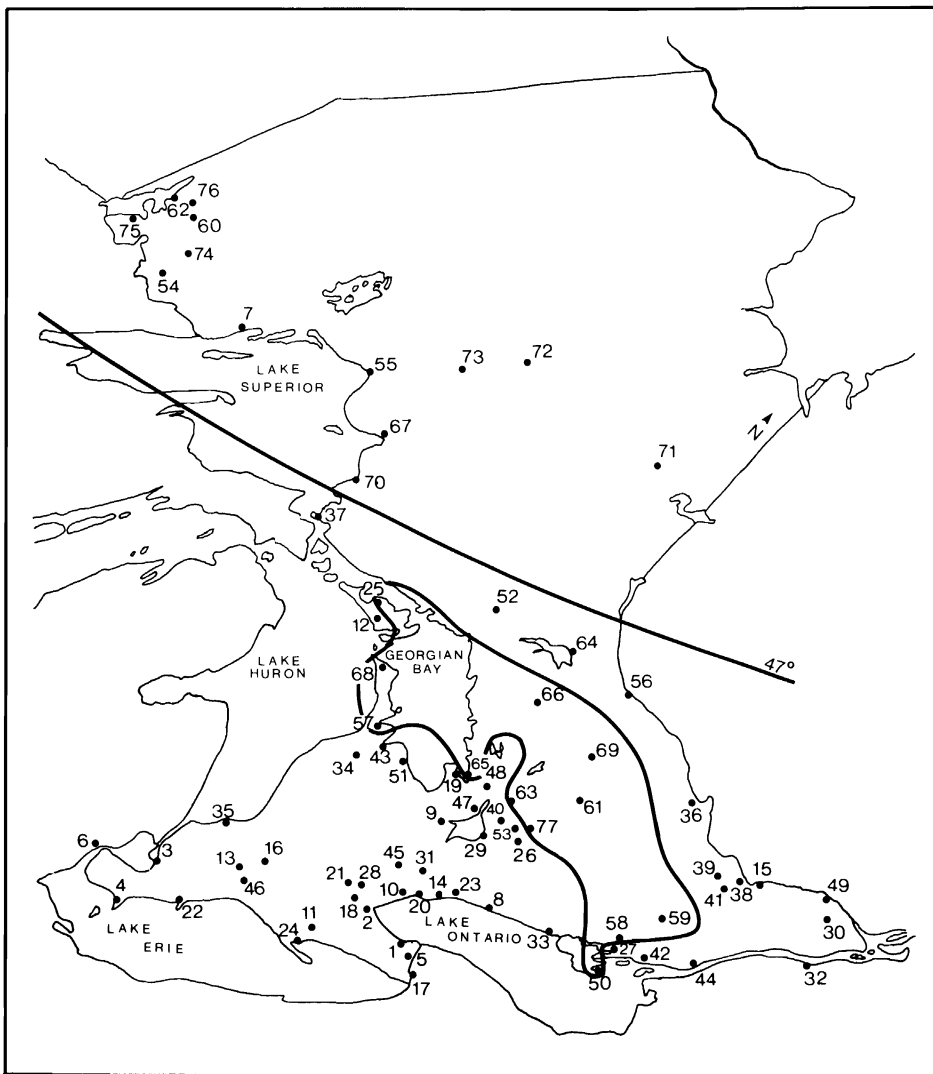
### Results

There was a total of 495 Christmas Bird Counts conducted at 77 different locations during the nine year period. The locations are plotted by number in Figure 1 and identified in Table 1. The average (mean) number of crows recorded per party-hour for each location's count period are listed by rank in Table 1. An Appendix, which lists the number of crows per party-hour for each location for each year is available upon request from the author. Of the 77 different CBCs, 33 (43%) had counts in each of the nine years of the study period. CBCs from a total of 64 locations (83%) were conducted for three or more years. Hence, the number of locations where the winter crow population was sampled a minimum of three times is fairly high.

Of the 77 locations at which CBCs were conducted, 53 (69%) recorded crows every year in which they reported a count, while 24 locations (31%) did not record crows in at least one year. Of the latter group, eight (10% of the total) never recorded crows. With the exception of an area extending from the counts at Manitoulin Island, Cypress Lake Provincial Park and Wiarton, east to Algonquin Provincial Park and south to Prince Edward Point, all Ontario counts south of 47°N latitude recorded crows every year they had a CBC (Figure 1). Of the 25 CBCs within the above described area or north of 47°N, only the count at Thunder Bay reported crows every year of its count. Eight (32%) never reported crows and 16 (64%) recorded crows only intermittently. Most of this last group failed to record crows in 50% or more of their years.

The average number of crows per party for the 77 counts ranged from 0 at several locations to 19.80 at St. Catharines (Table 1 and Figure 2). The average number of crows per party hour for all counts was 2.23.

The above normalized data (crows per party-hour) make it possible to compare, quantitatively, CBCs where there were different amounts of sampling effort, e.g. 30 party-hours vs 100 party-hours. The non-normalized data, i.e. the total number of crows recorded on each count, also provides useful information in this study. The total number of crows recorded on each count may represent a good minimum



**Figure 1.** Locations of Ontario Christmas Bird Counts reported in *American Birds*, 1975-1983. Counts with reduced frequency of occurrence of crows are located within enclosed area and north of 47°N latitude. See Table 1 for numerical code.

estimate of the size of the crow population within (or near) the 15 mile (24 km) diameter CBC circle. At the very least it is a number, the significance of which is easy to

comprehend. The average number of crows recorded on each CBC for the nine year period and each location's rank are given in Table 1. During the study period the

*Table 1. Results of tabulation of crow numbers and party hours on Ontario Christmas Bird Counts, 1975-1983.*

Count No. Name	Ave. No. Crows per Party-hr	Ave. No. Crows	Rank (Ave. No. Crows)	Years
1. St. Catharines	19.80	1366.0	2	1983
2. Hamilton	18.16	3260.6	1	1975 - 1983
3. St. Clair	15.54	803.0	4	1981 - 1983
4. Point Pelee	13.27	910.1	3	1975 - 1983
5. Niagara Falls	11.22	387.2	6	1975 - 1983
6. Detroit River, Mich.-Ont.	8.31	338.5	8	1978 - 1983
7. Thunder Bay	6.83	330.1	9	1975 - 1983
8. Port Hope-Cobourg	4.87	350.3	7	1975 - 1983
9. Barrie	3.70	254.1	12	1975 - 1983
10. Peel-Halton Counties	3.00	289.8	11	1975 - 1983
11. Woodhouse Twp.	2.01	122.5	16	1975 - 1983 <sup>a</sup>
12. Mindemoya	2.00	70.2	25	1975 - 1983
13. London	1.83	305.7	10	1975 - 1983
14. Pickering	1.57	160.2	14	1975 - 1983
15. Hull-Ottawa, Que.-Ont.	1.42	541.8	5	1976 - 1983
16. Ingersoll	1.22	56.0	28	1983
17. Buffalo, N.Y.-Ont.	1.19	176.5	13	1978 - 1983
18. Cambridge	1.14	130.5	15	1978 - 1983
19. Wye Marsh	1.13	45.0	32	1981 - 1983
20. Toronto	1.08	107.5	19	1975 - 1983
21. Kitchener	1.07	114.3	18	1975 - 1983 <sup>b</sup>
22. Blenheim	0.98	94.6	21	1975 - 1983
23. Oshawa	0.97	88.6	22	1975 - 1983
24. Long Point	0.89	117.0	17	1975 - 1983
25. Manitoulin Island	0.88	25.4	25	1975 - 1983
26. Peterborough	0.83	82.1	23	1975 - 1983
27. Napanee	0.79	37.8	38	1975 - 1983
28. Guelph	0.78	71.6	24	1975 - 1983
29. Beaverton	0.77	41.3	33	1976 - 1983
30. Van Kleek Hill	0.72	29.3	40	1978 - 1983
31. Richmond Hill	0.71	51.0	29	1976 & 1977 1982 & 1983
32. Massena, N.Y.-Ont.	0.66	27.3	42	1977 - 1983 <sup>c</sup>
33. Presqu'île Prov. Park	0.66	46.1	31	1975 - 1983
34. Hanover-Walkerton	0.63	38.9	34	1977 - 1983
35. Kettle Point	0.60	56.4	27	1975 - 1983
36. Pembroke	0.59	38.4	36	1979 - 1983
37. Sault Ste. Marie	0.53	21.9	45	1979 - 1983
38. Dunrobin- Breckenridge	0.53	95.5	20	1982 & 1983
39. Pakenham-Arnprior	0.50	38.2	37	1975 - 1983

Table 1 (cont.)

40. Coboconk	0.45	15.3	47	1978 - 1980
41. Carleton Place	0.44	38.4	36	1975 - 1983
42. Kingston	0.44	59.0	26	1975 - 1983
43. Owen Sound	0.43	25.2	44	1975 - 1983
44. Thousand Islands	0.41	27.2	41	1975 - 1983 <sup>d</sup>
45. Kleinburg	0.39	35.5	39	1982 & 1983
46. St. Thomas	0.36	49.8	30	1975 - 1983
47. Orillia	0.36	17.0	46	1982 & 1983
48. Gravenhurst- Bracebridge	0.25	11.0	52	1982 & 1983
49. Grenville- Hawkesbury, Que.-Ont.	0.22	10.3	53	1975 - 1977
50. Prince Edward Point	0.21	11.7	49	1978 - 1983
51. Meaford	0.21	12.3	48	1975 - 1980
52. Sudbury	0.16	11.3	50	1980 - 1983
53. Buckhorn	0.15	11.2	51	1979 - 1983
54. Atikokan	0.14	1.2	60	1975 - 1983
55. Marathon	0.14	2.5	57	1975 - 1980
56. Deep River	0.13	6.1	55	1975 - 1983
57. Wiarton	0.12	6.6	54	1976 - 1983
58. Moscow	0.07	2.4	58	1975 - 1983
59. Westport	0.06	2.8	56	1975 - 1983
60. Dryden	0.05	2.0	59	1975 - 1983
61. Bancroft	0.04	0.3	67	1975 - 1977
62. Kenora	0.03	0.3	67	1981 - 1983
63. Minden	0.03	1.0	61	1975 - 1983
64. North Bay	0.03	1.0	61	1983
65. Georgian Bay Islands	0.03	1.0	61	1977 - 1983
66. Burk's Falls	0.02	0.7	64	1978 - 1983
67. Wawa	0.02	0.2	69	1978 - 1983
68. Cyprus Lake Prov. Park	0.01	0.4	65	1975 - 1983
69. Algonquin Prov. Park	0	0.4	65	1975 - 1983
70. Agawa Bay	0	0	70	1978 & 1979
71. Cochrane	0	0	70	1983
72. Hearst	0	0	70	1982 & 1983
73. Hornpayne	0	0	70	1975
74. Ignace	0	0	70	1980 - 1983
75. Morson	0	0	70	1983
76. Vermilion Bay	0	0	70	1977 - 1982 <sup>d</sup>
77. Woodview	0	0	70	1975 & 1976
Average (N = 425)	2.23	165.4		

a. Except 1977

b. Except 1976 and 1981

c. Except 1979

d. Except 1981

average number of crows recorded per count ranged up to 3260 recorded at Hamilton. The average number of crows for all counts was 165.

### Discussion

The areas of Ontario with the largest number of crows per party hour during 1975-1983 were extreme southwestern Ontario, the northern half of the Niagara Peninsula, Port Hope-Cobourg and Thunder Bay (Figure 2). The same areas, plus Ottawa, also recorded large numbers of crows on their CBCs (Table 1). In general, crow populations were large in southern Ontario and decreased northward. The large number of crows and crows per party hour record at Thunder Bay were anomalous when compared to the rest of Ontario and reason(s) for this would be worthy of further investigation.

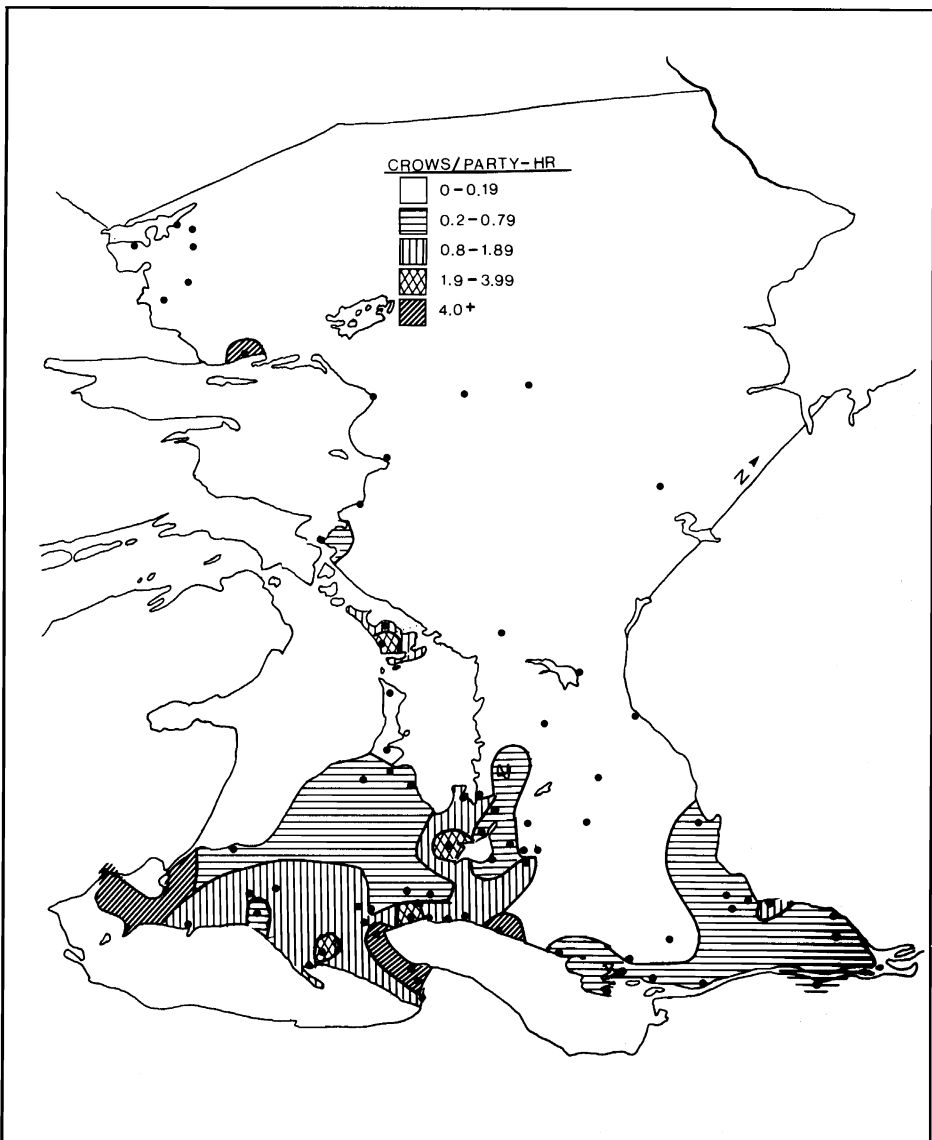
The causes for this pattern of declining crow numbers, south to north, are not known but they may be related to winter temperature, snow cover, the availability of food at sites such as garbage dumps or grain fields or some other factor(s). In Essex County during the winter months, I have observed crows feeding at garbage dumps (landfill sites) and in snow-free fields on numerous occasions (pers. obs.).

In a study of the midwinter distribution of crows in New York and California, Emlen (1938, 1940) could find no ecological factors which fully explained the crows' distribution, which in many cases had remained stable for 50 years or more. He suggested social factors, e.g. an innate affinity to (an) established territory, indepen-

dent of environmental factors, may play a role.

The CBCs with the greatest winter crow populations correspond well to the known locations of large crow roosts. Hamilton and St. Catharines have the two largest winter crow populations in Ontario according to the CBC data. Both cities are known to have large crow roosts (Lamoureux and Lamoureux 1980, Knapton and Maturi 1984). The CBCs in extreme southwestern Ontario (Pt. Pelee, Detroit River and St. Clair) also report large winter crow populations. What appears to be the largest crow roost in Ontario is located at Essex near the Point Pelee and Detroit River counts (Weseloh 1983) and there is a large roost of undetermined size at Chatham near the St. Clair count (pers. obs. and Tom Reaume, *in litt.*). The Port Hope-Cobourg CBC which ranks 7th and 8th in number of crows and crows per party-hour, respectively, also has a substantial crow roost of undetermined size (Roy John, pers. comm.).

From the data presented in this report it would appear that the American Crow reaches the northern limit of its early winter distribution in central Ontario. There are a few scattered populations associated with some northern towns and cities; the population at Thunder Bay is substantial. This conclusion is in agreement with that shown by the one year, continent-wide survey of crow data from CBCs in 1972 (Rosahn 1974). That study showed that the northern limit of crow distribution in eastern North America followed a line west along



*Figure 2.* Areas of relative crow abundance (crows per party-hour) as recorded on Christmas Bird Counts, 1975-1983.

the St. Lawrence River to eastern Ontario, west through central Ontario, northern lower peninsula Michigan, northern Wisconsin and central Minnesota. The centre of

the early winter distribution occurred in the area of the Appalachian Mountains from southeastern Pennsylvania to North Carolina. The number of



crows recorded on CBCs from this area was much greater than on those in Ontario. For example, during the period 1977-1980, counts of crows in Pennsylvania ranged from 35,000 to 50,000 or over 300 crows per party-hour (Schweinsberg 1977, 1980; Faust 1979)!

In conclusion, 77 different Christmas Bird Count locations in Ontario reported on the number of crows recorded during December/January for one or more years during the period 1975-1983. Both the number of crows per party hour and the total number of crows were greatest on CBCs in southern Ontario and with two notable exceptions, Thunder Bay and Ottawa, generally decreased northward. Several CBC locations that have large winter crow populations are known to have large winter crow roosts. However for most CBC locations, very little is known of the size or site of winter crow roosts. I would encourage anyone who knows of or is interested in crow roosts to report their results in note or article form to *Ontario Birds*.

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**Request for information:** Further interest in crow roosts seems to be developing. Mr. Tom Reaume, a Guelph artist working on a book on crows, asks OFO members who know of roosts of 1000 or more crows to contact him at 72 Waterloo Ave., Guelph, Ontario N1H 3H5.



PETER BURKE  
-1983-

# Winter Records of Swainson's Thrush in Ontario

by  
Martin K. McNicholl

On 3 March 1984, I was birding in High Park, Toronto, York R.M. when I was astonished to see a *Catharus* thrush flit back and forth into and out of some cedar (or similar) trees in a gully below me. Although I was aware of recent reports of Hermit Thrushes (*C. guttatus*) in the Toronto area (Parker 1984), my initial impression, based on the soft "whit" call very familiar to me from Vancouver Island and elsewhere and on a "wide-eyed" appearance, was of a Swainson's Thrush (*C. ustulatus*).

Although all the *Catharus* thrushes utter similar calls, they are sufficiently distinct that had I been in Alberta or British Columbia during the breeding season, I would have been reasonably certain of the species from this call alone. However, I was less certain on hearing it from such an out-of-season bird, especially considering the possibility that eastern races or populations may sound slightly different from western birds. I doubted this identification further when the thrush flicked its tail up and down slowly three or four times, a behaviour more frequently

exhibited by Hermit Thrushes, but also occasionally shown by Swainson's (Bent 1949; pers. obs. in Winnipeg and on Vancouver Island), and by Gray-cheeked (*C. minimus*) (A. Wormington, pers. comm. 1985). The thrush then flew into open sunlight, where I could clearly see the continuous olive-brown back and tail, with no hint of rusty from any angle, ruling out Hermit. The buffy throat, upper breast, cheek, lores, and especially wide eye ring, and the large breast spots ruled out both Gray-cheeked and Veery (*C. fuscescens*). The bird remained for the next 10 minutes (1540-1550h), while I studied it from above, below, and at eye level through 8x40 binoculars at times as close as three or four metres.

The normal winter range of Swainson's Thrush is in Central and South America (Bent 1949; A. O. U. 1983), with casual records to the Texas Gulf Coast (A. O. U. 1983). Parker (1983) indicated there were no March records for Toronto, only one in April, one December record, and three in November. James *et al.* (1976) indicated a normal

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occurrence period in Ontario from 17 April to 23 October, with extreme dates of 19 March and 11 November.

Christmas bird count data indicate a few early winter records for Ontario, most unsubstantiated, but none in Toronto. These include one not questioned by the compiler during the count period at London, Middlesex Co. in 1967 (Jarmain 1968), a 1976 record at Hamilton, Hamilton-Wentworth R.M. (North 1977a), a 1980 record at Blenheim, Kent Co. (Burk 1981)—these latter two praised by the Editor for “excellent details”—and 1978 and 1980 records at St. Thomas, Elgin Co. (Auckland 1979, 1981), considered “inconclusive.” A thrush at Deep River, Renfrew Co. on the 1971 count (Walker 1972) was believed to be a Swainson’s, but not claimed as a positive identification. Christmas bird count records are frequently inadequately documented, and most of these reports cannot be considered positive. Further details of the Hamilton record were published by North (1977 b, c), who reported that the bird was observed west of Willow Point by Alan Wormington and others on 2, 11 and 26 December. Wormington (pers. comm. 1985) notes that the description is on file with Dennis Rupert, Ontario CBC Editor.

The only winter records for Toronto of which I am aware are also from December: one was observed at Grenadier Pond in High Park by Bob Bateman and Don Smith on 5 December 1954 (Baillie 1955); and another was observed on 1 December 1981 by

Chip and Linda Weseloh (Weir 1982).

Another December record for Ontario occurred when David Agro and David Shepherd caught a hatch-year probable male in a ground trap with two American Tree Sparrows (*Spizella arborea*) about 1400h on 20 December 1984 at the Old Cut cottage station of the Long Point Bird Observatory, Haldimand-Norfolk R.M. Good details are on file at observatory headquarters.

The Point Pelee, Essex Co. checklist indicates two December records there (Wormington 1981), but this is apparently based on one record of a bird seen by Wormington and others from 5-8 December 1979 (A. Wormington, pers. comm. 1985). R.D. McRae (pers. comm. 1985) prepared a specimen of a Swainson’s Thrush that was observed to fly into a window at Kingsville, Essex Co. on 2 December 1976. The bird was brought to Point Pelee National Park by Norm Rattan, where McRae determined it was a hatch-year bird by the amount of skull ossification (T. Hince, pers. comm.). It is now in the National Museum of Canada, as yet uncatalogued, but with accession number 1983-86.

There are two December records for Ottawa—Carleton R.M., a bird seen by Bruce M. DiLabio at Almonte on 13 December 1984 and another observed three days later at Rockcliffe Village by Ray Holland and V. Bernard Ladouceur (Ladouceur and DiLabio 1984).

December records of

Swainson's and related thrushes (McRae 1984; Sandilands and Dance 1984) may represent birds that were injured or sick during their normal southward migration or, in some cases, birds responding to unseasonably mild weather, but in any case can be considered as extremely late migrants. The 1984 record at Long Point was of a bird with plenty of fat and healthy appearance that flew strongly on release (D. Shepherd, pers. comm. 1984) after banding (band number 1321-67708), but McRae's (1984) 1981 record of a Gray-cheeked Thrush at Point Pelee involved a bird that evidently was starving. Few such birds are likely to survive the entire winter.

March thrush records are far fewer, although there are many winter records of Hermits beyond December. James *et al.* (1976) have classed it as a rare winter resident. The 19 March date listed for Swainson's Thrush by James *et al.* (1976) for Ontario and for the "south-eastern Michigan/south-western Ontario" area by Kelley (1978) presumably is based on the 1972 observation at Point Pelee by F. Hirschmann and D.C. Sadler (Goodwin 1972) for which details are lacking. Kelley (1983) reports one additional record (10 March 1977) for her study area with no details. The bird that I observed in High Park appeared healthy and flew well in spite of -2° C weather.

#### Acknowledgements

The comments of Bill Crins, Heather Lang-Runtz, Doug McRae, and Alan Wormington helped improve the manuscript. The efforts of Michel Gosselin and

Don Wilkes in attempting to locate the Kingsville specimen and of Tom Hince in finally tracking it down are much appreciated.

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## New Titles

**Toronto Region Bird Report: 1984.** 1985. *B.D. Parker, H. Currie, D.V. Weseloh, G. Coady, A. Jaramillo and K. Konze* (Eds.) Toronto Ornithological Club. Available for \$5.00 from Bruce D. Parker, 109 Valleywoods Rd., TH 66, Don Mills, Ontario M3A 2R8.

This is the first of what the editors hope will be annual reports on the birdlife of this heavily birded region. The purpose of the report is to summarize the records of occurrence and abundance of all birds within the 50 km circle centred on the Royal Ontario Museum in downtown Toronto. This area encompasses the Lake Ontario shoreline from east

Burlington to Whitby, and inland to Georgetown and Newmarket. The period covered by the report is not the 1984 calendar year, but rather, covers the period from 1 December 1983 to 30 November 1984, to coincide with the traditional birding seasons. Brief seasonal summaries are provided, and these are followed by the 266 species' treatments.

W.J.C.

# Notes

## Winter Records of Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is an uncommon summer resident in southern Ontario, ranging from Prince Edward County north to Simcoe and Bruce Counties, and southward. Dates in the province range from April 10 to November 12 (James *et al.* 1976).

On 2 December 1984, I found an active Blue-gray Gnatcatcher near Cambridge in the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. While walking along the Grand River, just southeast of Blair and across the river from Cambridge, I recognized the thin, nasal call of the gnatcatcher amongst those of Golden-crowned Kinglets (*Regulus satrapa*) and Black-capped Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*). After "pishing" a few times, the bird approached to within 3 metres of me, so that I clearly recognized it as a female. For about one minute, it foraged in a nearby eastern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), twice chasing chickadees out of its feeding area.

The temperature rose to 10° C on this day. Previous weeks had been milder than average for late fall.

On 16 December the bird was rediscovered by P. Weller and myself, during the Cambridge

Christmas Bird Count, about 40 m from the original site. We spent a few minutes watching it feeding from a small cloud of tiny flies around a shrub overhanging 2 metre high cliffs above the Grand River.

A record high temperature of 15° C activated invertebrates and vertebrates normally dormant in mid-December. This warm trend continued but weakened until cold weather arrived around Christmas. Two return trips in early January failed to locate this bird, which may have perished during a severe January 1st ice storm.

This may be only the second winter record of Blue-gray Gnatcatcher for Ontario. D. Rupert and J. Wilson found one individual during the 24 December 1982 CBC at Point Pelee (Wilson 1983).

CBC results from 1983 revealed that the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is very rare north of Florida and the Gulf coast. Only 13 individuals were recorded in states north of Florida along the eastern seaboard (Virginia, North and South Carolina), while Florida counts turned up 3,420 individuals, more than any other state. Count results showed that Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were numerous

along parts of the Gulf coast (664 in Louisiana and 1262 in Freeport, Texas), with very few birds recorded on inland counts. They were also present on Arizona counts (197), and in California.

The Cambridge bird undoubtedly survived so long due to the unseasonably mild weather and a relatively abundant food supply. A physical or chemical disorder, or impairment may have prevented the bird's normal migratory

behaviour, rendering it captive to the Ontario winter.

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Ted Cheskey, c/o 22A Irvine St., Kitchener, Ontario N2H 1K8

## Interaction of Two Snowy Owls in Burlington, Ontario

A winter sighting of a Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) is exciting in itself. On 6 January 1985, Rob Cheskey was fortunate to watch two Snowy Owls interact.

Following is a description of what was seen.

At 1615h, Rob Cheskey was viewing waterfowl on Lake Ontario, on the south side of Lakeshore Blvd., just west of Brant St. in Burlington, Halton R.M. He noticed a large, whitish bird with a large round head and broad wings, which he identified as a Snowy Owl. It was flying eastward, about 10 m above the ground and 30 m distant. It continued east, landing on scaffolding above a building about 30 m high. After resting there for about one minute, the owl left its perch, and flew west. About 25 m away it slowed its flight and made high, thin screeching notes as a second Snowy Owl appeared

from the west, flying towards it. The two birds flew slowly towards one another and then encountered each other while airborne. An object which was formerly held by the second bird, was grasped by both birds as they twirled in mid-air. More screeching notes were heard while they were together. After a few seconds, the birds disengaged, and flew eastwards together flying out of view behind the large building on the south side of Lakeshore Blvd., opposite Brant St. No significant plumage differences were noted, perhaps because of dull light conditions. However, Rob Cheskey did see a distinct size difference while the two birds were together, suggesting that a male and female owl were involved in this display. Kay McKeever suggested (pers. comm.) that this was probably an aggressive encounter between two



birds vying for the same food supply. Bird's gonads would not

yet be active to stimulate courtship activity, she felt.

Rob Cheskey and Ted Cheskey, 280 Heslop Rd., Milton, Ontario L9T 1B8

## Early Nesting Record for European Starling in Southern Ontario

On a bird-watching trip (10 March 1985) to Long Point, Haldimand-Norfolk R.M., we discovered a nest in a cavity about six meters from the group in a black willow (*Salix nigra*). The nestlings were calling quite loudly. On climbing the tree, we found the entrance to the cavity was too narrow to allow a hand to pass. A single European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was observed flying in the vicinity of the nest. The flashlights we had with us were not powerful; thus, we were unable to see the nestlings. On observing the nest for five to ten minutes, two adult starlings were seen at the mouth of the cavity.

Judging by the strength of the nestlings' calls, we estimated their age to be at least a few days. The incubation period for *S. vulgaris* is between 12 and 15 days (Harrison 1984). This would mean that a conservative estimate of the laying of the last egg would be 24 February 1985. The previous

earliest nesting record for this species in Ontario is believed to be 26 March (R. James, pers. comm.). This nest, containing five eggs, was found in Gloucester Twp., Ottawa-Carleton R.M. by W.A. Holland of Ottawa. We know of only one other March nesting record for *S. vulgaris*, this being a nest, containing three eggs, discovered by E.A.C. Miller of Toronto in Mulmur Twp., Dufferin Co. (R. James, pers. comm.).

### Acknowledgement:

We thank Dr. Ross James, Associate Curator of Ornithology at the Royal Ontario Museum, for informing us of previous early starling nest records.

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S.C. Loughheed and D.W. Graham, Dept. of Zoology, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1

## Food Gathering for Nestlings by a Male Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*)

North American woodpeckers can be grouped into two categories with regard to their food gathering strategies for nestlings. One group, including the Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*), Hairy Woodpecker (*P. villosus*), and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*), carries food to the nest in the bill and generally feeds one nestling per trip (Lawrence 1966; Stokes and Stokes 1983). The second group, including the Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*), Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*), and Three-toed Woodpecker (*P. tridactylus*), are known to, or are suspected of, ingesting food and regurgitating it to the nestlings (Bent 1939; Stokes 1979).

Precise observations on the food gathering behaviour of the Black-backed Woodpecker during the nesting period seem to be limited. On 30 June 1984, while gathering data for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project near McKaskill Lake in southeastern Algonquin Provincial Park, Nipissing Dist., I noticed a male Black-backed Woodpecker foraging on a dead white spruce (*Picea glauca*). It flew off, presumably to a nest, and returned to the same tree a few minutes later, to resume its food gathering. It worked quickly, chipping off flakes of bark, probing tunnels of wood borers with its

tongue, and extracting the larvae. I had sufficiently good views of the process to determine that the larvae being extracted were of a large species of long-horned wood-boring beetle (perhaps a species of *Monochamus*, Cerambycidae, Coleoptera). On this single spruce, the woodpecker captured at least 12 large larvae. It apparently filled its crop with at least eight beetles, and then continued foraging until its beak was also filled with four visible larvae. Although Bent (1939) and Kilham (1983) note that Black-backed Woodpeckers regurgitate food to their young, based on the behaviour and duration of visits at the nest, this appears to be the first report of this species becoming fully engorged, in addition to carrying food in its beak, while foraging for its nestlings.

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## Topic of Note

**Eds. Comment:** We are very pleased with the response to date to the Topic of Note feature: an article-length contribution and several notes. Interest still seems to be high in our first Topic: feeding and damage by woodpeckers; and we hope there are more notes out there on interactions between birds and snakes. The Topic of Note for the December issue should come as no surprise: roosting locations of birds in Ontario. There is little information available on where most bird species roost. In fact, the roosting behaviour of some species is totally unknown. Also, in Ontario, there are many large roosts known for several species that are common knowledge among birders but are unrecorded in Ontario's bird literature, e.g. starlings under the Burlington Skyway and Gardiner Expressway

Bridges, crows at Chatham and Thunder Bay, numerous blackbird roosts and Blue Jays. Where do the large flocks of migrating Blue Jays spend the evening? If you have factual information on where, when and in what numbers any bird species roost in Ontario, write it up in note form and send it to us.

We will continue the Topic of Note feature into 1986. The Topic for the April issue will appeal to our botanically oriented members: natural foods of passerines in winter. Observe passerines feeding (not at feeders) in winter, 1 December - 28 February or while the ground is snow covered, identify exactly what they are feeding on and send us a short note on it. Notes will be due by 15 February 1986. In the next issue we will try to list several botanists who can assist in the identification of plant seeds, etc.

### Corrections.

In Table 1 of Ken Dance's note entitled "Man-made Materials in Nests of Gray Catbird" (Vol. 3(1): 35), the contents of nest No. 6 should include 11 pieces of plastic, not one.

Adolf Vogg's name was inadvertently omitted from the list of those who correctly guessed the Gray Jay Mystery Map from Vol. 2 No. 3.

# Yellow Warbler Nestling Predation by Eastern Fox Snake

by  
Reid Wilson

Our family's cottage is located on a 1 ha island in the Georgian Bay archipelago, 18 km southwest of Pointe au Baril, Parry Sound District, Ontario. The nearest mainland shore is approximately 10 km to the east, with dozens of islands of varying sizes in between.

Most small islands, like ours, have limited vegetation growing from the shallow soils over the pre-cambrian rock. It consists mostly of white pine (*Pinus strobus*), white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), pin cherry (*Prunus pensylvanica*), choke cherry (*P. virginiana*), juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and many various shrubs, mosses and grasses. Because of the small island's relative isolation, mammalian predators of ground-nesting or near ground-nesting birds, such as raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) and mink (*Mustela vison*) are few. We (my wife, Margaret, and I) have recorded 75 breeding species of birds within the island archipelago, one of the most common of which is the Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*).

Yellow Warblers have nested on our island every year for many years, although we have not always found the nest. On 3 June 1984, we found a Yellow Warbler

nest under construction 0.6 m high in the crotch of a choke cherry shrub. On 15 June we returned to find four eggs being incubated by the female. The inevitable cowbird egg was removed from the nest in the hopes that the three remaining eggs would hatch and the young warblers would eventually fledge. On 23 June, the three eggs all hatched between 0900h and 1700h and both male and female began busily bringing food to the hatchlings.

The young grew rapidly but on 20 June (four or five days from fledging) we observed both parents in an excited state near the nest. On closer investigation we found that a large Eastern Fox Snake (*Elaphe vulpina gloydi*) had wound its way up the centre stalk of the choke cherry and was about to devour the third nestling (two large lumps farther down the snake's neck indicated that it had already eaten the first two). We interrupted its attempt and it dropped the third bird which was visually unharmed but most likely in severe shock. The fox snake, which was approximately 1.5 m long and about 3 cm in diameter, disappeared into the undergrowth and we left the immediate vicinity of the nest, hoping the parents would resume feeding the last

remaining nestling.

In about ten minutes, the parent birds, along with an onlooking Red-Eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) and a Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), again began chirping and ticking loudly and we arrived at the nest just in time to see the fox snake carrying off the last young bird.

This was not the first time we had seen an unsuccessful nesting of the Yellow Warbler on our island, although it was undoubtedly the most dramatic. We found a recently constructed nest about 1 m up in a meadowsweet (*Spirea alba*) bush on 10 June 1983 and returned on 25 June to find it had been destroyed; cause unknown. On 10 July 1982 we found four Yellow Warbler eggs in a nest 0.75 m up in the crotch of a sugar maple sapling. Three eggs hatched on 17 July and the fourth on 18 July. On 21 July, we found the nest to be empty and deserted by the parents; cause unknown. My mother tells of Yellow Warbler young she observed in a nest in a choke cherry bush near the cottage (c. 1972) that were also predated by an Eastern Fox Snake.

Predation of ground-nesting or near ground-nesting warblers by snakes would appear to be relatively common, but information seems to be somewhat sketchy. In his discussion of the Eastern Yellow Warbler, Bent (1953) noted:

"The presence of a garter snake at the base of the bush caused great excitement; the snake was seen to climb up into the bush and carry off one of the young when it was about six days old; the young bird was dead before it could be rescued."

Bent also mentions snake predation of Black-and-White (*Mniotilta varia*) and Prothonotary Warblers (*Protonotaria citrea*). In his study of the Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*), Nolan (1978) observed that "Of 18 mobbings (14 April – 28 July), 6 certainly and 5 others probably were directed at snakes". The snakes referred to by Nolan were rat snakes and racers. In reference to a pair of Kirtland's Warblers (*Dendroica kirtlandi*) and their five hatchlings, Walkinshaw (1983) noted:

"On 1 July O.S. Pettingill (personal communication) visited the region and found this pair of adult warblers in an agitated state. The nest was empty and nearby a large garter snake was found which showed several lumps in its body. Three of the banded nestlings were squeezed out of the snake and a fourth was found dead beside the nest."

The Eastern Fox Snake is fairly common in the Georgian Bay archipelago, and reaches the northern limit of its range near Point au Baril (Logier and Toner 1961). According to Fromm (1967), the fox snake can climb, but because of its heavy body it is mostly a ground snake:

"It is an excellent mouser, and cottagers that have fox snakes about their property report that they are seldom bothered by mice. Rodents form the bulk of its food, but it may also eat amphibians and, occasionally, earthworms. It is a constrictor and kills large prey in its coils."

It seems clear that snakes find young birds in nests easy prey and

are probably easily found by the loud chirping at the nest each time food is brought by the parents. Once a nest had been located, the snake would persist until the food supply had been exhausted.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my wife Margaret Wilson for her excellent record-keeping in our island "ecology" book from whence these observations were extracted. Thanks also to Dr. J. Murray Speirs for help in finding references in his personal library on predation of bird nests by snakes.

**Eds. Note:** D. Fraser comments: "My experience with the fox snake from southern Georgian Bay (Go Home Bay, Muskoka Dist.) suggests that it is quite arboreal. I remember once finding a fox snake which had predated a Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) nest. The merganser had built its nest at the bottom of a hollowed-out white pine stump about 1.5 m deep. When found, the fox snake was stretched to its full length (approx. 1.5 m) along an overhanging pine bough (eye level) with 6 or 7 conspicuous bulges indicating ingested eggs. When

disturbed it moved sluggishly but adeptly. Fox snakes are obviously able to climb a vertical surface but whether they can move straight up or ascend in a spiral fashion, I am unsure."

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Reid Wilson, 1374 Tatra Drive, Pickering, Ontario, L1W 1K6

## Migrant Warblers Scold an Eastern Fox Snake

At 1400h, 12 May 1985, while walking in the field north of Tilden's Woods at Point Pelee, Essex Co., I was attracted toward one of the thickets of 3 to 5 m

Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo*) and dogwood (*Cornus* sp.) by the incessant chattering of small birds. Peering into the undergrowth, I could see no cause for the noise,

until one of the "trunks" moved and continued on up a Manitoba maple. An Eastern Fox Snake (*Elaphe vulpina gloydi*) measuring almost 2 m in length was being scolded by three warblers, a Magnolia (*Dendroica magnolia*), Yellow (*D. petechia*), and Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*), which all kept a respectful distance. There appeared to be no nests in this thicket although

Yellow Warblers were nesting in the area. We watched the birds for several minutes and it was only when the snake reached the upper branches of the thicket that they stopped harrassing the snake and flew away. Does one assume that snakes are such a grave danger to nests that even in migration, warblers will attempt to drive them away from nesting habitat?

Victoria Lister Carley, 211 Riverdale Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M4K 1C4

## Further Observations on Structural Damage to Buildings by Woodpeckers

John Carley's note in the April 1985 issue of *Ontario Birds* (Vol. 3, No. 1) reminded me of two incidents that I was called to investigate in the past. At the time they were of passing interest to me merely as part of my vocation. In retrospect, the significance of these sightings is, to say the least, thought-provoking. Why do birds attack buildings? Presumably, the answer is easy—they use them for their resonant capabilities for drumming or as a food source. The former reason seems fairly straight forward. But how do woodpeckers discover that chimneys and siding can produce sounds that are exciting to female woodpeckers? Further, how do they associate these buildings with food? Perhaps they discover hidden food sources during their romantic sonatas, or is it merely trial and error? I will leave these speculative arguments for others to ponder.

In October 1983, I attended a

residence in Asphodel Twp., Peterborough County to assist a resident in controlling woodpeckers that were "destroying her home". The building was an old log structure that had been modernized throughout using cedar shakes as siding on the upper story. These had apparently been in place for several years and, although recently stained, showed definite signs of age. At first the damage appeared totally random, indicating a simple search for food by the woodpeckers. However, upon closer examination, the birds seemed to concentrate their efforts on the east and west sides of the building, particularly in the immediate vicinity of the upstairs windows (Figure 1). In addition, most of the damage was along the seams where the shakes intersected. A careful search of the wall surfaces revealed intermittent activity by a "leaf-cutting" species of ant that due to its small size and

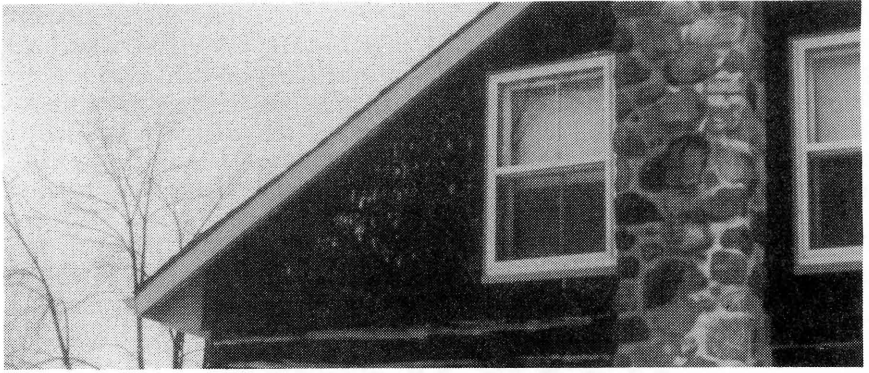


PHOTO: G. CARPENTIER

Figure 1. Woodpecker damage to cedar shakes.

elusive behaviour could not be identified. During the course of my investigation, two Downy Woodpeckers (*Picoides pubescens*) and a Hairy Woodpecker (*P. villosus*) were seen to land on the facing and probe the cracks, periodically pulling something from the crevices. They did not actually excavate any holes during this period.

In June 1985, while working on the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, I noted damage to an old barn in

Percy Twp., Northumberland County. This damage was quite old, but its origin was obvious. In this case, damage was concentrated along the lower edges of vertical pine boards above a stone foundation (Figure 2). Unlike the previous observation, the damage appeared to follow the grain of the wood, particularly where the boards met the stone. Instead of small excavations, long channels were cut in the wood, indicating the birds were following channels

Figure 2. Woodpecker damage to barn-siding.

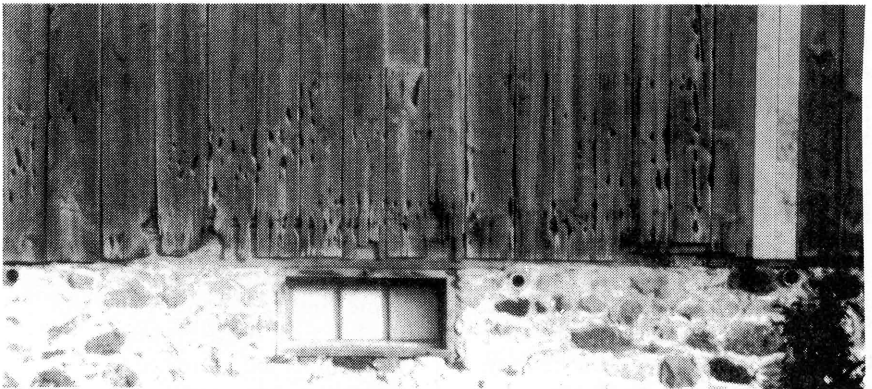


PHOTO: G. CARPENTIER



cut by some insect. Closer inspection revealed the former presence of Carpenter Ants throughout many of the boards. The species of birds involved could not positively be ascertained.

It would appear that in both of these cases, the birds were using the buildings as food sources, although the method of feeding was substantially different, due primarily to the habits of the two prey species.

A. Geoffrey Carpentier, 42 Wallis Drive, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 6B7

## Book Review

***Birds of North America, Eastern Region.*** 1985. By John Bull, Edith Bull, Gerald Gold & Pieter D. Prall. Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York. 156 pp.

As I thumbed through this slender volume for the first time, I groaned inwardly. "Not another pretender to the Peterson throne". I flipped and browsed, and wondered what could be different. So I sat down and read it.

On the assumption that most O.F.O. members are reasonably competent at field identification, this book is more likely to be recommended and given by members than bought for their own use. *Birds of North America* is aimed at novice birders, it is not a pretentious book, indeed it asks to be kept at the kitchen window or in the car's glove box. It makes no claim to be thorough or exhaustive, dealing with only 253 eastern species and therefore, clearly, there are large gaps.

The book, after a concise introduction to the very basics of bird watching, gets on with its task. There is no phylogenetic order or scientific names here (other than in the Appendix). The birds are

organized into groups of birds having broadly similar characteristics. Plate 1 on "Blue birds" illustrates Indigo Bunting, Blue Jay and Belted Kingfisher. Plates 2 & 3 are "Red Birds", Plates 4 & 5 "Black birds", and so on. There are "tree clingers", "small grayish birds" and "large grayish birds". I'm not entirely comfortable with the selected groupings, but I'm hard-put to think of better.

The illustrations are painted, not photographs, thank goodness! They are sometimes a little stiff, almost Audubonesque, but they do illustrate field marks well, though often at the expense of strict accuracy. Nevertheless, the authors are to be commended for sticking to their task of meeting the needs of new birders.

The omissions must have caused some soul-searching. They will likely cause some lifelong confusions unless further references are consulted. The

thrushes are limited to the Hermit and Wood Thrushes, no Veery, Gray-cheeked or Swainson's. Among *Empidonax* flycatchers, the Yellow-breasted, Acadian, Alder and Willow are omitted; perhaps confusion on these is the preserve of more experienced birders anyway. Adult male warblers are well represented, and, surprisingly, all three scoters.

Text, opposite the illustrations, is brief and is handled under the headings of Field Marks, Habitat, Season, Range, and sometimes Comments. An interesting

appendix reviews the plates, sometimes in groups, and expands on the information. It contrasts species and offers comments on migration, relative abundance and other general points of interest. These notes should not have been relegated to an appendix but perhaps given a part of the relevant pages. How to do so was obviously the difficulty.

It is too easy to pick holes in this book, but one has to bear in mind it's target market. It should find ready acceptance provided the marketeers can beat the established acceptability of Peterson's classic.

Peter Thoem, 550 Hurd Avenue, Burlington, Ontario L7S 1T1

## OFO Announcements

**Field Trip and Observational Study** – Essex County Crow Roost, 8-10 November 1985. The Essex County Crow Roost, located within the City Limits of Essex, Ontario, is the largest known crow roost in Ontario and perhaps in Canada. Observing several thousand crows returning to and dispersing from their evening roost is a totally exhilarating experience. Participants should plan to arrive in the Essex area Friday evening. Early Saturday we will travel to the roost to observe crows undergoing morning dispersal. Participants will be given maps and asked to follow flocks of crows to see where and how far the crows travel from

the roost. We will rendezvous for breakfast and discussions. The rest of the day will be spent birding the Essex-Pelee area. In the late afternoon we will position ourselves in various directions from the roost and observe and follow the crows back to the roost. Other participants will census the crows as they return to the roost. Plans for Sunday will depend on how many people can stay over. If you are interested in this different kind of field trip contact Chip Weseloh (416- 485-1464) before 5 November for details on where and when to meet. Accommodation for up to 18 persons has been arranged.