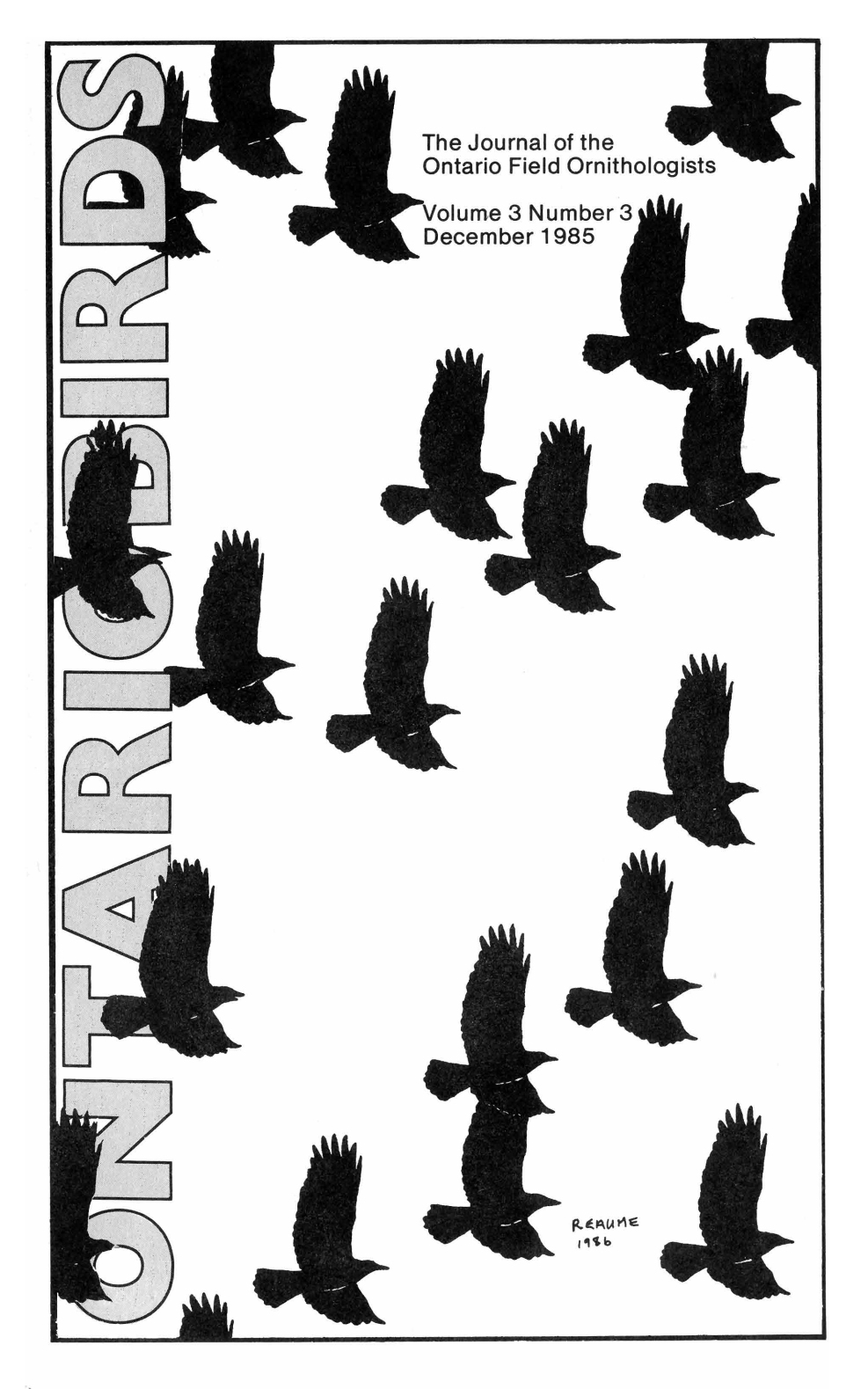


# ONTARIO BIRDS



The Journal of the  
Ontario Field Ornithologists

Volume 3 Number 3  
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REAUME  
1986

# Ontario Field Ornithologists

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

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

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Cover Illustration: Crows by Tom Reaume

## Letters to the Editors

### Overcrowding at Point Pelee

I agree with your correspondent Virgil Martin's comments on the overcrowding at Pt. Pelee National Park (*Ontario Birds* 3:41). I also agree that there are many other good birding areas and it would be logical for OFO to hold its Spring Meeting at a site other than Pt. Pelee. However, I find Mr. Martin's smug tone of voice unbecoming to OFO.

Last spring while walking on De Laurier Trail, my husband and I joined another birder pursuing rarer warblers. We were all loaded down with optical and camera equipment and nonchalantly wearing our 100 in 100 buttons (gold). A woman approached us and excitedly pointed out some lovely 'golden birds' we might want to photograph. We too muffled our chuckles. But retrospectively I realized how wrong we were in our attitude. Our desire for the rare had made us forget to appreciate the merely beautiful.

There was a time, and for some of us not long ago, when we were novices. Let's not become elitists and forget that birding is and should be an activity that can be enjoyed just as much by a person with a Life List of 100 as a Life List of 1000. Don't shun the novices, they may become hooked and one day be pointing out the birds to you!

Victoria Lister Carley  
Toronto, Ontario

### Bird roosts in St. Catharines—Niagara Falls Region

In response to your request for information on bird roosts, here is a synopsis of the numbers and species I have turned up so far in the St. Catharines—Niagara Falls region:

Mourning Dove: a roost of 650 in a 100 x 50 square metre scots pine plantation in St. David's.

American Robin and European Starling: a roost of these two species is located at the northeast corner of York Road and Concession 2, just east of St. David's, in a 300 x 100 square metre area of hawthorn, apple trees and willows. On 12 November there were between 400 and 500 Robins and between 25,000 and 30,000 Starlings there.

I checked under the Garden City Skyway, the Queenston Bridge and the Rainbow Bridge over the Niagara River for roosting birds—surprisingly, no birds other than a handful of Rock Doves were roosting under any of these bridges.

Richard Knapton  
St. Catharines, Ontario

### Video Cassette Birding Tapes

I have always felt that the strength of the field guide is to have a side by side visual comparison of family members, and also detailed comparison of the difficult to visually identify species such as: gulls, hawks, "peeps", and *Empidonax* flycatchers. This form



of family charts with very similar species together on facing pages has not been followed much lately. An overall view of family to family comparisons, and rapid in-family scanning has thus been lost. The loss is mainly to beginners, and in the field.

I have purchased four video cassette birding tapes to date. I have encountered either much time spent on very common birds, or a rapid look at everything that has been called AOU certified. Most tapes do provide bird calls with the bird in view. The tape medium has the potential to show the bird in typical postures, flight, habits, changing appearance of the field marks, "the jizz". If one tape could be spent on but one problem group such as the peeps, ah then perhaps the authors would have developed a new level of guide! Packaging, not utility, again seems the main concern.

Ken Brandes  
Hamburg, N.Y.

**Eds. Note:** Several of our members (the Editors included) have commented that they have not seen video cassette birding tapes. We invite Mr. Brandes, or any other member(s) familiar with them, to do a review of one or more for *Ontario Birds*. Please check with us beforehand to avoid duplication.

**Do snakes hear bird sounds?**  
I enjoyed Reid Wilson's note on nestling predation by an Eastern Fox Snake (*Ontario Birds* 3:73-75), however I would like to comment on his conclusion that

nestlings are "... probably easily found by the loud chirping at the nest". All snakes lack external ears, and while this does not entirely prevent them from hearing sounds transmitted through the air, it does greatly restrict this ability. As a general rule, most snakes appear to have a moderate ability to detect very low pitched sounds but their sensitivity decreases rapidly above 500 Hertz (*Wever, E.G. 1978. The reptile ear. Princeton Univ. Press.*). I think that it is safe to say that most begging calls from nestling birds have frequencies well above 500 Hertz, and that snakes must be using other cues to locate nests. Whether they are responding to odours or using some other sense is an interesting question and one which I cannot answer.

D. James Mountjoy  
Kingston, Ontario

### **Roosting or loafing Mourning Doves?**

I am contributing this note to you with regards to the Topic of Note for the December issue. I am not exactly certain how a roost is defined; if it must be a permanent, daily inhabited location, then this sighting is inappropriate to the topic, as it concerns an isolated occurrence. At any rate, the sighting was one I made on 22 December 1981 on the Weston Golf Course. On this date near midday, I observed the presence of 272 Mourning Doves perched in the trees at the golf course. At the commencement of my observation, doves were flying in from various directions. When the birds'

movements had subsided, I was able to make my count. The weather conditions at the time of this observation were overcast skies with very little wind, a temperature of 2°C, and wet snow on the ground from an overnight accumulation of about 1½" (3¾ centimetres). I had previously never recorded and have since never recorded any one group of Mourning Doves of this or anywhere near comparable size.

Mark Kubisz  
Rexdale, Ontario

**Eds. Comment:** Mr. Kubisz poses an interesting question, "What is the definition of a roost?" As one who has studied various aspects of roosting for nearly 20 years, I usually equate roosting with sleeping; a roost is where birds sleep and, as a verb, to roost is to sleep (or to be at a roost attempting to sleep). Most birds roost at night but a few, goatsuckers, owls, etc., roost during the day. Of course, some birds are gregarious and roost communally, like crows, gulls, starlings, etc., while others roost solitarily, e.g. chickadees, Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, Winter Wrens, etc. So, what do you call groups of normally diurnal birds which are sitting around during the day, e.g. gulls on a golf course, Mourning Doves in a tree, etc.? Many ornithologists would refer to these as *loafing* birds and the areas where they are loafing are usually called their *loafing grounds*. The various authorities provide some light: the Audubon Encyclopedia of Birds says a roost

is a place where groups of birds sleep (it does not define the word as a verb) and Webster calls a roost (1) a perch, and hence (2) a resting place, whereas to roost is to perch or rest. He refers to "loaf" as "to spend time in idleness". Thus for Mr. Kubisz, I think he saw a loafing flock of Mourning Doves. The next question is, "Where do they roost (in the Rexdale area)?"

**Damage caused by woodpeckers:  
a recent review**

Perhaps as a final note/summary to the Topic of Note on damage by woodpeckers, some of our readers may be interested in a short review of the subject which recently came to my attention. The reference is given below and deals with such topics as: Why woodpeckers make noise and attack siding, control measures, and a new chemical repellent for woodpeckers and birds that attack windows, houses and people. There is an extensive bibliography.

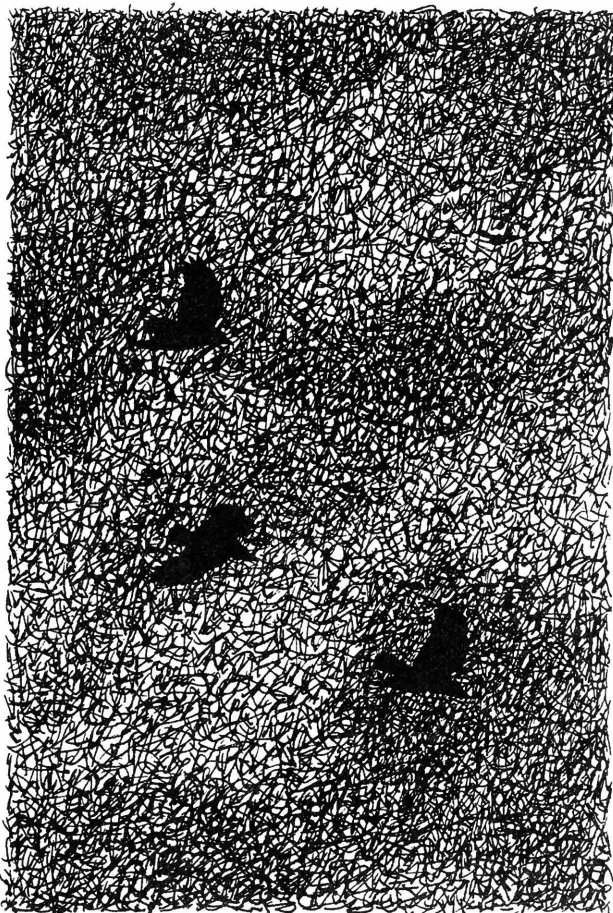
*Dove, L.E.* 1985. Birds that attack houses. Urban Wildlife Manager's Notebook #7. Supplement to Urban Wildlife News Vol. 8, No. 3 Summer 1985. Available for \$0.50 from the National Institute for Urban Wildlife, 10921 Trotting Ridge Way, Columbia, Maryland 21044.

Don Fraser  
Newmarket, Ontario

issue. However, those things will come with age. *Ontario Birds* is evolving in a very positive manner. And for that we thank you, our members. Keep up the good work. Be on the lookout for events, ideas and observations that will make good articles and notes. It has been a pleasure, and a bit of work, putting out the first volumes of *Ontario Birds*.

We welcome Don Fraser as the new Editor of *Ontario Birds*. Don has worked with us almost since that first day at the Jolly Miller. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of *Ontario Birds*. We are confident that he will continue the former and improve on the latter.

Good Birding,  
Chip & Linda Weseloh



REAUME

# Birds of Little Sachigo Lake and Thorne-Sachigo Rivers, Ontario

by  
John M.C. Peterson

## Introduction

A field party of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project composed of Theodore Mack, Daniel Nickerson, Timothy Stiles and the author spent 14–24 June 1985 at Little Sachigo Lake, Kenora District and 25 June–4 July 1985 along the Thorne and Sachigo Rivers beginning at an unnamed lake (“Bald Eagle Lake”, see Figure 1). The purpose of the expedition was to gather data from the two 100 x 100 km Atlas blocks (Blocks WL and XL) in northern Ontario that had received no previous coverage. Data were also obtained from a third block (Block WK) at Little Sachigo Lake.

## Location

Little Sachigo Lake is located near 54°20'N latitude and 92°10'W longitude within 40 km of the Manitoba border, about 320 km from Hudson Bay, and 150 km west of Big Trout Lake (Figure 1). The lake is about 12 km wide, eight km across, and is dotted with islands (many more than the 18

that show on the best 1:250,000 map available). Elevation is about 255 m. The stretch of the Thorne-Sachigo Rivers explored is near 55°N latitude, between 90° and 91°W longitude, and covers a distance of about 50 air km, with elevations dropping from 160 m to 140 m. The area is 120–140 km NNW of Big Trout Lake, and about 200 km south of Hudson Bay. It is estimated that the party canoed over 80 km at Little Sachigo and another 80 km or more along the two rivers and its tributaries.

## Relief

This is a generally flat land of winding rivers, irregular lakes, and muskeg. An area shown on the topographical maps, and henceforth referred to as Prominent Ridge, west of Little Sachigo Lake, hardly rises more than 30 m above the lake, and is forested with a mixture of balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera*), white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), and jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*).

John M.C. Peterson, Discovery Farm, RD 1, Elizabethtown, NY 12932  
U.S.A.

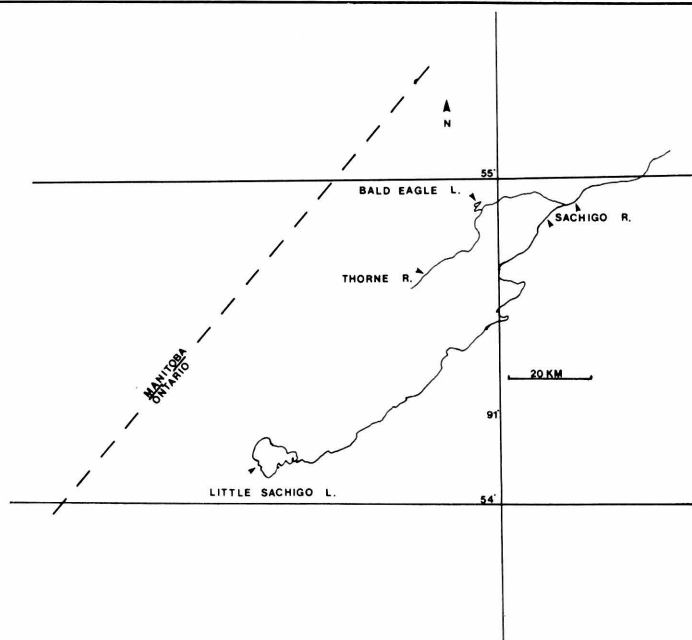


Figure 1. Map showing the two study areas: Little Sachigo Lake and Thorne-Sachigo Rivers.

### Drainage

Little Sachigo Lake receives water from Sachigo Lake to the south via the Sachigo River, and from smaller tributaries. Both the Thorne and Sachigo Rivers join the Severn River flowing into Hudson Bay. The rivers trend southwest-northeast, flowing down off the Shield to the Bay. Little Sachigo Lake is fairly silty due to clay runoff entering the lake, although the south-flowing streams on the north shore are clear. The Thorne River is clear, but the Sachigo is silty, in spite of contributions from the Thorne and other clear side tributaries.

### Climate

The early summer of 1985 was unusually wet, with a profound adverse impact upon nesting birds.

Of the 21 days spent in the field, it rained on at least six. Rain began the night of 20 June and continued without stop until 23 June. The storm accompanied by high winds from the northwest blew down trees around Little Sachigo Lake. On several other days strong winds and rains struck with little warning. The weather station at Big Trout Lake reported that during the first week of June there was snowfall equivalent to 5 cm of rain. The 20-23 June storm produced an additional 8 cm of rainfall, bringing the level of Big Trout Lake up another 30 cm. By 24 June, the beach at Camp 1 was mostly gone, and tents were moved into the spruce forest above the clay bank. On 27 June the Thorne was still in high flood stage, the current flowing back into the

spruce forest on both sides, no banks visible. Even by 4 July, when the mud residue on trees and shrubs showed that the Sachigo had dropped 1.25 m since the last rain a week previously, the river was still flowing over the tops of bankside willows and bushes. The personnel at the weather station felt that this should be the wettest June on record for northern Ontario and western Manitoba. The effect upon nesting birds, in the opinion of all four experienced observers, was devastating. Of 87 species recorded in Atlas Block XL at Little Sachigo Lake over 137 hours between 14-25 June, 27 (31%) were Confirmed. This low percentage actually dropped in Block XL along the Thorne-Sachigo Rivers. Of the 80 species recorded over a period of 130 hours between 25 June and 4 July, only 13 (16%) were Confirmed.

#### Areas Investigated

From Camps 1-4, the shoreline of Little Sachigo Lake from the southeast outlet around the north shore to Prominent Ridge in the west was investigated. Also explored were an unnamed lake to the south in Atlas square 15WK59, Warnock Lake to the north, an unnamed lake west of Warnock in 15WL50, and streams leading to these lakes. The surrounding forests, muskegs, bogs, and side channels were intensively investigated, as were all islands on the north (Block WL) side of the lake.

Camp 5 provided a base for exploring the entirety of the unnamed lake ("Bald Eagle

Lake") south of South Wanitawagao Creek. From the canoes and Camps 6-11, the Thorne and Sachigo Rivers received thorough coverage. For most of the river trip bankside vegetation was under the floodwaters and the banks were lined with flooded tall white spruce (*Picea glauca*). Near the river were forests of black spruce (*Picea mariana*), jack pine, and some white birch-balsam poplar, with fairly dense muskeg beyond. A large area of old burn lay behind Camp 9 at the Thorne-Sachigo confluence, where Common Nighthawks were particularly conspicuous. About a dozen side streams were also explored, some for several miles upstream by canoe and on foot.

#### Habitats

There was a rich variety of habitats, and successional types within; the conifer and broad-leaved forests, open habitats, and wetlands. Except for the ruins of a trapper's cabin at Little Sachigo Lake, a trapper's tepee at Warnock Lake, and a new cabin along the Sachigo River, there was little artificial disturbance by man.

Black spruce is dominant around Little Sachigo Lake, with some mixture of white birch and balsam poplar on higher ground, especially around the small lake to the south of the outlet where Least Flycatcher and Ovenbird were Confirmed, along Prominent Ridge on the west shore, and several ridges on the north side. Spruce generally grades off into tamarack (*Larix laricina*) in lower, wetter areas, the latter species being

dominant in several bog and wetland locations. The lake provides open water, with islands ranging from piles of bare boulders, to brush vegetation, as well as those forested with conifers or mixed woods. The shoreline of Little Sachigo is mostly lined with forests, although there are edges of willows (*Salix* sp.) or marsh in places, and at the east end there is a narrow strip of sandy beach. Shallow marshes are found near the outlet and up several streams, with cover varying from dense woody shrubs and cattails to flooded sedge meadows and emergent buckbeans. Fens and bogs tend to blend into black spruce forest. Interestingly, dandelions were noted at several grassy streamside embankments used as campsites by our party, showing signs of previous use by Indians.

White spruce borders much of the Thorne River, except where jack pine takes up higher ground along the banks. Mixed with and dominant behind this curtain is black spruce. Black spruce also borders the lake where we landed in square 15XL28 ("Bald Eagle Lake"). Some mixed or pure stands of birch-poplar are found along the Thorne, becoming more frequent at lower elevations along the wider Sachigo River. The Sachigo is also bordered by a wider band of willow along its banks. Much of the muskeg behind the riverbanks was found to be fairly dense, only rarely opening up, most notably around the old burn near the confluence of the two rivers. During our visit much

of the edge habitat was under the high floodwaters that sometimes intruded back into the spruce forest. Ground cover was sphagnum of various species throughout the study areas, often flooded to a depth of a 0.3 m or more. Patches of lichens were generally found on drier ground with well-drained sandy soil. No ferns were observed. Many familiar plants were found to be much smaller than their counterparts to the south.

### **The Bird Fauna**

Avian records were obtained from a total of fifteen 10 km squares: two in block WK, three in block WL, and ten in block XL. The variety of breeding birds in this study area was extremely rich, with 105 species found (and several others undoubtedly present) around Little Sachigo Lake and along the Thorne-Sachigo Rivers. Variety was generally better near the lake (93 species) than on the rivers (80 species), although the latter yielded a dozen new species for the trip. A highlight was the discovery of Double-crested Cormorants nesting on Little Sachigo Lake. Large numbers of waterfowl took advantage of the expanses of open water at Little Sachigo, including all-male flocks of scaups, Common Goldeneyes, and Buffleheads. Common Loon, Green-winged Teal, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, and Lesser Scaup were Confirmed as breeding species at Little Sachigo, and another seven waterfowl species noted there. Canada Geese were

Confirmed several times at the Thorne, Green-winged Teal Confirmed on a beaver pond upstream from the river, and eight other species of waterfowl noted, including White-winged Scoters on "Bald Eagle Lake." Eight species of eagle and hawks were found, as well as four owls (plus Short-eared at Pickle Lake). Sandhill Cranes were found at four locations. Five shorebirds were regularly encountered, and Semipalmated Sandpiper found once, resting on an islet in Little Sachigo. Common Nighthawks were commonly encountered at seven locations. Woodpeckers were notably scarce, with only four species recorded and only Northern Flicker Confirmed; Three-toed Woodpecker was not recorded, but undoubtedly present. These aforementioned species, as well as passerines, are treated in detail on the systematic list which follows.

The sequence and nomenclature of birds' names follows that of the American Ornithologists' Union's *Checklist of North American Birds* (6th Edition).

### Acknowledgements

This expedition was made possible

by the support and advice of a number of farflung and helpful individuals and institutions. Mike Cadman, Atlas coordinator for the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, was encouraging for more than two years. Thanks to his persistence and patience our plans finally became reality, and we're most appreciative. L.L. Bean, Inc., of Freeport, Maine, provided supplies, equipment, and the invaluable advice of their expert staff; they not only made our expedition possible, they made it safe. The James L. Baillie Memorial Fund helped defray expenses, while Austin Airways helped defray transportation costs and saw to it that four birders, two canoes, and 200 kg of gear moved north without delay. Big Trout Air Service, Ltd., did an outstanding job, and their pilots are to be commended for prompt and professional service. Thomas Terry of Voyageurs North provided sound advice and useful maps. Comfortable housing at Big Trout Lake was provided by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. We especially thank the people of Big Trout Lake for their hospitality.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

**Common Loon.** Nest with two eggs on small pond halfway up stream to Warnock Lake 16 June; this was a mainland nest, placed on a low hummock. Pairs were noted at Little Sachigo Lake and at Bald Eagle Lake, where two pairs engaged in territorial displays 26 June. There was also a pair on Warnock Lake, but no nest could be found, perhaps because islands were flooded by our visit on 24 June. We suspect many loon nests failed.

**Double-crested Cormorant.** Pair east end of Little Sachigo Lake; nest with three eggs found 20 June on a rocky islet formed of boulders 1.6 km out from the west shore of Little Sachigo, 3 adults present, and Herring Gulls also nesting among the rocks. This appears to be the northernmost nesting record for Ontario.



**American Bittern.** Heard or seen several times, including a pair at Little Sachigo.

**Great Blue Heron.** Pair near Little Sachigo; also seen at Bald Eagle Lake near the Thorne in suitable habitat in the channel to the river.

**Canada Goose.** Small flock Little Sachigo Lake; several broods near and along the Thorne River, plus adults along the Sachigo.

**Green-winged Teal.** Found in suitable habitat at Little Sachigo Lake and a pair with ducklings found in a channel at a lake north of the lake 19 June; a vigorous distraction display was given on a beaver pond between Bald Eagle Lake and the Thorne 26 June.

**Mallard.** Hen with brood Little Sachigo 18 June, upstream from Little Sachigo a pair with brood June 20; also noted near Bald Eagle Lake.

**Blue-winged Teal.** Distraction display north of Little Sachigo, also found near outlet.

**American Wigeon.** Pairs were encountered at a number of locations on and around Little Sachigo Lake on several dates.

**Ring-necked Duck.** Nest with nine eggs 19 June on stream north of Little Sachigo; pair near Bald Eagle Lake.

**Greater Scaup.** Pairs seen at several places around Little Sachigo Lake and found at Bald Eagle Lake.

**Lesser Scaup.** Distraction display, pairs, Little Sachigo.

**White-winged Scoter.** At Bald Eagle Lake 26 June a lone male took off from the water and made several passes over a mated pair swimming together.

**Common Goldeneye.** Little Sachigo Lake seemed to be a gathering place for the males of several species of duck, including this bird, which appeared in flocks of up to 50 individuals. A mated pair was noted near the outlet of Little Sachigo Lake. Also seen at the Thorne-Sachigo confluence.

**Bufflehead.** Found in smaller all-male flocks than goldeneyes at Little Sachigo.

**Common Merganser.** Uncommon on Little Sachigo Lake, more common along the Thorne-Sachigo corridor.

**Red-breasted Merganser.** Common at Little Sachigo, where pairs were found; quite scarce on the rivers.

**Osprey.** Active nest located atop spruce at Warnock Lake 24 June, also carrying fish at east end of Little Sachigo. Seen at Bald Eagle Lake.

**Bald Eagle.** At least one adult was seen five times at different locations around the northwest side of Little Sachigo over a period of several days, both before and after the storm. An adult was seen at Bald Eagle Lake, and we later saw an immature. Brian Barfoot of Big Trout Air Service reports that Bald Eagles are nesting atop the mine shaft building of an abandoned gold mine in square 15XL04, north of Foster Lake between the Thorne and Sachigo Rivers.

**Northern Harrier.** A pair frequented the same spot and kept dropping down in vegetation in a marshy area at the outlet of Little Sachigo 15 June.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk.** Seen once at Little Sachigo Lake, once near trapper's camp over Sachigo River widewater.

**Northern Goshawk.** Seen once at Little Sachigo Lake near a bog; another dived at Stiles on the muskeg behind the Thorne, upstream from its confluence.

**Red-shouldered Hawk.** One at the marshy outlet of Little Sachigo Lake on 15 June, an area that also produced the harriers and kestrel. The bordering forest was mostly broad-leaved trees (birch-poplar); the habitat was certainly suitable.

**Red-tailed Hawk.** Noted once, north of Little Sachigo Lake, 15 June.

**American Kestrel.** Seen once, near start of Sachigo River near the outlet of Little Sachigo Lake 15 June.

**Merlin.** Not recorded in study area, although a small falcon near Prominent Ridge 20 June may have been this species.

**Spruce Grouse.** Male along stream north of Little Sachigo 19 June; male near Prominent Ridge 21 June; female Bald Eagle Lake 26 June. Also recorded on basis of fresh scat in three squares along Thorne R., two squares along Sachigo R.

**Ruffed Grouse.** Pair with brood below Prominent Ridge 21 June; drumming and fresh scat also observed at Little Sachigo Lake.

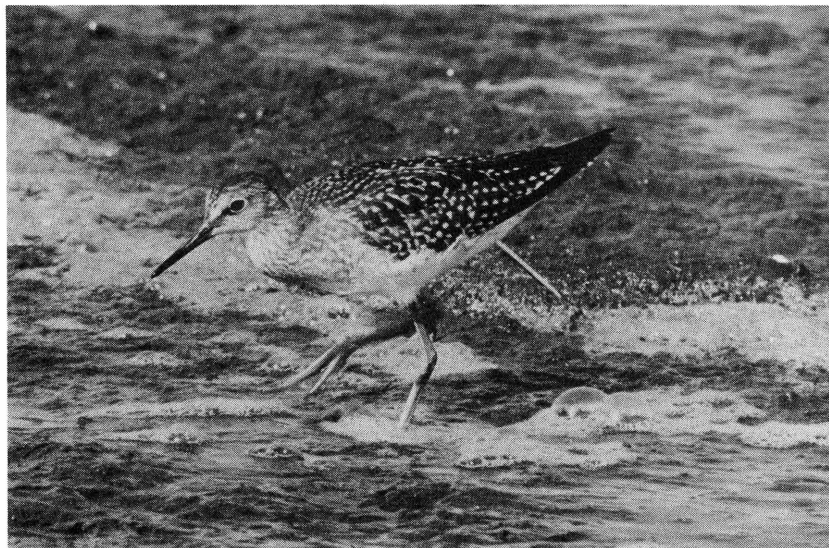
**Sora.** Heard at two locations in the marshy area near the outlet of Little Sachigo Lake, and also heard at a number of locations along the streams north of Little Sachigo Lake; often heard calling without prompting from our tape recorder, and two or more birds sometimes heard at same spot.

**Sandhill Crane.** Pair feeding in sedge meadow along stream north of Little Sachigo Lake 18 June; heard near Little Sachigo 20 June; heard twice along Thorne River; pair seen Sachigo River 1 July, for a total of five encounters within two weeks.

**Killdeer.** Not encountered in study area, but showing agitated behaviour at Big Trout Lake village near the Hudson Bay store.

**Greater Yellowlegs.** Numerous encounters of birds well seen and heard in five different squares, often with Lesser Yellowlegs for comparison, both at Little Sachigo Lake vicinity and along the river passage.

**Lesser Yellowlegs.** Numerous encounters in four different squares.



Lesser Yellowlegs.

PHOTO: R.D. McRAE

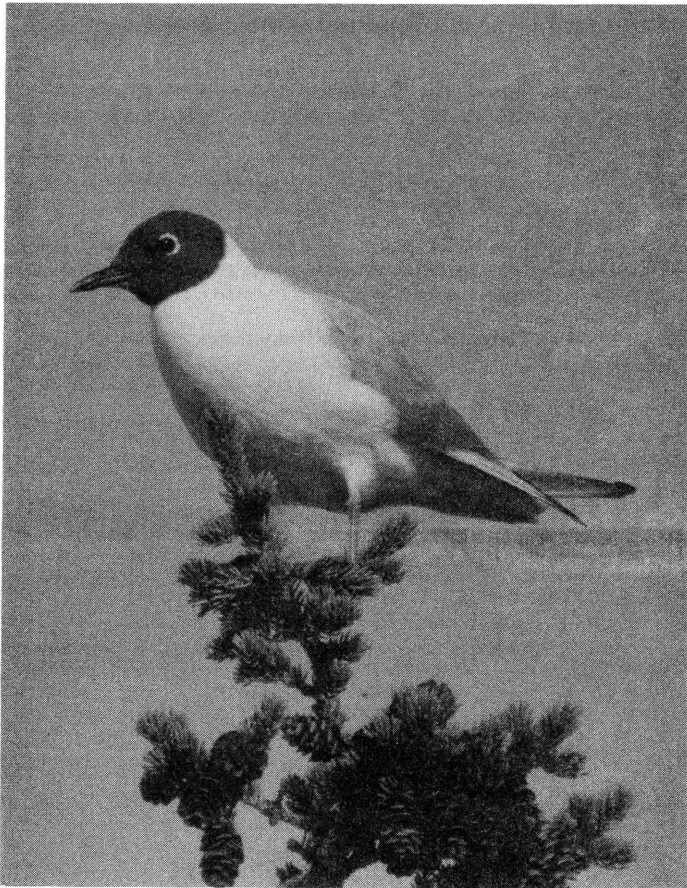
**Solitary Sandpiper.** Vigorous distraction display (one bird nearly falling into canoe) in swampy area below Warnock Lake 24 June. Regularly encountered in suitable habitat in nine different squares, with several encounters in some blocks, both near Little Sachigo and along the rivers.

**Spotted Sandpiper.** Distraction display near confluence of Thorne and Sachigo Rivers; numerous encounters in seven different squares.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper.** Two flushed from resting spot on islet at east side of Little Sachigo Lake on 15 June.

**Common Snipe.** Numerous encounters (seen, heard calling, winnowing) in seven different blocks both near Little Sachigo and the rivers.

**Bonaparte's Gull.** A pair frequented spruces at the east end of Little Sachigo Lake and another pair frequented spruces bordering Bald Eagle Lake, chasing off a Bald Eagle and sitting tight in a shoreline spruce as we paddled by within less than 15 m. Individuals seen several other times, and also seen on Pickle Lake.



Bonaparte's Gull.

PHOTO: R.D. McRAE

**Ring-billed Gull.** One individual in a small flock of Herring Gulls on an islet at the east end of Little Sachigo 24 June.

**Herring Gull.** A nest with eggs was found on a rock in the small lake south of the outlet of Little Sachigo 15 June. On the night of 20 June a number of nests with eggs and recently hatched chicks were found on a small rocky islet about 1.6 km out in the west end of Little Sachigo (where the cormorant nest was also found). A Herring Gull was also seen at Bald Eagle Lake 25 June, but none was seen along the rivers.

**Common Tern.** Adults were regularly seen carrying food to young at Little Sachigo Lake, but a nesting site was not found. It may be along the unexplored south side of the lake. Those recorded were clearly Common Terns. Several terns which might have been Arctic Terns were observed at Little Sachigo and Bald Eagle Lakes.

**Great Horned Owl.** At 0845 h, 29 June, in excellent light, a bird of the pale northern form (*B. v. wapacuthu*) was seen perched and subsequently in flight along the Thorne River; facial disc, breast, and back were entirely a frosty grey, with one or two brown primary tips showing through the folded wings. Downstream, that same night at 2350 h, we called in a pair of Great Horned Owls, but plumage could not be determined. The day of 30 June, further down the Thorne, another was heard calling.

**Northern Hawk-Owl.** At 0930 h, 19 June, in excellent light, a scolding bird flew out of the spruce forest over the stream leading north from Little Sachigo Lake to an unnamed lake, landed atop a spruce and scolded some more from about 30 m, and flew off across the stream. A search for a nest was unsuccessful. That same evening, over a mile north of the first encounter, we saw a second owl cache a vole or lemming atop a dead snag, then perch in some nearby spruce tops until dark.

**Great Gray Owl.** At 0705 h, 24 June, in good light, in the marsh below Warnock Lake, a Great Gray Owl flew by over the stream and into the muskeg, carrying food. The call heard downstream the night before undoubtedly was this species. A Great Gray was also heard calling at Bald Eagle Lake about 0300 h, 26 June.

**Boreal Owl.** At 0300 h, 28 June, during the brief period of real darkness, one began calling near Camp 6 along the Thorne River. It fell silent when a taped call was played, then gave a little sharp scream, screaming more to an imitative whistle of a saw-whet's toot. In response to a whistled imitation of screech owl it flew down, landing on a spruce pole beside our tent in the flashlight beam. He returned twice over the next hour for flashlight close-ups, sitting atop spruces giving his 9-11 note call, similar in a way to the whinny of a snipe. He was still calling as the sky lightened about 0400 h.

**Common Nighthawk.** Recorded in seven blocks; six or more at the confluence of Thorne and Sachigo Rivers, where they were booming at night; otherwise seen as singles or pairs.

**Belted Kingfisher.** Not frequently encountered, but two active nests found: northwest side of Little Sachigo Lake and along the Sachigo River widewater.

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.** Heard near outlet of the Little Sachigo; old stitched holes on birches along Prominent Ridge.

**Hairy Woodpecker.** Once near east beach, Little Sachigo Lake.

**Black-backed Woodpecker.** Female, 28 June, near Camp 6 along Thorne River. None of many nestholes with beveled bottom edges seemed active along the Thorne.

**Northern Flicker.** Active nest along the Thorne 29 June; species noted in 8 squares.

- Olive-sided Flycatcher.** Only two encounters with this species, although suitable habitat abounds. One heard in bog behind Camp 2 at 0530 h, 20 June on the stream north of Little Sachigo; a second on the muskeg about a mile behind Camp 8 on the Thorne on 29 June.
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.** Recorded in one block Little Sachigo Lake, four squares along the Thorne River; seemed quite scarce despite ideal habitat.
- Alder Flycatcher.** Numerous encounters in eight squares; nest-building along stream north of Little Sachigo 20 June.
- Least Flycatcher.** Feeding young in broad-leaf forest of birch-poplar bordering small lake south of Little Sachigo 15 June; recorded in five squares, but generally scarce.
- Tree Swallow.** Never confirmed, although recorded at a number of locations in five squares.
- Cliff Swallow.** Not recorded in study area, although seen gathering nesting material on muddy road at Big Trout Lake village.
- Gray Jay.** Probably the most ubiquitous species in all areas, and confirmed in ten different squares. Also confirmed south of Pickle Lake.
- American Crow.** Not recorded in study area, but recently fledged young observed in Big Trout Lake village.
- Common Raven.** Carrying food at east end of Little Sachigo; noted in seven squares, but more frequent around Little Sachigo than along the rivers.
- Black-capped Chickadee.** Only a single encounter; one or more birds heard in spruces across Sachigo River widewater on 4 July.
- Boreal Chickadee.** Nest with young in birch stub on stream north of Sachigo Lake 19 June; family group with fledged young along Thorne River 30 June; recorded in six squares. Scarce earlier in the season at Little Sachigo, but more vocal and obvious later along the rivers.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch.** In spite of abundant habitat, this species was found only at Warnock Lake, where it was noted on both the east and west shores in spruces.
- Brown Creeper.** Nest with young, 1 m up in a 1.5 m broken spruce stub behind Camp 2 on stream north of Little Sachigo, 20 June. Also found in four squares along the Thorne and Sachigo Rivers, with greatest density along the Thorne where birds were in song.
- Winter Wren.** Recorded in six squares, three at Little Sachigo, three along the rivers, but most frequently heard along the Thorne River.
- Golden-crowned Kinglet.** Recorded in six squares, three at Little Sachigo, three along the rivers, but nowhere common.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet.** Carrying food to young north of Little Sachigo; found in 12 different squares, and most abundant along the Thorne River, where one territory gave way to the next at times. We noticed that the song was different from that given in the Adirondacks.
- Gray-cheeked Thrush.** Heard and seen at Bald Eagle Lake near the Thorne 25-27 June at Camp 5. This was the only encounter with this thrush.
- Swainson's Thrush.** The usual evening and dawn songster in spruces around the campsites at Little Sachigo Lake and later a camp upstream from the Sachigo River; the most common thrush in most areas.

**Hermit Thrush.** The dawn and dusk songster around Thorne River campsites where jack pine was the dominant conifer on the sloping, well-drained sandy banks. We were surprised to find it becoming more common as we moved further north. However, we were dropping in elevation at the same time.

**American Robin.** Also more common along the Thorne. Secretive.

**Bohemian Waxwing.** Pair along Sachigo River below its confluence with the Thorne 1 July; prior to, and south of that, all waxwings had been "cedar birds." Nickerson saw and photographed another pair at Camp 10 upstream from the Sachigo that same evening of 1 July, and were heard the next morning. Waxwings heard only at Camp 11 on 2-3 July were suspected of being Bohemians.

**Cedar Waxwing.** Recorded in five squares, but nowhere common.

**Northern Shrike.** Adult sitting on a dead spruce pole in a stream mouth along the Thorne River on the morning of 29 June.

**European Starling.** Not recorded in study area. Active nest under eaves of Co-op at Big Trout Lake 4 July.

**Solitary Vireo.** Recorded in seven squares, as far north as the Sachigo River widewater, where it seemed most frequently encountered.

**Philadelphia Vireo.** Found singing at several locations along the Sachigo River in bankside poplars and willows 1-2 July. Plumage not as bright (greenish/yellowish) as Adirondack birds.

**Red-eyed Vireo.** Recorded in five squares. Most records from Little Sachigo Lake area where it was sometime found singing in streamside willow shrubs, but also found in more expected birch-balsam woods. Nowhere common.

**Tennessee Warbler.** Together with Yellow and Palm, one of the most common warblers, recorded in 13 squares, but only confirmed (carrying food) once, along the Thorne 29 June. Tennessees were generally in lakeside willows at Little Sachigo and riverbank willows along the rivers, but were rarely found up the smaller streams.

**Orange-crowned Warbler.** Found at several locations in streamside willows and alders upstream of Little Sachigo and several spots around Bald Eagle Lake, but not along the Thorne River. One location near the confluence.

**Yellow Warbler.** Quite regularly encountered along shorelines and streams, yet not confirmed. Not found at Bald Eagle Lake or along the upper Thorne, and then again regular from the confluence down the Sachigo R. widewater.

**Magnolia Warbler.** Recorded in eight squares, usually in spruces near the water's edge, but nowhere abundant.

**Cape May Warbler.** Not found along the Thorne River, although recorded in five squares near Little Sachigo and along the Sachigo widewater.

**Yellow-rumped Warbler.** Confirmed (carrying food) along the lower Thorne, noted in 11 squares, but not as common as we might have expected, given the amount of habitat.

**Palm Warbler.** All individuals seen were of the nominate "Western" subspecies (*D.p. palmarum*), as might be expected. Confirmed (carrying food) only twice, but regularly found in bog/muskeg habitat, usually away from lakeshores, streams, and rivers, in scattered to dense spruce-tamarack. At least six individuals in sight and sound at one place north of Little Sachigo in stunted tamarack bog. Noted in nine different squares.

# On Building a Balanced Library for the Ontario Birder

by  
Donald M. Fraser

Jim Heslop's inquiry concerning the essential books required to amass a balanced library for the Ontario birder (*Ontario Birds* Vol. 2 No.2) has prompted the following reply from a confirmed ornitho-bibliophile.

A number of Ontario's top field birders were canvassed and asked to provide a list of their personal choices, giving reasons why these particular books warranted inclusion. The results of this survey have been tabulated and are summarized below.

It is important to recognize that each birder will have specific literary needs, dependent in large part upon his/her level of expertise, place of residence and propensity for travelling throughout the province in search of birds. Some birders possess a specific interest in a particular aspect of avian behaviour such as nesting. Others may limit their activity to a given time of the year or a small geographic area.

Given this wide range of pursuits, I have attempted to design a library which is intended to satisfy the needs of the *average* Ontario birder. I have assumed

that this hypothetical individual has between five and ten years of birding experience, resides in southern Ontario, and is primarily interested in the essential aspects of "birding" (i.e., identification, distribution, life history, etc.) rather than mere "listing".

The books mentioned below have been grouped on the basis of their particular function into the following categories: field guides, distribution guides, birdfinding guides, general references and journals.

## Field Guides

The first essential, of course, is a field guide. Those polled seemed to be fairly evenly split between the latest edition of Peterson's Eastern guide and a relative newcomer, the National Geographic Society (NGS) guide. Most felt that both guides were a must, a sentiment which I would echo. Each complements the other; Peterson is an excellent starting point for the beginner, while the NGS guide caters more to those who strive for the state of the art in field identification.

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### Distribution Guides

The recent release of J. Murray Speirs' two-volume *Birds of Ontario* marks the first comprehensive treatment of the province's avifauna since T. W. McIlwraith's 1886 book of the same title. Since this ambitious work will be the subject of a full review in a future issue of *Ontario Birds*, I will not discuss its virtues and shortcomings here. Volume I, however, is no more than a photographic compendium of Ontario's birds and, at \$49.95, is grossly overpriced. Volume II, devoted to a species by species discussion of winter and breeding distributions, migration dates and extralimital records, is by far the more informative of the two and a relative bargain at only half the price.

Two other essential distribution references are the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario* (James *et al.* 1976) and *Breeding Birds of Ontario. Nidiology and Distribution. Volume 1: Non-passerines* (Peck and James 1983). Although the former is now somewhat out of date, it is very inexpensive and provides a quick reference to a great deal of succinctly summarized data. *Breeding Birds of Ontario. Nidiology and Distribution Volume 2: Passerines* is currently in press and due for release sometime in 1986. Together this set will provide a wealth of information on the nesting ecology of Ontario's birds. The inclusion of historical breeding distributions will allow comparisons with results of the forthcoming Atlas of the breeding birds of Ontario.

For those wishing to obtain a wider, Canadian perspective on bird distribution, there is only one recommended source, W. Earl Godfrey's classic *The Birds of Canada* (1966). Although still available in many bookstores, anyone without a copy might be better advised to hold off purchasing one until the long awaited revision appears. After innumerable production delays the second edition is now expected to be published in the spring of 1986.

The library of any serious Ontario birder should also contain the book(s) which cover the birds of his/her area of the province. There are many such regional/local avifaunas available; unfortunately it is impossible to list them all here. Some of the better ones, however, are *Birds of the Oshawa—Lake Scugog Region* (Tozer and Richards 1974), *History of the Birds of Kingston, Ontario* (Quilliam 1973), *A Cottager's Guide to the Birds of Muskoka and Parry Sound* (Mills 1981) and *Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region* (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

### Birdfinding Guides

There are two birdfinding guides currently on the market which are pertinent to Ontario birders. Goodwin's *A Bird-Finding Guide to Ontario* (1982) is indispensable to anyone visiting an unfamiliar part of the province. Although it contains a good summary of Ontario hotspots, Finlay's *A Bird-Finding Guide to Canada* (1984) should appeal to birders with somewhat broader horizons.



### Identification Guides

In keeping with the trend toward more specialization in field ornithology, a number of identification guides dealing with a particular family of birds have recently appeared on the market. Respondents to the survey were virtually unanimous in their endorsement of *Gulls: A Guide to Identification* (Grant 1982). This superb book contains dozens of excellent black-and-white photographs and is an essential reference for anyone wishing to unravel the complex sequence of age and season-related plumages peculiar to gulls. An equally confusing group, waders, is dealt with in a similar fashion by the *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders* (Prater *et al.* 1977). This is also an invaluable reference, despite the fact that it treats a number of Eurasian species which have never occurred in Ontario (let alone eastern North America). Much of the critical numerical information contained in this book (measurements of wing chords, tarsi, etc.,) are intended more for the benefit of the bander, rather than for the field birder.

Although it bills itself as a field guide, the three-volume *Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding* (Farrand 1983) is, by virtue of its size alone, most useful as a photographic reference. The text also contains many helpful identification hints not found elsewhere.

### General References

Although now somewhat dated, the 26-volume set of Life Histories

of North American Birds (1919–1968) by Bent (and collaborators) is unsurpassed in terms of the wealth of information it contains. Written in an engaging, often anecdotal style, these books are a refreshing change from the dry, overly factual style which typifies much of today's scientific writing. Anyone wishing to make an extremely worthwhile investment (and it is expensive!) is advised to do so without delay; apparently some of the popular Dover reprint editions are now out of print.

Another worthwhile but somewhat less costly investment is the one-volume *Audubon Encyclopedia of North American Birds* (Terres 1980). Although this book does not approach the Bent series in terms of overall comprehensiveness, the information it does contain is much more current.

Palmer's *Handbook of North American Birds* series, once considered the heir apparent to Bent's Life Histories, appears doomed to publishing oblivion. Since its inception in 1962, only three volumes of this monumental work have been released, encompassing loons through ducks. At this rate, none of us are likely to witness its completion during our lifetime. We can only hope that a new series of life histories, planned for release by the American Ornithologists' Union, will not suffer the same fate.

For those fortunate enough to have won a lottery, acquiring *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* by Cramp and Simmons is a must. Four volumes of this definitive

work have been published to date, and cover all the non-passerines. Fortunately, these are the species which are of greatest relevance to the Ontario birder, since many occur as vagrants on our side of the Atlantic. At approximately £60 per volume however, they are beyond the reach of all but the very serious (or the very wealthy).

### Journals

Given the phenomenal amount of ornithological information currently in print, it is virtually impossible to keep abreast of recent developments without subscribing to a pertinent bird journal (or two).

*American Birds*, published five times a year by the National Audubon Society, is requisite reading for anyone interested in North American bird distribution. The journal *Birding*, despite its unabashed emphasis on "listing", nevertheless often contains excellent articles on the identification of notoriously difficult species. The American Birding Association produces six issues of this journal annually. Needless to say, any library which does not contain all the issues of *Ontario Birds* is woefully incomplete.

What then are the essential references? The 15 listed below best reflect the opinions of those polled, in fulfilling the basic literary needs of the average Ontario birder. These are, in no particular order:

1. Peterson, R.T. 1980. *A Field Guide to the Birds*. Houghton-Mifflin. 384 pp.

2. Scott, S.L. (Ed.) 1983. *National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Kingsport Press. 464 pp.
3. Speirs, J.M. 1985. *The Birds of Ontario*. Volume 2. 986 pp.
4. Peck, G.K. and R.D. James. 1983. *Breeding Birds of Ontario. Nidiology and Distribution. Volume 1: Nonpasserines*. Royal Ontario Museum. 321 pp.
5. Peck, G.K. and R.D. James. In press. *Breeding Birds of Ontario. Nidiology and Distribution. Volume 2: Passerines*. Royal Ontario Museum.
6. *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario*. In prep. Federation of Ontario Naturalists.
7. Goodwin, C. 1982. *A Bird-Finding Guide to Ontario*. University of Toronto Press. 248 pp.
8. Tozer, R.G. and J.M. Richards. 1974. *Birds of Oshawa-Lake Scugog Region*. Alger Press. 384 pp.
9. Bent, A.C. and collaborators. 1919-1968. *Life Histories of North American Birds*. 26 Volumes. Dover Reprint Editions.
10. Godfrey, W.E. 1966. *The Birds of Canada*. National Museums of Canada. 428 pp. (Second edition due for publication in early 1986.)
11. James, R.D., R.L. MacLaren and J.C. Barlow. 1976. *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario*. Royal Ontario Museum. 78 pp.

12. Terres, J.K. 1980. *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf. 1109 pp.
13. Grant, P.J. 1982. *Gulls: A Guide to Identification*. T & AD Poyser. 280 pp.
14. *American Birds*. Journal of the National Audubon Society, New York. Five issues/year.
15. *Ontario Birds*. Journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists, Burlington. Three issues/year.

The final word on all of this comes from Jim Richards, who wisely cautions that,

“... by having the above, you will find that you are so damn busy reading that you won't have time to go birding much anyway, and after paying for the books and your annual magazine subscriptions, you won't be able to afford to go anywhere even if you had the time.”

Happy Reading!

## Notes

### Sexing Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (*Polioptila caerulea*)

I found the note by Ted Cheskey (*Ontario Birds* 3:68-69) on winter records of Blue-gray Gnatcatcher very interesting, but I'm afraid I must question his unqualified sexing of the one he saw as a female.

Spring adult Blue-gray Gnatcatchers are sexually dichromatic, as shown in virtually all bird books, the males having a narrow black line extending from the forehead to the sides of the crown. Only *one* of the current field guides (Terrill, in Farrand 1983) bothers to mention “immatures” at all, and here the wording is ambiguous; the head pattern of the spring adult male is correctly described, and then the text states “Females and immatures are similar but less bluish above”

(Vol. 1, p. 38). It is stated explicitly that females lack the black head marking, although this is probably implicit in the sentence attributing this mark to adult males, and of course the lack of the mark is obvious in the accompanying photograph of a female. What is *not* stated or even necessarily implied in the above-quoted sentence is that “immature” males (i.e., in first basic plumage) *also* lack the black line. This mark is not acquired until about February, in a limited first prealternate molt.

There appears to be some controversy in the literature as to whether fall adult males retain the black head markings after their complete prebasic molt. Dwight

(1900:307) and Oberholser (1974:679), usually the two best references on passerine plumage sequences, both clearly state that the "winter plumage" of adult males is the same as the "nuptial plumage", i.e., with the black face marks. Bent's "Life histories" (1949), oddly enough, is self-contradictory. On p. 352 the editor (i.e., Bent himself) states "young males lack the black frontal band during the first fall and winter, and the females never have it", rather clearly implying that *adult* males *do* have it in fall and winter. On the other hand, on p. 356, discussing the black facial marking of "the male gnatcatcher," the author of the general account for this species, Francis Marion Weston, writes: "It seems to be not generally known that this distinguishing mark is not present in winter specimens."

Wood's "Bird-bander's guide" (1969) is incorrect with respect to fall gnatcatchers, as he made no provision even for first-year males lacking head markings. This was rectified by Sheppard and Klimkiewicz (1976:26), who warned "Do not sex HY [hatching year] or AHY [after hatching year] (except AHY in Mar.-Jun.) by plumage." Inclusion of AHY ("adult") gnatcatchers in this ruling indicates the belief of the authors that all males do, in fact, lack the head markings in fall and winter, as stated by Weston (in Bent 1949). This viewpoint is supported by specimens in the collection of Carnegie Museum of Natural History. Of 19 specimens sexed as male taken between 17 August and 13 February (an 18

February male is in head molt), *none* has black head markings. Although most of these lack label annotations about skull pneumatization, it would appear unlikely that all of these 19 randomly collected fall/winter males were first-year birds.

Specimens in our collection confirm that spring males are bluer, less gray above than spring females, but I doubt that it would be possible to differentiate by color among the age and sex classes in the field in the fall, especially looking at only a single bird without available color comparisons. Because of the lack of black head markings on fall males, relying on field guide information for sexing Blue-gray Gnatcatchers will result in a manifestly impossible 0:1 sex ratio!

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Wood, M. 1969. A bird-bander's guide to determination of age and sex of selected species.

Penn. State Univ., University Park, Pa.

Kenneth C. Parkes, Section of Birds, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 4400 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213.

## Partial Albinism and the Determination of Local Movements in an American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

Albinism (the presence of abnormal white coloration in the plumage, cf. Sage 1962) has been recorded quite frequently in corvids (Harrison 1963, a,b; Lee and Keeler 1951; Sage 1962, 1963). The presence of white feathering on a black bird presents a striking pattern which is readily detected in the field. On 18 March 1985, A. Wormington and M. Jennings observed a partially albino American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) at the Burlington Landfill Site, on the North Service Road, Halton Regional Municipality (R.M.). It was flying in association with several hundred normally-plumaged crows. Four days later, on 22 March 1985, WJC observed a similar crow over the Queen Elizabeth Way near Cawthra Road in Mississauga, Peel R.M. It was flying in the company of four normally-plumaged crows. A comparison of our notes suggests that the same bird may have been involved in both observations, or perhaps we

had observed related birds from the same brood. We both noted the striking resemblance of the wing tip pattern to that of the Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*). The greater part of each primary feather on each wing was white, with the tips of these feathers being black. As far as it was possible to determine, the pattern of albinism was perfectly symmetrical.

Our observations are of interest for several reasons. They document an additional case of albinism in the American Crow (Nero (1968), Sealy (1967), and Short and Laybourne (1967) have reported other cases, which differ in the extent and distribution of albinism in the plumage), they record albinism in a migratory species, in which the incidence of albinism is low (Sage 1963), and they allow the determination of local dispersal, a poorly known aspect of the American Crow's life history (Stokes 1979). The distance between our sightings is approximately 36 kilometres.

Although this distance is not great, these observations provide a clue as to the timing and direction of post-roost dispersal of some crows at the west end of Lake Ontario in the spring. AW's observation was clearly that of a crow associating with roost mates (probably from the Hamilton Mountain roost mentioned by Lamoureux and Lamoureux 1980). The Burlington Landfill Site is a well-known feeding area for crows in winter (see recent Hamilton Christmas Bird Count results, published in *American Birds*). A few days later, the same or a closely related bird was seen in Mississauga. Its direction of flight was toward the southeast at the time of the observation, which was approximately 1700 h (dusk), and it seems unlikely that it would return to a roost over 40 km away after dark.

Albinism is often genetically based, although partial albinism may be induced by poor diet, senility, or shock (Goodwin 1976; Sage 1962). These latter forms of albinism appear to be rare, and may be reversible. Cowin (1933) observed a very similar magpie-like pattern in Jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*) on the Isle of Man, England. Several birds (nine or ten in one field) showed the pattern, and these birds were present for at least eight years, suggesting that the albinism was genetically based and well established in that British population. The symmetrical pattern observed by us is also suggestive of a genetically determined condition.

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## Topic of Note

**Eds. Comment:** As announced in the October issue, the Topic of Note for the next issue of *Ontario Birds* (April) is 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. The more individual observations you can make, on the same or different bird species, the better. Notes will be due the end of February 1986. Botanically-oriented ornithologists (or vice versa) who have volunteered to assist with the identification of winter plants are: Dan Brunton, 2704 Marie St., Ottawa, Ontario K2B 7E4 (613-829-7307); Dale Hoy, 726 Pickering Beach Road, Ajax, Ontario L1S 3K8 (416-683-5791); Donald Sutherland, 325 St. Clair Ave. E., Toronto, Ontario M4T 1P3 (416-488-7492) and Mike Oldham, R.R. #2, Ruthven, Ontario N0P 2G0 (519-733-

5982). Send them as much of the food plant as possible, carefully wrapped, and they will try to identify it.

We will take a temporary reprieve from naming a specific subject for the September/October 1986 Topic of Note. Instead we would like to encourage OFO members (and others) who have submitted records of rare birds to the Ontario Bird Records Committee and had them accepted, to write up their record. This applies not only to new (first) records for the province, e.g. Swainson's Warbler, but also to species which have been reported a "few" times, e.g. Tricolored Heron, Little Blue Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Swainson's Hawk, Laughing Gull, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Mountain Bluebird, Blue Grosbeak, Lark Bunting, etc. There's almost always a bit of a story that goes with finding any one of these birds; our readers would like to hear yours!

## A Roost of Chimney Swifts in Guelph

On 6 September 1985 I noticed a cloud of Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) swirling above the library at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph, Wellington Co. Their exotic behaviour, set against the glowing evening sky, summoned me for a closer look.

The next evening I counted 550 birds dropping into the four storey chimney. A day later, 740 were tallied. By 20 September, only 360 remained, indicating a gradual decline which ended on 1 October. Light frost, our earliest, melted from the rooftops on September 13.

Regardless of weather, the first swift was observed to enter the chimney 2-5 minutes before sunset and the last bird was in an average of 21 (range 17-26) minutes after sundown, based on eight counts. The first bird observed to depart over four mornings did so 7-20 minutes before sunrise.

Evening entry and morning exiting are not mirror images. Up to an hour before sundown, swifts gradually begin to assemble over the roost. Their quickness and small size did not allow me to define any flyways. Individual family groups of 2-5 birds most likely arrive on their own. It may be that the body of 700, which slept in this one chimney at the south end of Guelph, represents the total nesting population in this city of 73,000 people.

Most often the swifts circle the roost in a counterclockwise direction, 50-100 m in diameter.

As they pass over the chimney, some birds break from the flock and dive near its top. Finally, a few minutes before sunset, one drops in an awkward style, straight down into the chimney. In one instance, during the last 4 or 5 minutes of flying, 500 (85%) of the birds entered the roost. At their fastest rate about 10 swifts per second tumbled into the chimney. The flock becomes silent during the last few aerial minutes and no sound is emitted from the roost.

The morning departure is no less intense, but not as continuous. Without warning, the swifts begin to pour from the chimney, lightly calling as they drop over the sides. Moving out in all directions, they quickly rise and disperse. The departure of the first wave of 170 swifts lasted approximately one minute. Then, mysteriously, they stopped. Some reentered the roost. One morning I remained for 100 minutes after the initial outburst, but only observed a few dozen reentries.

The roosting behaviour of the Chimney Swift has intrigued ornithologists for more than 70 years. Pearson (1911) noted that a flock of more than 1000 swifts descended into a chimney in North Carolina in less than 20 minutes. Fischer (1958), in his monograph on the species, reported that the same roosts are often used for several successive seasons and that the intense amount of calling by swifts while circling above the chimney, prior to their actual descent, probably serves to attract



latecomers and to identify the location of the roost site. Linton (1924), Musselman (1926), Pickens (1935), Groskin (1945) and James (1950) have all noted other aspects of roosting by swifts.

### Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Don Fraser for furnishing many of the references and for commenting on an earlier version of the manuscript.

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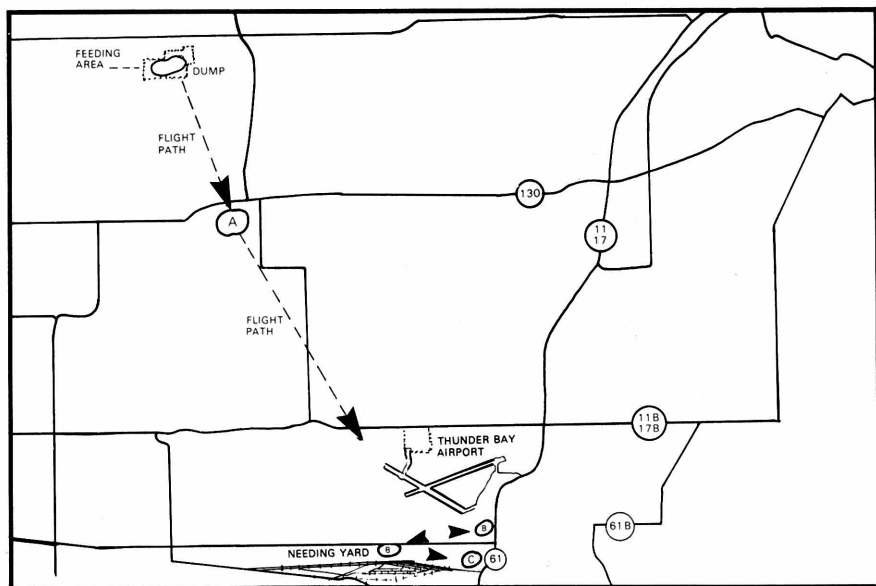
Tom Reaume, 72 Waterloo Ave., Guelph, Ontario N1H 3H5.

## Locating a Crow Roost in Thunder Bay, Ontario

There has been a growing interest in winter roosts of the American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) in southern Ontario (Weseloh 1983; Knapton and Maturi 1984). Many of these roosts correspond with areas that have recorded high numbers of crows on Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) (Weseloh 1985). CBCs in Thunder Bay, Ontario, have reported large numbers of crows, among the highest in the province, which is an anomaly for northern Ontario

(Weseloh 1985). This has prompted interest in locating a crow roost in Thunder Bay, where they have not previously been reported.

On 18 October 1985, crows were observed leaving the Thunder Bay Municipal Dump, located on John Street Road, 9 km west of Highway 17, and were seen headed in a southerly direction (Figure 1). They were followed to a site 3 km away, near the southwest corner of the



*Figure 1.* Map showing the locations of the pre-roost of 18 October (A), pre- and final roosts of 8 November (B and C, respectively) and various flightlines (arrows).

intersection of Oliver Road and Mapleward Road. Here, a large number of crows were observed feeding in a grass field and sitting in the trees of an aspen woodlot on the west border of the field. Crows continued to arrive from the direction of the dump in small, loose flocks until about 1840 h, 20 minutes before sunset. It was estimated that about 500 crows were present at the site.

At 1850 h, small flocks of crows began leaving this site, once again heading south. The entire flock had vacated this pre-roost site by 1915 h, 15 minutes after sunset. The location of the final roosting site was not determined at that time.

On 8 November, crows were again seen leaving the dump and flying south, at about 1615 h.

These crows did not stop at the previous pre-roost site, but continued on to a site 10 km southeast of the dump (Figure 1). This site was at the extreme southeast corner of the Thunder Bay Airport, near the Highway 61 overpass at Rosslyn Road. The crows were gathering on a patch of bare ground, arriving from a pre-roost area in a woodlot along Rosslyn Road, 1.5 km west of the site. Crows stopped arriving by 1650 h, 40 minutes before sunset. Again, approximately 500 crows were present.

At 1700 h, crows started to move to the Canadian Pacific Railway line which borders the south side of the Airport. Within a few minutes, all of the crows were sitting on or beside the railway tracks, in a dense group. An

interesting situation arose when, at 1710 h, a westbound train approached the group of crows sitting in its path. The crows remained on the tracks until the train was within 10 m of the closest individuals. Finally, the flock took flight, with some crows landing in trees on the south side of the railway line and others flying to a woodlot 0.5 km to the south across Rosslyn Road. After the train passed, the remaining crows flew to the woodlot south of Rosslyn Road, this being their final roost site.

The location of this crow roost is interesting because of its close proximity to areas of high human activity, such as a major highway, an airport, a railway line, several

industries and a residential area. Because of this high disturbance, the crows may use several sites within the area to roost. If anyone has further information regarding crow roosts in Thunder Bay, please contact the author.

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## The Chatham Crow Roost

On the weekend of 9-10 November 1985, OFO held a field/study trip to the crow roost at Essex, Essex Co. (results to appear in the next issue of *Ontario Birds*) in extreme southwestern Ontario. After two observational sessions on Saturday morning and evening, the latter under miserably rainy conditions, several observers opted to search for the roost of the American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) at Chatham, Kent Co. rather than continue at Essex. The purpose of this short note is to document the size, location and some of the flight paths of this heretofore

undescribed crow roost. We were interested also in discovering the flight paths associated with this roost because of its close proximity (60 km) to the roost at Essex. We could not help but wonder if there was interchange of crows between roosts.

Observations were made by Bill Wilson, Stan Teeple, Chip Weseloh and the author on Sunday morning (10 November) and by the author only on Sunday evening and Monday morning.

By driving along the Thames River on the west side of Chatham before sunrise on Sunday morning, we were able to audibly detect the

roosting crows and eventually drive to the site. Situated along the south shore of the river between Lacroix St. and Wellington St. bridges, the roost was pinpointed at the base of First St., just west of the YMCA building (Figure 1). The crows occupied about a dozen deciduous trees, a few shrub size and a few large poplars (*Populus* sp.), a metre or more in diameter.

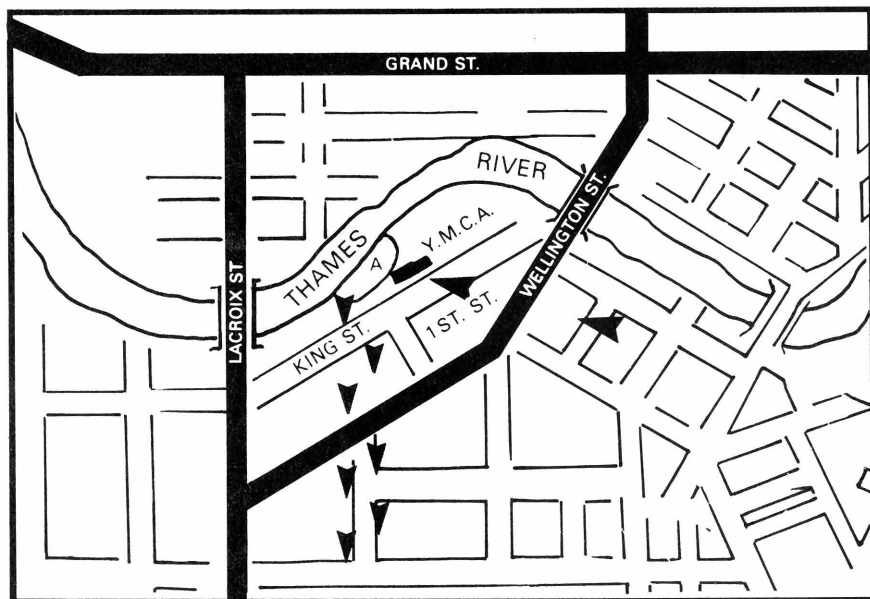
### Dispersal from the roost

On Sunday morning the four observers, in two vehicles, left the roost with the crows to determine their routes of dispersal and destinations. One party followed the main flock of crows, regardless of their direction. The second party, suspecting that the crows might be headed for the Blenheim dump (approximately 20 km to the

SE) drove in that direction, searching for flocks of crows en route. The first party followed several hundred crows flying to the south where they eventually ended up at the Indian Creek Golf and Country Club and agricultural fields to the east. From there a small group of crows (5-10 individuals) was followed to the east. The observers discontinued the chase when the crows were approximately 34 km east of Chatham, past the community of Ridgetown and still headed in an easterly direction!

The second group of observers noted small flocks of crows (1-8 individuals) between Chatham and the Blenheim dump and, during the 40 minute period 0915 to 0955 h, a maximum of 10 crows at the dump. Birds arrived only from the direction of Chatham.

Figure 1. Map of the City of Chatham showing: the roosting site (A), and flightlines (arrows).



On Monday morning I stayed at the roost to observe the entire dispersal process. Under cloudy but rainless skies I arrived at the YMCA parking lot at 0555 h (sunrise was at 0712 h); the crows were already calling. At 0635 h the crows were shifting upwards in the trees; their calling was intense and continuous. Then approximately 1000 took to the air—their day had begun—40 minutes before sunrise. The flock flew south and southeast over the city and many returned to the roost amid the clamour of their perched brethren. For several minutes the crows called but none left the roost. At 0645 h, a group of 40 returned to the roost from the east. With their arrival, the intensity of the cawing by the perched flock increased. No sooner had the 40 landed when a group of more than 1000 took to the air. Five minutes later a second, similarly sized group, departed. By 0700 h about 500 birds remained in the roost; at 0725 h, 13 minutes after sunrise, this number had diminished to 25. During the entire dispersal process only about a dozen crows flew northwest across the river.

#### **Arrival at the roost**

Sunday afternoon was rainy and cloudy. When I arrived at the YMCA parking lot at 1445 h (sunset was 1717 h), six crows were perched at the roost. An hour later 30 crows were similarly engaged. I drove around the southern outskirts of the city for 30 minutes but saw no flyways or pre-roost assemblies. I returned to the parking lot in time to watch the first flock arrive, from the east, at

1547 h. From the height of the arriving birds (up to 250 m) I concluded they had flown some distance from their pre-roost assembly (site unknown). This easterly flyway, the largest into the roost, was active from 1547–1645 h. During this time the crows arrived in segments. I counted them singly and in groups of fives and tens. The total count for the evening was 3300; the largest single group arriving was 300 crows.

From a height of 200 m it was not unusual to have six pairs of crows performing their “straight down adventure” twisting dives, finishing at treetop level. One pair took eight seconds to carry out this feat, another 15 seconds, beginning about 100 m above the roost’s location. When I left the roost at 1910 h, two hours after sunset, most crows were facing into the 20 kph east wind, with their bills tucked. I heard few calls. Three to five birds were usually changing positions on three limbs, flying to another tree. The rest were perched low on branches, covering their feet. Some were preening wing and body feathers.

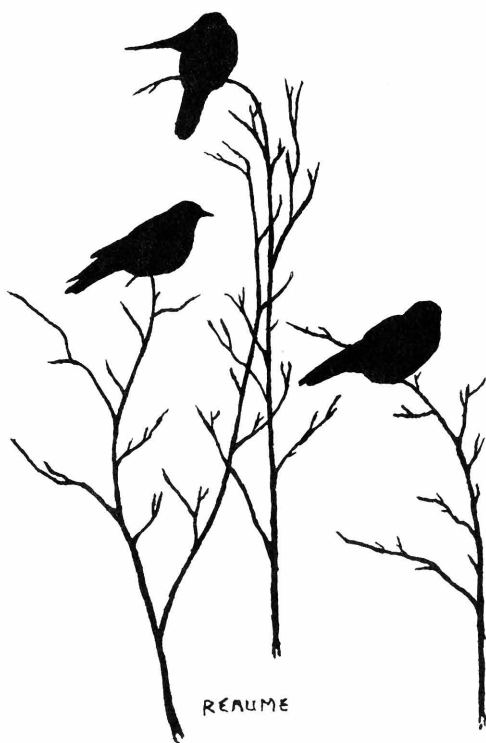
Based on my evening and morning experience at the Chatham roost, I would estimate the number of crows, at this time of the year, at between 3500 and 4000 individuals. No dead or injured birds were found in a morning walk beneath their trees, which is what I have come to expect from a flock of this size. This may be the fourth largest late autumn/winter crow roost in Ontario, ranking behind those at Essex, Hamilton (Hamilton-

Wentworth R.M.) and St. Catharines (Niagara R.M.). Based on observations from this weekend, the birds at the Chatham roost do not appear to associate with the larger Essex roost. Why they do not is a matter cognizant

only to Chatham crows. The centre of town belongs to them.

If anyone in the Chatham area is able to observe, census or follow these crows to and from their roost on a regular basis, please contact me at the address given below.

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# Book Review

***The Dictionary of American Bird Names.*** Revised Edition, 1985. Ernest A. Choate. Revised by Raymond A. Paynter, Jr. The Harvard Common Press: Harvard and Boston. 226 pp. \$9.95 paperbound.

This is an informative and attractively produced pocket sized book on how and why birds of North America received their names. The original edition of this book, published by the late Ernest Choate in 1973, has been thoroughly revised and enlarged to conform with the sixth edition of the American Ornithologists' Union's *Check-list of North American Birds* (1983).

The first section is a list of common names with explanations of how they were derived. Some birds were named after people. For example, Ross' Goose was named for Bernard R. Ross and the reader is referred to the biographical appendix of people's names which contains a paragraph about each person. A number of common names were derived from the sound of the bird's call: killdeer; pewee; phoebe; dickcissel; chickadee; cuckoo; curlew; towhee; kittiwake; chuck-will's-widow.

Others received common names because of a particular behavioural trait, such as turnstone, ovenbird, and sapsucker, though some names in this class are quite inappropriate. The nutcracker is fond of the nut of the pinyon pine, which it swallows whole, as it does other seeds, without cracking them.

Vernacular names are often very misleading. The European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) is classified

as a member of the group that includes Wheatear, Stonechat and Nightingale, while the North American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is one of the thrushes. In England the name was originally Redbreast, but Robin, the nickname of Robert, finally supplanted it. "American Robin" is the correct name designated by the A.O.U., as there are other birds in the world named robin. The name Rubythroat may also cause confusion. In North America this is the abbreviated name for the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), while in East Asia Rubythroat refers to the Siberian Rubythroat (*Luscinia calliope*), a member of the thrush group which included bluebirds. Since a Siberian Rubythroat was reported as a new species to Canada in 1983 (*Ontario Birds* 2:66-69) it is important not to shorten the name of either bird to 'Rubythroat'. Among the common names listed are many local nicknames which may still be met in rural areas and in accounts of earlier writers. The Oldsquaw has at least twenty names, some of them humorous. A few vernacular names are crude. The term Shite Poke, derived from a habit of ejecting effluent when making a startled departure, was applied to herons and the American Bittern. *Poke* is an English dialect word for

a 'bag'.

The next section consists of nine pages explaining how scientific names for birds have developed from the time of Linnaeus onwards. This explanation is concisely and lucidly written and is invaluable to the understanding of scientific bird names and the reason why each species was given its particular name. Scientific names are crucial to the understanding of a bird's relationship by family and species. For instance, the names *Passerina cyanea* (Indigo Bunting) and *Passerina amoena* (Lazuli Bunting) indicate that the generic name *Passerina* shows this relationship. This section explains taxonomy as an art and science, and the mysteries of such things as 'type' specimen, the law of priority, binomials and trinomials, and the problem of making (and unmaking) subspecies. It also explains the reason for continual revisions in the *Check-list* and the never ending struggle between the 'splitters and lumpers'. "Changes in status or other revisions of the *Check-list* are published in the *Auk*, the journal of the American Ornithologists' Union, from time to time between *Check-lists* and serve to keep nomenclature up to date." (p. 90)\*

In the list of scientific names, the author explains their derivations from Greek, Latin and native words, as well as from references to people's names. Thus *Spiza* comes from a Greek word meaning 'a finch', *Spizella* means a little finch while *Passer* means a sparrow, and *Passerella* is a small sparrow. However, the name

*Passer* was given to only three Old World species; House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow and Spanish Sparrow, which are classed as Weaver Finches. The many native North American 'sparrows' belong in the *Fringillidae*, a very large bird family which includes buntings and finches. This section is continually enlightening, though several derivations seem a little far fetched. The Parula Warbler signifies 'a little titmouse', the word Prothonotary is from a Latin word meaning 'an authorized scribe' and *Empidonax* appears to signify 'king of the gnats'. Since there are ten *Empidonax* flycatchers in North America, which are often difficult to distinguish from one another, it is convenient to call a bird '*Empidonax* sp.', meaning that it is one of the species of *Empidonax* flycatcher without having to say which.

A twenty-one page Biographical Appendix in which surnames of people after whom birds have been named follows. Here we can pinpoint all the names we are familiar with through using them in bird identification: Baird; Bachman; Barrow; Bewick; Bonaparte (not the emperor, but a son of Napoleon's younger brother Lucien); Brewer; Cassin; Cooper; Forster; Franklin; Harris; Henslow; Kirtland; Le Conte and many more. It is fascinating to find out why a bird was named after a particular person; some on very flimsy grounds, others for reasons that were well justified. A bibliography of books related in some way or other to the subject of taxonomy, valuable for further



reading, is included. Finally an English/Latin Glossary lists scientific and common names used in the book.

Roger Tory Peterson, in the accompanying blurb, recommends it strongly: "Ernest Choate's *Dictionary of American Bird Names* is not on a library shelf but on my desk where I can dip into it

whenever I am intrigued by a bird's name. . . . No informed birder should be without it." Bird watchers require a specific vocabulary for their esoteric language. Here it is.

\* For more on this topic see the article by Alex Mills in *Ontario Birds* 2:43-46.

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# OFO Announcements

## 2nd ANNOUNCEMENT

**"Historical Perspectives on Ornithology in Ontario"**

**OFO Special Publication No. 1**

**Commemorating the 100th Anniversary  
of the Publication of Thomas McIlwraith's  
The Birds of Ontario**

Plans are progressing well for this first OFO Special Publication; many responses were received to our first announcement (*Ontario Birds* Vol. 3 p. 80). Most chapters have been determined and potential authors have been approached. However, we are still looking for additional ideas and input concerning content, format, etc. If you have ideas for articles, wish to write a specific contribution or have unique knowledge or experience relating to Ontario's ornithology, please contact the Co-editors listed below. At this time we are also accepting suggestions for bird species that have undergone significant changes in their status or distribution in Ontario in the last 100 years.

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**Corrections:** In Volume 3 Number 2 p. 59, the third line from the bottom which reads "Average (N = 425). . ." *should read* "Average (N = 495). . ."