

# ONTARIO BIRDS

The Journal of the  
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Ornithologists

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TR



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## 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*.

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## Letters to the Editor

### Editorial policy of *Ontario Birds* breached

Some comments are warranted on the accuracy of the note by Geoffrey Carpentier (*Ontario Birds* 7:33-34) entitled "Western Kingbird nesting in Rainy River District". Some of the points worth detailing include:

- The pair "discovered" by the author *et al.* was actually at a known site and merely returned for a subsequent nesting.
- The nest in 1988 (as in 1987 and 1989) was not in a Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo*) as stated, but rather in a species of willow (*Salix* sp.)
- No source is stated for the record of three Western Kingbirds on 6-14 July 1983, which is listed as an additional summer record; since the dates conflict with those already published (3-8 July 1983) by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (*Ontario Birds* 3:10) confusion has now been created as to what dates are indeed actually correct.
- Mention of another bird observed (26 May 1981) 20km south of the above record clearly puts this well into adjacent Minnesota, even though it is an Ontario record.
- The author correctly points out that a prior 1943 Ontario

nesting cannot be considered certain as a description of the adults does not exist, but does not hesitate to state that his observation "constitutes the second confirmed nesting of the Western Kingbird in Ontario" even though no description of the adults or photograph of the nest has been presented!

In addition to the above, this record has been published prior to being reviewed by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (Robert Curry, pers. comm., 1989), which is against the stated editorial policy of the Ontario Field Ornithologists (see recent back covers of *Ontario Birds*). In summary, all of these errors could have been avoided if the editor had compared some of the data to those previously published; if stated policies of the OFO had been followed; and if the paper had been sent to outside reviewers before publication. At present, however, I believe the value of this type of article is nil if the majority of information presented is inaccurate.

Alan Wormington  
Leamington, Ontario

### Alternate song of the Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warbler

On a recent field trip, I was surprised to learn how few birders recognize, or even have heard, the alternate song of the Blue-winged

and Golden-winged Warbler.

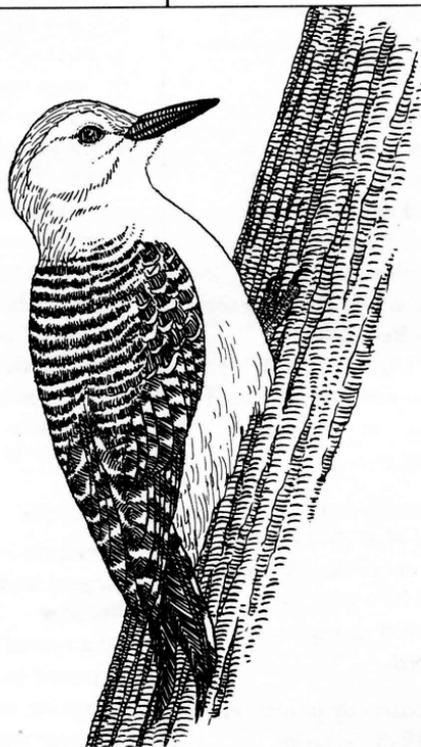
This song type, given by both species, is primarily a dusk-only variant and is, as far as I can tell, undescribed in the major literature.

The song type bears a structural and tonal resemblance to the song of the Cerulean Warbler and, as such, poses a pitfall to the neophyte birder. The song is a four-note arrangement, best described as "ti ti ti zeee". It is delivered rapidly, the final note having a flat, buzzy tone. To the trained ear, the song of the Cerulean Warbler is somewhat less rapid, with the introductory notes slightly lower and longer (giving the song its chanting quality).

This alternate song type of the Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warbler is sung quite frequently by territorial birds, primarily at dusk but at other times as well (pers. obs.).

It is surprising that most (all?) bird books ignore this song type and that even experienced field observers are often confused by it. Although call note and habitat will usually distinguish Ceruleans from Blue-wingeds and Golden-wingeds, a better understanding of song types would reduce confusion that can, and does, occur.

J. M. Holdsworth  
Woodstock, Ontario



J.S.

Red-bellied Woodpecker/Drawing by John Schmelefske

# Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1988

by  
Glenn Coady and Alan Wormington

This is the seventh annual report of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) of the Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO). A total of 102 records was reviewed by the OBRC during 1988, of which 70 (about 69%) were found to be acceptable.

This report officially adds one new species to Ontario's Checklist of Birds — Great-tailed Grackle — bringing the provincial total to 437 species. Added to the list of species now recorded in northern Ontario is Golden-crowned Sparrow; added to the list for southern Ontario is Brambling. The report also officially adds a new species to the list of breeding birds in Ontario — Western Kingbird — bringing the provincial total in this category to 285 species.

The OBRC members for 1988 were Robert Curry (Chairman), Glenn Coady (Secretary), Ross D. James, Ian L. Jones, D. James Mountjoy, Ronald G. Tozer and Alan Wormington.

## Species Accounts

In the following accounts information on age, sex and plumage for each record is included if it was available and the determination was certain. This information is presented on the system outlined in "Plumage, age and moult terminology" by Sharrock (1985). Place names in italics refer to a county, regional municipality or district in Ontario. All contributors who have provided a written description, photograph or specimen have been credited; contributor's names have also been underlined if they were a discoverer of the bird(s). All records pertain to sight records unless it is indicated that a photograph or specimen has been received.

Glenn Coady, #604-60 Mountview Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6P 2L4  
Alan Wormington, R. R. #1, Leamington, Ontario N8H 3V4

## Accepted Records

### Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)

1987 — one immature, 6 November, Woodstock, *Oxford* (James M. Holdsworth).

### American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

- 1988 — one, 14–17 May (not to only 15 May as in *American Birds* 42:427), Erieau, *Kent* (Thomas N. Hayman, P. Allen Woodliffe, Glenn Coady) — photos on file.  
 — one, 5–9 June, Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Roger Frost, Darin C. Bennett) — photo on file.  
 — one, 15–16 June, Omemee, *Victoria* (John Sadler, Jean Sadler) — photos on file.

### Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

1988 — one sub-adult, 29 February–12 March and 17 March–7 April, Pickering, *Durham*, and 13–14 March, Van Wagner's Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Margaret J. Bain, Brian K. Wylie, Robert Curry).

### Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

- 1987 — one juvenile, 5 August–13 September, Long Point Flats (5 August & 6 September) and Big Creek Nat. Wildlife Area (13 September), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Robert Curry).  
 1981 — one adult, 18 May–2 June (not to only 28 May as in *American Birds* 35:817), Selkirk Creek, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Brian Laidlaw) — photo on file.

### Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

1987 — one adult, 2–3 May, Townsend, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Robert L. Waldhuber).

### dark ibis sp. (*Plegadis* sp.)

- 1988 — one juvenile, 19 August, Big Creek Nat. Wildlife Area, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (James M. Holdsworth).  
 1986 — one, 15–19 October, Guelph Lake, *Wellington* (15th) and Bloomingdale, *Waterloo* (17th to 19th) (Jeffrey E. Poklen, Virgil Martin).

### Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

1988 — five, 30 May–10 June, Pukaskwa Nat. Park (Pic River mouth), *Thunder Bay* (Stanley V. Phippen).

### Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

- 1988 — one adult, 11 March, Aylmer, *Elgin* (William G. Lindley, Colleen Lindley) — photos on file.  
 1987 — one *frontalis* adult, 15 March, Port Royal, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (George E. Wallace).

### Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*)

1987 — one male, 4 May, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Michael Zeuck).

This record represents the third Cinnamon Teal to be recorded in northern Ontario; the previous two records were both in 1985 and were present 11–13 May at Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay*, and 1 July at Sable Island, *Rainy River* (*Ontario Birds* 4:7).

**Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)**

- 1988 — one male, 30 April–6 May, Townsend, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Rohan A. van Twest, Marina van Twest).
- 1987 — one male, 19 April, Shirley's Bay, *Ottawa-Carleton* (V. Bernard Ladouceur).  
 — one adult male, 26 September–27 October (not only 24 October as in *American Birds* 42:65), Britannia, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Raymond P. Holland, Simon Gawn).
- 1985 — one male, 21 April, Blenheim, *Kent* (Rohan A. van Twest, Marina van Twest).

**Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)**

- 1988 — one male, 17 June, Neys Prov. Park, *Thunder Bay* (Stephen J. O'Donnell).

**Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)**

- 1987/1988 — one immature, 26 December–3 January, Aldershot, *Halton* (D. James Mountjoy, Alan Wormington, Glenn Coady, Barry Gray) — photos on file.

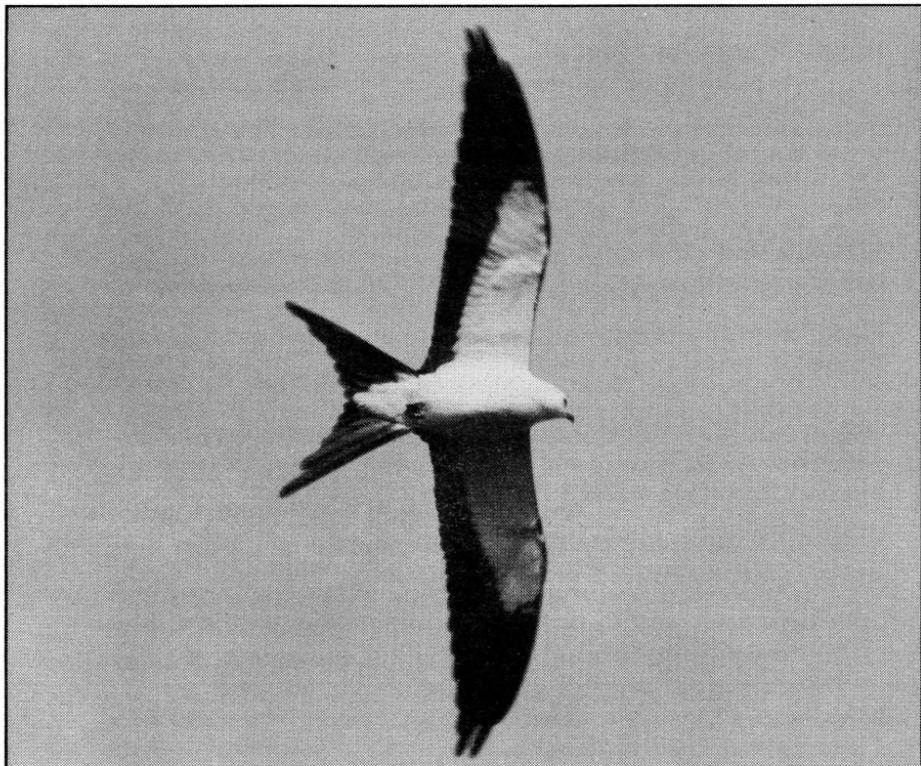
Only once before has a Black Vulture been recorded in Ontario during the winter: one was present at Long Point Prov. Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk*, on 16–17 February 1984 (*Ontario Birds* 3:7).

**American Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*)**

- 1988 — one immature, 16 August–5 September, Sturgeon Creek (16 August–5 September), Holiday Beach Cons. Area (25 August), and Point Pelee Nat. Park (5 September), *Essex* (Georgia A. Parsons, John W. Parsons, Alan Wormington, Michael A. Kielb, James N. Flynn) — photos on file.

Immature Black Vulture at Aldershot, *Halton*, from 26 December 1987 to 3 January 1988. Photo by *Glenn Coady*.





Immature Swallow-tailed Kite at Sturgeon Creek, Essex, 16 August to 5 September 1988. Photo by Alan Wormington.

**Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)**

1988 — one dark phase adult, 22 September, Clear Creek, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Ronald C. Ridout).

**Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)**

1987 — one, 19 October, Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (David Curson, Arun K. Bose).

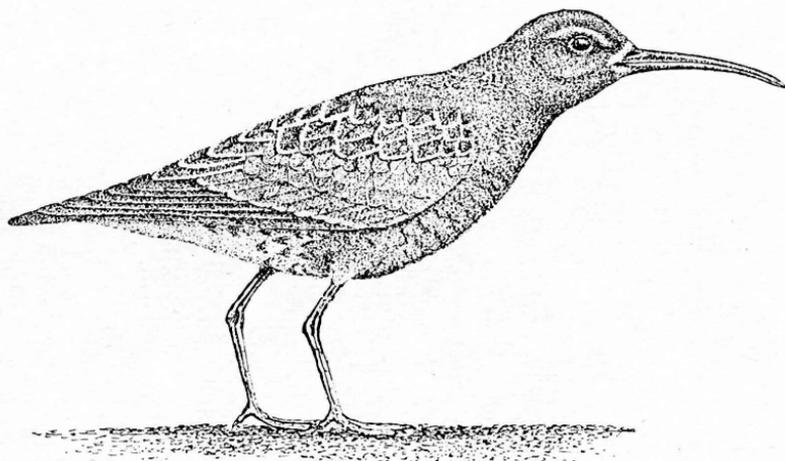
1986/1987 — one intermediate phase, 26 December–16 February (not beginning 15 January as in *American Birds* 41:276), Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma* (Karl Overman) — photo on file.

**Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)**

1987 — one adult, 1–2 May, Wheatley Harbour, *Kent* (Alan Wormington).

**American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*)**

1980 — one male, 5–12 September, Lemon Island (not McDonald Island as in *American Birds* 35:177; Weir & Quilliam 1980:12; and Speirs 1985:256), *Leeds & Grenville* (Robert Orr) — photo on file.



Ron Ridout

Curlew Sandpiper at the Long Point Flats, *Haldimand-Norfolk*, on 20 May 1988.  
Drawing by *Ronald C. Ridout*.

**Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)**

- 1988 — one adult summer, 13–20 May, Stoney Point, *Essex* (Robert W. Wilson, Graham L. Finch, Ian B. Gamble, Tim Sabo) — photo on file.  
— one adult summer female, 20 May, Long Point Flats, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Terric J. Woodrow, Ronald C. Ridout).  
— one adult summer female, 7–8 August, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Ross C. Snider, Alan Wormington).

**Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)**

- 1988 — two juveniles, 15–20 September, one to 24 September, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott).  
— one juvenile, 18 September, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott).  
1987 — one juvenile, 30 September–5 October, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington, Nicholas G. Escott) — photos on file.

**Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)**

- 1988 — one juvenile, 14 September, Long Point (Gravelly Bay and Tip), *Haldimand-Norfolk* (George E. Wallace).



Juvenile Long-billed Dowitcher at Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay*, 30 September to 5 October 1987. Photo by *Alan Wormington*.

**Mew Gull (*Larus canus*)**

1988 — one *brachyrhynchus* adult summer, 22 July, Dundas Marsh, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (*Robert Curry*).

1987 — one *brachyrhynchus* first winter immature, 9–11 March, Wheatley Harbour, *Kent / Essex* (*Alan Wormington*).

The Dundas Marsh bird on 22 July is a remarkable record for the date and probably represents an exceptionally early fall migrant; if so, the migration timing thus matches Bonaparte's Gull (which breeds at the same latitude as Mew Gull), the adults of which regularly appear as fall migrants along the lower Great Lakes by late July, often by the hundreds. In 1986 a similar early record of Mew Gull occurred when a juvenile appeared on 27 August at Grand Bend, *Lambton* (*Ontario Birds* 5:49). The circumstances and a very detailed description of the Dundas Marsh Mew Gull has been published by Curry (1988).

The Mew Gull at Wheatley Harbour represents only the second spring record for Ontario; the first was present 29 April–1 May 1983 at Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (*Ontario Birds* 2:57).

**California Gull (*Larus californicus*)**

- 1988 — one adult summer, 12–14 and 25 May (not observed between these dates), Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Roger Frost).
- one adult winter, 13–15 October, Nepean, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Stephen Gawn).
- 1987/1988 — one first winter immature, 28 December and 23 January (not observed between these dates) (not only 28 December as in *American Birds* 42:258), Sarnia, *Lambton* (Dennis F. Rupert, Tim Sabo).

A similar-plumaged California Gull observed at Aylmer, Quebec, on 12 November 1988 (*American Birds* 43:69) is almost certainly the Nepean individual; the two locations are only 10km apart on the Ottawa River.

**Hummingbird sp. (*Selasphorus* sp.)**

- 1988 — one adult male, 25 August, Holiday Beach Cons. Area, *Essex* (Michael A. Kielb).

**Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*)**

- 1988 — one, 31 July–1 August, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (Robert J. Parsons, David H. Elder) — photos on file.

**Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)**

- 1988 — one immature, 11–14 September (not to only 12 September as in *American Birds* 43:98), Rock Point Prov. Park, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Richard W. Knapton, Gordon Bellerby, Kayo J. Roy) — photos on file.
- 1987 — one, 25 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).
- two (breeding pair), 9 June–12 July (with three unfledged young 12 July), Rainy River, *Rainy River* (David H. Elder, Tom Nash, Adrian Van Rooyen) — photos on file.
- one immature, 22 September, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex* (Roy B. H. Smith, Tim R. Cleveca).
- one, 26 September, Van Wagner's Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Alfred Epp).
- one adult, 7 November, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex* (David McNorton, Alan Wormington).

The nesting birds at Rainy River in 1987 add Western Kingbird to the list of breeding birds in Ontario.

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*)**

- 1987 — one, 26 September, Marathon, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington).

This is the fourth Blue-gray Gnatcatcher to be recorded in northern Ontario. The three previous records were 1–3 October 1979 at Caribou Island, *Thunder Bay*; 13 July 1980 at Rainy River, *Rainy River*; and 16 October 1981 at Netitishi Point, *Cochrane* (*Ontario Birds* 2:59).

**Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*)**

- 1987 — one female, 15 October, Hawkeye Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Allan G. Harris).

**Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*)**

- 1986/1987 — one, 16 November–8 March, Rattray Marsh Cons. Area, *Psst* (Alex Gray, Kayo J. Roy, Tim Sabo, Derek Spindlow) — photos on file.

**Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*)**

- 1987 — one male, 11 January–22 February (not to only 14 February as in *American Birds* 41:278), North York, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Brian R. Neale, Jacqueline Neale, Tim Sabo, Kayo J. Roy) — photos on file.
- one male, 22–28 November, Rockcliffe Park, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Raymond P. Holland).

**Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)**

- 1987 — one, 16 May, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott).
- one, 28 September, Schreiber, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington, Nicholas G. Escott) — photos on file.

**Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*)**

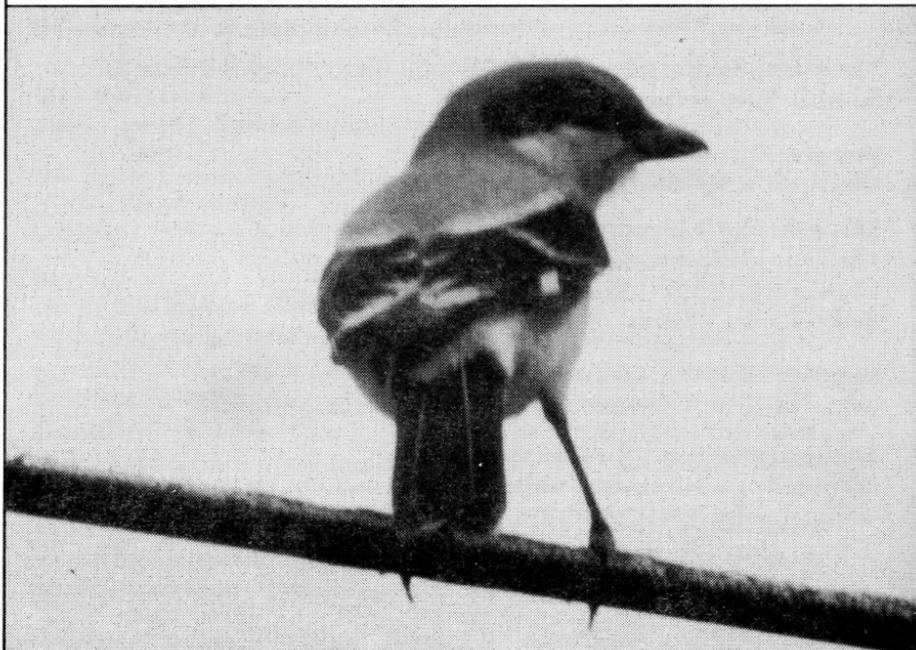
- 1988 — one male, 23–25 April, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex* (Ellen A. Smout, Sue Bestard, Kevin Bestard).

**Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*)**

- 1988 — one *albilora* male, 8 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington).
- one *albilora* female, 11–14 May, Comber, *Essex* (John B. Schmelefske, Jon L. Dunn).
- 1987/1988 — one *albilora* female, 18 December–5 January, Trenton, *Northumberland* (Claude Gray, Gertrude Gray, R.D. McRae) — photo on file.

A popular account of the Yellow-throated Warbler at Trenton, the latest fall migrant ever recorded in Ontario, has been published by Gray & Gray (1988).

Loggerhead Shrike at Schreiber, *Thunder Bay*, on 28 September 1987. Photo by *Alan Wormington*.



**Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)**

1988 — one adult female or immature, 16 October, Silver Islet, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott).

**Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*)**

1988 — one immature male, 9–16 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex* (Franklin E. Horne, Eileen Horne, Dennis F. Rupert, Alan Wormington, Kayo J. Roy) — photos on file.

— one immature male, 10 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex* (Wayne C. Wilson, Alan Wormington).

**Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*)**

1988 — one male, 15–18 June, Dryden, *Kenora* (Mrs. Lawrence Lamb) — photos on file.

**Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)**

1988 — one "eastern" male, 17–19 May, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington).

**Cassin's Sparrow (*Aimophila cassini*)**

1987 — one immature, 15 August, Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (George E. Wallace, Beverly Collier, Mary E. Gartshore) — photos on file.

This Cassin's Sparrow represents the fifth record for Ontario; to date there are still very few records of this species in eastern North America, with Ontario providing the bulk of these records.

**Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)**

1987 — one adult, 16 July, Dunrobin, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Raymond P. Holland) — photos on file.

— one immature, 23–24 August, Aylmer, *Elgin* (George E. Wallace).

Since the Lark Sparrow is a well-known early fall migrant, the bird at Dunrobin on 16 July 1987 possibly falls into this category. For example, the species has appeared as early as 3 August at Sable Island, Nova Scotia (McLaren 1981:79); 7, 25 and 28 July in coastal New York (Bull 1964:453–454); 17 July in Maryland (Robbins & Bystrak 1977:38); and 26 July in coastal Virginia (Kain *et al.* 1987:111).

**Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*)**

1988 — one adult male, 1 June, Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Darin C. Bennett, Roger Frost) — photo on file.

— one immature male, 29 August, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex* (Alan Wormington) — photos on file.

The Point Pelee Lark Bunting on 29 August 1988 represents the earliest fall migrant ever recorded in Ontario.

**Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*)**

1987 — one immature, 1 October, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington, Nicholas G. Escott) — photos on file.

This is the fourth Golden-crowned Sparrow to be recorded in the province, and the first in northern Ontario.



Immature Lark Bunting at Point Pelee National Park, *Essex*, on 29 August 1988. Photo by *Alan Wormington*.

**Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)**

1987 — one female, 7–25 October, Atikokan, *Rainy River* (David H. Elder, Tom Nash, Nicholas G. Escott, Alan Wormington) — photos on file.

For a detailed account of this Great-tailed Grackle, the first to be recorded in Ontario, see Elder (1988).

**Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)**

1980 — one, 12–18 November, Brampton, *Peel* (Margaret E. Schram) — photo on file.

This Brambling represents the first record for Ontario and pre-dates the occurrence of 23–26 October 1983 at Atikokan, *Rainy River*, a record which (at the time) was published as the first for the province (Elder 1984).

## Unaccepted Records: *Identification accepted, origin questionable*

Species in this category are those considered almost certainly to be escaped or released from captivity, even though wild occurrence is a remote possibility. Species placed here could be accepted later if future records clearly established a pattern of occurrence suggesting wild (rather than captive) origin.

### Ringed Teal (*Callonetta leucophrys*)

1986 — one male, 24 May–16 July, Toronto, *Metropolitan Toronto* (George A. Anthony) — photos on file.

## Unaccepted Records: *Identification uncertain*

In the majority of the records listed below, the description presented in the reports was deemed insufficient to establish with certainty the identity of the species claimed; in few cases was the committee actually convinced an incorrect identification was made.

- 1988 — Glossy Ibis, 14 May, Hillman Marsh, *Essex*.  
 — Cinnamon Teal (three), 29 April, Marathon, *Thunder Bay*.  
 — Pomarine Jaeger, 20 September, Long Point Flats, *Haldimand-Norfolk*.  
 — Ivory Gull, 18 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Roseate Tern (three), 5 May, Sturgeon Creek, *Essex*.  
 — Least Tern, 6 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Bridled Tern, 20 September, Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk*.  
 — Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 22 July, Fisher's Glen, *Haldimand-Norfolk*.  
 — Fish Crow, 16 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Bewick's Wren, 2 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Bewick's Wren, 17 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Blue Grosbeak, 11 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Chestnut-collared Longspur, 4 June, Rainy River, *Rainy River*.  
 — Eurasian Siakin, 4–8 February, Keene, *Peterborough*.  
 — Eurasian Siakin, 20 February and 6 April (not observed between these dates), Peterborough, *Peterborough*.  
 — Eurasian Siakin, 21–27 February, Smith Township, *Peterborough* — photos on file.
- 1987 — Pacific Loon, 29 November, Baie du Dore, *Drummond* — photos on file.  
 — Western Grebe, 18–19 October, Fisher's Glen, *Haldimand-Norfolk*.  
 — Curlew Sandpiper, 25 September, Hillman Marsh, *Essex*.  
 — Pomarine Jaeger, 15 September, Big Creek Nat. Wildlife Area, *Haldimand-Norfolk*.  
 — Pomarine Jaeger, 27 September, Van Wagner's Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth*.  
 — Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 24 June, Blenheim, *Kent*.  
 — Townsend's Solitaire, 3 June, McKellar, *Parry Sound*.  
 — Eurasian Blackbird, 17 May, north of Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Swainson's Warbler, 12 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Western Tanager, 16 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Black-headed Grosbeak, 19 September, Port Stanley, *Elgin*.  
 — Bachman's Sparrow, 13 May, Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.  
 — Lark Sparrow, 3 October, north of Point Pelee Nat. Park, *Essex*.
- 1984 — California Gull, 9 December, Queenston, *Niagara*.
- 1976 — Western Bluebird, 17 May, Fanshawe Lake, *Middlesex*.

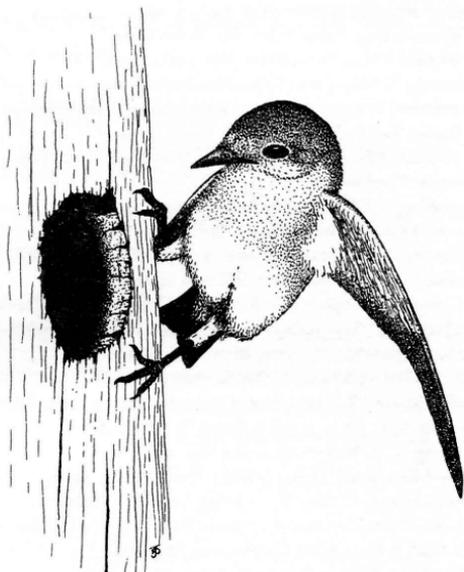
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The members of the OBRC would like to thank Ross D. James for hosting our annual meeting at the Royal Ontario Museum.

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Eastern Bluebird/Drawing by Ross D. James

# The Ontario Great Gray Owl Invasion of 1983–84: Habitat, behaviour, food, health, age, and sex

by  
Ross D. James

The following article is a summary of observations made during the 1983–84 invasion of Great Gray Owls in Ontario, with dates and locations of birds. Because of the general nature and short length of most reports I could seldom make correlations between different types of information; and obvious gaps result because no further data were provided. However, some very useful observations were recorded.

## Perch sites

Deciduous trees (50) were noted as perch sites more frequently than coniferous trees (16). This may reflect the higher availability of the former, or the increased visibility of owls among bare branches. However, it may be that hunting owls select perches in deciduous trees for easier manoeuvrability and better acoustics (R. W. Nero, pers. comm.).

Owls seemed to make little effort to conceal themselves. They were noted perched on bare

branches in trees 105 times, usually well out on branches, and almost as often in even less concealing situations. These included dead trees (32), utility poles (24), fence posts (13), overhead wires (9), snags (8), the tops of bushes (8), buildings of various sorts (6), stumps (2), guard rails (1), and stop signs (1).

Low perches were favoured over high sites. Small trees or bushes (21) were noted more often than tall trees (4); heights of perches were below 5m 12 times, between 5 and 10m ten times, and above 10m only three times. Utility poles and wires, fence posts, and stumps (62) could also be considered low perches. These low perches probably facilitated the location of prey by sound (Norberg 1987). On a couple of occasions, owls were noted flying closer to a place where they ultimately dropped to the ground, apparently getting closer to and locating the sound source more precisely.

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Only a few (4) observers specifically stated that birds perched near a road, but obviously those owls seen on utility poles, etc. (35) were also near roads. Some birds (12) were also noted near houses. There seems to have been considerable individual variation in the approachability of birds. Some observers commented that they were able to walk very close, while others noted that birds were very wary of humans. Unfortunately I could not correlate this behaviour with sex, age, or any other factor. Approachability may be increased when birds are hungry (Nero 1980, 1986), although few of the Great Gray Owls involved in the 1983-84 invasion were thought to be starving (see below). Birds may just have been preoccupied with something under the snow (Nero 1980), but this behaviour was not noted by the observers that were able to approach closely.

In three instances owls perched above bird feeders and on three occasions perched right on the feeders. Only one observer suggested that these owls were seeking small birds for food, but did not provide any specific observations to support this view. However, another observer noted that other birds flew close to an owl and were not bothered. Although the owls might have taken birds if they could, they were more likely seeking rodents attracted to spilled seed at the feeders (Nero 1980).

### Habitats

Habitats occupied by the owls were divided into three general types: open (87), at the edge of open and wooded (80), and wooded (54). However, the distinction among the habitat types was not always clear, and results must be interpreted cautiously. For example, some observers indicated that the birds were at the edge of a road or were in fields, but gave no indication of whether the adjacent habitat was wooded or open. Likewise, observations in wooded areas usually did not specify whether adjacent habitats might have been different. There were relatively few observations of birds in wooded situations, compared to others where there was at least some type of opening. This may be very much biased by the ease of observation in the open, and those owls in wooded areas, in most instances, may have been near the edge of the woods.

Where specified, mixed deciduous/coniferous woodlands (42) were the wooded habitats in which Great Gray Owls were most often observed. This may also be biased by the fact that the majority of observations were made in regions of the province where mixed forests predominate. Deciduous woods (19) were utilized to about the same extent as coniferous woods (15). Swamp woodlands (29) were favoured slightly more than dry woods (20).

Among the open habitats, or open areas at the edge of woodlands, fields of various types

(100) greatly predominated over road edges (27), residential areas (14), marshes (10), ponds or rivers (5), young pine plantations (5), farmyards (4), beaver meadows (2), or "bogs" (1). Among the fields, abandoned and/or shrubby fields (31) were used slightly more than agricultural fields (28), but some of the latter were described only as open and may have had some shrubs as well. Scattered trees or utility poles would also have been a feature of most such agricultural fields. Unfortunately, 40 other fields were not further described.

Overall there does not seem to be any clear indication of a preferred habitat. The owls probably hunted largely in open areas, but had nearby woodlands for roosting or cover, and were less often seen there. However, almost any type of open area was used for hunting in proportion to its availability and according to the wariness of the individual birds or the availability of food.

Few Great Gray Owls were seen in urban areas during the 1983-84 invasion. One was observed in downtown Sault Ste. Marie, Regional Municipality of Sault Ste. Marie, in January 1984 perched on a building; this was the only owl noted in a place where trees, lawns, or fields were lacking. Another bird at Sault Ste. Marie was observed on a balcony railing, but details regarding the adjacent habitat were not provided. Four Great Gray Owl sightings were made in Orillia, Simcoe Co., but pay have referred

to the same bird seen at different times and places. Gravenhurst, Muskoka District, and Lagoon City, Simcoe Co., also had single sightings.

### Hunting methods

There were ten observations of birds plunging head downward into snow, as described by Nero (1980). Seven of these were recorded by one observer, who noted that the snow was about 45cm deep. Another noted that the snow was soft at the spot where this head first plunging occurred. Other observers noted holes in the snow that were presumably made by the owls, but did not actually see the birds hunting, or provide information on snow depth or firmness. The larger size of the Great Gray Owl and this particular head first plunging behaviour permit this owl to take prey in as much as 50cm of snow (Duncan 1987) and are thought to give them an advantage over the smaller Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*) and Northern Hawk-Owl (*Surnia ulala*) in the Boreal forest in winter (Nero 1980).

Plunging into snow feet first was noted on fewer occasions (6). Perhaps this hunting technique was under-recorded because it was the more expected type of activity. No snow depths were given for situations where the feet first hunting method occurred. Only one observer noted a bird hovering (about 7m above the snow), although this is fairly typical hunting behaviour in more open

situations (Nero 1980).

On eight occasions observers noted that birds carried food (in the beak) to a perch to eat it. There is no indication that such food carrying was associated with courtship, and distances flown were not specified. Only one report of prey being consumed on the ground was received. Swallowing prey whole is the Great Gray Owl's usual feeding procedure, but only three people noted this behaviour. One person saw an item as small as a mole being torn apart for consumption, but an intact Star-nosed Mole (*Condylura cristata*) was found in one of the stomachs (see below). The distance from perch to capture site was noted on only nine occasions and varied from 5 to 15m, all relatively short distances.

### Food

Most observers said that birds were "hunting", but gave no more specific indication of what that involved. One person watched an owl for several hours without seeing any hunting activity, while another saw as many as seven "mice" caught in one hour. Two squirrels (sp?) were observed to "play" in the same tree as an owl, while the bird just watched!

Most observers noted mice or voles (28) being taken by the owls, and such items constituted the bulk of the food found in the stomach contents examined (Table 1). Two people had sufficiently good looks at prey to identify them as Star-nosed Moles. Both Star-nosed and

Hairy-tailed Moles (*Parascalops breweri*) were identified in stomach contents. This is perhaps not surprising, since moles are much the same size and colouration as the owls' usual prey. A small white animal was seen taken, which the observer suggested was either a young Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*), or an Ermine (Short-tailed Weasel, *Mustela erminea*). Since the observation was made on 3 January this prey would likely have been a weasel. Great Gray Owls have been known to take weasels (Brunton and Reynolds 1984), but this seems to be a rather unusual item.

One observer (Simcoe Co.) indicated that an owl was eating a "rabbit", and another (Peterborough area) a cottontail. These were both probably Eastern Cottontails (*Sylvilagus floridanus*). Cottontails are much larger than the usual prey taken by Great Gray Owls (Norberg 1987), and may have been road kills that were subsequently picked up by the owls. Scavenging behaviour has been noted (Nero 1980), and during the 1983-84 invasion one was seen feeding on a Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) carcass near a house (trappers?). Stomach contents from one owl also suggested scavenging, as it contained feathers, a leg, and lower mandible of what appeared to be a white, immature domestic chicken.

What may be more surprising is that the remains of 12 Meadow Voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) can

**Table 1:** Contents of Great Gray Owl stomachs (9) and pellets (1) from the winter of 1983–84 in Ontario.

Location	Date	Age	Sex	Contents
Cochrane Dist.	20 Nov.	-	-	2 Masked Shrews ( <i>Sorex cinereus</i> )
Cochrane Dist.	25 Nov.	-	-	4 Meadow Voles ( <i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i> )
Cochrane Dist.	30 Nov.	-	-	empty
Timiskaming Dist.	14 Nov.	-	-	1 Masked Shrew ( <i>Sorex cinereus</i> ), 1 Star-nosed Mole ( <i>Condylura cristata</i> )
Timiskaming Dist.	— Dec.	Ad.	F	6 Meadow Voles ( <i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i> )
Timiskaming Dist.	11 Jan.	Ad.	F	12 Meadow Voles ( <i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i> )
Sudbury Dist.	— Nov.	-	F	8 Meadow Voles ( <i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i> )
Muskoka Dist.	20 Dec.	Ad.	M	1 young chicken (part)
Simcoe Co.	12 Jan.	Ad.	F	1 Hairy-tailed Mole ( <i>Parascalops breweri</i> )
Simcoe Co.	11 Feb.	Ad.	F	1 Meadow Vole ( <i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i> ) (pellet)

be accommodated in a single owl stomach (Table 1). However, the crania of all skulls were crushed and most smaller bones such as ribs seemed to have vanished.

An observer reported that an owl swooped at a domestic cat. Whether this behaviour actually constituted hunting for food (for a larger than usual prey item although the size of the cat was not specified) or an aggressive response was not clear. One owl attacked a blond-haired person (with no hat) at night. This may have been a mistaken attempt by a hungry owl to get food, for there seems little reason for an aggressive response to a human in mid-winter. Another

owl was observed feeding on voles that were disturbed by someone ploughing snow from his driveway with a truck. The bird apparently caught six voles in a very short time, some within 3m of the truck. One bird was found eating a still-warm Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)! Unfortunately, there was no indication of how the owl had acquired this prey item, and it may have been scavenged.

#### Weather

Birds were seen in all types of conditions from completely overcast to full sun, and at temperatures ranging from -20°C to +20°C. Most observers noted that

winds were light or calm, as seems more usual (Nero 1980), but sometimes winds were recorded at speeds of 15 to 20km per hour. Snow depths ranged from none to 60cm. Some owls were present in the same area for a month or more and experienced all types of weather. There is no way to correlate various activities with any particular weather pattern, given the few observations provided.

### Health of birds/mortality

More than 90 observers remarked that birds appeared healthy and alert. Unless a bird was obviously almost dead nobody looking at a "free flying" or perched bird ever suggested that it appeared to be in poor condition. Poor condition may have been possible to diagnose only in the hand, but the overwhelming evidence is that most birds were healthy everywhere they were seen. Of 23 examined in the hand, 18 were considered to be in good condition. One bird appeared to have a damaged eye, but was still alive and apparently healthy when seen on 11 April 1984. One person was tested for rabies after being attacked by an owl. No cause for the attack was suggested and tests were negative. While food shortages may have driven the owls from their normal haunts, they were obviously able to find areas of food abundance.

There were 51 Great Gray Owl deaths noted during the 1983-84 invasion. Road kills (18) were the largest single reported cause of

mortality. Three others were listed as road kills or possible starvation. Since they were found near the road, they had probably been hit by cars also. The second largest cause of death was from shooting (9) and we can speculate that more birds were shot that were never reported. Other causes of death included traps (3), natural injuries (3), window kill (1), train (1), and hitting a wire (1). A couple of owls were found hanging in the crotch of trees, but whether they were initially caught there or fell there in weakened condition is not known. One bird was reported hanging by its feet from a "telephone" wire; no cause of death was suggested. Starvation was not implicated as a significant cause of mortality.

Owls were seen being harassed by American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) on two occasions, by Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) once, and by an American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) once. Although such harassment can be serious (Nero 1980), in one instance two crows "dive bombing" an owl did not even cause it to fly. It is unlikely that such harassment had any serious effect on the bird's health.

### Plumage and moult

With a sample of only five adult birds, one missing one wing and two others missing part of their flight feathers, little can be said about moult. There was no consistent pattern of feather replacement of flight feathers, each bird having a distinct pattern of

new and old feathers in each wing. There was even a different moult pattern observed on the right and left wing of each bird. Among primary flight feathers there seemed to be two classes of feathers: new, and worn (probably one year old). Among the secondaries, however, there were usually three distinct classes: new, worn, and very worn and faded, suggesting that some had been retained for two years.

### Sex and age

Few observers ventured to indicate the sex of the owls. Nineteen were thought to be female and eight male. Twelve dead birds were sexed by dissection, and ten of these were females, suggesting that the higher number of observed females was a real phenomenon. This is consistent with findings elsewhere that indicate that males tend to be much more sedentary than females (Duncan 1987; Hildén and Solonen 1987).

On the other hand, the age of birds (by plumage) was more frequently noted, and the overwhelming majority were adults (36) rather than immature birds (6). If most birds had been immature, one might have concluded that the young of a very successful breeding year were wandering or were forced by resident adults from natal areas because of competition for food or space. Movement of more juveniles than adults may be the usual situation during invasions (Hildén 1974). However, the strong showing

by adults suggests that food stress was a more likely cause of the movement, as there is good evidence that young are probably the first to leave an area in times of food stress (Duncan 1987). The small number of young also suggests that 1983 may have been a poor year in terms of nesting success, with few young produced. This is a normal situation during a period of low food supply (Nero 1980), further indicating that food stress was likely a major cause of the movement.

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# Common Raven Nesting in Eastern Ontario

by

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In Ontario, the Common Raven (*Corvus corax*), is considered a common permanent resident throughout the province, but rare south of Algonquin Provincial Park (James *et al.* 1976). Its status in the Ottawa District has changed considerably over the past decades. In 1911, the Common Raven was found to be a rare resident, becoming common on the Quebec side of the Ottawa District. In the immediate vicinity of Ottawa it was a rare winter visitor (Eifrig 1911). H. Lloyd described this species as a "rare resident" in the Ottawa District, "formerly occurring in the city" (Lloyd 1944). In 1969, Pittaway referred to the Common Raven as a "scarce resident in [the] Gatineau; breeds. Very rare elsewhere" (Pittaway 1969). Since then, the number of Common Raven sightings has increased on the Ontario side of the Ottawa District, primarily in the townships of West Carleton and Kanata. During the mid-1970s most of the observations were made during the winter months, but by the late 1970s sightings of Common Ravens were reported all year round. In the

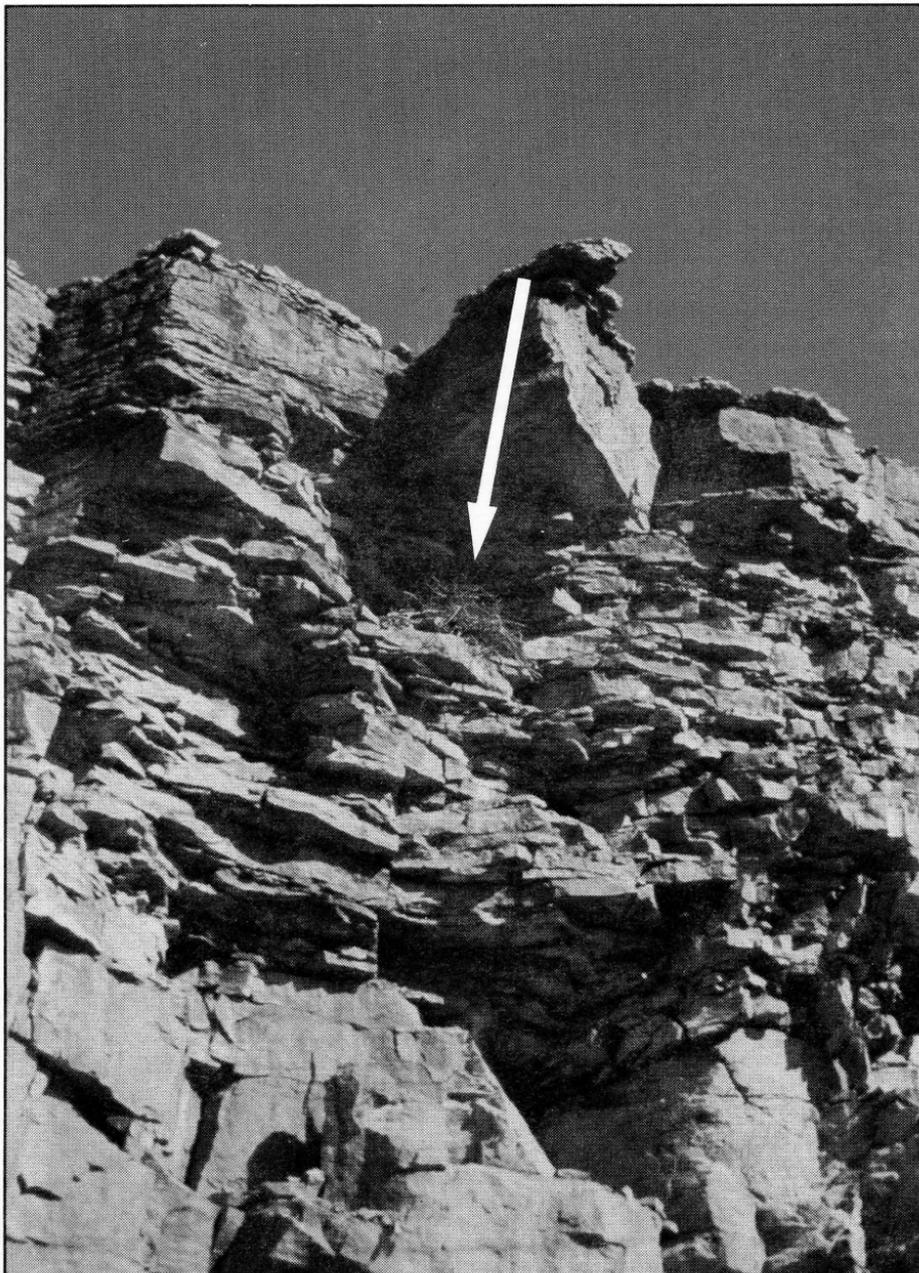
1980s, the winter population ranged from 10 to 40 birds, with most found at the Torbolton Township Dump, and a few remaining into the summer (B. M. D.).

In June 1984 the first possible breeding evidence in the Ottawa District was found. An adult raven and two young were observed in a heavily wooded area consisting of eastern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) and white pine (*Pinus strobus*) at the south end of Constance Lake, March Township (B. M. D.).

During the five years of the *Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas* project (1981-85), no confirmation of nesting was found in the Ottawa District or anywhere east of Ottawa (Blomme 1987). It was not until 1987 that the first documented nesting of Common Raven was established in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. Surprisingly, this nest site occurred east of Ottawa, rather than to the west where it was expected.

Since the early 1980s two or three Common Ravens have been regularly observed around the

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*Figure 1: Common Raven nest (arrow), Francon Gravel Pits, Gloucester, Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario, April 1987. Photo by Bruce M. Di Labio.*

Green's Creek Sewage Lagoon, east of Ottawa. Breeding was first suspected in May 1986, when a large abandoned nest was found at the Francon Gravel Pits along the north end of Bearbrook Road, near Blackburn Hamlet, Gloucester Township.

The gravel pit was monitored the following year, beginning in February. After numerous visits, a Common Raven was finally observed on 17 March. By 4 April two Common Ravens were present, with a large nest in the final stages of completion. From 5 April on, Common Ravens were observed sharing the incubation duties. Due to the remoteness of the nesting site, the authors were unable to view inside the nest, making the exact hatching date impossible to confirm. The nesting of the Common Ravens was later confirmed on 20 April when at least two and possibly three young were observed sticking their heads above the walls of the nest. They left the nest on 15 May, and were later seen less than 1 km away from the nesting site on 28 May.

The nest site was located on the side of the gravel pit wall, approximately 20 to 25 m above the floor of the quarry, and 3 m from the top. The nest was situated in a crevice with a large overhanging rock protecting the nest from weather and disturbance (Fig. 1). It is interesting to note that the nest site was at one of the highest elevations in Ontario east of Ottawa. The nest was situated on

the south-facing wall of the pit and was constructed mainly of large sticks. Due to the inaccessibility of the nest, a complete description of the nest materials was impossible.

The Common Raven is normally wary of humans; however in some circumstances they prove to adapt well when suitable man-made habitat is present (Blomme 1987). This proved to be the case with this nesting, since the gravel pit where the nest was located was active, with heavy machinery and dynamite activity present. This demonstrates the adaptability of Common Ravens in the selection of nest sites when there is a lack of natural nesting habitat.

This record represents an eastern extension of the breeding range of the Common Raven in Ontario. It is also the first documented breeding record of the Common Raven in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton.

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# Pine Grosbeaks Using Bird Feeders

by  
Ron Pittaway

## Introduction

The Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*) staged a major movement into southern Ontario during the winter of 1985–86 (Weir 1986). An unusual aspect of Pine Grosbeak behaviour in that winter was the species' widespread use of bird feeders (Weir 1986).

## Observations

I first noted Pine Grosbeaks eating sunflower seeds at a feeder on 5 January 1986. Throughout that winter, small flocks of Pine Grosbeaks, of up to a dozen individuals, regularly visited by feeder in Minden and many other feeders (pers. obs.) in Haliburton Co., Ontario. My last observation in 1986 was of two females at my feeder on 28 March. At feeders, Pine Grosbeaks were often dominated by the more aggressive Evening Grosbeaks (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*). They tended to frequent feeders more at midday after the Evening Grosbeaks had left. In 1986, Ron Tozer (pers. comm.) made his first observations of Pine Grosbeaks at feeders in the District Municipality of Muskoka. On one occasion at Dwight, he

observed six Pine Grosbeaks aggressively fighting with several Evening Grosbeaks over sunflower seeds.

These observations are noteworthy because in over 30 years I have only once before observed Pine Grosbeaks at a bird feeder (in January 1984, when I observed a small flock at a feeder near Haliburton Village, Haliburton Co.), although there have been many "irruptions" of this species in southern Ontario during that time (Speirs 1985). Crumb (1981) reported a female Pine Grosbeak at her feeder in upstate New York. She concluded, "although I have discussed this with many people over the years, I have never known of anyone who knew of a Pine Grosbeak actually eating at a feeder." As a result of her note, Dorothy Crumb (pers. comm.) learned from Kim Eckert (*in litt.*) of Duluth, that "Pine Grosbeaks routinely eat sunflower seeds at Minnesota feeders." Pine Grosbeaks also have been reported to use feeders in Nova Scotia (Tufts 1961).

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## Discussion

Why Pine Grosbeaks have not until recently been observed to use feeders in southern Ontario and upstate New York, but have elsewhere, is not known. I offer three (probably interrelated) possible explanations.

First, Newton (1972) stated that food habits of cardueline finches are learned from conspecifics and by trial and error. Thus, the use of feeding stations by Pine Grosbeaks appears to be a learned behaviour. Since most of the Pine Grosbeaks that visit southern Ontario breed in remote areas where there are few feeders, their infrequent irruptions may mean that some populations have not learned to use feeders.

Second, Pine Grosbeaks feed extensively on tree buds (Newton 1972), and so they may not be as dependent on feeders as are other winter finches when tree seeds and berries are at low levels. However, their appearance at feeders in 1986 may have been due to the failure of an important unrecognized food source. Weir (1986) attributed their use of feeders to "a shortage of wild seeds and berries".

Third, Tufts (1961) believed that increasing numbers of Evening Grosbeaks caused a decline in the use of feeders by Pine Grosbeaks in Nova Scotia. Therefore, Pine Grosbeaks may not go to feeders in southern Ontario and New York State because of the presence at those feeders of large numbers of more aggressive species such as Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*) and

Evening Grosbeaks. However, when a large irruption of Pine Grosbeaks occurs, there may be sufficient numbers present that some individuals seek out additional food sources such as feeders. Only small numbers may actually go to feeders, and these may be the more aggressive individuals that are ready to compete with other birds. Pine Grosbeaks using feeders could be rare in southern Ontario and New York State because those areas do not often have large numbers of this species. Perhaps they do go to feeders more frequently in Minnesota because that state usually has higher numbers of Pine Grosbeaks in winter than do southern Ontario and New York. Therefore, Minnesota more frequently has Pine Grosbeaks that are habituated to feeders.

There may be better explanations of these observations. Please contact me if you have a different interpretation.

## Epilogue

In January 1988 I observed one to three Pine Grosbeaks several times at the feeders of the Leslie M. Frost Natural Resources Centre, Haliburton Co. The observation of Pine Grosbeaks at feeders would have been considered exceptional before 1986. It will be interesting to see if the use of bird feeders by Pine Grosbeaks in southern Ontario increases in future years.

### Acknowledgements

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## Notes

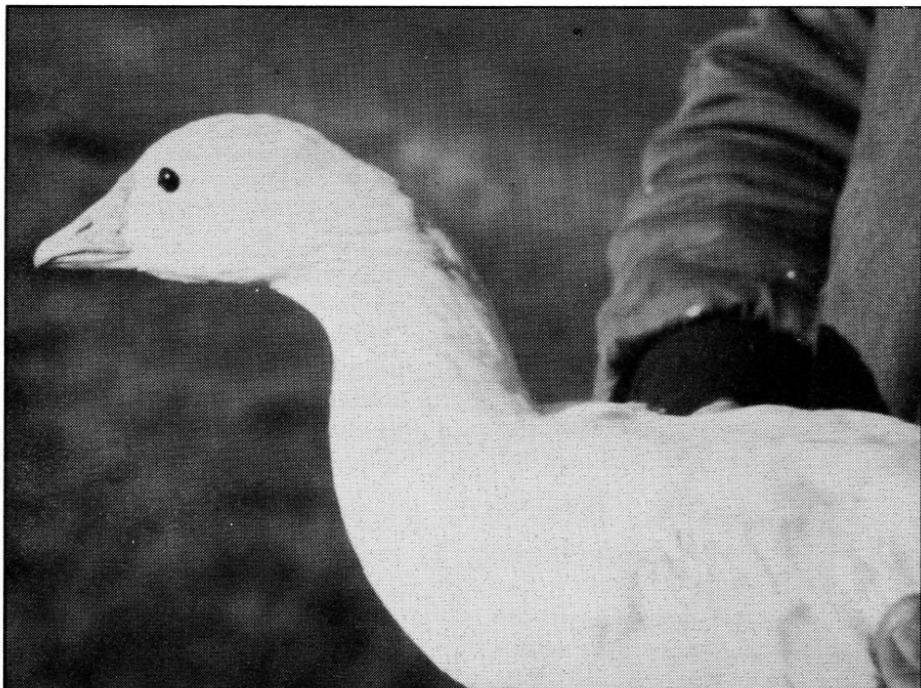
### Ross' Goose Breeding on Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories

During part of July 1984, Peter Burke and the author were participating in the *Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas* project in northern Ontario. Part of our assignment included assisting the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources staff with a goose banding program.

On 13 July 1984 we were involved in gathering wild geese into pens as part of this project. One flock of Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) was being "rounded up" on the northwest shoreline of Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories. Included in the flock of approximately 50 geese were several Canadas, two or three Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens*), one "Blue" Goose, and an adult male and two juvenile Ross' Geese (*Chen rossii*).

Photographs of the adult male Ross' and the goslings (Figs. 1 and 2) were obtained both in the hand and in the pens. The adult did not appear to be a hybrid and exhibited features one would expect in a "pure" Ross'. The juveniles were similar to young Snow Geese, but differed in that they were much whiter in appearance. No notable difference was found in bill structure between them and young Snow Geese. They were, however, much more aggressive than the young Snow Geese while in the pens.

Photographs were submitted to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, for evaluation. The impression of the reviewers was that the birds were likely pure juvenile Ross' Geese, but the possibility of hybridization could not be ruled out definitively.



*Figure 1: Adult male Ross' Goose, Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories, 13 July 1984. Photo by G. Carpentier.*

No female Ross' Goose was found on that date or on subsequent ones. Likewise, no female Snow Goose was found attending the young birds. The male Ross' seemed to be the only attendant bird to the young.

The Ross' Goose is a rare breeder in most of Canada's low Arctic, from MacKenzie (Perry River), Keewatin, Southampton Island, to northeast Manitoba (Godfrey 1986). The only other documented nesting attempt in eastern Canada involves a pre-fledgling Ross' Goose found 29 July 1975 near the mouth of the Brant

River, Kenora District (Prevett and Johnson 1977).

This sighting appears to represent the first nesting of a Ross' Goose in the Northwest Territories, and the second for eastern Canada. Although not recorded in Ontario, this was the only breeding record for Ross' Goose obtained during the Atlas (Prevett 1987).



Figure 2: Juvenile Ross' Goose, Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories, 13 July 1984. Photo by G. Carpentier.

[*Eds. note.* Although all islands in James Bay and Hudson Bay belong to the Northwest Territories, Akimiski Island was included in the geographic area covered by the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* (Cadman *et al.* 1987). Akimiski Island is situated in James Bay 25km east of the mouth of the Attawapiskat River, Kenora District, Ontario.]

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## Semipalmated Sandpiper Captured by Turtle

At approximately 1700h on 23 May 1989 I was looking for a female Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) which others had told me was in the west sewage lagoon at Stoney Point, Essex Co.

While walking the length of the dike separating the two lagoons, I noticed a small sandpiper in obvious difficulty, less than a metre in from the side of the east lagoon. All of the bird's lower body was under water, and it was flapping its wings in an apparent attempt to reach the edge of the pond.

At this point I realized that the large "rock" beside the bird was actually a turtle, and that it had one of the sandpiper's legs in its jaw, underwater.

The other leg, minus the foot, was trailing in the water behind the bird. The trailing leg was black which, in conjunction with the size and plumage details, confirmed the bird's identity as a Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*).

Because there was nothing I could do to help, I continued on to find the phalarope, a female in full breeding plumage. Five to ten minutes later, on returning to the place where the sandpiper had been, there was no sign of it or the turtle.

Not being familiar with turtles, I was unable to identify the species which had captured the sandpiper, although I did notice that the ridge on its back seemed quite pronounced rather than smooth.

[*Eds. note.* On the basis of the description provided above, this was probably a Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*). A similar case of predation involving a snapping turtle and a shorebird was observed in Ontario by M. Parker. The turtle captured and partially consumed a Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) at the Tara sewage lagoon, Bruce Co. on 12 August 1985 (Oldham 1988).]

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## Short-billed Dowitcher Breeding on Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories

As part of the *Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas* project (1981–85), Peter Burke and I surveyed much of the north shore and part of the interior of Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories.

On 12 July 1984, while working the coastal fringe of the northwest part of the island, we discovered a single adult Short-billed Dowitcher

(*Limnodromus griseus*) in an extremely agitated state. The bird vocalized incessantly as it flew in low circles over our heads. After every one or two cycles, it perched at the top of small willow bushes (*Salix* sp.) and continued to call. Eventually it flew to a more distant perch and remained silent but observant.



Figure 1: Juvenile Short-billed Dowitcher, Akimiski Island, Northwest Territories, 12 July 1984. Photo by G. Carpentier.

Feeling that a nest or young might be found in the vicinity, we searched the area thoroughly. After approximately 15 minutes Carpentier found a fairly large, flightless juvenile hiding in the grass.

Since it strongly resembled the adult seen nearby, and already exhibited most of the expected morphological features of the Short-billed Dowitcher, it was identified as this species.

Photographs were taken in the hand to document the nesting (Fig. 1). It was accepted by the Atlas Data Review Committee as the only confirmed breeding of the Short-billed Dowitcher for the Atlas period (Harris 1987).

The bird was subsequently released and shortly thereafter was joined by its "parent".

The Short-billed Dowitcher is a widespread breeder across Canada, from the southern Yukon and MacKenzie, northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec, and northwest British Columbia, Ontario, and Labrador (Godfrey 1986.)

Few Ontario breeding records were available prior to the Atlas. Tuck (1963) found a downy and recently fledged young at Winisk, Kenora District, in 1963 and Manning (1981) found it nesting at nearby North Twin Island, N. W. T., in 1981. Although no material evidence (i.e., nest or eggs) was found, the former record

represents the only known breeding record for Short-billed Dowitcher in Ontario.

The observations recorded in this note represent one of the few published records of Short-billed Dowitcher breeding in eastern Canada and, in fact, appears to expand the species' known breeding range in central Canada southward by about 20km, compared to Manning's (1981) observations.

[Eds. note: Although all islands in James Bay and Hudson Bay belong to the Northwest Territories, Akimiski Island was included in the geographic area covered by the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* (Cadman *et al.* 1987). Akimiski Island is situated in James Bay 25km east of the mouth of the Attawapiskat River, Kenora District, Ontario.]

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# Book Reviews

*Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario.* 1987. Edited by M. D. Cadman, P. F. J. Eagles, and F. M. Helleiner. University of Waterloo Press, Waterloo, Ontario. pp xx+617, maps illustrations. \$53.50.

This volume superbly documents the distributions of breeding birds in Ontario from 1981 until 1985. The heart and soul of the book are the maps recording in which squares (10 x 10km) and blocks (100 x 100km) in Ontario each of the 290 species of birds were observed in breeding habitat (possible breeding), observed behaving as if breeding (probable breeding), or confirmed breeding. These maps are complemented by well-written species accounts outlining the biology of each species, the historic range in Ontario, and any constraints inherent in the data presented. The *Atlas* is the benchmark for breeding bird distribution in the province. All documentation of future changes in distribution and comparisons with past distributions must start with the data presented here. The *Atlas* will also serve as an indicator of which species need protection now, and as a guide to finding breeding birds in Ontario, both for birders and professional ornithologists.

One of the major hurdles was to organize the atlasers so that all squares in southern Ontario and all blocks in northern Ontario were covered adequately. The inaccessibility of much of northern

Ontario provided the most difficult obstacle. A measure of the success and the effort involved in the *Atlas* project is that more squares were visited in northern Ontario (1,834) than in southern Ontario (1,824). The efforts of hundreds of volunteer atlasers, the expertise of many regional coordinators, the words of many authors of species accounts, the massive organizational effort by a management committee, the logistical support of several organizations and the sponsorship of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and the Long Point Bird Observatory were woven together to produce this valuable document. The effort expended and the organizational skills that were mobilized were truly monumental and the book lives up to this effort.

The maps of squares coded for possible, probable, and confirmed breeding are the best maps available for breeding bird distributions in Ontario. In comparison to the information available in Godfrey's *The Birds of Canada*, Peck and James' *Breeding Birds of Ontario: Nidiology and Distribution*, and Speirs' *Birds of Ontario*, the *Atlas* maps are by far the most useful and accurate. Since all 10 x 10km squares in southern

Ontario were covered, these maps have a precision that was not available to Godfrey and the rest. For example, Godfrey's maps are generally precise at the 100 x 100km block level. Godfrey was not able to show the gaps in distributions of many species in southern Ontario that the 10 x 10km squares can. These gaps are evident in the ranges of many common and widespread species such as Mallard, Ruffed Grouse, Chimney Swift, and Bank Swallow, and more obvious in less common widespread species such as Cooper's Hawk, Short-eared Owl, Sedge Wren, Eastern Bluebird, and Clay-colored Sparrow. Much effort was placed in surveying nesting birds in inaccessible locations in northern Ontario and much new information (for example the first breeding records for Bohemian Waxwing, Northern Shrike, Harris' Sparrow, and Snow Bunting) and, most importantly, much better information on the distribution of birds between Thunder Bay and Hudson Bay is presented. However, our knowledge of northern Ontario birds still lags far behind that of southern Ontario.

A minor but annoying problem with the maps is the difficulty in seeing whether a record is possible, probable, or confirmed in that square. Patterns with more contrast would have been helpful. This problem of map clarity recurs in many of the maps throughout. Few errors appear to have crept into the final maps. I did notice that one

square in the Dickcissel map (p. 437) is missing and the confirmed line of the Ring-necked Pheasant map (p. 135) is lacking. Fortunately, typographical errors of this nature are rare throughout the book. This is especially noteworthy considering how quickly after the fieldwork was finished that the *Atlas* was published.

The maps are complemented by generally well-written species accounts. The accounts give a general account of the species biology, how this biology affected *Atlas* reports of breeding, historical range in North America and Ontario, previous breeding reports from Ontario, range changes in Ontario, and often a prognostication for the future of the species. These accounts are extremely helpful in interpreting the data from the maps. These accounts will become ensconced as the conventional wisdom. Nevertheless, I urge everyone to question what is written. Most accounts are accurate and useful, but there are a few exceptions. The Wild Turkey account contains several inaccuracies and doubtful emphases. Turkeys did not return to Ontario in 1984; they have been on Hill Island along the St. Lawrence River for much longer. This population is ignored in the account, while the recent introductions have been emphasized, down to the number in each stocking. A few of the isolated records are not even considered. Are they legitimate

records? What is the source of those birds? No attempt was made to evaluate the future of turkeys in Ontario. A more detailed survey of turkeys and their history in Ontario is warranted, especially considering the effort being expended in re-establishing the species in Ontario.

Each species account is accompanied by a sketch of the bird. The shorebird sketches by Sue House and the blackbirds by Ian Jones are excellent. Some of the other sketches are less attractive and some are reproduced poorly (e.g., the Common Loon on p. 36).

An atlas project does a very good job of marshalling information about common and widespread species. Atlas information can also be used to identify rare species which would benefit from conservation measures or which, at the least, deserve more detailed surveying. The data presented in the *Atlas* should be used to reconsider the list of rare, threatened, and endangered birds in Ontario (see Appendix D). It seems strange to have Ivory Gull and Eskimo Curlew included on the list, along with Eastern Bluebird and Bald Eagle. A list of birds found in fewer than 100 squares in southern Ontario and/or fewer than 10 blocks in total would include Horned and Red-necked Grebe, Northern Bobwhite, Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Yellow-headed Blackbird, plus northern species such as Smith's Longspur, Northern Shrike, Gray-

cheeked Thrush and Ross' Goose. Should these birds be on a rare or threatened list? The data presented in the *Atlas* would produce a vastly different list than the present list. The recently initiated survey of rare breeding birds of Ontario has already gone a long way toward producing a more consistent list and in providing more data to assist the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in drawing up this list.

There are many highlights in the data presented. I was impressed with the results of nocturnal bird surveys. Consider that about half of the 223 squares in which the Least Bittern was recorded were for probable or confirmed breeding. Also the breeding ranges of Barred, Saw-whet, and Eastern Screech-Owls are now much better known because of nocturnal prowls. Range extensions are recorded for many species. Little Gulls were found nesting on the Hudson Bay Lowlands as well as in a few marshes in southern Ontario. This was expected, given that they nest at Churchill, but it is important that these expectations are confirmed by direct observation and documented. The expansion of the nesting range of House Finches is documented superbly, both in the species account and in an appendix. Another highlight is the identification of several areas with high numbers of breeding species or interesting suites of species. The

edge of the Canadian Shield, a few squares along the Niagara Escarpment, and the Long Point and Rondeau areas had particularly high species totals. The Long Point area shows the importance of habitat diversity, including remnant Carolinian forest, for the breeding of Hooded Warbler (see this excellent species account which highlights the role of the *Atlas* in redefining the status of a species in Ontario), Louisiana Waterthrush, Prothonotary Warbler, conifer stands/plantations for Whip-poor-will, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, and Pine Warbler and the extensive marsh for a wide variety of species. Two other noteworthy totals come from the block north of Rainy River and the one including Thunder Bay. I would recommend a few weeks of daily reading to find all of the highlights. I will warn you that browsing the *Atlas* is at least as addictive as watching baseball on TV.

There will obviously be some omissions and mistakes in a work of this magnitude. The data presented represent the best available. Because of the way data were vetted, there were questionable records of birds in suitable nesting habitat during the breeding season that were not mapped. Some maps, therefore, may underestimate slightly the breeding range of a species from 1981-85. There should be a few overestimations of

breeding range included. Anyone who detects omissions or likely omissions should go and find the birds and let everyone know. Have Dickcissels returned again this year? The *Atlas* is an excellent benchmark to compare with recent irruptions. Do Orange-crowned Warblers nest abundantly on the Hudson Bay Lowlands or have Acadian Flycatchers always nested in the woodlot over there? Have Loggerhead Shrikes disappeared from your area since the *Atlas*? The *Atlas* has given us a place to start in answering these questions.

There was a lesser emphasis placed on determining the abundance of breeding birds. The data on abundance are not as extensive nor as consistent because they are much more subjective. Usually 40-60% of squares in which a species was reported in southern Ontario, and less than 40% in northern Ontario, included abundance estimates. Atlassers were asked to extrapolate from what they saw in a square to provide an abundance estimate for the whole square. These estimates are useful, but not always accurate. They are subjective and therefore must be used very carefully. Most of the species accounts are cautious in the use of these estimates. However, Eagles (pp. 566-568) overrates their value in the write-up on the use of abundance estimates. It is imprudent to extrapolate to estimates of the provincial population based on subjective estimates from about half the

squares where a species occurs. This implies that the same levels of abundance occur in the squares where abundance was not reported. It is impractical to do extensive surveys, such as this *Atlas*, and intensive population estimates of about 100 species at the same time. For a few conspicuous species the estimates may be reasonable or useful, but for most they are just educated guesses. Lumsden (pp. 134, 140) points out that the abundance estimates for species for which there are good population estimates, such as Sharp-tailed Grouse and Ring-necked Pheasant, are much too low. Most estimates are probably underestimates. However the Warbling Vireo species account (p. 350) suggests that the population estimates are too high. Do more than 1,000 pairs of Warbling Vireos nest in any squares? In the species accounts many authors used the population estimates to identify areas where the species was particularly common in the province. The Northern Mockingbird account (p. 334) is a good example of the use of these estimates. Other accounts such as Red-bellied Woodpecker (p. 234) and American Coot (p. 158) would have benefitted from this approach. Overall, the abundance estimates should be used as a guide with caution.

A major strength of the *Atlas* is the well-described methodology. This will ensure as far as possible that the data collected will be used

and interpreted wisely, even the abundance estimates. Everything from the recording form atlases used, to the vetting of records, to coverage of squares and blocks, to how the abundance estimates were made, is described. In addition, each species account notes the strengths and the pitfalls of the data. At times I felt that the data were stronger than suggested by all the qualifiers used. This emphasis on methodology gives confidence that most records are accurate, a very important concern in a project with so many helpers. An introductory chapter on vegetation, climate, physiography, and land use in Ontario provides useful information. Interpreting the breeding bird data is much easier with all this information.

A major disappointment was the analysis of species clusters (pp. 576, 580). Identification of suites of co-occurring species will be one of the most important uses of atlas data. The results of this analysis, its methodology, and its goals are not well outlined. The maps are particularly difficult to follow. A missing ingredient here is attention to particular groups of species and particular areas. The analysis presented here is a start, but more work is needed and better presentation elsewhere is required.

This is an excellent book. The distributions of breeding birds in Ontario are well presented. The yardstick to measure changes in distributions is here. The *Atlas* will be of value to everyone involved in

resource management in Ontario and everyone interested in bird distributions in eastern North America. The Ontario *Atlas* is of comparable quality to those produced elsewhere, such as Great Britain and Australia. This atlas can serve as a model for other atlas

projects; it will encourage others that a task of this magnitude is possible. The results are of enormous value. Congratulations to the team that put it together, the army that provided the data, and the organizations which supported the project.

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*A Downy of Owls*. 1986. By Larry McKeever. Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd., Toronto, Ontario. 208pp. \$19.95 hardcover.

This delightful and humorous book is best described as a love story or, to be more precise, two love stories. One is the love of Lawrence (Larry) McKeever for his wife Katherine (Kay), a devotion that transcends knocking holes in the walls of a cherished cottage built by himself to accommodate owls; and the other is the love of Kay for sick and injured strigids with a passion that sees her develop, with neither medical nor ornithological training, into an expert in her field. This is not to imply that the love-bond between the two McKeeveres is a one-way street.

It is also a book recounting the road-blocks and detours on the way to establishing the Owl Rehabilitation Research Foundation and the ORRF Endowment Fund Inc., the latter being the money-raising arm of the centre. It is neither a text-book nor a primer. If it were, one would be lost trying to find wanted material. The absence

of an index and the fact that chapter heads are useless because chapters contain more than one topic makes relocation difficult.

As this reviewer can testify, the caring for injured birds is no sinecure. There are no amenities such as office hours, free weekends, or regular coffee breaks. Anyway, in the McKeever home, the latter can be interrupted by the plopping of an owl pellet into the tea cup. Larry glosses over such irregularities but still manages to convey the thought that caring for incapacitated birds of any kind should not be attempted without serious consideration, sound financial backing, and a profound knowledge of the subject. He proceeds to give just sufficient information that, if you persist in tending to injured birds, you will find yourself enduring the heartaches and hardships suffered by them.

Their initial, light-hearted approach to owl-caring begins with

a honeymoon trip that includes three adults, three owls, four dogs, and two flying squirrels, the entourage travelling in two cars. A faulty car-carrier on the roof of one produces a roadside stop of crowd-gathering proportions, including two members of the constabulary. The volume and density of the menagerie rises and falls throughout the book, resulting in many humorous and even hilarious situations. Cats are introduced, as are rabbits, with the number of owls continuing to grow until, with their accepting 100 or more during a year, the infirmary might contain 120 individuals. Not all submissions are accepted. Of those that are, about 30% are "put down" after a careful examination reveals that the case is hopeless. Half are released into the wild if, after treatment, it is evident that the patient's hunting skills are undiminished and that it shows no signs of "imprinting", a subject quite fully reviewed. Imprinting is an attitude that a bird may develop, usually when quite young, in which it fancies its human benefactor as its mother. Obviously, birds in that state will be vulnerable if released to fend for themselves.

Twenty per cent of the inmates are retained for breeding, those selected being of good health and sound body, other than the physical impairments brought about by their accidents and preventing their return to the wild. The centre is world-renowned for having bred many species for the first time in captivity.

The feeding of owls is somewhat different from feeding canaries. One cannot pay a casual visit to the pet shop to pick up a carton of mice. While purchases were made in the early stages of the centre, it was found more expedient to propagate food items, so that the raising of mice and crickets (for insect-eating owls) is now part of the centre's activities. Nor does one throw a mouse or two into an owl's cage and then go fishing. Larry tells of how honoured he felt when Kay, off on some business, invested him with the selection of mice to be fed to specific owls. Apparently there is a correlation between owl size and mouse size.

Life before mouse culture was hazardous and hilarious. Larry describes Kay's return on the "mouse run" with her shopping neatly stowed in various containers. At a traffic signal, she found the containers had "leaked", and that a hundred or so mice were trying to shake the "ennui" of car travel. A car full of rampant mice was not so much different from the McKeever home, as invariably there was at least one owl flying free, a situation perhaps unsettling to some visitors. The freedom of a bird or two meant that some human guest was subjected to indignities that were to be expected under such circumstances.

Both McKeever's have received honorary doctorates for their efforts, with Larry insisting that his was for nothing more than carpentry. He has devised and

constructed some ingenious contrivances to house and feed not only owls, but the foodstuffs of the birds.

Many of the chapters revolve around the acquisition of a certain, usually rare, species, or the attempts, often successful, to have certain species breed in captivity. He outlines the development of a corporation, a step to ensure the continuity of the centre in the event that either of the principals becomes incapacitated. There is also a review, far too brief, of the physiology of owls, including their remarkable hearing, restricted eye movement, and uncanny flight. Part of one chapter is devoted to

parasites that infest owls and means of their removal.

The photographs are largely of favourite individuals, but all seem of poor quality, a fault, perhaps, of the printer rather than of the photographer. The list of owls at the end of the book is in alphabetical order rather than the much preferred taxonomic arrangement, and the bibliography is very brief. The text concludes with the creed of the McKeevers, a model for all to follow.

The only error that I detected was found in the statement, "The hooting of an owl on the hunt ...", which suggests that owls hunt like a pack of hounds. They don't.

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## **OFO Field Trip**

### **Marathon and Lake Superior, October 11 - 14, 1989**

The final OFO field trip of the year will once again feature birding in the little-known but exciting area west of Marathon on the north shore of Lake Superior. Last year's participants were treated to northern specialties such as Peregrine Falcon, Spruce Grouse, Sandhill Crane, Black-backed Woodpecker and Boreal Chickadee, and two western rarities: Harris' Sparrow and Mountain Bluebird. Northern Ontario's first ever Carolina Wren was an unexpected surprise.

If you are looking for something new and different in Ontario birding, this area fits the bill. Leaders this year will be John Olmsted and Ron Scovell (416-745-9111). Alan Wormington has prepared a superb information package which will be available to interested members. Look for full details on this trip in the next OFO newsletter.