

ONTARIO BIRDS

The Journal of the
Ontario Field
Ornithologists

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Reports of rare birds (those for which the OBRC requires documentation — see supplement to *Ontario Birds* 5 (3)) should be sent to:

Secretary

Ontario Bird Records Committee

c/o Ontario Field Ornithologists
Box 1204, Station B
Burlington, Ontario
L7P 3S9

Ontario Birds

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Ron Tozer

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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". 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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Cover illustration: Black-billed Magpie by *Ed Poropat*

Note from the Editors

With the publication of this issue of *Ontario Birds*, a new triumvirate of editors begins its work. In the past, OFO has always had a single editor, who has been assisted by other members in various ways. As the new editorial team, we hope that we will have the continued assistance and support of the membership as we edit forthcoming issues.

We believe that there will be several advantages to having an editorial board composed of three members. One of these is that the work load for each individual will be manageable. Also, since we live relatively close to one another, we will be able to meet from time to time to discuss plans for new features and edit manuscripts. Hopefully, since we all have different contacts and acquaintances, we will also be able to tap a wider array of potential sources for articles, notes, and features.

In this issue, you will find the second in our series of Bird Finding Guides, this one on the Rainy River area. Also, we are initiating two new regular features: "Recognizable Forms" by Ron Pittaway, and "Photo Quiz" by Doug McRae. We are working on a few other ideas for new features, and we're looking forward to hearing your views on these and other concepts. We would like to encourage you to submit notes, articles, and letters to the editors, and to drop us a line with ideas about what you would like to see in *Ontario Birds*.

As OFO approaches the age of 10, we hope we can continue to produce a journal that is interesting and informative, and that evolves along with its readers' interests.

Bill Crins, Ron Pittaway, Ron Tozer,
Editors

Letters to the Editors

Suggested changes for *Ontario Birds*

There has been some concern expressed in recent months over the lack of material to publish in *Ontario Birds*. This is undoubtedly creating a dilemma for the board of directors of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. With fewer or thinner issues to send to members, interest wanes and subscriptions are not renewed, fewer prospective members are attracted and the cycle repeats itself. Without some changes, *Ontario Birds* may

soon go the way of the *Ontario Field Biologist*.

What I would like to suggest is something that I know was discussed in OFO's early years, and in fact was voted down by the board of directors at the time. But considering today's circumstances, maybe it is time to give it some more thought.

Many OFO members are active in the field and make a number of interesting sightings. With all due respect to *American Birds*, very few of

these records are included in that publication, either because of lack of space allotted for the Ontario section, or because the sightings may not seem to be significant enough to warrant inclusion in a publication of continental scope. However, I believe these sightings are of interest — to Ontario birders. I believe it would be most worthwhile to institute a seasonal summary section in *Ontario Birds*. People would be interested in seeing their name and records in print while feeling they have contributed something worthwhile without having to author a full article (or even a short note). Perhaps more importantly, significant records of birds would be officially documented. At this point in time I don't think any publication serves this purpose effectively. The Federation of Ontario Naturalists' publication *Seasons* used to have a seasonal summary but that has been dropped. *Canadian Birding* mentions some interesting Ontario sightings but reporting is more incidental than complete and is certainly not refereed. And as

mentioned earlier, *American Birds* fails to perform this function. I think that if *Ontario Birds* adopted this role it would serve Ontario's birds and birders much more successfully. *I would venture to say that membership in OFO might increase as well.*

Perhaps it is too much to suggest that *Ontario Birds* be expected to also include documenting the results of the Christmas Bird Counts held in Ontario. However every year I hear of more and more people who are disgruntled with the fee that *American Birds* enforces, now up to five dollars. As an example of inequity, why should Ottawa area birders fork over \$450 for one column of data while Pacific Canal Area birders in Panama pay only \$165, yet generate three columns of data? The paying and collecting certainly takes some of the fun out of doing a CBC. And anyone who does four or more counts can more than pay for an annual membership in OFO.

P. Allen Woodliffe
Chatham, Ontario

Erratum

The article entitled "Wilson's Plover at Windermere Basin" (*Ontario Birds* 8:82-84) should have stated that it was reprinted from *The Wood Duck* 44:26-27 (1990), the newsletter of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club.

Commentary

"I Don't See A Chat, Let's Bulldoze" A Commentary on Ecological Consulting

by

Graham J. Forbes

A Typical Example:

It's mid-June and you're relaxing after a morning of leisurely birding. The phone rings. The local consulting firm needs a biological survey of the old woodlot near the highway and you're one of the few naturalists available. The woodlot, recently purchased by a developer who has applied to re-zone the land to residential use, is the same woodlot where you saw a Red-shouldered Hawk (a provincially designated rare species) in June, last year. You have the time, the money is good, and so you take the job. But, besides finding a small grove of American chestnuts (a threatened species), you don't find anything else of "significance"; not the Red-shouldered Hawk, nor any sign of nesting. A year later, most of the trees are gone and the woodlot is now home to 30 luxury residences, and a handfull of stately maples. However, there is some comfort because the chestnuts survived, saved by the developer on the advice of the consultants. Nevertheless, driving by the new woodlot, you can't help wondering if you did the right thing...if you could have looked harder for that hawk.

The above account describes, in a rather simplified overview, both the pros and cons of environmental consulting, and the ideological

dilemma facing naturalists. Ecological or environmental consulting is one of the fastest growing industries in Canada and the readers of this journal represent an expertise in ornithology and natural history that is also increasing in demand. But the process has many flaws and for the birder who has spent a lifetime in local woodlots, the issue is complex. How do you, as a naturalist, best maintain natural areas in regions of expanding human populations and demand? Do you join a consulting firm and limit the damage of (inevitable) development, or join the "antis" and fight for a clearer, unadulterated vision of preservation?

The following briefly outlines a typical process of sub-contracting. Variations in methods and mitigation exist involving such tools as geographic information systems and experimental manipulation but they are not presented here due to their infrequent use. In most cases, the consulting firm is hired by a developer who requires a study of the effects of that development on the physical properties (flora and fauna). The consulting company will outline the scope and nature of the development in blueprints, maps, and air photos varying in scale, detail and accuracy. If the area is large, a complete inventory may not be

possible because of time and money constraints. Instead, some system of sampling will be required, and often, it is your job to determine the degree of sampling as well as the timing of the field work.

In the field, often at dawn or dusk (to maximize the survey during periods of high animal activity), the inventory is conducted by an assortment of birding, recorded tape play-backs, small mammal live trapping, turning over rocks and rotting logs, and sloshing through ponds. Ah...this is the life, actually being paid to do your hobby!

The data is often divided into distinguishable physiographic areas such as woodlot #2, swamp #1, meadow #3b, in accordance with the reports of other project members. The final report details your methodology (hours in the field, location of transect lines, etc.), results (often limited to presence-absence observations), and recommendations. The recommendations usually consist of proposed mitigative measures that could limit impact on species or habitats susceptible to the proposed development.

Each of the other reports (e.g. botanist's, engineer's, hydrologist's) are paraphrased into a larger submission for the developer and relevant government agencies. Basically, this report details the recommended course of action that the firm believes the developer should take. And although the developer is not legally bound to the report, to ignore too many of the recommendations would give considerable lobbying power to those individuals and organizations opposed to the development.

Some Problems

No system is perfect. But the means presently used to determine if the "ecological integrity" of an area to be developed will be negatively impacted by such development is so flawed that many basic improvements are immediately required.

The first problem with consulting is the over-reliance on rarity. Much of the business of development and control encompasses a theme of trade-off and compromise; certain areas can be "saved" and others "sacrificed". The existence of a rare or "significant" species often will justify the saving of that area. This has prompted many a consultant to find (and hope for?) something, anything rare. Obviously, if priorities are to be given, it will be for a threatened species. But what about the effects of cumulative loss? If, for example, the last 10 woodlots in a region each contain only common species (and thus each pose scant rationale to prevent development), the loss of those woodlots will make those previously common species considerably rarer. This non-integrated, piece by piece analysis of separate woodlots will result in a cumulative loss of critical habitat for species we now take for granted.

The rarity issue also brings into focus the problems of methodology, notably sampling. Was your coverage extensive enough or was the Red-shouldered Hawk present and you missed it? Or maybe the hawk is not present one year but would have returned in the next. Or the timing was wrong and breeding has finished. With these problems in mind, the potential for a species' presence

(rather than just occurred/not occurred) must be given more credence in the consulting process. More than one final report has been sent back by a government agency because a consulting firm, constrained by time, conducted a survey in the middle of winter and concluded no mammals or birds would be adversely affected!

The consulting process is similarly over-reliant on certain "types" of animals. Normally, whatever is noisy or visible gets counted. Singing birds and frogs, or deer pellets and coyote scats are easily counted if you choose the proper seasons, time of day, and habitat for your survey. However, secretive small rodents and bats are often undetected, but assumed, or not assumed, to be present. And insects are rarely surveyed. None of these types lend themselves to the "quick survey" common in the industry.

The second major problem is inherent to the system. In most cases, the consulting firm is hired by the developer (as opposed to a government agency). A consulting firm employing no-one but idealists, all totally opposed to development, is not going to attract much business. Such a situation can foster conflict of interest. Some of the pressure could be removed if, for example, a local government (municipal/regional) formed a standing committee that took an active role in monitoring and surveying areas to be developed.

There is also the problem, where, in certain cases, no trade-off or compromise is acceptable. An area may be too susceptible to disturbance, a species may be too rare, or the potential for damage too great to justify *any* development.

In projects such as these one may question involvement in a development that may be detrimental regardless of any degree of proposed mitigation. Such was the case a few years ago in Prince Edward Island where a proposed golf course and access to beaches used by breeding Piping Plovers (an endangered species) made national news. Regardless of any recommended controls (proposed by an environmental consultant) on numbers of people, timing, or type of vehicle allowed on the beach, the potential for damage to the plovers was too great and the proposal was denied. The point here is that development and its proposed mitigation was denied by government agencies, not by the consultants.

Two Opposing Views

Environmental consulting can pose an ethical dilemma. People involved with consulting state that, without them, somebody less qualified would do it, or it may not be done at all. This is likely true. Secondly, environmental consultants mitigate the effect of development, they lessen its impact or advise against certain aspects. As a result, the consulting industry may, on average, increase the protection offered to the environment while still allowing development to occur in a controlled manner.

People against the development state that environmental consultants are part of a process that weakens the stance against certain kinds, or instances of development. They believe consultants are sugar-coating a problem by compromise and trade-off where no trade-off is acceptable. The label of "selling your soul" is

often applied to environmentalists who would be fighting the development if they did not work for the consultant/developer. All of this is arguably true. But, more importantly, it need not be.

The major criticisms of the consulting industry would be addressed by 1) improving and standardizing the methodology and content of surveys, 2) considering the regional context of species and habitat depletion instead of site specific analyses, and 3) removing the pressure of developers hiring consultants through greater government involvement.

Improving the industry is a means of improving the protection of natural areas. Development cannot be ignored, hoping, as we often do, that it will go away. But it can be controlled in a responsible way where both preservation and development are possible. Consulting, even with its problems, is still the best vehicle for controls on development. Improvement of the

consulting business can only give greater credence to the protective aspects of the industry.

The dilemma of the naturalist would also improve considerably with the implementation of these safeguards. But what about the role of naturalists as part-time consultants today? No clear answer exists because much of the dilemma is based upon your own personal ideologies. It seems simple enough. If you believe in compromise and moderation you may fit well into the consulting business. Conversely, if the loss of any natural area is unacceptable to you, be it relatively natural or degraded, then consulting is not for you. For those naturalists deciding to delve into consulting they need to follow just two rules; work only on specific projects and only with specific reputable firms. The thought that your effort and your methods could be responsible for protecting, or losing, a species from an area should dictate the quality of your consulting. Otherwise...

Graham J. Forbes, Faculty of Environmental Studies,
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Recognizable Forms

Orange-Banded Variant of the Cedar Waxwing

by
Ron Pittaway

In 1987 I was asked by John McLennan to identify a strange bird which had apparently flown into his window near Dorset, District of Muskoka. He described the bird as having a crest and a bright orange band along the tip of the tail. I was puzzled by the description until he sent me a colour photograph of the bird to examine. The bird in question proved to be a Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) in juvenal plumage.

Shortly after this event, I read a request in *Birder's World* for information about Cedar Waxwings with orange tail tips (Parkes and Wood 1988). I have since checked waxwings for this plumage variant. I saw my first Cedar Waxwing with a bright orange tail band 19 August 1989 near Port Perry, Durham Region. This bird was in juvenal plumage. It was fly-catching in association with several Eastern Kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*). Strangely enough, I observed another juvenile waxwing with orange tail tips in exactly the same location on 14 August 1990. It was among approximately one dozen normally pigmented (yellow-banded) adult and juvenile waxwings. Since juvenile Cedar Waxwings moult into adult-like plumage (first basic) in their first fall, my 1989 and 1990 sightings were of two different birds. Interestingly, most reported cases of orange-banded

variants in Cedar Waxwings have been of birds in juvenal plumage (Hudon and Brush 1989).

Hudon and Brush (1989) reported the frequency of this colour variant has increased recently, and is not found in museum specimens older than about thirty years. They suggest the orange colour is possibly due to waxwings eating the fruit of introduced shrubs containing the pigment rhodoxanthin. More recently, Brush (1990) reported a possible source of the rhodoxanthin was the introduced Morrow's Honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*). This species of honeysuckle is widespread in southern Ontario (Bill Crins, Dan Brunton, pers. comms. 1991).

Some observers have mistakenly referred to the orange-banded variant as the "Japanese race" of the Cedar Waxwing (Parkes 1983). This mistake possibly arose because the Japanese Waxwing (*Bombycilla japonica*) of northeastern Asia has red tail tips. However, as Parkes (1983) pointed out, Cedar Waxwings with orange tail tips have absolutely nothing to do with the concept of subspecies or race. Taxonomically, in animals, race is synonymous with subspecies. Subspecies are distinct geographical subdivisions of a species which interbreed freely (intergrade) or are potentially capable of interbreeding with other subspecies of the same species. As well, this form should not

be called a colour morph since colour morphs are usually genetically determined, like eye colour in humans. Therefore, this form of the Cedar Waxwing is best termed a colour variant.

For birders, the orange-banded variant of the Cedar Waxwing is a recognizable form of the species. By listing and reporting it, birders can contribute to the knowledge of the species. I would like to hear of any sightings birders may have encountered. I am also looking for examples of this colour variant in Bohemian Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*). As far as I know, one has never been reported. As well, please forward any observations to: Dr. Kenneth C. Parkes, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, PA, USA, 15213. Your reports should include the date seen, relative age of the bird, and the exact location of the observation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance in the preparation of this note: Dan Brunton, Bill Crins, Chris Lemieux, John McLennan, Jim Mountjoy, Ron Tozer, and Mike Turner.

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Editors' Note

This is the first in a series on "Recognizable Forms" by Ron Pittaway. In this regular feature, Ron will discuss the identification, taxonomy and nomenclature of bird forms below the species level which are identifiable in the field. Ron is also preparing a checklist of recognizable forms such as subspecies, colour morphs, well-known hybrids, etc. for the next issue. Please contact him with your ideas and comments.

Ron Pittaway, Box 619, Minden, Ontario K0M 2K0

**Ontario Field Ornithologists
BIRD FINDING GUIDE #2**

A BIRDER'S GUIDE

to the

RAINY RIVER

AREA



by DAVE ELDER

ATIKOKAN, ONTARIO

ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) is an organization dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It was formed to unify the ever-growing numbers of birdwatchers across the province and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among its members.

OFO publishes a newsletter and a journal (Ontario Birds), hosts field trips throughout Ontario, oversees the activities of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC), and holds a Spring Field Meeting as well as 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 OFO.

Membership dues are \$20.00 for an Annual Membership or \$400.00 for a Life Membership. Please send memberships or inquiries to: Ontario Field Ornithologists, P.O. Box 1204, Station B, Burlington, Ontario L7P 3S9

Bird Finding Guide #2:

A Birder's Guide to the Rainy River Area, by Dave Elder

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Design/Production: Centennial Printers (Peterborough) Ltd.

A BIRDER'S GUIDE to the RAINY RIVER AREA of Ontario

Introduction

The area around the small community of Rainy River in extreme Northwestern Ontario presents some exciting birding opportunities. A combination of geographic location, topography, climatic conditions and land uses has resulted in a definite "western" condition that is reflected in the natural history of the area. In addition, the Rainy River empties into the Lake of the Woods here and together they provide unique and interesting habitats that are very attractive to birds as breeding and migrational staging areas. And where there are birds, there are birders. A good day in the Rainy River area can be incredibly rewarding; a week, unbelievable!

This guide will give visitors to the area nearly all the information they may need to see the local specialties whether their stay is only for a few hours or several days. It must be kept in mind, however, that circumstance, time of day and just plain luck affect the outcome of a visit to Rainy River.

Scope of the Guide

Through a series of maps and written descriptions, information on what to see and where to see it is provided. Assuming that most area visitors will arrive from the south and the east, information from Thunder Bay (very general) to Rainy River (very specific) will be given. Although the entire region is of considerable interest, the area around the town of Rainy River will be given the most attention.

General Information

1) Weather

Assume the weather will be variable and prepare for it, particularly in the spring and in the fall. The ground is usually snow-covered by mid November and remains so until mid April. Ice will be present on Lake of the Woods until early May but the Channel between the Sable Islands and the mainland usually opens two weeks earlier. Each year is different, of course, but the Rainy River itself is usually ice free by the second week in April. From mid May to early September, the days can be very warm with high temperatures exceeding 30°C. Afternoon birding can be an effort in these conditions. Wind can be a problem and *extreme care* should be taken when boating or canoeing on the Rainy River, Lake of the Woods and the Channel. The lake, in particular, can blow up very suddenly so keep an eye on the wind.

Winter temperatures can drop to -40°C. on occasion but are usually more pleasant. Most of the roads in the area are gravel and can get a little muddy in rainy weather.

2) Insects

Mosquitoes, black flies, deer flies, moose flies, dog flies, sand flies and the infamous wood tick combine to make life interesting for the birder. With some precautions, insects need not constrain birding activities. Early mornings and late evenings will generally be bad for mosquitoes since most of the area is low-lying and there is an abundance of breeding habitat. Use a good repellent and wear light-coloured clothing, including long-sleeved shirts. Head nets can be worn but tend to restrict vision and trap heat. In the open areas during the day mosquitoes should not be a problem. Expect them in wooded areas and marshes all the time. Wood ticks are present in the area from early May to August and are found everywhere except in the middle of ploughed fields. Use of a repellent, tucking pant legs in socks and a complete tick check (body search) at the end of the day are the best precautions to take. If you find a tick attached to you, it can be removed by gently pulling it until it comes free. Ticks take some time to become firmly attached and can usually be removed with no difficulty. If one is strongly attached, you may want to consult a physician. The recent publicity on Lyme disease has made people aware of ticks and while the possibility of infection exists, common sense and a little care will generally remove the risk. Wearing light-coloured clothing makes any tick that finds you easier to see. After a walk in grassy or bushy areas, look over your clothing carefully and remove any ticks you find. The wood tick of the Rainy River area is small, rounded (1/2 cm or less in diameter), flat and reddish brown.

3) Where to Stay

Accommodation in the Rainy River area consists of motels, hotels, rental cabins and rental campsites. In the town itself, there is one motel, the Roadrunner (807-852-3296) and a couple of older hotels. Cabins and campsites can be rented at Budreau's Oak Grove Camp on the Rainy River (807-852-3702) and at Windy Bay Lodge on Lake of the Woods (807-488-5723). Boats and motors can be rented at both Oak Grove and Windy Bay. In addition, rides out to and return from the Sable Islands or Windy Point can be arranged. Check with the owners in advance. Also, there is a free campground on the river in the town of Rainy River and a Provincial Park, Lake of the Woods, on Highway 621 north of Sleeman. There are numerous other motels in Baudette, Minnesota in the United States on the south side of the Rainy River. Be prepared for the usual border crossing procedures if you decide to stay there.

The town of Rainy River has all the stores associated with a small community and food, gas, supplies and incidentals can be purchased. Restaurant meals are difficult to obtain in Rainy River and, notwithstanding the inconvenience, crossing the border to Baudette will give you a better selection.

4) How to Get to Rainy River

Rainy River is located in the extreme southwestern corner of Northwestern Ontario at the western end of Highway 11 about 1900 km from Toronto. Getting there is time consuming. If you are not keen on driving for two and a half days (at least), you can fly commercially to Thunder Bay or Fort Frances and rent a car on arrival. Flying to Winnipeg and renting a car to drive through southeastern Manitoba is another alternative.

5) Private Property

Most of the land in the Rainy River area is privately owned. If you encounter a "No Trespassing" sign, respect it. Farmers in the area are getting to know birders and will usually give permission to enter their property if asked. Most birding can be done from public roads or on unposted land.

The local people are friendly, helpful and quite willing to talk to visitors about birds. Farmers in particular are quite aware of the more obvious species and can be helpful in pointing out a field visited by Sandhill Cranes or Sharp-tailed Grouse. Don't abuse the rights of the landowners. If property is posted, assume there is a good reason for the posting. Don't make things difficult for everyone by selfish or inconsiderate actions.

6) Maps

The sketch maps in the guide are based on the 1:50,000 National Topographical Series. These can be obtained from: The Canada Map Office, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, 615 Booth Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0E9 or from most retail map outlets. The following sheets cover the Rainy River area:

52 D/15 & 52 D/10 - Rainy River

52 D/16 - Arbor Vitae

52 D/9 - Pinewood



BIRD SPECIALTIES of the RAINY RIVER AREA

American White Pelican - Lake of the Woods, overhead anywhere

Ruddy Duck - Rainy River sewage ponds

Bald Eagle - Lake of the Woods, Rainy River

Sharp-tailed Grouse - fields, roadsides throughout area

Sandhill Crane - large fields throughout area

Yellow Rail - the Big Marsh off Fred's Road, wet fields

Piping Plover - Sable Islands, Windy Point

Marbled Godwit - fields throughout area

Wilson's Phalarope - Rainy River sewage ponds

Franklin's Gull - Lake of the Woods, Sable Islands

Red-headed Woodpecker - throughout area

Western Kingbird - throughout area (irregular)

Black-billed Magpie - throughout area

Sedge Wren - wet fields throughout area

Yellow-throated Vireo - aspen and oak woods

Connecticut Warbler - aspen groves throughout area

Brewer's Blackbird - fields, roadsides throughout area

Yellow-headed Blackbird - Rainy River, Sable Islands

Western Meadowlark - fields throughout area

Clay-colored Sparrow - brushy fields

Leconte's Sparrow - wet meadows, hay fields

BIRDING AREAS

Area #1 - Thunder Bay to Fort Frances

This is a 350 km drive on Highway 17/11 west from Thunder Bay to Shabauqua and then west on Highway 11 to Fort Frances. The highway passes through typical Canadian Shield country with numerous rock outcrops, lakes and boreal forest. Stop occasionally at places that catch your interest such as black spruce stands, jack pine stands, cutovers, black spruce bogs and mixed aspen-conifer stands for warblers, sparrows and other boreal species. Connecticut Warblers can be found in most of the more open black spruce bogs. They are easy to hear but hard to see. You *may* see a Great Gray Owl or a Spruce Grouse along the highway right of way. Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers are possible anywhere but not to be expected. Spend as much time as you wish birding as you travel. Just before Fort Frances, you will cross Rainy Lake on a causeway. There are several pull-offs along the causeway that give a good view of the lake and a good chance to see a Bald Eagle. A pair of eagles has a nest in a large white pine on a small island on the right about half way across the causeway.

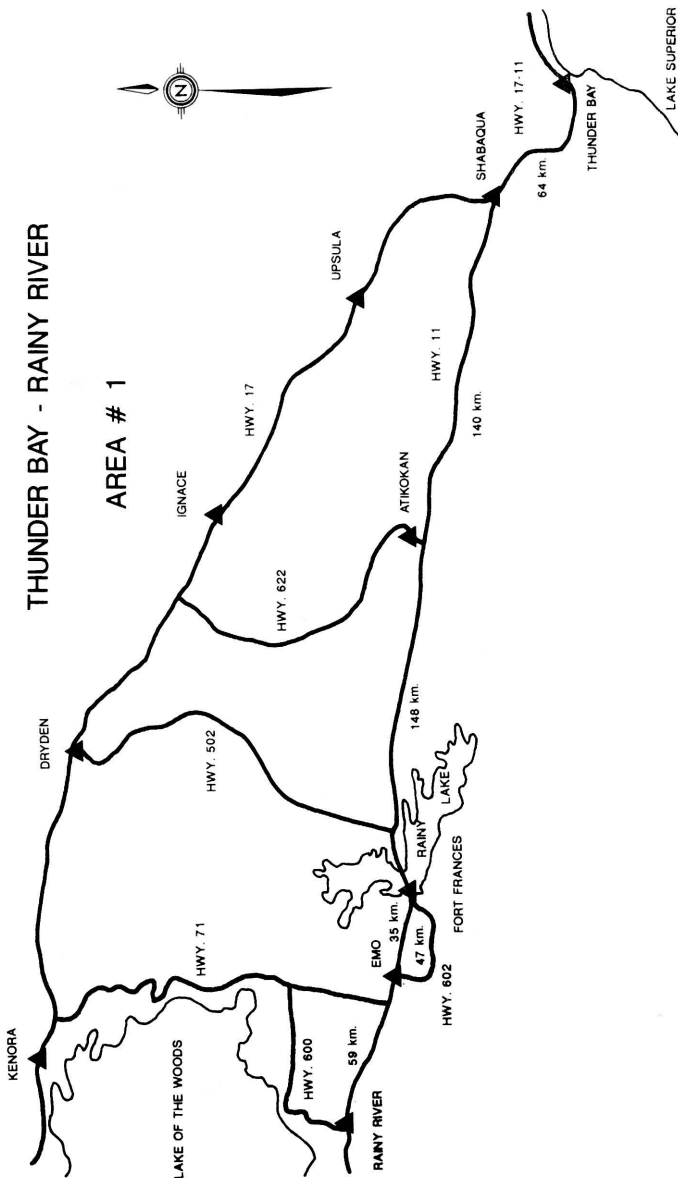
Area #2 - Fort Frances to Rainy River

This is about a 100 km drive west on Highway 11. West of Fort Frances, the rock of the Canadian Shield is left behind. Flat country, farm fields and patches of aspen woods characterize the landscape. The change is sudden and is reflected in the birds likely to be seen. Near the west end of Fort Frances, just west of the cemetery, is a small, open wooded park. The park overlooks the Rainy River and the pulp mills located on both shores. The river is good for waterfowl and when low, for shorebirds. The park trees harbour Eastern Wood-Pewee, Warbling Vireo, and Northern Oriole while Chimney Swifts wheel overhead. None of these are found east of Fort Frances, except rarely. There are two alternatives for driving west from Fort Frances. One is to follow Highway 11 west to Rainy River, checking fields and other interesting spots as you go. The other alternative takes a bit longer but is much more enjoyable. Just before the "McDonald's" restaurant, turn left on Highway 602 (also called the River Road) and follow it to Emo. The road follows the Rainy River and a leisurely drive will produce Western Meadowlark, Clay-colored Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird (check each one in case it is a Mountain Bluebird), Brewer's Blackbird, Northern Harrier and occasionally a Black-billed Magpie. This 47 km drive is a good introduction to the country and the birds you can expect as you move west. At Emo you will again be on Highway 11. Turn left and continue to Rainy River. West of Emo, you will pass through several small communities including Barwick, Stratton, Pinewood and Sleeman. At the west side of Pinewood, the highway crosses the Pinewood River. This is a good spot to stop and look for waterfowl, herons and to observe the large colony of Cliff Swallows that nest under the highway bridge. The open fields on either side of the highway can be checked as you drive or during occasional stops for open country species.

REGIONAL SKETCH MAP

THUNDER BAY - RAINY RIVER

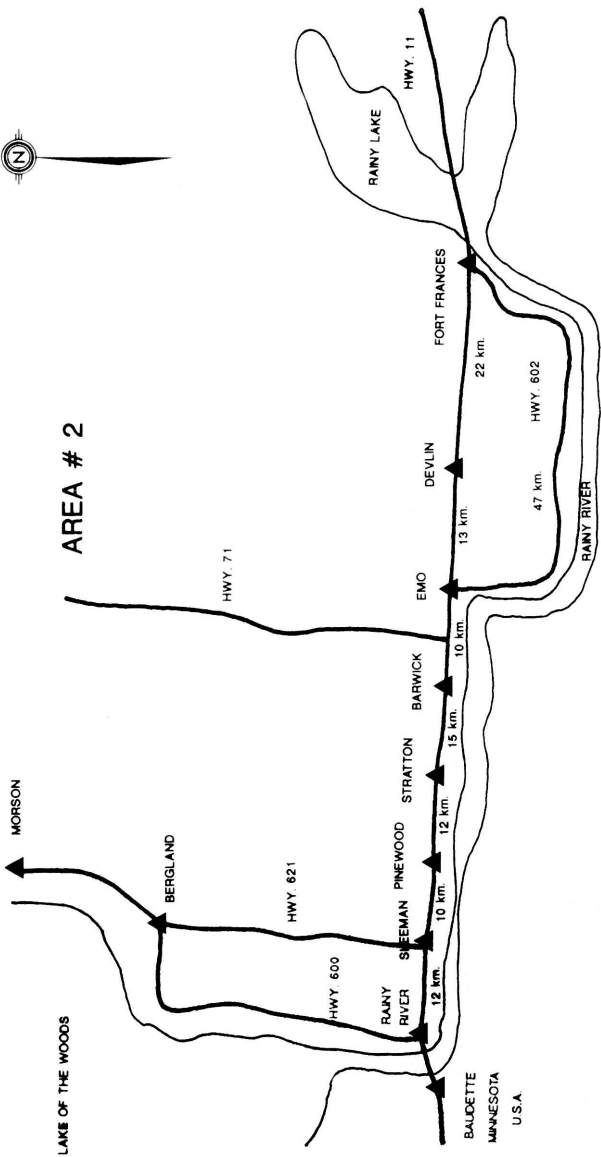
AREA # 1



SKETCH MAP

FORT FRANCES - RAINY RIVER

AREA # 2



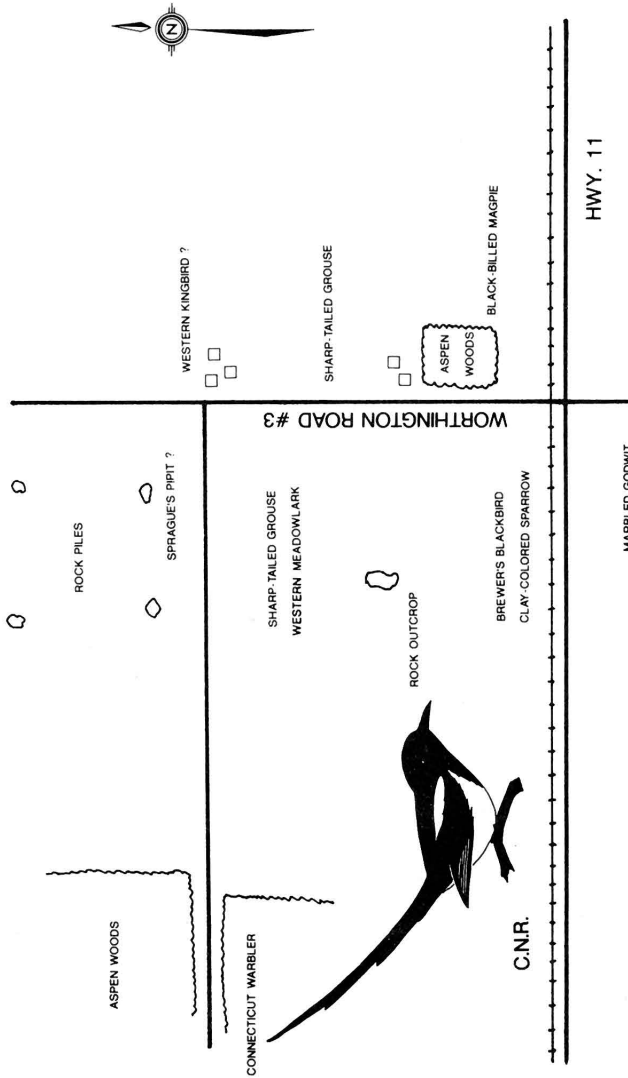
Area #3 - Worthington Road and Highway 11

This is the first of the site-specific areas described for Rainy River and it can be an exciting introduction to the bird specialties of the area as a whole. The best time to be here is during the first couple of hours after sunrise any day in the last week of May and the first two weeks of June. This well-signed junction is about 4 km west of Sleeman or 8 km east of Rainy River. Turn right on Worthington Road #3, cross the railway tracks, park, get out and watch and listen. In the surrounding fields, you will see or hear Sharp-tailed Grouse, Marbled Godwit, Upland Sandpiper, Horned Lark, Northern Harrier, Brewer's Blackbird, Leconte's Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Western Meadowlark and Black-billed Magpie. The magpies nest in the small aspen woods just ahead on the right. Watch for them flying over the fields or perched on the tops of trees in the woods. There is a magpie nest in a willow tree right by the fence at the nearest corner of the woods beside the road. Move ahead (north) to the second group of farm buildings on the right. For three years, 1987, 1988 and 1989, Western Kingbirds nested in one of the willow trees in the farm yard. Opposite the farm buildings, turn left. The short grass field on the right has several stone piles in it and in 1990 the field was occupied by a Sprague's Pipit. Good ears are necessary to find this bird as it seems to spend most of its time high in the air, singing. Moving ahead, Connecticut Warblers nest in the first aspen woods on the left. Continue moving ahead to Highway 600, checking fields, woodlots and farm yards as you go.

Area #4 - Rainy River Sewage Lagoons

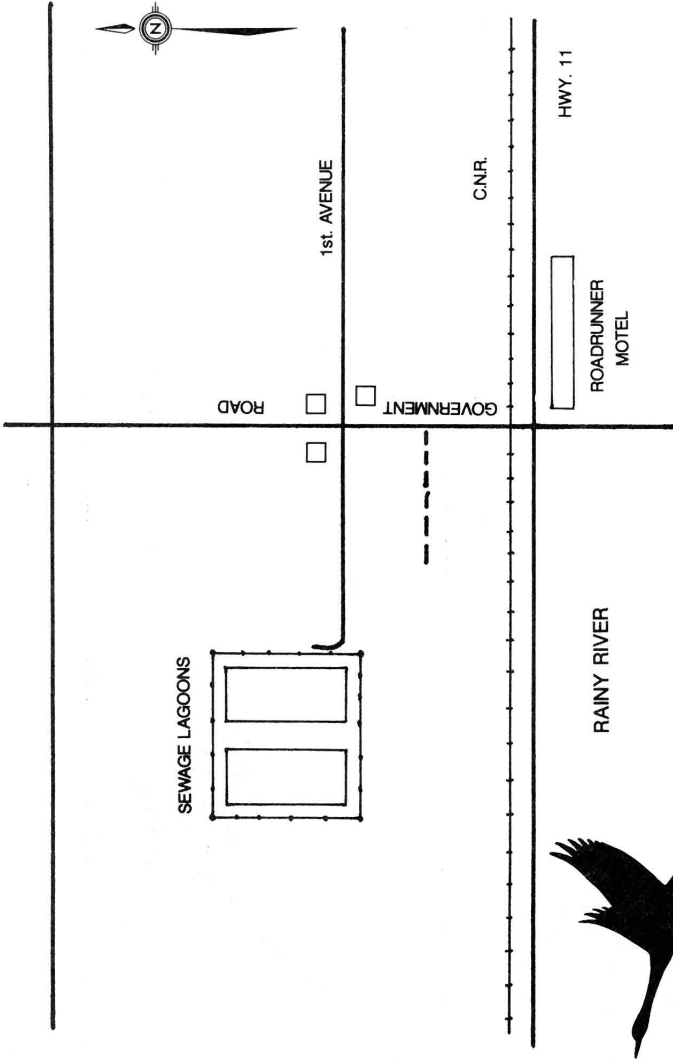
This area can be very productive for waterfowl and shorebirds depending on the water levels present in the lagoons. They are easily reached by turning right on Government Road off Highway 11 opposite the Roadrunner Motel in Rainy River. Cross the tracks and take the first drivable dirt road to the left to the lagoons. There is the usual fence and "Keep Out" signs but entry to date has not been challenged. Use your own judgement. There are two lagoons and they should both be checked. Most of the common duck species are usually present with several species, including Ruddy Duck, breeding. In late May and early June, it is not unusual to see up to 300 Wilson's Phalaropes spinning around on the ponds. Soras frequent the cattail edge and when water levels are low in the lagoons, good numbers of shorebirds congregate. During spring and fall migration periods, all of the regular swallow species can be seen. If you are in the Rainy River area for several days, more than one visit to the lagoon is recommended.

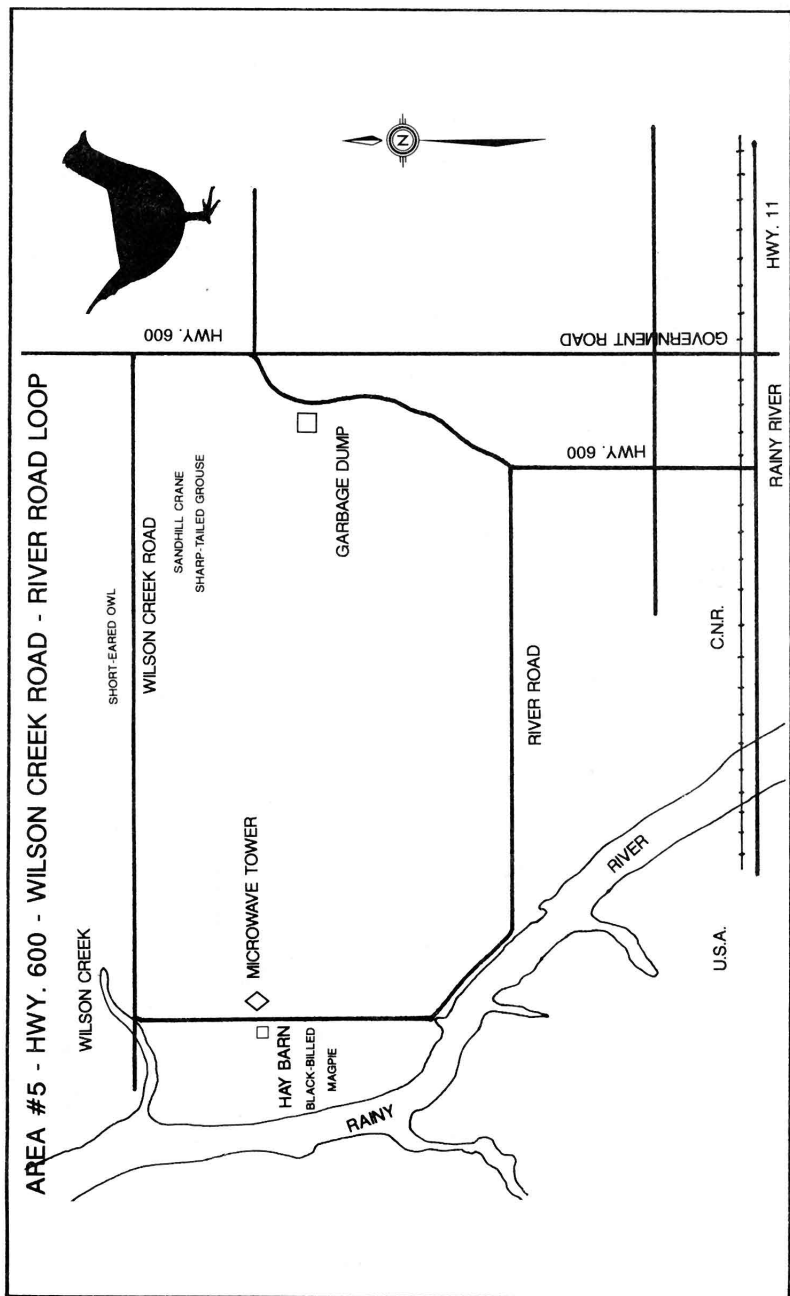
AREA #3 - WORTHINGTON ROAD #3 and HWY. 11

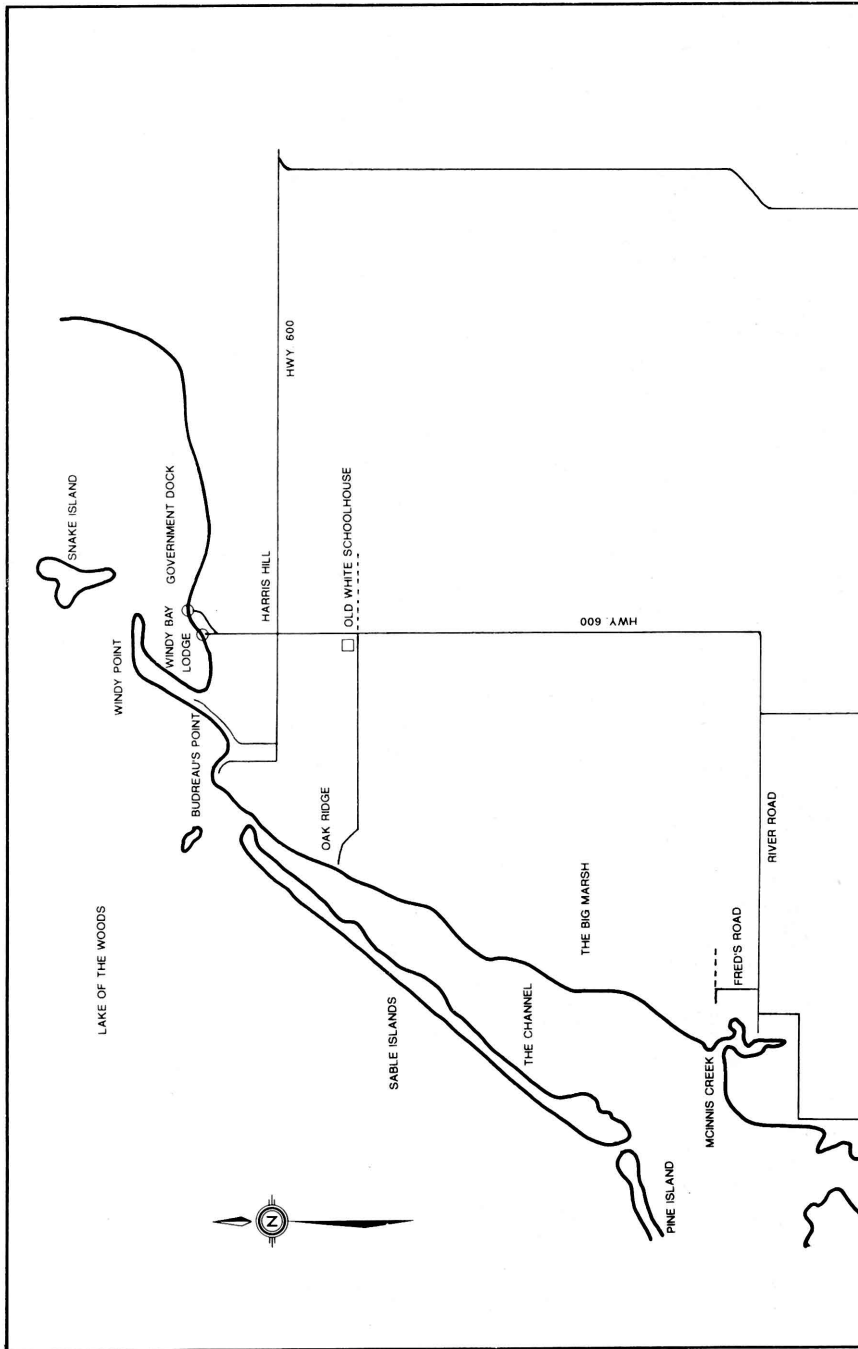


C.N.R.

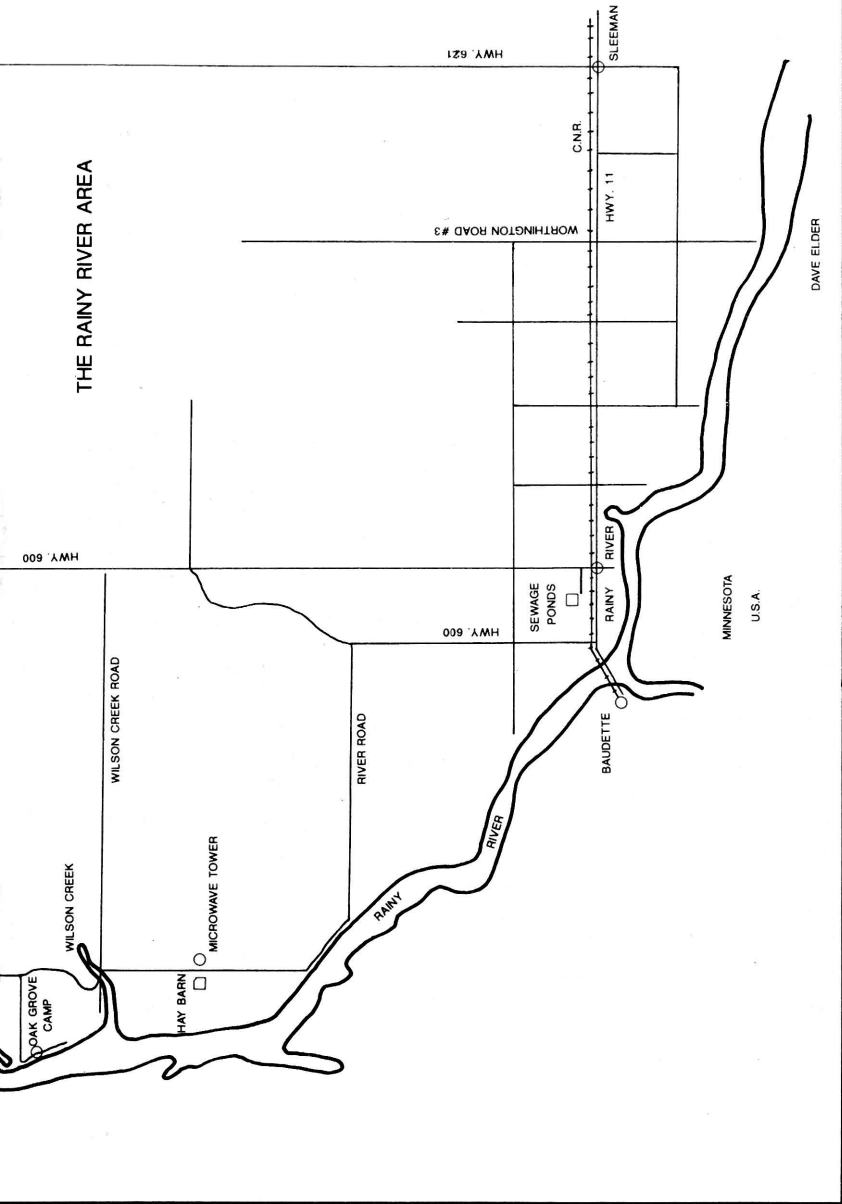
AREA #4 - RAINY RIVER SEWAGE LAGOONS







THE RAINY RIVER AREA

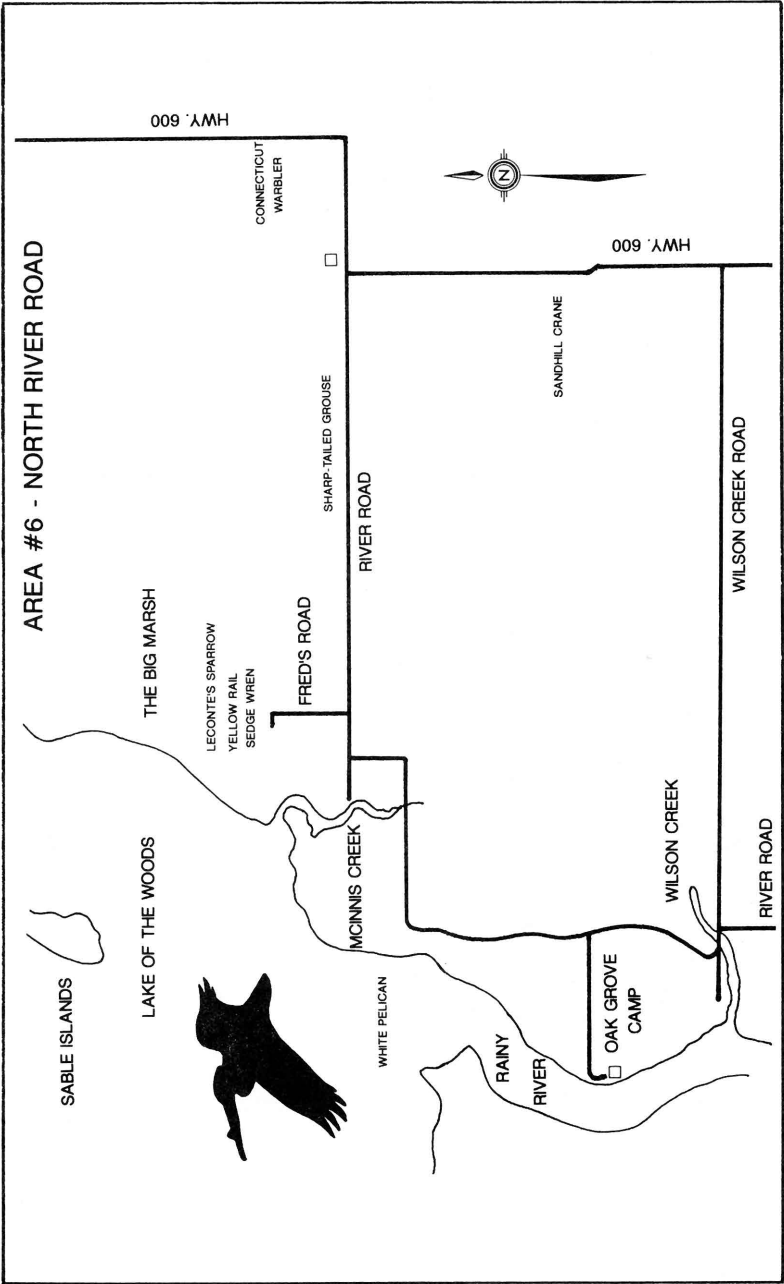


Area #5 - Highway 600 - Wilson Creek Road - River Road Loop

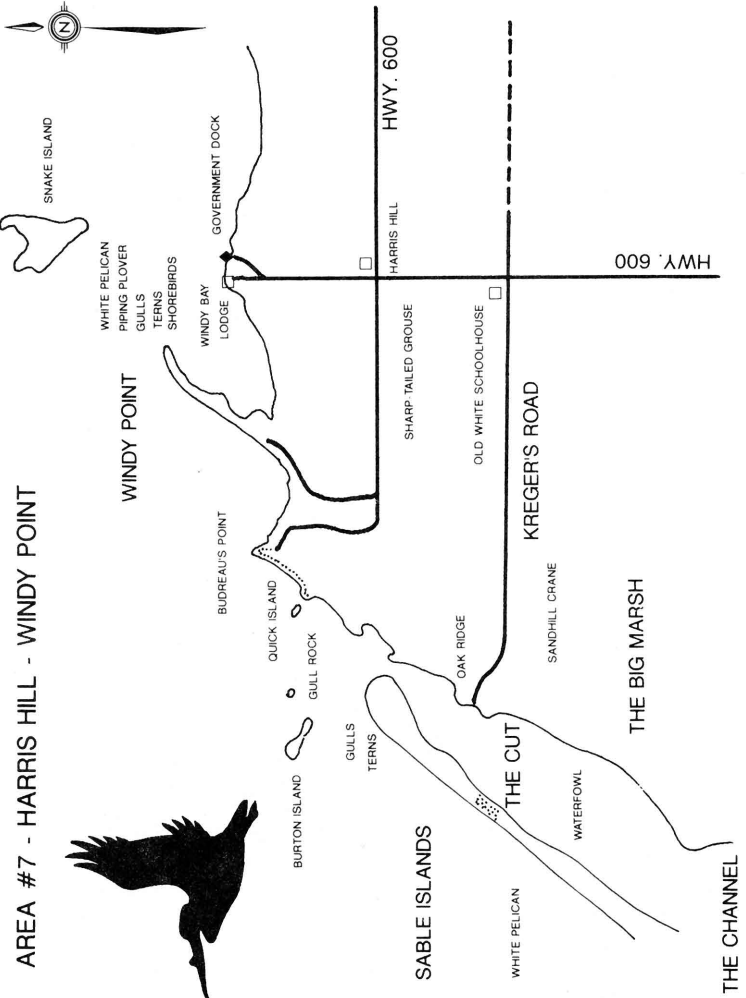
From Highway 11 at the west end of the town of Rainy River turn right (north) onto Highway 600. Follow Highway 600 north past the garbage dump to the Wilson Creek Road, on the left. As you travel along Highway 600, stop at any aspen woods and listen for the loud ringing song of the Connecticut Warbler. If you hear one, you can, with care, walk into the woods and see the bird. They are hard to find in the aspens; their colour blends in perfectly with their surroundings. Turn west on the Wilson Creek Road and drive slowly along watching the big fields on either side for Sandhill Cranes, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Sedge Wren, Leconte's Sparrow, Black-billed Magpie and, in the evenings, Short-eared Owl. This is one of the best areas to find Sandhill Cranes, especially in the spring and early summer. Even though cranes are large birds, they blend in extremely well with the ploughed fields and the vegetation of early summer. Look carefully. As you near the western end of the road, check the deciduous woods on either side; Wood Thrushes live in them. Brush up on your thrush songs because the Hermit Thrush is quite common in the area and can, at a distance, be confused with the Wood Thrush. Continue to the intersection with the River Road (to the left and straight ahead). Go ahead past the metal building and the gray house on the right to the Wilson Creek culvert crossing. Check both sides of the creek for waterfowl, grebes, herons and land birds in the surrounding oaks. Continue ahead on the River Road and take the next road on the left which leads past some houses and ends where Wilson Creek flows into the Rainy River. Waterfowl and White Pelicans like this area and the woods are great for land birds. Return to the Wilson Creek culvert and follow the River Road south (if you go straight ahead, you will be on the Wilson Creek Road again). Ahead on the left, you will see a tall microwave tower. . . Opposite the tower is an open hay barn where Black-billed Magpies have nested under the eaves of the barn for many years and can usually be seen flying out of the barn or perched at the top of nearby trees. The fields around the microwave tower are good for Sandhill Crane and Sharp-tailed Grouse. It is also a good spot to look for Western Kingbird. Continue to the south until the road swings to the left and follows the Rainy River. Check the reed beds in the river for Yellow-headed Blackbirds, waterfowl, White Pelicans, gulls, grebes and swallows. The oak woods and the small ponds near the residences along the road are excellent for Yellow-throated Vireo and other land birds. Follow the River Road east to Highway 600 checking the fields as you go, then turn right and you will soon be back in Rainy River.

Area #6 - North River Road

Starting at the Wilson Creek culvert, continue north along the River Road to the sign and road leading to Budreau's Oak Grove Camp on the left. Take this road and check the woods on either side for warblers, flycatchers, sparrows and Scarlet Tanagers. Oak Grove Camp is a beautiful spot set in a stand of bur and Hills' oaks on the Rainy River. The place usually abounds with birds. It's a great place to stay in a cabin or on a campsite but if you are just visiting, stop at the office first and ask if you can do some birding - there should be no problem. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers have been seen here several times as have Western Tanagers. Spend some time on the river bank as waterfowl, gulls, terns and White Pelicans are constantly flying by. Return to the River Road, turn left and proceed northward. The next small road on the left leads to a fisherman's dock on the river. If you want to check this spot (big stands of cattail), ask at the brown house on the right if you can go out to the dock. Continue on until you cross McInnis Creek. The big trees near the houses are good for Red-headed Woodpecker. After a left and a right turn, watch for Fred's Road on the left. Take this road to its end and turn left for a few car lengths and park (don't block access to the field on your right). In the field on your right, you will notice a single elm tree. Beyond the tree is the south end of the big marsh. Check the stand of *Phragmites* for Sharp-tailed Sparrow and watch and listen for Sandhill Cranes. The best time to check for rails is in the evening. The marsh is wet; you will need rubber boots or runners and the mosquitoes will be bad. Walk out into the marsh and listen for the "tick-tick, tick-tick" calls of the rails. Good luck in seeing one! Leconte's Sparrows and Sedge Wrens are here in good numbers also. Take a flash light with you if you stay after dark so you can find your way back to your car. Return to the River Road, turn left and follow it to Highway 600. If it is after dark, stop from time to time to listen for Whip-poor-wills and owls. At Highway 600, turn right and return to Rainy River. The big fields on the right are good for cranes, grouse and in the evenings, Short-eared Owls. Check any farm yard that has cattle; Yellow-headed Blackbirds like manure piles. The vast tamarack and spruce bog on the left, north of the Wilson Creek Road is almost inaccessible but for birders made of stern stuff, could be home to some interesting species.



AREA #7 - HARRIS HILL - WINDY POINT



Area #7 - Harris Hill - Windy Point

This is a good area and a lot of time can be spent here. Again, proceed north from Rainy River on Highway 600 past the River Road and the Wilson Creek Road until you reach Kreger's Road on the left. An old, white schoolhouse on the corner is a convenient landmark. Turn left (west) and follow the road through the woods (good for land birds), past some fields (check for cranes), until you reach the end on the shore of "The Channel". To the south is the Big Marsh. Straight ahead across the Channel are the Sable Islands. This is a good spot to launch a boat or canoe if you want to go out to the Sables. To the right is the "Oak Ridge" that gives an excellent view of the area. From the Oak Ridge overlooking the channel and the main lake, watch for White Pelican, Franklin's Gull, terns, waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors. The oaks around you are excellent for migrating land birds. Northern Mockingbird and Red-bellied Woodpecker are two rarities that have been found here.

Return to Highway 600, turn left (north) to Harris Hill. Here the highway makes a sharp turn to the right. Go straight ahead on the gravel road and follow it to Windy Bay Lodge and the Government Dock on Lake of the Woods. If you ask, the lodge owners will let you go down to the water's edge to bird. You can see the same area from the Government Dock. Check the surrounding woods for land birds and look over the lake toward Windy Point for waterfowl, White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Bald Eagle and Great Blue Heron. Windy Point is worth a visit and boat rides can usually be arranged at the lodge for a reasonable fee. Ask to be dropped off and picked up a couple of hours later. The point is excellent for gulls, terns, shorebirds, and White Pelican and is often frequented by a pair of Piping Plover. If you see the plovers, give them lots of room. They occasionally try to breed here and should not be disturbed. The cattails and *Phragmites* on the Windy Bay side of the point contain a large colony of nesting Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

Return to the Harris Hill corner and turn right towards Budreau's Point. This road leads through an interesting woods and to the base of Windy Point. The base of the point is privately owned and permission is needed to park and walk out to Windy Point (if lake water levels permit). Continuing ahead, the road ends on a rocky ridge at the lake, near some cottages. From the ridge, you can walk ahead to Budreau's Point on a trail from the small beach at the bottom of the ridge. The big trees on the point are great for land birds and the rocks on the far side of the point are attractive to waterfowl and gulls. Be careful on the trail because there is an abundance of poison ivy in the woods. Return to Highway 600 and go back south to Rainy River.

Area #8 - The Sable Islands

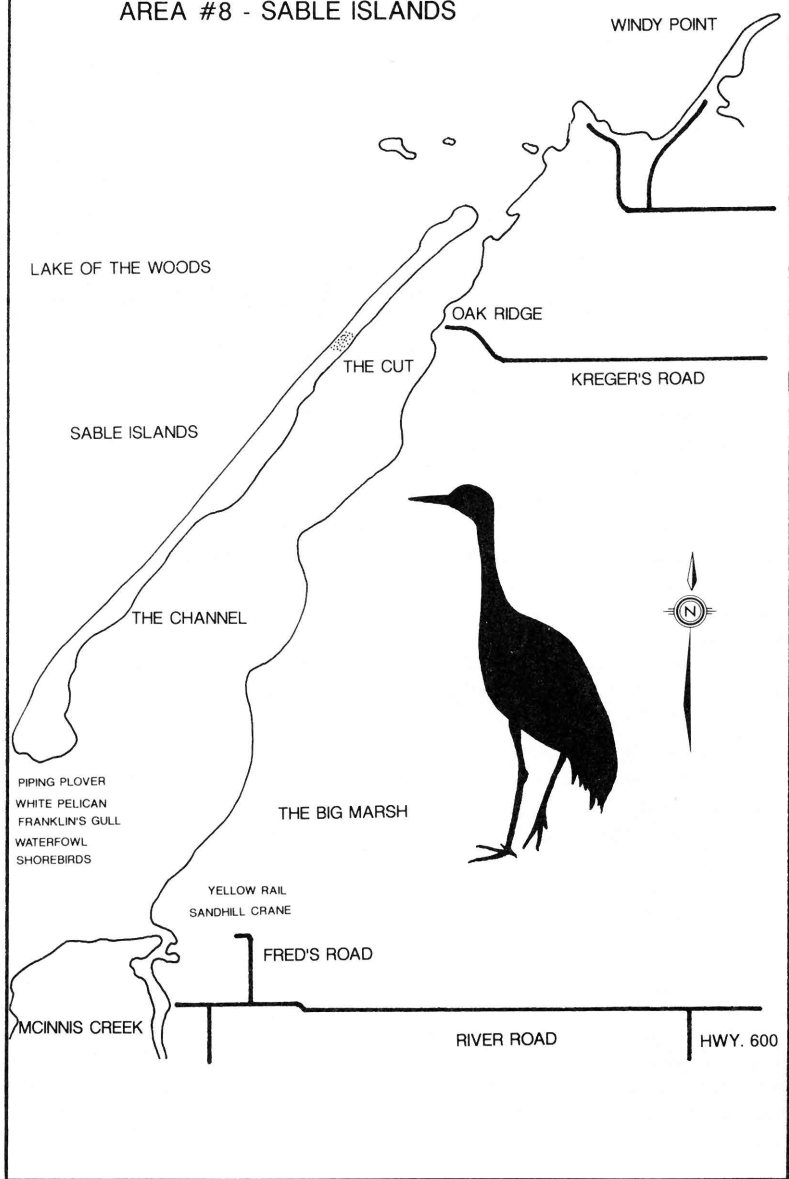
These sandy barrier islands at the mouth of the Rainy River are like a magnet to birds. The islands have a total length of about 9.5 km and consist of a south island and a north island joined by a sand bar (the Cut) that is high and dry in low water years and covered with up to two feet of water in high water years. A day spent on the islands can be very interesting - getting there is the hard part. If you have your own boat or canoe, you can launch at Oak Grove Camp (for a fee), at the Oak Ridge at the end of Kreger's Road (free) or at the Government dock near Windy Bay Lodge. *Always watch the weather* on both the lake and the Channel as conditions can change very quickly. Arrangements for a boat ride out to the Sables and a later pickup can be made at Budreau's Oak Grove Camp for a fee. (Boats and motors can also be rented here and from Windy Bay Lodge if you wish to go yourself.) You can be dropped off at the south end of the islands and spend the day walking the length of the islands and back or simply stay in one place and be picked up later. The best birding areas are the south end, the Cut area and the north end. No matter how long you are on the islands, make sure you have ample food, water and sun protection.

Depending on water levels, the south end has extensive sand and mud flats. Expect any shorebird, tern, gull or waterfowl. Piping Plovers nest on the islands in the U.S. to the south and quite often fly over to the Sables to feed. If you plan to walk the islands, go on the outside (the lake side) and make periodic checks of the Channel side. The outside beaches are easiest to walk on. The Cut, if exposed, is used as a loafing area for gulls, terns and White Pelicans. Some years there are hundreds of Franklin's Gulls present; other years there are few if any. The north end is also favoured by gulls, shorebirds, White Pelicans and waterfowl. If you are short on time, two or three hours spent on the south end of the island will be most rewarding. Instead of walking the islands, you can travel the Channel in a boat or canoe and check both sides of the islands as you wish. In addition, you can check the shore of the Big Marsh and also the stands of bulrush in the Channel for Sharp-tailed Sparrow. In 1990, a pair of Western Grebes was seen throughout the summer at various places along the Channel. If you encounter any Piping Plover along the islands, give them lots of room. This may be the last place in Ontario they may nest.

Conclusion

With any degree of luck and cooperation from both the weather and the birds, you will have good looks at most of the special birds of the Rainy River area and good chances of seeing what you want. Not every road, field and woodlot has been described and exploration on your own could turn up almost anything.

AREA #8 - SABLE ISLANDS



A CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF THE RAINY RIVER DISTRICT, ONTARIO

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Common Loon — Pied-billed Grebe — Horned Grebe — Red-necked Grebe — Eared Grebe — Western Grebe — American White Pelican — Double-crested Cormorant — American Bittern — Least Bittern — Great Blue Heron — Great Egret — Snowy Egret — Cattle Egret — Green-backed Heron — Tundra Swan — Snow Goose — Canada Goose — Wood Duck — Green-winged Teal — American Black Duck — Mallard — Northern Pintail — Blue-winged Teal — Cinnamon Teal — Northern Shoveler — Gadwall — American Wigeon — Canvasback — Redhead — Ring-necked Duck — Great Scaup — Lesser Scaup — Harlequin Duck — Oldsquaw — Black Scoter — Surf Scoter — White-winged Scoter — Common Goldeneye — Barrow's Goldeneye — Bufflehead — Hooded Merganser — Common Merganser | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Red-breasted Merganser — Ruddy Duck — Turkey Vulture — Osprey — Bald Eagle — Northern Harrier — Sharp-shinned Hawk — Cooper's Hawk — Northern Goshawk — Red-shouldered Hawk — Broad-winged Hawk — Swainson's Hawk — Red-tailed Hawk — Rough-legged Hawk — Golden Eagle — American Kestrel — Merlin — Peregrine Falcon — Spruce Grouse — Ruffed Grouse — Sharp-tailed Grouse — Yellow Rail — Virginia Rail — Sora — American Coot — Sandhill Crane — Black-bellied Plover — Lesser Golden Plover — Semipalmated Plover — Piping Plover — Killdeer — Black-necked Stilt — American Avocet — Greater Yellowlegs — Lesser Yellowlegs — Solitary Sandpiper — Willet — Spotted Sandpiper |
|--|---|

- Upland Sandpiper
- Whimbrel
- Hudsonian Godwit
- Marbled Godwit
- Ruddy Turnstone
- Red Knot
- Sanderling
- Semipalmated Sandpiper
- Least Sandpiper
- White-rumped Sandpiper
- Baird's Sandpiper
- Pectoral Sandpiper
- Dunlin
- Stilt Sandpiper
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper
- Short-billed Dowitcher
- Common Snipe
- American Woodcock

- Wilson's Phalarope
- Red-necked Phalarope

- Parasitic Jaeger
- Franklin's Gull
- Bonaparte's Gull
- Ring-billed Gull
- Herring Gull
- Iceland Gull
- Glaucous Gull

- Caspian Tern
- Common Tern
- Forster's Tern
- Black Tern

- Rock Dove
- Mourning Dove
- Passenger Pigeon

- Black-billed Cuckoo
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo

- Eastern Screech-Owl
- Great Horned Owl
- Snowy Owl
- Northern Hawk Owl
- Barred Owl
- Great Gray Owl
- Long-eared Owl
- Short-eared Owl
- Boreal Owl
- Northern Saw-whet Owl

- Common Nighthawk

- Whip-poor-will

- Chimney Swift

- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Rufous Hummingbird

- Belted Kingfisher

- Lewis' Woodpecker
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Hairy Woodpecker
- Three-toed Woodpecker
- Black-backed Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Pileated Woodpecker

- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
- Alder Flycatcher
- Willow Flycatcher
- Least Flycatcher
- Eastern Phoebe
- Say's Phoebe

- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Western Kingbird
- Eastern Kingbird
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

- Horned Lark

- Purple Martin
- Tree Swallow
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- Bank Swallow
- Cliff Swallow
- Barn Swallow

- Gray Jay
- Blue Jay
- Black-billed Magpie
- American Crow
- Common Raven

- Black-capped Chickadee
- Boreal Chickadee

- Red-breasted Nuthatch
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Brown Creeper
- Carolina Wren
- House Wren
- Winter Wren
- Sedge Wren
- Marsh Wren
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
- Eastern Bluebird
- Mountain Bluebird
- Veery
- Gray-cheeked Thrush
- Swainson's Thrush
- Hermit Thrush
- Wood Thrush
- American Robin
- Varied Thrush
- Gray Catbird
- Northern Mockingbird
- Sage Thrasher
- Brown Thrasher
- American Pipit
- Sprague's Pipit
- Bohemian Waxwing
- Cedar Waxwing
- Northern Shrike
- Loggerhead Shrike
- European Starling
- Solitary Vireo
- Yellow-throated Vireo
- Warbling Vireo
- Philadelphia Vireo
- Red-eyed Vireo
- Golden-winged Warbler
- Tennessee Warbler
- Orange-crowned Warbler
- Nashville Warbler
- Northern Parula

- Yellow Warbler
- Chestnut-sided Warbler
- Magnolia Warbler
- Cape May Warbler
- Black-throated Blue Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Black-throated Green Warbler
- Blackburnian Warbler
- Pine Warbler
- Palm Warbler
- Bay-breasted Warbler
- Blackpoll Warbler
- Black-and-white Warbler
- American Redstart
- Prothonotary Warbler
- Ovenbird
- Northern Waterthrush
- Connecticut Warbler
- Mourning Warbler
- Common Yellowthroat
- Wilson's Warbler
- Canada Warbler
- Summer Tanager
- Scarlet Tanager
- Western Tanager
- Northern Cardinal
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- Indigo Bunting
- Dickcissel
- Rufous-sided Towhee
- American Tree Sparrow
- Chipping Sparrow
- Clay-colored Sparrow
- Vesper Sparrow
- Lark Sparrow
- Savannah Sparrow
- Grasshopper Sparrow
- Le Conte's Sparrow
- Sharp-tailed Sparrow
- Fox Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- Lincoln's Sparrow
- Swamp Sparrow
- White-throated Sparrow
- White-crowned Sparrow
- Harris' Sparrow
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Lapland Longspur
- Snow Bunting

- Bobolink
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Western Meadowlark
- Yellow-headed Blackbird
- Rusty Blackbird
- Brewer's Blackbird
- Great-tailed Grackle
- Common Grackle
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Northern Oriole

- Brambling

- Pine Grosbeak
- Purple Finch
- Red Crossbill
- White-winged Crossbill
- Common Redpoll
- Hoary Redpoll
- Pine Siskin
- American Goldfinch
- Evening Grosbeak

- House Sparrow

Notes

Ontario's Second Ross' Gull

by
Doug McRae

On 11 December 1990 an adult Ross' Gull in winter plumage was discovered on the beach at Turkey Point, Norfolk County, establishing the second record for Ontario.

The bird was first seen by the writer at 0900h as it fed along the shoreline with a flock of 15 Bonaparte's Gulls near the base of Ferris Street and Ordnance Avenue, in the village of Turkey Point. Within minutes, Jim Dowell, Barry Jones, John Olmsted and Bill Smith, who were birding nearby, also saw the gull and Smith managed to take a number of photographs. I then left to phone various birders while the others remained to watch the gull.

When I returned at 0925h the others said that the bird had moved to a nearby sandbar and rested briefly, then flew south directly out over Lake Erie and out of view. Local birders began to arrive and all of us began scanning the distant gulls that were feeding about 1 km offshore. At 0940h I saw the bird at long range but was unable to show it satisfactorily to anyone else before I lost it in the distance. To obtain a better view of the distant gulls, we moved about 1 km south to the Basin Street Marina. At 1000h Jon McCracken spotted it much closer as it flew past the marina, about 75 m away, from the direction of the Turkey Point marsh then out over Lake Erie again. At this point Bev

Collier, McCracken, Don Sutherland, Anne Marie Taylor, Deidra Skuce, and Susy Skuce also saw the bird. To my knowledge, this was the final sighting of the Ross' Gull despite many people searching for it on subsequent days.

While the photographs depict the general appearance of the bird, a few points are worth noting. The upper surface of the swimming bird stood out as being very pale when compared with the adjacent Bonaparte's Gulls. While much confusing discussion has occurred in the literature about the degree of pink colouration on this species, of the 15 or so different individuals I have observed in breeding season, this bird was far and away the pinkest I have ever seen. In addition to pink on the breast and belly, this bird displayed pink on the face, upper surface of the tail and rump. There was dark smudging around the eye, and what appeared to be traces of dark feathering where the neck collar would be on one side of the neck. The underwing colour was medium grey, clearly much darker than the upper surface but not nearly as dark as a Little Gull.

While I am confident that the last sighting of the bird was on 11 December at 1000h, I am not as certain that the bird had not been present earlier. A resident of Turkey Point with an interest in birds spoke

with several of us just after the last sighting and asked if we were looking for the "arctic gull". At this point, he had not talked to any of the birders present. He described seeing a strange gull on 10 December and that some hunters had also seen it on 8 December. While the details provided at the scene and later in writing are not convincing or consistent with each other, I fail to understand how he came up with "arctic gull" out of the blue either. In the week prior to the sighting, Turkey Point received regular coverage since there was a late flock of shorebirds present, including a Western Sandpiper. While Little Gulls were regularly seen with the Bonaparte's during the previous week, no one reported a Ross' Gull. The OBRC has considered the only acceptable date for this sighting as 11 December 1990, but it is possible that the Ross' Gull may have been present earlier.

The Turkey Point Ross' Gull is the first record for southern Ontario. The only previous record for the province is of an adult, nearing full breeding plumage, seen at Moosonee from 14 to 23 May 1983 (Abraham 1984). The only other Great Lakes record is from southern Lake Michigan where an adult was seen in

the Chicago area intermittently from 19 November to 1 December 1978 (Balch *et al* 1979).

Ross' Gulls are being seen with increased frequency south of the arctic and subarctic zones of North America in recent decades. While locations of these records are scattered, most have come from the mid-Atlantic coast in early winter, and most have been associated with Bonaparte's Gulls. It seems likely that some birds from the north, perhaps the Churchill population and/or other undiscovered populations in the Hudson Bay Lowland, may be migrating south with greater frequency than we realize. Observers should be watchful for this species when migrant Bonaparte's are encountered in Ontario, particularly in eastern Ontario in late April and early May, when large numbers of northbound Bonaparte's Gulls are seen that have presumably wintered along the New England coast.

Literature Cited

- Abraham, K.F.* 1984. Ross' Gull: New to Ontario. *Ontario Birds* 2:116-119.
- Balch, L.G., H.D. Bohlen & G.B. Rosenband.* 1979. The Illinois Ross' Gull. *American Birds* 33:140-142.

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Book Reviews

Feeding Wild Birds in Winter. 1981 (seventh printing 1989). By Clive Dobson. Firefly Books, Willowdale, Ontario. 128 pp. \$9.95.

Every winter more and more people decide to take up bird-feeding as a hobby, but many of them have little idea of how to properly embark upon this venture. By providing chapters on avian feeder visitors, food, feeders and other topics, *Feeding Wild Birds in Winter* attempts to arm prospective and beginning feeder-operators with the basics needed to start a feeding program.

But for a brief introductory chapter, the book starts with the second chapter entitled "The Winter Birds", which aims to provide descriptions and information about winter feeder visitors.

The chapter begins with what is essentially a table of contents showing the layout of the chapter. The layout is unorthodox, to say the least. Rather than using taxonomic order, the author groups birds alphabetically by groups. The groups themselves are a hodge-podge of orders (waterfowl), families (creepers, jays and crows) and subfamilies (blackbirds, grouse). Since the groups used are visually distinct and have some taxonomic basis, this alphabetical ordering of taxa would be acceptable (ignoring that some birds are placed in the wrong groups; e.g. sparrows are placed in the Finch family), given that the book is aimed at beginners, if at least this system were applied uniformly. Unfortunately, it is not, and a few birds are not even placed in one of the taxa where one would expect

them. The Rock Dove, for example, is not found in the pigeons and doves section, but in a separate section called "city birds", along with House Sparrow, Starling and Herring Gull (??).

Confusing to the beginner is the mixture of current, slightly old (e.g. Common Flicker) and simply archaic bird names (e.g. Common Cowbird). Given that the book's seventh printing was in 1989, such nomenclatural errors are very sloppy.

The choice of species included in the book is also puzzling. I've already mentioned the Herring Gull, but some of the other dubious or rare feeder visitors the book contains include Pileated Woodpecker, Red and White-winged Crossbills and Ruffed Grouse. The inclusion of such species would be understandable if the book were striving for completeness, but at the same time it completely ignores common feeder visitors such as the Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow.

A further glance through chapter 2 reveals, unfortunately, more shortcomings. Many of the right hand side text pages have only a few sentences of text, the rest being blank. And this limited text is littered with judgmental anthropomorphisms, inaccuracies, and juvenile assertions. The Evening Grosbeak, for example, is described as "messy and greedy". The female House Finch is described as differing from the Purple Finch

only by being "generally lighter in colour" (no mention of the eyeline). And of the House Sparrow we learn that "at certain times of the year they migrate along with masses of people to the many farms and exhibitions where rows of concession stands offer a variety of found foods".

While the right hand pages have the species write-ups, most of the left hand pages of the second chapter are taken up with full-page, rather unspectacular black-and-white drawings. I found them mediocre for the most part, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Labelling, however, is not. Two glaring errors are the drawing labelled White-breasted Nuthatch which shows a Red-breasted Nuthatch, and the drawing labelled Pileated Woodpecker which actually shows an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, flying through northern coniferous forest!

Chapter 3 is a marked improvement over chapter 2. It deals with food, listing a variety of common and not-so-common foods and what species eat them. To the uninitiated bird feeder, this is a real help. However, even here the value of the information presented is lessened by mistakes and inaccuracies. For example, corn is listed as the favourite food of Hairy Woodpeckers, and of the Red-breasted Grosbeak, whatever that is. (Probably Rose-breasted Grosbeak is meant, but what is that bird doing in a book about *winter* bird-feeding?) And while exotic foods like coconut, apricots and peas are included, the book makes no mention at all of niger, the seed of choice in attracting Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches (the book lists the favourite seed of the goldfinch as

millet).

Finally, chapters 4, 5 and 6 concern themselves with feeders, creating a natural habitat, and problems and solutions of bird-feeding, respectively. All three of these chapters cement the reader's hunch from chapter 2 that the author really didn't have enough material to write a book but went ahead anyway, for more than half of the pages in these chapters are either virtually blank or are taken up with huge-scale drawings. Some of these drawings (such as different feeder designs) are necessary but easily could have been reduced in size, while others are rather useless, such as the entire page showing different styles of fencing (?), with its opposing page entirely blank but for the caption.

Chapter 4 concerns itself with different types of feeders, which is useful for the neophyte feeder of birds. "Creating a Natural Habitat" similarly underlines important points that may not be apparent to the novice, such as the importance of conifers for cover, berry-bearing trees, etc. (although I found the author's endorsement of numerous non-native plant species for the purposes of achieving a "natural" situation to be disconcerting).

Finally, chapter 6 is a very brief treatment of problems (such as squirrels) at feeders and their solutions. The solutions described to prevent feeder raids by squirrels are useful and effective, but some of the other advice offered is bad. For example, the author implies one should feel for a pulse to check if a bird that has hit a window is still alive; this only risks further hurting or even killing the bird. Even worse, the author says that, in times of bad

weather, food should be scattered "after the storm has subsided," when in fact just before and during the storm is when birds need the food most.

My overall impression of this book is mixed. While it achieves its aim of introducing new feeder

operators to the basics of bird-feeding (food, feeders, habitat), it does so with many errors and omissions. In view of these errors and an overall shallow treatment, I would hesitate to recommend the book - you are probably better off to spend the ten bucks on bird seed.

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The Bird Biographies of W.H. Hudson. 1988. Forwarded by *Jonathan Maslow*. Capra Press, Santa Barbara, CA, USA. (Canadian distributors: Raincoast Books, Vancouver, B.C.) 208 pp. \$14.50 paper.

This little book contains a selection of 49 of William Henry Hudson's bird studies published in 1920 in *Birds of La Plata*, long since out of print and as rare as Eskimo Curlews. They make a delightful read, for Hudson was a careful observer and an accomplished writer.

The foreward contains a brief account of Hudson's life concentrating on his work as a naturalist. He was born in Argentina in 1841 and spent his boyhood and young manhood on his parents' frontier estancia near the Rio de La Plata. This is the northern border of the "pampa humida", at that time a vast flat expanse of tall grass interspersed with innumerable marshes extending about 700 km southward to the Rio Colorado and not yet tamed by intensive cattle raising and agriculture. From the age of 5, when he was given a pony, he roamed the area to his heart's content, but it was not until he was 15 and read White's *Natural History of Selbourne* during recovery from a

near-fatal illness that he began making copious notes of his observations, extending his travels as far south as the Rio Negro in northern Patagonia.

For many years he collected specimens for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington and the London Zoological Society, but the payments he received were very small. He also wrote many notes for the latter on the wildlife of the region, especially birds, and became well known in London ornithological circles. His income was never sufficient to cover expenses on his journeys but he had always been able to return home when money ran out. After his father died in 1868 Henry carried on his work for 6 more years but finally his lack of income, a feeling of isolation (he never met anyone with similar interests), and hopes that his London contacts might lead to congenial and better paid employment caused him to go to England. He sailed in 1874, never to return, a severe loss to South

American ornithology. His hopes for employment were never realized and he lived in near-penury for most of the next 15 years. It was not until 1889 that *Argentine Ornithology* was published, based primarily on his notes and specimens but authored by a professional ornithologist. Hudson's contributions were acknowledged in the introduction. It was not until 1892, however, when "The Naturalist in La Plata" was published that he gained widespread recognition and an income that made life easier. He continued to write, both novels and non-fiction (e.g. *British Birds* in 1895; *Birds in London* in 1898), and espouse the environmental cause and the interdependence of man and nature. In 1920 he turned his attention once again to Argentine birds, revising and republishing his notes as "Birds of La Plata". He died 2 years later.

The pieces in this selection vary in length from 1-page to a 14-page study in which he describes how he was able to sort out the very different nesting habits of the 2 species of cowbird native to the La Plata region. I enjoyed this immensely but I think my favourite was his discussion of the behaviour of the Chimango or Common Carrion Hawk. This crowd-sized relative of the Crested Caracara looks most like a harrier in shape and flight but no longer subsists principally by hunting. Instead it had adapted to fill the niche left by the lack of corvids in Argentina and has developed the great catholicity of eating habits that this implies. Hudson seems to have observed most of them. This species can be found throughout the country but is commonest across the pampas to the Andean foothills where I spent most of 1981. My notes include a comment

that they would appear each morning from somewhere to the west, up to 200 at a time, circling lazily overhead as they drifted towards a nearby dump and the countryside beyond. Each evening I would see them returning and I assumed that they roost together just as their North American counterparts do when not nesting.

In addition to his visual observations Hudson also had an excellent ear and some of the most entertaining passages describe songs and calls, often with notes on the actions that accompany them. I particularly liked his descriptions of the duets of the mated pairs of Ovenbirds or Rufous Horneros and the ungainly-looking Southern Screamers.

I spent only a few days on "la pampa humida" but had the good fortune to have a tour of 2 estancias about 200 km southeast of Hudson's boyhood home. I can report that while the vegetation has undoubtedly changed for the worse his more pessimistic predictions about species disappearances have proved untrue although many are greatly reduced in numbers. My list of 75 species for the day included Greater Rhea, Southern Screamer, Jacana, Monk Parakeet and both Black-necked and Coscoroba Swans. It also included 4 "Norteamericanos" down for our winter - Lesser Golden Plover and Baird's, White-rumped and Pectoral Sandpipers.

The purpose of publishing this selection is not stated explicitly in the foreword nor is it clear who did the choosing. In addition to the text there are well-done black and white sketches of some of the species discussed. These are much superior

to any to be found in either of the field guides I have but again their source is not given - presumably they were also taken from "Birds of La Plata". Somewhere I seem to have read that once a Linnaean name has been assigned to a species it is more or less inviolate, but this is certainly not the case for South American birds. In fact of the 49 species treated here only 8 have retained both their English and Latin names. The names used in the original have been retained in the main text but an "Afterword" is included written by Judith Young in which she has updated the names. She used *A Guide to the Birds of South America* (1970) by R.M. de Schauensee (spelt Shawnses here) and has generally done a good job but in 8 cases has missed completely, naming birds that do not even occur in Argentina. The most glaring error is identifying Hudson's "Green Parakeet" (*Bolborhynchus monachus*) as the Sierra Parakeet (*B. aymara*) when the description of the bird, its habits and its abundance clearly indicate that it is the Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*).

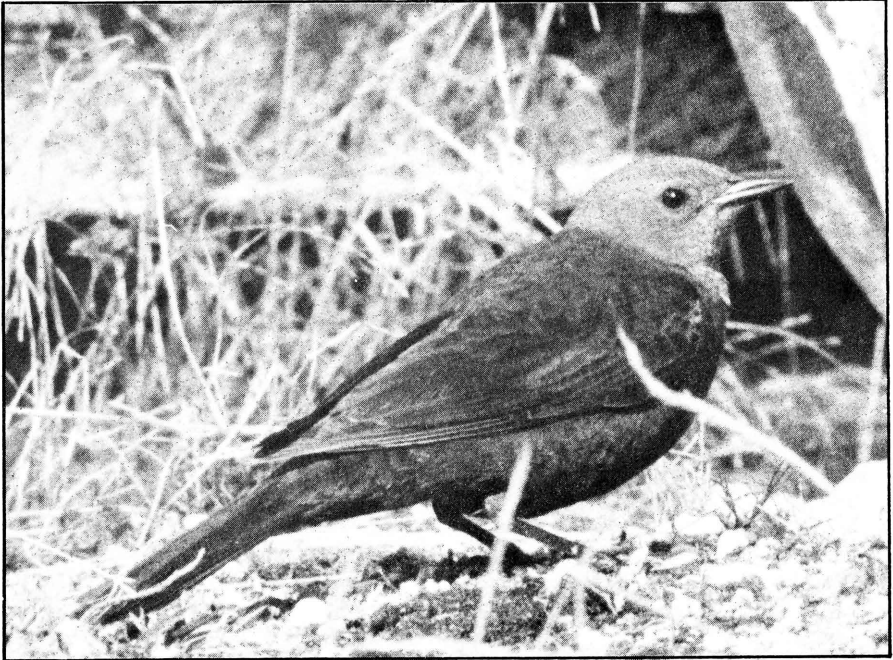
For anyone interested in the history of birding and in evocative writing of bird behaviour and song, this inexpensive book will be a welcome addition to their library. For those who do buy it here is a list of the correct identities of the 8 species mentioned above. The names are taken from Tito Narosky's *Aves Argentinas*, a misleading title that should be "Aves de la Provincia Buenos Aires" since that is its scope. It includes English translations and species names.

4. Blue-and-White Swallow (*Notiochelida cyanoleuca*)
7. Saffron Finch (*Sycalis flaveola*)
10. Lesser Red-breasted Meadowlark (*Sturnella defillipi*)
22. Monk Parakeet
31. Stripe-backed Bittern (*Ixobrychus involucris*)
33. Southern Screamer (*Chauna torquata*)
35. Brazilian Duck (*Amazonetta brasiliensis*)
36. Yellow-billed Pintail (*Anas georgica*)

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Photo Quiz

by
Doug McRae



Welcome to the *Ontario Birds* Photo Quiz. Each issue will feature a new photo and take up the answer to the previous bird. The species selected are birds that range from being common to rare in Ontario, but they are often of familiar species that traditionally cause some confusion to many birders. This quiz is not designed for "experts", but rather for the keen birder who likes a bit of a challenge. It is hoped that you will not only find the quiz fun, but also instructional.

You can help with the quiz too. If you have a slide or print of a bird that you think would make a good "mystery shot", let me know and we may use it. Remember, it should be of reasonably good quality and show enough distinctive features to facilitate a positive identification.

Now, on to our first photo. It's early June and you see this bird feeding on some corn in a junk pile. What is it?

Doug McRae, Box 130, St. Williams, Ontario N0E 1P0

Ontario Field Ornithologists

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 \$20.00 Annual Membership or \$400.00 Life Membership. 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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