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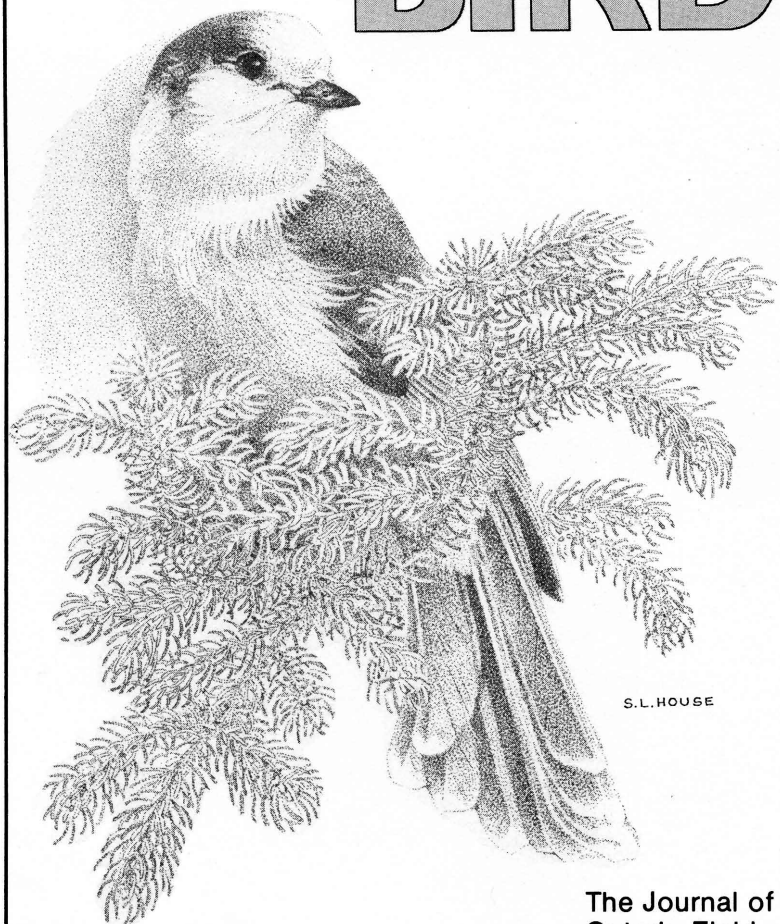

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Articles

Finding (and Watching) Gray Jays in Algonquin Park

by
Dan Strickland

The Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*) is one of the northern birds most "wanted" by birders living in the urban and agricultural areas of southern Ontario. Although this species occasionally makes fall and winter flights into the south, the southern birder who wants to see Gray Jays must go north. This article will describe how to find Gray Jays in Algonquin Provincial Park, one of the most convenient and reliable places available to the southern birder. Also, since Gray Jays are so eminently observable and have been the subject of serious study in Algonquin for over 30 years, I will attempt to point out a few aspects of this bird's fascinating behaviour that might not be obvious to the first-time or occasional Gray Jay watcher.

To appreciate the value of Algonquin Park as a place to observe Gray Jays, one need only consult the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* (Cadman *et al.* 1987). In common with Boreal Chickadee, Cape May Warbler, Rusty Blackbird, and a few other northern birds, the Gray Jay's breeding distribution shows a distinct concentration of confirmed and probable squares in the Algonquin highlands. The measurably cooler climate conferred by the Park area's higher altitude of up to 585m (1900 ft) above sea level favours a correspondingly greater presence of spruce (*Picea* spp.) and other boreal forest elements, and this apparently renders the area suitable for Gray Jays. There are breeding Gray Jays elsewhere in southern Ontario, most notably at Petroglyphs Provincial Park near Peterborough, fully 100km south of Algonquin, but such examples are quite isolated. Generally speaking, Gray Jays drop out of the picture quite rapidly as one descends from the Algonquin highlands in any direction, including northwards. Where I live, for example, just outside the Park on Highway 60 at Oxtongue Lake, Gray Jays are confined to isolated spruce bogs, even though a ten minute drive can get me back into more extensive Gray Jay country inside the Park.

I do not want to create the impression, however, that Algonquin Park is "wall to wall" Gray Jays. Even in true Gray Jay country, the real boreal forests found much farther north than Algonquin, Gray Jays are no more densely packed than 1.46 pairs per square kilometre (Strickland 1968). In Algonquin Park, almost at the southern edge of the breeding range, the breeding density of Gray Jays has been only about 0.68 pairs per square kilometre, at least in the areas where a marked population has been followed over the last 25

years. If anything, there has been a trend to an even lower figure with many formerly occupied, but apparently marginal, territories dominated by deciduous forests now mostly empty of Gray Jays. For example, all three of the former Gray Jay territories around the Algonquin Park Museum are now vacant, although a quarter of a century ago they figured prominently in the work of the late Russell J. Rutter (1969), a famous park naturalist (Figure 1) who began the Algonquin Gray Jay study and sparked my own interest in the species.

I do not know whether the disappearance of Gray Jays from many traditional Algonquin Park territories is part of a long term trend. Nor do I know what might account for such a trend if it is real. It is to be expected, of course, that any individuals (of any organism) living near the edge of their breeding range will be extremely sensitive to even the most minor shifts in environmental conditions. By definition, after all, those individuals are living very close to areas where conditions are sufficiently hostile to exclude them as breeders. One is tempted in the case of Gray Jays to speculate that the warmer climate we seem to be experiencing in recent years might be just enough to render uninhabitable territories that until then had been just within the limits of acceptability. As for exactly what it might be about warmer temperatures that would exclude breeding Gray Jays from formerly suitable habitat, your guess is as good as mine! It does seem undeniable, however, that something must be stopping Gray Jays from breeding farther south than they actually do. Whatever that something is, moreover, it seems plausible that it would move north if the climate is indeed warming up.

Be that as it may, Gray Jays are still very much part of the Algonquin Park scene, particularly in low-lying, "boreal" areas of black spruce (*P. mariana*). There are a number of such areas in the Highway 60 corridor section of Algonquin which starts just 40km east of Huntsville. This is the easiest part of the Park to visit for southern birders driving up from the Toronto area to look for Gray Jays and other northern species. Of particular note are the Opeongo Road that travels six km north from Highway 60 starting at km 46.3 (measured from the West Gate), and the Mizzy Lake Trail, starting at km 15.4. The locations and other expected birds of all three areas are described in the *Checklist and Seasonal Status of the Birds of Algonquin Provincial Park* (Tozer 1990), and detailed directions for birding the Spruce Bog and Mizzy Lake trails are available in the excellent article by Ron Tozer and Ron Pittaway on finding Spruce Grouse in Algonquin Park (Tozer and Pittaway 1990). It also helps to drop in at the Algonquin Park Museum at km 20 (go to the back door during the off season). Staff will always be glad to direct you to good Gray Jay places based on the latest observations if you are having any trouble finding them on your own.

Far more important than knowing where to look for Gray Jays in Algonquin is knowing when to look. Although these birds live on the same permanent territories year round, there are times when finding them is child's play and other times when the frustrated birder will be ready to

Figure 1: Russell J. Rutter (1899-1976), the well-known park naturalist who started the Algonquin Gray Jay study and inspired the author's interest in this remarkable bird. Seen here holding a 16 day old nestling, April 1968. Photo by *Dan Strickland.*

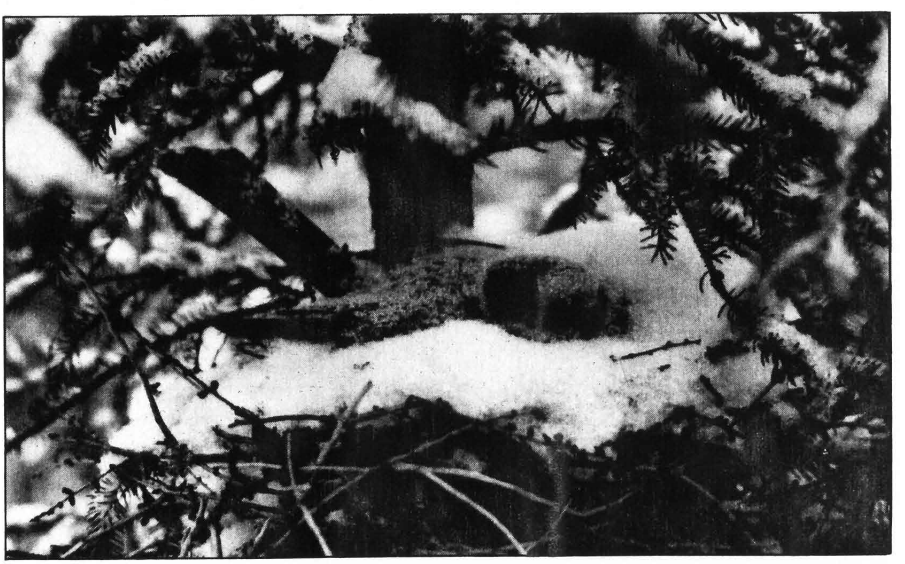

Figure 2: Female incubating in a snowstorm, 1 April 1968. Her three eggs all hatched three days later. Photo by *Dan Strickland.*

declare them extinct. The bad time is the warm half of the year, although it starts with the onset of the Gray Jay incubation period near the end of March (Figure 2). From then to the middle of October, one could never be sure of going out and seeing Gray Jays even in the best of habitat, and in June and July, you can almost be sure of not seeing Gray Jays, no matter how hard you try. My best illustration of how tough it can be was in 1986 when the Park hosted a side trip from the 19th International Ornithological Congress held in June of that year in Ottawa. Twenty ornithologists from as far away as Australia and the Soviet Union had chosen the trip to the Park particularly in the hope of seeing a Gray Jay (official symbol of the Congress), and we did our best to accommodate them. For three days, two excellent birders from our summer naturalist staff repeatedly guided the group to all the right places and turned my study area "upside down" -- but all for nought. Not a single Gray Jay was seen and the group left empty-handed, much to their disappointment and my embarrassment.

Because looking for Gray Jays in the summer is so unrewarding, and also because work leaves me so little opportunity at that time of the year, I hardly even try then. Instead I wait until mid-October, after Canadian Thanksgiving, and do what I call my annual fall Gray Jay "round-up". By then Gray Jays are easy to find, and I improve my chances even more by taking an afternoon to put up suet bait in each Gray Jay territory I want to check. The next day I start patrolling my baits and usually have no trouble catching up with the occupants of 25 or 30 territories in just a day or two. This includes not only merely seeing the birds but catching and banding any new birds that have replaced previously known individuals that have disappeared over the summer. Visiting birders usually don't have the luxury of being able to set up suet feeding stations to simplify the task of finding Gray Jays, but then they usually don't need to find 25 pairs in just one day in order to be happy! One or two pairs are probably quite sufficient for most people, and the effectiveness of my fall round-up should show how responsive Gray Jays are and how easy they are to see starting in mid-October -- in marked contrast to the trouble they can be earlier on in the summer. Indeed, for the rest of the fall and winter, Gray Jays are almost impossible to miss seeing in suitable Gray Jay habitat, except on days of high wind or snowstorms. On Algonquin Christmas Bird Counts, for example, we routinely get totals of 50 to 60 individual birds. This is far from all the Gray Jays in our count circle but it is still a respectable showing and virtually every observer sees a pair or two.

There is a particular reason why Gray Jays are easy to see (during the cold season) in Algonquin Park that many birders may not appreciate --namely that the birds are well trained. Contrary to popular belief, Gray Jays do not instinctively seek out people; they must learn to associate us with food, and until they do, they are about as wild and unlikely to deliberately reveal their presence as any other kind of bird. Fortunately for the birder visiting Algonquin Park in search of Gray Jays, however, almost all of the

individual birds inhabiting the places he or she is likely to visit have received a good education, either from me, other birders, or ordinary tourists, all of whom have shared many a lunch with Algonquin Park Gray Jays. A lesson learned by a Gray Jay is a lesson never forgotten. The result is that individual birds habituated to humans will "drop whatever they are doing" and fly over to any human being they spot, even hundreds of metres away, to look for a handout. Birds that would have remained far away and unnoticed if they were truly wild, unhabituated Gray Jays actually seek out birders or any other human being that comes onto their territory. Needless to say, this enormously improves a birder's chances of seeing the birds and the fact that most Algonquin Park Gray Jays are "broken in", at least in the most frequented areas, is yet another reason why Algonquin is an excellent place to look for them.

Because many individual jays are so tame that they will literally come and take food out of your hand, they provide unsurpassed opportunities for close-up observation. This brings us to the second part of this article which has to do with actually watching the birds after you have found them -- or rather, they have found you! Some people would argue that the most interesting part of the observation of any bird is watching their behaviour and getting an insight into their ecology (how they make a living), rather than merely counting the bird as another species seen. This is particularly true in the case of Gray Jays because the relationship between their behaviour and social organization is especially complex, and yet parts of both are readily observable.

If you present food to the pair of Gray Jays that alights beside you in Algonquin Park, for example, you will quickly see some remarkable behaviour that is the secret of the Gray Jay's biology and its success in the boreal forest. Instead of actually eating the food, a Gray Jay will break off a piece, work it back and forth in its closed mouth, fly back into the forest, and tuck the food behind a flake of bark, under a tuft of lichens or in some other similar hiding place (Figure 3). Sometimes, if you're really lucky, you might even see a Gray Jay reach over, pull off another piece of bark and jam it in on top of the hidden food as if to conceal it even better.

Here is the secret of the Gray Jay's success and in particular of its ability to live year round in the great boreal and sub-alpine forests of North America while almost all other birds are forced to leave each fall. Gray Jays get around the otherwise fatal lack of food by falling back on the thousands of pieces of food hidden away the previous summer and fall. The food is secured in place by the sticky saliva produced in the bird's enormous salivary glands and applied just before storage (Dow 1965). As for recovery, recent work suggests that, incredible as it may seem, Gray Jays actually remember their storage locations (Bunch and Tomback 1986, Strickland 1991). It is mind-boggling to think that the pair of Gray Jays you encounter on your visit to Algonquin, and watch making trip after trip back into the bush, could really be remembering every place they use to hide food, not to mention all the places they have used in the

Figure 3: Gray Jays coat food with sticky saliva produced by greatly enlarged glands, and then hide it under lichens or behind flakes of bark. Recovery is apparently achieved through memory of individual storage locations. Photo by *Dan Strickland.*

Figure 4: This Gray Jay nestling has just received the unique combination of coloured bands that will permit easy individual recognition later in life. Photo by *Dan Strickland.*

previous weeks and months. After all, none of us could match such mental prowess. Nevertheless, that's what the evidence seems to suggest, and when you get right down to it, remembering a few thousand hiding places in a spruce forest may not really be any more impressive than other "intellectual" feats accomplished by birds that we are used to and now take for granted --like Bobolinks finding their way to Argentina and back every year.

A second major thing you will notice about Algonquin Park Gray Jays is that most of the ones you see are likely banded, each with its own unique combination of two or three colour bands and one standard aluminum band (Figure 4). The technique of colour-banding, which permits recognition of individual birds from a distance without having to recapture them to read a number on a standard aluminum band, is routine in long term studies of birds but there aren't many places where birders ever get to see it being applied.

Visitors to Algonquin can not only see a good, up-close example in the form of my colour-banded Gray Jays, they can also make a real contribution to the study by reporting the colour combinations of banded birds to the Park Museum, and they may derive an extra measure of interest and pleasure through learning the history of the birds they have observed. In recording colour combinations, the main thing you need to remember is to jot down (don't trust your memory!) which colour is above which other colour on which leg. That is to say you have to distinguish between "red over white" and "white over red", as well as between the left leg and the right. It is also important to distinguish between light and dark shades of blue and green, since all four are used in the Algonquin Gray Jay project. I find it very useful to name each bird according to its band combinations. Thus, a bird named WOPLOOSR (pronounced they way it looks) would have been banded as "White Over Purple Left, Orange Over Standard Right", or if you reported seeing a bird with the combination of red over standard left, yellow over purple right, I would know that you must have seen good old ROSLYOPR, banded as a Hermit Creek nestling in 1986 and now a territory-holding male at Sunday Creek.

The colour-banding technique transforms otherwise anonymous and unknowable birds into the distinct individuals they really are. It is also the indispensable key to learning the rudiments of the species' social organization. For example, by following the occupants of each Gray Jay territory from one year to the next, one can observe how often the identity of the territory-holders remains the same, and how often the marked birds disappear and are replaced. The disappearance, or mortality, rate of Gray Jays tells us a great deal about how effective their "store-food-and-stay-at-home" strategy really is. For males and females combined, the average mortality rate for territory-holding adults in Algonquin Park over the last 25 years has been about 18% (i.e., 18 of 100 territory-holding adults disappear every year, and 82 stay the same from one year to the next). Most migratory birds have mortality rates far higher than this; in fact annual mortality rates close to or

greater than 50% are quite normal. Right away we can see that Gray Jays, by doing away with the need to migrate, achieve a major payoff in the form of a lifespan that is much longer than that enjoyed by migrants. The oldest known Gray Jay in Algonquin Park to date was a female banded as a nestling in 1969 by Russ Rutter that was last seen when 16 years old.

The effectiveness of food storage shows up especially clearly when we analyze mortality rates according to season. About three quarters of what little mortality there is actually takes place in the summer, not in the winter when you would expect it! In other words, Gray Jays (at least at the southern edge of their range in Algonquin Park) have absolutely no problem with the supposedly deadly winter season. Something, almost certainly their food stores, apparently confers virtual immunity on Gray Jays in winter. And if you have any lingering doubts on the subject, the reason that habituated Gray Jays eagerly take food for hours on end from the occasional human who enters their territories in winter cannot be that the birds are "starving to death". Rather, the eagerness of winter Gray Jays is probably best explained by the idea that these birds are highly motivated to store any food they come across, and when we walk into their territories in winter we represent the only source of new, storable food that the birds have seen for days or even weeks or months. (By the same token, incidentally, this may explain why Gray Jays are so hard to find in summer. At that time of year, humans on a Gray Jay territory are far from the only source of storable food. Why should a Gray Jay bother with people when the woods are full of opportunities to store natural food?)

Another aspect of Gray Jay biology revealed by colour-banding, and about which the casual jay watcher can get an inkling, is the bird's social organization. Normally the Gray Jays you encounter will be in pairs. These are in fact almost always true breeding pairs, a male and female who nest in the same territory year after year and remain mated to each other as long as both birds are alive. When one bird dies it is usually replaced quite quickly, although sometimes the widowed bird will itself move to fill a breeding vacancy elsewhere.

Rather than encountering a pair of Gray Jays, however, you might well run into a threesome, and it is in that situation that relationships become especially complex and interesting. Gray Jays normally lay three eggs, and an impressive two thirds of all pairs succeed in fledging young. Nevertheless, by the time fall rolls around and the birds become reliably findable again, after their long summer of virtual undetectability, the pairs are either all alone again or accompanied by just one extra bird (i.e., making a threesome). Juvenile Gray Jays moult into adult plumage in July, and certainly by the end of August are indistinguishable from adults. In mid-October, accordingly, there is no hope of telling from plumage which two of a threesome are the pair and which, if any, is their young from the previous spring. It has taken years of finding nests and colour-banding the nestlings to establish that most of the extra birds in the fall trios are indeed single young birds still with their

parents. Much more surprising is the finding that almost 30% of the extra birds are not the young of the pairs they are with, but in fact were hatched on other territories. For some reason these birds have left their original territories and taken up residence with unrelated adults elsewhere.

These peculiar goings-on have been only slightly clarified by the rare observations of Gray Jay family groups actually breaking up in June. When the young are between 55 and 65 days old, they start to fight amongst themselves with increasing hostility until one young, the dominant juvenile, has expelled its siblings from the natal territory (Figure 5). This, then, accounts for the fact that if any young bird at all remains with its parents the following October it is alone. It also explains the origin of the extra birds who form trios with unrelated adults. Apparently some of the youngsters expelled from their natal territories succeed in finding a degree of acceptance with other pairs who are unaccompanied by young of their own (presumably because their nesting had failed).

Beyond these bare facts lie the why's. Why do "family groups" in the fall consist of just a pair and one extra bird at the most? Why should a dominant juvenile expel its siblings from the natal territory (and in the

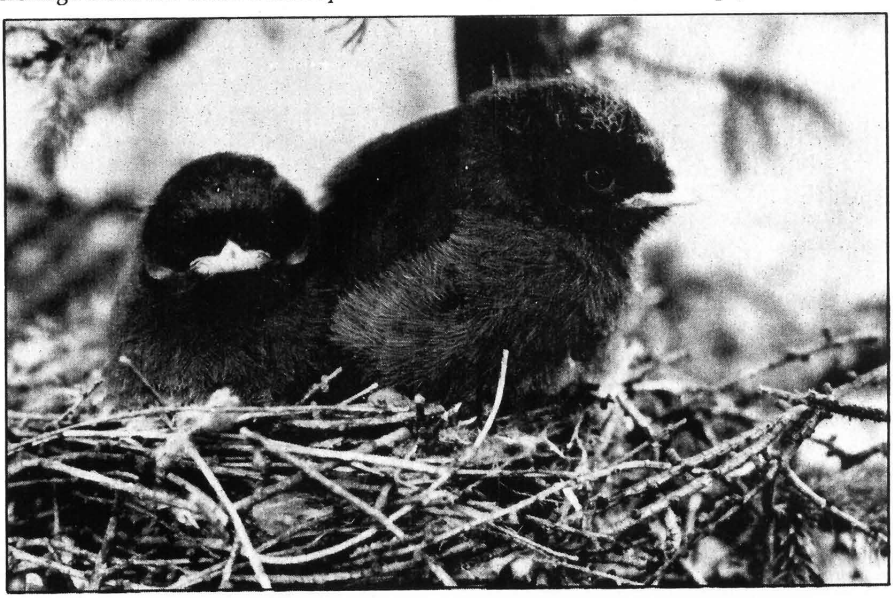

Figure 5: These two 21 or 22 day old nestlings will leave the nest in a day or two. At about 55 days of age they will become increasingly aggressive towards each other, and within 10 days one will have expelled the other from the natal territory. The dominant juvenile will remain in a trio with its parents until the onset of the next breeding season. The "ejectee", if it survives at all, will form a similar trio with unrelated adults whose own nesting has failed. Photo by *Dan Strickland.*

process condemn them to a much higher probability of early death)? I personally think (Strickland1991) that the behaviour is probably best explained by the inability of young Gray Jays to store enough food for their own first winter survival, and their consequent need to be subsidized by extra stored food provided by the parents. If the parental subsidy is reliable for only one extra young, however, it would be in the interest of each young to get rid of its former nestmates and thereby achieve exclusive access to the parental subsidy. And, if stored food is recovered by memory as I have suggested, it will be in the interest of the young birds to get rid of their rivals as soon as possible -- in June, at the beginning of the food storage season, rather than later. That way (and only that way), the rivals will be prevented from ever knowing where the vital parental subsidy of stored food is hidden.

These are some of the questions one can ponder when enjoying the visit of tame Gray Jays in Algonquin Park, and which have been at least partly answered by carefully watching colour-banded individuals over the last 25 years. But there are many other intriguing questions as well. Questions like "Just why do they nest in late winter when there is no obvious food around and most other birds haven't even come back to the Park, let alone started to raise young?". Or, "Why don't the dominant juveniles who stay with their parents until the following nesting season help their parents to raise a brood of younger brothers and sisters? After all, many tropical birds that also retain non-breeders in the family group until the next breeding season do this, so why don't Gray Jays?"

It's fun under any circumstances to admire a soft, fluffy Gray Jay perched on your hand waiting for more of your lunch. It's even more fun to peer into its big, dark eyes and try to figure out what is really going on in its remarkable little brain, and why these birds do the things they do. A winter visit to Algonquin Park affords an almost sure fire opportunity both to find Gray Jays in the first place, and then to settle down for some serious watching as well. Good luck in both endeavours!

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Dan Strickland, Oxtongue Lake, R.R. 1, Dwight, Ontario P0A 1H0

American Kestrel Preys on Killdeer

by
Ron Tozer

On 19 April 1980, at Oxtongue Lake (McClintock Twp., Haliburton Co., Ontario), I observed an American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) successfully capture, kill, and transport a Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*). I had never seen an American Kestrel prey on any organism even approaching the size of a Killdeer, and so I made some field notes for future reference. Recently, I decided to do some reading on kestrel behaviour and predation habits, and attempt to discover any special circumstances which might have contributed to the occurrence.

The event took place at about 0800h on 19 April 1980, with a temperature of -1° C and clear skies. There was a covering of ice on puddles, but the only snow left consisted of patches in deep shade. Daily high temperatures for the preceding week had barely reached the freezing mark, but then the day before (18 April) this abnormally cold weather ended with a high of 10° C, and the arrival of numerous migrants. Both the American Kestrel and the Killdeer were probably recently arrived migrants themselves, and may have been hard-pressed to obtain food given the "wintery" conditions. Oxtongue Lake is located along Highway 60 between Huntsville and Algonquin Provincial Park. Average spring arrival dates at Huntsville and Algonquin for American Kestrel are 6 April and 11 April, respectively, and 26 March and 30 March for Killdeer (Mills 1981, Tozer 1990).

The Killdeer was foraging (alternately standing and running) on an extensive area of lawn, with scattered shade trees, bordering Oxtongue Lake (mostly frozen) prior to the attack. The bird appeared to be healthy. Then suddenly, the American Kestrel dove from above and behind the Killdeer, and gripped the shorebird in the rump area with its talons. There was much wing-flapping and excited calling by both birds, as they literally rolled over several times on the ground. For one or two minutes, the Killdeer actually progressed a few metres across the lawn with the flapping kestrel fastened onto its back. When the Killdeer seemed to weaken, the kestrel pecked it twice at the base of the skull and the Killdeer went limp. The kestrel then flew just off the ground, with the Killdeer still in its talons, in a laboured flight which took it into some adjoining cover out of my sight.

The method of capture and killing was typical of that reported for American Kestrel when preying on birds (Bent 1938). The fact that there was a single, moving Killdeer in the open may have been significant since "prey activity is more important than either prey size or coloration with respect to selection by wild kestrels, probably because moving prey are most readily detected" and since "kestrels are less selective when

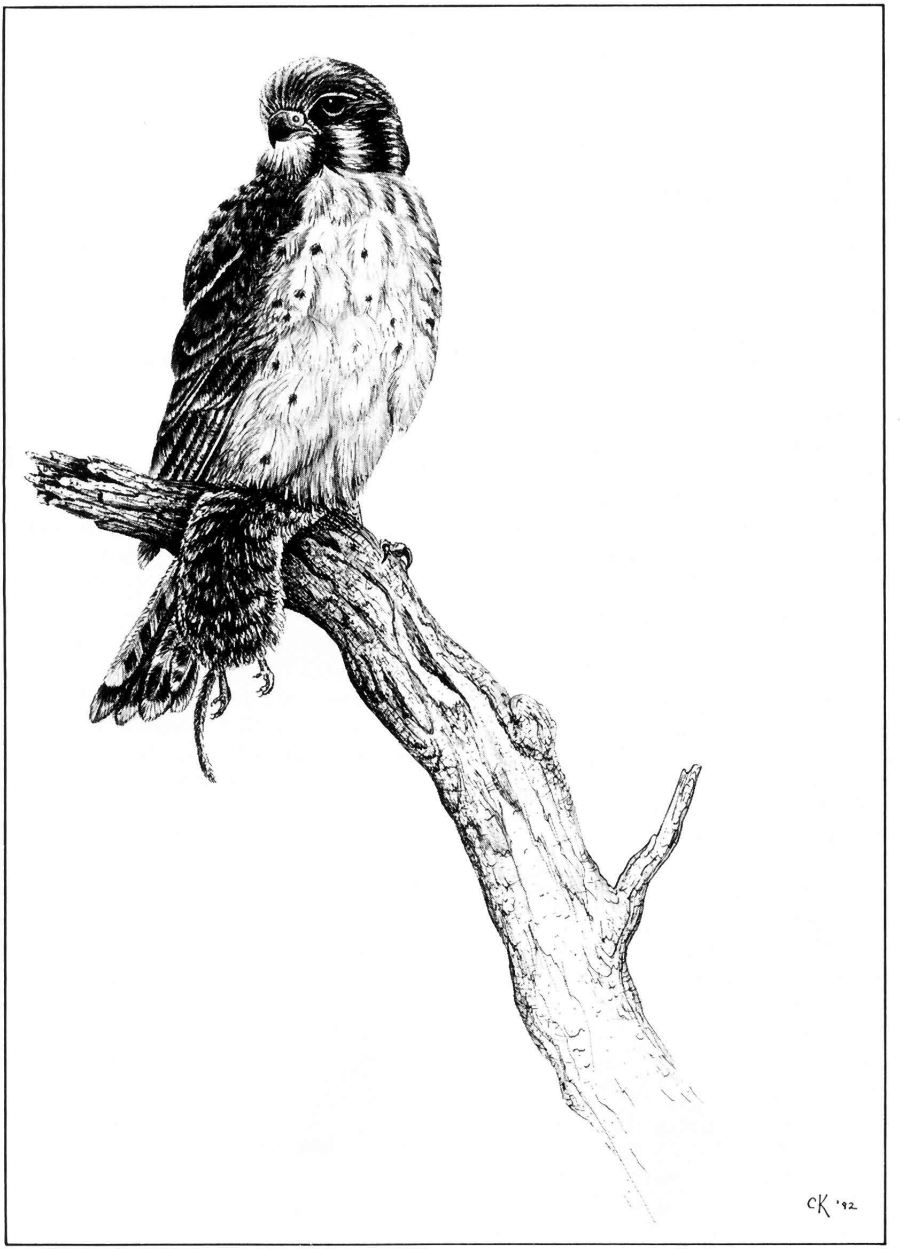

Figure 1: Male American Kestrel with a vole (*Microtus*).
Drawing by *Chris Kerrigan*.

deciding whether or not to pounce on a single prey item" (Smallwood 1989). Increased prey contrast against the background, and length of time exposed (both high for the Killdeer) tend to increase attacks and successful predation by American Kestrels (Sparrowe 1972).

Prey usually taken by American Kestrels consists primarily of insects, small mammals, small birds (including preflight young), small reptiles and a few amphibians (Mueller 1987, Palmer 1988). Normally, they take "at least several times as many insects as vertebrates", according to David Bird (Palmer 1988). However, "during winter in northern latitudes this hawk's prey is restricted to birds and small mammals" (Bent 1938), and those were the conditions confronting the kestrel at Oxtongue Lake.

Bird (Palmer 1988) reported that American Kestrels take birds "more often when they are moving about conspicuously, as during spring migration when other kestrel food is less accessible". However, Young and Blomme (1975) studying the kestrel's feeding habits during the nesting season in northern Ontario found that birds accounted for fully 20.5% of the prey types taken, even when other food sources (such as insects) were readily available. Similarly, Hart (1972) identified 54% of the prey remains in one American Kestrel nest box as birds, during a breeding season with unusually low vole (*Microtus*) populations. Apparently, vertebrates yield more nourishment per capture during brood rearing (Palmer 1988). Also, individual American Kestrels develop specialized "prey habits" (Bond 1936) or "specific search images" (Palmer 1988) wherein they concentrate on a single species or group (such as birds) exclusively, as long as they are available (Mueller 1987).

Bird (Palmer 1988) noted that bird kills by kestrels ranged in size from Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) down to hummingbirds (*Trochilidae*), with birds as large as California Quail (*Callipepla californica*) and screech-owl (*Otus* sp.) having been fed upon as carrion. Male kestrels have been recorded as taking birds more often than females (Mills 1976). Unfortunately, I did not record the sex of the Oxtongue Lake kestrel! Research has also shown that hungry American Kestrels prefer larger prey (Palmer 1988), and Mueller (1987) claimed that "kestrels attack birds much more often in the spring than in the fall and often with a dash and verve resembling that of the Merlin (*F. columbarius*)".

Having learned that American Kestrels sometimes take fairly large birds, I now wondered whether shorebirds (and particularly the Killdeer) had previously been reported as prey. Young and Blomme (1975) found the remains of a Common Snipe (*Capella gallinago*) in a kestrel nesting box. Three different male kestrels were observed to take a total of twelve Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*) and two "small sandpipers" (*Calidris* sp.) during winter in California (Page and Whitacre 1975). A Killdeer was reported inadvertently as prey of the American Kestrel in Palmer (1988), but these data actually pertained to a study of the Aplomado Falcon (*F. femoralis*) in Mexico (Sherrod 1978). Consequently, I could find no

previous published report of an American Kestrel preying on a Killdeer in the literature surveying food habits (see Bond 1936, Bent 1938, Heintzelman 1964, Sherrod 1978, Terres 1982, Mueller 1987, Palmer 1988).

In addition to this prey species being apparently unknown, I was interested in the significance of an American Kestrel killing and transporting a bird the size of a Killdeer. The American Kestrel has been observed to occasionally kill prey heavier than itself (Palmer 1988). Weights of male kestrels were recorded by Roest (1957) as averaging 102.5 g (with a range from 80.0 to 143.0 g), while females averaged 119.0 g (ranging from 86.0 to 164.8 g). Killdeer weights have been reported to average 88 g (Terres 1982), and to reach as much as 99 g (Palmer 1967). Thus, the Oxtongue Lake kestrel probably weighed more than its prey. Male kestrels have been recorded successfully carrying prey weighing 89 g, with difficulty (Palmer 1988). Lamore (1956) observed a male kestrel carrying an adult American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*), with an estimated weight of 74 to 85 g, under laboured flight. Adult female American Kestrels have been observed carrying full-grown rats (*Rattus* sp.), but only 0.3 m above the ground -- "indicating some ability to transport prey approaching twice their own weight" (Palmer 1988).

In summary, the Oxtongue Lake American Kestrel may have taken the Killdeer (a relatively large bird) due to the lack of other prey in early spring, the kestrel's individual habit of preying on birds, and because it was hungry. Given the early spring date and avian prey, this kestrel may well have been a migrant male (but the sex is unrecorded). The Killdeer was vulnerable to kestrel attack because it contrasted with its background in open habitat, was solitary, and was moving on the ground. A Killdeer is one of the heaviest prey organisms to be successfully killed and transported by a kestrel. This is apparently the first published account of an American Kestrel preying on a Killdeer.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank David Bird and Ron Pittaway for their critical review of this note.

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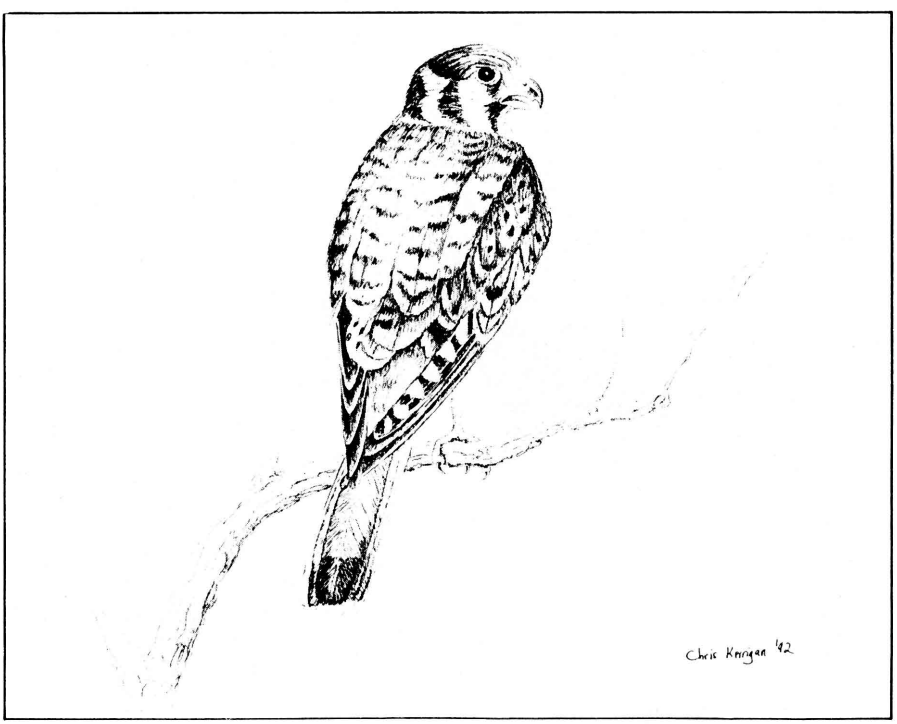

Figure 2: Male American Kestrel. Drawing by *Chris Kerrigan*.

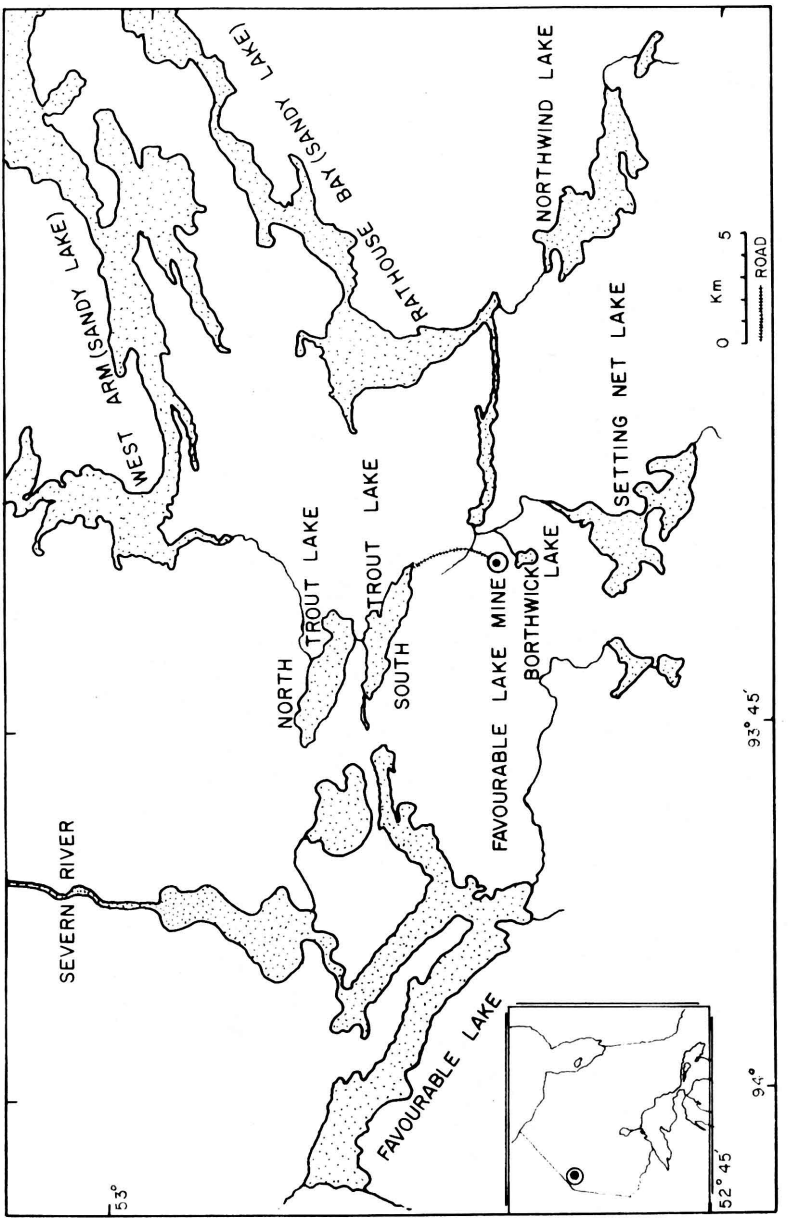

Figure 1: Map of the Favourable Lake Mine area, Ontario.

Cliff Hope at Favourable Lake Mine in 1938

by
Ross D. James

As part of a pioneering effort to gather information on the status and distribution of the birds of Ontario, Clifford E. Hope visited several places in the far northern parts of the province, under the direction of L.L. Snyder, for the Royal Ontario Museum between 1938 and 1948. A complete list of birds found in these various places has never been published, although a few significant records have found their way into several publications (such as Peck 1972; Peck and James 1983, 1987; and Cadman, Eagles and Helleiner 1987).

The following information was gleaned largely from an unpublished manuscript left by Hope in the files of the ROM. Additional material was taken from his field notes in the archives of the ROM. The notes provide a daily list of species and numbers seen, something that was essential to assessing the status of each species.

Hope's manuscript was concerned to a considerable extent with specimens collected, while my objective is to provide a list of species, an idea of their abundance and breeding status and, as it turns out, to correct a previously published item concerning the Lesser Yellowlegs. I have, therefore, omitted specific information about specimens, indicating only whether specimens were obtained by the ROM field party (#), or by someone subsequent to their departure (!). An asterisk (*) following the species name indicates that some evidence of breeding was found. Specimen evidence to confirm breeding or nesting was secured in every instance where I have indicated breeding. Additional details about specimens or nesting and breeding records are available in the ROM.

Favourable Lake lies nearly 20 km west of Sandy Lake in the northwestern part of Ontario (52° 55′ N, 93° 57′ W) in the Severn River Drainage, at an elevation of nearly 300 m above sea level. The mine itself was about 12 km southeast of Favourable Lake (Figure 1). Hope, with L.A. Prince and G.M. Neal, travelled by train from Toronto to Winnipeg and then flew with Wings Limited, reaching South Trout Lake on 29 May 1938, and walking the final 5 km to the mine along a corduroy road. The party remained there until 6 August. Most observations were made within an 8 km radius of the mine. Travel was mainly on foot. A couple of them poled a raft down and back the almost 10 km of the end of Rathouse Bay - once.

Precambrian hills covered with sparse forest rose as much as 60 m above more low-lying glacial tills. Jack pine and mixed forest mainly of white birch, trembling aspen, white spruce and jack pine occurred on drier sites, giving way to black spruce in moist areas. Dense mixed second growth following earlier fires was found in several places. Lakes were

typically deep and clear with rocky shores. However, Setting Net and Borthwick Lakes, as well as Rathouse Bay, were shallow with extensive marshes, and with spruce bogs and alder swales surrounding them. A stump-studded clearing around the mine covered about half a square mile, with a dozen buildings and a small sawmill clustered about the mine shaft.

Mr. M.D. Banghart of Berens River Mines, owners of the mine, arranged for the party to use one of the buildings for sleeping quarters, for laboratory space in another, and to obtain board at the mine cookhouse. Mr. William Goddard, cook in the mine kitchen, took a keen interest in their activities, and following their departure continued to collect additional material for another five months, and secured a number of specimens from the local Indian people.

Common Loon, *Gavia immer:* ! Rather rare; a maximum of three seen one day. They were very wary as they were apparently hunted for food in the area.

Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus podiceps:* * # More numerous than loons, with 3 or 4 seen on several days on Rathouse Bay, and Borthwick Lake. Nests with eggs were found 9, 16, and 27 June.

Horned Grebe, *Podiceps auritus:* # A single bird found 29 July on South Trout Lake where no suitable nesting habitat was available.

Red-necked Grebe, *Podiceps grisegena:* * ! One pair noted through June and July on Borthwick Lake, and a nest with one egg was found 10 June.

American Bittern, *Botaurus lentiginosus:* # Rare, but present throughout the period in the Borthwick Lake and Rathouse Bay marshes.

Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias:* ! Reported only as a wanderer in late summer.

Green-winged Teal, *Anas crecca:* Four males were seen 27 June.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos:* ! Rarely seen in June and July; more numerous in autumn.

Blue-winged Teal, *Anas discors:* * # Rarely observed, but a female was flushed from a nest beside Rathouse Bay on 22 June.

Ring-necked Duck, *Aythya collaris:* # The commonest breeding duck; 3 or 4 seen frequently. Three broods of 7 or 8 downy young were noted 24 July on Borthwick Lake.

Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis:* ! Reported only as an autumn migrant.

Common Goldeneye, *Bucephala clangula:* ! Rare during the summer with no evidence of breeding noted.

Bufflehead, *Bucephala albeola:* * # One to 3 seen frequently in early June and present on Borthwick Lake throughout the summer. Two broods of 8 and 3 young were seen on 24 July, these being the first breeding records for the province.

Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus:* ! Very rarely seen; specimens were of flying immatures secured shortly after Hope left the area, and may have been raised not far away.

Northern Harrier, *Circus cyaneus:* Seen only once, a juvenile flying about Rathouse Bay, on 31 July.

Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter striatus:* # Seen rarely throughout the summer.

Northern Goshawk, *Accipiter gentilis:* ! Not seen in summer, but 4 birds were removed from leg hold traps between 4 Nov. and 16 Dec.

Broad-winged Hawk, *Buteo platypterus:* # Rarely seen throughout the summer.

Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis:* ! One bird seen several times in the same area along the creek flowing from Setting Net Lake.

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius:* * # One to 3 seen almost daily often about the mine clearing. An egg nearly ready to lay was taken from a specimen on 30 May; young of the year were seen in early August.

Merlin, *Falco columbarius:* Only one seen on 31 July near Rathouse Bay.

Spruce Grouse, *Dendragapus canadensis:* * # Common in the area; broods first noted on 30 June and frequently thereafter.

Ruffed Grouse, *Bonasa umbellus:* * # Seen as frequently as Spruce Grouse, however, fewer broods were noted, beginning on 22 June.

Sharp-tailed Grouse, *Tympanuchus phasianellus:* ! Never seen during the summer, but reported regularly in the mine clearing from late October to mid-May.

Sora, *Porzana carolina:* * # Considered common in the marshes about Rathouse Bay and Borthwick Lake. Nests with eggs were found 16 and 27 June, the latter on the point of hatching.

American Coot, *Fulica americana:* ! Not seen in summer, a single bird was recorded 17 Sept.

Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola:* # Single migrant recorded 31 May.

Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus:* * # Two pairs occupied the mine clearing. A nest with eggs was found 14 June, and broods of young from the other pair were seen 29 June and 9 July.

Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca:* # Seen only once, an apparent migrant on 4 August.

Lesser Yellowlegs, *Tringa flavipes:* What was believed to be the first nest record for Ontario (Peck and James 1983) was one with 2 eggs found by Neal "amid bog pools" in the mine clearing on 4 June. These abandoned eggs were later collected. However, in reading Hope's manuscript he clearly states "No birds were ever seen at the nest." It so happened that on the same day, a mile away, two birds, apparently of this species, were seen flying overhead. No other Lesser Yellowlegs were ever seen during the entire month of June.

I wondered whether he could accurately identify the birds flying over (out of gun range?) and how distinctive were Lesser Yellowlegs eggs. In checking the egg measurements I found that they were completely outside the extreme small measurements for this species as given by Bent (1927). The measurements are in the range of both Common Snipe and Killdeer, the only other possibilities, the length being closer to the average for snipe and the width closer to the average for Killdeer. Hope's field notes indicate that he first thought it was a Killdeer nest, but later when he found a Killdeer nest to compare, he comments that "they certainly were not those of a Killdeer" and that he would compare them with snipe when he returned to the museum. The eggs are more blotched like typical snipe, but the ground colour is more buff like a typical Killdeer. There are variants of either species that approach these in colour, markings and size. The habitat where they were found is somewhat uncertain. His field notes just say "in the mine clearing". We know there were Killdeer there, but there were also snipe in the wetter places of the clearing. Does "amid bog pools", as found in his manuscript, indicate a vegetated area where a snipe might conceal a nest or a more open spot useable by a Killdeer? How much was he biased by what he thought they were? Doubtless Hope did not see these as typical of either snipe or Killdeer and he concluded they belonged to the only other shorebird of the appropriate size that he believed he saw there at the time, and he comments that he expected to find Lesser Yellowlegs there (rather than Greater Yellowlegs). Perhaps he felt that although the eggs were somewhat small, they were close enough to be those of Lesser Yellowlegs.

The identity of these eggs remains uncertain, but what we must conclude is that breeding for Lesser Yellowlegs was not established until Hope visited Fort Severn in 1940, where he collected downy young. And the first (and only) nest then, was not found until 1990, by A. Wormington, at Shagamu River.

Solitary Sandpiper, *Tringa solitaria:* * # Regular, but not common after late June. A flying juvenile with traces of downy plumage, taken 29 July was probably locally raised.

Spotted Sandpiper, *Actitis macularia:* * # Rare except on the river from Northwind Lake where six were seen one day. Juvenile birds were recorded 28 and 29 July at Borthwick Lake.

Least Sandpiper, *Calidris minutilla:* # Recorded as a rare late summer migrant.

Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago:* * # The commonest shorebird, seen and heard daily (and nightly) throughout June and most of July. Downy young and partially feathered juveniles encountered a number of times after 29 June. Second nesting is suggested by a female with a well developed egg taken 18 July.

Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis:* ! A single bird was encountered 16 August.

Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus:* ! Rarely seen during the summer.

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo:* # Seen in small numbers only on South Trout and Northwind Lakes. (Found nesting on Sandy Lake in 1937 by J. Satterly).

Black Tern, *Chlidonias niger:* * # A common species, particularly in Rathouse Bay. As many as 300 were seen on one day. Many nests were found, hatching commencing about 27 June.

Great Horned Owl, *Bubo virginianus:* * # Frequently heard in late July and early August. Two juveniles, not long out of the nest were found 29 July.

Northern Hawk Owl, *Surnia ulula:* ! Not seen during the summer, but reported in November.

Common Nighthawk, *Chordeiles minor:* * # As many as 10-12 seen almost daily. A newly hatched young was found 7 July.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird, *Archilochus colubris:* # On only one occasion, 8 July, two females were seen.

Belted Kingfisher, *Ceryle alcyon:* # Seen most days in small numbers about all lakes and rivers, but no nesting sites were located.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus varius:* * # Regularly encountered in small numbers. Several nests found in July contained noisy young.

Downy Woodpecker, *Picoides pubescens:* * # Rarely encountered, and young of the year first seen 19 July.

Hairy Woodpecker, *Picoides villosus:* * # Also rarely seen; young of the year first encountered 8 July.

Three-toed Woodpecker, *Picoides tridactylus:* # Rarely encountered; a nest with fresh eggs was found 6 June.

Black-backed Woodpecker, *Picoides arcticus:* * # Also rarely encountered in spruce bogs. An alarmed female, 29 June, suggested a nest or young were nearby.

Northern Flicker, *Colaptes auratus:* * # Small numbers encountered most days. Several nests were found; young were noted out of the nest beginning 28 June.

Pileated Woodpecker, *Dryocopus pileatus:* ! Rarely seen; their excavations were more frequently encountered in mature woods.

Olive-sided Flycatcher, *Contopus borealis:* # Uncommon in spruce bogs.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, *Empidonax flaviventris:* # Uncommon in spruce bogs. Although no nests were found, birds became agitated on several occasions.

Alder Flycatcher, *Empidonax alnorum:* # Uncommon in alders and willows after arriving on 2 June, but no nests or young were seen.

Least Flycatcher, *Empidonax minimus:* * # Common in deciduous woods; many nests with eggs were found in the latter half of June.

Eastern Phoebe, *Sayornis phoebe:* * # Three widely separate pairs were noted. A nest and renests were located 30 May, 20 and 28 June at the mine.

Eastern Kingbird, *Tyrannus tyrannus:* * # A rare summer resident. A brood of four flying juveniles was noted 31 July.

Purple Martin, *Progne subis:* A single individual flew about the mine area for half an hour on 1 June.

Tree Swallow, *Tachycineta bicolor:* # Uncommon throughout the summer, but no nesting evidence was obtained.

Gray Jay, *Perisoreus canadensis:* * # Uncommon; fledged young were being fed by adults in early June.

American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos:* # Occasional and usually only one or two seen, mainly in June.

Common Raven, *Corvus corax:* Rare and only occasionally seen through the summer.

Black-capped Chickadee, *Parus atricapillus:* * # Uncommon; six young flew from a nest found 15 June.

Boreal Chickadee, *Parus hudsonicus:* * # Rarely encountered, but young of the year were noted after 15 July.

Red-breasted Nuthatch, *Sitta canadensis:* Only one was heard 23 July.

Brown Creeper, *Certhia americana:* # Seen only a couple of times in mature woods near South Trout Lake.

Winter Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes:* * # Uncommon in wet areas; fledged young were first encountered 6 July.

Golden-crowned Kinglet, *Regulus satrapa:* * # Uncommon in mature mixed woods. Juveniles not long out of the nest were encountered 7 July.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, *Regulus calendula:* * # Common in black spruce bogs. Recently fledged young were noted 15 July.

Eastern Bluebird, *Sialia sialis:* Single pairs seen 5 and 11 June in the mine clearing.

Swainson's Thrush, *Catharus ustulatus:* * # Not as numerous as Hermit Thrush, but fairly common. Several nests were found.

Hermit Thrush, *Catharus guttatus;* * # A common bird in forests; a nest with eggs was found on 5 June.

American Robin, *Turdus migratorius;* * # Uncommon in various habitats. A nest was found in a mine structure 1 June.

Cedar Waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum:* * # Uncommon; a nest with eggs was found 5 July, and recently fledged young were seen 24 July.

Solitary Vireo, *Vireo solitarius:* * # Uncommon; two nests were found 23 June, one with eggs and one with well-feathered young.

Philadelphia Vireo, *Vireo philadelphicus:* * # Apparently only uncommon. A nest with young, the first for the province, was found 27 June.

Red-eyed Vireo, *Vireo olivaceus:* A common summer resident, but no breeding evidence was noted.

Tennessee Warbler, *Vermivora peregrina:* * # The commonest warbler; nests with eggs were found 16 and 18 June; many broods were seen from 28 June on.

Orange-crowned Warbler, *Vermivora celata:* * # An uncommon summer resident, the first time it was ever encountered as such in Ontario. The first and only nest for the province was located 14 June when a female was flushed from a nest with eggs. Fledged young with their parents were also noted 12 July.

Nashville Warbler, *Vermivora ruficapilla:* * # Uncommon and not more numerous than the Orange-crowned Warbler; a juvenile bird 19 July was the only breeding evidence.

Yellow Warbler, *Dendroica petechia:* # Rarely encountered along the shores of Rathouse Bay, and no breeding evidence was found.

Magnolia Warbler, *Dendroica magnolia:* * # A fairly common bird in mixed woods, with several nests found and fledged young seen.

Cape May Warbler, *Dendroica tigrina:* # Rare in larger mixed woods.

Yellow-rumped Warbler, *Dendroica coronata:* * # Common mainly in coniferous woods. A single nest with eggs was located 26 June.

Black-throated Green Warbler, *Dendroica virens:* * # Uncommon in mixed woods with mature white spruce. The only evidence of breeding was a juvenile being fed by a parent on 21 July.

Blackburnian Warbler, *Dendroica fusca:* # Individuals were seen on only three occasions. Breeding is probable as a young of the year was recorded 21 July.

Palm Warbler, *Dendroica palmarum:* * # Rare in black spruce bogs. Evidence of breeding was a recently fledged juvenile recorded 28 July.

Bay-breasted Warbler, *Dendroica castanea:* * # Fairly common in mature mixed woods. Nests with eggs 15 June, and with young 21 June, were the first for Ontario. A recently fledged juvenile was seen 4 July.

Blackpoll Warbler, *Dendroica striata:* # A single male on 14 June was the only bird encountered. However, it was a singing male in breeding condition, suggesting the possibility of breeding.

Black-and-white Warbler, *Mniotilta varia:* * # Rare in mixed second growth; a young of the year was recorded 19 July.

American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla:* # Rare in deciduous forest. Probably breeding there, as a young of the year was recorded 5 August.

Ovenbird, *Seiurus aurocapillus:* * # Common in deciduous woods. A nest with young was found 25 June.

Northern Waterthrush, *Seiurus noveboracensis:* * # Common near lakes and rivers. Nests with eggs were found 16 and 22 June.

Connecticut Warbler, *Oporornis agilis:* # Rare in dense black spruce bogs.

Mourning Warbler, *Oporornis philadelphia:* # Rarely encountered in deciduous forest clearings.

Wilson's Warbler, *Wilsonia pusilla:* # Rare in alders bordering lakes and streams.

Canada Warbler, *Wilsonia canadensis:* # Rare in dense mixed second growth.

Chipping Sparrow, *Spizella passerina:* * # A common species of dry mixed forest; several nests were found.

Vesper Sparrow, *Pooecetes gramineus:* # Singing males were twice noted in the mine clearing where habitat was scarcely suitable.

Savannah Sparrow, *Passerculus sandwichensis:* # Occasionally individuals appeared in the newly made mine clearing where habitat was not suitable for nesting. Apparently no suitable habitat was available elsewhere.

Fox Sparrow, *Passerella iliaca:* # Uncommon in dry mixed second growth. A very agitated pair on 6 July was the only evidence of breeding noted, however.

Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia:* * # Only five birds were encountered in the summer; one was a well-feathered juvenile on 29 July.

Lincoln's Sparrow, *Melospiza lincolnii:* * # Common summer resident in all wet situations. Usually sang only at dawn and dusk, except on cloudy and rainy days when they would sing all day. A female with an egg ready to lay on 5 June, and a juvenile bird 19 July both indicated breeding.

Swamp Sparrow, *Melospiza georgiana:* * # An uncommon resident in the marshes bordering Rathouse Bay and Borthwick Lake. A new nest was found 4 June, later abandoned with a couple of eggs.

White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis:* * # Common in all habitats. Several nests were found in the first two weeks of June and again in the first two weeks of July suggesting two broods were produced.

Dark-eyed Junco, *Junco hyemalis:* * # Common in drier, more open parts of most habitats. Also apparently being double-brooded with a pattern of nesting like the White-throated Sparrow.

Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus:* * # Common in marshy areas especially about Rathouse Bay. A nest with eggs was found 8 June.

Western Meadowlark, *Sturnella neglecta:* A single bird was seen and heard 31 May in the mine clearing.

Rusty Blackbird, *Euphagus carolinus:* # None encountered until early August when young of the year, probably raised not too far away, were moving about.

Common Grackle, *Quiscalus quiscula:* * # Uncommon but regular along the marshy borders of Rathouse Bay and Borthwick Lake. A nest with eggs was found 11 June.

Purple Finch, *Carpodacus purpureus:* * # Uncommon; a juvenile taken 18 July indicated local breeding.

White-winged Crossbill, *Loxia leucoptera:* Encountered fairly regularly only after 22 June, usually fewer than 10 a day, but one flock of 150.

Hoary Redpoll, *Carduelis hornemanni:* ! Reported to be a rare winter visitor.

Pine Siskin, *Carduelis pinus:* * # Common summer resident; newly fledged juveniles were frequently encountered in late July.

Hope's field notes do not provide details of the working conditions. For example, did he have a canoe or did he just wade into the water to locate grebe nests? Trying to carry a canoe through a kilometre of bush was not a practical proposition even if he had had access to one, however. I know that he tried unsuccessfully to identify the "owners" of a grebe nest by setting snares in one instance. The raft used on Rathouse Bay was undoubtedly constructed on the site and perhaps he used this technique on Borthwick Lake as well. There were several comments in his journals about the "joys" of living with blackflies, and any who have tried can imagine the efforts of fieldwork in such a situation.

There are a number of species that might have been expected there that he did not record. Probably if he had had greater mobility both on land

and water, he would have seen more. His notes mention seeing two small gulls with black heads, but they were too far away to identify. They may have been Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*). He also reports twice seeing either Common or Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus merganser* or *M. serrator*), also too far away to be certain of the identity.

The Favourable Lake trip followed field work at several other places in northern Ontario: on Lake Nipigon (1923, 1924), at Lake Abitibi (1925), in Rainy River District (1929), along northeastern Lake Superior (1936), in Sudbury District (1937), and near Kenora (1937). It was not expected then that any new species would be found, but Bufflehead and Orange-crowned Warblers were recorded breeding for the first time. The nests of Philadelphia Vireo and Bay-breasted Warbler were the first for the province. At the time, it was certainly a worthwhile effort in piecing together information on the avifauna of Ontario. It also provided a background for the more widespread breeding bird atlas program that followed many years later (1981 to 1985).

Acknowledgements

To Cliff Hope, whom I never had the opportunity to meet, I am indebted for the observations in this paper. I trust that he is happy to finally see them published and that I have accurately conveyed his knowledge of the Favourable Lake Mine area.

I am also appreciative of the support of Charlotte Goodwin and Julia Matthews, in the Library and Archives of the Royal Ontario Museum. Figure 1 was reproduced with the assistance of Brian Boyle in the Photography Dept. of the ROM. George Peck conferred with me about the Lesser Yellowlegs record.

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Recognizable Forms

Subspecies of the Iceland Gull

by
Ron Pittaway

Introduction

The taxonomy of the Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*) is complex and much debated by ornithologists and birders. In this account, I hope to clear up some of the confusion about the status and identification of the three Iceland Gull subspecies in Ontario -- the Kumlien's Gull (*L.g. kumlieni*), Thayer's Gull (*L.g. thayeri*), and the nominate "Greenland" race (*L.g. glaucoides*). Here I follow Godfrey (1986) and James (1991) who consider the Thayer's Gull to be a subspecies (race) of the Iceland Gull. I refer the reader to Plate 36 and the excellent discussion on the Iceland Gull in the revised edition of *The Birds of Canada* (Godfrey 1986). (Dr. Earl Godfrey is an internationally recognized taxonomist and leading authority on the Iceland Gull.)

Kumlien's Gull:

Kumlien's Gull, pronounced "K00M-leans" (Terres 1982), breeds in the eastern Canadian Arctic and winters mainly in the Atlantic provinces and Gulf of St. Lawrence, with small numbers on the Great Lakes (Godfrey 1986). Contrary to what many Ontario birders believe, Kumlien's is the most common race of the Iceland Gull in the province. The impression that it is rarer than the nominate "Greenland" race (*L.g. glaucoides*) has persisted for a long time. This misconception likely resulted from the fact that the variable grey markings on the wingtips of many adult Kumlien's are difficult to see and can be easily overlooked on distant birds. As well, immature birds are more frequent in southern Ontario than adults, and there has been an assumption that these "white-winged" immatures are of the nominate race.

Adult Kumlien's Gulls have darker grey mantles than adults of the nominate race, and adult Glaucous Gulls (*L. hyperboreus*). In fact, many Ontario adult Kumlien's have mantles almost as dark as Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*) (Richard Poulin, pers. comm.). Typical adults, which have light to moderate pigmentation in the wingtips, can be reliably identified to race. However, beware of the fact that the Nelson's Gull (Herring X Glaucous hybrid) is rare, but regular, in Ontario. Some are similar to Kumlien's, but are usually distinguishable by their larger size and heavier bills.

First winter Kumlien's average darker than nominate birds. Most are probably indistinguishable in the field (Godfrey 1986). However, those somewhat darker than normal individuals having considerable dark smudging in the wingtips and darker tails are probably safely called Kumlien's, but see the reference to intergrades under Thayer's Gull. For

further discussion and excellent photographs of Kumlien's Gull, the reader is referred to the recent article in *Birding* by Zimmer (1991).

Thayer's Gull

Thayer's Gull was once considered a subspecies of the Herring Gull, and more recently a separate species by the American Ornithologists' Union (1973), based primarily on the studies of Smith (1966). Gaston and Decker (1985), Godfrey (1986), and Snell (1989) have reported interbreeding between Kumlien's and Thayer's Gulls, contrary to Smith (1966). It is now apparent that the Thayer's Gull represents the dark extreme of the Iceland Gull complex (Godfrey 1986).

Thayer's Gulls breed in the western and high Arctic, and winter mainly on the West coast. Small numbers occur in migration and winter in southern Ontario. Typical adult and first year Thayer's Gulls can be distinguished from Kumlien's Gulls "with considerable confidence in the field" (Godfrey 1986). Intermediates between Thayer's and Kumlien's may represent either extremes in variation or intergrades (Gaston and Decker 1985, Godfrey 1986, Zimmer 1991).

Beware of two identification pitfalls. First, an occasional aberrant Herring Gull can have a Thayer's-like wing pattern. The Herring's bright yellow eyes and yellowish (instead of reddish) fleshy orbital rings should serve to distinguish it. Second, some Herring X Glaucous Gull hybrids (Nelson's Gull) closely resemble Thayer's Gulls. Their larger size, paler mantles, and heavier bills should distinguish the hybrids. First year hybrids usually have bicoloured, Glaucous-like bills. Detailed discussion of Thayer's Gull identification may be found in Godfrey (1986), Gosselin and David (1975), Lehman (1980), and Zimmer (1990).

"Greenland" Iceland Gull

Godfrey (1986) states that the nominate race (*L.g. glaucoides*) is "a non-breeding visitor, mostly in winter, to southeastern Canada from the breeding grounds in southern Greenland". It is by far the rarest of the three subspecies in Ontario. Earl Godfrey (pers. comm.) has confirmed that there is an adult specimen of the nominate race from Ontario in the National Museum in Ottawa. This specimen was collected on 28 November 1974 at Ottawa by Richard Poulin. Another small and very pale first winter bird, collected 5 December 1974 at Ottawa by the author and Richard Poulin, is "almost certainly" of the nominate race (Earl Godfrey, pers. comm.).

The field identification of nominate birds in Ontario should be attempted with extreme caution. Nevertheless, a classic individual should be recognizable. For a winter adult (compared with Kumlien's), the combination of immaculate primary tips, smaller size, slighter bill, very pale Glaucous-like mantle, clear yellow eyes, and pale spotting confined to the head and nape add up with reasonable certainty to *L.g. glaucoides*. Bruce DiLabio (pers. comm.) observed such a classic nominate adult in direct comparison with adult Kumlien's and Glaucous Gulls at the Cornwall Dam on 19 January 1991. First year birds cannot be identified subspecifically in the field (Godfrey 1986). However, small

and very pale first winter birds, having pale at the base of the bill, are suggestive of the nominate race. See Figures 2 and 7 in Zimmer (1991). For additional discussion of identification, see Godfrey (1986) and Grant (1986).

Summary

Kumlien's Gull is the most frequently occurring subspecies of the Iceland Gull in Ontario. The majority of adults can be reliably identified to race in the field. Most first winter birds are probably indistinguishable from nominate birds. Thayer's Gull is of regular occurrence, but somewhat less frequent than Kumlien's Gull. Typical adult and first winter Thayer's can be distinguished from Kumlien's with considerable confidence in the field. The occurrence of nominate Iceland Gulls in the province is supported by a specimen in the National Museum. However, this subspecies is extremely rare here, and should be identified with great caution. Classic adult nominate individuals are recognizable in the field with a high degree of certainty. Most first winter birds are not separable in the field from Kumlien's. As a final note on gull identification, don't be afraid to say "I just don't know what it is!"

Acknowledgements

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Notes

Black-chinned Hummingbird: New to Ontario

by
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About 1700h, Friday, 25 May 1990, a warm sunny day, Dr. and Mrs. A.A. Sterns of Rideau Ferry, Lanark County (on the Rideau Waterway, about 9 km south of Perth) spotted a strange hummingbird amongst the many Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at their feeders. It appeared to be "larger, with a black head and a bit of a crest". They thought it might be sick or dying as it sat much of the time without moving, only occasionally sipping from a feeder. And they noted that the Ruby-throats tried to chase it.

Dr. Sterns videotaped the strange hummer. Mrs. Sterns tried to locate an expert to identify it. First she called the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper, but its staff was too busy with the Meech Lake Accord affair to help. Next she tried Lynne Thompson of the Perth Wildlife Reserve who, unable to, asked me to go. I drove from my Smiths Falls home pronto, arriving about 1915h.

The Sterns pointed the bird out to me, with other hummingbirds in the shrubbery-bordered feeder area siding the house on the south. It was best seen from the windows overlooking this enclosure, but was mainly viewed amongst the foliage on top of and inside the hedge where the light was variable because of shadows. From the front, its head did appear to be black, with the breast and sides darker than the Ruby-throats'. There was no crest. I too thought it looked larger.

I asked Ron Beacock of Perth, a sharp-eyed, experienced birdwatcher with remarkable surveillance skills, to come. From 2000h to 2045h, with the light waning, we caught glimpses of the bird in the feeder area, but these and the videotaped pictures were not clear enough to give us what we needed definitively concerning its colour. We decided to return the next day to obtain more details which might show whether it was a larger, darker Ruby-throated or prove that it was another species such as the Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*). In that event, we would have to get an expert to confirm the identification.

By Saturday morning, after further studying our books, we concluded that of all the North American hummingbirds our bird was most like the Black-chinned. Ron returned by 0830h and I by 1000h, watching until noon with no luck. Back again at 1600h, I spied him immediately, sitting alone at a feeder -- right out in the open in bright sunlight! Within minutes, Ron arrived and took photographs of the bird from all sides. For 30 minutes

before it disappeared finally out of sight, we observed it with binoculars (10x50 and 8x40) from a distance of 3 to 6m, as it fed, rested, and flew.

We noted: the very green sheen of its back; dusky forehead; black chin and throat; white collar between throat and breast; breast a light grey with what appeared to be a darker grey wash on the sides (darker than the Ruby-throats' sides); the slightly downcurved bill approximately the same length as the Ruby-throats', and blackish-brown and shiny smooth; and tail moderately notched, but the same length as the Ruby-throats'. The overall length of the bird looked to be a few millimetres longer than many of the Ruby-throats at the Sterns'. The Ruby-throats' movements were very quick and light, while this bird's were sluggish; takeoffs and landings were slower, and all movements including flight were smoother. The Ruby-throats looked as if they were going about their business on breeding territory in a brisk, purposeful manner, while the stranger did not. No call or wing sounds were heard.

Then suddenly, I saw a momentary burst of a glorious iridescent blue-pink violet over the bottom of the throat in a narrow band (not elongated at the sides), unlike any colour I had ever seen before on a bird. I was absolutely stunned! Ron saw purple once.

Convinced beyond a doubt now that it was an adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird, we consulted with Gordon Pringle of Ottawa. He came out on Sunday afternoon (27 May), bringing Larry Nealy (who has personal experience with the species) -- but our bird was not about, nor was it seen again after the 26th! Glad to help in any other way, the Sterns had asked that there be no publicity that would bring flocks of birdwatchers and photographers.

We were disappointed that the bird had vanished before confirmation by other observers, but our faith lay in Ron's transparencies for proof. Then tragedy struck. On Tuesday, he was informed that the wrong developing solution had been used, removing all pictures from the film! This hope gone, Gordon and Larry ran the videotape through in their respective labs, but were unable to get anything conclusive.

As designated report writer, I continued to document relevant facts. For example, I determined by colour chart the exact colours which we had seen on the throat, learning that Mrs. Sterns had seen a "blue-pink" in a very narrow band along its bottom twice on Friday, and Dr. Sterns had seen black only. I took colour prints of the habitat, which was ideal for Black-chinned's breeding (Stokes and Stokes 1989) -- lowland bordered by water on two sides, with willow trees along one shore. Weather reports which I obtained confirmed severe weather disturbances had occurred southwest of the U.S.A./Canada border 24 to 48 hours before the bird had been spotted, which might account for its presence and behaviour. I compared W. Earl Godfrey's (1986) tip of the bill to tip of the tail measurements for Black-chins and Ruby-throats, finding that our bird was possibly at the top of the Black-chin's range of 7.5 to 9.5 cm -- making it appear longer than many of the Ruby-throats.

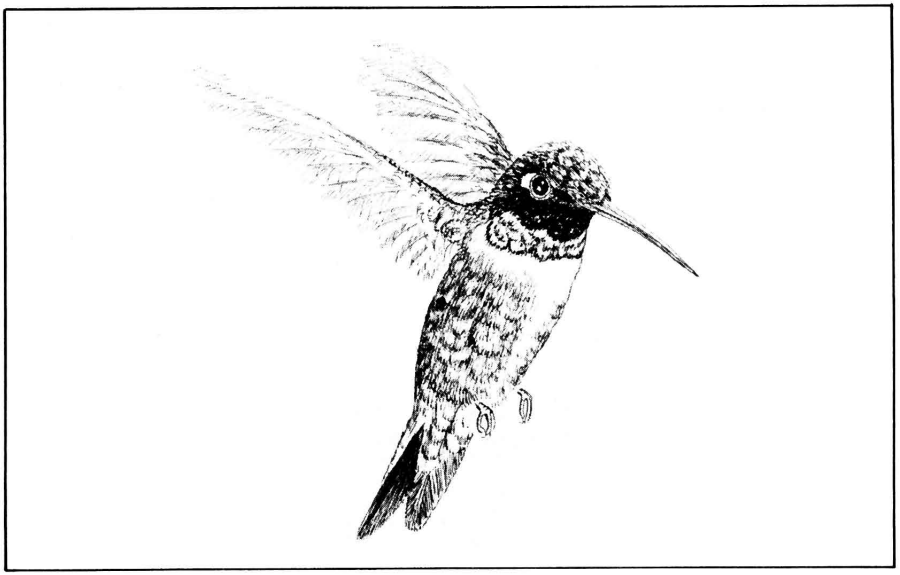

Figure 1: Black-chinned Hummingbird showing diagnostic flash of shiny violet on lower throat. Drawing by *Chris Kerrigan.*

Sustained by the support of Gordon Pringle and Bob Curry who guided us through procedures, and Ron D. Weir's spontaneous "I buy that!" when I described the find to him, we submitted a report of our observations to the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). The OBRC subsequently accepted the sighting (Curry 1991), as the first documented occurrence for Ontario. Thus, the tortuous tale, if ever there was one, of this Black-chinned Hummingbird has finally been told --as we observers saw it.

The Black-chinned Hummingbird breeds in the West from southwestern British Columbia and northwestern Montana south through California, Arizona, New Mexico and southern Texas, to northern Mexico (AOU 1983). Godfrey (1986) reported it as a casual visitant to southern Alberta (specimen), and southern Saskatchewan (sight record). There were no Canadian records east of Saskatchewan prior to our observation, according to Desante and Pyle (1986). In the United States, it is a very rare vagrant eastward to Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida (Desante and Pyle 1986), and there is one record from Cohasset, Massachusetts -- the most easterly occurrence for the continent (AOU 1983).

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Bat as Food of Northern Shrike

by
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About 1100h on 26 January 1992, we observed an adult Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) holding a bat (*Chiroptera*). The observation was made near Nephton, Peterborough County, Ontario. The morning was sunny and cold, with an overnight temperature of -20°C. The shrike was first noted when it flushed in front of us. It flew low for a short distance, holding the bat with its feet. When the shrike perched, the bat could be clearly seen in our telescope.

An extensive review of the literature revealed no reports of Northern Shrike preying on bats. Ross James (pers. comm.), of the Royal Ontario Museum, also was unaware of any instances of bats being taken by this shrike. However, Bent (1950) reported two separate cases of the Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) attempting unsuccessfully to capture bats in flight.

The two most cold-hardy bats that hibernate in central Ontario are the Big Brown Bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) and the Small-footed Bat (*Myotis leibii*) (Ed Poropat, pers. comm.). The relatively large size of the bat held by the shrike we saw suggested to us that it was probably a Big Brown. This species often hibernates in buildings, and is occasionally active in winter. In fact, Banfield (1974) states that "when disturbed in hibernation, the bats (Big Brown) awaken, raise their body temperatures by shivering, and after a period of about five minutes take to shaky flight about their winter quarters".

Our observation was made near several mine buildings and residences. We speculate that the bat may have been disturbed in a nearby building, and then caught by the shrike when it attempted to move to a new location. Another possibility

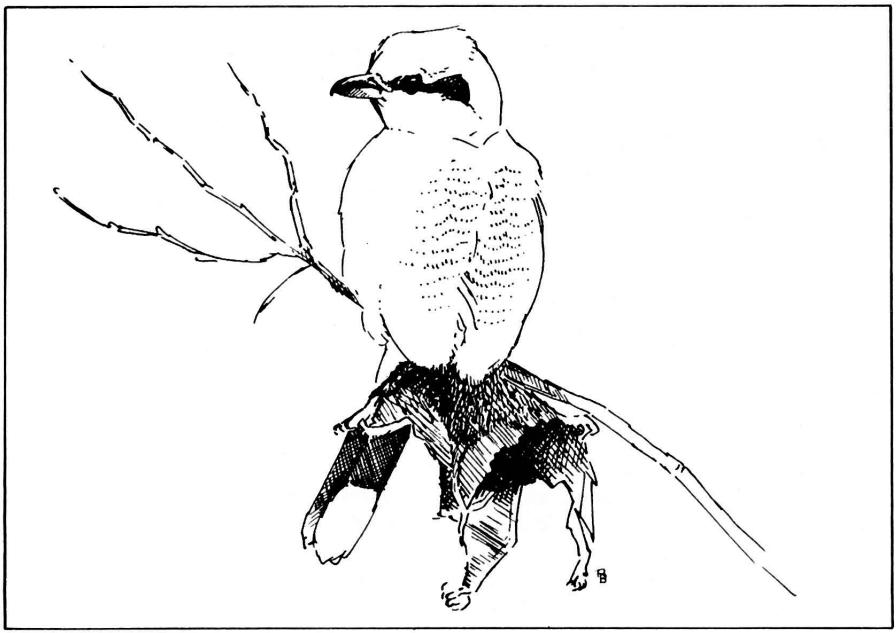

Figure 1: Northern Shrike holding probable Big Brown Bat. Drawing by *Peter Burke*.

is that the bat was found dead by the shrike. Previous reports of Northern Shrike scavenging on carrion involved a domestic cow (Bent 1950), and an American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) (James 1987).

This observation apparently constitutes the first report of a Northern Shrike preying or scavenging on a bat in North America.

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Book Reviews

Birds of Algonquin Provincial Park. 1990. By *Dan Strickland.* The Friends of Algonquin Park, Whitney, Ontario. 40 pp., illustrated. $2.95.

This first publication, *Birds of Algonquin Provincial Park,* is suitable for park visitors who are relative beginners to birding. It covers 77 species which the summer birder is most likely to encounter in Algonquin. The book is broken down by major habitats which include: spruce bogs, conifer forests, hardwood forests, beaver ponds, lakes and rivers, winter, and the sky (the last two do not really qualify as habitats). Each habitat is described and accounts are given of the various species characteristic of that habitat.

I get annoyed at some so-called regional bird books that only provide general information that is available elsewhere, and scarcely make any mention of the area that they claim to portray. Fortunately this is not such a publication. Wherever possible, Strickland includes information that is specific to Algonquin Park. In a few cases such as Nashville Warbler and Black-throated Blue Warbler, the accounts are general, saying little about the respective species, however these are the exception. The accounts often depict how a bird is likely to be first encountered by the park visitor.

Strickland uses an easy readable style and the species accounts are packed with behavioural or ecological tidbits, some of which will be of interest even to the experienced. For example, I did not know that Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are dependent on the sap that oozes from sapsucker holes in spring before suitable nectar-producing flowers are in bloom. Nor was I aware that loons sometimes kill competing mergansers, or that Bobolinks nest in some of the large open bog mats in the Algonquin Park interior. The booklet can also be of value to the experienced birder by helping locate Algonquin specialties like Spruce Grouse or Gray Jay.

The text is a little repetitive in a few places. Most obviously, the diversity of feeding strategies employed by the various warbler species is noted in several places. This is a minor criticism, however. Excellent photographs of all 77 species are included with surprisingly fine colour reproduction for such an inexpensive publication.

Checklist and Seasonal Status of the Birds of Algonquin Provincial Park. 1990. By *Ron Tozer.* The Friends of Algonquin Park, Whitney, Ontario. 28 pp. $1.25.

The *Checklist and Seasonal Status of the Birds of Algonquin Provincial Park* may be of more interest to the serious birder planning a visit to the park. All 258 species and 134 breeders that have been recorded from the 7600 square kilometres of Algonquin Provincial Park are listed. Each species is assigned a status as either common, uncommon, rare, very rare, accidental, irregular and/or breeding. In addition, some of the best known birding sites along the Hwy. 60 and Grand Lake-Travers

Road corridors are described, guiding the newcomer to potentially productive sites.

The real value of the checklist is that bar graphs depict the seasonal occurrence of each species, based on years of tabulated data. A heavy bar is shown between average arrival and departure dates for both migration periods, while a thin bar stretches between absolute earliest and latest arrival dates. The Algonquin visitor can therefore gauge what species he or she is likely to see at any time of the year, and can determine which sightings are unusual.

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Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario. 1991 (second edition). By *Ross D. James.* Life Sciences Miscellaneous Publications. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Ontario. 128 pp. $12.00.

One has but to read the opening paragraphs of this slim volume and turn to the 17 pages of references near the end to realize that there is an ever increasing mass of literature pertaining, directly and indirectly, to the avifauna of Ontario. This checklist is an effort to summarize that literature which pertains to the status of birds in the province, with particular emphasis on updating the situation since the first edition, produced by James, McLaren and Barlow (1976).

As James points out, this is no simple revision, with changes made to virtually every species in the checklist. A comparison of the totals from the first and second editions effectively emphasizes the dynamic nature of Ontario bird life. Eliminating those records considered to be "hypothetical", the first edition listed 394 species supported by documentary evidence (specimens or photographs) compared to 442 by early 1991. Similarly, the number considered to have bred has increased from 268 to 285. Certainly, these statistics testify to the need for such a revision.

Birders, being birders, will likely first flip through the species accounts to see how rarities have been handled. Accordingly, James has included, right after the introduction, a section on the treatment of rarities. Significantly, from the birder's point of view, James, in contrast to the first edition, now accepts well documented sight records which have been reviewed and accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). The only perplexing aspect of this is that he is not consistent in his citations of rarities, sometimes citing the OBRC reports and on other occasions citing *American Birds.* However, I wholeheartedly applaud the removal of the designation "hypothetical" for those species records in which the author lacks confidence. The term, borrowed from the language of experimental science, had no real place or universally understood meaning in ornithological literature. Instead, square brackets surround 13 species for reasons of errors in the literature, likelihood of escapes, or lack of convincing evidence.

On the other hand, James says that it is not possible to agree completely with records committees now or in the past. I would argue that the consistent approach in such a work as this would be to follow the decisions of the OBRC. It seems especially perplexing that James would not follow the precepts of a group on which he was a founding member and on which he has served more often than not. Thus, he includes Barnacle Goose and Painted Bunting, neither of which was considered, at press time, to have occurred as a wild vagrant by the OBRC, by stating that several of the records are "probably wild birds", but cites none specifically. The inclusion of one newly documented species in 1990 (Wilson's Plover), but the exclusion of the four other new birds with acceptable documentation in the OBRC files: Ferruginous Hawk, Black Rail, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Cassin's Finch (Curry 1991), only adds to the confusion. Does this imply that he found only the plover to be convincing? If so, should not the others have appeared in square brackets? If James felt all the evidence was not in, better, in my view, to have stopped this checklist at the end of 1989 and not include any new 1990 species.

Thayer's Gull represents a similar case in which the decision of an internationally accepted arbiter, the AOU (1983) Checklist and supplements, and the OBRC, has been contravened, as James follows Godfrey (1986) in relegating this to a subspecies of Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*). My point here is not whether they are right or wrong (indeed, the prevailing trend is to lump *thayeri* with *glaucoides*), but that an official checklist should possess a consistency based upon the decisions of authoritative and recognized bodies; which begs the question, which is the official checklist of the birds of Ontario, this James version or the version that appeared in *Ontario Birds* (Wormington and James 1984, with annual additions in OBRC reports)?

The author explains at length the terms used to portray the status of each species in the province. "North", "south", "north coast" and "west" are adequately defined and are about as useful as they can be in describing distribution over such a far-flung province. James points out that everyone seems to prefer a different system of labelling frequency of occurrence and relative abundance. Not to disappoint him, I will offer some criticism. But first, I am in total agreement with the elimination of the term "accidental" used by many authors to designate rarities so extreme as to suggest that they will never occur again. Over the course of time, most of them have! I actually prefer his somewhat looser definition of "occasional", as it is not so bound by numerical criteria, and the definition of "vagrant" is a good one. My problem is with a separate set of terms to describe relative abundance. Surely, "occasional" (from the frequency list), not expected every year but to be expected in most years, and "rare" (from the relative abundance list), usually seen singly and difficult to find on any particular outing, are redundant. I would prefer a single set of terms describing status from "abundant" to "vagrant". There is also a set of terms to describe seasonal status. Most of these are

very useful, but James seems to have replaced his perfectly clear "visitant" with "straggler". The latter has a place in the list, i.e., to indicate that a species has been known to lag behind after the bulk of the population has left. Although the dictionary does allow for the interpretation of irregularly wandering into the province as "straggling", would it not be clearer to describe, to take just two examples, Say's Phoebe and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher as "occasional visitant" to the province, rather than as occasional or rare stragglers? Then, straggler could be reserved to describe birds like Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Barn Swallow that I would prefer to describe as "vagrant stragglers into early winter" rather than merely "vagrant in winter", which could be equally applied to Smew. I found that in a number of instances, James did not seem to adhere to his own system in labelling the status of species. Surely Yellow-billed Loon and Wood Stork are vagrant rather than occasional, and Indigo Bunting is not a winter resident at Thunder Bay!

James has chosen, in this edition, to forego dates of occurrence, except for vagrants. Some will argue that he could have used the published record to include specific dates for extremes of early and late occurrences, as he did in the first edition. Certainly, users of this book would have liked to know the outside dates of occurrence of birds in the province to set their own observations in perspective. Unlike some publications (e.g., Speirs 1985), he has, I believe correctly, not rigidly defined seasons by calendar months. Many species have occurred in December as late fall migrants, or attempt to winter, but subsequently leave or die (see above discussion of stragglers).

One of the most useful features of the checklist is that the subspecies known to have occurred in the province are listed at the end of each species account. Moreover, an excellent appendix presents background on the subspecies. It is here that the amateur field ornithologist can find fascinating information on the range, morphological variation, and current status of subspecies. In addition to the generally understood trends in ornithological thinking (e.g., that American Black Duck may well be lumped with Mallard, and Hoary Redpoll with Common Redpoll), there is a wealth of information here for those interested in learning about bird identification and status beyond the species level. Taken together with the series by Ron Pittaway (1991), to be continued in *Ontario Birds*, this section will interest and challenge Ontario birders looking for a little more.

Of course, the species accounts are the meat of this publication. The inclusion of a four-letter code for each species, fashioned after, but not strictly adhering to those used by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service bird banding manual, is a useful addition which may help with field notes or computer records. The status description format has already been discussed. It remains to comment on the status James assigns to the individual species. Certainly, the seasonal status of many species is open to criticism. In the first edition, James gave specific dates of occurrence whereas this time he divides the months into three parts ("early", "mid", and "late"). I would

like to have seen the outside dates for each species, and even the location, as surely these data were available in the sources James used to give the part of the month.

Reviewers and readers will entertain themselves by finding what they take to be errors in the principal dates of occurrence in the province, or labels of seasonal status. Certainly, these should be as accurate as possible, but the reader, especially if from a peripheral extreme, is to be cautioned against trying to criticize from a parochial perspective. Species such as migrant hawks and warblers will regularly occur earlier than James' dates, which indicate when "nearly normal numbers are usually found". Thus, average dates of first arrival and records at migration hot spots do not indicate when the bulk of the population has arrived. Having said this in defence of James, I believe that there has been an amelioration of climate which has resulted in birds arriving earlier in spring and lingering on into winter in larger numbers than heretofore, whereas he has tended to stick to the principal dates given in the first edition.

I found incomplete dates and places for extreme rarities to be particularly annoying, especially as they are given for some species, and as they can be found in *American Birds* or *Audubon Field Notes*. To sample a few: only the specimen date and collecting location of the 1960 Amercian Oystercatcher are given, when in fact, it was seen at Toronto and Presqu'ile from May onward. Similarly, only the photographed date is given for the 1981 Spotted Redshank, the 1977 Wandering Tattler, the 1973 Lewis' Woodpecker, and both Sprague's Pipits, as well as only the collecting date of the 1949 Vermillion Flycatcher. And why could not all of the places and dates be included for vagrants such as Yellow-billed Loon and Black-throated Gray Warbler?

Understandably, the author had to consult and cite various sources; until OBRC has reviewed all historical records there will be no single arbiter for the status of rarities. Unusual date records are equally problematic. This made James' job more difficult, and it is perhaps understandable that he would have missed records that have appeared in *Audubon Field Notes, American Birds*, or local publications (e.g., *The Wood Duck*), such as two separate Hamilton Bell's Vireos, Arctic Tern in November at Niagara, and Semipalmated Plover near Port Credit in January. The Black-headed Grosbeak has occurred from early December (at Dundas in 1973).

Whether you agree or disagree with James or these comments on the Checklist, the book is an excellent summary of the status of birds in Ontario, and a compilation of data available nowhere else. It is really a must for all students of Ontario birds, from the beginner who wants to know where her/his sighting fits into the picture, to the experienced who can't quite remember where that Sooty Tern was seen or how many records there are of Black Skimmer.

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Photo Quiz

by
Doug McRae

Answer to Photo Quiz in *Ontario Birds 9 (3):* **White-crowned Sparrow.**

This bird is one member of a family that traditionally causes various forms of mental trauma for many birders -- the sparrows. Due to reproduction problems, some of the field identification points discussed below can't be seen in our photograph -- but it is an immature White-crowned Sparrow! Before going into the fine details as to why, there are a few general points on sparrow identification to keep in mind that may be helpful.

Just over twenty species of sparrows have occurred in Ontario. Most have distinct plumages for adults and immatures, and some have different plumages in winter and summer and between male and female. All told, that's a lot of plumage possibilities and this is why some birders, especially those who are starting out, find sparrows to be a bit of a nightmare. Sparrows in juvenile plumage (the first set of body feathers they attain) are hard and that's all there is to that, but fortunately the plumage is held briefly! Also, when in this plumage, they are often attended by adults which can help facilitate identification -- but there is no shame in letting some go unidentified.

Despite this initial hurdle, sparrows are not so bad once you get used to them. Some, like the Dark-eyed Junco, are really quite easy and shouldn't present a problem once out of juvenile plumage. If you can take the time to learn five or ten common species well, most others will fall into place surprisingly quickly. To learn them well, however, means watching different individuals of the same species over and over, and not for just a few seconds. For example, find a Song Sparrow and then follow it.

Watch it from behind, silhouetted above you, obscured by bushes, etc. When you have watched them enough you will find that recognition comes almost instantly, and at this point you know the bird! If you don't have the patience or interest to learn them well, you will always have trouble with the dreaded little brown birds.

Now let's get on to the bird at hand. The conical bill and rather "average" body proportions put this bird in the sparrow family. There are several features that are obvious and help to eliminate many possibilities right away. First of all, this sparrow is unstreaked on the breast and flanks. It has two obvious white wingbars. The bill is light coloured, and the crown appears dark with a lighter area in the middle. If you flip through a field guide and look at the plain-breasted sparrows that have occurred in Ontario, you will find the following: Grasshopper, Le Conte's, Sharp-tailed, Lark, American Tree, Field, Chipping, Clay-colored, White-throated, White-crowned and Golden-crowned.

Now take the same birds and see which ones have two clear white wingbars, and you are left with American Tree, Field, Chipping, White-throated, White-crowned and Golden-crowned. Our bird is not a Tree Sparrow because it lacks the black breast spot, does not have a bicoloured bill, and has a strong head pattern (which is lacking on Tree). Field Sparrow can be eliminated because of the strong head pattern on our bird, and the incomplete eye ring (compared to Field's full eye ring). Chipping Sparrow is easily eliminated since adults lack any conspicuous head pattern in winter and in breeding plumage show a bright red cap with a bold white eyebrow above a black eye line, while juveniles are heavily streaked on the breast.

This leaves us with the three big sparrows. White-throated is ruled out by several features. While some White-throats can be quite dull, virtually all will show some trace of the white throat and bordering dark malar stripes. Also, all birds will show yellow lores, albeit dull on some individuals. Because our bird lacks bold black or white on the crown, it is an immature bird. (The photo was taken in October.) White-crowned and Golden-crowned are quite similar in this plumage. While the colour of the central crown stripe differs somewhat between these two, this can be difficult to detect and can be variable. However, there is one feature that is visible that tells us that this is a White-crowned -- and that is the fine black eye line. You can clearly see that the lores are dark and the black line extends through the eye on to the ear covert area. This feature helps to accentuate the light eye-brow of the immature White-crown while the Golden-crowns do not have this line, and as a result, have a somewhat plainer looking face.

So when you are out birding next fall, and see White-crowned Sparrows, check for the black eye line. Who know's, maybe you will be the next person to discover the very rare (in the east anyway) Golden-crowned!

The next bird could be seen just about anywhere in Ontario.

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OBRC Announcement

Review List of Recognizable Forms (1992)

In past annual reports of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) published in *Ontario Birds*, the identity of the subspecies and morphs of review species has been noted when this information could be determined from a report. Examples are the races of the Yellow-throated Warbler and the morphs of the Gyrfalcon.

For those species on the Review List, the OBRC continues to request observers to describe the subspecies or morph involved whenever possible. In addition, documentation is now also requested by the OBRC for the following rare forms of regularly occurring species which are not on the Review List:

"Cory's" Least Bittern (dark morph)

"Bewick's" Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*)

"Black" Brant (*Branta bernicla nigricans*)

"Eurasian" Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca crecca*)

Broad-winged Hawk (dark morph)

"Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*)

"Richardson's" Merlin (*Falco columbarius richardsonii*)

"Pacific" Lesser Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica fulva*)

"Coastal" Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus semipalmatus*)

"White-rumped" Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus* group)

"Greenland" Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides glaucoides*)

"Scandinavian" Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus fuscus*)

"Red-shafted" Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus collaris* group)

"Bicknell's" Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus bicknelli*)

"Lawrence's" Warbler (hybrid)

"Appalachian" Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens cairnsi*)

"Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata memorabilis* group)

"Spotted" Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus arcticus* group)

"Gray-headed" Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*)

"Purple" Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula stonei*)

"Bullock's" Northern Oriole (*Icterus galbula bullockii*)

"Hornemann's" Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni hornemanni*)

For a complete checklist of recognizable forms in Ontario, refer to *Ontario Birds* 9: 49-55. The OBRC welcomes reports involving any distinctive forms not found on that checklist, and would appreciate comments and suggestions concerning the documentation of rare forms in Ontario.

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 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 62014, Burlington Mall Postal Outlet, Burlington, Ontario L3R 4K2.

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