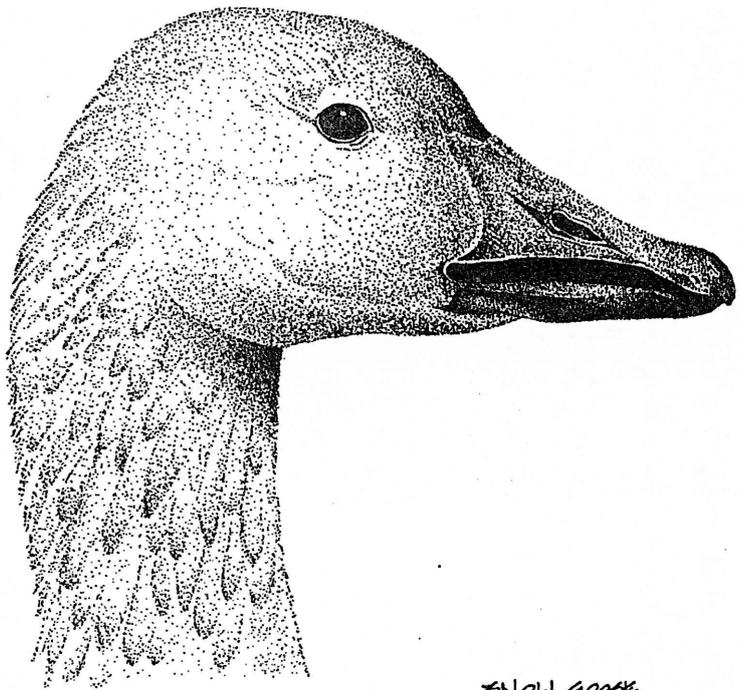


ONTARIO BIRDS



SNOW GOOSE

Shauna LaBelle-Bradman
1992

The Journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists
Volume 10 Number 2 August 1992



Reports of rare birds, (those for which the OBRC requires documentation — see supplement to *Ontario Birds* 9 (2)), should be sent to:

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Ontario Birds is the journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Its aim is to provide a vehicle for the documentation of the birds of Ontario. We encourage the submission of full length articles or short notes on the status of bird species in Ontario, significant provincial or county distributional records, tips on bird identification, behavioural observations of birds in Ontario, location guides to

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significant birdwatching areas in Ontario, book reviews, and similar material of interest on Ontario birds. We do not accept submissions dealing with "listing". Distributional records of species for which the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) requires documentation must be accepted by them before they can be published in *Ontario Birds*.

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Commentary

"I Don't See A Mallard, Let's Put One There" Government Involvement in Consulting Can Be a Double-edged Sword

by

Keith Reynolds and John Reynolds

May we expand on Graham Forbes's commentary on ecological consulting ("I Don't See a Chat, Let's Bulldoze") in the April 1991 issue? We agree that ecological consultants can face ethical and professional conflicts but would like to take a more positive stance towards prospects for fair ecological assessments and offer a cautionary note about government involvement.

Ecological consulting should start by establishing goals. Those being considered by the Ontario Chapter of the Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists (CSEB) offer a place to begin:

"To promote conservation and integrated assessment of natural resources within the context of sound ecological principles to ensure their sustainability, and

"To strive for the highest possible standards of professionalism in both practice and conduct on the part of all members".

Established goals make it easier for prospective consultants to decide whether they possess adequate expertise to carry out specific assignments. In Graham's example, a local naturalist, offered a contract to investigate a woodlot slated for development, might recall seeing

Red-shouldered Hawks there. Lacking adequate knowledge to meet goals such as those above, advice should be sought from people with broader perspectives or the contract should be refused.

Would more government involvement improve ecological assessment? Graham recommends that local governments form standing committees to take "an active role in monitoring and surveying areas to be developed" (p. 5) and "removing the pressure of developers hiring consultants through greater government involvement" (p. 6).

Although government bodies play significant roles in natural resource matters, too often they are more part of the problem than of the solution. Their agendas, vacillations, and funding commitments are too unpredictable to encompass the complex, long-term nature of most ecological issues.

Consultants hired by governments can face conflicts similar to their counterparts in the private sector. Both public and private purchasers of advice have the right to reject recommendations inconsistent with their priorities. In the case of governments, consultants often encounter bureaucrats more

skilled in politics than in weighing sound biological advice. Not surprisingly, many biologists and naturalists are irritated by pervasive, even if declining, game and management biases in government, particularly among senior biologists of the "shotgun/chainsaw" school of conservation. So, while a developer might want to hear "I don't see a chat, let's bulldoze"; a wildlife manager might prefer "I don't see a Mallard, let's put one there." Either way, prospective consultants should be wary of employers whose priorities differ from their own.

Which levels of government can best make decisions about protection and development? Conservationists may prefer to deal with local governments, as Graham suggests. Perhaps they are more sympathetic towards habitats and locally rare species, but developers may also have more clout at the local level. The battle over Toronto's Leslie Street Spit, where some "carnival scenarios" found favour with city planning officials, comes to mind.

The question becomes even more complex when diverging mandates of governments are considered. The Long Point experience is an example. The Long Point Company, when it owned almost all of the peninsula east of the Provincial Park, proposed to give most of it to the province. Who could resist the gift of a long, uninhabited peninsula in various stages of succession? But would it be safe in provincial hands or its fragile ecosystem put at risk by "management" pressures, such as roads, picnic grounds, and camping sites? Every Ontario birder knows of well-intentioned plans gone awry.

Weighing such concerns, the donor was advised to consider giving the property to the federal government. Ottawa's statutes and serenely impersonal isolation seemed more likely to protect this unique ecological entity. The gambit seems to have succeeded and today the area is well protected.

Given the complexities, confidentiality, and long-term nature of acquiring lands prior to development, it is not usually realistic to require developers to undertake detailed ecological assessment before land purchase contracts are closed. But if something along this line could be devised, pressures on both developer and ecological consultants would be greatly eased. Once lands deals are sealed, pressures to approve development plans are difficult to resist. Developers are often more skilled, more politically astute, and have deeper pockets than environmentalists. However, the power of public relations is increasingly important in environmental matters. Reputable developers often seek high standards of assessment and pay attention to the results, if only to ward off confrontations with environmentalists. Less reputable firms, which seek short-term gains, appeal less to consultants as employers.

Several recent trends are encouraging. First, consulting firms are drawing on an increasing diversity of expertise to match the complexities of ecological problems. Second, governments are becoming more interested in non-game species and their habitats. Third, consultants

have access to comprehensive data bases yielding masses of information. In the realm of birds, the options include the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas and its descendant, the Ontario Rare Breeding Bird Program, the Nature Conservancy of Canada's Conservation Data Centre, the Long Point Bird Observatory's studies, and the Canadian Wildlife Service's newsletters tying together various population monitoring schemes. These and other sources of reliable information contribute to better,

more defensible decisions about the significance of chats, Red-shouldered Hawks, and ... even Mallards!

We commend Graham Forbes for his thoughtful article. Development proposals demand knowledge and realism from consultants. Advice may sometimes conflict with personal beliefs but it should be objective, whether tendered to developers or governments. As biology and data improve, so should the processes and standards.

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 Oxford OX2 6DR, England

Articles

Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1991

by
 Margaret Bain

This is the tenth annual report of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. A total of 125 records were received and reviewed by the Committee in 1991. Of these, 94 were accepted; two were not accepted on the grounds of debatable origin, and 24 were not accepted because of uncertainties regarding identification. Allowing for some duplications (for example, the White-winged Tern reports from Port Lambton and Long Point were originally submitted as two separate occurrences, but later

judged to pertain to the same bird), and a beautiful Harlequin Duck on the Spanish River, which on close inspection was just a few km south of the 47th parallel, this gives an acceptance rate of 78.5%. No historical records were reviewed in 1991.

Four new species were added to the Ontario list: White-winged Tern, Green Violet-ear, Black-capped Vireo and Painted Bunting, bringing the provincial total to 449. No new breeding species were added in 1991. No changes were made to the Review

List for Northern or Southern Ontario this year, apart from the addition of recognizable forms, discussed below.

Members of the OBRC in 1991 were R. Douglas McRae (Chairman), Margaret J.C. Bain (non-voting Secretary), Nicholas G. Escott, Richard W. Knapton, Kevin A. McLaughlin, Ronald J. Pittaway, Michael W.P. Runtz, Dennis F. Rupert and George E. Wallace. (Richard Knapton took over partway through the year when George left for Antarctica.)

The Committee held two meetings, instead of the traditional single annual meeting. In November 1991, a meeting was held at Locke House, the FON headquarters in Toronto, to discuss OBRC policy, and in March 1992 a second meeting was held there to review reports still requiring final decisions. Nick Escott deserves the thanks of the Committee for making the journey from Thunder Bay on both occasions.

One of the major policy modifications made at these meetings was the adoption, after much discussion, of the OBRC Review List of Recognizable Forms (1992). For a list of the 22 forms for which the OBRC now invites reports see *Ontario Birds* 10: 39-40. Records prior to January 1992 will not be reviewed, except for a few reports submitted before this announcement. The purpose of this expansion of reporting is to document the occurrence of rare forms in the province, and to stimulate interest in the subspecies and morphs found among the avian population in Ontario. Such close scrutiny of individual birds can only lead to an upgrading of everyone's identification skills; in addition, some

of these forms are so distinctive (e.g. the North American and Eurasian races of Green-winged Teal) that they may have been in the past, or may at some future time be considered separate species. The first example of an acceptable submission of a recognizable form is the record of a "White-rumped" Whimbrel incorporated in this Report. One theoretical danger in encouraging reports of a wide range of forms is the possibility that the Committee may get bogged down in taxonomic wrangles, and have less time to consider more significant rarities. This seems unlikely, but only time will tell; also, if this did occur it would not be difficult to make readjustments.

The major problem the Committee faces continues to be the relatively low percentage of rarities documented and submitted. We are most indebted to Ron Weir for forwarding to the Secretary a distillation from each *American Birds* Seasonal Summary of reportable species and their observers. Even with this as a source, it is estimated that the OBRC receives reports of no more than 60% of potential records from across the province. This compares unfavourably with the 92% claimed by the California Records Committee (Don Roberson 1991, pers. comm.), which does admit however that it took many years to build up a climate of confidence among the birders of that state. The two main factors contributing to the low compliance in Ontario would seem to be, firstly, a degree of regional rivalry, with the OBRC perceived as a Toronto/Hamilton-based body, and secondly a



Figure 1: Ontario Bird Records Committee at Locke House, 21 March 1992. Left to right: Dennis Rupert, Doug McRae, Richard Knapton, Margaret Bain, Kevin McLaughlin, Nick Escott and Ron Pittaway (Mike Runtz absent). Photo by *Bob Curry*.

reluctance on the part of many birders to run the risk of a report rejection. The first criticism is being addressed by recruiting Committee members from various regions of the province. Members now come from Sarnia, Thunder Bay, Arnprior and Algonquin Park as well as the Golden Horseshoe. The second can only be helped by persuasion and education. If a report is rejected it must be realized that it is the content of the report that is considered insufficient to substantiate the sighting and that no one is calling the observer a liar!

Many thanks to the observers who have sent in their excellent descriptions, often accompanied by field sketches and photographs - even very diagrammatic sketches, with labelling of salient features, can be

invaluable when the report is considered later. All reports, whether accepted or not, are deposited (with the Committee votes and remarks attached) in the Royal Ontario Museum and can be viewed on request. A new non-voting position on the OBRC, that of ROM Liaison, will be instituted shortly; Ross James has agreed to take on this role.

The format of this report follows that used in the Report for 1990 (Curry 1991). For each record, information on age, sex and plumage is included if it can be reliably ascertained. Place names in italics refer to counties, regional municipalities or districts in Ontario. All contributors who have provided written descriptions or photographs, videotapes or any other form of

documentation have been credited. Contributors who discovered a bird and also submitted documentation have their names underlined, and finders of birds, where known, are also acknowledged even if they have not contributed a report. After each species name, you will find a summary number in three parts. This follows the system used in *British Birds* (Rogers 1988): the first number refers to the total number of accepted records in Ontario before the first OBRC Report in 1981, the second to the total since 1981 excluding records for the current year, and the third is the number of records for the current year. For many of the "less rare" species this number may well be incomplete - we hear of many more Gyrfalcons and Varied Thrushes than

received reports would suggest were seen.

Every effort is made to verify dates, locations and observers' names, but our data are bound to contain some omissions and inaccuracies. Incontrovertible corrections or updates are welcomed by the Committee. In cases where we are dealing with original reports, and dates or other details differ from those quoted by other sources, for example the *American Birds* Seasonal Summaries, we have used the information which seems most accurate from our own documentation. We hope these explanations will encourage many more reports to the OBRC in the coming years.

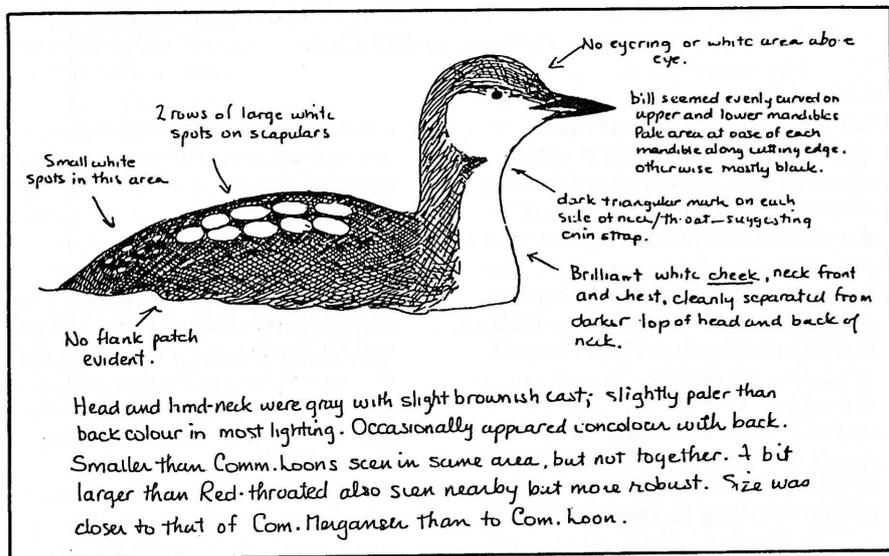


Figure 2: Pacific Loon on Lake Huron at Highland Glen C.A., Lambton, 5 November 1991. Drawing by Dennis Rupert.

Accepted Records

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) South Only(3/7/2)

1991 – one adult, 22, 26, 27 August, Tiny Marsh, Simcoe (Dave Hawke) - photos on file.
 – one adult, 5 November, Highland Glen C.A., Lambton (Dennis Rupert).

Since this species breeds in northern Ontario, it is assumed that these southern records are of Pacific rather than Arctic Loon (*G. arctica*). Godfrey (1986) lists two British Columbia specimens as the only records of Arctic Loon for Canada. However, these specimens have been re-examined recently and both were found to be Pacific Loons (Campbell *et al.* 1990).

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) (0/4/1)

1991 - two (pair), 23, 24 June, Lake of the Woods P.P., Kenora (Scott Connop) - photos on file.

For the third consecutive year this species has been reported from this westerly corner of the province, making a nesting record for Ontario increasingly likely soon. The observer also raised the possibility that the two sightings, on consecutive days but 15 km apart, may have been of two different pairs, although here they are treated as the same birds on both days.

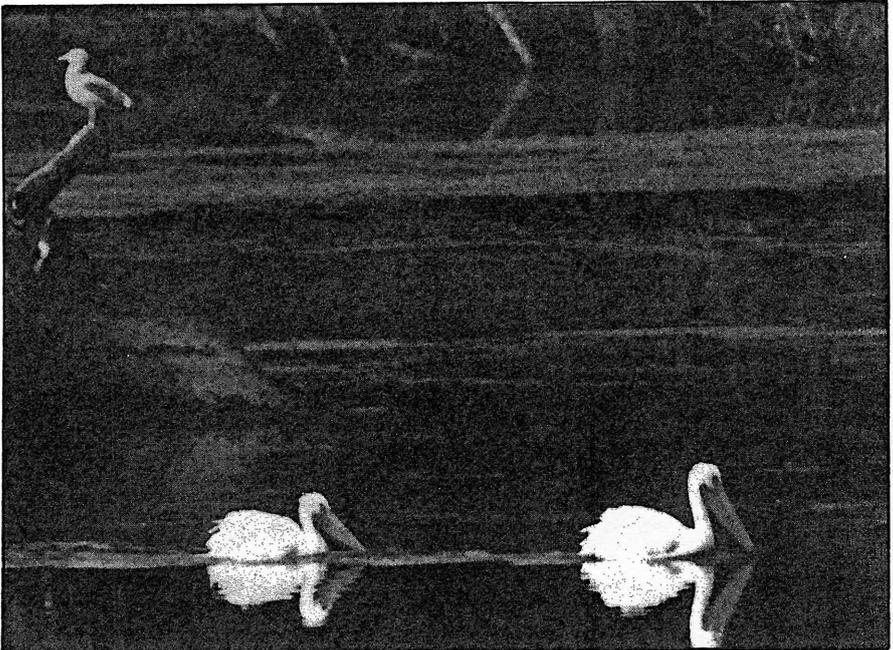


Figure 3: The two long-staying American White Pelicans at Jordan Harbour, Niagara from 17 November 1991 - 13 January 1992.
 Photo by Bob Tymczyszyn.

GREAT CORMORANTS, HAMILTON HARBOUR FEB-MAR 1991

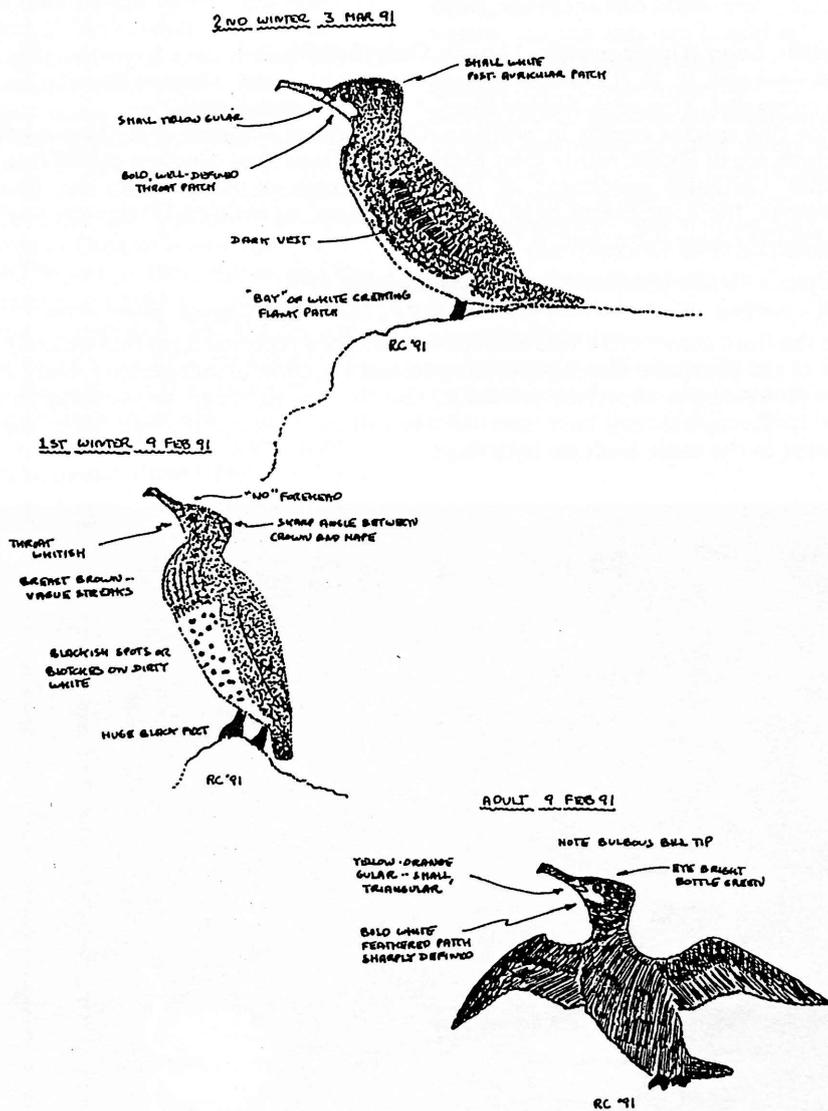


Figure 4: Three Great Cormorants present at Hamilton Harbour from 9 February 1991 to at least the end of April. Drawings by Bob Curry.

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) (2/9/1)

1991 — one juvenile, 10 November - 1 December, Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Niagara* to west Hamilton Bay, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (John G. Keenleyside, Kevin McLaughlin, George Naylor).

As in previous years, multiple sightings of single, distinctive rarities like this young gannet have been treated as pertaining to the same individual bird.

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) (2/20/2)

1991 — two (pair), 10, 12 June, Lake Huron, Oliphant, *Bruce* (Larry W. Elliott) - photos on file.

— two (pair), 29 September - 8 November, Mountsberg C.A., 17 November - 13 January 1992, Jordan Estuary, *Niagara* (Rob Dobos, Mary Ellen Hebb, Bob Tymczyszyn) - photo on file.

There is a sad ending to the tale of the two wintering pelicans - one was found frozen in the ice in Jordan Harbour after a cold spell in January, and it must be assumed that the other also perished.

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) (1/3/1)

1991 — one adult, 9 February - 29 April, plus one first year and one second year, 9 February - 8 May, Windermere Basin, Hamilton Bay, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Bob Curry, Don Shanahan).

An unprecedented number of Great Cormorants for the Great Lakes.

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) (*/*/5)

1991 — one adult, 22-26 April, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Ron Ridout, Wilf Yusek; found by Kathleen McNamara and Ralph Speak) - photos on file.

— one adult, 30 April, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Mark J. Palmer).

— one adult, 21, 22 May, Kettle Point, *Lambton* (Rob Tymstra) - photo on file.

— one adult, 25 May, Lake Travers, Algonquin Park, *Nipissing* (Mike Runtz, Ron Tozer).

— one, 27 May, Oshawa Second Marsh, *Durham* (Tyler Hoar) - photos on file.

A good year for this species. This was only the second record for Algonquin Park. The two reports from Long Point were thought to be of different birds.



Figure 5: Adult Snowy Egret at Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* from 22-26 April 1991. Photo by *Wilf Yusek*.

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) North Only (4/6/1)

1991 — one, 1 November, Hurkett, *Thunder Bay* (Wendi Brown) - photos on file. Specimen in the Royal Ontario Museum.

This bird had wandered even farther north than most of the Cattle Egrets seen in such record numbers in Ontario in the fall of 1991. It was brought in to the Ministry of Natural Resources in Nipigon in an emaciated condition, and did not survive. The specimen has been sent to the Royal Ontario Museum.

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) North Only (0/1/1)

1991 — one adult, 18-20 May, Hazelwood Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott; found by Kathleen Kivi) - photos on file.

There are very few records for this species from northern Ontario; most, like this bird, are probably spring overshoots.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) (5/15/1)

1991 — one juvenile, 8-24 September, Silver Lake, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Kevin A. McLaughlin, Christopher J. Escott, Doug McRae, Michael Richardson) - photos on file.

Fall reports of this species are less frequent than spring sightings; this is the first fall record since 1987.

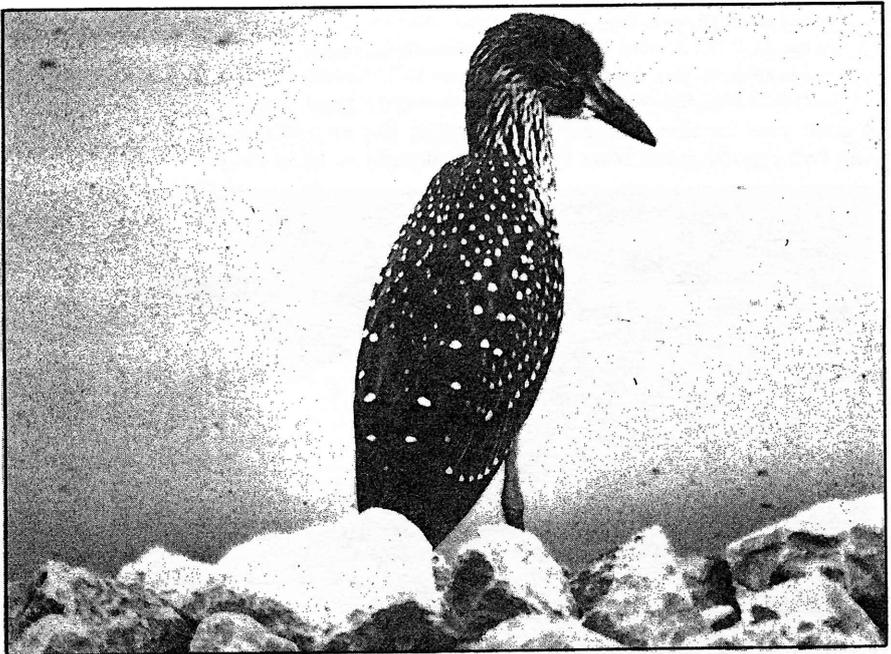


Figure 6: Juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron at Silver Lake, *Haldimand-Norfolk* from 8-24 September 1991. Photo by *Doug McRae*.

White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) (0/0/1)

1991 — one second year, 12-14 October and 29-30 October, Turkey Point Marsh, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Jim Coey, Michael Richardson; found by John Lamey).

This was Ontario's fourth record (Lamey 1991), and gratified many observers.

Ibis (*Plegadis* sp.) (3/10/1)

1991 — one, 28 October, Kincardine Sewage Lagoons, *Bruce* (Al McTavish).

1990 — one, 21 September, Shallow Lake, *Grey* (Ernie Johns).

With the first Ontario record of White-faced Ibis (*P. chihi*) overdue (Sabo, 1992), observers are urged to document carefully all the field-marks of any dark ibis. Many reports of Glossy Ibis (*P. falcinellus*) cannot be assigned specific status, and will be recorded as above.

Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) (6/2/0)

1990 — one, 3 June, Petrel Point, *Bruce* (Derek and Anita Kirkland).

As with all waterfowl records, the possibility of an escape must be borne in mind. The Committee enquired and was satisfied that none of this species were present in any waterfowl collection on the Bruce Peninsula; also, the date is reasonable for a spring vagrant.

Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) South Only (2/21/2)

1991 — two, 31 March, Cranberry Marsh, *Durham* (Jay Silverberg).

— 12-15 adults and immatures, 22 October, Keppel Twp., *Grey* (Dave Fidler).

1986 — one, 26 April, Presqu'ile P.P., *Northumberland* (Deborah Taylor, Bernd Krueger).

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) (3/38/5)

1991 — one adult male, 19-21 March, Brighton Bay, *Northumberland* (Steve LaForest, Don Shanahan; found by Gerry Shemilt).

— one adult male, 30 March - 10 April, Port Royal, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Doug McRae, George Wallace; found by Mark Palmer, Paul Prior, Michael Richardson).

— one adult male, 25-30 April, Chippewa Landfill, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott; found by Wally Zarowski).

— one adult male, 5 May, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Mark Kubisz).

— one adult male, 13-26 May, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (David Fewster).

The Moosonee bird is only the second record for the Hudson Bay Lowlands in Ontario, the first having been at Ekwan Point, *Kenora* in 1990.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) (2/6/1)

1991 — one adult, 15 February, Port Hope, *Northumberland* (Ted R. McDonald).

This is the third winter record for Black Vulture in Ontario.

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) (5/6/1)

1991 — one adult, 17-20 May, Point Pelee, *Essex* (Terry Osborne, Graham P. Catley, Lewis Covell, Andy Sims, Moss Taylor, Ken W. Thorpe) - photo on file.

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*) South Only (4/12/3)

1991 — one immature, dark morph, 24 January, Amherst Island, *Addington* (Don Shanahan).

— one immature, gray morph, 16 November 1991 - 8 January 1992, Cranberry Marsh, *Durham* (John J. Barker, Doug Lockrey, Brian Henshaw, Matt Holder).

— one adult, gray morph, 8 December, Ferndale, *Bruce* (Al McTavish).

Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) (0/1/1)

1991 — one, 10 June, Big Creek Marsh, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Richard Knapton).

The second accepted Ontario record. This bird was heard only, but the excellent description of the very distinctive call in typical habitat in calm conditions was completely convincing.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) (* /20/4)

1991 — one adult male, 24 April, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Ron Ridout).

— one adult, 10 May, Point Pelee, *Essex* (Steve Starling).

— one adult, 21 May, Oliphant, *Bruce* (Dave Fidler).

— one adult, 27 May, Point Clark, *Bruce* (Al McTavish).

1990 — one adult, 26 April, North Oliphant, *Bruce* (Peter Middleton).

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) (2/3/1)

1991 — three, 19 May, Mitchell Sewage Lagoons, *Perth* (Erwin and Annie Meissner) - photos on file.

A very nicely documented report of the sixth Ontario record; this is the largest group seen in the province so far.

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) (7/27/3)

1991 — six adults, 26 April, McGeachy Pond, Erieau, *Kent* (Mac McAlpine).

— one adult male, 15 May, Hamilton Harbour, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Bob Curry).

— one adult, 6 June, Longridge Point, James Bay, *Cochrane* (Jacqueline M. Leader, Doug McRae, Robert Tymstra) - photo on file.

The Longridge bird represents the first record for the Hudson Bay Lowlands in Ontario, and the most northeasterly record of this species.

"White-rumped" Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus* group) (0/0/1)

1991 — one, 23 May, Etobicoke, *Peel* (Bob Yukich).

Two of the four races of Whimbrel, *N. p. phaeopus* and *N. p. alboaxillaris*, both Western Palearctic in range, have an unbarred white back and rump (Marchant *et al.* 1987). This bird is in fact a greater rarity in Ontario than the preceding American Avocets. More thorough documentation of identifiable forms such as these will add considerably to our knowledge of their occurrence in the province.

Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) (3/15/3)

1991 — one adult, 29 September, Point Edward, *Lambton* (Dennis Rupert).

— four juveniles, 26 October, Van Wagner's Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Rob Z. Dobos).

— one juvenile, 4 November, Point Edward, *Lambton* (Dennis Rupert).

There was an exceptionally strong jaeger flight throughout the Great Lakes in the fall of 1991, with many observations in Michigan and New York State as well as Ontario (*American Birds*, 1992). Most birds were Parasitics (*S. parasiticus*), but there were also remarkably high numbers of Pomarines. As usual, Sarnia and Hamilton were the places to be. A perhaps understandable reluctance to try to get a report "through the Committee" resulted in far fewer submissions to the OBRC than expected from the sightings one heard about!

Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) (3/8/1)

1991 — one juvenile, 28 October, Van Wagner's Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Verne Evans, John L. Olmsted).

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) (14/52/3)

- 1991 — one adult, 1 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul N. Prior) - photos on file.
 — one adult, 11 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul N. Prior).
 — one second summer, 18 May, Point Pelee, *Essex* (Kevin McLaughlin, Barry Cheriere) - photo on file.

Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) North Only (0/0/1)

- 1991 — one adult, 31 July, Longridge Point, James Bay, *Cochrane* (Bob Curry, Don Shanahan).

This well-studied bird is the first OBRC record for the Hudson Bay Lowlands in Ontario. There is one previous record for which we have no documentation.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*) (0/6/2)

- 1991 — one first winter, 11, 14, 15 March, Pittock Lake, *Oxford* (James M. Holdsworth).
 — one second summer, 9 and 12 May, Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Julian R. Hough).

Two more convincing reports this year continue the almost annual occurrence of this species, for which there were no Ontario records prior to 1981.

White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) (0/0/1)

- 1991 — one adult, 8-12 May, Port Lambton and Sombra Sewage Lagoons, *Lambton* (Rob Tymstra, Allen Chartier, Michael A. Patten) - photos on file; 15-18 May, Big Creek Marsh, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (John Carley, Bev Collier, Mark Palmer; found by Tim Sabo) - photos on file.

The first Ontario record for this beautiful tern. Originally, the reports from the two locations were circulated separately, but the final consensus was that it was most likely that all the reports pertained to the same individual.



Figure 7: The White-winged Tern at Big Creek Marsh, *Haldimand-Norfolk*, seen by many from 15-18 May 1991. Photo by *Mark Palmer*.



Figure 8: Burrowing Owl at Arnprior, *Renfrew* 19-24 April 1991.
Photo by Michael Runtz.

Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) (0/3/1)

1991 — one, 19-24 April, Arnprior, *Renfrew* (Michael Runtz; found by Eric Ridgen) - photos on file.

Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*) (* /1/1)

1991 — one male, 6 May - 10 June, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Michael Richardson; found by Mary Gartshore).

Green Violet-ear (*Colibri thalassinus*) (0/0/1)

1991 — one, 30 June - 3 July, Kakabeka Falls, *Thunder Bay* (David H. Elder, Nicholas G. Escott, Tim Nash; found by Bob Broome) - photos on file.

Not only new to Ontario, but also a new species for Canada, this sensational find rivals even the White-winged Tern and the Black-capped Vireo for bird of the year. The Green Violet-ear is a montane species resident from Mexico south through the highlands of Middle America to eastern Peru and northern Bolivia (AOU 1983). It is considered casual in south Texas, and there are four records from Arkansas and one from North Carolina. The possibility of an escape was examined carefully, but there were no factors making this at all likely.

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) (8/35/2)

1991 — one, 13 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Julian R. Hough).

— one, 21 May, Point Pelee, *Essex* (Frank Baugh, Jon Dunn, Kevin McLaughlin; found by Sue Utterback) - photos on file.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) (3/16/3)

- 1991 — one adult, 1 June, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul Derbyshire).
 — one, 3-13 October, Kincardine, *Bruce* (Alan McTavish, Kayo Roy) - photo on file.
 — one immature, 9, 10 October, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott; found by Alan Wormington) - photos on file.
 — one immature male, 9 October, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott; found by David Shepherd) - photos on file.

The two birds seen together at the Thunder Cape Observatory, and so well photographed, were a most unusual record.

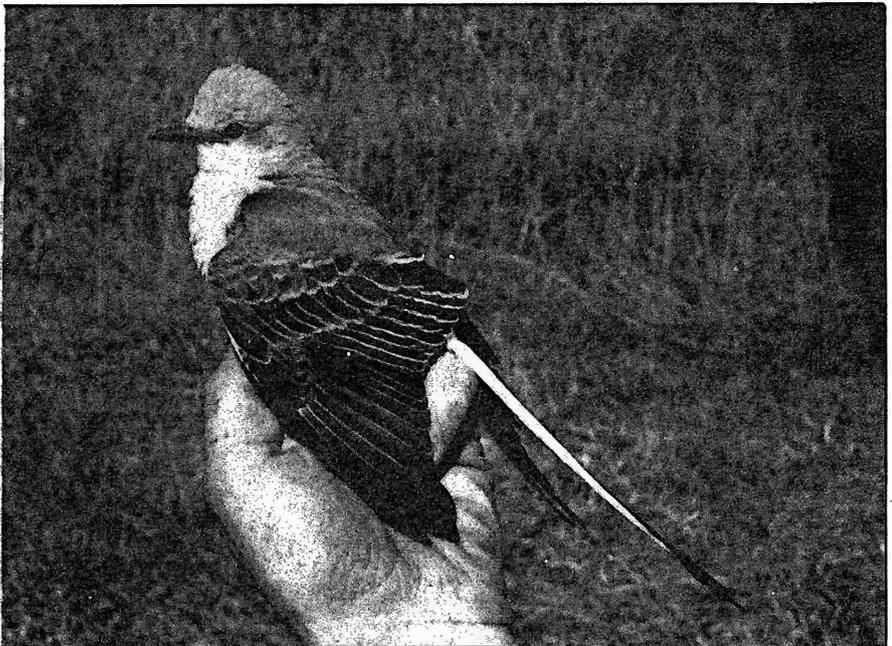


Figure 9: The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher banded at Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* on 9 October 1991. Photo by Nick Escott.

Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) (2/8/2)

- 1991 — one adult male, 7 April, Atikokan, *Rainy River* (Don Graham, Dave Elder) - photos on file.
 — one immature male, 26, 27 September, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (Kevin McLaughlin, Barbara Charlton, Rob Dobos).

Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) (4/12/1)

- 1991 — one, 28 September, Sleeping Giant P.P., *Thunder Bay* (Rob Dobos, Kevin McLaughlin).

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) (5/38/1)

- 1991/92 — one adult male, 6 December - 10 April (not seen for about ten days in January), Boston Mills, *Peel* (Terry Osborne; found by Brian and Gloria Durrell).

Black-capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapillus*) (0/0/1)

1991 — one female, 27 April, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Julian R. Hough) - photo on file.

Another amazing record, and another new species for Ontario and Canada. The Black-capped Vireo is a short distance migrant and considered endangered in its restricted North American breeding range in Oklahoma and southwest Texas, so to find one in a mistnet at Long Point was incredible. For a full description and discussion of the occurrence see Hough (1991).

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) (17/39/4)

1991 — one, *albilora*, 14 April, Port Stanley, *Elgin* (Anne and Marvin Smout).

- one adult, *albilora*, 14 May, Old Cut, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Julian R. Hough) - photo on file.
- one adult, 18 May, Wheatley P.P., *Kent* (Thomas Hurst; found by John Lisek).
- one adult, 27 September, Scarborough, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Mark Pearson).

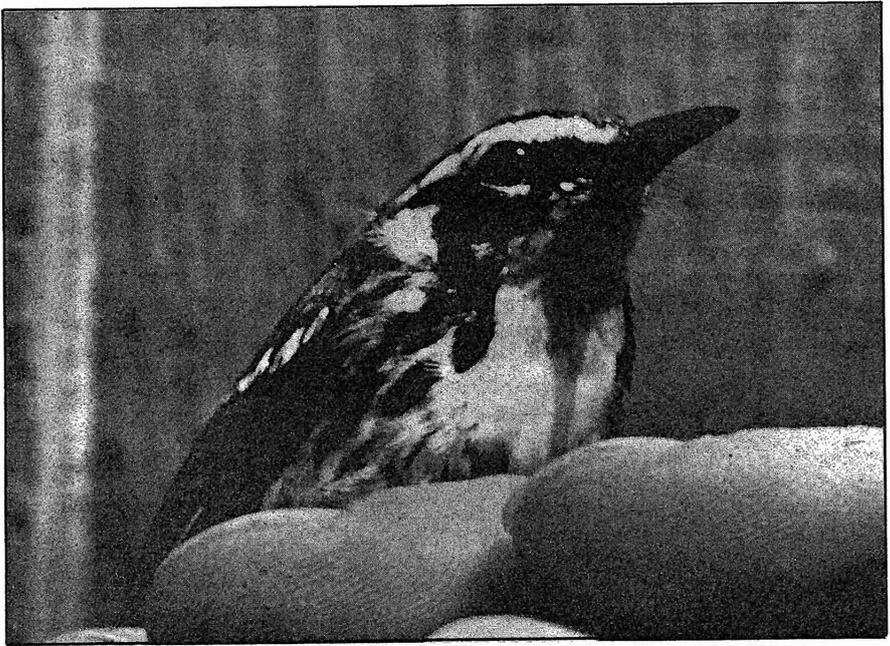


Figure 10: A Yellow-throated Warbler banded at Old Cut, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* on 14 May 1991. Photo by Julian Hough.

Kirtland's Warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) (7/4/1)

1991 — one adult, 22 May, Leslie Street Spit, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Martin McNicholl).

Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) (1/0/1)

1991 — one adult male, 25-28 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (James M. Holdsworth, Jon McCracken, Ron Ridout; found by Denys Gardiner) - photos on file.

This unusually cooperative singing male was a "lifer" for many enthusiastic birders, and an Ontario bird for most who saw it.



Figure 11: Male Swainson's Warbler banded at Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk*, seen and heard by many, from 25-28 May 1991.
Photo by Ron Ridout.

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) North Only (1/14/2)

1990/91 — one adult male, 22 December - 10 May, Chapleau, *Sudbury* (Con Schmidt) - photo on file.

1991 — one adult male, 19 April, Glackmeyer Twp., *Cochrane* (Dan Paleczny; found by Suzanne and Jake Paleczny).

— two (pair), 11 May, Kirkland Lake, *Timiskaming* (Lloyd Taman; found by Vic Nielson).

A series of milder winters may be helping the Northern Cardinal consolidate its northerly range expansion. There have been at least four birds reported from various locations in the north of Ontario each year for the last three years.

Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*) (7/14/3)

1991 — one male, 8 May, Wyevale, *Simcoe* (Bill Zufelt; found by Peter Hough) - photo on file.

— one female, 12 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Michael Richardson) - photo on file.

— one first spring male, 19, 20 May, Kopegaron Woods, Wheatley, *Essex* (Graham P. Catley, John and Victoria Carley, Diane Haselmayer) - photos on file.

An interesting and very well-documented selection of differing individuals of this sometimes misidentified species.



Figure 12: Female Blue Grosbeak banded at Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* on 12 May 1991. Photo by *Michael Richardson*.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) (0/0/1)

1991 — one, 4 June, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Mark J. Palmer, Paul N. Prior) - photos on file.

This bird was thoroughly examined, measured and photographed after being mist-netted. The excellent photographs leave no doubt as to identity. No evidence of wear due to captivity was found. There are now enough established extralimital records to justify this being considered a true vagrant, and the date would be very suitable for a young non-breeding male, as this bird probably was, to be found out of range. Painted Bunting, therefore, finally makes it to the Ontario List. Several previous Ontario records submitted to the Committee are retained on a Deferred List because of concerns about origin, and these may be reviewed at a future date.

Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) North Only (2/5/1)

1991 — one adult male, 23 November - 3 December, Clute Twp., *Cochrane* (John E. Thompson).

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) (4/25/3)

1991 — one, 10 May, Rondeau P.P., *Kent* (Bennett Hennessey).

— one, 20 May, Cobalt, *Timiskaming* (Bruce Murphy) - photo on file.

— one, 2 September, Neys P.P., *Thunder Bay* (Ted Armstrong).

Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) (3/11/0)

1990 — one adult male, 23 June, Greenbank, *Durham* (Stuart Williams).



Figure 13: Painted Bunting banded at Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* on 4 June 1991. Photo by *Mark Palmer*.

Harris' Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) South Only (3/12/2)

1991 — one adult, 8-10 May, Greens Corner, *Haldimand-Norfolk* ([Marcie Jacklin](#)).

— one adult, 11 October, Byng Inlet, *Parry Sound* ([Mark Kubisz](#)).

Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) (0/0/1)

1991 — one winter male, 29 April, Sleeping Giant P.P., *Thunder Bay* ([Nicholas G. Escott](#)).

This well-described bird represents only the third record for Ontario.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) (1/1/2)

1991 — one male, 20 February - 30 March and 11 April, Hamilton Twp., *Northumberland* ([John Geale](#), Nancy Barrett, Jim Coey, Geoff Dale, Sid and Dorothy Hadlington, Steve LaForest, Ted R. McDonald, Don Shanahan) - photos on file.

— one adult male, 4-7 October, Atikokan, *Rainy River* (Dave Elder, Don Graham; found by Jerry Zajac) - video on file.

These are the third and fourth records for Ontario, the first having been at Brampton, *Peel* in 1980, and the second at Atikokan in 1983. A large number of birders saw the cooperative Brambling at the feeder north of Port Hope, but few visited after the end of March, and the bird may well have lingered further into spring than these dates suggest. Dave Elder's excellent video of the Atikokan bird is only the second example of this form of documentation in OBRC files.

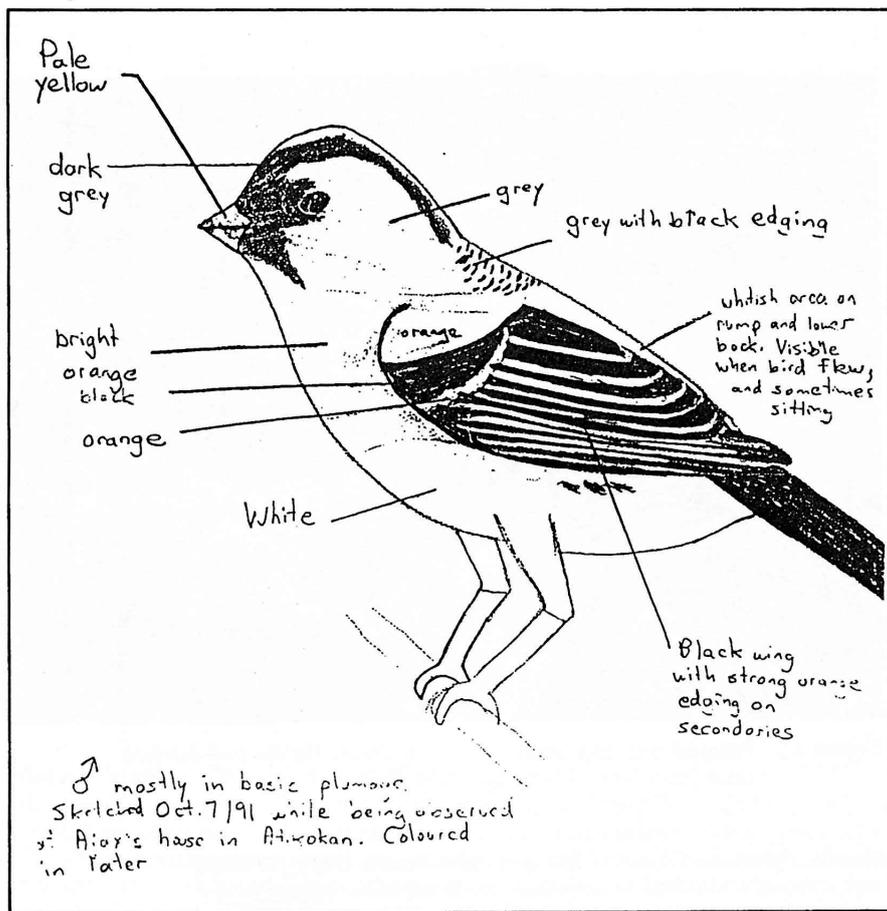


Figure 14: Male Brambling at Atikokan, Rainy River from 4-7 October 1991.
Drawing by Don Graham.

Rosy Finch (*Leucosticte arctoa*) (1/1/0)

1975 — one, January/February (exact dates unknown), Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott; found by the late Howard Quackenbush) - photos on file.

This bird appeared to be of the gray-crowned *tephrocotis* race. James (1991) quotes six other provincial records; there is one other photographic record of *tephrocotis*, and two of the more extensively gray-headed race *littoralis*.

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) North Only (0/0/1)

1991 — one male, 24-29 April and 2 May, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Gordon A Allen, Ted Armstrong) - photos on file.

Unaccepted Records

Identification accepted, origin questionable

Records in this category are those considered by the Committee to be almost certainly escaped birds or birds released from captivity. However, as with all submissions to the OBRC, such records may be reviewed again at any time should further information arise suggesting a wild origin.

Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*) South Only

1991 — one, 8 October, Dorchester, *Middlesex* (Bev Collier).

The Committee's conservative approach to records of this species in southern Ontario continues, and will probably do so until or if there is evidence of a major movement through the province at some time in the future.

Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)

1976 — one, 16 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (David J.T. Hussell) - photos and nape feather on file.

This record had not previously been reviewed by the OBRC, but was circulated together with another current report of this species. This raven is often kept in captivity in the United States (Godfrey 1986) and the described tameness of the bird in question further suggested a captive origin.

Unaccepted Records

Identification uncertain

In most of the records listed below, the description supplied was found to be insufficient to establish with certainty the identity of the species claimed. In very few cases did the Committee consider that the identification was actually erroneous. Again, any of these reports may be resubmitted for further review if some new supporting evidence comes to light.

- 1991 — Pacific Loon, one, 18 November, Highland Glen C.A., *Lambton*
- Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*), one, 24 August, Fort William I.R., *Thunder Bay*.
- Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*), one 11-15 May, Smooth Rock Falls, *Cochrane*.
- Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*), one, 16 May, Point Pelee, *Essex*.
- Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), one, 19 May, Point Pelee, *Essex*.
- Eurasian Wigeon, four, 21 April, Point Pelee, *Essex*.
- Gyrfalcon, one, 3 February, Whitby, *Durham*.
- Piping Plover, one, 10 May, Rondeau P.P., *Kent*.
- Pomarine Jaeger, one, 5 November, Presqu'ile P.P., *Northumberland*.
- Laughing Gull, one, 27 April, Mission Island Marsh, *Thunder Bay*.
- Laughing Gull, one, 11 May, Point Pelee, *Essex*.
- Dovekie (*Alle alle*), one, 12 June, Polar Bear P.P., *Cochrane*.
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, one, 13 May, Point Pelee, *Essex*.

- Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), one, 8 May, Point Pelee, Essex.
 - Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*), one, 19 May, Moose Factory, Cochrane.
 - Swainson's Warbler, one, 9 May, Point Pelee, Essex.
 - Blue Grosbeak, one, 17 May, Point Pelee, Essex.
 - Blue Grosbeak, one, 17-21 May, Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay.
 - Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*), one, 17 May, Point Pelee, Essex.
- 1990 — American White Pelican, one, 15, 16 May, Orangeville Reservoir, Dufferin.
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, one, 22 May, Whitby, Durham.
 - Chihuahuan Raven, one, 19 August, Minaki, Kenora.
- 1986 — Gyrfalcon, one, 24 December, Presqu'île P.P., Northumberland.
- 1985 — Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*), one, 26, 27 July, Long Point, Haldimand-Norfolk.

Corrections/Updates to Previous OBRC Reports

1990 Report (*Ontario Birds* 8: 4-32)

- under Northern Gannet, the last sentence should read "The Moore Point bird is the first fall adult accepted by the OBRC."
- under American White Pelican (1990 at Whitby) add "found by Ian Richardson".
- "Great White-fronted Goose" should read "Greater White-fronted Goose".
- under Greater White-fronted Goose (1990 at Whitby) add "Brian Henshaw" as co-finder submitting documentation.
- under Mew Gull (1990/91 at Toronto) add "Nancy Barrett" as a contributor, as she supplied the photo on file.
- under Western Kingbird (1981 at Long Point), change Roy C. Smith to Roy B.H. Smith.
- under Bewick's Wren (1981 at Long Point), dates should be 7-15 April 1981.
- under Lark Bunting (1990 at Winona) add "found by Alf Epp".
- under Acknowledgements, change Roy C. Smith to Roy B.H. Smith.

Acknowledgements

The OBRC would like to thank the many observers who took the time to compile and submit reports and photographs in 1991. We are especially grateful to those who provided assistance with obtaining reports that were not their own, or information on dates of occurrence, or gave expert opinions in cases of difficult identification problems; they include Barbara Charlton, Rob Dobos,

Nick Escott, Dave Fidler, Mary Ellen Hebb, Brian Henshaw, Alvaro Jaramillo, Steve LaForest, Jon McCracken, Kevin McLaughlin, John Olmsted, Terry Osborne, Michael Patten, J. Van Remsen, Ron Ridout, Don Roberson, Gary Rosenberg, Dave Shepherd and George Wallace.

Many thanks again to Ron Weir for his helpful abstractions from the *American Birds* Seasonal Summaries.

We wish him well in his new editorial position with the *Journal of Chemical Thermodynamics* and look forward to working with his successor, Ron Ridout of Long Point Bird Observatory. Bob Curry most kindly took on the task of preparing the summary numbers accompanying each record, and supplied much advice and encouragement as a previous author of this Report. Doug McRae was a charming Chairman to work for. Thanks to all the 1991 Committee for their comments on reviewing the first draft of this Report. Last but not least, we once again thank Bob Finlayson for making printer-ready the slides and colour prints accompanying the reports.

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Recent extensions of the breeding range of Great Black-backed Gulls (*Larus marinus*) in the Great Lakes of North America

by

P.J. Ewins, H. Blokpoel and J.P. Ludwig

Introduction

The first breeding record of Great Black-backed Gulls (*Larus marinus*) on the Great Lakes was on Lake Huron, in 1954, when a pair bred successfully on Little Haystack Island, just west of the Bruce Peninsula (Krug 1956). However, this may have been an isolated breeding record, since regular nesting is only known to have occurred on two Ontario islands (Pigeon Island and Gull Island), in eastern Lake Ontario during the 1960s and 1970s (Angehrn *et al.* 1979; Peck and James 1983). Lake Ontario remains the stronghold of Great Black-backed Gulls on the Great Lakes today, with Little Galloo Island (New York State) supporting up to 6 pairs annually (Weseloh 1984, and pers. comm.).

Ludwig (1968) predicted that this species seemed "poised at the edge of the Great Lakes for an invasion", but this had not happened by 1979 (Angehrn *et al.* 1979), nor by 1985 (Blokpoel 1987). During the years of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, 1981-85, breeding (always of single pairs) was confirmed at six islands in Lake Ontario and only one in Lake Huron (Blokpoel 1987). Extensive surveys of colonial bird colonies throughout Lake Huron in 1976-77 (USA) and 1980 (Canada) did not find any breeding Great Black-backed

Gulls (Scharf *et al.* 1978; Weseloh *et al.* 1986).

In this paper we report a recent increase in the number of breeding pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls on Lake Huron, which, with an increase in records of summering birds, suggests that the species may finally be starting the 'invasion' of the Great Lakes, which was predicted over 20 years ago.

Observations

Details of the known breeding records in Lake Huron are presented in Table 1. Prior to 1988 there were only two confirmed reports of breeding (assuming that the 1954 nesting involved only one pair), both off the west side of the Bruce Peninsula, Ontario. However, between 1988 and 1991 we recorded 12 confirmed or probable breeding attempts, at eight separate sites (Table 1). Each nesting attempt appeared to involve birds in full adult plumage, only a single pair at each island in a given year, and always on rocky islands also occupied by breeding Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*) and/or Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*). All Great Black-backed Gull nests we found within gull colonies, during ground-based nest counts of the aforementioned species, were at least 3-6 m from the nearest

Table 1: Confirmed and potential breeding records of Great Black-backed Gulls at sites where breeding has been confirmed on Lake Huron. (Site reference numbers refer to locations shown in Figure 1).

Location	Ref. #	Lat./Long.	Source *	Year	Observations
L. Haystack I.	1	44° 46' 18" N 81° 18' 48" W	a	1954	3 adults & 3 chicks.
			e	1989	1 active nest.
Basswood I.	2	44° 45' 42" N 81° 19' 12" W	bc	1983	1 adult and 1 small chick.
			c	1987	1 adult loafing, early July.
			g	1991	1 adult incubating.
Halfmoon I.	6	45° 26' N 81° 28' W	d	1988	Nest with 3 eggs.
			f	1991	Adult and 3rd year, loafing.
Cavalier I.	4	44° 49' N 81° 21' W	e	1989	1 active nest.
Erie Shingle	8	45° 35' N 81° 38' W	f	1990	Pair; alarm behaviour suggests nest (June).
			d	1990	Pair of adults, not alarming (July).
			d	1991	Pair and 1 large chick.
Kokanongwi Shingle	9	45° 56' N 81° 33' W	f	1990	1 adult, alarm behaviour indicating nesting.
			f	1991	1 adult incubating 3 eggs.
Little Saddlebag I.	10	45° 57' N 84° 03' W	f	1990	Pair with at least 1 large chick.
Goose I.	11	45° 55' N 84° 26' W	d	1990	Pair at nest, with hatched egg(s) found.

Note: * a Krug (1956); b Blokpoel (1987); c M. Parker, pers. comm.;
d JPL, pers. obs; e HB, unpubl. data; f PJE, pers. obs.; g HB, pers. obs.

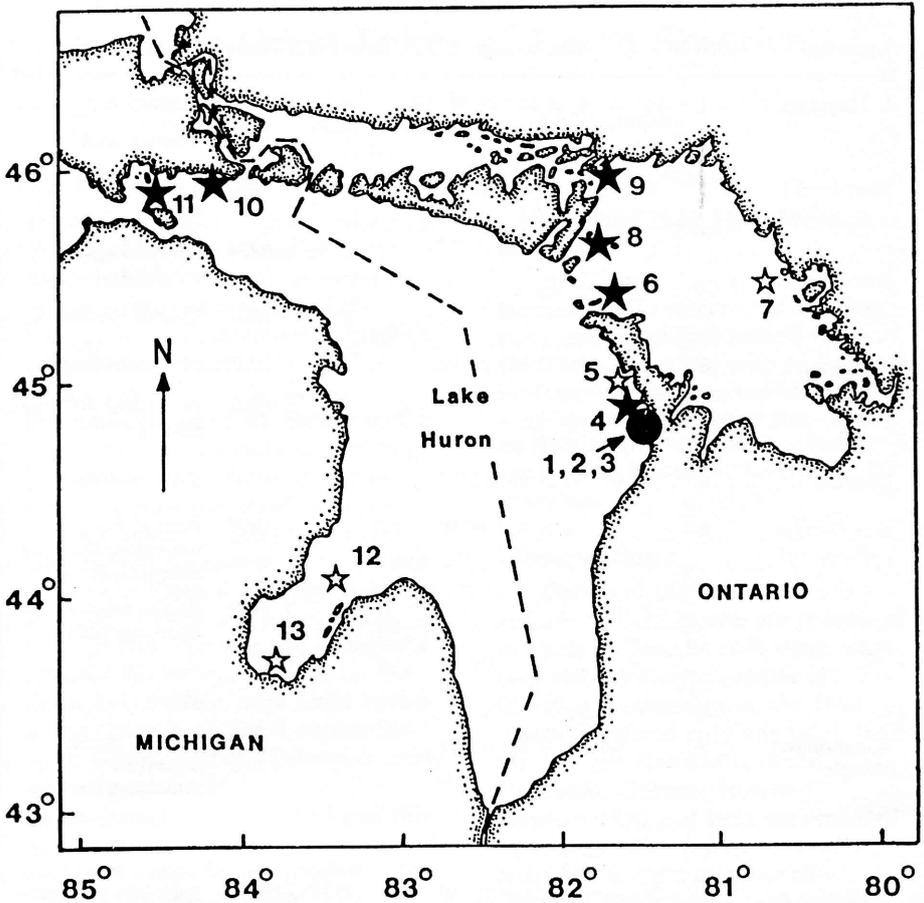


Figure 1: The location of breeding and summering sites of Great Black-backed Gulls on Lake Huron, 1954-91. Filled stars represent nesting locations away from the Basswood I. - Little Haystack I. area (filled circle). Numbers given beside these symbols refer to individual nesting attempts detailed in Tables 1 and 2. Unfilled stars represent other sites at which birds were seen during the breeding season. The dashed line indicates the international boundary.

gull nest. Five of the 12 breeding records in Lake Huron were from the Fishing Islands (numbers 1, 2, 4 and 12 in Table 1 and Figure 1), off Oliphant on the Bruce Peninsula, five were in northwestern Georgian Bay, and two (16%) were in Michigan waters in the extreme northwestern part of Lake Huron (Figure 1).

Breeding was almost certainly attempted in 1990 and 1991 at both Erie Shingle and Kokanongwi Shingle, to the east of Manitoulin Island. However, there was no evidence of breeding at three islands visited in June 1991, 1-2 years after the first breeding record (Cavalier I., Little Saddlebag I. and Goose I.). We did not make regular observations on the Fishing Islands, so it is uncertain whether birds were breeding in the years between those of our breeding observations. However, in the course of other work with colonial waterbirds, two of us (HB and JPL), as well as various Canadian Wildlife Service staff and contractors, have visited many of the aquatic bird colonies in Lake Huron periodically since the mid-1970s, so we believe the increase in numbers of breeding Great Black-backed Gulls to be real, rather than reflecting increased coverage. In summary, since the first breeding record in 1954, there have been a minimum of 11 confirmed or probable breeding attempts on Lake Huron - one in 1983, one in 1988, two in 1989, four in 1990 and three in 1991.

Since 1988, we have also noticed Great Black-backed Gulls loafing during the breeding season, but apparently not breeding, at other islands in Lake Huron (Table 2). Each of these islands supported large colonies of Herring Gulls and Ring-

billed Gulls (Weseloh *et al.* 1986; pers. obs.). Although it is unlikely that the birds in sub-adult or immature plumage had attempted to breed, some of the adults could have been failed breeders (but not necessarily from the islands at which they were seen by us). Others may have been prospecting for suitable breeding sites. At Erie Shingle, a pair of adults were alarm-calling vigorously on a visit in May 1990, but in June the birds were just loafing, indicating that breeding had failed. At Kokanongwi Shingle the nesting attempt in 1990 was unsuccessful, almost certainly due to destruction of the eggs (along with many Herring Gull nests) by humans.

Discussion

These breeding records for Lake Huron represent northward and westward extensions of the breeding range of Great Black-backed Gulls in the Great Lakes. The nesting in 1990 on Goose Island, Michigan, in the Straight of Mackinac, is the most westerly known for this species (Cramp and Simmons 1983; Godfrey 1986). The two pairs nesting in Michigan in 1990 constitute the first breeding record for Great Black-backed Gulls in that U.S. state, but no established breeding site is yet known. It seems that breeding is now fairly regular in Lake Huron, on isolated rocky islands in the Fishing Islands and to the east of Manitoulin Island. The apparent increase in records of summering sub-adults and adults at other potential breeding islands, and the successful breeding of at least some pairs, indicates that this species is now steadily colonizing Lake Huron as a breeding species. We expect that further breeding

locations will be found before the end of the century. We know of no records of Great Black-backed Gulls nesting or summering in either Lake Michigan or Lake Superior. However, a number of gull colonies on islands in both lakes seem to offer similar nesting opportunities to those in Lake Huron or Lake Ontario.

Great Black-backed Gulls have been expanding their breeding range southward along the Atlantic coast of the United States, and the western Atlantic populations seem to have been increasing overall, since at least the 1930s (Mayfield 1946; Peakall 1967; Drury 1973; Brousseau and Chapdelaine 1990). From the mid 1940s to at least 1985 increasing numbers (predominantly adults) have wintered on the lower Great Lakes (Peakall 1967; Angehrn *et al.* 1979;

Dolbeer 1986; D.V. Weseloh, CWS unpubl. data), and more birds are remaining in the Great Lakes until late in the spring (for example, 80 at Long Point, Lake Erie, in mid May 1991 (Weir 1991)). Up to 25 Great Black-backed Gulls now winter at the outfall to the Bruce Nuclear Power Station on the Bruce Peninsula, Lake Huron (M. Parker pers. comm.). Band recoveries during the period 1923-77 indicate that birds wintering on the Great Lakes originate from colonies in the St. Lawrence estuary and Maine (Angehrn *et al.* 1979). There are, as yet, no recoveries of birds on the Great Lakes during the breeding season, so we do not know to what extent continued immigration has been responsible for the recent increases, as opposed to recruitment of birds raised on the Great Lakes.

Table 2: Non-breeding records of Great Black-backed Gulls in summer at potential islands in Lake Huron. Site reference numbers refer to locations shown in Figure 1.

Location	Ref. #	Lat./Long.	Source *	Year	Observations
South Limestone I.	7	45° 23' N 80° 32' W	f	1991	1 adult, not breeding.
Little Charity I.	12	44° 01' N 83° 18' W	d	1991	Pair of adults loafing, May 27.
Channel-Shelter I.	13	43° 40' N 83° 49' W	f	1991	2nd year bird, loafing.
Warren I.	5	44° 47' N 81° 20' W	g	1991	Adult & Immature loafing, no nest seen.
Chimney Reef	3	44° 51' N 81° 20' W	g	1991	2 sub-adults, not breeding.

Note: * d JPL, pers. obs.; f PJE, pers. obs.; g HB, pers. obs.

There have been recent increases in Great Black-backed Gull breeding numbers in Quebec (Chapdelaine and Brousseau 1991; Ladouceur 1991), and colonization of new sites at inland lakes in Vermont (Lake Champlain, M. La Barr pers. comm.), in upper New York State (Meade 1988), and even into the Northwest Territories (Cooch 1977), so the Lake Huron increases seem to be part of general increases away from the Atlantic coast. Numbers breeding on Lake Ontario have increased only slightly over the last 5-6 years (D.V. Weseloh, pers. comm.; pers. obs.), possibly due to the relative scarcity of islands supporting aquatic bird colonies which do not already have breeding Great Black-backed Gulls. However, regular observations in 1991 in the vicinity of gull and tern colonies at Leslie Street Spit, Toronto, indicated that at least 2 adults summered in that area, and breeding is a possibility in future years. By mid August, 1991, up to 16 adults and four sub-adults frequented the Leslie Street Spit area (M.K. McNicholl, unpubl. data).

During the breeding season Great Black-backed Gulls regularly eat fish, carrion, mammals, and eggs, chicks and adults of a variety of colonial larids and other bird species (Cramp and Simmons 1983). On the Great Lakes their breeding territories are often littered with remains of Ring-billed Gulls, both young and adults (pers. obs.), indicating that gulls form an important part of the diet. On Lake Champlain large numbers of Ring-billed Gull eggs are taken at dusk by Great Black-backed Gulls (M. LaBarr pers. comm.). Thus, given the abundance of gull colonies in Lake Huron (Weseloh *et al.* 1986),

why have Great Black-backed Gulls taken so long to 'invade' these areas?

In the Western Palearctic, climatic amelioration has been proposed as one possible explanation for range expansions of Great Black-backed Gulls in some areas (Cramp and Simmons 1983). This factor could have played some part in the overall changes seen in northeastern North America. Another possible explanation for the delayed colonization of Lake Huron is that the founding birds in 1954 nested only once, then vacated the area. Subsequent colonization of one or more pairs in 1983 could have produced recruits into the breeding population from 1987 onwards, since first breeding is usually at 4-5 years old (Cramp and Simmons 1983). Voous (1960) suggested that the Great Black-backed Gull was fundamentally a marine species, and in some way it could be poorly adapted for an inland, freshwater lifestyle. Inland nesting is not infrequent in the Western Palearctic, and breeding birds do forage at inland gull colonies and in agricultural areas in Scotland (PJE, pers. obs.). However, large numbers of nests do not normally occur more than a few miles from the coast (Cramp and Simmons 1983; Lloyd *et al.* 1991). Presumably it is the availability of food, rather than nest-sites, which is the key determinant of breeding distribution in most parts of the range.

Another important factor may have been the presence of toxic contaminants in the Great Lakes ecosystem. Since Great Black-backed Gulls are near the top of the food web, and appear to consume substantial quantities of other gulls

and their eggs on the Great Lakes, one would expect them to have accumulated higher contaminant levels than either Herring or Ring-billed Gulls (which feed more on fish and invertebrates in summer). This is due to a phenomenon known as biomagnification, whereby lipophilic contaminants are concentrated at successively higher trophic levels in the food web. During the 1960s and 1970s most piscivorous birds inhabiting the Great Lakes accumulated high levels of a suite of organochlorine contaminants, often associated with reproductive failures, egg breakage, embryonic mortality, congenital abnormalities and chick edema disease [Fox *et al.* 1991]. Levels of most contaminants declined markedly during the 1980s in most aquatic birds studied and reproductive success improved (Government of Canada 1991; Bishop *et al.* in prep.). However, another predator at the top of the food web, the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) still appears to experience reduced breeding output at nests along the Great Lakes shorelines, compared with nests further inland [Bowerman *et al.* 1991].

Even though there are no data on contaminant residues in Great Black-backed Gulls or their eggs on the Great Lakes, elevated levels in eggs and body tissues during the 1960s and 1970s must have occurred. In that period reproduction could have been impaired, and productivity rendered insufficient to balance adult mortality, let alone fuel further colonization of the Great Lakes. The lower contaminant levels of the 1980s may have permitted more successful breeding, and improved adult

survival, and some of the young produced could have survived to settle as breeders at new sites in Lake Huron. Clearly, banding of young reared on the Great Lakes will help our understanding of the importance of any continued immigration to the current increases on Lake Huron.

Acknowledgements

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Recognizable Forms

Subspecies and Morphs of the Snow Goose

by
Ron Pittaway

Introduction

The Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*) has two distinct subspecies: the nominate Lesser Snow Goose (*C.c. caerulescens*) and the Greater Snow Goose (*C.c. atlanticus*). The two subspecies differ in their distribution, size, structure and weight, and each occurs in two distinct colour morphs (phases). The blue morph is common in the Lesser subspecies, but rare in the Greater subspecies (Godfrey 1986). The two morphs were once considered separate species — the Snow Goose and the Blue Goose (A.O.U. 1957).

The Greater and Lesser Snow Goose subspecies can often be identified in the field if one knows all the differences in their distribution, morphs, size and structure.

This note first outlines important information about the distribution, populations, and identification of the two subspecies in Ontario. Secondly, it describes the historical changes in the distribution and populations of the two morphs. Thirdly, it explains the fascinating genetic and behavioral differences between the two morphs.

Lesser Snow Goose

The Lesser Snow Goose subspecies is the normally encountered race in most of Ontario, except in eastern Ontario east of Ottawa where increasing numbers of

Greater Snow Geese have occurred in recent years. The Lesser Snow Goose breeds in the low Arctic (south and west of the Greater Snow Goose) south along the Ontario coasts of Hudson Bay and James Bay (Godfrey 1986). In Ontario populations, the blue morph is more common than the white morph. For example, the blue morph constitutes 70 to 75% of the breeders at Cape Henrietta Maria (Lumsden in Cadman *et al* 1987). Large numbers of Lesser Snow Geese stage in southern James Bay. Most of the James Bay populations migrate west of southern Ontario, but small numbers are seen in the south.

Usually the blue morph predominates among migrant Lesser Snow Geese seen in southern Ontario. Since the blue morph is rare in the Greater subspecies, a mixed flock having a high percentage of blue morph birds can be identified confidently as Lesser Snow Geese. In addition, Lesser Snow Geese are noticeably smaller in comparison with the two large races of the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis interior* and *B.c. maxima*) found in southern Ontario, whereas Greater Snow Geese appear almost as big.

Greater Snow Goose

This larger eastern subspecies breeds in the Canadian eastern high Arctic and northern Greenland, and

winters along the Atlantic coast of the United States. Historically, the entire population staged in spring and fall along the St. Lawrence River near Quebec City (Godfrey 1986). In 1900, the population of Greater Snow Geese staging along the St. Lawrence was estimated to be 2-3,000 (Bellrose 1976). Greater Snow Geese have been increasing rapidly in recent years, with an estimated population of 356,000 along the St. Lawrence River in the spring of 1991 including 137,000 at Lac St. Pierre, approximately 100 kilometres down-river from Montreal where they were uncommon a decade ago (Yank *et al*, 1991). The population staging along the St. Lawrence River in the fall of 1991 was estimated at 500,000! (Yves Aubry, pers. comm.). Henri Ouellet (pers. comm.) of the Canadian Museum of Nature reports that Greater Snow Geese are now being seen in numbers near Montreal. This recent spread of Greater Snow Geese may be due to an increase in their food resources. They are using croplands more now which means that the population can increase and expand in distribution.

The Greater Snow Goose was not listed for Ontario by James (1991). However, the rapidly expanding numbers of Greater Snow Geese close to the provincial border suggested that they should be occurring in eastern Ontario. The first reported evidence of the Greater subspecies in Ontario was documented in the spring of 1986 when birds photographed by Bruce DiLabio (pers. comm.) east of Ottawa at Riceville, Prescott County, were identified as Greater Snow Geese by Graham Cooch of the Canadian Wildlife Service. Bruce DiLabio (pers.

comm.) reports that Greater Snow Geese now occur annually in eastern Ontario. He observed over 2,000 Greater Snow Geese at Riceville on 31 March 1991 and over 2,400 Greater Snow Geese at Bourget, Russell County, on 3 April 1991. The above flocks were more than 99% white morph birds. Some of the blue morph birds observed with the above flocks were the same size as the white morph Greater Snow Geese indicating the occurrence of blue morph Greater Snow Geese in Ontario (Bruce DiLabio, pers. comm.).

Smaller numbers of Greater Snow Geese also occur in fall. For example, Bruce DiLabio (pers. comm.) observed 11 Greater Snow Geese with a flock of Canada Geese on 3 November 1991 near Cornwall. One of the above Greater Snow Geese had been neck banded in Delaware on 8 November 1990.

Greater Snow Geese may be occurring occasionally farther west in Ontario. A flock of 40 white morph birds observed on 29 March 1991 near Lake Scugog in Durham Region could have been Greater Snow Geese (Bain and Henshaw 1992). Commenting on the above observation, Paul Prevett (pers. comm.) of the Ministry of Natural Resources stated that "there was a high probability that a flock of 40 white morph birds at this location was Greater Snow Geese".

Since the blue morph is rare in the Greater subspecies and common in the Ontario population of the Lesser Snow Goose, any large flock of all white morph birds seen in eastern Ontario almost certainly involves Greater Snow Geese. In addition,

Snow Geese often can be identified to subspecies in direct comparison with the large races of the Canada Goose. Greater Snow Geese are chunkier and thicker necked than Lesser Snow Geese and appear almost as big as large Canada Geese. Lesser Snow Geese are always somewhat smaller than large Canada Geese. In summary, as noted by J.R. Forster (*in Bent 1925*), "the measurements of the greater snow goose do not well illustrate its real superiority in size; it is a much heavier bird than its western relative, with a much more stocky build, thicker neck, and larger head. It is generally recognizable at a glance in the flesh." In the past, the Greater Snow Goose and the Lesser Snow Goose were largely isolated from one another. Recently, their ranges have begun to overlap. The two subspecies may become blurred by more intermediate-sized birds (intergrades) in the future.

Morph Taxonomy

The Snow Goose and Blue Goose were originally believed to be distinct species. This view lasted for a long time because of the very different appearance of the two forms. Also, no mixed pairs were reported when Blue Geese were first discovered breeding in the Arctic in 1929 (Soper 1930). At that time, the Snow Goose and Blue Goose had allopatric (separate) breeding and wintering ranges, and they appeared to be distinct species. In fact, Cooke (1988) reported that the Snow Goose and Blue Goose may have been separate since the last ice age and began to interbreed 40 to 80 years ago, probably because of human alterations in their winter habitat that brought the two forms together.

The taxonomic status of the Snow Goose and Blue Goose remained confused for some time. Manning *et al* (1956) preferred to consider three subspecies: Greater Snow Goose, Lesser Snow Goose and Blue Goose. Following studies of breeding colonies with mixed pairs, Cooch (1961) proposed that the Blue Goose was a colour morph of the Lesser Snow Goose. The American Ornithologists' Union (1973) subsequently lumped the two forms as colour morphs.

There continues to be a gradual mixing of the two morphs on the breeding and wintering grounds. The first blue morph Greater Snow Geese were reported in 1973 (Palmer 1976), suggesting interbreeding (gene flow) between blue morph Lesser Snow Geese and Greater Snow Geese. Except for the size difference, the blue morph is identical in both subspecies. The blue morph appears to be increasing in the Greater Snow Goose. Nevertheless, it currently constitutes less than one percent of the populations moulting on Bylot Island, NWT or staging along the St. Lawrence in Quebec (Yves Aubry, pers. comm.).

Morph Genetics

The plumage colour of the Snow Goose is controlled by a single gene. This gene has two forms called alleles. A blue morph has two dominant blue alleles, one from each parent. Similarly, a white morph bird has two recessive white alleles. A pair of white morphs will produce only white offspring, and a pair of blue morphs only blue offspring. However, when a white morph crosses with a blue morph, the offspring inherit both a white allele

and a blue allele for plumage colour. Since the blue allele is incompletely dominant over the recessive white allele, the offspring of a cross are more like a blue morph but with varying amounts of white on the belly. Excellent illustrations of the intermediate or white-bellied morph are found on plate 10 in *The Birds of Canada* (Godfrey 1986) and on page 65 in the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (Scott 1987).

Interestingly, the offspring produced by a pair of white-bellied morphs (intermediate morphs) will occur in the ratio of two intermediates to one white to one blue morph. The reason that pure white or pure blue morphs can result from a pair of intermediates is because each intermediate carries alleles for both white and blue plumage. Each intermediate passes on only one allele (white or blue) for plumage colour to each offspring. Therefore, if the offspring inherits a white allele from each parent then it will be a white morph, and so on. The above situation is similar to a blue-eyed child being born to brown-eyed parents where the child inherits two recessive alleles for blue eyes, one from each parent. The offspring of an intermediate morph and a white morph will occur in a ratio of one intermediate to one white. Similarly, the offspring of an intermediate and a blue will also occur in a one-to-one ratio.

In the *Checklist of Recognizable Ontario Bird Forms* (Pittaway 1991), the intermediate morphs were listed as the "white x blue morph" which implied that this form was the result only of a mixed white and blue pair.

Since intermediates can result from other combinations of morphs as well, I now prefer to call this form the "white-bellied morph".

Morph Behaviour

In mixed colonies, both morphs usually pair selectively with geese of the same plumage colour as themselves. The principal force controlling mate selection appears to be family colour, with most young geese later choosing mates of the same colour as their parents and siblings (Cooke 1988). Enough mixed pairs occur to prevent the two morphs from becoming separate species. The frequency of mixed pairs is around 15% (Cooke 1988). The offspring of a mixed pair may choose a mate of either colour. One of the reasons that mixed pairs occur is the habit Snow Geese have of laying their eggs in other Snow Goose nests. For example, if the female of a blue pair lays an egg in a white pair's nest, the young blue morph will be imprinted on a white family. As an adult, it will most likely choose a white mate. Neither morph appears to have a survival advantage over the other. Mixed pairs and their intermediate offspring also show no reduction in reproductive success.

Conclusion

The next time that you observe Snow Geese, it is my hope that a knowledge of their subspecies, morphs, genetics, ecology and behaviour will make your birding that much more enjoyable.

Acknowledgements

It would be impossible to write about Snow Geese or other recognizable

forms without consulting with many knowledgeable individuals. I wish to thank Yves Aubry, Fred Cooke, Bill Crins, Bruce DiLabio, Cendrine Huemer, Chris Lemieux, Rory MacKay, Henri Ouellet, Richard Poulin, Paul Prevett, Ken Ross, Ron Tozer and Mike Turner for their valuable help.

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Notes

Snow Bathing Proves Fatal For An American Goldfinch

by
Al Sandilands

Early on the morning of 30 December 1989, I observed an American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) flopping around in the snow of our yard. This behaviour continued for over a minute, and I assumed that the bird was injured. When it sat up normally and then flew away, I realized that it had been bathing in the snow. Its actions were similar to Method 1 of water bathing as described by Slessers (1970).

Snow bathing appears to be a relatively rare behaviour of birds. In the six winters that a feeder has been maintained at this site, it has been visited daily by 20 to 80 goldfinches, and snow bathing was only observed on this one date. Furness and Peterson (1987) reported snow bathing and construction of snow burrows by Common Redpolls (*Carduelis flammea*). Bathing in this instance occurred simultaneously by two dozen redpolls out of a flock of about 150. Clement (1968) reported one other incidence of redpolls snow bathing. Hooper (1984, 1986) reported snow bathing by Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*), a Boreal Chickadee (*Parus hudsonicus*) and House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), and Hopkins (1987, 1989) observed ravens and an American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) snow bathing.

There are numerous accounts of passerine birds burrowing in snow, and McNicholl (1987) gave a good summary of records. This usually occurs during harsh weather, with birds attempting to escape the elements or find food under the snow. Species most frequently recorded burrowing are American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*), Common Redpoll (Cade 1953), Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*), and Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*). Winter bathing in open water is also a relatively frequent occurrence (Slessers 1970, Welty 1982, Ehrlich *et al.* 1988).

The above records, however, were the only ones I could find on snow bathing. The smaller passerines bath by flapping their wings and rolling about in the snow as if it were water. The corvids flatten themselves in the snow and plough through it, propelling themselves with their wings.

Later that afternoon, another, or possibly the same, goldfinch was seen snow bathing in the same spot. As I was watching through binoculars, an American Crow that was under the feeder suddenly flew the 15 m to the goldfinch and pounced on it as it flapped in the snow. The crow landed

on it with its feet and immediately killed it with its beak. After pecking at the goldfinch for about 15 seconds, the crow flew with it to a tree about 30 m away and completely consumed it in approximately eight minutes.

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Photo Quiz

by
Doug McRae

Answer to Photo Quiz in *Ontario Birds* 10 (1): **Northern Mockingbird**.

This Northern Mockingbird should not present too many problems, unless you were looking for a trick. The most diagnostic feature -- the white wing patch -- is clearly visible in this photo and eliminates most other possibilities. Shrikes, which also show a similar wing patch, would have a much heavier bill and stronger black masks.

Had the wing patch been hidden, there are still some other features visible which could be helpful in identifying this bird. The white outer tail feathers are easily seen in this shot from below, and the thin pointed bill can also be seen.

There is nothing in this photograph to give a sense of relative scale and this can throw an observer off from time to time. To my eye, this bird appears smaller than a Mockingbird should and, because the

belly feathers are fluffed out, the bird looks fatter than most Mockingbirds. If these two things gave you trouble, you might start looking for other possibilities. The thin bill might suggest a warbler (Black-throated Blue being the only one with a similar wing patch), but the tail is too long. Another possible bird for confusion would be a Gnatcatcher, but the lack of an eyering on this bird and the presence of the wing patch

rule out this species too. Besides, in the field the larger size of the Mockingbird would be apparent.

In Ontario, this bird is a "normal" sight only in the greater Niagara peninsula region, but can be found almost anywhere in the province. Our next bird is a classic identification challenge, especially for those who haven't had the chance to study this group before.



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In Memoriam:

Otto Edmund Devitt (1904-1992)

by Gerry Bennett

One of Ontario's best informed and most respected naturalists passed away in Richmond Hill's York Central Hospital, 20 January 1992, after a lengthy illness.

Ott, as he was best known to his colleagues and friends, grew up in the Stayner/Wasaga sector of Ontario's Simcoe County. Here, as a boy of 10, he began studying and recording the various phases of Natural History. Although he lived most of his life in the Toronto/Richmond Hill area, he always maintained a prime interest in his original surroundings. He became an acknowledged expert on the ecology of Simcoe County, both botanically and zoologically.

Ott was a Pharmacist by profession. For years, he was on staff at the T. Eaton Co., Ltd. store in downtown Toronto as a dispensing chemist. But, his desire to be constantly involved in the milieu of Biology resulted in a switch in vocations. In the early 1950's, Ott traded his Pharmacy career for a position with Ontario's Department of Lands and Forests -- now known as the Ministry of Natural Resources. His new duties found him in charge of the Fish and Wildlife library at the Ministry's District Office in Maple, Ontario. He performed these duties with dedication and efficiency until his retirement in the 1970's.

Ott married Mary MacKay who was also a self-taught expert on the flora and fauna of the Peel/York sector of Ontario. Throughout their active lives, "The Devitts", as they were widely known, were held in high regard by other naturalists who admired their ardour, and envied their wide and profound ranges of knowledge. Mary died 20 January 1991, exactly one year prior to Ott's passing.

Limited space prevents us from a complete review of Ott's many interests and achievements. His observations extended over a span of seven decades. His activities included those of diarist, collector, photographer, speaker, ornithologist, and botanist. He produced more than 70 articles embracing a wide range of topics. One of these was *The Birds of Simcoe County*, originally published in 1943, with a revised edition sponsored by the Brereton Field Naturalists in 1967. He had a special interest in Michigan's Kirtland's Warbler, and presented a paper on this species to the Toronto Ornithological Club. He was the first local naturalist to find and photograph the nest of the Yellow Rail. He had found the nest himself in the Holland Marsh, just east of Bradford. He photographed almost every species of fern and orchid in Ontario.

Somehow, in addition to time and energy devoted to field studies relating to Biology, he was able to indulge a strong interest in Archaeology, constantly exploring eroded hillsides and newly-ploughed fields in search of relics. He built up a fine collection of flints and other artifacts. This avocation included an intense interest in the petroglyphs of Petroglyphs Provincial Park in Peterborough County.

Ott was a founding member of the Toronto Ornithological Club. Various other associations included membership in the Toronto Field Naturalists, the Brodie Club, and the Richmond Hill Naturalists.

Following a brief service at Richmond Hill's Marshall Funeral Home on 22 January, Ott's remains were returned to his native corner of Simcoe County for interment in the Stayner Cemetery.

Gerry Bennett, R.R. 2, 10780 Pine Valley Drive, Woodbridge, Ontario L4L 1A6

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 L7R 4K2.

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