ONTARIO BIRDS

The Journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists
Volume 12 Number 2 August 1994

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. Current President: Gerry Shemilt, 51 Montressor Drive, North York, Ontario M2P 1Z3.

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 $22.00 (Annual) or $400.00 (Life Membership). All members receive *Ontario Birds*. Please send memberships to: **Ontario Field Ornithologists, Box 62014, Burlington Mall Postal Outlet, Burlington, Ontario L7R 4K2.**

Ontario Birds

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The aim of *Ontario Birds* is to provide a vehicle for documentation of the birds of Ontario. We encourage the submission of full length articles and short notes on the status, distribution, identification, and behaviour of birds in Ontario, as well as location guides to significant Ontario birdwatching areas, book reviews, and similar material of interest on Ontario birds.

If possible, material submitted for publication should be double-spaced and typewritten. All submissions are subject to review and editing. Please submit items for publication to the Editors at the address noted above.

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Articles

Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 1993

by
Margaret Bain

This is the twelfth annual report of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) of the Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO). A total of 122 records was reviewed by the Committee in 1993. Of these, 109 (90%) were accepted, two were deferred awaiting further information, two were accorded Historical status, and 9 were not accepted.

Continuing the remarkable trend of rapid expansion of the Ontario list, four new species were added in 1993: Garganey, Marbled Murrelet, Dusky Flycatcher and Variegated Flycatcher, bringing the provincial total to 458. The Variegated Flycatcher was also a first for Canada. No new provincial breeding species were added in 1993.

Members of the OBRC in 1993 were Ronald J. Pittaway (Chairman), Margaret J. C. Bain (non-voting Secretary), Robert Curry, Nicholas G. Escott, Ross D. James, Richard W. Knapton, Dennis F. Rupert and Ronald G. Tozer (Figure 1). The Committee held two meetings in 1993, a Policy meeting in November and a March meeting to review records requiring final adjudication.

Almost 50 fewer reports were received in 1993 than in the previous year. This was mainly due, unfortunately, to the lack of the usual spring reports forwarded by Point Pelee National Park. We very much hope that these reports will be forthcoming in the near future. Ironically, the fewer reports from visitors to Point Pelee have resulted in fewer unaccepted records, and a gratifying percentage of acceptances! The Committee was very pleased with the generally excellent level of reporting of rarities, especially the fact that several observers often took the time to send in independent reports or photographs of the same bird, giving a much more complete and detailed record. Interest is growing in subspecific identification, and many reports made a conscious effort to document a recognizable form or subspecies. Only two reports, both Lawrence's Warblers, related directly to the Recognizable Forms added to the Review List in 1992.

All Committee members cooperated in researching the reported occurrences between 1988 and 1992 inclusive, in both northern and southern Ontario, of 15 species that were deemed to be close to the OBRC criteria for removal from the Review List, i.e. more than 25 accepted reports in the province in a space of five years. After lengthy discussions at the March meeting, seven of these species were removed from the Review List for southern

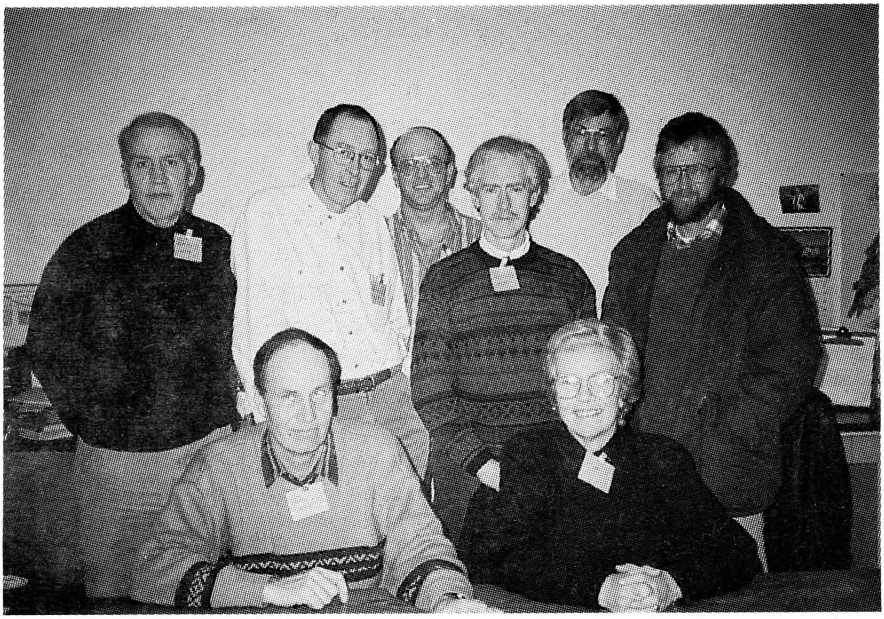

Figure 1: Ontario Bird Records Committee in the Bird Room, Royal Ontario Museum, 5 March 1994. Left to right: Dennis Rupert, Ron Tozer, Bob Curry, Ron Pittaway, Nick Escott, Margaret Bain, Ross James, and Richard Knapton.

Ontario, but none from the north. The seven species so designated were: American White Pelican, Eurasian Wigeon, Gyrfalcon, Pomarine Jaeger, Laughing Gull, Varied Thrush and Yellow-throated Warbler. (Documentation for American White Pelican and Gyrfalcon was not required from northern Ontario in the old Review List in any case.) This change is effective from 1 January 1994, but records prior to this date will still require documentation and will continue to be published in the Annual Report. Obvious problems exist in Northern Ontario where there are very few birders in a vast amount of often inaccessible territory. Birds which are seen fairly regularly, such as Western Kingbird and Varied Thrush, are reported infrequently. Development of a separate set of criteria for the North will be a point for future discussion.

Ross James has produced the amended Review List included with this issue of Ontario Birds. The new List also incorporates the changes to the American Ornithologists' Union (A.O.U.) Check-list of North American Birds as put forward in the Thirty-ninth supplement (1993). Ross's Geese, Lewis's Woodpeckers and Harris's Sparrows are suddenly easier to talk about!

Thanks go to all the observers across the province who took the time to document and submit their observations of birds on the Review

List. All these reports, whether accepted or not, are deposited in the Ornithology Department of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. The votes and remarks of Committee members are attached to all the reports, and may be reviewed on request to Ross James at the ROM.

The format of this report follows that used in the OBRC Report for 1992 (Bain 1993). For each record, information on age, sex and plumage is included, where 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, 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.

For the first time, a listing of Historical Records follows the catalogue of Accepted Records in this Report. This category includes records occurring before 1981, which have been previously published, but which do not meet current documentation requirements. Its aim is to augment and make more complete our database of rare birds in Ontario. There are only two records in this section this year - it is hoped that many more observers will submit notes, however brief, on old records that fulfill these criteria (Curry 1993). Work is also ongoing on a review of the ornithological literature prior to 1981 for appropriate records.

Discussion took place at the Policy meeting regarding the summary numbers used in this report. It was said that many readers of the report find the tripartite number, based on the system used in *British Birds* (Rogers 1988), difficult to understand. Most of those present felt that the system was a worthwhile measure of changing status, but modifications were suggested. A two-number system will now be used, with the FIRST number a total of all pre-1981 records, including Historical records, and the SECOND number a total of all records since 1 January 1981. The third number was felt to be self-evident, as it is easy to see how many records there are for the current year.

Every effort is made to verify dates, locations and observers' names, but our data are bound to include some inaccuracies. We welcome any corrections or updates to make records more exact. Where dates or other details in original reports differ from those quoted in other sources, for example the *American Birds* Seasonal Summaries, we have used the information which seems most accurate from our own documentation.

Accepted Records

Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) South Only (3/12)

1993 — one summer adult, 4 May, Petticoat Creek C.A., *Durham* (Matthew L. Holder, Margaret Bain).

This silvery-headed adult was the sixth record for Durham.

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) (0/6)

1993 — one, 21-24 November, Hamilton Bay, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Bob Curry).

This corner at the west end of Hamilton Bay, overlooked by the Woodland Cemetery, may be a favourite for Western Grebes - one was seen in the same spot in April 1989.

Grebe (*Aechmophorus sp.*) (1/3)

1993 — one, 11 October, Wicklow Beach, *Northumberland* (Clive E. Goodwin).

Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) (3/5)

1992 — one, 30 November, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Bryan Merritt, Doug McRae; found by Redfern Whiskeychan) - photo on file. Specimen: ROM # 157559.

This emaciated bird was brought in to the Ministry of Natural Resources in Moosonee, beyond recovery (Merritt 1993).

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) (2/11)

1993 — one, sometimes two, juveniles, Van Wagner's Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth*, Whitby, *Durham*, and Niagara-on-the-Lake, *Niagara*, 25 October - 17 December (John L. Olmsted, Rob Z. Dobos, Margaret Bain, Gordon Bellerby, Brian Henshaw, Phill Holder, Jim Hummel, Rudolf F. Koes; found independently at Whitby by George Scott).

As usual, it is difficult to be certain that all the gannet sightings at the west end of Lake Ontario in the fall of 1993 pertained to the same two juveniles, but all the descriptions were so very similar and the distances between the locations where the birds were seen so small in gannet-terms, that it was decided to treat all the reports as pertaining to the same birds.

Since Northern Gannets do not begin their post-juvenile moult until, at the earliest, the March following the year they were hatched (Palmer 1962), the very dark overall appearance of these birds was still their juvenile plumage.

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) South Only (2/30)

1992 — one, 17 August, Sarnia, *Lambton* (Gerry Clements, Art Teasel) - photo on file.

This is one of the seven species removed from the Review List in 1994. The numbers of American White Pelicans in southern Ontario have increased slowly but steadily in the last few years, and now exceed the OBRC criteria for a reportable species. Records prior to 1 January 1994 still require documentation, and will still be published in the Annual Report.

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) (North Only until 1991) (1/14)

1992 — one immature, 11-23 August, McGeachy's Pond, Erieau, *Kent* (P. Allen Woodliffe) - photo on file.

1991 — one immature, 8-18 September, Rondeau P.P., *Kent* (P. Allen Woodliffe) - photo on file.

Numbers of Snowy Egrets in the province continue to fluctuate greatly. 1992 was a good year, with seven reports of a total of 13 birds, including this one; no reports were received for 1993, although a couple of sightings were mentioned in the *American Birds* Seasonal Summary (Ridout 1993).

Figure 2: Snowy Egret at McGeachy's Pond, Erieau, *Kent* from 11 to 23 August 1992. Photo by *Al Woodliffe*.

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) (7/21)

1993 — one adult, 5 May -29 June, Big Creek Marsh, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Ron Ridout).

1992 — one adult, 21 and 22 April, La Salle, *Essex* (Hank Hunt, Paul Pratt; found by Charles Wilson) - photos on file.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) (5/18)

1993 — one summer adult, 16-22 May, Cootes Paradise, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Bruce Duncan).

This bird was often hard to find, but was seen by many birders during its stay.

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) (2/18)

1993 — one adult, 10 and 11 June, Cranberry Marsh, *Durham* (Betty Ariss, Margaret Bain).

— one adult, 1-15 November, Gosport, *Northumberland* (Don Shanahan).

Ibis (*Plegadis sp.*) (3/13)

1993 — one winter adult, 7 November, Bronte, *Halton* (Mark Jennings) and Hamilton Bay, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Bob Curry).

With the hope of a first acceptable record of White-faced Ibis (*P. chihi*) for the province, great care is going into the documentation of most dark ibises, some of which are bound to be seen in lighting conditions precluding specific identification.

Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) South Only (2/27)

1993 — two adults, 27 March, Silver Lake, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Edward Czerwinski).

— two adult *flavirostris*, 4 April, Waterloo, *Waterloo* (Rob Z. Dobos).

1992 — two adults, 6 November 1992 - 6 January 1993, Grande Pointe, *Kent* (P. Allen Woodliffe; found by John Haggeman) - photos on file.

The orange colour of the bills on the Waterloo birds was indicative of the Greenland race *flavirostris*. A slight size difference suggested a mated pair.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) (0/1)

1993 — one adult male, 18-23 April, Stafford Twp., *Renfrew* (Chris Michener, Catherine Bayly, Bruce Di Labio, Mark Gawn, Sid Hadlington, Steve LaForest, Myron Loback, Ken Hooles) - photos on file.

In the last 30 years, there have been spring records of this Eurasian species across North America, including most of the other Canadian provinces, and it has a known propensity to wander. It was therefore felt that this bird on this date was considerably more likely to be a true vagrant than an escape, and the species has been added to the Ontario checklist.

Account was taken of reports of exotic teal, including some Garganeys, escaping from a waterfowl collection in New York State during a severe blizzard a few weeks prior to the sighting. The reader is referred to the excellent article "The recent occurrence of Garganey in North America and the Hawaiian Islands" by Larry B. Spear et al. (1988).

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) (3/57)

1993 — one adult male, 8 March, Burlington, *Halton* (Rob Z. Dobos).

— one adult male, 11 April -6 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Steve LaForest).

— one adult male, 2 May, Cranberry Marsh, *Durham* (Margaret Bain; found by Steve Wood).

This is another species which is a "regular rarity" in spring in the marshes of southern Ontario, and has exceeded the OBRC criteria for a reportable species there. It has therefore been delisted as of 1 January 1994. Occurrences in northern Ontario will still require documentation.

The Cranberry Marsh bird was accompanied by a second drake which showed features of a hybrid American/Eurasian wigeon (*A. americana x A. penelope*). Such hybrids seem not unusual in British Columbia, but are considered rare on the east coast (Blake Maybank, pers. comm.).

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) (0/6)

1993 — one female, 12-15 April, Presqu'ile P.P., *Northumberland* (Don Shanahan; found by Geoff Carpentier).

Up to three Tufted Ducks were seen at the west end of Lake Ontario in the early part of the year, but so far no documentation of any of these birds has been received. Two of them were seen to be banded, raising doubts as to their origin, although most reports of Tufted Ducks on the Great Lakes have been assumed to be wild birds.

Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) South Only (2/5)

1993 — one first winter male, 6-20 March, Burlington, *Halton* (Kevin McLaughlin; found by Jeff Poklin, Tony Salvadori and Brian Wyatt).

— one male, 30 October - 3 November, Dewitt Road, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Ron Pittaway, David Worthington; co-finder: Jean Iron).

1970 — one first winter-second summer male *sedentaria*, 25 December 1970 - 21 July 1972, Etobicoke, *Metropolitan Toronto* and 28 November 1971, Clarkson, *Peel* (John A. Kelley, Clive E. Goodwin, Donald R. Gunn, Barry Ranford, Alan Wormington) - photos on file.

1969 — one first winter male, 18 December 1969, Chippawa, *Niagara* (Harold H. Axtell, Robert F. Andrle, J. T. Foy, Walter Klabunde, Harold D. Mitchell, Arthur E. Schaffner, Robert A. Sundell).

The 1969 - 1971 records were researched by Alan Wormington, with assistance

from Robert F. Andrle and Daniel R. Salisbury. After being shot by a hunter, or injured by some other means, the 1969 Chippawa bird remained continuously at the mouth of the Welland River until 10 January 1971, eventually attaining adult-like plumage. Apart from these two summering birds, the only other summer record in southern Ontario is the female at Darlington P.P., *Durham* in 1992 (Ontario Birds 11: 50). There is one other additional summer occurrence considered valid but apparently not documented: a male in adult plumage at Nanticoke, *Haldimand-Norfolk* on 29 June 1980, observed by Anne B. Lambert (A. Wormington, pers. comm.).

Most recent winter reports are of birds found among the huge flocks of scoters and scaup feeding on zebra mussels at the west end of Lake Ontario. Time and patience are prerequisites for finding these eiders.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) (2/12)

1993 — one, 5 October, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Bob Westmore).

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) (5/9)

1993 — one first year subadult, 16 May, Point Pelee, *Essex* (Kevin McLaughlin, George Naylor).

Again, this Mississippi Kite at Pelee appeared in the narrow window between May 13th and 28th accommodating all of the existing 16 Ontario records (Wormington 1993).

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) (8/17)

1993 — one, 20 April, Beamer C.A., *Niagara* (George A. Meyers).

— one adult, light morph, 7 May, Atikokan, *Rainy River* (Don Graham).

1992 — one adult, 28 June, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (P. Allen Woodliffe).

Figure 3: Male Common Eider at Sunnyside Beach, *Metropolitan Toronto* in December 1971. Photo by *John A. Kelley.*

Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) South Only (4/26)

1993 — one dark morph, 31 January, Ottawa, *Ottawa-Carleton* (Don Shanahan).
— one dark morph, 7 March, Amherst Island, *Addington* (Don Shanahan).
— one gray morph, 10 April, Barrie Island Airport, *Manitoulin* (Ron Tasker).
— one gray morph, 18 December, Mud Creek, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Ron Tasker).
1992 — one juvenile, dark morph, 8 January, Walpole Island, *Lambton* (P. Allen Woodliffe).
1991 — one, 18 December 1991 - 12 March 1992, Junction Creek, *Sudbury* (Yvonne Crawford, John Lemon) - video on file.

John Lemon's painstaking catalogue of all the Sudbury area Gyrfalcons for the last 20 years was one of the factors taken into account in the delisting of this species from southern Ontario. About time too, say Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Manitoulin and Ottawa!

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) (7/33)

1993 — one adult male, breeding plumage, 21-28 May, Nonquon S.L., *Durham* (Margaret Bain; found by John Sabean).
— one adult male, breeding plumage, 22-31 May, Holland Landing S.L., *York* (John McLean, Theo Hofmann) - photos on file.
— three juveniles (two females, one male), 21-28 August, Windermere Basin, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Barry Cherriere, George Naylor; found by Alf Epp) - photo on file.
— one, 4 September, Presqu'ile P.P., *Northumberland* (Don Shanahan; found by John Blaney).
— one adult male, winter plumage, 24-29 September, Harmony Pond, Oshawa, *Durham* (Margaret Bain; found by Harry Kerr) - photos on file.

This was a good year for sightings of this spectacular shorebird, but we still notice that not all the reports on the hotlines translate into submissions to the OBRC.

Figure 4: Three juvenile American Avocets at Windermere Basin *Hamilton-Wentworth* on 23 August 1993. Photo by *Barry Cherriere.*

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) (0/13)

1993 — one, 18-20 May, Bright's Grove S.L., *Lambton* (Dennis Rupert; found by Rob Tymstra) - photo on file.

— one, 30 May - 3 June, Harmony Pond, Oshawa, *Durham* (Peter Burke).

Both these birds were well documented, the first by a series of excellent photographs, the second by the superb sketch reproduced here.

Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) (3/26)

1993 — one, 17 October, Lake Ontario off Winona, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Kevin McLaughlin).

— five, 25 October, Van Wagner's Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (John L. Olmsted).

1992 — one immature, 20 December, Port Weller, *Niagara* (Rob Z. Dobos).

— one immature, 28 December, Burlington, *Halton* (Alan Wormington).

1991 — one, 2 November, Radiant Lake, *Nipissing* (Jeff Skevington).

The Pomarine Jaeger seen on 17 October 1993 followed the boat carrying the annual OFO pelagic trip for over an hour, giving excellent opportunities for study.

This species is now uncommon but regular on Lake Ontario in the fall, and has been taken off the Review List for southern Ontario. Reports from northern Ontario will still require documentation.

Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) (3/11)

1993 — one, 7 October, Point Pelee N.P., *Essex* (Kevin McLaughlin).

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) (14/68)

1993 — one first winter, 24 January, Queenston Heights, *Niagara* (John and Victoria Carley, Doug McRae).

— one, 26 January - 9 February, Grenadier Pond, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Bill Edmunds) - photos on file.

— one adult, 24 September, Blenheim S.L., *Kent* (Jim Coey).

— one juvenile/first winter, 30 September - 28 October, Wheatley Harbour, *Essex/Kent* (Doug McRae), and 8 October, Point Pelee, *Essex* (Kevin McLaughlin) - photos on file.

1992 — one first winter, 28 November - 3 December, Belwood Lake, *Wellington* (Mike Lepage).

Although it is quite likely that the birds seen at Niagara and at Toronto were one and the same, the Committee was not unanimous on this point, and therefore the reports are treated as separate individuals.

An impressive list of sightings in southern Ontario over the last few years delists this species there once more. However, Laughing Gull remains on the Review List for the north.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) North Only (0/5)

1992 — one adult, 16-20 May, Moosonee and Moose Factory, *Cochrane* (Doug McRae) - photo on file.

This bird was seen at the dumps in both these nearby communities. What was probably a different bird was seen at Moose Factory on 24 May, and another was at Hannah Bay on 22 June, but unfortunately these subsequent sightings lack documentation.

Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) (0/1)

1993 — one adult, 9 June, Wheatley Harbour, *Kent* (Alan Wormington).

This is the first record accepted by the OBRC for the province. However, an earlier sight record at Niagara in 1958 (James 1991) is presently under review.

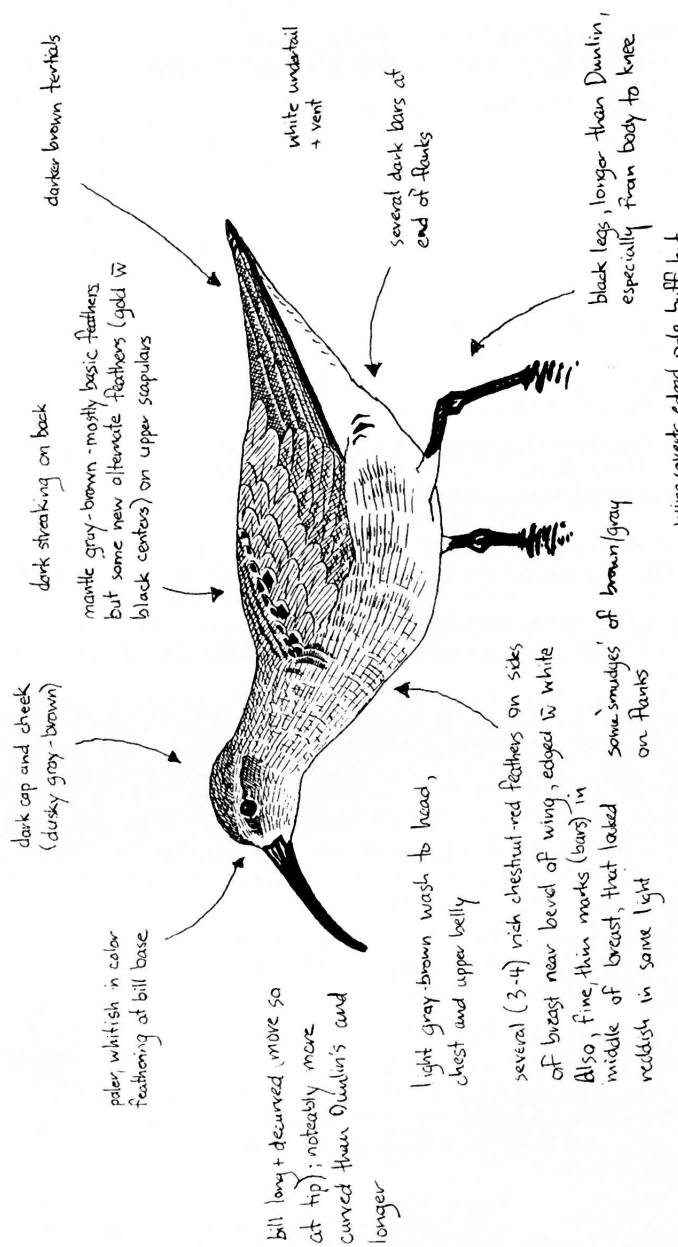

Figure 5: Curlew Sandpiper at Harmony Pond, Oshawa, *Durham* from 30 May to 3 June 1993. Drawing by *Peter Burke*.

Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) (0/1)

1993 — one, winter plumage *perdix*, 11-30 October, Cornwall Dam, *Stormont* (Bruce Di Labio, Kayo Roy, David Sibley) - photo on file.

This was an exciting find, a first for both Ontario and New York State as it bobbed about on the St. Lawrence River. The bird could often be approached fairly closely by boat, and field marks suggested that it was of the Asiatic subspecies, *B. m. perdix*. All previous 13 records from interior and eastern North America have been of this subspecies; the Pacific coast race *B. m. marmoratus* has never been recorded more than 75 km inland. Studies of the DNA and breeding habits of these two forms may indicate that they are in fact full species (Sibley 1993).

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) (2/2)

1993 — one, 18 September, Long Point Tip, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul N. Prior).

The date and location of this observation would strongly suggest a wild origin for this bird, rather than a cage-bird escape. It is only the fourth record for Ontario.

Chuck-will's-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*) (*/3)

1993 — one male, 22 May, Burpee Twp., *Manitoulin* (Ron Ridout, Ron Tasker) - audiotape on file.

This singing male appeared to have returned to its territory of the previous year.

Dusky Flycatcher (*Empidonax oberholseri*) (0/1)

1993 — one immature, 12 September, Porphyry Island, *Thunder Bay*. Specimen: ROM # 157852.

Another addition to the Ontario checklist, this bird was netted in a weakened condition and died the following day. Identification was confirmed by Ross D. James and W. Earl Godfrey.

Gray Flycatcher (*Empidonax wrightii*) (0/2)

1993 — one, 7 June, Point Pelee N.P., *Essex* (Alan Wormington).

What a year for flycatchers in Ontario! This was only the second record for the province - the first (not yet reviewed by the OBRC) was a bird banded at Toronto Island in 1981, photographed, and one outer tail feather with its distinctive white outer web removed as confirmation before the bird was released (James 1991).

Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) (1/4)

1993 — one adult, 16 September, Crooks Twp., *Thunder Bay* (Susan and Mike Bryan) - photos on file.

Variegated Flycatcher (*Empidonomus varius*) (0/1)

1993 — one, 7 October - 6 November, Centre Island, *Metropolitan Toronto* (David and Jaye Houle, Jim Coey, Brian Henshaw, Ron Tasker) - photos on file.

The star of the year! A first for Canada, and only the fourth record for North America (Houle and Houle 1993), this obliging bird was seen by hundreds of birders from across the continent during its extended stay.

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) (8/45)

1993 — one, 11 June, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Dave Shepherd).
— one adult, 12 June, Heron Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Douglas Tate).
— one, 27 June, Rutherglen, *Nipissing* (Richard D. Tafel).
1992 — one, 24 May, Sibley P.P., *Thunder Bay* (Susan Bryan).
— one immature, 13 October, Terrace Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington).
1988 — one adult, 3-6 June, Worthington Twp., *Rainy River* (Nancy L. Barrett, Geoff Carpentier, Dave Elder) - photos on file.

The 1988 bird was one of a pair using the same nest site as in 1987 and 1989; in 1991, a pair nested in a Rainy River backyard instead (*fide* Dave Elder).

The October 1992 record was by far the latest Western Kingbird ever recorded in northern Ontario, by about a month (*fide* Alan Wormington).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) (3/24)

1993 — one, 12 May, Stanhope Twp., *Haliburton* (Robert Pollard).

— one, 13 June, Prairie River, *Thunder Bay* (Frank Leppanen) - photo on file.

— one adult, 15 August - 24 September, Wheatley, *Kent* (Jim Coey; found by Alan Wormington).

These beautiful flycatchers were quite outshone by their rarer congeners this year.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*) (0/1)

1993 — one adult, 29 and 30 September, Cayuga, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (John Miles, Kayo Roy; found by John Dickie Jr.) - photos on file.

Many birders were disappointed by the short, midweek stay of this spectacular bird. Amazingly, it was found in the same farmyard that a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher had frequented some 15 years previously. It allowed quite close approach, resulting in many stunning photographs. This was only the second record for Ontario, the first being seen in Dorion, *Thunder Bay* in 1977 (James 1991).

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) (7/11)

1993 — one immature *leucorhoa*, 20-27 September, Barrie Island Causeway, *Manitoulin* (John Lemon, Terry Osborne; found by Monty Brigham) - photos on file.

Although this bird is a rare transient throughout the province, mainly in the fall, this was the first record for the Manitoulin-Sudbury area.

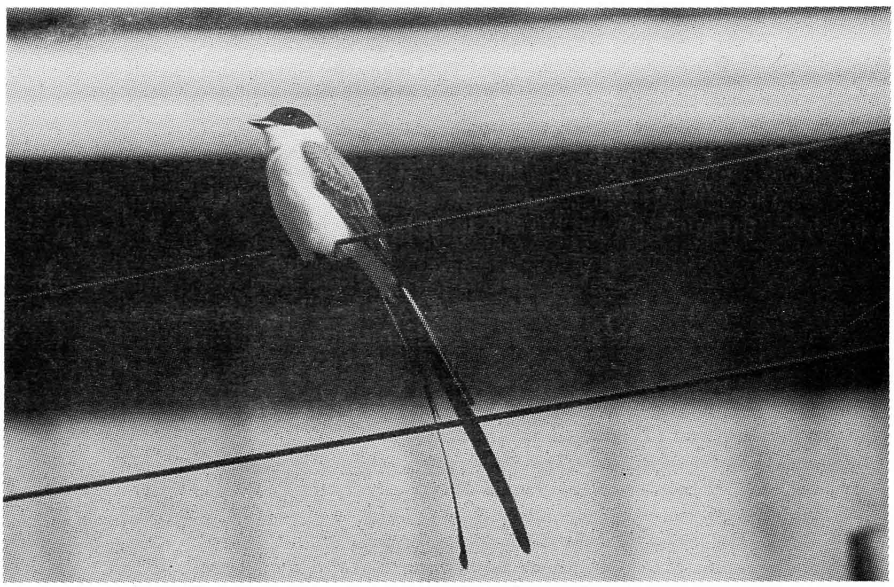

Figure 6: Fork-tailed Flycatcher at Cayuga, *Haldimand-Norfolk* on 30 September 1993. Photo by *Nancy L. Barrett.*

Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) (2/9)

1993 — one adult male, 3-13 April, Port Rowan, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Doug McRae; found by Ian Platt) - photos on file.

Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) (4/21)

1993 — one, 17 January - 26 March, Lakehead University, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott; found by John Woodcock) - photo on file.

1992 — one adult, 28 November, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Susan Bryan).

— one, 29 November 1992 - 31 March 1993, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Don Peuramaki; found by George Fairfield).

— one, 5 December, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Nicholas G. Escott).

It was considered probable that the three birds at Thunder Bay were three different individuals, especially as Minnesota had an invasion of Townsend's Solitaires in the winter of 1992/93.

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) (5/45)

1993 — one adult female, 18 December 1993 - 11 January 1994, Rosedale, *Victoria* (Margaret Bain; found by Russ and Andrea Thompson).

1992 — one, 12 October, Temagami, *Nipissing* (Sloan Watters).

— one adult male, 13 December, Kaministiquia, *Thunder Bay* (Joy and Richard Lipowski, Nicholas G. Escott) - photos on file.

— one female, 30 December 1992 - 13 January 1993, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Nichola G. Escott; found by Pat Kuper) - photo on file.

Although there may well be as many or even more Varied Thrushes in northern Ontario than in the south of the province, birders in the north are few and far between, and the total number of their reports does not reach the OBRC threshold whereas it easily does so in the much more heavily birded south. This species is therefore removed from the Review List for southern Ontario.

Lawrence's Warbler (*Vermivora pinus x V. chrysoptera*) (*/4)

1993 — one male, 10 and 11 May, Lambton Woods, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Tom Cosburn).

— one adult female, 11 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (David Agro, Brian Henshaw; found by Alan Conlin) - photo on file.

The bird in Lambton Woods was singing an apparently typical Blue-winged Warbler (*V. pinus*) song.

Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) (4/7)

1992 — one, 7 September, Point Pelee N.P., *Essex* (Carolyn Pomarius, Calvin W. Pomarius, William C. D'Anna).

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) (17/57)

1993 — one adult male *albilora*, 13-15 May, Thickson's Woods, *Durham* (Margaret Bain).

— one adult male, 17 May, Toronto, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Ron Tasker).

— one male *albilora*, 23 June, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Peter Burke; found by Dawn M. Brenner).

— one *dominica*, 12 November - 4 December, Sault Ste.Marie, *Algoma* (Edward Czerwinski; found by Eileen Fallon) - photo on file.

1992 — one immature, 20 April, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul N. Prior).

— one immature, 28 April - 6 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul N. Prior).

— one, 12-16 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul N. Prior, Rinchen Boardman) - photo on file.

— one immature, 13-18 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Paul N. Prior).

With the recent remarkable increase in sightings of this southern warbler, it easily meets the criteria for delisting in the south, but remains on the Review List for nor-

Figure 7: Adult female Lawrence's Warbler at Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* on 11 May 1993. Photo by *Brian Henshaw.*

thern Ontario. It was interesting to note that the first record for the Sault Ste.Marie area was of the less expected, yellow-lored subspecies, *D. d. dominica*. The photograph was examined by Kenneth C. Parkes of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburg, who pointed out additional field marks, including the finer flank streaking characteristic of this race.

Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) (1/3)

1993 — one male, 6 May, Tremblay Beach C.A., *Essex* (Erwin Meissner).

This is the fourth record for Ontario. True to its secretive nature, the distinctive, loud and repeated song was its main feature as the bird gave brief views from dense cover.

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) (2/8)

1992 — one female, 5-8 December, Port Colborne, *Niagara* (Nancy Barrett, Kayo Roy; found by Margaret Cunningham) - photos on file.

This bird was fed on mealworms by the homeowner and eventually trapped and shipped out to the west coast.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) (2/3)

1993 — one adult male, 6 May, Warsaw, *Peterborough* (John Nighswander, Doug Sadler) - photo and video on file.

1986 — one adult male, 29 April - 1 May, Arva, *Middlesex* (Alan W. McTavish; found by Robert Packer) -photo on file.

1978 — one, 21-23 May, Long Point, *Haldimand-Norfolk* (Erica Nol, Warren Russell).

— one female, December 1978 - January 1979 (exact dates not on record), Toronto Island, *Metropolitan Toronto* (Mark Ferguson) - photo on file.

At the OBRC Policy meeting in November 1993, Bob Curry presented a summary of his research into extralimital records of Painted Buntings. The consensus was that if these birds were escaping from captivity, they would be turning up all over North America, and not mostly in the eastern states. It is also no longer legal to keep Painted Buntings in captivity. The Committee therefore decided that henceforth, Ontario records of Painted Bunting should be accepted unless there is definite evidence making the likelihood of an escape outweigh the probability of wild status. The species was first added to the Ontario checklist in 1992 (Ontario Birds 10: 43-63).

The brilliant male at a Warsaw feeder showed every detail of its plumage on a home video, but unfortunately only stayed one day. The three earlier records had been placed in the Deferred category, but were reviewed and accepted.

Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) North Only (1/5)

1993 — one adult male, 25 May, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Keith Johnson, John Woronkewych).

Rufous-sided Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) North Only (2/6)

1992 — one adult male *erythrophthalmus*, 9-13 November, Kaministiquia, *Thunder Bay* (Val Guenther, Jean Lister) - photo on file.

The photograph allows identification of the bird as of the nominate race, which is found in Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec.

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*) (4/30)

1992 — one, 5 December 1992 - 22 March 1993, Guelph, *Wellington* (Leslie Lougheed).

During its prolonged stay, this bird visited several feeders in an older residential neighbourhood in the north end of the city, so was often frustratingly difficult to find on any given day.

Figure 8: Female Western Tanager at Port Colborne, *Niagara* on 6 December 1992. Photo by *Kayo Roy*.

Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) (3/15)

1993 — one adult male, 5 June, Kingston, *Frontenac* (Ada Valkris).
— one adult male, 12 June, Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma* (Greg Sadowski).
— one male, 29 June, Point Pelee N.P., *Essex* (Alan Wormington).

This was an excellent season for sightings of this scarce visitor from the prairies.

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) South Only (3/19)

1992 — one, 16 May, Rondeau P.P., *Kent* (Raymond M. Seng, Dee Tata).

1991 — one winter adult, 25 December 1991 - 29 February 1992, Caledon, *Peel* (David Milsom) - photo on file.

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) North Only (0/3)

1993 — one female, 27 May, Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* (Matthew L. Holder) - photo on file.

This bird was a first for the Thunder Cape Bird Observatory.

Historical Records

These are records occurring before 1981, which have been previously published, but which do not meet current documentation requirements.

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*) (1/1)

1966 — one, 17-20 May, Hamilton Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth* (Bob Curry; found by George W. North).

Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) (1/7)

1975 — one, second week of May for three days, Sarnia, *Lambton* (Gerry Clements).

Deferred Records

Identification accepted, wild status deferred

Records in this category are those where wild status is currently debatable, and a decision has therefore been deferred until more information can be assembled.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

1993 — nine adults, 17 June - 7 July, Rayside, Balfour, *Sudbury* (Fred Marshall, Nancy Barrett, John Lemon, Charles T. Whitelaw, Alan Wormington) - photos on file.

A decision on origin was deferred pending further study of extralimital occurrences.

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 at any time should new information arise suggesting a wild origin.

European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

1992 — one adult male, 29 November - 5 December, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Carl Cooper) - photo on file.

Unaccepted Records
Identification uncertain

In most of the records listed below, the written 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 an error. Any of these reports may be resubmitted for further review if new supporting evidence comes to light.

1993 — Greater White-fronted Goose, 26 November - 4 December, Adelaide Twp., *Middlesex.*
— Pomarine Jaeger, three, 25 October, Van Wagner's Beach, *Hamilton-Wentworth.*
— Long-tailed Jaeger, 24 September, Wheatley Harbour, *Kent.*
— Hepatic Tanager (*Piranga flava*), 23 May, Presqu'ile P.P., *Northumberland.*
1992 — Swainson's Hawk, 25 September, Holiday Beach, *Essex.*
— Swainson's Hawk, 29 November, Clarksburg, *Grey.*
— Gyrfalcon, 14 December, Floradale, *Waterloo.*
— Long-tailed Jaeger, 1 September, McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve, *Durham.*
1989 — Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*), 20 May, Humber Bay, *Peel.*

Corrections/Updates to Previous OBRC Reports

1992 Report (*Ontario Birds* 11: 46-63)

— under American White Pelican (1992) add: "15 April" to the date and "Mark Jennings" as an independent finder on that date, at the same location.
— under Slaty-backed Gull, replace "1991" with "1992".
— under Atlantic Puffin, replace "west of Cochrane" with "east of Cochrane".

1991 Report (*Ontario Birds* 10: 43-63)

— under Mississippi Kite (1991), extend the dates of occurrence to 21 May, and split the record into two occurrences as follows: (1) one adult, 17-18 May, Point Pelee N.P., *Essex* (Graham P. Catley, Andy C. Sims, Terry Osborne, Moss Taylor) - photo on file; and (2) one first year subadult, 19-21 May, Point Pelee N.P. *Essex* (Ken W. Thorpe).
— under Swainson's Warbler, replace summary number "1/0/1" with "1/1/1".

1984 Report (*Ontario Birds* 3: 2-17)

— under Mississippi Kite (1984) change "Strabane" to "Westover", *Hamilton-Wentworth.*

1982 Report (*Ontario Birds* 1: 7-15)

— under Mississippi Kite, add "first year subadult" to the record as the age of the bird.

Acknowledgements

The OBRC would like to thank the many observers who took the time to compile and submit reports and photographs in 1993. We are especially grateful to those who helped to obtain reports that were not their own, or gave the Committee information on dates of occurrence, or acted as expert opinions in cases of difficult identification problems; they include Allen Chartier, W. Earl Godfrey, Steve LaForest, Paul Lehman, John Lemon, Doug McRae, Kenneth Parkes, Paul Pratt, Keith Reynolds, Kayo Roy, Will Russell, and Alan Wormington.

Many thanks to Ron Ridout for continuing to forward the relevant observations from the *American Birds* Seasonal Summaries, which are most useful in following up reportable species. Bob Curry again most kindly prepared the summary numbers accompanying the records. My sincere thanks go to Committee Chairman, Ron Pittaway, for his patient encouragement and advice throughout the year. Thanks also to all the members of the 1993 Committee for their prompt processing of the report packages, and for reviewing the first draft of this article. We must also thank Bob Finlayson yet again for ably handling the slides and prints illustrating this Report.

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Margaret Bain, 210 Byron Street N., Whitby, Ontario L1N 4N1.

Henslow's Sparrows: An Up-Date

by
Madeline J.W. Austen

Introduction

In Canada, Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*) has been known to breed in Ontario and in southwestern Quebec. In recent years, Henslow's Sparrow has been known to breed only in Ontario, with the majority of nesting sites in the mid-1980s being located in the southern part of Hastings, Lennox-Addington, and Frontenac Counties, and in Prince Edward County. It also has occurred in Grey, Bruce, and Dufferin Counties. Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution of Henslow's Sparrow in Ontario, based on data from the Breeding Bird Atlas and the Ontario Rare Breeding Bird Program (ORBBP).

This article provides an up-date on the status of Henslow's Sparrow and summarizes the results of survey efforts since Knapton (1986).

Population trends and status in Ontario

Population declines have been reported in Ontario within the last 30 to 40 years, and the species' range within the province has also been reduced. Henslow's Sparrow numbers appeared to have decreased in the late 1970s or early 1980s in Ontario (Knapton 1982; Speirs 1985). Declines have also been noted in the number of individual Henslow's Sparrows reported during spring migration in Ontario from 1986-1993: 17, 17, 18, 0, 3, 5, 7, and 8 (R. Weir, pers. comm., 1992; R. Ridout, pers. comm., 1993).

Knapton (1982) reported that only 17 individuals in seven widely scattered areas across southern Ontario were detected during the 1981 breeding season. In 1983, the known Ontario population of Henslow's Sparrows was 25 to 29 individuals at 13 sites (Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas; Risley 1983). During the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, the Henslow's Sparrow was found in only 38 squares, and in only 8% of these was breeding confirmed (Cadman *et al.* 1987). At this time, it was unlikely that the total provincial population exceeded 50 pairs in any given year (Knapton 1987). The ORBBP received information on only 23 Henslow's Sparrow sites, seven of which were active during the 1986 to 1991 period. However, breeding site information from the Kingston area was not reported to the ORBBP.

Active colonies reported in Ontario Seasonal Summary reports during the summers of 1986 - 1991 included: Shelburne area (T. Sabo) and Walpole Island (C. Spitz) in 1986; Shelburne area (T. Murray) and Kortright, Kleinburg (B. Edmunds) in 1987; three birds in Arkell Hills, Guelph in 1988; and Conn area in Grey County (*fide* T. Murray) (R. Weir pers. comm. 1992).

Current Status

In 1986, Henslow's Sparrow was listed as Threatened by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Based on the ORBBP's review of available

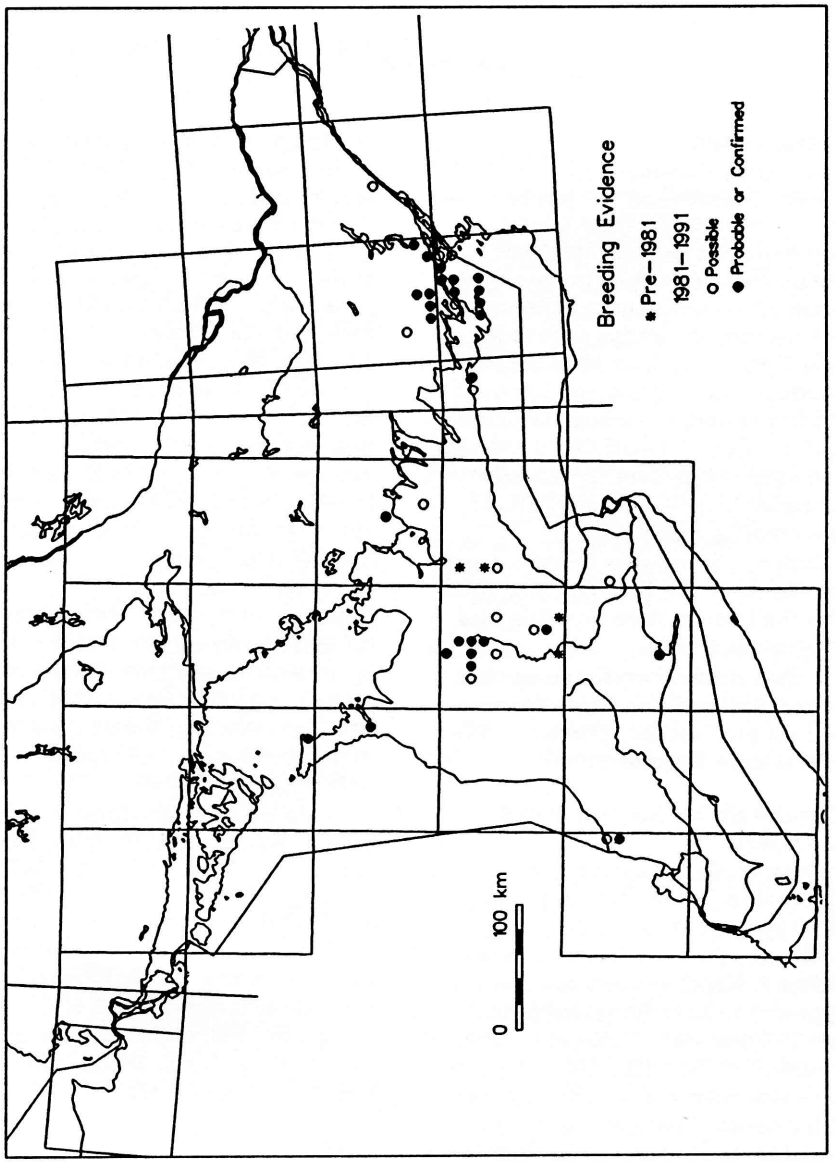

Figure 1: 10-km squares in which the Henslow's Sparrow was reported to the Breeding Bird Atlas and the Ontario Rare Breeding Bird Program in southern Ontario.

information on the population trends and status of Henslow's Sparrow in Ontario and across North America, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designated the Henslow's Sparrow as Endangered in Canada in April, 1993. The species was formally registered under the Ontario Endangered Species Act in May of 1994 to give the species and its habitat legal protection.

Recent surveys in Ontario

A thorough survey for Henslow's Sparrows had not been conducted in core breeding areas in Ontario since Knapton (1986). In June of 1988, 1989 and 1990, ORBBP staff and volunteers surveyed the southern portion of Grey County and sections of Dufferin County for Henslow's Sparrows; two birds were found in 1988, one singing male was found in 1989, and no birds were found in 1990. Volunteers also surveyed north Wellington for Henslow's Sparrows during the ORBBP but no birds were located. In 1989, a site with 10 territories was located in Haldimand-Norfolk Regional Municipality, but the colony was "abandoned mysteriously" during the breeding season (D. McRae, pers. comm.).

In 1992 and 1993, surveys for Henslow's Sparrows were conducted in various areas of southern and eastern Ontario using census techniques similar to Risley (1983) and Knapton (1986). In the summer of 1992, thirty 10-km squares in which the species occurred during the Atlas were surveyed. Squares were located in Grey, Wellington, Dufferin, Northumberland, Prince Edward, Hastings, Frontenac, Lennox-Addington, Leeds-Grenville, and Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry Counties. Eighteen former Henslow's Sparrow sites were visited in 1992, but no Henslow's Sparrows were located. Only three sites (Tuttles Hill, Frontenac Co.; Arkell Hill, Wellington Co.; and a site west of Dundalk, Grey Co.) still had habitat that was apparently suitable for the species. Approximately 150 other sites with suitable habitat or potentially suitable habitat were checked for Henslow's Sparrows in 1992. One singing male was found in eastern Ontario on June 25 and 26, well into the breeding season. The bird was found in an old hayfield, approximately 3 ha in size, that is dominated by grasses (0.5 - 1 m in height), but is beginning to be invaded by shrubs.

In 1993, suitable sites were checked for Henslow's Sparrows in Prince Edward County, Amherst Island, and Walpole Island by Ridout and Austen (1993). Some historic sites and suitable areas in Haldimand-Norfolk and Niagara Regional Municipalities were surveyed by volunteers. Two sites near Sarnia (Lambton County) were also checked for Henslow's Sparrows: the Bunyan location where a pair was present in 1984 (Knapton 1984, 1986), and the Sarnia Airport where a singing male was reported in 1985. In 1993, Henslow's Sparrows were found only at the site located in eastern Ontario during the 1992 survey.

The results of the 1992 and 1993 surveys suggest that far fewer than 50 pairs (probably less than 10 pairs) are breeding in the province. It is possible that there are other active Henslow's Sparrow sites that remain

undetected, but surveys by Risley (1983), Knapton (1986), Austen and Kubisz (1992), and Ridout and Austen (1993) all suggest that the Ontario population of Henslow's Sparrow is continuing to decline. Clearly, Henslow's Sparrows are critically imperilled in Ontario and worthy of Endangered status.

Henslow's Sparrow sightings

A Henslow's Sparrow sighting was reported to *Birders Journal* in the summer of 1992 (location unknown, Henshaw and Kerr 1992), but according to the reporter the site was abandoned early in the summer. A Henslow's Sparrow was also reported singing at one of the first ten stops on the Roblin Breeding Bird Survey route in the Tweed area on 7 June 1992 (E. Hayakawa, pers. comm., 1992). Ron Weir (pers. comm.) estimated that there were about six active Henslow's Sparrow sites in the Kingston area in 1992: two sites in each of Prince Edward, Lennox-Addington, and Frontenac counties. However, no birds were found by ORBBP staff in the Kingston area in 1992, but these surveys were restricted to fields near roadsides.

In 1993, Henslow's Sparrows were reported during spring migration at Long Point, Point Pelee, Amherst Island, Hockley Valley near Orangeville (unconfirmed) and Unionville, but were not known to breed in these areas.

Population trends in North America and adjacent states

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) results from North America, eastern North America, and the United States show significant declines in Henslow's Sparrow populations from 1966 to 1988, with an average rate of decline of 3.5 to 4.5% per year. Results from BBS routes in Canada during the period from 1967 to 1988 suggest a decline in Henslow's Sparrow numbers, but the species was not reported on enough routes to accurately determine a population trend (B. Peterjohn, pers. comm., 1991). The BBS is a roadside survey, conducted annually in mid-June in road-accessible areas across North America.

In the majority of the northeastern and northcentral United States where Henslow's Sparrow has been listed, the species is considered of Special Concern or Endangered. It is listed as Endangered in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Vermont, and Virginia (proposed); Threatened in Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa; of Special Concern in Kentucky, Minnesota, New York, Maryland, West Virginia, and Wisconsin; and At Risk in Pennsylvania (Hands *et al.* 1989; Smith 1992). Henslow's Sparrow has been listed as a "migratory nongame bird of management concern" in the north-central region which includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin (United States Fish and Wildlife Service 1987). Butcher (1989) labelled Henslow's Sparrow as one of two species of management concern in the United States that are in the most danger of extinction.

Breeding Bird Atlas data from the northeastern and northcentral United States also confirm that Henslow's Sparrow is a rare breeding bird. Ohio is the only state listed that has

Henslow's Sparrows breeding in more than 10% of the atlas blocks surveyed, with birds reported in 18.5% of blocks surveyed.

Reasons for decline

Declines of Henslow's Sparrows in the Northcentral and Midwest United States appear to track loss of grassland or old field habitats on the breeding grounds (Knapton 1986; Hands *et al.* 1989; McPeek 1991; Smith 1992). Reasons for the decline of Henslow's Sparrows in Canada are unknown, but the loss of suitable breeding habitat appears to be the most likely limiting factor. Many of the abandoned fields in which Henslow's Sparrows formerly bred have succeeded to shrub land or forest, have been subjected to changes in agricultural practices (e.g. rowcrop production, corn planting, continual use of fields with no fallow periods, annual or more frequent mowing, overgrazing, pesticide use, etc.), or have been lost to industrial and urban expansion.

Some sites still have apparently suitable habitat for Henslow's Sparrows, but birds are no longer breeding there. For example, in Grey County large areas (20-30 ha) of apparently suitable habitat still exist but no birds were found breeding in the southern part of the county in 1990. Similar situations occur in other counties such as Prince Edward, Lennox-Addington, and Frontenac. This suggests that other factors (e.g. loss of wintering habitat, mortality between breeding seasons, or population losses due to small numbers of individuals in isolated locations) are also influencing the Henslow's Sparrow population.

Recovery Efforts

Although numbers of Henslow's Sparrows in Ontario are very low at present, there is still potential for the species to recover in the province. There are several active colonies nearby in Michigan and New York that may act as source populations, and the species is still being seen in spring migration at sites such as Long Point and Point Pelee.

A national recovery plan for Henslow's Sparrows is being drafted by M. Austen and the Henslow's Sparrow Recovery Team. The major recovery actions recommended for the species include: determination of population status and distribution; determination of the cause of the species' decline; determination of the habitat requirements of the species and the availability of that habitat during the breeding and wintering seasons; protection and management of breeding habitat; and the development of integrated grassland management programs.

Recovery activities will be concentrated in Ontario. Although there are historical records for the species in Quebec, the species has not been reported breeding in the province since 1968 (Knapton 1986) and is not recorded on Quebec's list of rare and threatened species. Due to the small size of the population in Ontario and the limited success of recent survey efforts, emphasis will now be placed on establishing and managing a network of grassland areas suitable for Henslow's Sparrows and other grassland species.

Integrated Grassland Management

In the United States and Canada, efforts are being made to protect

major grassland remnants in national parks, national grasslands, wildlife refuges and nature reserves. The protection of large grasslands appears to have helped maintain some Henslow's Sparrow populations in Iowa (Drilling 1985 *in* Smith 1992), Illinois (Herkert 1991) and Kansas (Zimmerman 1988). Similar efforts which maintain open, grassy fields in agricultural areas or protect and restore remnant tall grass prairie and grassland habitats must be undertaken in Ontario. This will necessitate active management in some areas (e.g. grazing, mowing, or prescribed burns) to maintain and enhance populations of grassland species, including Henslow's Sparrow.

This year, funding has been sought from the Endangered Species Recovery Fund, Canadian Wildlife Services (Ontario Region), and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to develop guidelines that allow for an integrative management program for Henslow's Sparrows and other grassland species. A pilot site management plan will be drawn up for an area in eastern Haldimand-Norfolk R.M., and will outline activities that should be undertaken to benefit grassland species that could potentially breed in the area (e.g. Short-eared Owl, Barn Owl, Northern Harrier, Grasshopper Sparrow and Henslow's Sparrow). Ideally, a network of protected grassland areas would be established in the province for the benefit of grassland flora and fauna.

How to locate Henslow's Sparrows

1. *Identify areas with suitable habitat.*

Henslow's Sparrow is believed to have originally been adapted to the tall grass prairie community (Knapton 1982). However, with the loss or alteration of many grassland and prairie habitats in North America this species often inhabits pasture land and hayfields (Knapton 1982; Hands *et al.* 1989).

In Ontario, Henslow's Sparrows occupy fairly specific habitats which often include a high percent, and a moderate to high density, of grass cover; a thick mat of ground cover from previous years' vegetation (i.e. no gross disturbance to the vegetation for a period of at least one year); a height of dense vegetation of about half a metre; no current disturbance in the form of grazing livestock; and a low-lying wet area (Knapton 1982, 1984, 1986; Peterson 1983; Risley 1983). Colonies have been located in abandoned fields, ungrazed or lightly grazed pasture, fallow hayfields with high clover and alfalfa content, grassy swales in open rolling farmland, wet meadows, or infrequently mowed fields with an abundance of dead stalks from previous years' growth (Cuddy 1984). Despite this, the species will occur in areas with marginal habitat or areas that do not correspond with "typical habitat descriptions" for the species (M. Cadman, pers comm.).

The minimum area required by Henslow's Sparrows for breeding is estimated at 30 ha (Peterson 1983; Zimmerman 1988), but minimum area requirements are far from proven and may not hold for all regions. In Illinois, Henslow's Sparrows have been documented as being more sensitive to habitat fragmentation than other grassland species including Upland Sandpiper, Savannah Sparrow, Bobolink, Grasshopper Sparrow, Sedge Wren,

Eastern Meadowlark, and Dickcissel (Herkert 1991).

2. *Learn the "song".*

Henslow's Sparrows have a very short, insect-like song ("tslick") that can be difficult to hear at a distance when other grassland birds (e.g. Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrows, etc.) are singing. Therefore, it is often best to listen for the species' song later in the evening when other bird species have stopped singing. On calm nights, Henslow's Sparrows can be heard from 200 m or more (Risley 1983). At a site in New York, a singing male was heard from a distance of 240 m in a field occupied by singing Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows and Savannah Sparrows on a calm night.

Henslow's Sparrows may be found in association with other grassland or wet meadow species such as Northern Harrier, Ring-necked Pheasant, Common Snipe, Upland Sandpiper, Sedge Wren, Bobolink, Horned Lark, Eastern Meadowlark, Vesper Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and Savannah Sparrow.

Acknowledgements

The information presented above was gathered through the efforts of many individuals and organizations. Thanks are extended to R. Guthrie (1991/1992), M. Kubisz (1992), and R. Ridout (1993) who helped with surveys during the ORBBP, and to A. Page who prepared the distribution map. The ORBBP is a co-operative program sponsored by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and cosponsored by the Long Point Bird Observatory, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Ontario Field Ornithologists.

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Early spring migration of waterbirds in Severn Sound, Georgian Bay in 1992

by
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Introduction

The use of wetland habitats by waterfowl during spring migration has been reasonably well documented around the lower Great Lakes and connecting channels (Boyd 1974; Curtis *et al.* 1984). However, there is little published information on waterfowl migration around the Canadian shorelines of Lake Huron, and none for Georgian Bay (Dennis *et al.* 1984). Many of the more extensive wetlands, bays, and adjoining river systems on the lower Great Lakes support large numbers of staging waterfowl in spring, and for some areas the timing of migration has been studied (Dennis and Chandler 1974; Dennis *et al.* 1984; Ross 1984; R.W. Knapton, pers. comm.).

In early spring 1992 I had the opportunity to census waterbird species at regular intervals in parts of Severn Sound, at the southeastern end of Georgian Bay, Lake Huron. Parts of Severn Sound have been identified by the International Joint Commission as one of 43 key Areas of Concern around the Great Lakes, mainly on account of degradation of aquatic and shoreline habitats, attributable largely to physical development pressures and eutrophication from agricultural run-off and sewage discharges (Anonymous 1988). Matchedash Bay, at the head of Severn Sound, is an extensive wetland of outstanding, but not yet quantified, importance for staging and breeding waterfowl (Gartner Lee Limited 1990). It is currently being purchased by the Nature Conservancy, and is a key site identified in the Lower Great Lakes-St. Lawrence basin area as priority habitat for waterfowl, within the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Environment Canada 1986; Prince *et al.* 1992).

This paper provides the first documentation of the chronology and numbers of waterbird species in spring in some parts of Severn Sound (including the western part of Matchedash Bay), between late March and mid April in 1992.

Methods

Observations were made within three hours of sunrise on eight dates between 25 March and 19 April 1992. Birds were counted from seven suitable vantage points overlooking clearly defined areas of open water or ice (Figure 1). Species were identified with a telescope with 20x wide-angle lens, and zoom lens to 45x magnification. Counts were of individual birds whenever possible, but numbers in large, compact resting groups, or active feeding flocks, were estimated to the nearest 10-100 birds. Ducks farther than approximately 1 km away were not usually identified specifically. The vast majority of unidentified birds were species of diving duck, other than Mergansers (*Mergus* spp.). All identifications,

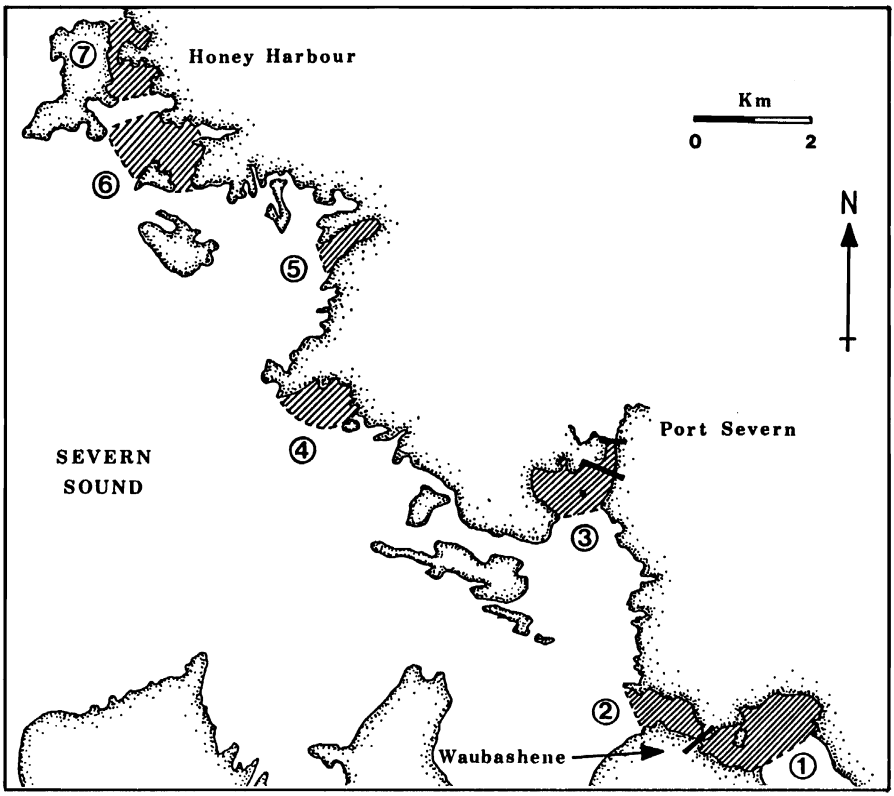

Figure 1: The location of census points and approximate areas within which waterbirds were counted (shaded). Numbers refer to those given in Table 1. Area 1 = Matchedash Bay (western parts); 2 = off Waubashene; 3 = Tug Channel - Sawdust Is.; 4 = Musky Bay; 5 = Macey's Bay; 6 = off Brandy's I.; 7 = off Picnic I.

counts and estimates were made by me. Observations were discontinued after 17 April, when open water permitted birds to feed over large areas of Severn Sound. However, an additional count of Ospreys was made on 19 April, since these birds occurred at nest-sites within the census areas.

Air temperatures were a few degrees below zero during all counts except those on 8 April (3° C) and 17 April (1-2° C). Winds were calm on 17 April, moderate on 1 April (NW 40 km h^{-1}), and light (10-20 km h^{-1}) on other count dates. The % extent of open water was estimated by eye.

Results and Discussion

Ice cover

At the end of March, the only area having open water was area 3, at the outflow of the Severn River at Port Severn. Only a very small area of water below the main dam remained

open throughout the winter. Some open water areas extended out to the Sawdust Islands (1 km south of the Highway 69 bridge at Port Severn) by early April, and by 10 April ice covered only 30% of the area. The next areas of open water to develop were in Matchedash Bay and off Waubashene (areas 1 and 2), and off Picnic Island at Honey Harbour (area 7). Ice still covered $\geq$ 90% of areas 4-6 (northern shore of Severn Sound) on 17 April (Table 1).

Ice melt was later in 1992 in southeastern Georgian Bay than in recent years, by up to two weeks in Severn Sound survey areas checked in both 1991 and 1992 (pers. obs.).

Bird numbers

Duck species comprised the bulk of waterbirds in the census areas, from 66% of all birds seen on 25 March, to over 98% after 8 April (Table 2). Duck numbers were highly significantly correlated with the proportion of open water in each census area ($r^2 = 0.55$, $F_{1,31} = 37.6$, $P = 0.0001$; Table 1). Over 19,000 ducks were counted on 15 April (greater numbers were present outside the census areas), but after that date so much open water was present that birds became less concentrated and more difficult to census accurately from the shoreline. Thus, the apparent reduction in duck numbers on 17 April reflected shifting distribution rather than fewer birds in the overall area.

Areas 1-3 were by far the most important of those censussed during this period, supporting 89-100% of the ducks counted on any date. When ice finally began to melt in other areas (eg. 6 and 7), ducks quickly moved in to feed. On each observation date, ducks were engaged in foraging, resting, and courtship behaviour, usually in rather dense aggregations. Also, flocks of up to about 300 ducks were seen flying in a general northerly direction high over the census areas at times, and whilst counts were being made in the census areas, a few flocks took off and headed north or northwest. Thus, there was undoubtedly considerable turn-over of birds between successive count dates and so the total number of individuals utilizing the area was greater than indicated by the peak counts in Table 2.

A total of 21 species was recorded: 12 waterfowl species (Scaup spp. included specific identification only for Greater Scaup, *Aythya marila*); three gulls; Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*), Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*), Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) (Table 1), as well as Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*, two birds in area 7 on 15 April), and Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*), one in area 4 on 5 April, plus 3800 hawking over areas 1-3 on 15 April. Two Pied-billed Grebes had probably overwintered below the dam at Port Severn.

Diving ducks were by far the most numerous group, with Ring-necked Duck (*A. collaris*), Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), Bufflehead (*B. albeola*) and Common Merganser (*M. merganser*) together accounting for $\geq$ 80% of ducks identified on any date (Table 2). The maximum counts for Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) and Common

Date	Survey section number (see Figure 1) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
% open water							
March 25	-	-	5	-	-	-	-
April 1	-	-	30	-	-	-	-
April 5	1	1	40	-	-	-	1
April 8	2	5	60	-	1	1	10
April 10	20	30	70	-	1	3	10
April 15	40	40	90	-	1	3	10
April 17	70	60	90	1	1	10	20
No. of ducks							
March 25	-	-	97	-	-	-	-
April 1	-	-	280	-	-	-	-
April 5	32	43	665	-	-	-	47
April 8	339	1200	2552	-	10	44	30
April 10	3400	3213	3994	1	-	45	48
April 15	8840	807	7970	-	-	1370	220
April 17	8000	2104	3146	8	-	1300	400

Table 1: Percentage open water and number of ducks in each survey section of Severn Sound, 25 March - 17 April 1992.

Merganser were all higher than those recorded in spring 1992 from another known site of wildfowl importance in the Great Lakes - the Inner Bay at Long Point, Lake Erie (R.W. Knapton, pers. comm.). Clearly, the Severn Sound numbers for these species were even higher than indicated in Table 2, since about 50% of the diving ducks could not be identified specifically after 5 April. Such large spring staging concentrations of Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye and Bufflehead are not seen on Lake Erie (R.W. Knapton, pers. comm.), so presumably these birds are coming from wintering areas on Lake Ontario or farther south.

Species seen in good numbers elsewhere in the lower Great Lakes during early spring migration, but which were notable by their absence from Severn Sound include: Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*), White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*), Canvasback (*A. valisineria*), Redhead (*A. americana*), Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), and Green-winged Teal (*A. crecca*). With the exception of Green-winged Teal, these species were found to be uncommon or rare spring migrants in the Muskoka and Parry Sound districts of Georgian Bay (Mills 1981), and in Matchedash Bay (Gartner Lee Limited 1990). In

general, early spring numbers of dabbling ducks in Severn Sound were low compared to counts at other lower Great Lakes sites, but diving duck numbers were higher (Dennis and Chandler 1974; Dennis *et al.* 1984; Prince *et al.* 1992; R.W. Knapton, pers. comm.). I was unable to extend counts into inner Matchedash Bay, but the wetland areas there appeared to offer much more suitable shallow water feeding conditions for dabbling ducks, so may have supported considerable numbers once free of ice. Clearly, on the basis of these 1992 data, Severn Sound appears to be one of the most important spring staging areas for diving ducks in the Great Lakes.

Chronology

There were considerable differences among species in the timing of spring build-ups in Severn Sound (Table 2). Some Canada Geese and Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) were present even when little open water was available, whereas Double-crested Cormorants, Caspian Terns, Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) and scaup species only appeared once melt was well under way. Among the diving ducks, numbers of Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead and Common Merganser began to build up earlier than other species. Dabbling duck numbers rose steeply after 5 April, but were never large. Very similar temporal trends were seen amongst these waterfowl species in counts made on the same dates in 1992 at Lake Dalrymple and Canal Lake, at the northwestern end of the Kawartha Lakes complex, about 70 km east of Severn Sound. At these sites, the timing of ice melt was virtually identical to that in Severn Sound, but total waterfowl numbers never exceeded 500 individuals in April 1992 (pers. obs.).

An aerial (rotor-winged) survey of some of these Severn Sound census areas on 11 April 1991 recorded considerably lower numbers of waterfowl than my ground counts in mid April 1992 (R. Craig, pers. comm.). However, in 1991 the birds were dispersed over much wider areas, since ice melt was up to two weeks earlier than in 1992. Systematic aerial counts along transects, and/or ground and boat counts of all open water areas, would probably have revealed much higher numbers in 1991. Further, a delayed melt in 1992 may well have caused an unusually concentrated passage of waterfowl returning northwards in April.

Along the Canadian shorelines of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, extensive spring waterfowl surveys from 1969 to 1973 revealed that numbers of dabbling ducks, most diving ducks, Canada Geese and Tundra Swans peaked on 1 April and declined thereafter (Dennis and Chandler 1974). A more detailed, regular census of waterfowl at Long Point, Lake Erie, in 1992 found similar relative patterns of spring build-up of waterfowl species to those seen in Severn Sound (i.e. Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser peaking earlier, followed by Ring-necked duck, Bufflehead, scaup spp., Hooded Merganser, etc.), but the increases occurred for virtually all species about a month earlier than in Severn Sound (R.W. Knapton, pers. comm.).

	25 March	1 April	5 April	8 April	10 April	15 April	17 April
Pied-billed Grebe	2	2	2	2	2	3	1
Double-crested Cormorant	-	-	-	1	9	54	81
Osprey	-	-	-	2	6	10	12
Ring-billed Gull	-	-	-	-	2	235	11
Herring Gull	27	31	4	118	57	81	8
Great Black-backed Gull	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Caspian Tern	-	-	-	-	-	12	3
Canada Goose	20	150	137	218	28	27	95
Wood Duck	-	-	-	15	-	-	6
Black Duck	-	-	12	12	12	33	-
Mallard	-	10	1	5	46	12	-
Gadwall	-	-	-	5	2	-	-
American Wigeon	-	-	1	-	1	64	32
Ring-necked Duck	15	110	283	1650	4160	3809	355
Scaup spp.	-	-	-	-	45	1525	29
Common Goldeneye	40	50	234	505	845	2320	35
Bufflehead	7	40	96	256	1092	1128	32
Hooded Merganser	-	30	50	83	142	435	30
Common Merganser	35	40	110	444	376	931	39
Unidentified Duck spp.	-	-	-	1200	3950	8950	14400
Total ducks	*97*	*280*	*787*	*4175*	*10671*	*19207*	*14958*

Table 2: Counts of waterbirds in Severn Sound census areas, March - April 1992.

Herring Gulls were present in small numbers throughout the period, but increased from 8 April onwards. An influx of Ring-billed Gulls and Caspian Terns was noted on 13 April. Double-crested Cormorant numbers increased steeply from 8 April onwards - perhaps mostly birds from the South Watcher I. colony, 35 km to the northwest, in the open waters of Georgian Bay. In 1991, cormorants were seen at that colony from 4 April onwards, and approximately 17% of the total number of birds which subsequently bred were present at the colony in the middle part of the day on 25 April. At eight occupied Osprey nest-sites occurring within the census areas, numbers built up steadily from 8 April, until all sites were occupied by at least one bird on 25 April. Solid ice cover around some nests until mid April meant that some Ospreys flew up to 12 km from their nest to reach open water fishing areas. This suggests that there was a premium on early occupation of the limited number of high quality nest-platforms in the area.

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Recognizable Forms

Merlin

by
Ron Pittaway

Introduction

Three distinct forms of the Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) breed in North America: (1) Taiga Merlin (*F. c. columbarius*), a medium dark bird of the boreal forest (taiga is a Russian word for boreal or northern forest); (2) Richardson's Merlin (*F. c. richardsonii*), a very pale bird of the northern prairies and aspen parklands; and (3) Black Merlin (*F. c. suckleyi*), a very dark bird of the West Coast. See Figure 1 and Map 1. These forms are also illustrated in Clark and Wheeler (1987), Scott (1987) and Peterson (1990). Note that the illustrations in the latter are mislabelled; from left to right they should read *suckleyi, columbarius,* and *richardsonii.* Also see the excellent paintings by Paul Donahue, including adult males and females of all three forms, in the Fall 1987 issue of *American Birds* 41: 369. In this note I discuss the taxonomy, occurrence, and identification of the recognizable forms of the Merlin in Ontario.

Taxonomy

The American Ornithologists' Union (1957) and Godfrey (1986) list four subspecies of the Merlin as breeding in North America: (1) *F. c. columbarius*; (2) *F. c. bendirei*; (3) *F. c. richardsonii*; (4) *F. c. suckleyi.* See Godfrey (1986) for ranges of the subspecies (races) and areas of intergradation.

Many authorities do not recognize *bendirei* (western taiga population) as a valid subspecies because it is similar to *columbarius* (eastern taiga population) in phenotype (appearance) and ecology (Swarth 1935, Taverner 1937, Rand 1946, Temple 1972a, Beebe 1974, Palmer 1988, Sodhi *et al.* 1993). Here I follow

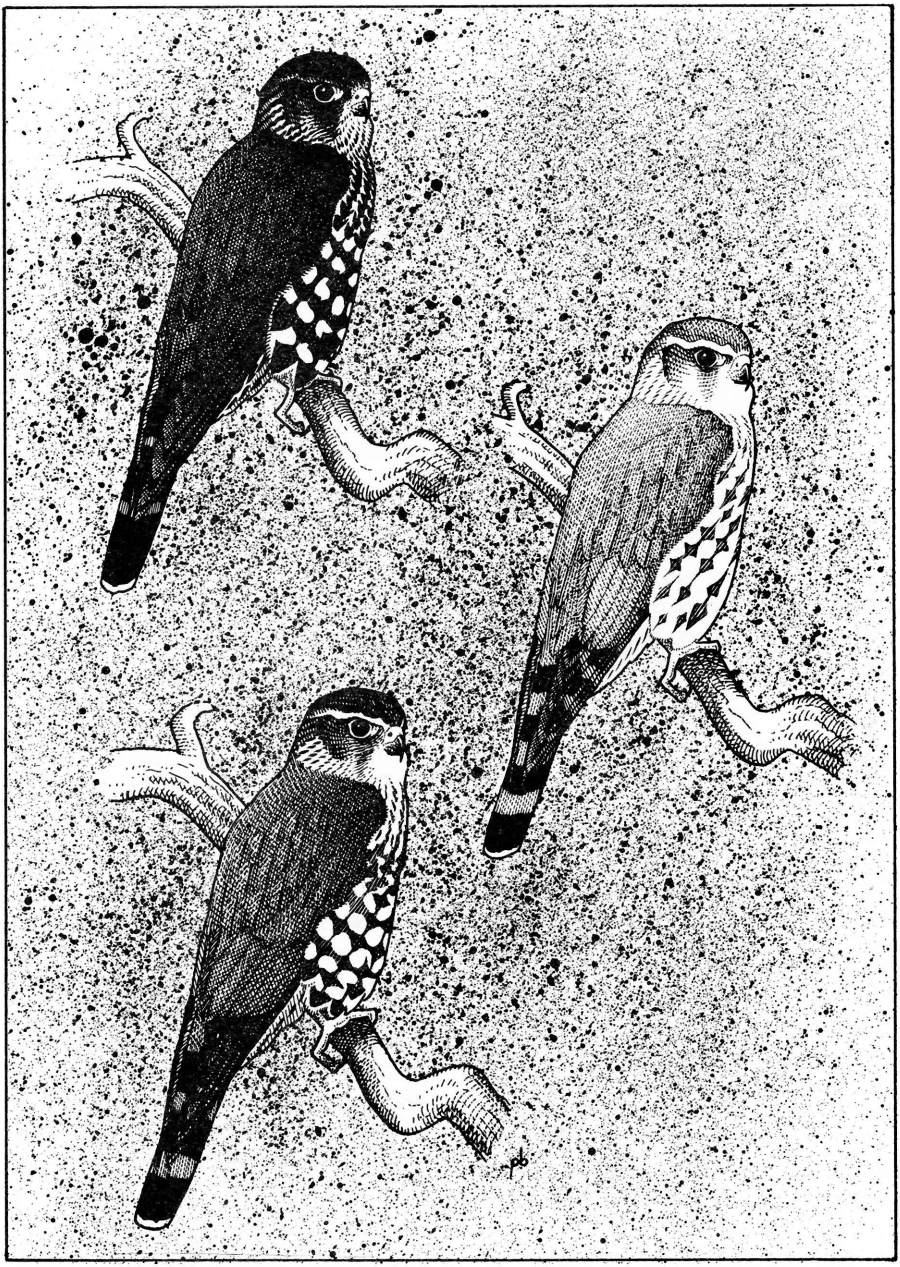


Figure 1: Adult male Merlins: *F.c. suckleyi* (top); *F.c. richardsonii* (middle); and *F.c. columbarius* (bottom). Drawing by *Peter Burke.*

Temple (1972a) who concluded that *bendirei* should be merged with *columbarius* as one subspecies *F. c. columbarius* because "Phenotypically no basis exists for separating the taiga population geographically in the manner the present subspecies designations indicate. The clinal nature of the geographic variation in these populations makes it clear that any attempts at dividing the taiga populations will be arbitrary and not reflect accurately either phenotypic or phylogenetic differences...".

Swarth (1935) questioned the validity of the subspecies *suckleyi*, suggesting that it may be a dark morph (phase) of *columbarius* (*bendirei*). However, Temple (1972a) concluded that "Merlins breeding in the coastal forest biome are markedly different from those of the adjoining taiga, and an exclusive range for this phenotype is indicated".

Plumages, Molts and Ageing

The sexes of adult (definitive basic) Merlins differ in coloration and size. Males vary from pale blue-gray to bluish black on the upperparts. Females are brown-backed (light to dark) with a hint of gray on the rump and uppertail coverts, although this is next to impossible to see in the field. Males are on average noticeably smaller than females.

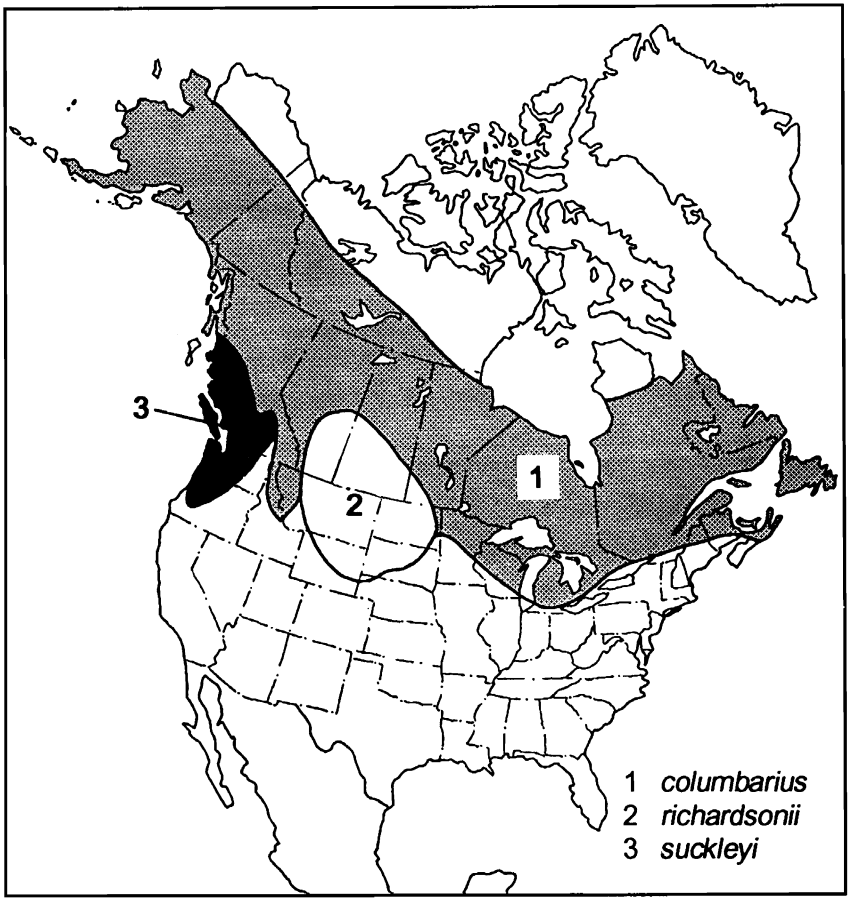
Immature (juvenile) male and female Merlins are brown-backed and are normally inseparable from adult females in the field. The full juvenile plumage is worn from the time the birds leave the nest until the next spring when the gradual molt to adult plumage begins.

Merlins (adults and year-old juveniles) undergo one complete molt annually, extending from mid-April to late September (Temple 1972b). After a juvenile has completed its first annual molt it is in adult plumage. Fall migrants consist of adults and juveniles in fresh plumage. By the following summer, some birds (especially juveniles) can become quite faded.

Taiga Merlin (*F. c. columbarius*)

The Taiga or Boreal Merlin breeds across the northern forests of Canada and Alaska (Sodhi *et al.* 1993). See Map 1. Taiga populations from Manitoba westward are classified as the subspecies *F. c. bendirei* by some authorities. In Ontario, Taiga Merlins breed from the tree line south regularly to Manitoulin Island and Algonquin Park (James 1991). Like Richardson's Merlin on the prairies, Taiga Merlins have adapted to breeding in groves of spruce (*Picea* spp.) in cities and towns such as Thunder Bay (Escott 1986) and Arnprior (Mike Runtz, pers. comm.). Following the discontinued widespread use of DDT, Taiga Merlins have increased and migrants are now seen more regularly in southern Ontario (Duncan 1993) and reports of wintering birds have also increased in recent years.

In the Checklist of Recognizable Ontario Bird Forms (Pittaway 1991), I listed the Eastern race (*columbarius*) and the Bendire's race (*bendirei*) as separate forms. I now believe that many *bendirei* are inseparable from *columbarius* (Temple 1972a, Palmer 1988). In a revision of the checklist I will combine the two, and rename the form as the Taiga Merlin (*F. c. columbarius*) after Clark and Wheeler (1987).



Map 1: Breeding ranges of Merlin subspecies.

Richardson's Merlin
(*F. c. richardsonii*)
The Richardson's or Prairie Merlin is a very pale subspecies breeding on the northern prairies and aspen parklands (Godfrey 1986). See Map 1. The population includes both resident and migrant birds. This form was named after Sir John Richardson, Arctic explorer and naturalist, who collected the first specimen near Carlton, Saskatchewan, on 14 May 1827 (Bent 1938).

Richardson's Merlins have been reported east to southern Ontario (Wormington 1986, Palmer 1988), and there is a report by George Meyers of a male from Grimsby on 6 January 1989 that was accepted by the Hamilton Bird Records Committee (Dobos 1990). James (1991) questioned Wormington's (1986) sight record at Point Pelee because "There are a number of pale-

coloured migrants in ROM collections conforming to *F. c. bendirei*". Wormington did not compare *richardsonii* with *bendirei* in his note; however, his description agrees closely with classic Richardson's in my opinion. Interestingly, expert hawkwatcher Frank Nicoletti (pers. comm.) reports Richardson's Merlins close to Ontario in each of the last three autumns at Hawk Ridge located on the west end of Lake Superior near Duluth, Minnesota. In addition, Rob Dobos (pers. comm.) observed a juvenile or female Richardson's Merlin near Rainy River on 28 August 1988.

Earl Godfrey (pers. comm.) considers the Richardson's Merlin to be a "very well-marked subspecies". In October 1992, I observed several Richardson's Merlins in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Perched adult males were very distinctive with pale blue-gray upperparts, and much paler crowns than *columbarius*. See Figure 1. Adult females and juveniles (immatures) were much paler than *columbarius* and in flight the underwings were not dark like the latter. In flight at a distance, the sandy-brown females and juveniles can be very reminiscent of female American Kestrels (*F. sparverius*), or they can appear like miniature Prairie Falcons (*F. mexicanus*)!

Some Merlins are intermediate between *columbarius* and *richardsonii* (Brian Wheeler, pers. comm.). They may be treated either as intergrades or as *F. c. bendirei* of some authorities (AOU 1957, Godfrey 1986, James 1991).

Black Merlin (*F. c. suckleyi*)
This very dark subspecies breeds mainly in western British Columbia (Sodhi *et al.* 1993). See Map 1. See also the full page painting of an adult male in Beebe (1974). Black Merlins are not highly migratory but some move as far as southern California and New Mexico (Sodhi *et al.* 1993), and Palmer (1988) cites a record east to Wisconsin. Interestingly, there is a specimen of a very dark female Merlin in the Canadian Museum of Nature (CMN #8588) that was collected in Ottawa on 23 March 1923 (Michel Gosselin, pers. comm.). I have examined this specimen and found it to be very similar to several specimens of *suckleyi* from British Columbia in the collection. P.A. Taverner wrote on the specimen label in 1939 "This bird so strongly resembles *suckleyi* that the temptation to call it so is very strong". According to Earl Godfrey (pers. comm.) "Whether it is genetically a Black Merlin is unknown". There are two possibilities: it is either a far-wandering individual of the subspecies *suckleyi*, or an extreme variant of *columbarius*. Rand (1948) stated that doubtful cases such as this are best treated as local variants, and suggested that on annotated checklists "it is not desirable to suppress the facts of their occurrence; under subspecies "A" a line might follow stating that occasional individuals approaching (or similar to, or identical with) subspecies "B" occur, as the data may require".

Clark and Wheeler (1987) state that "Characteristics of some individual Merlins are intermediate between those of Black and Taiga". In addition, Brian Wheeler (pers.

comm.) and Frank Nicoletti (pers. comm.) also report that very dark individuals suggestive of Black Merlins occur occasionally in the East. They believe these intermediate and dark birds are most likely variants of the Taiga form. More recently, Alan Wormington (*in litt.*) reported a dark Merlin wintering at Pelee in 1993-94. When observed closely on 13 and 14 April, it was "an exceptionally dark bird suggesting *suckleyi*". He believes it was probably a very dark *columbarius*.

Summary

Three recognizable forms of the Merlin breed in North America: Taiga, Richardson's, and Black. The Taiga Merlin is the usual form found in Ontario. Richardson's Merlins have been reported in southern Ontario, and they may be regular migrants in northwestern Ontario. As well, intermediates between Taiga and Richardson's Merlins are seen from time to time. Occasionally, very dark Merlins suggestive of the Black form occur in the East.

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Notes

Gyrfalcon Harassing a Snowy Owl

by
Don Shanahan

On 7 March 1993, three companions and I were driving a concession road on the west end of Amherst Island, near Kingston. Suddenly, a low-flying dark phase Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) flew directly at a Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) perched on a large rock in a pasture, 60 to 70 m south of us. Although no contact was made, the Gyrfalcon came very close to the owl. As a result, the Snowy fluttered awkwardly into the air and then landed again on its rock perch. The Gyrfalcon flew away.

Backtracking east, we looked for the Gyrfalcon, and stopped ten minutes later overlooking another pasture. A second Snowy Owl perched on a two metre pole some 60 to 70 m south of our position. Suddenly, the Gyrfalcon appeared, again flying close to the ground, and flew directly at the Snowy Owl. This owl didn't flinch, and at the last second the Gyrfalcon veered slightly upward to miss the owl. The Snowy remained perched, and the Gyrfalcon flew away and was lost from sight. No vocalizations were heard in either episode.

Wondering if this was a common interaction between these dominant Arctic raptors, I referred to the literature. I found no information on confrontations between Gyrfalcons and Snowy Owls either on the breeding or wintering grounds. However, one article (Cade 1953)

reported a juvenal Gyrfalcon in Alaska making abortive stoop attacks on a variety of raptors (not including Snowy Owls), as well as Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and Red-throated Loons (*Gavia stellata*).

Subsequently, I contacted birders who have observed Gyrfalcons overwintering in the Ottawa area. This produced only one reported instance of a Gyrfalcon buzzing a Snowy Owl (J. Harris, pers. comm.). Stewart MacDonald (pers. comm.) informed that he had never witnessed an interaction between many Gyrfalcons and Snowy Owls seen in close proximity in the Arctic.

Bruce Mactavish (pers. comm.) reported seeing three close range clashes between Gyrfalcons and Snowy Owls overwintering in Newfoundland. In two cases, white Gyrfalcons initiated attacks. The third case saw a Snowy Owl drive a dark phase Gyrfalcon off prey. The first two instances involved much vocalization, and in all three cases there was no physical contact between combatants.

Reports of Gyrfalcon/Snowy Owl interactions in Ontario are no doubt rare because of the low likelihood of the species encountering one another or being observed. Nevertheless, if the species apparently don't interact on northern breeding grounds perhaps a different set of parameters apply on southern wintering grounds. Dramatic but contact-free displays could involve food protection, the defence of winter territories, or other factors. Whatever the reason, this type of interaction between Gyrfalcons and Snowy Owls warrants further study.

Acknowledgements

I thank Bruce Mactavish, Jim Harris, Bruce DiLabio, Stewart MacDonald and Cameron Eckert for providing information on Gyrfalcons. Ron Pittaway and Bob Curry helped with the literature review.

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Book Review

Peregrine Falcons. 1992. By *Candace Savage.* Douglas & McIntyre, Toronto. (Hardcover) 145 pp. $35.00.

"Peregrine Falcons" is a slim, beautiful coffee table book detailing the biology of peregrine falcons, and recovery efforts, in Canada. The colour photographs by a wide variety of wildlife photographers and peregrine falcon researchers are beautiful, breathtaking, and

comprehensive. They present magnificent close-ups of peregrines, panoramic landscapes, and excellent portrayals of peregrines in the natural landscape. The author's fascination with peregrine falcons is obvious, and adds to the book's attraction. The photographs are distributed throughout the text, with relatively few pages of text in three chapters sandwiched between pages and pages of photographs. However the photographs and their accompanying descriptions, which are quite enlightening, do not follow the text in logical fashion according to each chapter's subject. Instead, they randomly but beautifully portray peregrines - their biology, nesting biology and habitat.

The text in this book is definitely secondary to the photographs. It presents a logical progressive description of the decline and recovery of the peregrine falcon population. This includes a fascinating, detailed chronology of the detective work that led to the implication of DDT as a causal agent in the eggshell thinning and subsequent population crashes experienced by peregrines and other birds of prey. I was unaware of the role that pigeon fanciers played in identifying the population crash of peregrines worldwide; the author indicates that this decline was first noted in a study commissioned to look into the complaints of British pigeon fanciers that the peregrine falcon population was rapidly expanding and killing too many pigeons - control measures were being called for.

This is not a thorough scientific book - there is no mention of the various subspecies of the peregrine in Canada or the world, or a distinction for those which are considered endangered. The massive recovery efforts directed towards the peregrine falcon on an international scale are only superficially addressed -hacking, fostering, inventory, etc., and the intense cooperative efforts of many agencies, organizations and volunteers. The author's research appears to have been primarily carried out with reference to the University of Saskatchewan's involvement in recovery programs; little mention is made of recovery efforts in jurisdictions outside Saskatchewan, including Ontario, or of the initial successes of those programs.

This book also carries a warning. The author makes many references to the need for us to improve our environmental ethic. She is particularly concerned about the future effects of our continued reliance on the many synthetic chemicals in use today.

This book is first and foremost a celebration of beauty and majesty of peregrine falcons. The photographs alone make it a welcome addition to any bird lover's library.

Ted Armstrong, 615 Rosewood Crescent, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7E 2R5.

Photo Quiz

by
Bob Curry

So this is what I get for complaining about the "too easy" Broad-winged Hawk! Some readers will recall the AGM quiz several years ago when a colour slide of a *Catharus* thrush fully two feet high on the screen split the audience down the middle, with one half certain that the bird was a Veery and the other equally adamant that it was a Hermit. This was another reminder that identification of a non-moving photo image of a bird is infinitely more difficult than of a bird in life. Notwithstanding such difficulties, we shall endeavour to explain that the Photo Quiz bird in *Ontario Birds* 12 (1) is a **Hermit** - - or a **Swainson's Thrush**!

Let's say at the outset that it may be impossible to unequivocally identify the species from this black-and-white photograph. With a black-and-white still we'll have to forego the colour differences, behavioural idiosyncracies and species-specific vocalizations, all of which taken in combination render thrush identification perhaps not simple but, with knowledge and experience, quite manageable. Even with colour transparencies (which your correspondent unabashedly admits to having studied) there are problems with light quality at the time, and with colour saturation of the film. Incidentally, the bird is an immature as evidenced by the light tips to a couple of greater coverts, but this is of no help in species identification.

First, let's eliminate the easier species. The spotted breast, plump body and relatively short, straight bill indicate immediately that this is one of the brown thrushes. Wood Thrush with more extensive large, bold, discrete spots or blotches sharply contrasting with clear, white underparts, a relatively large somewhat crested head and stout bill, and very bold eye ring, may be quickly eliminated. Wood Thrush is structurally different enough to be placed in a genus separate from the four *Catharus* thrushes to which we now turn our attention. Veery, at least the subspecies found in Ontario, has smaller, less distinct breast spots blending into a warm wash, and a vague or slight eye ring. Often there are no discrete breast spots on Veery, with just a wash across the breast. Our bird is not a Veery.

Distinguishing the other three *Catharus* thrushes in this head-on photo requires analyzing the facial patterns. Most frequently Swainson's has a much bolder, thicker eye ring and a spectacled effect as the lores are the same light buff shade. The photo bird shows some whitish in the lores but it is not an extension of the eye ring but rather separate from it and not well defined. In my experience, in perhaps five to ten percent of Swainson's the eye ring is much less bold and the spectacled effect is also lost so that the face can look very much like Hermit. This may be just such an instance. In such cases, features alluded to earlier such as breast and upperparts colours, voice and mannerisms will be necessary to clinch identification.

The most frequent misidentification within this group is the Gray-cheeked/Hermit problem, especially when a bird appears as in the photo then abruptly departs

through thick vegetation and deep shadow, allowing no clear dorsal view. For the sake of this analysis, Bicknell's Thrush (*C. minimus bicknelli*) will be included with Gray-cheeked, not least because none of the described differences in appearance (Ouellet 1993) of that subspecies or species is discernable in a black-and-white photograph. Gray-cheeked generally presents a plain-faced visage with little or no apparent eye ring. However, many birds possess a one-half to two-thirds complete whitish eye ring except that the front of the eye is plain lending the bird a vapid look. Hermit always has a complete, uniform, relatively fine but nonetheless conspicuous, whitish eye ring as is apparent in the photo. This lends it an alert appearance rather consistent with its behaviour when encountered. Hermit also has the most symmetrically rounded head, and appears the "plumpest" of the *Catharus*, a feature also evident in this photo.

Using the print, therefore, Gray-cheeked can be eliminated, and my sense is that this is a Hermit Thrush. However, the colour slides show a slightly buffy tone to the upper breast, throat and eye ring, suggestive of Swainson's. However, the entire slide is a warm "golden", late September - early October image which may exaggerate these tones. With apologies that readers do not have all the information, we nevertheless invite your comments on this bird.

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Editors' Note:

Here's our next quiz bird, and it is definitely not a thrush!