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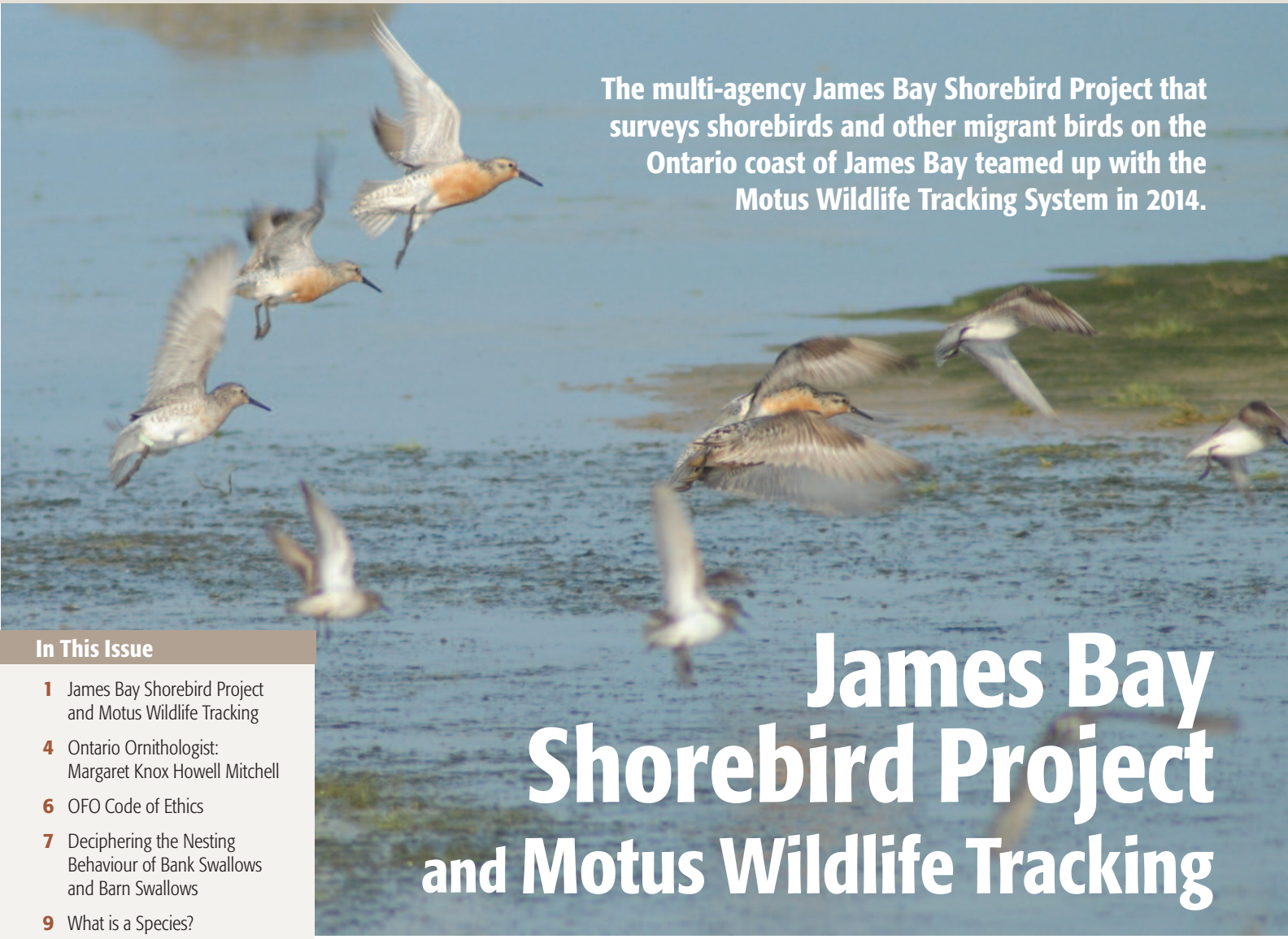
OFO News

NEWSLETTER OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS



The multi-agency James Bay Shorebird Project that surveys shorebirds and other migrant birds on the Ontario coast of James Bay teamed up with the Motus Wildlife Tracking System in 2014.

In This Issue

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James Bay Shorebird Project and Motus Wildlife Tracking

Red Knot and Pectoral, White-rumped and Semipalmated Sandpipers at Longridge Point. *Christian Friis*

By Christian Friis

Briefly, the goals of the project are to better estimate staging shorebird population trends; to better understand where and why birds move along the coast; and to conserve areas important to staging shorebirds on the James Bay coast. Data collected to date have been used to update information for Important Bird Areas on James Bay (www.ibacanada.ca/). Friis *et al.* (2013) provide a good summary of the project.

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System (Motus) comprises a network of coordinated automated radio telemetry towers that track the movements of small organisms throughout terrestrial environments. The purpose of Motus is to facilitate landscape-scale research and education on the ecology and conservation of migratory animals. It is a program of Bird Studies Canada (BSC) in partnership with Acadia University, Western University, the University of Guelph and all collaborating researchers and organizations.

In July 2014, as part of the James Bay shorebird project, a small crew established five Motus towers at sites along the southern end of James Bay.
CWS Ontario 2015; map data: Google.

The study areas of the shorebird project host tens of thousands of staging shorebirds annually, the most abundant of which include Semipalmated Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Dunlin, Red Knot, and Hudsonian Godwit. We chose these as our focal species in the 2014 banding and tagging effort (see Table on opposite page for results of our crews' efforts).

Among the interesting results of the 2014 season is a picture of the length of time shorebirds stage on James Bay. On average, tagged birds spent over two weeks within our study area. More specifically, tagged Semipalmated and White-rumped Sandpipers staged for up to 35 days, while tagged Red Knots staged for up to 20 days in our study area. This is a significant amount of time, highlighting the importance of the region to shorebirds.

In the 2015 field season we will continue to build on this work. Doctoral candidate Alexandra Anderson at Trent University, co-supervised by Dr. Erica Nol and Dr. Paul Smith, has joined the team. Using Motus, in part, to answer some of the many questions she has as part of her project will no doubt further highlight James Bay and its importance to migrant shorebirds.

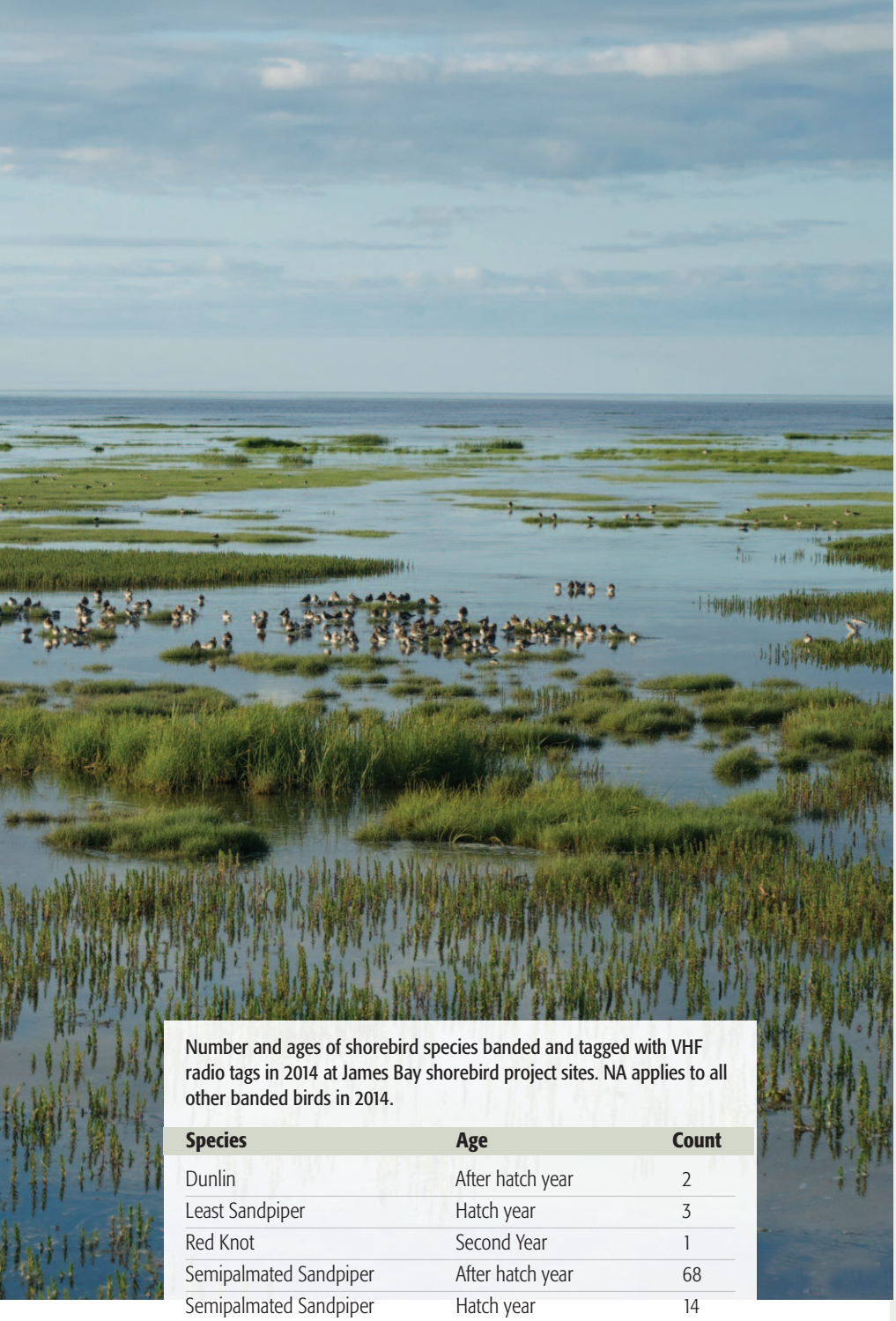
Visit www.motus-wts.org/ for further details.

Roosting and feeding shorebirds at Chickney Channel, James Bay, July 2012.
Christian Friis

Each tower housed sensorgnome units (data logging devices affixed to three antennae that sit about 6.1 meters off the ground.) *Motus.*

Sensorgnome unit.
Motus

The James Bay Shorebird Project is a cooperative effort of Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service and Science and Technology Branch, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Bird Studies Canada, Trent University, and Moose Cree First Nation. These agencies provide significant funding and staff resources. Additional funding for 2014-2016 has been provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *Neotropical*



Number and ages of shorebird species banded and tagged with VHF radio tags in 2014 at James Bay shorebird project sites. NA applies to all other banded birds in 2014.

Species	Age	Count
Dunlin	After hatch year	2
Least Sandpiper	Hatch year	3
Red Knot	Second Year	1
Semipalmated Sandpiper	After hatch year	68
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Hatch year	14
White-rumped Sandpiper	After hatch year	58
NA	NA	252
Total		**398**

Migratory Bird Conservation Act program, which supports work to conserve Neotropical migratory birds in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. Finally, without the many hours of dedicated volunteer support, this project would not have been possible. Many thanks to the numerous volunteers and staff who gave their time to the project over the years.

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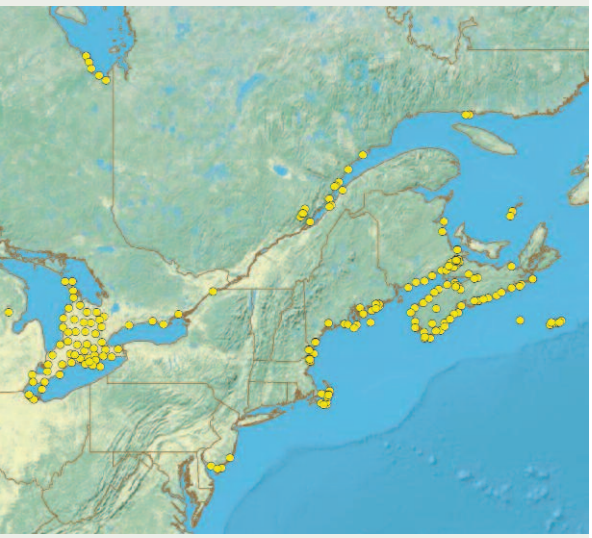
Lesser Yellowlegs. *Christian Friis*

Tracking Birds at Continental Scales: The Motus Wildlife Tracking System

One of the greatest thrills for ecologists is the ability to track animals over vast distances. These kinds of studies provide critical insights into the ecology of migratory animals and their extraordinary feats. For example, determining how birds behave in different landscapes, and what types of habitats they use during migration, can tell us whether conservation efforts are being directed in the right way. Thanks to a combination of miniaturized radio transmitters and a new, expansive network of receivers, researchers are now able to track movements of even very small birds over distances that span the entire continent.

Motus is latin for motion. The Motus Wildlife Tracking System was developed to use a combination of physical and data management infrastructure to track small organisms in real time using very high frequency (VHF) radio telemetry.

Transmitters are getting smaller and smaller (now weighing less than 0.3 g), allowing researchers to tag birds as small as warblers. Each transmitter, or tag, emits a short pulse with a unique pattern. Thousands of tags, each broadcasting individual



The 2014 Motus Array. *Bird Studies Canada*

signals, can be simultaneously deployed. Receivers on towers then automatically detect and record signals from the tags at distances of up to 15 km.

In late 2012 funding was obtained from the Canada Foundation for Innovation to vastly expand the size and scope of the arrays and Motus was born. As of summer 2014, receiving stations have been established throughout southern Ontario, Québec, and the Maritimes, and as far north as Southampton Island, Nunavut. With partners in the U.S., the array has been extended down the east coast to Virginia. At this point, 20 different research projects are now tracking the movements of over 1000 birds of more than 20 species.

The Future

Over the next five years, a variety of projects will vastly increase our knowledge of regional-scale and migratory movements of a variety of species of birds and bats. With good planning and careful placement of receiving towers, the opportunities are endless.

Motus is expanding thanks to the extensive adoption of the system by researchers across North America. If the scale of expansion over the past couple of years is any indication of where we're heading, a coordinated hemispheric or global tracking system for all migratory bird species is within our reach.

This article (or parts of) was originally published in the Fall 2014 issue of ***BirdWatch Canada****, Bird Studies Canada's magazine. To learn more about Canada's leading science-based bird conservation organization visit* ***birdscanada.org****.*

Ontario Ornithologist
Margaret Knox Howell Mitchell

By Cindy Cartwright

From real time data using cutting edge technology to time-consuming manual slogging through records, reports and surveys, the need to document what is happening/has happened in our natural world is of utmost importance. We can't understand where we are headed if we forget where we have been.

Margaret's graduation photo, 1924. *Courtesy of the University of Toronto Archives*

Prior to the 100th anniversary of the Passenger Pigeon extinction, very few birders had ever heard of Margaret Mitchell. Even now, most birders would more readily recognize the names of the American authors who have written more recent books on the subject than hers.

Margaret Knox Howell was born in October 1901 in Toronto. Known as Peggy to family and friends, she was interested in birds from an early age. In May 1909 while watching birds from a window in the family home with her parents, the excited 7 year old observed a Northern Cardinal which she believed was probably the same one identified and documented in the area by J. H. Fleming and other well known ornithologists — a rarity in Canada at the time (Fleming, J.A. *Auk* 24: 71-89) She later declared that this was the 'spark' bird that led to her life-long love of birds, writing "This event was probably what gave me my first definite push on the ornithological path which I have followed with life-long pleasure, as a dedicated field observer and research worker" in her biographical notes kept in the AOU Archives. (Mitchell 1974)

Peggy always wanted a career in science and she studied at University College (University of Toronto), graduating with a B.A. in 1924. Her chosen path in life was obvious from the description below her graduating photo. "Fraternizes with flowers and communes with birds... Future: A nest — domestic or avian (latter preferred at present)." (Torontonensis 1924:22)

Unlike many women in the early 1900s, who only looked to marriage and children in their futures, Peggy would have liked to continue as a graduate student at the university, but the death of her father caused her to change her plans. Instead, Peggy entered the working world as secretary to the head of the paleontology department at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and worked there until her marriage to Osborne Mitchell in September 1927.

After her marriage, Peggy volunteered for unpaid work in the ornithology department, becoming the first woman research affiliate of any National History Museum in Canada (Ainley 1994)

She was fortunate to work with Jim Baillie, Lester Snyder and James Fleming and it was during this time that she researched and wrote Ontario's most important monograph on the life history and extinction of the Passenger Pigeon, published by the ROM in 1935. By various means, Peggy accumulated and compiled all the available information on Passenger Pigeons in Ontario. She collected surveys and letters and, before it was too late, contacted those naturalists and observers who had personally witnessed the extinct birds. This book is still considered to be one of the most comprehensive studies written on this species, referenced by every author who writes about the Passenger Pigeon.

This was completed long before computers, email and scanned documents were even imagined — a monumental task!

Peggy joined the AOU in 1928 and remained a strong supporter throughout her life. In 1933, she also joined the Wilson Society. She was made an Elective Member of the AOU in 1958 in recognition of her accomplishments, the second Canadian woman to be honoured this way. Throughout her life, she felt it was important to support these organizations, even joining the British Ornithologists' Union during her brief time in England.

Although Peggy would become "Canada's first woman ornithologist of international repute" (Ainley 1994), she was denied membership in the 'all-male' birding clubs in Toronto during her years there. Even though she worked at the ROM where the Brodie Club met after hours (Dickson 1986), she was never invited to join. Peggy remained a "loner birder" from childhood, when her friends did not share her interests, through her adult years.

Margaret Mitchell, 1975. *Photo courtesy of the AOU Archives, Smithsonian Institute*

In 1950, the Mitchells left for Brazil for four years. On her return, she published another important monograph "Observations on Birds of southeastern Brazil" through the ROM. In 1958 Ontario permanently lost a great asset in the study of ornithology when Peggy went to England with her husband. She continued her research on birds in England, Barbados and British Columbia. She died on 3 October 1988 in Victoria BC, an area which she mentions in her notes "… rightly designated by George Sutton as: the hinterland of Vancouver Island…." The last known paper that she wrote was "An Albino Hummingbird in Oregon" (*The Murrelet*, Jan-Apr 1974, p.4). Her card catalogue of observations and diary may be gone forever.

The Margaret H. K. Mitchell Society of Historical Ornithologists was founded in 2014 by Cindy Cartwright to continue Peggy's tradition of meticulous research, and to promote the importance of documenting historical ornithology and related topics. For information contact Cindy at ***pom@bmts.com***

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Women excluded from Birding Clubs

Sheila Mackay-Cuja and the Brodie Club

In 2005, former Federation of Ontario Naturalists President Bruce Falls reported that following a "lengthy debate" the Brodie Club, founded in 1921, finally began admitting women in1980. Sheila Mackay-Cuja became the first female member on 15 January 1980. Prior to that time, the club's constitution did not say anything about the gender of members and Falls commented that for many years there was no pressure to accept women. However, he went on to say that "They have been selective about who they invited to join the club…." If membership was by invitation only, there is no way to determine if women had wanted to join or not. Falls reported that occasional women visitors caused the members discomfort. (*Ontario Nature*. Winter 2005/2006. pg. 20-21)

Phyllis E. Mackay and the Toronto Ornithological Club

The Toronto Ornithological Club (TOC) was formed in 1934 and did not accept women as members until 1980 either. As with the Brodie Club, there was nothing in the TOC constitution or bylaws to specifically prevent women from joining, but any person could be excluded if three members voted against them. When Phyllis E. Mackay's name was put forward, three men "blackballed" her by voting against her acceptance into the club. This incredible battle was only resolved when her son, Barry Kent Mackay found a loophole in the constitution which showed that the three men involved were not eligible to vote. No legitimate voting member had voted against her and as a result, Phyllis became the first woman to be accepted into the TOC. (Mackay, Barry. 1985 pers. notes) Had Barry not found this information, women might not have been allowed to join until 1991 when the organization's bylaws were rewritten.

Doris Speirs and the Nice Club

A visiting ornithologist from Europe prompted Doris Speirs (accomplished naturalist and ornithologist) to form her own club after she informed him that women were not welcome at the TOC meetings, one of which he planned to attend with her husband Murray — a member of both the Brodie Club and the TOC. She took his advice and formed the Margaret Nice Ornithological Club (the Nice Club) with other like-minded women in January 1952.

The fact that women like Doris Speirs, knowledgeable and enthusiastic naturalists and birders in their own right, had to form a separate club because they were not accepted by the men of the Brodie Club or TOC prior to 1980 speaks volumes about how much society in Ontario has changed in the last 35 years. Ainley notes in *Ornithology in Ontario* that women elsewhere in Canada received more equitable treatment and were among the founding members of organizations in Quebec and Alberta decades earlier. The Nice Club was dissolved after women were finally allowed to join the Brodie Club and TOC in 1980. It is not known if Peggy Mitchell joined The Nice Club between 1954 and 1958 when she returned to Ontario from Brazil.

OFO Code of Ethics

We hope that everyone birding in Ontario will endorse and actively follow, and encourage others to follow this code.

The OFO Code of Ethics, adopted in 1994, is more relevant today than ever before. The number of people watching birds has grown immensely, stimulated by birding listservs, social media and better communications. We ask all OFO members to read it. We hope that everyone birding in Ontario will endorse and actively follow, and encourage others to follow this code.

As the number of birders increases, we must all make every effort to act in a positive and responsible way. We must also convey a responsible image to non-birders who may be affected by our activities. Most people appreciate birds but this appreciation can be quickly destroyed by the irresponsible actions of a handful of birders.

In the past a code of ethics was not considered necessary, but times have changed and as more and more pressure is put on our environment it is essential to do whatever we can to lead by example. Each of us must show consideration to other birders, landowners, habitat, birds and other wildlife at all times. We are ambassadors of birding and our actions today will reflect the respect we receive in the future.

The welfare of the birds must come first

Whatever your interest, from scientific study to listing, always consider the impact of your activity on the bird. Respect bird protection laws. We are all responsible to ensure we abide by them at all times.

Habitat protection

Habitat is vital for the existence of birds and we must ensure that our activities cause minimum damage to our environment. Use trails to avoid trampling vegetation.

Keep disturbance to a minimum

Although some birds can tolerate human activity, this varies from species to species and from season to season. Use common sense and extreme caution around nests. Migrants may be tired and hungry and should not be kept from resting or feeding. When photographing birds, study their

Photo: Jean Iron

reaction and if they become agitated, back off. Avoid the use of flash photography on owls. Tape recordings and similar methods of attracting birds may cause stress for territorial birds. They should be used sparingly and avoided in heavily birded areas. Do not deliberately flush birds. Patience is often rewarded.

Rare breeding birds

If you discover a rare breeding bird, do not feel under any obligation to report your find to other birders. Record the details of your discovery. You may wish to file the details of a nest with the Ontario Nest Records Scheme at the Royal Ontario Museum. Avoid visiting known sites of rare breeding birds unless they can be viewed from a distance without disturbance.

Rare birds

Rare migrants or vagrants are the species most sought after by birders. If you discover a rarity, consider the circumstances carefully before releasing the information. You must take responsibility for the decision to release the find. You should consider whether an influx of birders will disturb the bird, people or other species in the area; whether habitat will be damaged; and where people will park. Inform the landowner of the find, explain what may happen and obtain permission to tell other birders. Ask the landowner for a list of dos and don'ts, for example, where birders may stand to get a good view and what restrictions there may be on time of day. Also ask which areas are off limit. If you decide to release the news, give precise directions and instructions. If possible include a phone number. At all times make as little noise as possible. Remember, most non-birders will be surprised by the number of visitors who wish to see a rare bird.

Respect the rights of landowners and occupiers of land

Before entering an area, be aware of the rules about access such as by-laws of Conservation Authorities, National and Provincial Parks, and Regional Authorities. Many landowners and authorities allow birders access to areas normally off limits. Always act in a responsible way and if you are asked to leave, do so immediately. Do not block gateways or cause damage to fences, and leave gates as you find them. Do not obstruct people who may be working in these areas.

Have proper consideration for other birders

When telephoning for information, do so at reasonable hours of the day. Try not to disrupt other birders' activities or scare the birds they are watching. Many other people enjoy the outdoors; do not interfere with their activities. Be polite to other birders and helpful to beginners. If you see people obviously disturbing birds or significantly damaging habitat, explain to them the effect of their actions but be courteous; they may not be aware of the effect they are having.

Increase our knowledge about birds

Keep notes of your sightings and send them to area compilers. Send rare bird reports to the Secretary, Ontario Bird Records Committee.

Birding in other countries, provinces or regions

Find out if there is a local code of ethics or any special rules that should be respected.

OFO Code of Ethics:
www.ofo.ca/ site/page/view/aboutus.ethics

DECIPHERING THE

Nesting Behaviour of Bank Swallows and Barn Swallows

By Kristyn Richardson, Stewardship Biologist, Bird Studies Canada

Adult Barn Swallow. *Mark Peck*

It's difficult to imagine what the rural landscape of Ontario would be like without swallows; many landowners view their arrival in spring as a momentous indication that winter has finally passed. Indeed, unlike many other species of birds they truly share our "habitat", nesting on human-built structures including our barns and our homes.

Despite how frequently human activities overlap with those of swallows (part of a group of birds collectively called aerial insectivores because of their habit of eating flying insects while flying high in the air) we know relatively little about them. This is unfortunate considering the severe population declines that species of swifts, swallows and nightjars are currently experiencing in Ontario and around the world. While the causes of these declines are unknown, here in Ontario reductions in the amount of available nesting habitat as well as human-caused disturbance are two potential reasons. Other suspected causes include changes in insect populations and climate change including unpredictable severe weather events. Lastly, because these species "roost" or gather together in large groups (sometimes in the thousands) to spend the night they are especially vulnerable to the loss or degradation of these roosting sites.

In an effort to help conserve swallows and their habitats, Bird Studies Canada (BSC), a national charitable organization dedicated to bird science, conservation and education, is working with partners, communities and individuals to help address some high priority threats and knowledge gaps for two at risk species: Barn Swallows and Bank Swallows.

Barn Swallow nestlings. *Christian Artuso*

Barn Swallows nest almost exclusively on human-made structures such as barns, sheds, bridges and culverts and are the most widely distributed of all swallows. As such, many people would be shocked to learn that the Ontario population has declined by 66% since 1970. In response to this, BSC initiated a Barn Swallow monitoring and stewardship project in 2012 and in the spring of 2013 began building and testing different types of artificial nesting structures with the goal of developing an optimal design that could potentially take the place of the habitat (*e.g.*, barns) being lost across southern Ontario. As well, in 2014 BSC collaborated with Bird Ecology and Conservation Ontario, based out of Toronto, to test how social cues such as the presence of other swallows might impact Barn Swallow uptake and use of these new structures. So far BSC has deployed eight structures which have successfully hosted five pairs of nesting Barn Swallows and an additional 10 structures will be deployed in the spring of 2015.

Top: **Monitoring Bank Swallow nest contents.** *Myles Falconer*

Bank Swallow fledgling. *Jim Dunn*

Left: **Pair of Barn Swallows.** *Christian Artuso*

Right: **Nesting cup with three Barn Swallow eggs. A mirror on a pole is used to monitor the nest.** *Carolyn Zanchetta*

In addition to testing artificial nesting structures, BSC has also looked at the preferred nesting structure types of Barn Swallows. Not surprisingly, barns came out on top but their use of other structures such as bridges and culverts was also quantified. All of this information is being used to determine what breeding habitat characteristics are most important for Barn Swallows in Ontario.

Bank Swallows are the smallest member of the swallow family and are colonial nesters, with the number of nests in a colony ranging from 10 to 2,000. The population decline of Bank Swallows in Ontario is even steeper than that of Barn Swallows, dropping by 93% since 1970. Since 2010, BSC has been surveying Bank Swallows on the north shore of Lake Erie, from Rondeau to Turkey Point, a 130 km-long stretch of shoreline that supports 120,000 individuals. This is the equivalent of 8% of Canada's and 36% of Ontario's breeding pairs, and means that the north shore of Lake Erie population is provincially and nationally, and maybe even globally significant. Not all Bank Swallows nest along eroding lake bluffs and river banks; a substantial number use the extraction faces in aggregate pits, and topsoil piles in construction areas, where excavation of material creates similar vertical faces to those of natural nesting sites. BSC, along with partners, have looked at the habitat characteristics important for nesting habitat selection at both natural and human-made sites. This information is useful for understanding Bank Swallow occupancy patterns as well as for successfully creating or managing artificial nesting habitat at aggregate and construction sites. Key findings were that: 1) occupancy by Bank Swallows decreased with increasing tree and shrub cover on the bank slope, and; 2) occupancy increased with increasing bank length. Both of these criteria may actually point to the true variable determining Bank Swallow occupancy, which is soil composition and penetrability (*i.e.*, what makes the soil right for burrows).

BSC plans to continue their work on Barn and Bank Swallows in 2015, focusing on identifying key pre-migratory and post-breeding roost sites in Ontario. To successfully achieve this goal, we will be relying primarily on volunteers to submit observations of known and historical roosting sites through BSC's new Swifts and Swallows webpage, which will be completed and active in the spring.

If you have any questions or want to report a swallow roost site, contact Kristyn Richardson at krichardson@bsc-eoc.org or (519) 586-3531 ext. 127.

BSC thanks the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Environment Canada, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, and Ontario Power Generation for their generous support of the Barn and Bank Swallow projects.

WHAT IS A SPECIES?

A Critique of the Tobias Scoring System used in the Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World

By Bob Curry

That *The Checklist Birds of the World* (The Checklist) (del Hoyo and Collar editors) is a beautiful and informative work is unarguable (see review in this newsletter). What is debatable is the approach used to determine taxonomic decisions pertaining to the world's avifauna. The editors acknowledge that many decisions taken herein "have not been rapidly adopted in published species-level taxonomic revisions".

Thus the most intriguing aspect of the book is the treatment of what constitutes a species. The Introduction explaining The Checklist approach runs to 35 pages that, as the editors point out, is three to 10 times as long as in other checklists of birds of the world. It is here that this somewhat radical approach to splitting and lumping is explicated.

The introduction explains that birds are classified using molecular differences (genetics); the Biological Species Concept (to what extent do potentially different taxa hybridize?); and the Phylogenetic Species Concept (one or more unique characters separate similar species). They state that none of these three approaches, genetics, the BSC or the PSC by itself does an adequate job of determining species. For example, for apparently similar taxa whose ranges do not overlap (allopatric) how can one determine how they might behave should they encounter one another? Many species of birds and other taxa that are very different in morphology have been known to interbreed on occasion but this does not make them the same species. Moreover, in many cases of range overlap (sympatry) and where interbreeding is relatively common the resultant hybrids are statistically less viable and the parent species have retained their integrity over long periods of contact. Readers are familiar with the use of DNA criteria in recent years that have resulted in the splitting of some North American taxa that are extremely similar in appearance into two or more "new" species. The Checklist, in fact, suggests that genetic work at some future date may underpin taxonomic decisions but they say it is not as yet reliable.

Northern Flicker. The North American flickers (*Colaptes* sp.) have been at the forefront of the lumping versus splitting debate for decades. *Ann Brokelman*

Instead, in an effort to achieve some consistency in determining species, The Checklist uses a scoring system developed by evolutionary biologists at the University of Oxford and named after their leader, J. A. Tobias. The Tobias Scoring System examines, for species that appear to be quite similar in plumage characters, all that is known of their morphology, vocalizations, behaviours, degree of hybridization, distribution and degree of range contact and assigns a value to each of the differences to produce a total score for each taxon. The score is intended as an objective measure of the degree of difference but the editors admit to a degree of subjectivity in assigning these values. Never-the-less, application of Tobias Scores to avifauna of well-studied areas such as the Western Palearctic achieve almost identical classification results (*i.e.*, the Tobias scores yield the same species as have many years of previous taxonomic research). In the Tobias Scoring System, any taxon whose differences attain a score of (7) or more is defined as a separate species. The end result

is that Volume 1 contains 462 newly split taxa since the publication of the last volume of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (HBW) in 2013. The System has also reduced 30 taxa to 22 species. Taking lumps and splits together has produced a net increase of 454 "new" non-passerine species. Del Hoyo and Collar do say that about half of the splits are those proposed by others and half are split using the Tobias Scoring System.

How does the system work in practice?

I have selected as examples those species complexes for which there are representative taxa in Ontario. First, a lump — American Three-toed Woodpecker has been lumped with the Old World form (relumped to be precise) into Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*): Tobias *et al* reject the genetic differences that prompted the split in 2010 and instead point out that the phylogenetic differences are so slight that they only achieve a score of about (2). The result is a total of seven subspecies with "Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker" retaining the subspecies appellation *tridactylus* while the earliest described North American form (*P. t. dorsalis*), which ranges through the southern Rocky Mountains, retains the subspecific common name, "American Three-toed Woodpecker".

Yet again, the Green Heron is subject to scrutiny.
Ann Brokelman

The much larger numbers of splits will be of great interest to acquisitive birders. Del Hoyo and Collar even allude to pressure from world birdwatchers to encourage splits and thusly increase their lifelists. They of course reject this notion that plays no part in an analytic, quantitative approach. Similarly, they assert that conservation concerns (*i.e.* that more resources are put towards saving species level taxa than to subspecies) also cannot influence scientific analysis.

So, the editors, "consider it a cardinal obligation ... to use the Tobias criteria dispassionately both for splitting and for lumping." And yet there is the Herring Gull complex that we all know is a conundrum. The Checklist splits off the American forms and names them collectively as Arctic Herring Gull (*Larus smithsonianus*) comprising three subspecies: *L. s. mongolicus,* "Mongolian Herring Gull"; *L. s. vegae*, "Vega Herring Gull", and *L. s. smithsonianus*, "American Herring Gull". The Old World taxa are now named European Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*) with two subspecies. My point is that in the extensive Taxonomic Notes accompanying these two species the discussion points out that morphologically they are so similar that they would not be split using the Tobias Score. However, in this case they defer to molecular work which itself states in the case of the complex that "splits or lumps based solely on mtDNA cannot be regarded as robust" (Collinson *et al* 2008). Thus the HBW decision seems to contradict the approach taken with the Three-toed Woodpecker.

The North American flickers (*Colaptes* sp.) have been at the forefront of the lumping versus splitting debate for decades. On account of considerable interbreeding among taxa where their ranges meet or overlap they have in recent decades been lumped as Northern Flicker (the BSC in application). The Checklist position is that even where hybridism occurs in the case of flickers and indeed most other such instances the resultant hybrids are less fit than their parent forms and the parent forms have retained their genetic integrity. Therefore, The Checklist uses differences in colour and pattern (the PSC) and arrives at a score of (10) for *C. cafer*, well over the required score of (7) and thus Red-shafted Flicker is assigned full species status by Tobias *et al*. In a similar fashion, Guatemalan Flicker (*C. mexicanoides*) is assigned a score of (8) when compared with Yellow-shafted Flicker (*C. auratus*) and a score of (7) when compared with Gilded Flicker (*C. chrysoides*). In conclusion there are, according to The Checklist, now three species of flickers — Yellow-shafted, Red-shafted and Guatemalan where, previously, there was just Northern Flicker.

Several other split/lump situations pertinent to Ontario caught my eye.

Mew Gull has often been regarded as a potential split from the Eurasian Common Gull. Tobias continues to lump these as Mew Gull (*Larus c. canus*) for the Western Palearctic taxon, "Short-billed Gull" (*L. c. brachyrynchus*) for the North American form and "Kamchatka Gull" (*L. c. camtschatchensis*) for the intermediate form that occurs in Siberia. "Green-winged Teal" (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) receives a Tobias score of only (5) and thus is regarded as a subspecies of Common Teal (*A. crecca*). Franklin's Grouse (*Falcipennis franklinii)* of northwestern North America with a very high Tobias Score of (11) is split from Spruce Grouse (*F. canadensis*), but of course the latter is the only species represented in Ontario. The White-winged Scoter complex is split into three: White-winged Scoter *(Melanitta deglandi*) of North America, Velvet Scoter (*M. fusca*) of the Western Palearctic and Siberian Scoter (*M. stejnegeri*) of the Eastern Palearctic.

And yet again the Green Heron is subject to scrutiny. Older readers will remember that Green Heron was changed to Green-backed Heron and considered to be different from the Striated Heron of tropical latitudes. Indeed they are different in appearance. Then the common name reverted to Green Heron but Striated Heron was still regarded as a separate species on most checklists. Now, Tobias *et al*. lump all forms (33 subspecies) under the common name Green-backed Heron (*Butorides striata*).

The question is whether "Green Heron" (*B. virescens*) is sufficiently distinct to maintain separate species status. They give it a score of (5) based on fairly consistent plumage differences and a narrow area of overlap with *striata*. But, while the Tobias Score approaches the magical (7), separation of "our" Green Heron "would leave all the South American taxa conspecific with Old World taxa, a situation that seems improbable" according to The Checklist.

Where will all this splitting and lumping end?
The short answer is that it will not. As the editors state, "In a sense everything in taxonomy is hypothetical, even species." Based on new evidence and new insights species will continue to emerge or, in other cases, be conflated into fewer taxa. In respect of this and perhaps to counter claims that the Tobias Score is too liberal, The Checklist will set up an Internet forum to which anyone may submit evidence in support of taxonomic changes. As they state, taxonomy has been democratized and new evidence from both professional ornithologists and birdwatchers, such as sound recordings, may influence future taxonomic decisions.

The Checklist has received acceptance at a conservation level if not widely yet at a professional ornithological level. For example, during the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals CMS (COP11), celebrated in Quito, Ecuador 4–9 November 2014, the HBW and *BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World Volume 1: Non-passerines* was officially adopted as the CMS standard reference for bird taxonomy and nomenclature for non-passerine species.

So how is a birdwatcher supposed to react to yet another world checklist with a different approach to species taxonomy and different results? From a lay person's perspective, giving taxa that possess differences in morphology that are detectable in the field — size, shape, plumage, voice — is more attractive than genetics or even the BSC (when the parent forms are still recognizably different). However, a problem arises with the publication of lists especially using list management devices such as eBird that use a different taxonomic arbiter. It is possible that at some future date, there will be general agreement on the list of birds of the world. But until that time it remains up to the individual to decide for her/himself what checklist to use in determining what birds to count as species.

Reference

Collinson, J. M., **Parkin, D. T.**, **Knox, A. G.**, **Sangster, G. & Svensson, L** 2008. Species boundaries in the Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull complex. *British Birds* 101 (7): 340-363.

Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund

The MattHolder Enviromental Education Fund has been set up in the memory of Matt Holder who passed suddenly in 2011. The fund will provide grants to young naturalists to do research projects within the Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve, Whitby, creating a complete inventory of the biodiversity of the Reserve and thus provide the data to help protect any species at risk.

Known since the 1960s as a birding hotspot, there have been 315 species of birds recorded in the Reserve and May "warbler days" are spectacular. Protecting the biodiversity of the Reserve will ensure that future generations will continue to enjoy this jewel located along the industrialized Whitby lakeshore.

The second guide (*Shorebirds*) in **The Field Identification Series** of the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund has just been released. Proceeds from the sale of publications in this series go to the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund. The first guide in the series was *The Basics of Bird Identification* by Phill Holder and Margaret Bain.

For information see: www.mattholderfund.com

The Field Identification Series of the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund

SHOREBIRDS of Southern Ontario

by Jean Iron

This photographic guide provides a quick and easy means of identifying 39 species of sandpipers, plovers and their relatives commonly seen in southern Ontario plus some of our rarer visitors. Photos by Jean Iron, Jeremy Bensette, Cherise Charron, Barry Cherriere, Frank and Sandra Horvath, Michael Nelson, Mark Peck, Harold Stiver, Brendan Toews and Alan Wormington

For more information and to order, please see:
www.jeaniron.ca/2015/shorebirds.htm
Price: $15 includes HST. Mail order: post and packing extra
Questions, please contact Phill Holder: **hawkowl@bell.net**

Published by Hawk Owl Publishing Proceeds from the sale of this publication will go to the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund.

What's in a Name?

Was that a snippet of snipes, a volley of vultures or a mangle of martins? Well actually none of these is correct but they're not far from the truth. As I'm sure many of you do, I often wonder what a bunch of birds is called. Some group names are familiar and often cited but most remain a mystery.

By Geoffrey Carpentier

A Whiteness of Swans. *Geoff Carpentier*

Everything can't be a flock, a herd, a bunch, a kettle or a hoard. Surely there must be better names for these agglomerations of birds? Well, good news — there are. This is not meant to be an inclusive list so please feel free to contact me privately if you have other nifty names for bird flocks. I checked several sources and came up with this compendium for your amusement and edification.

Birds are known to travel in groups for many reasons — to find food, for safety, to confuse predators, to follow migrational pathways, etc. In general they may travel as a flight, a fleet, a volary, a pod or a parcel, but gamebirds and waterfowl more likely move as a dissimulation or a brace. Never solitary, penguins live in rookeries or crèches when young, while ducks move in rafts (on water), safes (on land), teams, paddlings, badlings/badelynges, knobs, sords, plumps, suits or strings, while geese simply occur in gaggles (on the ground) or skeins (when airborne) — how mundane! However, a dopping of mergansers, a trip of wigeons or a spring of teal will excite the birder in late March as these waterfowl work the lakes and rivers on their way north.

A Daggle of Mallards. *Geoff Carpentier*

Cranes might travel in a sedge, but a dance or a swoop intrigues me more. A flamboyance of flamingoes is much more captivating than a pod of pelicans or a mustering of storks to be sure. Game birds are known to flock together, so a drift of quail, a bevy of partridge, a pack of grouse or a rafter of turkeys might make a nice meal. No matter how tasty however, they don't hold a candle to an ostentation of peacocks, which strut their stuff with flamboyant flair.

In Europe the traveler might find a mountainside chattering of choughs, a tok of capercaillie in the Black Forest, a garden full of a bellowing of bullfinches, a deceit of lapwings on the heath, a trip of dotterels by the shore or a train of jackdaws on a rampart. A charm of finches will delight, but a rasp of guineafowl or a wake of buzzards might confuse. Hawk watchers are sure to be delighted by a cast of falcons, a flight of goshawks, a lease of hawks or a boil of raptors.

Marshes attract many different kinds of birds and the variety of names match the varied habitats. One might find a siege of egrets standing stock still, a cover of coots upending in the shallows, a gulp of cormorants chasing minnows or a plump of moorhens nibbling lush greenery as you tramp the wetlands of North America or the moors in the Old County.

By the shore, we might find sandpipers forming flocks, but have you ever seen a fling of dunlins, a congregation of plovers or a wisp of snipe? Well, when you do, you shan't forget it as they sometimes pass in huge numbers. A peep of chicks is cute to watch, as is a pitying of doves, but a mob of emus demands caution! A majestic sight to be sure is the convocation of eagles, while assuredly a drift of swans can delight as their white feathers catch the sun, but a flock of swifts is a scream!

Our own fields might be home to a chain of bobolinks, an exaltation of larks or a bouquet of pheasants, but our woodlands can harbour a muster or a murder of crows, a scold of jays or a tiding, gulp or tittering of magpies. Ever exciting, a descent of woodpeckers or a fall of woodcocks are sometimes seen but never forgotten. Pigeons come in kits, ravens form a congress and rooks and owls appear as a parliament. The elusive nightingales sing as a watch and a host of sparrows is interesting, but neither holds a candle to a murmuration of starlings or a rainbow of hummingbirds.

It's really difficult to decide how many of these are real or actually have meaning, but perhaps it doesn't really matter as the entertainment value far exceeds the science. Let me share a few more that are clearly whimsical. An ordination of bishops might grace a church yard, but a pieful of blackbirds, a box of corn crakes, a stew of oystercatchers and a peel of bananaquits might feed the congregation. A mooing of cowbirds or a mewing of catbirds is sure to delight the ear, while a stealth of creepers is certainly not to be trusted. A crookedness of crossbills or ladle of dippers would be an odd sight to see, but for my eyes I'd be glad if a rush of goldfinches graced my yard. An outfield of flycatchers would be a sight to remember, while a stampede of Cattle Egrets would surely surprise. A castle of kinglets would be odd to behold, especially if they're joined by a coronation of kingbirds. Perhaps one would have trouble respecting a plagiary of mockingbirds, but only a nobleman could truly appreciate a ballet of nutcrackers, all dressed in their operatic finery. A marathon of roadrunners might be fast on the trail, but can they keep up with a motor of scoters — ugh! Sometimes when alone, a game of solitaires can amuse, but play too long and an ache of sora might be experienced. But help is near, so wash down your sorrows with a pint of bitterns.

Species	Group Name	Whimsical Name
Albatrosses	*A colony, weight or rookery*	
Auks	*A loomery, colony or raft*	
Birds in general	*A flight, flock, fleet, party, volary or volery, brace (gamebirds or waterfowl), parcel, pod or dissimulation (small birds)*	
Bitterns	*A siege, sedge, dash, freeze, or pretense*	*A pint*
Blackbirds	*A cloud, cluster or merl*	*A pieful (pie full)*
Buntings	*A sacrifice or strut*	*A decoration, mural*
Buzzards	*A wake*	
Bobolinks	*A chain*	
Catbirds	*A seat*	*A mewing*
Choughs	*A chattering or clattering*	
Coots	*A cover, covert, commotion or fleet*	
Cormorants	*A flight or rookery*	*A gulp, sunning or swim*
Cowbirds	*A herd or stealth*	*A corral or mooing*
Cranes	*A sedge, siege, dance, swoop, bugle or herd*	*A construction*
Creeper		*A sleeze, stealth or spiral*
Crossbills		*A warp or crookedness*
Crows	*A murder, horde, muster, congress, hover, mob, parcel or parliament*	*A storytelling or cauldron*
Cuckoos	*A cooch*	*An asylum*
Curlews	*A herd, game or skein*	*A curfew, head, salon*
Dippers		*A ladle or punchbowl*
Doves	*A dole, dule, pitying (specific to turtle doves), piteousness, pitying, flight or bevy*	
Ducks	*On water – a raft, paddling or badling/badelynge; on land – a safe; in flight – a sord or plump; for Mallards – a lute, daggle, dopping or twack; a doading of Shelducks or generally a team, brace, knob, sute, suit, string or flush*	
Dunlins	*A fling, trip or flight*	
Eagles	*A convocation, aerie, congress or jubilee*	
Egrets	*A sedge, siege, congregation, heronry or skewer*	*A stampede (Cattle Egret)*
Falcons	*A cast; a hover, flight or soar (Kestrel); a brace, leash or illusion (Merlin) or a cade of Peregrines*	
Finches	*A charm, trimming, company, trembling, drum, chirm, charm, or troubling*	*A development of House Finches; or rush, treasury or vein of Goldfinches or a bouquet of Rosy-finches*
Flamingos	*A stand, colony, flamboyance, flurry, regiment*	
Frigatebirds	*A fleet or flotilla*	
Flycatchers		*An outfield, centrefield, swatting, zapper or zipper*
Geese	*A flock, gaggle (on the ground), skein or wedge (in flight) or nide or plump (on water)*	
Godwits		*An omniscience, pantheon or prayer*
Goshawks	*A flight*	*A half, glare or gross*
Grosbeaks		*A gross*
Grouse	*A pack (in late season), covey, chorus, drumming, lek or leash*	*A grumbling*
Guillemots	*A bazaar or loomery*	
Gulls	*A colony, flock, flotilla, gullery*	*A screech, scavenging, or squabble*

Be not judged and take this article with a grain of sanderlings! Here's more …

A Sedge of Sandhills
Geoff Carpentier

Species	Group Name	Whimsical Name
Hawks	*A cast, kettle (large numbers in flight), lease, knot, boil (two or more in flight), spiraling, aerie, stream, tower, or cauldron*	
Herons	*A siege, sedge, battery, hedge, rookery or scattering*	*A pose*
Hummingbirds	*A rainbow, charm, bouquet*	*A hovering, hover, tune, shimmer or glittering*
Ibis	*A congregation, stand or wedge*	
Jackdaws	*A clattering or train*	
Jaegers/Skuas	*A shishkab*	
Jays	*A party, cast or band*	*A sold*
Killdeer	*A season*	
Kingfisher	*A concentration, realm*	*A crown or rattle (Belted) or clique (Green)*
Kingbirds	*A regency*	*A coronation, tyranny or court*
Kinglets		*A castle, court, princedom or dynasty*
Kites	*A brood, kettle, roost, stooping or string*	
Knots		*A cluster, fling or tangle*
Larks	*An exaltation, bevy, exalting, ascension, chattering, happiness, or springul*	
Loons	*Loomery or raft*	*An asylum, cry or dance*
Magpies	*A tidings, gulp, murder, tribe, charm, congregation, tittering or conventicle*	
Martins	*A flight, richness or colony*	*A gulp, circlage or swoop*

A Grain of Sanderlings. *Geoff Carpentier*

Species	Group Name	Whimsical Name
Meadowlarks	*A pod*	
Mergansers	*A dopping*	
Mockingbirds	*A mime*	*An echo, exactness, plagiary or ridicule*
Moorhens	*A plump or fleet*	
Murrelets	*A colony, loomery, bazaar, or raft*	
Murres	*A colony or bazaar*	
Nighthawks	*A kettle*	
Nuthatches		*A jar or creep*
Owls	*A parliament or bazaar*	*A rafter of Barn-Owls or stare, glaring, swooping, stooping, wisdom or study*
Parrots	*A company, pandemonium, prattle or psittacosis*	
Partridge	*A covey, bevy, drift, brace, jugging or a warren*	
Peacocks/Peafowl	*A muster, ostentation, party or pride*	
Pelicans	*A pod, brief or squadron*	*A scoop or pouch*
Penguins	*A colony, rookery, or creche*	*A huddle or parcel*
Phalaropes	*A dopping or whirligig*	*A swirl, twirl, whirl*
Pheasant	*A nest, nide (a brood), nye (large group), bouquet, head, brace, covey or trip*	*A plume or plump*
Pigeons	*A kit, flock, band, dropping, passel or school*	*A loft*
Plovers	*A congregation, wing (in flight) or stand, brace, deceipt, ponderance*	*A flurry, drift, blizzard or storm of Snowy Plovers*
Ptarmigans	*A covey or congregation*	*An invisibleness*
Quail	*A bevy, covey or drift, battery, flush, rout or shake*	*A revenge of Montezuma Quail*
Rails	*A hill or rumour*	*A reel (Virginia), applause, audience or commercial (Clapper) or clique (Yellow)*
Ravens	*An unkindness or congress*	
Redpolls		*A gallup*
Robins	*A rotundity*	*A worm*
Rooks	*A building, congregation, clamour or parliament*	

Species	Group Name	Whimsical Name
Sanderlings	*A retreat or scramble*	*A grain*
Sandpipers	*A fling, bind or contradiction*	*A hill or time-step*
Scoters		*A motor*
Shrikes	*An abbatoir or watch*	
Skimmers		*A scoop or creamery*
Snipe	*A walk, wisp, leash, whisper, winnowing or volley*	
Solitaires		*A game*
Sora	*A solitude or sneak*	*A whinny, ache or expression*
Sparrows	*A host, meinie, tribe, flutter, quarrel, ubiquity, crue, crew, tournament or crew*	*A poll, blight, humiliation or subdivision (House Sparrow), den or slyness (Fox Sparrow), a reign (Golden-crowned Sparrow), choir or chorus (Song Sparrow) or congregation or liturgy (Vesper Sparrow)*
Starlings	*A murmuration, chattering, clattering, cloud, congregation or constellation*	*A filth, scourge or vulgarity*
Storks	*A muster/mustering, flight or phalanx (when migrating)*	*A clatter, filth, swoop or delivery room*
Surfbirds		*A board*
Swallows	*A herd, kettle, richness or sord*	*A foreclosure (Bank Swallow) or stand (Tree Swallow), flight or gulp*
Swans	*A wedge (in flight), team, bank, drift, game, regatta, herd, eyrar, school, gaggle, lamentation, sownder or bevy*	*A whiting, ballet, gargle or whiteness*
Swifts	*A flock, scream or flock*	*A box, frenzy or swoop*
Tanagers	*A season, coil, dopping, knob, diving or paddling*	
Teal	*A spring or knob*	
Terns	*A committee (Common Tern) or straightness (Least Tern)*	*A "U", right tern, left tern or ternery*
Thrashers		*A wheat field or scratch*
Thrushes	*A hermitage or mutation*	*A flute*
Titmice	*A banditry or dissimulation*	
Turkeys	*A rafter, gang, dole, posse*	*A raffle, crop or committee*
Vireos	*A cheer or glean*	*A call*
Vultures	*A cast, committee, vortex, wake, venue or volt*	*A meal*
Warblers	*A bouquet, confusion, fall or wrench*	*An embarrassment (of Red-faced Warblers)*
Waxwings	*An aristocracy*	*An ear-full or museum*
Wigeons	*A company, trip or coil*	*A smidgeon*
Whip-poor-wills		*An invisibility or seek*
Woodcocks	*A fall*	
Woodpeckers	*A descent*	*A drumming or gatling*
Wrens	*A flight, flock or herd*	*A chime*
Yellowlegs		*An incontinence*

OFO Certificates of Appreciation 2014

By Ken Burrell

OFO is pleased to recognize the following recipients:

Maris Apse for his many years of Baillie Birdathon fundraising on behalf of OFO. Maris served on the OFO Board for many years and expanded OFO sales, with his wife Penny, by participating in just about every OFO trip for years to sell OFO merchandise. Maris is always eager to do things for the membership. After retiring from his career as a teacher in Toronto, he moved to Grand Bend where he continues his birding, support for OFO, and leads multiple OFO field trips each year.

Patrick Baichoo (and his family) for allowing numerous visitors to view the Lark Sparrow in Fort Erie from his property.

Tony Clarke, Roads Manager for Clearview Township for protecting a sand pile with nesting Bank Swallows at Stayner. This is a prime example of our ability to help species at risk.

Michel Gagnier and Countryside Canners Co. Ltd. for their hospitality to birders viewing shorebirds in the wet fields at the back of their property, which continue to attract a host of species.

Frank and Sandra Horvath for their dedication in building the OFO photo collection. Spanning a majority of the documented species in Ontario, this collection has taken hundreds of hours to accumulate and document in detail.

Fred Jazvac for his contributions to birders in Ontario. His countless hours of volunteering and dedication have inspired many.

Sherri Jensen for discovering the Amherst Island Lark Bunting and posting the location for the many birders who wanted to see this rarity.

Mike Malone of Pelee Wings for his assistance in making our 2013 Convention a success. Mike is a steadfast supporter of OFO, helping many OFO members at Point Pelee throughout the year.

North Bay Hydro Distribution Ltd. for their exceptional effort to protect a pair of Osprey that had nested on a hydro pole. North Bay Hydro received permission from the MNR&F to move the nest but installed a new pole instead to avoid disturbing it.

Portlands Energy Centre for protection of the first ravens nesting on the Toronto lakeshore in 130 years. Birders were invited to monitor the nest at the site, and maintenance and repairs were delayed to protect it.

Alan Wormington, and the **Friends of Point Pelee**. See *OFO News* October 2014 for previously published details.

It's Just an Animal

Salthaven receives over 4000 calls a year for help and information concerning sick, injured and orphaned wildlife

By Ashley Hanas and Brian Salt

The world has undergone immense changes over the past century. Of course, some of these modifications are easily attributed to natural events; however one can hardly deny that the bulk can be attributed to the actions of humankind. For years, we have plundered and manipulated the land with little regard of the eventual costs, and have done so on an even larger scale since the industrial revolution. With our increased access and technological abilities, we have irreversibly altered countless ecosystems, which has had devastating effects on many types of plants and animals.

True, there are a select few animals that have benefited from our intrusion. The construction of suburbs has expanded the range and habitat opportunities for Coopers and Sharp-shinned Hawks. They have adapted very well to the use of backyard birdfeeders as smorgasbord take-outs. However, the positive impacts the human presence has provided wildlife are vastly outweighed by the negative. Habitat destruction, collisions with cars and windows, free-roaming family pets as well as toxins claim the lives of billions of animals annually, catapulting species such as the Acadian Flycatcher, Golden Eagle and King Rail to their currently designated endangered status under the *Species at Risk Act of Ontario* (SARO).

Officially established as a non-profit, charitable organization in 2004, Salthaven receives over 4000 calls a year for help and information concerning sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. Our mission is twofold: To rehabilitate sick, injured and orphaned wild animals and to not only educate, but inspire the public to know that they as individuals can make a difference in the environment and on the issues that impact Canadian wildlife.

Still, we are not delusional about what we do at Salthaven. We realize that more animals succumb to road accidents in a single night in Ontario than we could ever hope to rehabilitate in a whole year. Often we are questioned why we concern ourselves with this; why we expose ourselves to so much pessimism when in the grand scheme of things, "we are hardly making a difference" helping that one, single animal. After all, "it's just an animal." In fact wildlife rehabilitation is a cure for the perception of futility. We also act as barometers of the environment; we provide a focal point for environmental issues; we teach; we give people a chance to get involved. We spread the word that is so heavily trampled by corporate polluters. We provide a voice for the animals, the environment. And yes — we do make a difference — to the individual animals we care for successfully.

In the summer of 2014, Salthaven admitted an individual, juvenile, female Bald Eagle that had tumbled to the ground after the massive nest collapsed the tree it had been built in. Attempts to get her back with her parents failed, leaving us to finish the job Mom and Dad had started. At Salthaven she grew quickly on a varied and nutritious diet. It wasn't long before she developed an intimidating 2-metre wingspan and the ability to make powerful flights around the practice field on a creance line. Her progress was steady and sure and in the fall of that year, she was given back what was rightfully hers…her freedom.

Fifty years ago, the Southern Ontario population of Bald Eagles was nearly extirpated from southwestern Ontario due to the widespread use of DDT. Thanks to the unwavering commitment of multiple organizations and citizen volunteers, this magnificent bird's status was upgraded to 'special concern' in 2009. However, due to the presence of significant threats such as lead poisoning and botulism, their numbers remain vulnerable. Therefore, every individual counts and contributes to the maintenance of a sustainable population. Bald Eagles reach sexual maturity at around 5 years of age, and live an average of 30 years in the wild. They will produce a clutch of 1-3 eggs per active mating season, but often only one eaglet will survive. Consequently, this young, female Bald Eagle we released has the potential to contribute 25 or more Bald Eagles to the population over the course of her reproductive life. Wildlife rehabilitation does not only attend to the needs of the rehabilitated individual, but lays the foundation for the existence of future generations as well.

Wildlife rehabilitation is often a multifaceted effort on the part of Salthaven and the community. When a compromised wild animal is found by the public, often the best course of action is to get it to a wildlife rehabilitation facility quickly. Often the timing can mean the difference between life and death. In the case of the Bald Eagle, the quick response of the finder in getting her to Salthaven likely saved her life.

Salthaven Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Centre is located in Mount Brydges, Ontario near Strathroy. For more information on Salthaven, visit our website: ***www.salthaven.org*** *and follow us on social media including Youtube, Facebook and Twitter. For help with a wildlife emergency, please call* ***519-264-2440****.*

A young, female Bald Eagle rescued and successfully released in 2014.
Brian Salt

President's Message

By Lynne Freeman

I hope you have enjoyed the spring migration, for many of us the highlight of the birding year. OFO is proud to be expanding its outreach activities through the Hillman Marsh Shorebird Nights and our partnership with Point Pelee's Festival of Birds.

Outreach is one of the most important OFO goals. Last November the Board, past presidents and the chair of the OBRC got together to review OFO's objectives and to define strategies to strengthen our organization.

We reaffirmed the original goals of OFO when it was formed over thirty years ago:

a) To promote the appreciation of Ontario's avifauna;

b) To disseminate information relating to the status, identification, distribution, ecology and behavior of Ontario's avifauna;

c) To encourage field studies of Ontario's avifauna;

d) To adjudicate records of rare birds and to maintain an official list of Ontario birds

We will continue to serve expert birders and listers. We will also put efforts into outreach for novice birders, youth and their families. Communication is tops on our agenda. We will be strengthening our social media presence and will soon be sending a regular email to OFO members with news, events and other information.

We would like to hear from our members. What else could OFO be doing for you and to attract new birders?

Ornithological Library for Bruce-Grey

According to Statistics Canada, 91% of people in Ontario live within 80 km of a university, giving them access to extensive reference libraries. Birders in Bruce and Grey counties are not so fortunate. The closest universities are more than 150 km away resulting in over five hours round trip travel. If you are downsizing your personal library, *OFO News* editor Cindy Cartwright would be happy to add your books to the ornithological reference library she is creating for birders and students in the Bruce-Grey area.

For information contact Cindy at **pom@bmts.com**

Thank You

The Ontario Field Ornithologists would like to acknowledge our many sponsors for their generous donations

2014 Convention Donors

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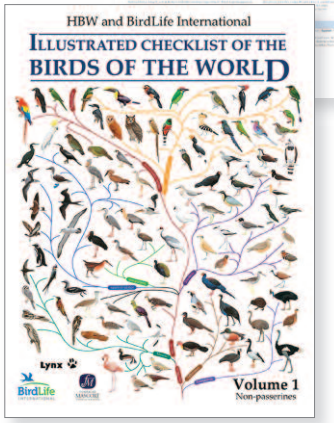
Book Review

***HBW and BirdLife International,* Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World, Volume 1, Non-passerines** (2014), Editors Josep del Hoyo and Nigel J. Collar. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. 903 pages. Hardcover. 185 Euros (145 Euros for each volume if ordered pre publication).



The magnificent 17 volume Lynx Edicion, *Birdlife International Handbook of Birds of the World* (HBW) was completed with the publication of the last volume in June 2013. They now present a two-volume *Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World* (The Checklist). *Volume 1, Non-Passerines* is a massive, beautiful opus in which superlatives abound. A total of 357 colour plates illustrate 8,290 birds and 4,428 distribution maps.

The Checklist comprises 705 pages that recognize 4,471 non-passerine bird species (a 33-page introduction explains how the Checklist has determined species status). Each right hand page illustrates in full-colour 10 -17 species. A visual scale in centimetres and inches is given on each plate. The common and scientific names of species and scientific names of illustrated subspecies are included on the plates. For polytypic species usually one or more subspecies is illustrated. A range map is nearby each species. Faint lines define each species and thicker lines separate genera. It is possible to detect different artistic styles but the quality is uniformly high. A list of artist credits is provided should the reader wish to check. While most illustrations can be found in the original volumes, many have been altered to comply with more up-to-date understanding of the taxa, and newly defined species have been illustrated. In a similar fashion, range maps have been updated to convey the latest knowledge of breeding, wintering and permanent ranges. In sum the plates are both highly informative and extremely attractive.

On the left, facing page are species accounts numbered in taxonomic order and to match the illustrations. Information includes: scientific names, common names, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) status and other features. The colour-coded two-letter code for IUCN Status provides an immediate snapshot of rarity status of all species. There is a pointer to the volume and page in HBW where complete details of the species may be found. There is no description *per se* of the species but the Taxonomic Notes section provides, for closely related species, a condensed analysis as to why said taxon has been described as a separate species and *ipso facto* describes the salient features of the bird. Subspecies are listed and their geographic ranges described. Finally, a detailed written distribution indicates countries and renders the range map on the opposite page more understandable.

There are three appendices. Appendix 1 illustrates Extinct Species and provides the same textual material as on the extant species list. Appendix 2 continues the list of extinctions with 49 more species for which there is not a complete specimen. The reference maps in Appendix 3 are particularly useful in situating species that have small ranges. The Bibliography contains 1982 references. The index incorporates common and scientific names in three colours: black for extant taxa; blue for extinct taxa; and red for alternative, unaccepted or invalid names. For example, Common Merganser is in red and Goosander, the preferred common name, is thus in black.

All the material in the HBW is now available and constantly updated in HBW Alive. There the illustrated checklist on which subscribers can maintain their lists and which will be easily updated as new taxonomic changes appear will appeal to many readers. I would add that this is a beautiful book, an art book that anyone would be pleased to display on their coffee table. Numerous reviewers have chosen The Checklist as their Best Bird Book of 2014. I agree completely and can hardly wait until Volume 2, Passerines is available in 2016.

By Bob Curry

Update from the Ontario Bird Records Committee

Brandon Holden, Chair

The OBRC held our annual meeting at the ROM on 29 March, finishing up all deliberations related to 2014 bird observations. The committee reviewed a remarkable 186 records in 2014. Publication of our annual report in *Ontario Birds* in August will mark the end of the three year terms of Peter Burke and Mark Gawn. On behalf of the committee I wish to thank them for their hard work as voting members. To fill their roles, Tim Lucas and Ken Burrell have been elected to serve from 2015-2017, joining me, Bruce Di Labio, Ron Ridout, Bill Crins, Ross Wood, Mike Burrell (secretary) and Barb Charlton (assistant secretary).

To contact the OBRC or its members, and to submit rare bird reports, please email: obrc@ofo.ca

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Photo Quiz

By Willie D'Anna

Photo: Josh Vandermeulen

I am about to give you something more scarce than a rare bird — a clue about the photo quiz. Our quiz bird for this issue is a grouse. Can you imagine seeing this bird at Long Point or on the Bruce Peninsula or in the Carden Alvar? If you did, would you know what it was? I know that if I did, I would assume it was a Ruffed Grouse until it dawned on me how little it resembled one. However, unless there was someone in the neighborhood releasing or simply allowing captive birds to fly away, if I saw a grouse in one of those spots it almost certainly would be Ruffed since that is the only species of grouse found in those areas. That's the thing about grouse — they are non-migratory. They are not about to show up kilometres out of range and confuse the heck out of you. Except for ptarmigan, that is. The arctic-breeding Willow and Rock Ptarmigan, which essentially are grouse, make very rare movements far south of their usual range and so they could conceivably occur in one of these spots. I am sure some readers will fondly recall seeing the Willow Ptarmigan at Darlington Nuclear Station near Oshawa a few years ago. But that is still an extremely rare case.

So, with my clue and a quick look at the range maps in the field guide, we can narrow our possible choices down to Ruffed Grouse, Spruce Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Willow and Rock Ptarmigan. I have already written that I do not think this bird resembles a Ruffed Grouse very much. Why not? The main reason is that it is not showing a crest and the pattern on the rear flanks seems wrong. Ruffed Grouse shows wide black bars on a mainly white background on the rear flanks, unlike the quiz bird's pattern of black and white barring that appears quite uniform throughout the flanks and across the centre of the belly as well. I should point out that Ruffed Grouse can lower the crest so that the lack of one does not, in itself, rule out that species. Let's skip the Spruce Grouse for now and consider Sharp-tailed Grouse. This is a grassland species and the quiz bird does seem right at home surrounded by grass in the photo. However, one look at those flanks and we know it cannot be that. Sharp-tailed Grouse show dark spots or streaks on mostly pale flanks, unlike the quiz bird.

Could this be a ptarmigan? Well, for starters since this is a photo quiz and we do not know where the photo was taken, it absolutely can be. And, as I intimated before, they could occur anywhere in the province, even though it is very unlikely in central and southern Ontario. If this is a ptarmigan, then it would have to be a female in summer plumage, lacking the obvious white that is shown by males at all times and females in winter and transitional plumages. It may seem odd to say this but the quiz bird has too much white to be a female ptarmigan in summer plumage. A ptarmigan could show the uniform barring on the underparts but when it has this many dark bars, it mostly lacks white between them, appearing warm brown in that area. A ptarmigan also has thin black and warm brown bars on the uppertail that

is not shown by the quiz bird. Before I declare this a Spruce Grouse by default, I have to mention Greater Prairie-Chicken, which once bred in Ontario but was last seen in the province in 1966. However, that species looks quite different with its multi-barred appearance on the upper and underparts.

So, by process of elimination, this is a **female Spruce Grouse**. I find it interesting that this bird does not look a lot like the illustrations in my field guides. However, the strong black and white barring below and the short black tail with grayish finely barred uppertail coverts fit Spruce Grouse very well. So does the white mark below the eye and the white mark on the rear auriculars (ear coverts). Note: the obvious white tips on the sides of the tail in the photo that one might assume are on the outer tail feathers are actually on the undertail coverts. If this confused you, you are not alone. I was not sure what to make of this field mark at first. Grouse are not my strong point, probably because most of the places that I have been to only have one or two possibilities so I don't have to pay that much attention to identification. They have interesting displays, make unique sounds, and I always enjoy seeing them. This female Spruce Grouse was photographed at Abitibi Canyon, Cochrane District by Josh Vandermeulen on 27 September 2014.

Josh has other photos at his website:
www.joshvandermeulen.blogspot.com

Adult Glaucous Gull. *Jean Iron*

OFO Gull Weekend at Niagara

Workshop on Saturday and Field Trip on Sunday
28-29 November 2015

WORKSHOP: Saturday 28 November
4:30 to 6:00 p.m.
LaMarsh Room, Niagara Falls Public Library on Victoria Avenue, Niagara Falls, Ontario. Free parking off Buckley Avenue (1 block east of Victoria Avenue via Morrison St.) 5 minutes from Hampton Inn Riverside at Whirlpool Bridge, Niagara Falls, Ontario.

Gulls of the Niagara River IBA by Mike Burrell
Hear about the importance of the Niagara River Important Bird Area to the global conservation of gulls.

Gull ID Quiz with Mark Peck and Jean Iron
Tune up your gull identification skills with this informative, challenging and fun quiz.

Everyone Welcome,
Pre-registration Required.
Please register for the workshop on the OFO website: **www.ofo.ca** so that we know how many will attend. No charge for this event.

OFO GULL FIELD TRIP: Sunday 29 November
Meet leaders Ron Tozer and Jean Iron at 9:00 a.m. at Sir Adam Beck Lookout.

Staying Over?
A group hotel rate for the OFO Gull Trip has been arranged at Hampton Inn Riverside at the Whirlpool Bridge, Niagara Falls, Ontario. 905-358-5555.
Say you are with the OFO Birding Group and request special rates. Book early to avoid disappointment.
Rates (including breakfast): Thursday Night, 26 Nov. to Sunday Night, 29 Nov: $55 each night.
For more information about the hotel, please contact **Claire Nelson: mcnelson@rogers.com**

NIAGARA RIVER CORRIDOR IBA SURVEY BLITZ
Saturday 28 November
The Ontario Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) Program is seeking volunteers to cover parts of the Niagara River and count gulls and other waterbirds on the second annual survey blitz. Volunteers will be assigned a stretch of the river that can be covered in about an hour.

For more information or to sign-up, contact **Mike Burrell: mburrell@birdscanada.org or 1-888-448-BIRD(2473) x 167.**

Ontario Field Ornithologists
OFO

OFO News

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Ontbirds, with over 3000 subscribers, is OFO's successful listserv for reporting rare bird sightings. Now the largest birding listserv in North America, *Ontbirds* has become an integral part of the Ontario birding community. Follow the instructions on the OFO website to subscribe to *Ontbirds*.
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