

# Favourite Birding Hotspots

## Luther Marsh

by David Brewer

Luther Marsh, or Luther Lake, can be regarded as the source of the Grand River. It is a very large area, comprising about 7,000 hectares, of which more than 2,000 are open water. Although a man-made feature (it arose when the headwaters of the Grand River were dammed in 1952), it is probably the richest inland marsh in Ontario.

The main body of water lies midway between Highways 9 and 89 to the south and north, and Wellington County Road 16 to the west and Highway 25 to the east. The main accesses to the area can be reached by travelling west on Highway 9 from Orangeville or east on Highway 9 from Arthur. There is no public transit to the marsh; a vehicle is essential, and a canoe is very useful. The marsh is split between Wellington and Dufferin Counties, and is administered by the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

The ornithological interest of the marsh lies in three different areas: the open water itself, and especially the numerous islands and floating bogs therein; the surrounding woodlands, many of them very wet; and Wylde Lake, an extensive area of raised bog in the southeast corner.

**By canoe.** By far the best way to see most of the interesting species in the marsh is by canoe. A permit is required to put any boat onto the lake from the break-up (usually April) until the end of July, and can be obtained by calling the GRCA in Cambridge (519) 621-2761 ahead of time. A word of caution concerning canoeing: the lake can become treacherous very quickly if a wind springs up, especially from the southwest. There have been two drowning fatalities in the lake in recent years, so watch the weather.

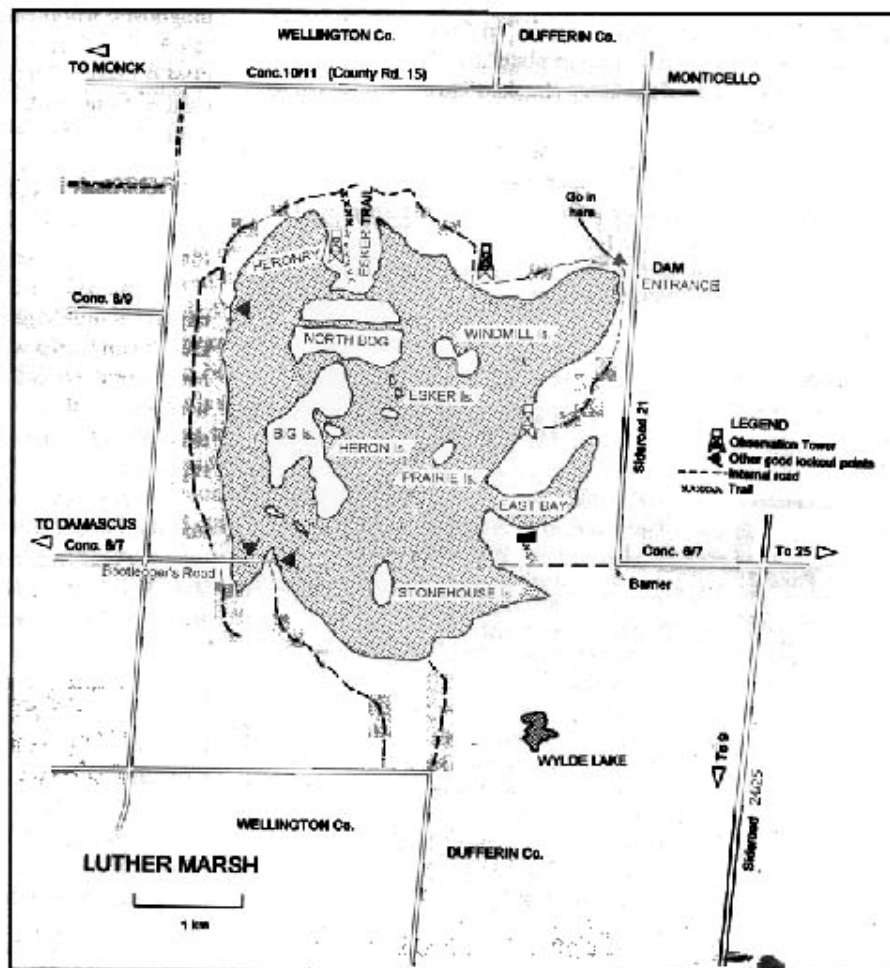
There are two main canoe access points, depending upon wind direction. With a westerly wind, the best access is via a drowned road known locally as the Bootlegger's Road. The Bootlegger's is reached by turning east from County Road 16 at the village store in Damascus and going about 3 km until the road disappears into the lake. Launching here, one can travel north, up either side of Big Island to the North Bog, giving a view of an extensive heronry (close access is prohibited). In calm weather it is possible to skirt the North Bog and investigate the other small islands such as Windmill, Esker and Prairie. A second route from the Bootlegger's involves heading east, around Stonehouse Island and the marshes fringing the southwest shore of the

lake; this is particularly good for Least Bitterns.

A second launch from the dam area or the internal road leading south from the dam, gives access to East Bay and the north end of Wylde Lake. This should only be attempted in calm conditions.

Note that there are restricted areas for canoes, all based on sound considerations of wildlife conservation. These include the heronry, some islands and the immediate vicinity of Osprey nests, all of which are on artificial nest-sites. Also note that the floating bogs should not be landed on, unless you wish to become a fossil for the edification of future generations, since they are bottomless mires covered by a thin skin of vegetation.

**On foot or by car.** Without a canoe the marsh still offers good birding. A good overview may be had from the Bootlegger's Road, and from the area south of the dam where there is an observation tower about 1.5 km south of the gate (this stretch of road is usually drivable). The well-marked dam entrance is about 2.2 km south of Monticello on Sideroad 20/21. From the dam an internal road (not open to vehicles) runs all the way



## Profile of an Artist Barry Kent MacKay

by

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around the north and west side to the Bootlegger's. The first several kilometres of this are worth walking since they pass through good wet woodland in places, and a second observation tower is located about 2 km in. Continue on the internal road and where it turns south, a trail through excellent deciduous woodland (sign-posted "Esker Trail") leads down to a third tower overlooking the north end of the lake. Following the internal road a further 1.5 km brings you to the drowned eighth/ninth concession, which gives another view of the heronry. Continuing 1.8 km brings you to the Bootlegger's Road where you turn left towards the lake. On the last little hill before descending to a causeway, a track on the right (south) leads to an interesting little slough a couple of hundred metres in. The county's first Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was seen here.

Other good areas not needing a canoe are: the wet woodlands on either side of County Road 15 (Concession 10/11) midway between Monck and Monticello; the southern shore of East Bay where a blind has been built by the Guelph Field Naturalists' Club; and the drowned eastern extension of the Bootlegger's Road. The latter two areas are accessible from Highway 25 by travelling west on East Luther Concession 6/7, or from Highway 9 by travelling north on East Luther Sideroad 24/25. To get to the blind, walk west along Concession 6/7 of East Luther, past the barrier, and walk north along the first fire breaks in the pines north of the disused road.

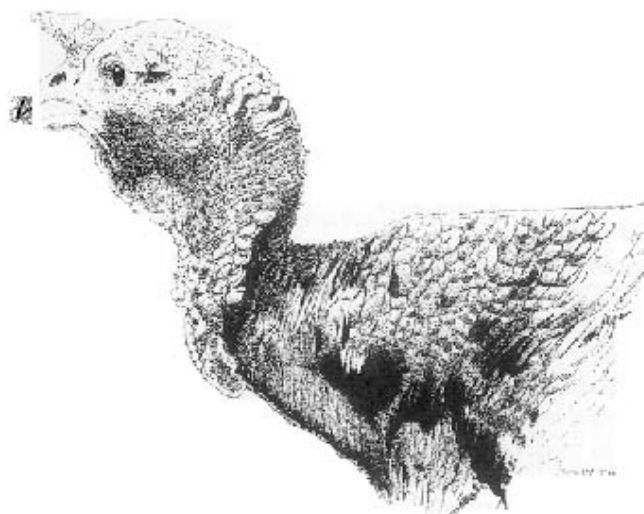
Wylde Lake is an extensive area of tamarack woodland of a very good boreal aspect. Access is from Highway 9, 7.3 km west of Highway 25 and 11.5 km east of Arthur (Highway 6) where a dirt road leads 5.3 km north from Hwy 9 (actually the Wellington/Dufferin county line). The road takes a sharp left turn; at this point Wylde Lake is to the right (east). It is a large area, easy to get lost in. There are significant numbers of breeding Lincoln's Sparrows and other boreal species here.

**Breeding Birds of Luther.** Great Blue Heron, a large colony; American Bittern, in most reedbeds; Least Bittern, especially at southern end; Great Egret, sporadic nester; Double-crested Cormorant, probable; up to 15 species of duck, though many are sporadic; regular breeders include American Wigeon, Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, Lesser Scaup, Redhead; less regular are Canvasback, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal and Hooded Merganser; Common Loon, 1-2 pairs most years; Red-necked Grebe, formerly but may no longer breed here; Osprey, up to seven pairs; Wilson's Phalarope, Windmill, Heron and Prairie Islands; American Coot; Virginia Rail and Sora in reedbeds, especially on islands; Black Tern, formerly abundant, now only a few pairs mostly near Stonehouse Island and the North Bog; Marsh Wren, all reedbeds; Sedge Wren, sporadic and variable; Lincoln's Sparrow, Wylde Lake; Yellow-rumped Warbler, pine plantations; Louisiana Waterthrush (one record of a singing bird).

In addition, after the spring thaw the lake holds large quantities of migrant ducks such as Bufflehead and both scaup. There is good habitat for migrant shorebirds during the fall draw-down, especially on the edges of the floating bogs.

Hunting is allowed from late September to mid-December, and the area is not recommended during this period.

Interesting records for the Wellington section of the marsh would be greatly appreciated by Bryan Wyatt, 63 Woodland Glen Road, Guelph, ON N1G 3S3.



Wild Turkey

### Where to Find Ontario's Birds

Members will be pleased to hear that Clive Goodwin's completely revised and updated **A Bird-Finding Guide to Ontario** is now in nature stores, bookstores and at BJ Sales (905) 668-0241 (Publisher: University of Toronto Press).