

# Favourite Birding Hotspots

## Sarnia Waterworks

by Dennis Rupert

**General Description.** Located at the mouth of the St. Clair River at the extreme south end of Lake Huron, this site is probably the best place in southern Ontario (or Michigan) to see pelagic species such as jaegers, kittiwakes and Sabine's Gulls. The location has also been called the "Point Edward Lighthouse", an obvious misnomer since the site is actually in the City of Sarnia, and the "lighthouse" is in fact a navigational beacon used by southbound ships entering the river. The only real lighthouse in the area is across the river at the coast guard station in Port Huron.

To reach the Waterworks, exit Highway 402 at Front St. and proceed north (left) on Front past the traffic lights at St. Clair/Lite St. to the stop sign at Michigan Ave. Proceed across Michigan, turning west (left) onto Victoria Ave. Noting the stop sign at Alfred, proceed on Victoria to Fort St., the last street before Victoria ends at Livingstone. Drive north (right) on Fort, passing between the Waterworks plant and the Sarnia Yacht Club, and turn left into the parking lot overlooking the rivermouth. The location is also a favourite among trout-fishermen and this parking area can be quite busy. Additional parking is located on the west side of the Waterworks with an access road on the south.

**Time of Year.** The Waterworks location is useful mainly for observing the fall migration of waterbirds down Lake Huron, and to a lesser extent, that of landbirds along the shoreline. The area is best during passage of cold fronts when strong winds blow from the N or NW. Under the "best" conditions, most birders remain in their vehicles, braving the elements only when necessary. It is best to park at a slight angle to the wind so that the leeward windows can be opened for viewing without receiving a faceful of rain or snow.

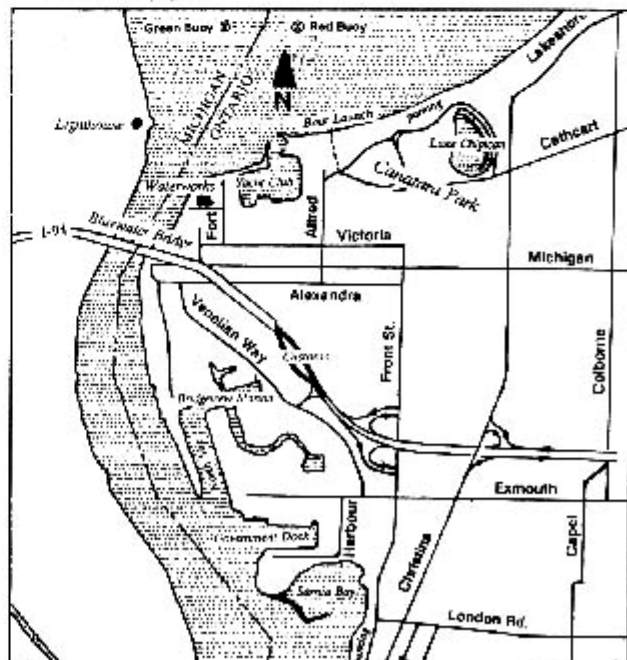
**Style of Birding.** At this location, birders simply sit (or stand) and wait for the birds to come. It is a style of birding with which many are not comfortable, preferring to be on the move. For these birders, side-trips to nearby birding spots such as Canatara Park or Sarnia Bay may be of interest. Depending on the weather, rafts of waterfowl can usually be found either off the boat-launch ramp or beach parking areas at Canatara Park, on Lake Chipican, or in Sarnia Bay. Canatara Park also offers a nature trail through the wooded areas along Christina St. for landbirds, and distributes a checklist for the Birds of Sarnia (300+) species. The checklist can be obtained at the Information Building at the west end of Cathcart Blvd. on Sundays, or at the Ontario Tourist Information Centre on Seaway Drive. During "nice" weather, I prefer to get some exercise by walking to the top of the hill behind the parking lot for a spectacular view of the Lake and to watch for flocks of landbirds crossing into Michigan. The pines at the top of the hill frequently harbour late passerines which attract the occasional Cooper's Hawk, Merlin or Peregrine Falcon.

**The Birds.** The jaeger season extends from late August through mid-January. Over the past 18 years, the total of all jaegers has

averaged 25 per year, averaging 17 Parasitic, 3 Pomarine and 5 unidentified per year. There have been only 3 reports of Long-tailed, two juveniles in early September and one adult in early October. Parasitic Jaegers have been reported from Aug. 27 to Dec. 27, and while a minor peak occurs in mid-September, 78% of all reports occur in October and November with the peak period from Oct. 23 to Nov. 11. About one-third of the birds are adults, with pale-phase outnumbering dark-phase about 10:1. Reports of Pomarine Jaegers cover a similar span, but tend to be later, with 76% of all reports occurring in November and December. About one-fifth of the birds are adults, all being pale-phase birds. Identification of jaegers can be extremely difficult, particularly when the distinctive elongated central tail retrices are lacking, and subjective characteristics such as size and bulk must be used. Under these conditions experience is essential, and while that experience is being gained many jaegers will be left unidentified. My percentage of unidentifieds has averaged 20% over the past 18 years, but during the early years was much higher, reaching a full 100% in 1977.

**Black-legged Kittiwakes** have been monitored at this location for the past 17 years, with an average of 14 per year reported. While there are 3 reports from late September and another 3 in mid-January, all other reports are from Oct. 11 to Dec. 25. November is the best month with 66% of reports, and the peak occurs from Nov. 4-11. About 94% of the kittiwakes have been in first winter plumage, but reports have included two second winter birds and 12 adults. **Sabine's Gulls** have

Continued on page 3



# Profile of an Artist

## Ron Ridout

by  
Jon McCracken

*This issue of OFO NEWS is illustrated by Ron Ridout*

Like all good wildlife artists, Ron has been literally pursuing his subject matter for most of his life, ever since he was knee-high to a Grasshopper Sparrow. You can tell when an artist really knows and understands his or her subject matter; this familiarity is readily apparent in Ron's drawings and paintings.

Ron's pencil and pen-and-ink drawings have appeared in numerous newsletters, magazines and journals (including *Ontario Birds*). His work is quite graphic without sacrificing important detail. The compositions have a strong yet simple sense of design.

Ron studied applied photography at Sheridan College, graduating in 1977. Afterwards, he served as an assistant to Robert Bateman over a five-year period. This experience no doubt helped hone his technical skills, particularly in the acrylic medium.

Ron is well travelled, having spent considerable time birding through Costa Rica, Cuba and Ecuador. He now works for the Long Point Bird Observatory where he is kept busy coordinating Birdathon and other projects.

Ron is known to members for being OFO's first president.

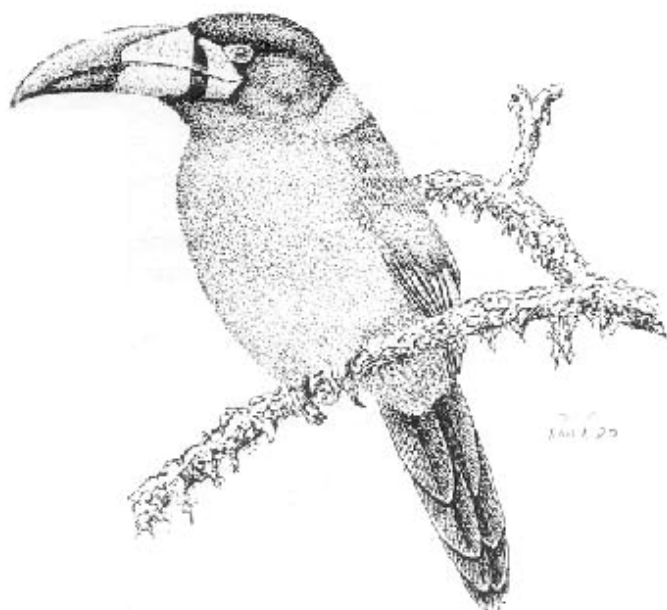
### Sarnia cont.....

averaged 2 per year over the same span, with nine reports in September, 16 in October and three in November. One individual remained in the harbour area for three weeks during 1991.

Large numbers of other waterbirds also move down Lake Huron with many resting in large flocks offshore. Among those seen regularly are Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Snow Goose, Brant, King Eider and Harlequin Duck. Franklin's Gulls and Little Gulls are included among the gulls that stream past, and an occasional Short-eared Owl is seen migrating down the centre of the lake. The more unusual sightings have included Pacific Loon, Eared Grebe, Northern Gannet, Magnificent Frigatebird, Common Eider, Gyrfalcon, Sandhill Crane, Mew Gull, Red Phalarope, and Common Raven. Sarnia harbour also produced an adult Ross's Gull in February 1992.

### Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch

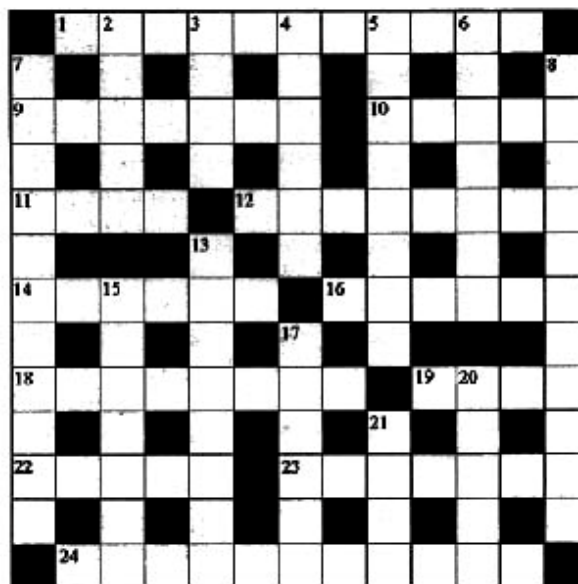
Beamer Conservation Area from March 1 to mid-May. Experienced counters needed. Contact Mary Ellen Hebb (905) 937-7671. Open House Good Friday April 14, 1995. Directions: Christie St. exit from QEW in Grimsby, go south and continue up the escarpment on Mountain St. At the top take the first right onto Ridge Rd. W. Follow the park signs to Quarry Rd. and the park entrance.



Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan

## Crossbird Puzzle

by Gerry Bennett



### Across

1. Nocturnal virtuoso
9. Prairie slough waders
10. Arboreal songster
11. Turn sharply in flight
12. Most happy
14. Greet with respect
16. What the Bubo did
18. Not just ordinary
19. In a bird's neck
22. Uniform colour
23. These trigger activities
24. What disagreeing shrikes may be at

### Down

2. Amo (2 words)
3. Shades
4. Part of a foot
5. Top man in some states
6. Of all birds, ostriches are
7. Some *Aythya*
8. Binocular feature (2 words)
13. Black bird not a blackbird
15. Not recently (2 words)
17. Old World sparrow
20. Having no corners
21. Grebes do

Answers page 7.