ONTARIO BIRDS

VOLUME 38 NUMBER 1
APRIL 2020

JOURNAL OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) is dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario

OFO was formed in 1982 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 (*OFO News*) and this journal (*Ontario Birds*); operates a bird sightings listserv (Ontbirds), coordinated by Mark Cranford; hosts field trips throughout Ontario; and holds an Annual Convention and Banquet in the autumn. Current information on all OFO activities is on the OFO website (email: admin@ofo.ca), coordinated by Ivor Williams. Comments or questions can be directed to OFO by e-mail (ofo@ofo.ca).

All persons interested in bird study, regardless of their level of expertise, are invited to become members of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Membership rates can be found on the OFO website. All members receive *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News*.

OFO Ontario Field Ornithologists
www.ofo.ca
PO Box 116, Station F, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2L4

ONTARIO BIRDS

JOURNAL OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 38 NUMBER 1
APRIL 2020
PAGES 1-48

2 Nesting of American White Pelicans in Lake Erie, 2019
D.V. Chip Weseloh, Adam Byrne, Doug Crump, David J. Moore and James P. Ludwig

14 Effects of Double-crested Cormorants on a nest tree at a newly formed colony
Justin Peter

21 A ground-nesting Bald Eagle in Ontario
Daniel J. Riley

26 White-crowned Pigeon: New to Ontario and Canada
Bruce M. Di Labio and Ross Harris

28 Thick-billed Kingbird at Presqu'ile Provincial Park: New to Ontario
Bruce M. Di Labio

31 The discovery of a Great Kiskadee at Rondeau Provincial Park: New to Ontario and Canada
Laura Rainbow Dragon

34 Extralimital records of the Great Kiskadee
P. Allen Woodliffe

36 Aberrant colouration in some Ontario birds
Kenneth F. Abraham, Chris J. Risley and D.V. Chip Weseloh

Cover: Great Kiskadee, by Barry Kent MacKay

ISSN 0822-3890
Publications Mail Agreement No. 40046348

Nesting of American White Pelicans in Lake Erie, 2019

D.V. Chip Weseloh, Adam Byrne, Doug Crump, David J. Moore and James P. Ludwig

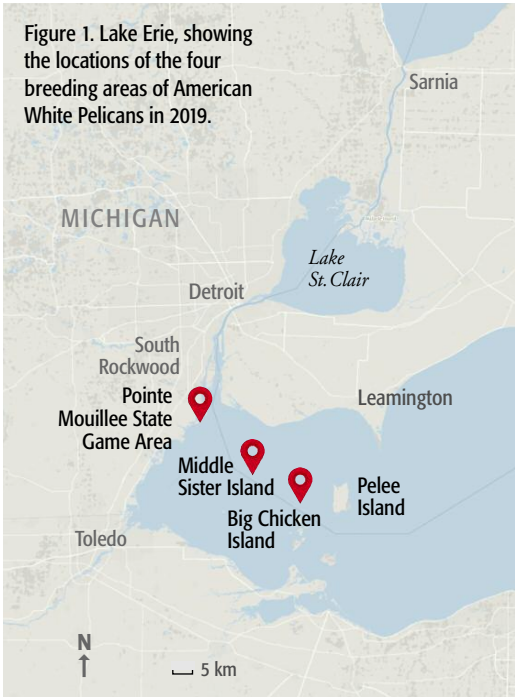


Figure 1. Lake Erie, showing the locations of the four breeding areas of American White Pelicans in 2019.

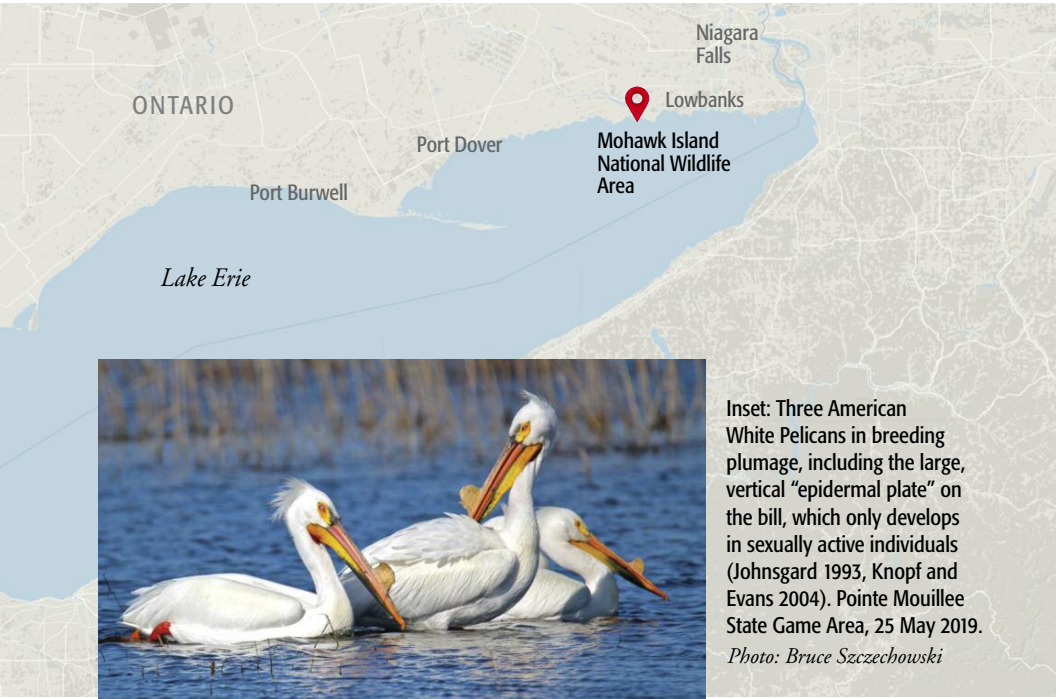
Summary

The first two nesting sites of American White Pelicans in the lower Great Lakes were discovered in the Canadian waters of western Lake Erie in 2016 and monitored during 2016-2018. They both showed an increased number of nests and fledglings in 2019. Two new nesting sites were discovered in Lake Erie in 2019: a site at the Mohawk Island National Wildlife Area, near Lowbanks, Ontario, in eastern Lake Erie, where a single nest with two eggs was found but later abandoned, and a site at the Pointe Mouillee State Game Area, near South Rockwood, Michigan, in western Lake Erie, where two nests produced two young. The increased nesting activity of American White Pelicans in Lake Erie in the last four years should alert field observers to watch for additional nesting activity of this species anywhere in the eastern Great Lakes area.

Introduction

American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) (henceforth pelicans) first nested in Lake Erie in 2016 (Tymstra *et al.* 2019) on two islands in the western basin: Big Chicken Island (41.77°N, 82.82°W) and Middle Sister Island (41.84°N, 83.00°W). They also nested on Big Chicken Island in 2017 but, unfortunately, the island was not visited in 2018, so their status for that year is unknown. On Middle Sister Island, pelicans were noted nesting in 2016-2018 (Tymstra *et al.* 2019).

One of the objectives of this article is to document the status of nesting of pelicans on those two islands in 2019. In addition, we report on pelican nesting activities at the Mohawk Island National



Inset: Three American White Pelicans in breeding plumage, including the large, vertical "epidermal plate" on the bill, which only develops in sexually active individuals (Johnsgard 1993, Knopf and Evans 2004). Pointe Mouillee State Game Area, 25 May 2019. *Photo: Bruce Szczechowski*

Wildlife Area, Ontario, and the Pointe Mouillee State Game Area, Michigan, two additional sites in Lake Erie where pelicans nested for the first time in 2019.

Methods

As with the two nesting sites discovered in 2016, the nesting on Mohawk Island was discovered while conducting fieldwork for toxicology studies on Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*). The nesting at Pointe Mouillee was discovered as a result of observations of intense activity of pelicans in suitable nesting habitat. Mohawk Island National Wildlife Area (42.83°N, 79.52°W) is located in the eastern basin of Lake Erie approximately 4 km southwest of Lowbanks, Haldimand County, Ontario. Pointe Mouillee State Game Area (42.01°N, 83.19°W) is located at the extreme western end of Lake Erie, 8 km southeast of South Rockwood, Monroe County, Michigan (Figure 1).

Observations

Mohawk Island

While visiting Mohawk Island (Figure 2) on 29 April 2019, DC and Kim Williams found a single pelican nest located between the main Herring Gull colony and the cormorant nesting area, near the top of a large knoll on the northeast portion of the island. No adult pelicans were observed in the vicinity but the

Figure 2. Mohawk Island, looking south from the top of the knoll. 18 June 2009. *Photo: Laura King*

characteristically minimal nest contained two distinctive large white pelican eggs (Figure 3). On 6 May, the same observers noted only one egg remained and it was very cold and presumably abandoned; there were no adult pelicans observed on this visit either.

Pointe Mouillee

At Pointe Mouillee, three pelicans were first reported on 20 April 2019, with numbers building to over 60 individuals by the end of the month. Near the beginning of May, a subset of these birds started to frequent a small island in the south end of the Vermet Unit of this large diked wetland complex (Figure 4). Breeding was suspected, but it was not confirmed until 27 May, when Bruce Szczechowski photographed pelicans

Opposite: Figure 3. The two-egg nest of American White Pelican on Mohawk Island, 29 April 2019. For comparison, the red field book measures approximately 10.6 cm x 17.1 cm.
Photo: Doug Crump


2008
FIELD
WORK - BOOK
2019
CARNET DE
TRAVAIL

Figure 4. Pointe Mouillee State Game Area, showing the Vermet Unit and the small island (circle) on which the pelicans nested in 2019. *Google Earth 2020*

sitting on two raised nests (Figure 5) and a young chick on 26 June (Figure 6). On 29 June 2019, adults were observed tending to two small, flightless young. By mid-August, each pair had one large chick still present on the small island. The maximum productivity, as assessed from photographs, was 2 chicks (1.0 yg/nest; n=2 nests).

Middle Sister Island

On Middle Sister Island on 30 April 2019, JPL found two nesting areas (pods) of pelicans. The first pod, at the east end of the island, had 15 nests (14 two-egg nests and 1 one-egg nest); the second pod, more westerly towards the interior of the island, had 27 nests (13 two-egg nests, 4 one-egg nests and 10 zero-egg nests). Hence, a total of 42 nests.

He noted 72 adult pelicans sitting offshore in the water.

JPL returned to Middle Sister Island on 21 May and counted 18 nests in the eastern pod and 48 nests in the interior pod. Most of the eggs in the eastern pod had hatched and 14 small young were present; the oldest young were about two weeks old. In the interior pod, no eggs had yet hatched. The two pods together accounted for 66 nests with eggs or young. DC visited the island on 19 June and noted 20 pelican chicks. DJM visited the island on 18 July; he flushed 27 pelicans, could only distinguish four old pelican nests and found one young pre-fledged pelican. Most pelicans had already left the island. The maximum productivity was 20 chicks (0.3 yg/nest; n=66 nests).

Big Chicken Island

At Big Chicken Island on 7 May 2019, DC did not find any pelican nests and noted only one pelican fly off the island. Nearly six weeks later on 18 June, he noted 30 nests (5 two-egg nests, 3 one-egg nests and 22 zero-egg nests) and between 80 and 120 adult pelicans. DJM visited the island on 18 July (a month later) and noted 61 pelican nests (1 one chick nest, 4 one-egg + one-chick,

Figure 5. The small dirt island in the Vermet Unit wetland showing two apparently adult American White Pelicans sitting on slightly elevated nests incubating eggs or brooding small young, 27 May 2019. *Photo: Bruce Szszechowski*

Figure 6. A young American White Pelican chick (in circle, facing obliquely to the right), approximately one week old and flanked by breeding adults in supplemental (chick-feeding-adult) plumage and by adult Double-crested Cormorants (black birds). Cormorants did not nest on the island. 26 June 2019. *Photo: Bruce Szczechowski*

3 three-egg nests, 23 two-egg nests, 19 one-egg nests and 11 zero-egg nests). He counted 87 adults as they flushed from the island. Dean Robillard, a private boat captain from Pelee Island, drove by Big Chicken Island several times during the summer of 2019. He first noticed six pelican chicks on 2 July and on his last trip, 12 September, noted 12 large chicks (R. Tymstra, pers. comm.). The maximum productivity was 12 chicks (0.2 yg/nest; n=61 nests).

Discussion

The changes in the nesting activity of the pelicans on Big Chicken and Middle Sister Islands between 2016 and 2019 are dramatic (Table 1). The total number of nests on the two islands increased from a minimum of 44 to 127. The number of known eggs went from 30 to 138 and the number of pre-fledged young went from 0 to 32. The numbers of adult pelicans at each site in each year are not as well characterized. Numbers from Big Chicken (2016) and Middle Sister (2017) combined were 155 compared to 159 in 2019. Therefore, the number of adult pelicans between 2016-17 and 2019 appears to have not changed, suggesting a stable adult population; perhaps the same adults are returning to the two islands annually. Although the research visits to these two islands during 2016-2019

Table 1. Maximum number of nests, eggs, adults and chicks of American White Pelicans found at Big Chicken and Middle Sister islands, 2016-2019 and at Pointe Mouillee State Game Area and Mohawk Island, 2019.

Data for 2016-2018 are from Tymstra *et al.* 2019; data for 2019 are from this study.

+ = At least this many, ND = no data

LOCATION	2016	2017	2018	2019
Big Chicken Island				
Nests	20	6+	ND	61
Eggs	6	ND	ND	79
Adults	105	35+	ND	87
Chicks	0	10+	ND	12
Middle Sister Island				
Nests	24	34	30	66
Eggs	24	24*	4	59
Adults	0	50*	ND	72
Chicks	0	Dead	ND	20
Pointe Mouillee SGA				
Nests	Not known to nest here			4
Eggs				2+
Adults				60+
Chicks				2
Mohawk Island				
Nests	Not known to nest here			1
Eggs				2
Adults				0
Chicks				0

*D.Crump, *in litt.*

were not timed to maximize the counts of nests, eggs or adults, the productivity metrics (number of nests, eggs and chicks) appear to have increased considerably on both islands. Also, although the combined number of pelican chicks known to have been produced at the two older colonies was low (0.25 chicks/nest) (see above), both colonies did successfully produce chicks in 2019. Productivity at pelican colonies is known to be highly variable, fluctuating from zero (total reproductive failure) to 1.48 pre-fledged young/nest (Knopf and Evans 2004, Madden and Restani 2005, Van Spall *et al.* 2005).

The number of pelican nests on the two new colonies, i.e., Mohawk Island and Pointe Mouillee, was much lower than the initial numbers on Big Chicken and Middle Sister Islands when they were discovered. Perhaps the flocks of pelicans that "pioneered" the two new sites were much smaller than those which discovered the two older sites. Alternatively, the habitat at these new sites may not be as suitable as that at the older sites. Mohawk Island is most similar to Big Chicken Island and is composed of solid limestone bedrock (as opposed to total cobblestone on Big Chicken), is slightly larger than Big Chicken Island and has a large noticeable soil and rocky knoll, presumably formed by pressure from wind-driven ice in the winter.There are often large accumulations of Zebra Mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*) shells on the east side of the island. Both Mohawk and Big Chicken Islands have little or no vegetation. Double-crested Cormorants, Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*), Herring Gulls and Caspian Terns (*Hydropogne caspia*)

usually nest on Mohawk Island annually and Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) occasionally nest there (Blokpoel and Tessier 1996, Canadian Wildlife Service, unpubl. data). Big Chicken Island usually only has Herring Gulls nesting on it, though cormorants nested there in the 1970s (Blokpoel and Tessier 1996) and early 1980s and currently use it only as a loafing area (DVCW, unpubl. data).

Pointe Mouillee State Game Area, the site of the other new colony, is very large; it is a 1,618 ha (4,000 acres, 16.2 km^2) complex of natural and constructed marsh ponds and diked paths. The pelicans nested on a relatively small dirt island in one of eight medium to large shallow impounded wetland units (the Vermet Unit, 372 ha) heavily overgrown with cattails (*Typhus* sp.). This small dirt island in a large impounded wetland, surrounded by cattails, is totally unlike the other three sites: Middle Sister Island is much larger and heavily forested, severely reducing visibility to the horizon; Big Chicken and Mohawk Islands are also relatively larger than the dirt island but are treeless with no emergent vegetation and have unlimited visibility to the horizon. There were no other colonial waterbirds nesting on the small dirt island; it was probably too small, but others have nested, and do nest, in the wetland complex.There are published records of Great Egrets (*Ardea alba*) Great Blue Herons (*A. herodias*), Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and Herring Gulls nesting at Pointe Mouillee prior to and during surveys in 2007-2010 (Cuthbert and Wires 2013). Great Blue Herons nested there after the 2010 surveys but the exact years were not noted; Great Egrets nested as recently as 2014 and night-herons, Herring Gulls and Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) nested there in 2019 (A. Byrne, pers. obs.).

Table 2. Egg dates for American White Pelicans at four colony sites in Lake Erie, 2016-2019. Data for 2016-2018 are from Tymstra *et al.* 2019; data for 2019 are from this study.

DATE	NESTING STAGE
Big Chicken Island	
19 July 2016	Nests with eggs
31 July 2017	Incubating eggs or young
18 June 2019	Nests with eggs
Middle Sister Island	
25 April 2017	Nests with eggs
30 April 2019	Nests with eggs
Pointe Mouillee	
27 May 2019	Incubating eggs or young
Mohawk Island	
29 April 2019	Nest with eggs

There is an interesting difference in the nesting phenology of the pelicans at these four nesting areas, even though two of the areas have only been active for one year each and have only had one or two nests. The pelicans at Middle Sister Island, Mohawk Island and Pointe Mouillee have all had eggs relatively early in the season, in April or May (Table 2). Pelicans nesting on Big Chicken Island, however, have only had eggs much later in the season, in June or July (Table 2). Given that the nesting

efforts of pelicans on Middle Sister Island failed in both 2016 and 2017 and the adults subsequently abandoned the island, it is plausible that these birds simply moved to Big Chicken Island and undertook a second nesting. This would explain the late egg dates on Big Chicken Island in both of those years. However, this explanation is not valid for 2019 when pelicans did not abandon Middle Sister Island and the egg dates on Big Chicken Island were relatively late again. One possibility for the different timings might be the timing of the availability of whatever species of fish the pelicans are foraging on at or near their nesting site. Many fish school and spawn as a function of water temperatures (Wismer and Christie 1987, and references therein) which are probably quite different at different places in Lake Erie at the same moment in time. Shallower areas may have spawning at rather different times than sites surrounded by deeper waters. However, pelicans are known to range over large distances to feed, greater than 320 km round trip (Madden and Restoni 2005), and there may not be much temperature variation in offshore waters among the closely juxtaposed islands in the shallow western basin of Lake Erie.

The development of four pelican nesting colonies with three of them having successful nesting attempts in Lake Erie over the past four years, indicates that suitable habitat of sufficient quality for nesting exists. Colonial waterbird researchers in the eastern Great Lakes should be on the lookout for pelicans nesting at other sites on Lake Erie, and/or new sites on Lakes Huron and Ontario and any other suitable areas to the east. As a final thought, we would ask any researchers who visit these Lake Erie pelican colonies, to opportunistically collect regurgitated food pellets from pelicans; these might help us resolve the differential phenology question.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank to Kim Williams for field assistance to DC, Jeff Costa, Jaimie Bortolotti, Samuel Ross, Jade Bassler and Olivia Trudeau for field assistance to DM, Bruce Szczechowski for the photographs of the nesting birds at Pointe Mouillee, Laura King for the photograph of Mohawk Island, Judie Shore for making the map and Dean Robillard and Rob Tymstra for collecting and sharing data from Big Chicken Island in 2019. Chris Risley, Ken Abraham and Tommy King provided constructive comments on previous versions of this paper.

Literature Cited

Blokpoel, H. and **G.D. Tessier.** 1996. Atlas of colonial waterbirds nesting on the Canadian Great Lakes, 1989-1991. Part 3. Cormorants, gulls and island nesting terns on the lower Great Lakes system in 1990. Technical Report Series Number 225, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 74 pp.

Cuthbert, F.J. and **L. Wires.** 2013. The fourth decadal U.S. Great Lakes colonial waterbird survey: Results and recommendations to improve the scientific basis for conservation and management. Final Report. Unpublished manuscript. University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minnesota. 40 pp+ 158 pp (Tables, Figures and Appendices).

Johnsgard, P.A. 1993. Cormorants, Darters and Pelicans of the World. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 445 pp.

Knopf, F.L. and **R.M. Evans**. 2020. American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*), version 1.0 *In* Birds of the World (A.F. Poole, Ed.). Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York, USA. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.amwpel.01

Madden, E.M. and **M. Restani**. 2005. History and breeding ecology of the American White Pelican at Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Montana. Waterbirds 28 (Special Publication 1):23-26.

Tymstra, Y.R., D.V.C. Weseloh, D.J. Moore, D. Crump and **J.P. Ludwig**. 2019. American White Pelicans expand breeding range into western Lake Erie, 2016-2018. Ontario Birds 37:2-15.

Vanspall, K., J. Steciw and **J.A. Young.** 2005. Fifty years of American White Pelican breeding at Stum Lake, British Columbia. Waterbirds 28 (Special Publication 1):18-22.

Wismer, D.A. and **A.E. Christie**. 1987. Temperature relationships of Great Lakes fishes: a data compilation. Great Lakes Fishery Commission Special Publication 87-3. 165 p. (www.glfc.org/pubs/SpecialPubs/Sp87_3.pdf)

D.V. Chip Weseloh
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment and Climate Change Canada
4905 Dufferin St.
Toronto, Ontario M3H 5T4
Email: chip.weseloh@canada.ca

Adam Byrne
11771 Rachel Lane
DeWitt, Michigan 48820

Doug Crump
Science and Technology Branch
Environment and Climate Change Canada
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H7

David J. Moore
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment and Climate Change Canada
Canada Centre for Inland Waters
867 Lakeshore Road
Burlington, Ontario L7S 1A1

James P. Ludwig
19835 Duart Road
Duart, Ontario N0L 1H0

Effects of Double-crested Cormorants on a nest tree at a newly formed colony

Justin Peter

Observation

On the sunny afternoon of 7 July 2019, I was paddling my canoe at Big Crow Lake in Algonquin Provincial Park (*Nipissing District*) when I noted the unusual appearance of an Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*, henceforth "pine") that was growing near the lake's edge on a point. The pine stood an estimated 25 m in height. Its base was situated approximately 2 m above the water level and 4 m overland from the water's edge. The tree was interesting as the central portion of its otherwise live crown seemed devoid of foliage (Figure 1). The pine was closely surrounded by other, shorter trees, mainly Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) and Northern White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) standing to a maximum of two thirds of the pine's height, with minor representation of Balsam Fir (*Abies balsamea*) and White Birch (*Betula papyrifera*). Speckled Alder (*Alnus rugosa*) grew immediately along the waterline. As I approached, I noticed that there were three substantial stick nests in the tree; two of the nests were placed in crotches formed by two or more large branches adjoining the main trunk, one nest approximately 2 m above the other and on the opposite side of the trunk from the first; a third nest was situated in a fork along a large branch approximately 3 m away from the trunk. An adult Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) was sitting on the latter nest. As I paddled around the tree for a better view, I saw a second adult bird sitting on the lower of the two nests by the trunk and then a third bird perched on a branch 2 m above the upper nest (Figure 2). From these circumstances, I deduced that the pine held an active cormorant colony comprised of three nests and that the sitting birds were either incubating eggs or brooding young. I did not notice the same tree in this general state (nor nests or cormorants) during my last visit to this site in July 2017.

Figure 1. The white pine tree with a small colony of Double-crested Cormorants at Big Crow Lake in Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, on 7 July 2019. Circles indicate the three nests. Note that the nearby branches are nearly devoid of pine needle foliage.

Photo: Justin Peter

Figure 2. Three nests of Double-crested Cormorants (lower three circles) at Big Grow Lake in Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, on 7 July 2019. Cormorants were sitting on the two lower nests while a third cormorant (top circle) was perched on a branch above the uppermost nest. Again, the reduction in needle foliage can be seen on branches extending outward from the area of the nests.

Photo: Justin Peter

I was interested in how the sparse appearance of the tree might relate to the cormorants' presence. With 8x42 binoculars, I determined that the nests appeared to be composed entirely of pine branches with needles attached. The needles were rust-coloured, indicating that the twigs had been dead for at least a few weeks. The near-absence of live twigs with needles within proximity of each nest and along the large branches closest to the nests up to approximately 1 m from the large branches' tips suggested that the birds had foraged for live twigs from this very tree, gathering what they were able to break off while perched as close to the nest site as possible and only so far from the trunk as the branches might support their weight. I examined the mainly bare large branches and counted over 50 discrete points where pine resin glistened brightly in the sunlight. I deduced that these were the points where the cormorants had broken off twigs they would use in their nests, and the fact the resin glistened suggested that the birds had removed the twigs earlier during the current breeding season. The live twigs in the lower crown within 3 m of the trunk seemed to bear a yellowish cast as distinct from the vibrant green of the foliage on the crown periphery and in the upper crown above the nests. I could not discern whitewash in the discoloured area and could form no conclusions as to whether the needles were yellowed, or covered by a fine spray of guano, or both. There was whitewash visible on branches immediately below each nest and a branch adjacent to one nest was covered with guano. I estimated that the pine

Figure 3. Speckled Alder foliage beneath the nest tree of the colony of Double-crested Cormorants at Big Crow Lake in Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario, on 7 July 2019, showing scattered guano deposition. *Photo: Justin Peter*

had made approximately 25 cm of height growth in the current season. At the shoreline below, there was light, scattered guano deposited on alder foliage approximately 6 m from the base of the pine (Figure 3). I did not notice any guano on the ground below the nest tree.

Discussion

The Double-crested Cormorant is a habitually colonial bird; males select a nest site on the ground or in a tree and once it is accepted by a female, the pair proceeds to build the nest using various materials including seaweed, sticks and extraneous materials (Dorr *et al.* 2020). Tree-nesting cormorants prefer to use tall trees (Koh *et al.* 2012, Lafferty *et al.* 2016) and Eastern White Pine is the preferred species in Algonquin Park (Tozer 2012). It is well established that tree-nesting cormorant colonies can have adverse effects on their nest trees and other vegetation in their midst, and perennial occupation by large numbers of birds can result in the death of the nest

trees (Hebert *et al.* 2005, 2014, Koh *et al.* 2012). I was curious as to whether — given the young age of this colony — the effects on the nest tree thus far would be detrimental. Cormorants impact live nest trees in various ways; first, as seen here, they will preferentially collect twigs from the host tree, by stripping branches within proximity of the nest (Lemmon *et al.* 1994). It stands to reason that the removal of live foliage beyond a certain volume would irreversibly impact the pine's photosynthetic capacities and, therefore, self-maintenance abilities. Based on a visual approximation of the remaining twig volume in the pine's crown and what had already been harvested to construct the three nests, I would estimate that there remained sufficient and accessible live twigs to support the construction of four to six additional cormorant nests in this tree and using twigs from this tree alone. In considering the impacts of the related Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) in Europe on pines as nesting trees, Goc *et al.* (2005) suggested that a pair would require 12.7 kg of pine twigs (dry mass) to construct a nest, and that most of this quantity was in fact dropped and not retrieved. Assuming a pine contained 30 kg of needles (Suliński 1997 in Goc *et al.* 2005), the supply of materials from the nest tree itself would be quickly exhausted. I was unable to find information on the maximum percentage of canopy loss that an Eastern White Pine can withstand. Observations of ice storm damage to this species suggest that compared to other species, notably various hardwoods, Eastern White Pine does not readily re-sprout branches following their removal (Brommit *et al.* 2004), so twig loss due to nest construction would represent a permanent reduction of photosynthetic capacity.

Cormorants may also impact nest trees through guano deposition. It has long been assumed that guano deposition is the means by which Double-crested Cormorants kill nest trees (Palmer 1962). More recent authors reaffirmed the impact of guano deposition at colonies of the Great Cormorant to be more important than cropping of nesting materials (Klimaszyk and Rzymski 2016). The importance of guano deposition is reinforced by observations of this same cormorant species on roost trees — where the birds do not nest nor collect twigs — and which eventually die anyway as guano accumulates. However, most such observations have been conducted at colonies or roosts consisting of at least tens of birds, not a few pairs, and colony density of nesting birds appears to be an important factor in the degree of impacts observed (Koh e*t al.* 2012, Klimaszyk and Rzymski 2016). Guano may impact the tree directly through whitewash deposition on the tree, blocking sunlight and impeding the leaf's biochemical processes, as well by changing the soil chemistry when guano reaches the ground (Lemmon *et al.* 1994). The negative effects on nest trees appear to be invariably progressive in large colonies (Koh *et al.* 2012). Detrimental effects of guano were not readily apparent at the site described in this note, neither on the nest tree nor on the surrounding understory.

It is premature to make any pronouncements about the future impacts that this new cormorant colony may have on the nest tree or surrounding habitat. Subsequent, finer and systematic observations of such a colony might provide additional insights into the pathways to habitat alteration occasioned by cormorants, notably if it remains a small colony. I believe this observation is significant in detailing the early environmental impacts on a nest tree at a cormorant colony site in Ontario and vividly illustrating what we understand about the nest construction process in this species.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Chip Weseloh for assistance with the literature and the reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Literature Cited

Brommit, A.G., N. Charbonneau, T.A. Contreras and **L. Fahrig.** 2004. Crown loss and subsequent branch sprouting of forest trees in response to a major ice storm. Journal of the Torrey Botanical Society 131:169-176.

Dorr, B.S., J.J. Hatch and **D.V. Weseloh** 2020. Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), version 2.0. *In* The Birds of the World (A.F. Poole, Ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York, USA. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.doccor.01

Goc, M., L. Ilyszko and **L. Stempniewicz.** 2005. The largest European colony of the Great Cormorant on the Vistula Spit (N Poland) — an impact on the forest ecosystem. Ecological Questions 6:93-103.

Hebert, C.E., J. Duffe, D.V.C. Weseloh, E.M.T. Senese and **G.D. Haffner**. 2005. Unique island habitats may be threatened by Double-crested Cormorants. Journal of Wildlife Management 69:68-76.

Hebert, C.E., J. Pasher, D.V.C. Weseloh, T. Dobbie, S. Dobbyn, D. Moore, V. Minelga and **J. Duffe**. 2014. Nesting cormorants and temporal changes in island habitat. Journal of Wildlife Management 78:307-313.

Klimaszyk, P. and **P. Rzymski**. 2016. The complexity of ecological impacts induced by great cormorants. Hydrobiologia 771:13-30.

Koh, W., A. Tanentzap, G. Mouland, T. Dobbie, L. Carr, J. Keitel, K. Hogsden, G. Harvey, J. Hudson and **R. Thorndyke.** 2012. Double-crested Cormorants alter forest structure and increase damage indices of individual trees on island habitats in Lake Erie. Waterbirds 35(Special Publication 1):13-22.

Lemmon, C.R., G. Bugbee and **G.R. Stephens**. 1994. Tree damage by nesting Double-crested Cormorants in Connecticut. Connecticut Warbler 14:27-30.

Lafferty D.J.R., K.C. Hanson-Dorr, A.M. Prisock and **B.S. Dorr.** 2016. Biotic and abiotic impacts of Double-crested Cormorant breeding colonies on forested islands in the southeastern United States. Forest Ecology and Management 369:10–19.

Palmer, R.S. 1962. Handbook of North American Birds, Volume 1. Yale University Press. New Haven, Connecticut. 567 pp.

Suliński, J. 1997. The amount of biomass as a function of the height and density of a tree stand. Pp. 85-90 *in* Proceedings 3rd National Conference on Applications of Mathematics in Biology and Medicine, Mądralin, Poland 1997 Sep 16.

Tozer, R. 2012. Birds of Algonquin Park. The Friends of Algonquin Park. Whitney, Ontario. 474 pp.

Justin Peter
927-65 Scadding Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M5A 4L1
E-mail: jbpetr@yahoo.ca

A ground-nesting Bald Eagle in Ontario

Daniel J. Riley

Figure 1. Bald Eagle ground-nest. James Island, Ontario. 4 July 2019. *Photo: Daniel J. Riley*

The Observation

During the first week of July 2019, Kyle Davis and I, of Natural Resource Solutions Inc. (NRSI), were conducting nest surveys of Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*). This was the third and final week in a series of surveys which spanned Lake Huron from Georgian Bay to the North Channel and waters along the Bruce Peninsula. Over the course of the past two days, we had been surveying islands with cormorant colonies along the Bruce Peninsula and south of Manitoulin Island.

On the morning of 4 July 2019, we had launched out of the South Baymouth marina, Manitoulin Island, in clear conditions with calm waters. Despite being the start of July, the air was still a crisp 15°C as we set out to begin our day's work. Anyone familiar with the waters around the Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin will know that they are often a clear turquoise, allowing you to see rocks

and the lake's topography deep beneath the surface. This was the case that morning and the stillness of the water extended the visibility. The spring and summer high water levels meant that many of the islands we planned to visit were partially or entirely submerged, and the clarity of the water found us throttling back for rocks 10 to 15 feet below the surface.

At 10:20, we arrived at our third survey point of the morning, the small, rocky and shrub covered James Island, located south of Fitzwilliam Island and north of Yeo Island in Manitoulin District. These islands form part of a chain of Niagara Escarpment islands that are primarily composed of limestone and dolomite (Henson *et al.* 2010). The shorelines of islands in this part of Lake Huron are characterized by cobble beaches and shelving bedrock (Henson *et al.* 2010). These beaches provided excellent locations to land our vessel and disembark. As we approached a small peninsula, we noticed a large stick nest perched within the limestone rubble, (Figure 1). Initially, I assumed it to be the nest of a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), as we had observed a few ground-nests of this species in the preceding weeks.

We landed the boat down the shore from the nest, so as to avoid disturbing any adults or young that may be on the nest. We approached the nest which appeared to be vacant upon first inspection. The nest was flattened in appearance and constructed of small to medium sized branches and sticks. As we got closer, I was surprised to see a Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) chick perched just down slope of the nest, (Figures 1 and 2). The chick appeared to be between seven and eight weeks old based on size, feather development and mobility (Bortolotti 1984). It had most likely left the nest when it heard our boat approaching. Neither of the parents were in sight and were presumably out hunting or alternatively, keeping an eye on us from a distance.

Not wanting to disturb the chick, we quickly took a few photos and continued our search for cormorant nests. Upon returning to the boat, I texted with a few colleagues and fellow birders inquiring whether Bald Eagle ground-nesting was a known or regularly occurring phenomenon. Most agreed that it was not a commonly known behaviour, particularly in the given habitat and location in Ontario. Notably, two islands with suitable nesting trees were located in relatively close proximity to James Island. Fitzwilliam Island, 3.3 kilometres from the nest, and Yeo Island, 3.8 kilometres from the nest, are both forested islands with an abundance of potentially suitable nesting trees for Bald Eagles. During our time surveying cormorant colonies, we observed an additional five active Bald Eagle nests on islands in Lake Huron, all of these were located in trees.

Bald Eagle Ground-Nests

Bald Eagles are found in diverse habitats across North America, ranging from northern Alaska to the deserts of the American southwest and east through the boreal forest and Rocky Mountains, all the way to the Atlantic coast (Buehler 2000). Suitable breeding habitat typically consists of areas of mature and old-growth forest near to a waterbody or watercourse,

Figure 2. Bald Eagle chick on ground-nest. James Island, Ontario. 4 July 2019. *Photo: Daniel J. Riley*

which provide foraging habitat (Buehler 2000). The nest is usually built in the one of the largest trees in the area, on an exposed branch capable of supporting the massive nest which can weigh as much as 2 metric tons (Herrick 1932). In Ontario, Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) is often the tree species of choice although other large conifers and deciduous trees, including aspen species *(Populus* sp.) are regularly used (OMNR 1987).

With their extensive breeding range, Bald Eagles sometimes need to be creative in their selection of nest sites. In the treeless portions of their range, such as Alaska, northern Canada, Arizona and coastal islands off California, ground-nests are used with greater regularity. These nests are generally positioned on ridges, cliff sides or sea stacks allowing for easy access from the air but limited accessibility for terrestrial predators (Sherrod *et al.* 1976). Observation records of Bald Eagles constructing ground-nests in other regions exist, but they are few and far between.

In 1991, a Bald Eagle ground-nest was documented on an island in Minnesota (Hines and Lipke 1991). In Florida, Curnutt and Robertson (1994) found three ground-nests on mangrove keys in Florida Bay. More recently, in the summer of 2004, Chris Martin observed the first known Bald Eagle ground-nest from Ontario, in Quetico Provincial Park, Rainy River District (Martin 2005). The nest was located on a small treeless rocky island in Pickerel Lake and was occupied by a juvenile eagle. Much like my observation from Lake Huron, the nest was

located in an area where seemingly suitable nesting trees abound. In 2010, on Vivian Island in the Strait of Georgia, British Columbia, Burton (2010) observed a Bald Eagle incubating an egg on a ground-nest.

In April 2013, a ground-nesting Bald Eagle was documented on Little Cobb Island, a barrier island located in Northampton County, Virginia (Watts *et al.* 2015); this nest contained two chicks, both approximately 35 days old and being cared for by an adult. Two months later, in June, Ruth Boettcher discovered a second ground-nest in Virginia, this time on Cedar Island, Accomack County, another of Virginia's Barrier Islands (Watts *et al.* 2015). Observations of ground-nests have since increased on other Virginia Barrier Islands, with two more nests found in 2018 and another in March 2019, all on separate islands (Santora 2019). Bryan Watts, of the April 2013 observation, speculates that an increase in the Bald Eagle population in recent years may be causing eagles to resort to riskier nesting locations (Santora 2019). Perhaps a similar trend in Ontario's Bald Eagle population will result in more observations of eagles nesting in unusual places.

Conclusion

Although I can only hypothesize as to why a pair of Bald Eagles would choose to nest on the ground among limestone cobble, it is fascinating to learn that this is not an isolated observation of this behaviour. This observation represents the second documented Bald Eagle ground-nest in Ontario. Interestingly, the nest is quite similar in position to a number of ground-nests recently documented on Virginia's Barrier Islands. The ground-nests have a number of traits in common, they are located on islands in large waterbodies, which are primarily rocky and have an absence of terrestrial predators. These commonalities offer a small amount of clarity as to why these sites are being selected; however, they do not entirely explain the behaviour. Regardless of the reasoning behind it, the ground-nest represents a unique and memorable sighting for this observer.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ken Burrell for encouraging me to write this article, Nathan Miller for organizing the logistics and giving me the opportunity to

participate in this exciting field work and my father, Garth Riley, for his help reviewing and editing my writing. I would also like to thank the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for their support.

Literature Cited

Bortolotti, G.R. 1984. Physical development of nestling Bald Eagles with emphasis on the timing of growth events. Wilson Bulletin 96:524-542.

Buehler, D.A. 2000. Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), version 2.0. *In* the Birds of the World (A.F. Poole and F.B. Gill, Ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York USA. https://doi.org/10.2173/bna.506

Burton, C.H. 2010. Ground-nesting Bald Eagle in the Strait of Georgia, British Columbia. Wildlife Afield 7:126-127.

Curnutt, J.L. and **W.B. Robertson, Jr.** 1994. Bald Eagle nest site characteristics in south Florida. Journal of Wildlife Management 58:218-221.

Henson, B.L., D.T. Kraus, M.J. McMurtry and **D.N. Ewert**. 2010. Islands of Life: A Biodiversity and Conservation Atlas of the Great Lakes Islands. Nature Conservancy of Canada. 154 pp.

Herrick, F.H. 1932. Daily life of the American eagle: early phase. Auk 49:307-323.

Hines, P. and **H. Lipke**. 1991. Ground-nesting Bald Eagles in northwestern Minnesota. Loon 63:155-157.

Martin, C. 2005. Ground nesting by Bald Eagles. Ontario Birds 23:31-33.

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). 1987. Bald Eagle Habitat Management Guidelines. Toronto, ON. 21pp.

Santora, T. 2019. Overcrowding might be driving Bald Eagles to nest on beaches. Audubon Magazine. June 18, 2019. Accessed at: https://www.audubon.org/news/overcrowding-might-be-driving-bald-eagles-nest-beaches

Sherrod, S.K., C.M. White and **F.S.L. Williamson**. 1976. Biology of the Bald Eagle on Amchitka Island, Alaska. Living Bird 15:145-182.

Watts, B.D., R. Boettcher and **B.R. Truitt**. 2015. Ground-nesting Bald Eagles on the Virginia Barrier Islands. The Raven. 86:15-17.

Daniel J. Riley
Natural Resource Solutions Inc.
415 Phillip Street, Unit C
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3X2
E-mail: driley@nrsi.on.ca

White-crowned Pigeon: New to Ontario and Canada

Bruce M. Di Labio and Ross Harris

Figure 1. White-crowned Pigeon at Pembroke, Ontario. 14 November 2018.
Photo: Mark E. Dojczman

One of the most amazing records

In recent years, for Ontario and Canada, was the discovery of a White-crowned Pigeon (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) at Pembroke, Ontario, on 14 November 2018. This was the fifth new species for Ontario in 2018, along with Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*), Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*), Costa's Hummingbird (*Calypte costae*) and Calliope Hummingbird (*Selasphorus calliope*) (Burrell *et al.* 2019). Truly an amazing year.

Unfortunately for the rest of us, only one extremely lucky birder saw this bird. While walking along the Kiwanis Way behind Algonquin College in Pembroke, Mark E. Dojczman observed an unfamiliar pigeon. He observed it both in flight and perched and was fortunately able to photograph it (Figure 1). After examining the image, he determined it to be a White-crowned Pigeon. Mark texted the photograph to me (BMD), and I, too, identified the bird as a White-crowned Pigeon. At the time I was down in Prince Edward County. Needless to say, I almost immediately did a "180" and headed for Pembroke — after quick phone calls to my son, Ben, in Carp and Doug McRae, in Brighton. Ben and I arrived at Pembroke during the early afternoon but neither we, nor several local birders, were able to re-find the pigeon. There were high winds and cold temperatures for most of the day. The following morning a few birders arrived but the bird was never seen again.

The Pembroke White-crowned Pigeon was subsequently identified as a bird in first basic plumage (Burrell *et al.* 2019); thus it hatched earlier during 2018. The primary range of the White-crowned Pigeon is the Caribbean; within the United States, it is usually found only in southern Florida (Raffaele *et al.* 1998, Bancroft *et al.* 2020). Although this species is known to wander somewhat within the Caribbean range and is capable of long-distance flights between islands in the Caribbean (Raffaele *et al.* 1998), it is not prone to wandering long distances to the north. There are very few extralimital records (Bancroft *et al.* 2020), unlike some other pigeons and doves, e.g., White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) and Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*). A search of eBird (2020) revealed only four records outside Florida and the Caribbean: Virginia (9 June 2013), Texas (4-14 October 2018, 4 September 2019) and Alabama (27 October to 12 November 2019). The species is also known to be in decline in many parts of its normal range because of hunting, disturbance and habitat loss (Bancroft *et al.* 2020). This highlights the truly remarkable nature of the Ontario record.

What was a fruit-eating pigeon from the mangrove swamps somewhere around the Gulf of Mexico doing in Pembroke on a cold and windy day in November? One could speculate that it was caught earlier in a Caribbean hurricane. However, hurricanes are hardly new to the Caribbean or Florida yet there is little history of long distance storm displacement of White-crowned Pigeons. The likelihood of this bird being an escapee is remote, given that White-crowned Pigeons are not known to be kept in captivity regularly or sold in North America (Raffaele *et al.* 1998).

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Mark E. Dojczman for sharing his discovery of this mega rarity.

Literature Cited

Bancroft, G.T., G. Thomas and **R. Bowman**. 2020. White-crowned Pigeon (*Patagioenas leucocephala*), version 1.0. *In* Birds of the World (A.F. Poole and F.B. Gill, editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York, USA.

Burrell, M.V.A., B.N. Charlton, K.G.D. Burrell, J.D.Vandermeulen, A.C. Guercio, B.A. Mann, D.A. Sutherland, P.D. Pratt and **W.G. Lamond**. 2019. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2018. Ontario Birds 37:52-83.

eBird. 2020. eBird: An online data base of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Ithaca, New York. Available at http://www.ebird.ca.

Raffaele, H.A., J. Wiley, O.H. Garrido, A. Keith and J.I. Raffaele. 1998. A guide to the birds of the West Indies. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA.

Bruce M. Di Labio
P.O. Box 538
Carp, Ontario K0A 1L0
E-mail: dilabiobirding@gmail.com

Ross E. Harris
19 Chicora Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M5R 1T7

Thick-billed Kingbird at Presqu'ile Provincial Park: New to Ontario

Bruce M. Di Labio

Figure 1. Thick-billed Kingbird at Calf Pasture, Presqu'ile Provincial Park, 29 August 2012.
Photo: Bruce M. Di Labio.

On the evening of Tuesday, 28 August 2012, Bill Gilmour decided to bike along Bayshore Drive at Presqu'ile Provincial Park, to look for Common Nighthawks (*Chordeiles minor*) from the bridge at the Calf Pasture. As he cycled along the road, he heard an unfamiliar call. He traced the call to a large flycatcher perched atop a tree. To his astonishment, it was a THICK-BILLED KINGBIRD!

After numerous phone calls, several local birders were fortunate to see this incredible rarity and obtain photos, videos and audio recordings as the light faded. That evening, the alert went out across Ontario. Everyone was hoping, or more likely praying, that the kingbird would stay overnight.

At daybreak on 29 August, the Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*) appeared to the delight of everyone present and spent most of the day feeding in the same general area where it was discovered on 28 August. It appeared to be in good health, catching and eating dragonflies and other insects. Much of its behaviour was very similar to that of the Olive-sided Flycatcher feeding (*Contopus cooperi)*,

foraging within a small area and repeatedly returning to the top of the same tree (Figure 1). More than 150 birders came to view the kingbird that day. It was very cooperative, perching and foraging in the open (Figure 2); no doubt thousands of photographs were taken of the bird! That evening the kingbird roosted overnight in willow trees along Calf Pasture Point.

On 30 August, the kingbird was not as cooperative and disappeared for part of the day. Fortunately, it was re-located during the late afternoon as it sat in a large dead tree overlooking the cove at the north end of Atkins Lane at Calf Pasture.

The kingbird was even more elusive the following morning, 31 August. It would occasionally vanish for up to 30 minutes and then suddenly reappear. It was spending more time at the Calf Pasture Point area catching bugs and returning to perch on trees on the point. The kingbird was last reported late that morning. A disappointed group of birders waited at the roost site that evening but unfortunately the bird did not appear. Those birders who did not make it during the week arrived on Saturday morning, 1 September. They searched for hours, but by mid-afternoon it became apparent the kingbird was no longer present.

This bird was identified as an adult female (Cranford 2013). In contrast, most of the extralimital records of Thick-billed Kingbird in western North America are suspected of referring to immature birds (Roberson 1980:258-259).

This amazing record is another reminder that birds fly and anything is possible. This sighting is the first record for Ontario, the second for Canada, and

Figure 2. Thick-billed Kingbird on a foraging flight, Presqu'ile Provincial Park, 29 August 2012. *Photo: Bruce M. Di Labio.*

the first documented record in eastern North America. The first Canadian record was at Qualicum Beach, British Columbia in 1974; that bird was present from 20 October to 11 November (Campbell *et al.* 1997:536). It was found dead below a window on 12 November. The specimen, an immature male, was prepared into a study skin at the Royal British Columbia Museum (specimen # 14750). Ironically even W.E. Godfrey (1986:368) in *The Birds of Canada* listed it as "Not to be expected" in Canada.

The Thick-billed Kingbird ranges primarily throughout western Mexico (Lowther *et al.* 2020). It was first found nesting in the United States in 1958, at Guadalupe Canyon in southeastern Arizona (Phillips *et al.* 1964:79). Since then it has become an uncommon but regular resident breeder in extreme southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico (Lowther *et al.* 2020).

Like some other tyrannid flycatchers, the Thick-billed Kingbird is known to wander north of its breeding range. It is

a casual stray to southern California, with 27 accepted records between 1965 and 2019 (D. Roberson, pers. comm.). In addition to the 1974 British Columbia record described above (eBird 2020), there are also documented records for Colorado (1992, 2018), Nevada (1996, 2017), Utah (2009) and North Dakota (2018).

On 28 September 1986 — 26 years before the Thick-billed Kingbird sighting — the first Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes luteiventris*) was documented in Ontario and Canada (Gawn 1987). Remarkably, that bird was also at Presqu'ile near the Calf Pasture! What's even more interesting is that both birds occupy a similar range in Mexico and a very limited range in southeastern Arizona.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Bill Gilmour for the discovery of this mega rarity and Ross Harris and Joy Hill for their helpful comments and review of the article.

Literature Cited

Campbell, R.W., N.K. Dawe, I. McTaggart-Cowan, J.M. Cooper, G.W. Kaiser, M.C.E. McNall and **G.E.J. Smith**. 1997. The Birds of British Columbia. Volume 3. Passerines: flycatchers through vireos. UBC Press, Vancouver. 693 pp.

Cranford, M.H. 2013. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2012. Ontario Birds 31:58-85

eBird. 2020. eBird: An online data base of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Ithaca, New York. Available at http://www.ebird.ca.

Gawn, M. 1987. Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher: New to Ontario and Canada. Ontario Birds 5:87-93

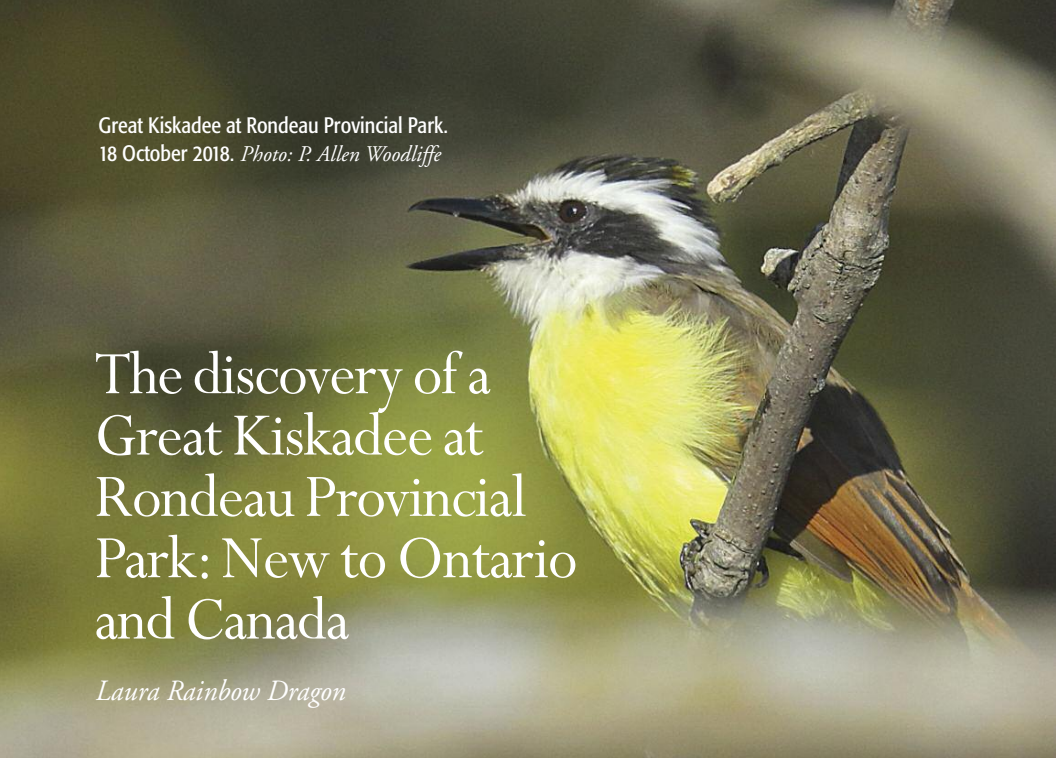
Godfrey, W.E. 1986. Birds of Canada, Revised Edition. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa. 595 pp.

Lowther, P.E., P. Pyle and **M.A. Patten**. 2020. Thick-billed Kingbird (*Tyrannus crassirostris*), version 1.0. *In* Birds of the World (P.G. Rodewald, ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York, USA. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.thbkin.01

Phillips, A., J. Marshall and **G. Monson**. 1964. The Birds of Arizona. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. 212 pp.

Roberson, D. 1980. Rare Birds of The West Coast of North America. Woodcock Publications, Pacific Grove, California. 496 pp.

Bruce M. Di Labio
P.O. Box 538
Carp, Ontario K0A 1L0
E-mail: dilabiobirding@gmail.com



Great Kiskadee at Rondeau Provincial Park. 18 October 2018. *Photo: P. Allen Woodliffe*

The discovery of a Great Kiskadee at Rondeau Provincial Park: New to Ontario and Canada

Laura Rainbow Dragon

On the morning of 7 September 2018, I was hiking the Marsh Trail in Rondeau Provincial Park when I spotted a bird I did not recognize perched on a branch of a fallen tree. This was not a surprise to me. I had been bitten by the birding bug through my visits to Rondeau Park in the spring of that same year and by September had learned enough to know that Rondeau was visited by over 300 species of birds each year, most of which I, as yet, did not know how to identify. As far as I knew, a bird with a bright yellow belly, rusty brown back, and black-and-white striped head was a regular visitor to Rondeau that I had simply not encountered before. I took a few photographs of the bird and then I walked over to join a couple of cyclists on the trail who had stopped to observe the same bird.

I asked the cyclists if they knew what kind of bird it was we were observing. One of them did not. The other thought the bird might be a Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens).* Having never before seen a Yellow-breasted Chat, I did not know he was mistaken. After a couple of minutes, the bird we had been observing flew off. The cyclists and I wished each other well and I resumed my hike.

When I returned home from my hike, I looked up the Yellow-breasted Chat in my *Birds of Ontario* Lone Pine Field Guide (Bezener 2000). Immediately I realized that was not the bird I had seen in Rondeau that morning. I rifled through the field guide in search of a more likely suspect, but nothing seemed to fit the bill. So I uploaded my photographs of the bird to iNaturalist.

The image recognition software of iNaturalist suggested that my bird was a Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) (Figure 1). Having never heard of a Great Kiskadee before, I clicked on the link to the bird's species account page to read a bit about what I had seen. The description given of the bird and photographs from other observers fit with what I had seen, but the distribution was wrong. Both the iNaturalist range map and the Wikipedia account of the Great Kiskadee described the bird's range as South and Central America, Mexico and the southern-most tip of Texas. The Great Kiskadee was not an Ontario bird. That could not have been what I had seen.

So I checked the secondary species suggestions given by iNaturalist, such as Lesser Kiskadee (*Pitangus lector*), Boat-billed Flycatcher (*Megarynchus pitangua*) and Social Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis*). While the Boat-billed Flycatcher's bill looked obviously wrong, it and a few of the other alternative suggestions did have the right colour pattern for my bird. But their distributions were all even further south than that of the Great Kiskadee.

Figure 1. Photo of Great Kiskadee uploaded to iNaturalist, 7 September 2018.
Photo: Laura Rainbow Dragon

I was stumped. I eventually decided to simply identify my observation as a "Tyrant Flycatcher" and left it at that. I fully expected that, within a few hours, a more experienced birder than myself would see my observation and immediately recognize it as one of the Rondeau peninsula's common fall visitors. As it turned out, I was half right.

When I checked my iNaturalist account again a few hours later, to see if my mystery bird had been identified, I was very surprised by the level of interest my observation had generated and also surprised that the more experienced birders who had reviewed my submission agreed with the image recognition software's analysis. I had apparently truly seen a Great Kiskadee that morning—a bird never before recorded in Canada (Burrell *et al.* 2019).

After seeing my report on iNaturalist, a few other local birders headed out to Rondeau Park on the afternoon of 7 September and succeeded in finding the Great Kiskadee within a couple hundred metres of my original sighting. The following day, well over a hundred birders made the trek to Rondeau Park and again, most were rewarded with a sighting of this Canadian first (Figures 2 and 3).

Facing page: Figure 2. Great Kiskadee at Rondeau, 3 November 2018.

Figure 3. Kiskadee pond, 4 November 2018.
Photos: P. Allen Woodliffe

Over the course of the next three months, the Great Kiskadee was observed in Rondeau Park by many birders. Records for this bird were submitted to eBird daily from 7-16 September, after which time the bird disappeared for a few weeks, only to reappear again on 18 October and eBird data show the bird was seen and/or heard daily from 18-31 October and most days from 2-9 November. Rondeau's Great Kiskadee disappeared again at this time, but was observed again in December and again seen or heard daily from 2-10 December. Though local birders continued to search daily for the next week, hoping to score the Great Kiskadee as a new species for the Rondeau/Blenheim Christmas Bird Count on 16 December, the bird was never seen or heard again after 10 December 2018 (eBird 2020).

Great Kiskadee at Rondeau
11 September 2018
Photo: P. Allen Woodliffe

Literature Cited

Bezener, A. 2000. Birds of Ontario. Lone Pine Publishing, Edmonton. 376 pp.

Burrell, M.V.A., B.N. Charlton, K.G.D. Burrell, J.D.Vandermeulen, A.C. Guercio, B.A. Mann, D.A. Sutherland, P.D. Pratt and **W.G. Lamond**. 2019. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2018. Ontario Birds 37:52-83.

eBird. 2020. eBird: An online data base of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Ithaca, New York. Checklist for 10 December 2018: https://ebird.org/checklist/S50844954

Laura Rainbow Dragon
E-mail: laura@rainbowdragon.ca

Extralimital records of the Great Kiskadee

P. Allen Woodliffe

The Great Kiskadee, known as the Derby Flycatcher at the time, was first recorded north of Mexico in 1879 when two were shot near Lake San Jose along the lower Rio Grande in southern Texas (Bent 1942). It was recorded on rare occasions for several decades after that, but only in extreme southern Texas. While it was thought in the late 1800s and early 1900s that the species would not do well in Texas due to the ongoing changes in natural habitat (Bent 1942), it showed remarkable adaptation to such changes. It has never been considered much of a

migrant especially compared with many other flycatcher species, remaining largely in its normal range most of the time. Yet it has expanded that range quite a bit.

In recent years, in North America north of Mexico, it is most often seen south of the general Houston to San Antonio latitude (29° 30' N); north of there, the records diminish considerably (eBird 2020). Nonetheless, there have been scattered observations from as far west as southern Arizona to as far east as South Carolina and to as far north as South Dakota.

Spring records of Great Kiskadee well beyond the species normal range in places like Colorado, Tennessee and Arkansas, are single day records only. However, when a Great Kiskadee shows up well beyond its normal range in late summer or early winter, it may linger for quite a while (eBird 2020). For example, while there are only three records for Arizona, one of them included a bird staying at Canoa, a short distance south of Tucson, from 27 December 1979 to 6 May 1980 (Tucson Audubon Society 2011). Another bird was present in Kansas from 15 September to 10 November 2013. One that showed up in South Carolina in February 2017 was observed until April 2018. The northernmost record of Great Kiskadee on eBird is just north of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where one was observed from 14 November 2015 to 1 January 2016. These extralimital birds were all present for a period ranging from approximately four weeks to well over a year.

As we know, the bird at Rondeau fits that pattern: it was seen regularly, but intermittently, from 7 September to 10 December 2018 (Dragon 2020). Interestingly, a bird was observed in northeastern Indiana, a straight-line distance of about 400 km southwest of Rondeau, from 17 December 2018 to 13 January 2019. We may surmise that the Rondeau bird had finally had enough of Ontario's winter and decided to return towards warmer climes.

Literature Cited

Bent, A.C. 1942. Life Histories of North American Flycatchers, Larks, Swallows and their Allies. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. 555 pp.

Dragon, L. R. 2020. The discovery of a Great Kiskadee at Rondeau Provincial Park: New to Ontario and Canada. Ontario Birds 38:31-34.

eBird. 2020. eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: http://www.ebird.org. (Accessed: April 2, 2020).

Tucson Audubon Society. 2011. Finding Birds in Southeast Arizona, Eighth Edition. Tucson Audubon Society. 372 pp.

P. Allen Woodliffe
30 Argyle Crescent
Chatham, Ontario N7L 4T8
E-mail: awoodliffe@hotmail.com

Aberrant colouration in some Ontario birds

Kenneth F. Abraham, Chris J. Risley and D.V. Chip Weseloh

Lesser Yellowlegs, 19 September 2018, Upper Canada Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ingleside, Ontario. *Photo: Brian Morin*

Evening Grosbeak, 2 April 2017, Eagle River Ontario. *Photo: John Terpstra*

Trumpeter Swan, 4 December 2018, Rideau Lakes, Ontario. *Photo: via Jon Ruddy*

Abnormal colours or aberrant "plumages" in birds garner much attention from birders, ornithologists and aviculturists alike. Possibly because we rely so heavily on the usually consistent and definitive plumages to obtain quick identifications, we are drawn to the slightest differences from those typical species characters. In past issues of Ontario Birds, we have seen striking examples of abnormal plumage attributed to conditions such as erythrism in a Rose-breasted Grosbeak *(Pheucticus ludovicianus*) (Pittaway and Iron 2006), and leucism in American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), Black-crowned Night-heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) (Cherriere 2007), Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) (Cherriere 2008), Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) (Carter 2018) and Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) (Iron 2018). Both Cherriere (2007) and Iron (2018), provide well-referenced and detailed explanations on the development of these abnormalities.

Colour abnormalities often result from a genetic anomaly, the most common being mutations that interfere with production of the two melanins (eumelanin and phaeomelanin) or prevent pigments from being incorporated into feathers, but they can also arise from disease, trauma or environmental causes during feather production, such as malnutrition or lack of certain items in the diet. Variation in terminology causes much confusion and several attempts at simplification have been made. Davis (2007) and van Grouw (2006, 2013) provide excellent reviews of abnormal colouration in birds and its causes; both propose linking the aberration term to its cause. Davis (2007) proposes a unifying terminology based on the type of pigment (e.g., aeumelanin meaning a reduction in the pigment eumelanin) and its production that he suggests might reduce confusion while recognizing the cause of the anomalous plumage. van Grouw (2013) also proposes a unifying terminology based on use of the six most common heritable (genetic) colour aberrations. These are: albinism (absence of both melanins in feathers, eyes and skin), leucism (partial or total lack of both melanins in feathers and skin), brown (a qualitative reduction of eumelanin), dilution (a quantitative reduction of melanins), Ino (a strong qualitative reduction of

Common Grackle, 5 December 2018, Walsingham, Ontario. *Photo: Diane Salter*

Blue Jay, 28 February 2014, Algonquin Park, Ontario.
Photo: Kyle Blaney

both melanins) and melanism (an abnormal deposit of melanin in skin and/or feathers). Sibley (2011) provides a simple approach to abnormal colour in birds and the associated terminology, focusing only on the most common types birders will encounter. All of these references are suggested for further reading depending on your level of interest. For those of you interested in other means of exploring or contributing to the study of plumage abnormalities, check out an iNaturalist project "Amazing Aberrants" at: https://inaturalist.ca/projects/amazing-aberrants.

The articles previously published in *Ontario Birds,* in addition to the frequent posting of examples of anomalous plumages on social media, such as the Ontario Birds Facebook group, prompted us to make a call in *Ontario Birds*, and on the Ontbirds listserv, for photos and notes of birds with aberrant plumages for the purpose of illustrating the occurrence of this condition in some Ontario species (see "Wanted: Photos and notes on bids with aberrant plumage", *Ontario Birds* 36:143). The response to this call from OFO members and *Ontario Birds* readers was enthusiastic. To date, we have received responses from at least 71 individuals documenting aberrant plumages in 44 species (Table 1). These photographs and reports provide an excellent sample of the breadth of bird families in which aberrant colouration occurs, but the submissions are not a complete list of Ontario species which have shown these traits as is shown by the literature

Table 1. Species and number of unique individuals for which photographs or description of observed aberrant colouration were received in response to the *Ontario Birds* editors' request published in December 2018 (*Ontario Birds* 36:143).

Canada Goose	*Branta canadensis*	10
Trumpeter Swan	*Cygnus buccinator*	1
Wood Duck	*Aix sponsa*	1
Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	1
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	16
American Black Duck	*Anas rubripes*	1
Blue-winged Teal	*Spatula discors*	1
Greater Scaup	*Aythya marila*	1
Long-tailed Duck	*Clangula hyemalis*	1
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	*Archilochus colubris*	2
Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*	1
Spotted Sandpiper	*Actitis macularius*	1
Lesser Yellowlegs	*Tringa flavipes*	1
Herring Gull	*Larus argentatus*	2
Double-crested Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax auritus*	1
Mourning Dove	*Zenaida macroura*	1
Broad-winged Hawk	*Buteo platypterus*	1
Red-tailed Hawk	*Buteo jamaicensis*	4
Great Gray Owl	*Strix nebulosa*	1
Eastern Kingbird	*Tyrannus tyrannus*	2
Blue Jay	*Cyanocitta cristata*	2
American Crow	*Corvus brachyrhynchos*	2
Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	1
Purple Martin	*Progne subis*	1
Tree Swallow	*Tachycineta bicolor*	1
Black-capped Chickadee	*Poecile atricapillus*	5

Tree Swallow, 5 June 2018, St. George, Ontario.
Photo: Renée Hallman

American Robin	*Turdus migratorius*	13
Bohemian Waxwing	*Bombycilla garrulus*	1
House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	1
Evening Grosbeak	*Coccothraustes vespertinus*	2
House Finch	*Haemorhous mexicanus*	1
Pine Grosbeak	*Pinicola enucleator*	1
Common Redpoll	*Acanthis flammea*	3
Pine Siskin	*Spinus pinus*	1
American Goldfinch	*Spinus tristis*	1
Song Sparrow	*Melospiza melodia*	1
Swamp Sparrow	*Melospiza georgiana*	1
Dark-eyed Junco	*Junco hyemalis*	5
Bobolink	*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*	1
Red-winged Blackbird	*Agelaius phoeniceus*	1
Common Grackle	*Quiscalus quiscula*	6
Northern Cardinal	*Cardinalis cardinalis*	1
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	*Pheucticus ludovicianus*	1
Dickcissel	*Spiza americana*	1

Common Redpoll, 24 to 31 January 2012, Marathon, Ontario. *Photo: Michael Butler and Martha Allen*

and other sources such as the Royal Ontario Museum collection and various Ontario birding Facebook groups. The submissions we received also are not necessarily representative of the frequency of such unusual plumages within these species or across families of birds, but more likely a reflection of birder's chance encounters and the relative abundance of those species. Most species (29/44, 66%) were represented by a single report. The Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) had the most reports (16), followed by American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) (13) and Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) (10).

The majority of submissions were examples of birds with unusual amounts of white feathering. The amount of white ranged from birds with a single white wing feather, tail feather or body contour feather to birds that were completely white or very pale, looking washed out. Although as birders and ornithologists we tend to focus on plumage aberrations, the soft parts (bill, eye, leg) of many birds also are affected by pigment reduction in the various conditions that have been described (as noted above, van Grouw 2013). There was a range of these abnormalities in the submissions as well from normal soft parts to un-pigmented bills

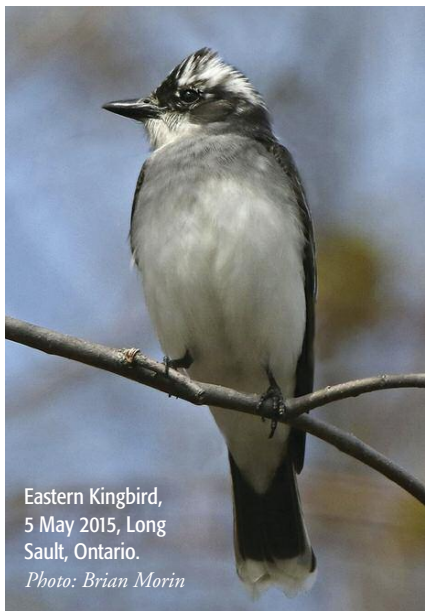
House Sparrow, 8 September 2015, Guelph, Ontario.
Photo: Ted Down

Black-capped Chickadee, 21 January 2011, Ottawa, Ontario.
Photo: Tom Devecseri

and legs in all combinations with the abnormal plumages. Some of the soft part abnormalities are particularly striking, e.g., the Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*). Only one individual, a Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) had a pale (pink) eye indicating a true albino. We did receive a few examples of melanism (as defined above, van Grouw 2013) and a few birds of rare but previously known morphs.

This article presents the first installment of photos we will present in *Ontario Birds*, highlighting these interesting examples of abnormal plumages in Ontario bird species. In future installments, we will explore the range of abnormalities within species for which we had multiple submissions, e.g., American Robin, Canada Goose, Mallard, and Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapllus*). If you have photos or notes of Ontario species with aberrant or unusual colouration that you'd be willing to share, please send them with a short narrative describing the details (date, location, behaviours, etc.) of the record to the editors of *Ontario Birds* (editors@ofo.ca); please include a statement of permission to publish so they may be used in a future issue. Finally, we note that hybridization is another source of aberrant plumage that attracts much attention; however, it is a separate topic that is not explored in this series.

American Robin, 2 April 2012, Newcastle, Ontario. *Photo: Jim Richards*



Eastern Kingbird, 5 May 2015, Long Sault, Ontario. *Photo: Brian Morin*

Pine Grosbeak, 17 to 22 February 2019, Dinorwic Lake near Dryden, Ontario.
Photo: Ellen Riggins

Dark-eyed Junco, 20 December 2015, Kingston, Ontario.
Photo: Gaye Beckwith

Dunlin, 15 July 2014, Cobourg, Ontario.
Photo: Tom Jackman

Facing page: Herring Gull, white chick, 28 May 2019, Nottawasaga Island,Ontario.
Photo: Chip Weseloh

Mallard, 25 November 2018, LaSalle Marina, Burlington, Ontario. *Photo: Rosemary Harris*

Below: American Black Duck, 13 August 2016, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. *Photo: Ed McAskill*

Wood Duck, 26 August 2017, Cherry Hill Gate, Burlington, Ontario. *Photo: Katelyn Luff*

Acknowledgements

We thank the following photographers and others who submitted images of abnormally coloured birds for this article. An (*) denotes submission of multiple unique observations. Martha Allen, Gaye Beckwith*, Robert Bell*, Kim Bennett, Kyle Blaney*, Kathryn Boothby, Richard Brault, David Brewer, Chris Burris, Michael Butler*, Mike Cadman*, Geoff Carpentier*, Tom Devecseri*, Carter Dorscht, Ted Down*, Warren Dunlop*, Bill Edmunds, Pat Fisher, David Goodyear*, Regan Goodyear*, Janet Griffin-Scott*, Dianne Groteau, Renée Hallman, Rosemary Harris, Marlene Hart, Clive Hodder, Wendy Hogan, Tom Jackman, Roy John, Tim Keys, Sarah Lamond, Rick Lauzon, David LeGros, Chris Leys, Sandra Leys, Katelyn Luff, Roger Lupton*, Gerry Markhoff, Dave Martin, Anne Mauro*, Ken MacDonald, Susan MacDonald, Ed McAskill, Barry Kent McKay*, Brian Morin*, Miranda O'Hara, Martin Parker*, Geoff Pekor, Steve Pitt, Jason Pizzey, Bill Read, Jim Richards, Ellen Riggins*, Jim Robertson*, Gerald Romanchuck, Jack Romanow*, Steven Rowe, Jon Ruddy*, Diane Salter*, Pat Schiller, Tammie Schmidt, Doug Sheepway, Kai Sheffield*, Arnie Simpson, Don Sutherland, John Terpstra, David Turner, Ron Vandebeek*, Marg Werden, Chip Weseloh, Dave Worthington, and Bryan Wyatt. We thank Jean Iron, Ron Pittaway and Don Sutherland for reviewing photographs and/or providing comments on the text and Michael Dawber for alerting us to the iNaturalist project.

Literature Cited

Carter, C. 2018. Leucistic Eastern Kingbird at Rattray Marsh. Ontario Birds 36:89-91.

Cherriere, B. 2007. Leucistic birds in Ontario. Ontario Birds 25:115-120.

Cherriere, B. 2008. Another leucistic bird: Common Goldeneye. Ontario Birds 26:57.

Davis, J.N. 2007. Color abnormalities in birds: A proposed nomenclature for birders. Birding (September-October 2007):36-46.

Iron, J. 2018. Double-crested Cormorant with aberrant pale plumage. Ontario Birds 36:137-143.

Sibley, D. 2011. Sibley Guides: Identification of North American birds and trees. https://www.sibleyguides.com/2011/08/abnormal-coloration-in-birds-melanin-reduction/ Accessed 3 April 2020.

van Grouw, H. 2006. Not every white bird is an albino: sense and nonsense about colour aberrations in birds. Dutch Birding 28:79-89.

van Grouw, H. 2013. What colour is that bird? The causes and recognition of common colour aberrations in birds. British Birds 106:17-29.

Kenneth F. Abraham
434 Manorhill Avenue
Peterborough, Ontario K9J 6H8
Email: kenabra@sympatico.ca

Chris J. Risley
510 Gilmour Street
Peterborough, Ontario K9H 2J9

D.V. Chip Weseloh
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment and Climate Change Canada
4905 Dufferin Street
Toronto, Ontario M3H 5T4

ONTARIO BIRDS

Editors:
Chip Weseloh, 1391 Mount Pleasant Road, Toronto, Ontario M4N 2T7

Ken Abraham, 434 Manorhill Avenue, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 6H8

Chris Risley, 510 Gilmour Street, Peterborough, Ontario K9H 2J9

Ornithological Consultants: Glenn Coady, Michel Gosselin, Ross James and Mark Peck

Cover Art: Barry Kent MacKay

Advertising: advertising@ofo.ca

Design/Production: Judie Shore

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, and similar material of interest on Ontario birds.

Submit material for publication by e-mail attachment (or CD or DVD) to either:
chip.weseloh@canada.ca
kenabra@sympatico.ca
risleych@gmail.com

Please follow the style of this issue of *Ontario Birds*. All submissions are subject to review and editing and may be submitted to peer review beyond that of the editors. For photographic material used in *Ontario Birds,* the copyright remains in the possession of the photographers.

Printing: DTP Inc.,Concord, Ontario

© **Mixed Sources**
Product group from well-managed forests, controlled sources and recycled wood or fibre
www.fsc.org Cert no. SW-COC-003090
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council
FSC

bullfrogpowered
Printing by DTP Inc is bullfrogpowered

OFO **Ontario Field Ornithologists**