

Notes

Unusual Nesting of the Swainson's Thrush

by

Ron Tozer, Dan Strickland and Doug Tozer

On 4 June 1994, while conducting an early morning Forest Bird Monitoring Project (FBMP) survey, near Canisbay Lake (Canisbay Township, Nipissing District) in Algonquin Provincial Park, Strickland discovered an unattended, active nest at Station B. The nest contained a single egg of the Swainson's

Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*), showing the distinctive pale blue background blotched with brown (Godfrey 1986). An adult Swainson's Thrush was observed sitting on the nest on 17 June, and the nest contained one egg and three young on 18 June.



Figure 1: Swainson's Thrush nest in deciduous forest. Photo by Doug Tozer.



Figure 2: Swainson's Thrush nest on bracket fungus. Photo by *Doug Tozer*.

Strickland has heard singing Swainson's Thrushes regularly in the mature hardwood forest of the "Canisbay Hardwoods" FBMP site during annual surveys since 1989. Although to be expected in this habitat, the Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) has been notably absent.

Description

The nest was located in pure deciduous forest consisting primarily of Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), with some Yellow Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*) and American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), typical of the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Forest (Rowe 1972). Sugar Maple saplings were numerous under the large trees (Figure 1). There

were no coniferous trees visible from the nest site. An area of moist seepage was located near the nest tree.

The nest was placed on top of a small bracket fungus (*Polyporaceae*) growing on the trunk of a large Sugar Maple (50 cm in diameter), at a height of two metres (Figure 2). The nest itself was of typical construction for Swainson's Thrush, being a "bulky, well-made cup" formed of grasses and other plant stalks, with "lengths of vegetation trailing . . . below the main structure" (Peck and James 1987). The nest dimensions were: outside diameter, 14 cm; inside diameter, 7.5 cm; outside depth, 10 cm; and inside depth, 4 cm. These measurements fall within those reported for Swainson's Thrush nests

in the Ontario Nest Records Scheme (Peck and James 1987).

Discussion

Swainson's Thrush has been reported to nest typically in habitat with a coniferous element (Harrison 1975, Sadler 1987), rather than deciduous forest. Of 65 Swainson's Thrush nests reported in Ontario, 59 (91 percent) were in mixed or coniferous woods, with only 6 nests in deciduous forest (Peck and James 1987). However, in extreme northwestern Ontario, Swainson's Thrush was most "abundant in deciduous scrub" (McLaren and McLaren 1981), and Godfrey (1986) characterized its typical habitat as "deciduous tall shrubs".

Bent (1949) noted that Swainson's Thrush nests were "almost always in small trees where the forest growth was more or less dense", and Peck and James (1987) described typical nests as being in small diameter conifers in "dense woods and thickets" in "wet areas such as bogs and swamps". Swainson's Thrush typically occupies coniferous forest fringes around lakes in Algonquin Park. These conditions are markedly different than those of the Canisbay nest.

Only 36 (30 percent) of 121 Ontario Swainson's Thrush nests were placed in deciduous trees and shrubs, with 70 percent in coniferous trees (Peck and James 1987). In addition, Peck and James (1987) did not report Sugar Maple as a nest tree used by this species in Ontario.

Swainson's Thrushes commonly build their nests in crotches, or on two or more horizontal branches near the trunk (Bent 1949, Harrison 1975, Peck and James 1987). In the literature we examined, only one nest, described as being in "an open cavity in the side of a standing tree", appeared even somewhat similar in placement to the Canisbay Swainson's Thrush nest (Peck and James 1987).

This Swainson's Thrush nesting was very unusual for its forest type location, the size and species of the nest tree, and the nest placement. Details have been provided to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme.

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Ron Tozer, Spring Lake Road, R.R. 1, Dwight, Ontario P0A 1H0

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An Ivory Gull in Renfrew County

by

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On 11 November 1995, at 1430h, Manson Fleguel of Pembroke noticed a white object floating on Lake Doré, Renfrew County, approximately 100 m offshore. At first, he thought it was simply a plastic bottle but upon closer examination with his binoculars, he realized it was a white gull with black smudge markings on its face. Consulting his National Geographic Guide, he identified the bird as a first winter plumaged Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*). Knowing it was a rarity, he contacted two local birders, Chris Michener of nearby Golden Lake and Ken Hooles from the Pembroke area. The Ivory Gull then disappeared and was not seen again until 1630h when it appeared at a distance working its way along the shoreline. With its close proximity to the observers, an excellent view of the bird was attained.

The following morning, the bird was first observed at dawn by Bill Lindley of London, Ontario. By 0810h, I arrived at a cottage on the northwest corner of the lake and, with a small group of birders, observed the gull resting on the water approximately 50 m offshore. Knowing that Ivory Gulls are somewhat tame, and having previously fed them in Salisbury Beach, Massachusetts and Montreal, Quebec, I brought a can of cat food in hopes of attracting the bird closer to the observers. It took only minutes for the bird to detect the bait, at which point it landed on target (Figure 1) and began to consume the cat food. The Ivory Gull was quite content despite our close

proximity; however, it was wary of the Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and the Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) that were circling, and guarded its meal closely. After the gull finished eating the cat food, I gutted a dead Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) which I had picked up at Presqu'ile Provincial Park the previous day. The duck was placed on the shoreline and within 15 minutes, the gull began to enjoy a meal of entrails, and continued to feed on the carcass for the remainder of the day.

On 13 November, the gull could still be found feeding on the duck and patrolling the shoreline along the northwest corner of Lake Doré. By late afternoon, with 20 cm of fresh snow, weather conditions were beginning to deteriorate, and the gull was difficult to locate on 14 and 15 November. Although it remained in the area, it could only be observed at a distance as overnight temperatures dropped below zero, and the shoreline of Lake Doré began to freeze, thus forcing the bird to move farther out into the lake. The Ivory Gull was last observed on 19 November.

In Canada, the Ivory Gull breeds in the high Arctic (Godfrey 1986) and winters along the pack ice north of Newfoundland. It is a winter vagrant to Ontario, Quebec and northeastern United States. Most observations of the Ivory Gull in Ontario occur in December or January. The Lake Doré Ivory Gull is the earliest accepted record for Ontario, and the first accepted record for eastern Ontario (Wormington and

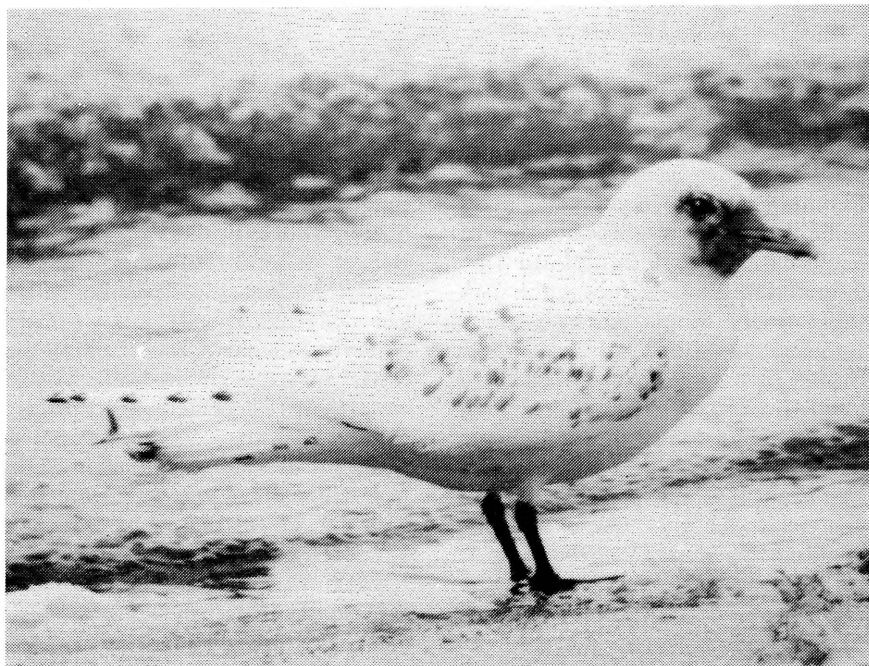


Figure 1: Ivory Gull on Lake Doré, Renfrew County, 12 November 1995.
Photo by *Bruce Di Labio*.

Curry 1990). It is suspected that this gull originated from the Hudson/James Bay region, since prior to its discovery a major cold front accompanied by unsettled weather conditions passed through eastern Ontario between 9 and 11 November.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Manson Fleguel for quickly alerting local birders to his

discovery, Liz Stevenson for her reviews of earlier drafts and my wife Laurie for typing and editing this note.

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Remembering Norm Chesterfield

by

Jim Wilson

In the 1950s, after viewing a Pileated Woodpecker at close range while building a cottage near Dorset, Ontario, I eventually started investigating Point Pelee National Park to seek out some of its birds. There, I met Norm who informed me that a visitor in the Park suggested he should purchase Roger Tory Peterson's "A Field Guide to the Birds" to assist him with his bird identification. He liked the book immediately and recommended I should buy the same. I learned from him that although he had graduated as a pharmacist, he was now a full-time mink rancher in nearby Wheatley. At his mink ranch, I found his knowledge of drugs and antibiotics kept his hundreds of mink in good health, and his proximity to the Wheatley fisheries provided a relatively inexpensive food supply for the animals during their rapid growth period. He applied the same acuity to his bird identifications. His pioneering in bird-chasing was done without many of the field guides we so easily purchase and rely on today.

Shortly after our meeting, I assisted him on his Breeding Bird Census route near Kingsville. We were happy to have a Bald Eagle nest in our area, one of several that could be seen on a Sunday afternoon's drive along Highway 3 between Amherstburg and Wheatley. Today, I regret not taking a picture of an ancient nest (20 feet tall) in an old elm before it collapsed in the late 1950s. We had exciting and interesting birds on that census; the one I particularly remember was the Upland Sandpiper call of repeated, descending whistles.

Although Norm would spend three weeks birding southern Mexico in the fall of 1970, in March of that year he suggested we take a Canadian Audubon Society Tour to British Honduras (now Belize). What a thrill to do my first tropical birding, and especially with a knowledgeable friend! Now, we throw a copy of Peterson's "Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico" in the backpack and we're away! Then, the book to identify the birds of British Honduras was "The Birds of Mexico" by Emmet Blake which contained an interesting text with a few black and white drawings. However, we had to do an awful lot of reading in the field to identify some of the birds. We flew by jet to Belize City, and then by small plane to bird the southern part of the country, and even motored to the pine forest next to Guatemala. I was surprised recently to read that our trip of eleven days cost only six hundred and seventy Canadian dollars per participant!

Before the B.H. trip was over, in our euphoric state we thought it only "sensible" to go home via Panama City and the Santa Marta Mountains of Colombia, spending a few days of birdwatching in each location! Apart from the gorgeous, tropical birds, I find unforgettable the view we had when stepping out of our bus on the hillside of Cerro Azul; an estimated 750 Swainson's Hawks soared at eye level, and farther down in the valley below us, an endless ribbon of Eastern Kingbirds moved northward in their spring migration. After that sighting, every year when April 1st rolls around, I

recall that Kingbird movement in Panama.

The following year I decided I was ready for the Galapagos. Norm, now a "world-birder", said that, even though the trip might be interesting, there were more places with larger bird lists that he preferred to visit. Since I wanted to see the Darwin's Finches and the huge land tortoises, I went to the unforgettable Galapagos by myself, twenty-five years ago.

In March 1972, the next year, Lou Marsh of Toronto, Norm and I birded Venezuela. Since then I have led trips in that country with the book "Birds of Venezuela" (with a coloured plate for each species) tucked confidently under my arm. In contrast, in 1972, our field guide was Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee's "A Guide to the Birds of South America" (1970). Although I hear it is a collector's item today, it was a great task to ferret out the birds to be seen in Venezuela from the nearly 3,000 South American species described in this single volume. Despite the problems, we tallied more than 350 bird species with exotic names like: White-tipped Quetzal, Blue-winged Mountain-tanager and Handsome Fruiteater. Today, my most vivid memory is that of a brilliant, male Bay-breasted Warbler high in a treetop on the Caribbean slope of Henri Pittier Park!

Another successful trip to Cape Henrietta Maria, where James Bay meets Hudson Bay, gave us the three Ontario

birds we sought: Willow Ptarmigan, Smith's Longspur and Pacific Loon. In the stuffy, gasoline fume-laden cockpit of the Austin Airways plane, I remember taking pictures of half sick birders chomping on some of Norm's carrots. Standard travelling fare in his second piece of luggage was granola on one side, and raw carrots on the other! World listers, take heed!

Norm was always generous with his acquired birding information. He liked Peter Alden and John Gooders' "Finding Birds Around the World", using it on many of his trips.

I should have spent more time chasing new birds into Norm's backyard, as he stated he would pay twenty-five dollars for each new species so received! As fortune would have it, a few days before he passed away, we chatted for over an hour recalling many of our happy times together along with the fact that he now had almost two hundred on his backyard list (including his best visitor, I think, the western Rufous Hummingbird).

I won't forget the many times I stayed in that same backyard during Pelee bird migration, within range of the nocturnal vocalizations of his mink. In order that I might get an early start, Norm, in the black of morning, tapped on the camper's metal side to inform me that "oatmeal is ready"! Knowing Norm Chesterfield has been a joyful experience in my lifetime.

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Editors' Note:

Norm Chesterfield died on 10 November 1996 at age 83. He observed 6,617 of the world's over 9,000 bird species while travelling to more than 130 countries. He was Canada's top bird lister, with 519 species recorded in this country.