

Notes

Extended Incubation by a Tundra Swan

Ken Abraham

On 2 August 2002, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) helicopter pilot, Don Filliter, noted a swan on a nest below us while transporting a goose banding crew to Cape Henrietta Maria. We were in Polar Bear Provincial Park (ca. 55° 05' N, 83° 16' W), the heart of Ontario's Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) nesting range, so the observation was in the right place but it was decidedly at the "wrong" time of year. For a week, we had been recording broods of Tundra Swan containing one-quarter to one-third-grown cygnets at other locations throughout the park. Therefore, we backtracked and confirmed the sighting from the air, then landed nearby to investigate from the ground. As we approached, the swan flushed from the nest and flew to a nearby large lake, joining two other adult-plumaged swans.

The nest was on a peat mound that measured about 5 m across at the base. The nest bowl was made of twigs and branches and contained little down, but it sat upon a mound of moss and sedges pulled up by the swan. The nest was about 1 m above ground (Figure 1), similar to other

swan nests I have visited in the Hudson Bay Lowland and those described by Kear (1972). The mound was situated in a *Carex aquatilis* fen approximately 30 m from a large open lake. Swamp birch (*Betula pumila*) covered about 50 percent of the mound, with black crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and bog rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) also relatively abundant. It had two distinct paths leading to it from



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Figure 1: Tundra Swan nest containing five eggs in Polar Bear Provincial Park, Ontario, 2 August 2002. Photo by Ken Abraham.

the surrounding sedge fen. The nest contained 5 eggs, but close examination of all eggs revealed both a smell and a metallic tinny sound when tapped, indicating (in my experience) decomposing contents. I opened one egg (or rather it exploded when I attempted to do so), sending forth a malodorous liquid and confirming the non-viable nature of the eggs.

Discussion

The Tundra Swan is one of the earliest northern waterfowl species to commence egg-laying (e.g., Bergman et al. 1977) because of the length of the period needed to successfully reproduce. The incubation period is about 32 days and the period from

hatch to flight attainment is about 60–70 days, so about 100 days are needed in all (Bellrose 1976). Although laying dates from the Hudson Bay Lowland in Ontario are lacking, Lumsden (1987) indicated laying in late May, and my own unpublished observations show incubation is usually restricted to June and early July, and broods are present from early July onward. It was obvious from the date that this swan had been incubating for a long, extended period.

Incubation behaviour is under the control of the endocrine system and brain. As long as eggs are present, the stimulus is to sit. Hatch in most waterfowl is a relatively synchronous process, but still occurs

over 1–2 days. It is preceded by a brief period when the female and the young still in the eggs communicate. Because these eggs were incapable of hatching, this swan would only have received stimulus to keep incubating and would have lacked any communication stimulus signalling imminent hatch. How long the incubation may have continued is unknown, but eventually, loss of body weight and need for maintenance energy would have triggered desertion (see review in Afton and Paulus 1992). Kear (1972) reported cases of captive Mute Swans (*C. olor*) that sat on infertile or dead clutches for 50 days and 53 days, far beyond normal (35.5 days) for that species. Lumsden (1980, 1983) reported a female Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) that incubated a combination of dummy eggs and then foster eggs for a total of 53 days before hatching the foster eggs; the same female incubated a set of dummy eggs for 61 days before desertion in another year. Incubation extended about twice the normal period (28 days) in each case.

Causes of egg failure in the wild are varied, but include non-fertilization, developmental anomalies of embryos ending in death, and perhaps bacterial infection during laying. In 2002, spring melt along this part of the Hudson Bay coast was especially late (e.g., Canada Geese nested 21 days later than in

2001, hatching near 1 July). It is possible that the winter-like conditions led to freezing of the swan's eggs during laying, followed by embryo death and subsequent decomposition. Frequency of such events, and consequently of extended incubation, is difficult to estimate, as is the effect on subsequent condition and behaviour of the female.

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A Birder's Guide to Second Marsh Wildlife Area, McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve, and Surroundings: Update

Jim Richards and Tyler Hoar

The purpose of this note is to revise OFO Bird Finding Guide # 7, published in *Ontario Birds* in 1999 (Richards 1999), with respect to additional birds and breeding species now known to have occurred in the designated area (Oshawa Second Marsh Wildlife Area and McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve in southeast Oshawa, Ontario, and Darlington Provincial Park in the Municipality of Clarington to the east). In this update, reports of Review List

species that have not yet been reviewed by the Ontario Bird Records Committee are marked with an asterisk (*).

The original article listed 276 species, of which 98 species were known to have bred (although there were in fact 99). A short note in *Ontario Birds* in 2000 corrected and updated this list by adding 12 species (Richards 2000a). Dates and details of currently known records for these additional species are listed below.

Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis*

1963: three in Darlington Provincial Park, 20 October, M. Sherwood, N. Sherwood; and one still present, 21 October, J.L. Baillie (Tozer and Richards 1974).*

1966: one off Beaton's Point (now McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve), 11 May, A. Foster, R. Foster (Tozer and Richards 1974).*

1997: one moving west with Red-necked Grebes (*Podiceps grisegena*) off Darlington Provincial Park and Oshawa Second Marsh, 22 April, T. Hoar.*

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*

1998: one male in Darlington Provincial Park, 16-18 January, M. Bain, T. Hoar, et al.

Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus*

A small covey was present during at least 1982 to 1986 on the east side of Darlington Provincial Park, and birds were encountered frequently (T. Hoar). Undoubtedly, these were escapees from a game farm or birds released for hunting purposes.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*

1960: one adult in Darlington Provincial Park, 28 September, A.A. Wood (Tozer and Richards 1974).

1963: one in Darlington Provincial Park, 4 September, C. Christy (Tozer and Richards 1974).

2003: one adult in Oshawa Second Marsh, 2 June, T. Hoar.

Thayer's Gull *Larus thayeri*

1997: one first summer in Darlington Provincial Park, 21 May, T. Hoar; and 22 May, R. Pye.

- 1997: one first summer in Darlington Provincial Park, 14 June, T. Hoar.
 2000: one juvenile in McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve, 2 January, T. Hoar.
 2001: one adult in Darlington Provincial Park, 17 December, T. Hoar.
 2002: one juvenile in Darlington Provincial Park, 22 December, T. Hoar.

Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*

- 1971: one first winter at Oshawa lakefront, 3 January, G.A. Scott, D. Calvert (Tozer and Richards 1974, Wormington and Curry 1990).
 1973/74: one first winter at Oshawa lakefront, 24 December, D. Calvert; and 1 January, D. Calvert, G.A. Scott et al. (Tozer and Richards 1974, Wormington and Curry 1990).
 1997: one first winter at Pickering-Whitby-Oshawa lakefronts, 1 January, M. Holder et al. (Dobos 1998).

Great Gray Owl *Strix nebulosa*

- 1979: one in Darlington Provincial Park, 18 February, G. Henwood, P. Bridges; and likely the same bird at Oshawa Second Marsh, 24 February, L. Raczkowski.
 1995: two in Darlington Provincial Park, 23 December, T. Hoar, G. Carpentier.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

- 1997: one over Oshawa Second Marsh and Darlington Provincial Park, 25 April, T. Hoar.
 1998: one in Darlington Provincial Park, 20 December, T. Hoar.
 2000: one flying past Oshawa Second Marsh, 26 April, R. Pye.
 2001: one in McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve, 25 June, J. Richards.

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

- 1991: one in Darlington Provincial Park, 29 August, T. Hoar.
 2002: one in McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve, 21 April, M. Bense.
 2002: one male at Oshawa Second Marsh, 17 May, J. Richards, T. Hoar.

Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulous*

- 2000: 11 in Darlington Provincial Park, 12 March, T. Hoar.

Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorus*

- 1992: one in Darlington Provincial Park, 12 May, C. McEvoy (Bain and Henshaw 1993).

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*

- 2002: one male in the Ghost Road Bush, Oshawa Second Marsh, 17 May, T. Hoar.

Dates and details for currently known records of the three additional breeding species reported by Richards (2000a) are as follows:

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

- 1998: one flightless young being fed by adults on the beach in Darlington Provincial Park, 23 June, T. Hoar.

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*

- 1997: pair feeding young in nest in Darlington Provincial Park, 6 June, T. Hoar.

Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius*

- 1991: pair observed mating in Darlington Provincial Park, 20 May, D. Tozer, R. Tozer (Bain and Henshaw 1992); and adults with fledged young, 17 July, T. Hoar.

2001: pair feeding at least two fledged young in McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve, 25 June, J. Richards.

2002: nest with three small young in McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve, 21 June, J. Richards.

A new species total of 288, including 101 breeders (which should have been 102), was published in 2000 by Friends of Second Marsh in their *McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve and Second Marsh Wildlife Area Visitor's Guide* (Richards 2000b). Records have now been obtained for 15 more species, bringing the checklist total to 303 species. Dates and details of these additional species are as follows:

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

2002: three in Oshawa Second Marsh, 16 May, D. Ruch.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

1961: one juvenile off Beaton's Point, 22 October, G.A. Scott (Tozer and Richards 1974).*

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*

1977: one on Beaton's Point, 5 June, G.A. Scott.*

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*

1972: one in Darlington Provincial Park, 1 August, R.A. Smith (Tozer and Richards 1974).

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

2003: one male (molting, with a hint of a black ruff) in Oshawa Second Marsh, 3 September, T. Hoar.

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*

2000: one subadult off Darlington Provincial Park, 17 December, T. Hoar.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*

2001: one juvenile off Darlington Provincial Park, 17 December, T. Hoar.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

1967: one juvenile found freshly dead (ROM specimen #100003) on the beach in Darlington Provincial Park, 13 September, R.A. Davis (Tozer and Richards 1974).

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

2003: one in Oshawa Second Marsh, 25 May, T. Hoar.*

Blue-winged Warbler *Vermivora pinus*

1998: one female in Darlington Provincial Park, 25-26 August, T. Hoar, G. Vogg.

1999: one male in Darlington Provincial Park, 15 May, T. Hoar.

2000: one male in Darlington Provincial Park, 27 August, T. Hoar.

2002: one male in Darlington Provincial Park, 17 May, T. Hoar.

Kentucky Warbler *Oporornis formosus*

2002: one male in Darlington Provincial Park, 21 May, T. Hoar.

Le Conte's Sparrow *Ammodramus leconteii*

2001: one in Darlington Provincial Park, 28 September, T. Hoar.

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

1967: one male in Oshawa Second Marsh, 19 July, S. Hockett, D. Holmes, B. Staples (Tozer and Richards 1974).

1984: one male (worn first basic) in Beaton's farm field and later in Oshawa Second Marsh, 26 May, R. Tozer.

2002: one female in Darlington Provincial Park, 14 May, T. Hoar.

2003: one male in Oshawa Second Marsh, 13 May, D. Pazaratz.

Hoary Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*

1977: one at edge of Darlington Provincial Park, 31 December, L. Raczkowski.

2001: one in Darlington Provincial Park, 8 December, T. Hoar.

Finally, records have been obtained for an additional four breeding species (bringing the checklist total to 106), as follows:

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

2002: female with five small young in Oshawa Second Marsh, 10 August, T. Hoar.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

2003: two active nests (contents unknown) in Oshawa Second Marsh, 26-27 June; appeared abandoned, 1 July, J. Richards, T. Hoar.

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

1981: 22 active nests on a barn at Beaton's Point, 28 June, G.A. Scott.

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

2002: an adult with at least two fledged young being fed in Darlington Provincial Park, 6 August, T. Hoar.

Note:

On 9 July 2003, a pair of Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) with five small cygnets was observed in Oshawa Second Marsh by T. Hoar. While not yet an established, "countable" species in Ontario according to the latest decision by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (Burke 2003), the observation is still of great interest.

Summary

Currently, the total number of bird species recorded within the described checklist area stands at

303, of which 106 species have been known to breed.

Acknowledgements

We are greatly indebted to the many observers who have made their records available through personal communications; listservs such as ONTBIRDS (M. Cranford), and the Durham Rare Bird Line (R. Pye); *The Naturalist* (Durham Region Field Naturalists newsletter); *Birders Journal*; and the Ontario Nest Records Scheme (M. Peck, Royal Ontario Museum).

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Early First Prebasic Molt in Short-billed Dowitcher

Kevin McLaughlin and Ron Pittaway

On 7 September 2003, the first author and Jerry Guenther observed six juvenile Short-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus griseus*) at the Grimsby Sewage Lagoons in *Niagara*. One of the birds clearly exhibited evidence of first prebasic (postjuvenile) molt. Among the dark-centred and narrowly buff-fringed juvenile scapulars on each side were at least four new contrasting grey first basic feathers as shown in Figure 1. These scapulars were a medium grey colour with a dark

shaft streak and thin white fringe. The mantle (upper back between the scapulars) also had some grey first basic feathers mixed with brown juvenile feathers, but these are not fully visible in the photograph.

Previously, we had not seen signs of molt on southbound juvenile (and adult) Short-billed Dowitchers, although it is normal to see molting adult and juvenile southbound Long-billed Dowitchers (*L. scolopaceus*) in southern Ontario. Until this bird, our observations agreed with Dunn



Figure 1: Short-billed Dowitcher at Grimsby Sewage Lagoons, *Niagara*, on 5 September 2003. Arrow points to several new grey first basic scapular feathers, which contrast with the brighter juvenile scapulars. Photo by Ken Newcombe.

(1999) who reported: "Reflecting the pattern of adults, juvenile short-bills migrate through the Midwest in full juvenal plumage and even the latest migrants in early October haven't yet molted."

This is the first documented case of first prebasic molt in a juvenile Short-billed Dowitcher in Ontario.

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Ron Pittaway, Box 619, Minden, Ontario K0M 2K0

Acknowledgements

We thank Ken Newcombe for his photograph, which made this note possible. Jean Iron commented on a draft.

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OFO Annual Convention Oakville, Ontario 2 and 3 October 2004

Mark your calendar now to attend the 2004 OFO Annual Convention which will be held in Oakville. An exciting weekend of birding and presentations is being planned. On both Saturday and Sunday, experts will lead groups of convention participants to several of the great fall birding locations in the area. Saturday's events will include Ron Scovell's popular book sale, and an evening banquet and special featured speaker, at the St. Volodymyr Cultural Centre in Oakville. Watch for further details and registration information in *OFO News*.



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Robert Curry: Distinguished Ornithologist

Bill Crins

This note is based on remarks by Bill Crins at the presentation of the Distinguished Ornithologist Award to Bob Curry at the OFO Annual Convention in Leamington, Ontario, on 20 September 2003.

It is a great honour and a pleasure for me to present the Ontario Field Ornithologists' (OFO) most prestigious award, the Distinguished Ornithologist Award, to Robert Curry, at this annual convention of our organization. Bob was my birding mentor, one of my geography teachers in high school, and continues to be my friend, as well as being a source of inspiration, particularly with regard to his depth of knowledge, commitment to excellence in observation and reporting, and incisive, analytical mind.

The Distinguished Ornithologist Award was established in 1997 to recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the scientific study of birds in Ontario and Canada, and who have contributed significantly to OFO and Ontario's birding community (Iron 1997). Bob Curry was nominated for this award by the editors of Ontario Birds (Ron Tozer, Ron Pittaway, and me) because he meets these qualifications eminently, and as such, he joins company with the previous recipients, Earl Godfrey (Di Labio

and Brunton 1997), Ross James (Peck 1998), Murray Speirs (Falls 2000), George Peck (Richards 2001), and Bruce Falls (Tasker 2002).

Before the award is presented, I would like to provide a brief overview of some of the many achievements for which Bob Curry is being recognized. Bob's legacy to Ontario's birding community spans several decades and has taken many forms. I have already mentioned that he was my mentor when I was developing my interest in birds. When I was in Grade 9 at M. M. Robinson High School in Burlington, I became interested in birds, but I really had no idea about how to go about cultivating that interest. I asked the teacher who supervised the Science Club at the school, Dr. Richardson, and he suggested that I talk to one of the geography teachers, namely Bob. Bob gave generously of his time, and even lent me a pair of binoculars until I obtained my own. Along with several other Hamilton area birders, including Barry Jones, John Olmsted, and George Bryant, I often was invited to join Bob on birding trips in the Hamilton and Long Point areas. My first birding trips to Point Pelee were with Bob and his compatriots, as well. Later, when I was an undergraduate student at Guelph, I joined them on a couple of weekend odysseys to Massachusetts, first in search of



Figure 1: Bob Curry (left) receives the Distinguished Ornithologist Award, presented by Bill Crins, during the OFO Annual Convention at the Roma Club in Leamington, Ontario, on 20 September 2003. Photo by Ron Pittaway.

Dovekies and other late fall/early winter coastal birds, and then in search of the famous Newburyport Ross's Gull. These are just a few personal examples of Bob's generosity and willingness to cultivate a young person's interest in birds. This early mentorship has evolved into a friendship that lasts to this day. Many other birders, including OFO members Rob Dobos and Kevin McLaughlin, have benefited from Bob's knowledge and assistance, then and since, much as he himself benefited from the mentorship of the legendary

George W. North.

Bob learned the birds and their vocalizations (this was well before audiotapes) as a teenager by hiking and cycling the fields, forests and shores of Hamilton, Long Point, and beyond. In 1960, he hitchhiked to Windmill Point on Lake Erie in search of an American Oystercatcher; not only did he see it, but he also found a Wandering Tattler. A favourite memory of his comes from June 1961 when the Wilson Ornithological Society held its annual meeting in Huntsville,

Ontario. Roger Tory Peterson wanted to bird Algonquin with George North so the three of them birded together. Bob was proud to point out song dialects (of, for example, Black-throated Blue Warbler) with which the world's most famous birder was unfamiliar.

Bob has been very active in local and provincial natural history organizations. He has been involved with the Hamilton Naturalists Club as president and in other capacities, and in its Bird Study Group, for many years. He has served on the Board of Directors of the Long Point Bird Observatory, and for several years, he was the compiler of the Long Point Christmas Bird Count. He was a founding life member of OFO in 1982, and was a founding member of the Ontario Bird Records Committee, as well as being its most frequently serving member (16 of its 22 years, including 9 years as Chairperson and 2 years as Secretary). Also, he has served our organization as the Photo Quiz Editor for *Ontario Birds* for 10 years, and during that period, he has provided extremely valuable and insightful instruction in bird identification to OFO members.

He has served important roles in the two Breeding Bird Atlas projects that have been undertaken in Ontario, as an atlaser and a member of the Data Review Committee in both atlases, and as an author (of the Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, and Brown Thrasher accounts), reviewer of text, and

Regional Coordinator for the Hamilton Region in the first atlas.

He is widely recognized as an authority on the status, distribution and identification of the birds of Ontario. Bob has published numerous articles about the birds of the province, and particularly concerning birds in the Hamilton Study Area. Currently, he is writing a major treatise on *The Birds of Hamilton*, which will be one of the most authoritative and extensive regional bird books ever produced in Ontario. In support of such a large undertaking, in addition to doing the exhaustive research necessary to produce such a book, he expends considerable effort in the field documenting the occurrence

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of species himself. Presently, he is involved in conducting faunal surveys for the Halton Region Natural Areas Inventory, and he has been involved in similar surveys in Hamilton (formerly Wentworth County) and other areas in southern Ontario in the past.

This brief and partial summary of Bob's accomplishments on the

birding front (not to mention his expertise in other areas of natural history), highlighting mentorship, communication skills, field experience, and overall ornithological expertise, illustrate his worthiness as a recipient of OFO's prestigious Distinguished Ornithologist Award.

A representative selection of his publications follows:

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