Harry Lumsden (right) receiving the Distinguished Ornithologist Award from Ken Abraham at the OFO Annual Convention in Hamilton on 4 October 2008. *Photo: Jean Iron*

Harry G. Lumsden
Distinguished Ornithologist

Kenneth F. Abraham

I had the privilege to present Harry Lumsden with the Distinguished Ornithologist Award on behalf of the Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) on 4 October 2008 at the Annual Convention and Banquet in Hamilton.

Let me start by suggesting that if Ornithology were an Olympic sport, we would have some difficulty deciding whether Harry was a marathoner, a decathlete or a high jumper, and we might well conclude that he was all three rolled into one. Harry's interest in birds can be traced to his youth in Scotland, but his professional contributions began in the early 1940s, and he is still publishing in refereed journals, newsletters, and society publications to this day. That makes over 65 years of written output spanning seven decades. Certainly this qualifies as a feat of endurance in any field, a true marathon. Harry has a passion for grouse, for geese, and of course, for swans, and he has developed and led

major programs on all of these groups during his long career and in "retirement". However, he has also studied and published papers on a host of other species from Tree Swallows to guillemots. He is a life-long student of the behaviour of birds, has contributed to taxonomy and classification, written about migration ecology, refined methods of captive breeding, developed trapping technologies, and described regional avifauna, not to mention constructing wetlands and developing habitat management techniques and adaptive hunting regulations. That long list certainly qualifies him in the decathlon or perhaps that should be the centathlon. What about high jumping? Well, he was named a member of the Order of Canada in 2004, he's been cited by the Ontario Heritage Trust in the Natural Heritage category, and has received recognition for significant contributions to his community. I think you will agree that three medals can comfortably rest around his neck.

Despite all of this, I would guess that the majority of you have little knowledge of Harry's life and career, beyond his well-known contributions to the restoration of Trumpeter Swans, and perhaps his involvement in the reintroduction of Canada Geese in southern Ontario. So now I want to share some of the details and highlights of his life and career in ornithology.

Impressions of his youth

Harry told me that one of his earliest memories is of walking with his father in their garden at the age of 4 1/2 and being enthralled to see his first Song Thrush, which was sitting on a nest on a low spruce branch over a grass midden. He said he was hooked on birds from that moment. His youthful fascination also included initiation into the game bird hunting tradition, which was to play a big part in his early career as an ornithologist. He also confided that he isn't much of a "bird watcher" in our modern sense of the words, partly because of poor hearing, but mostly because he would rather spend that time in focused observation because of his fascination with bird behaviour. This was much aided by the fact that his father was a contemporary of the like-minded Sir Peter Scott, the founder of the Slimbridge Wildfowl Trust, with whom he traded waterfowl that he raised in captivity. This gave Harry great opportunity to observe nesting birds and their young in close proximity. Interestingly, Harry himself interacted professionally with Sir Peter when he visited Canada on expeditions. Of course, these experiences in youth also laid the foundations for Harry's captive rearing programs for swans and geese involving private avicultural co-operators.

Coming to Canada for the first time: the RAF and ROM

During World War II, Harry joined the Royal Air Force (RAF). Like many other British pilots, he was sent to Canada for training. This involved a three year tour of duty, and for Harry it meant training at Bowden, Penhold and Vulcan, Alberta, as

an instructor at Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Mt. Hope, Ontario, and at an Operational Training Unit on Mosquitoes at Deburt, Nova Scotia. His first formal experience with birds occurred while he was on a week's leave from his training station at Mt. Hope. He went to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), where he met Jim Baillie, Lester Snyder, Terry Shortt and Cliff Hope — all legends of Ontario ornithology. Harry ended up spending that week in the basement of the ROM learning to prepare bird skins — especially starlings that Cliff shot daily at the Toronto dump.

This training led seamlessly to Harry's first significant contributions to Ontario and world ornithology. He was then able to combine his skill and love of hunting with his opportunity to travel while in the RAF, as well as his new skills as a museum skin preparator, to become a consummate collector for the ROM. During his wartime service, he was posted for about a year each in India and Japan. While there, he collected birds, prepared them and shipped them back to the ROM. He was particularly interested in the grouse, pheasants and waterfowl. Upon return to the British Isles after his tour with the occupation forces in Japan, he continued the practice of preparing skins during hunts in his native Scotland. After he immigrated to Canada, it became a habit and hallmark of his career. He used vacation time, and once with a leave of absence, to study grouse behaviour in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Montana, Wisconsin and Oklahoma. He also collected in the mountains and tropics of Colombia, South America, where, among other species, he collected Cinnamon Teal, Torrent Ducks and Ruddy Ducks. His contributions to Cinnamon Teal taxonomy led to the discovery that there were three subspecies, the North American *septentrionalium* and two resident South American forms (*borreroi* and *tropicus*).

Over his career, Harry has contributed 1506 specimens to the ROM in 19 avian Orders. (ROM catalogue information supplied by Mark Peck). Lest you shy away from this fact, remember that museums and their collections were the foundation of the study of ornithology, from anatomy to classification to food habits and even behaviour. Through DNA studies now and in the future, museums will be the bank from which many research "cheques" will be cashed. This was the era in which Harry began his long road in ornithology and it reflects the kind of work without which Roger Tory Peterson could not have created his classic guides and David Sibley would not be the household name he is in birding circles today.

Coming to Canada for good: the Ontario Government

After the war, Harry contemplated a peace time career in the RAF, but fortunately for all of us, the RAF stalled in making a decision. Harry had also written to Cliff Hope asking about the possibility of a job at the ROM. Cliff replied that no job of that sort was available, but that the Ontario government was looking for

biologists. By this route, Harry shortly thereafter accepted a job offer from the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests' Doug Clarke and came to Canada for good in March 1948.

Harry became the District Biologist in the Erie District, where he lived at St. Williams for two years. He moved to the Tweed District where he worked for four years on a variety of projects, but especially on muskrat management in marshes. In 1954, he moved to Maple to become a game management coordinator for over eight years. He then took his final position with the Wildlife Research group, as Waterfowl and Upland Game Scientist, remaining there until he retired in 1988.

Almost from the beginning, he established a pattern of travelling across the province, doing what he thought was important in each region, with support from Doug Clarke, and his supervisors Jack Grew and Rod Stanfield and a host of colleagues. Among other areas, the Hudson Bay Lowland became an area of concentration for Harry's excursions and study of birds. I will summarize Harry's work on two bird groups of special interest: the grouse and the waterfowl. In the grouse group, he worked especially with the lek species such as Greater and Lesser Prairie-Chickens, Sharp-tailed Grouse and Sage Grouse. In the waterfowl group, he conducted research on Common Goldeneyes, Hooded Mergansers, Canada Geese, Snow Geese, Tundra Swans and Trumpeter Swans.

The Hudson Bay Lowland

The Hudson Bay Lowland became an area of special interest for Harry from the 1950s, when he went there to attend annual trappers meetings and record wildlife harvests, throughout the balance of his government career. Working with the Cree, he found the first Ontario nesting colony of Snow Geese near Cape Henrietta Maria and conducted the first photographic survey of the kind that has become the standard for such inventories. He discovered nesting Black Guillemots and wrote accounts of the regional avifauna of Cape Henrietta Maria. He conducted annual summer surveys of productivity of Canada Geese and Snow Geese along the Hudson Bay and James Bay coast from the Northwest Territories to Quebec for over 35 years, with colleagues from the Canadian Wildlife Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Illinois Natural History Survey. He established the first on-the-ground nesting ecology research of subarctic Canada Geese in eastern Canada in cooperation with Dennis Raveling and the Mississippi Flyway. He also tracked their productivity with fall counts in southern Ontario in the Lake St. Clair region near Bradley's Marsh.

Geese

In the late 1960s, after the re-discovery of Giant Canada Geese by Harold Hanson, game management agencies across eastern North America were interested in restoring extirpated populations, and

Ontario was no different. Harry spearheaded this effort, working with partners from the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, the Ontario Waterfowl Research Foundation at Kortright Waterfowl Park and districts around the province, to establish breeding groups and release areas. The program was a "giant" success by any measure. He also focused for many years on Snow Geese with Steve Curtis (CWS), carrying out numerous fall productivity surveys and two surveys of spring migration counts on the southern Hudson Bay coast, as well as conducting the first banding in the newly expanded southern part of the breeding range, that provided information on the colony associations of the founding birds and their interchange within the large mid-continent meta-population. He participated in the annual meetings to record harvest and contributed to formal quantification of waterfowl kill by Cree in the Hudson Bay Lowland in the 1970s.

Swans

Harry's interest in Trumpeter Swans began several years before retirement. It sprang from the passage of the first Endangered Species Act of Ontario in 1977. Programs to re-establish declining or extirpated species such as Peregrine Falcons and Wild Turkeys began at the same time, and it was natural for Harry to focus on a group with which he had great familiarity. As you already know, this program became one of his primary pursuits after retirement and culminated in 2007, in its 25th year, with the achievement of a self-sustaining, naturally reproducing population and the inclusion of the Trumpeter Swan on the official list of Ontario breeding bird species.

Productivity: Writing for many audiences

Harry is the sole author of 110 publications, the senior author of 14 publications and the co-author of 27 publications (that is 151 in total and still counting) spanning the period from 1945, when his first note appeared in the *Auk*, to 2007 and 2008 with contributions on swans to the *Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas* and *Toronto Birds.* Among these are 22 contributions on the grouse family, 24 about geese, 39 about swans, 14 on ducks, 5 on regional avifauna and 10 on artificial nesting structures and investigative tools. Among these, his knowledge of the birds of northern Ontario has been shared in more than 40 publications. He was a major contributor to the first *Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas*, authoring or co-authoring 18 species accounts as well as serving on many committees.

He has been a member of OFO since 1983, and is a long-time and enthusiastic supporter of the organization through his help to members and editors of OFO publications. He has contributed articles to *Ontario Birds* and to the special publication, *Ornithology in Ontario.*

Conclusion

I would be remiss if I did not mention that, while Harry is a life-long student of birds, he has accomplished all of this through self-learning. Because he went into the RAF rather than university, he has no university education or advanced degrees. In an age such as ours, when such credentials have almost become synonymous with expertise, this serves as a reminder that there are exceptions to such stereotypes. For an organization such as OFO in which the membership includes many whose birding expertise is a result of passion and concern, not professional training, Harry represents what can be aspired to by the most dedicated. Harry's career began when Jim Baillie was still determined that the best way to learn about birds was to collect them. It has spanned a period of remarkable change in our approach to bird study and our learning tools. Harry now includes DNA analysis as a matter of course when he deliberates on how to solve problems of egg hatchability in Trumpeter Swans or the phylogenetic status of Sharp-tailed Grouse on Manitoulin Island. Harry's determination and his pursuit of knowledge are a true inspiration.

It seems hard for me to believe that I have known Harry for over 30 years. He had a strong influence on me from the beginning of my graduate studies of Snow Geese in 1975, and his influence on the Fred Cooke lab at Queens University was significant. He was a mentor in my early years in the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in Moosonee, where he introduced me to the Hudson Bay Lowland, and trained me on his survey techniques, as he had done with my predecessor Paul Prevett. I am now honoured to work in the position Harry created and occupied for over 25 years in the Wildlife Research Section. I was extraordinarily pleased to learn that OFO had chosen him for this award, and very happy to be given the chance to present it.

On behalf of the Ontario Field Ornithologists, it gives me great pleasure to present their Distinguished Ornithologist Award for 2008 to Harry Lumsden.

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Editors' Note:

The editors received a request from Harry Lumsden to include the following remarks in gratitude for receiving this year's Distinguished Ornithologist Award:

The Ontario Field Ornithologists have awarded me a great honour in conferring on me the Distinguished Ornithologist Award for 2008. This was a complete surprise and I thank you for this singular recognition. I also thank you for giving me a life membership in your organization. Harry G. Lumsden

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