

The Breeding Bird List for Ontario: Additions and Comments

by
Ross D. James

Elsewhere in this issue is a checklist of the birds of Ontario prepared by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). That list also includes an indication of those that breed (or have bred) in the province. However, some comments are necessary to explain why the OBRC has included several species as breeding birds.

Since the publication of the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario* (James *et al.* 1976) 13 species have been added to the breeding bird list, based on material evidence received, including: Cinnamon Teal (refer to Checklist for scientific names), Canvasback, Rough-legged Hawk, American Avocet, Greater Yellowlegs, California Gull, Great Gray Owl, Chuck-will's-widow, Black-billed Magpie, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Shrike, Harris' Sparrow and House Finch. In a few instances, details of these additions have not been published and I include comments below. For those already published only brief details with a reference are given.

The Pine Grosbeak was

included as a breeding bird by James *et al.* (1976) but further comments are necessary to clarify its inclusion. In addition, the OBRC reviewed the status of various species formerly considered as "hypothetical breeders," that is, species without some material evidence of nesting or breeding in the province. The OBRC felt that for four species (Canvasback, Short-billed Dowitcher, Kirtland's Warbler and Connecticut Warbler) plus the Pine Grosbeak, there was sufficient evidence of breeding that they should be added to the Ontario breeding bird list. A summary of the information leading to the decision to include them is also presented here. With these additions the breeding bird list now totals 283 species.

CINNAMON TEAL – This species has been a rare and occasional visitor to the province for many years, but always during the migration period. On 28 May 1983 a pair of birds was found at the Amherstburg sewage ponds, Essex County, approximately 1500 km from their normal

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breeding range in the prairies. They remained there only until 3 July. On 24 June 1983 A. Wormington flushed the female from a clutch of 8 eggs to provide the first nest for the province. A single egg from this apparently unsuccessful nesting is in the ROM (ROM 12854).

CANVASBACK – In the Lake St. Clair area breeding was reported in 1897, 1948, 1952, 1953 (Baillie 1962) and in 1983 (D. Brewer, pers. comm.). They were also reported nesting at Luther Marsh, Wellington and Dufferin counties, in 1965 (Brewer 1977) and 1982, but not until 1983 was a female with a brood of 8 photographed there, on 10 July, by L. Yerex (ROM PR 1473-1479) for the first material evidence of breeding.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK – A nest with 2 young was photographed by J.P. Prevett at site 416, Cape Henrietta Maria, Kenora District, 26 July 1976 (ROM PR 650-657) (Peck 1976). Also, at site 415, Cape Henrietta Maria, W. Creighton photographed young in a nest, 20 July 1977 (ROM PR 854-856).

AMERICAN AVOCET – Flightless young, photographed by W. Wilson at Sable Island, Lake-of-the-Woods, Rainy River District, 6 July 1980 (ROM PR 1154-1160), were about 250 km east of their normal breeding range (see Lamey 1981).

GREATER YELLOWLEGS – Flightless young (ROM 137159,

137165) and a clutch of eggs (ROM 12654) were collected in 1980 near Aquatuk Lake, Kenora District to provide the first positive breeding evidence in Ontario (see Nash and Dick 1981).

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER

– The inclusion of this species rests largely on the account of the capture and banding of a young bird on 10 July 1963, at Winisk, Kenora District, as provided by Tuck (1968). Although this is the only report of young dowitchers in Ontario there is reason to believe this account. Tuck was a well respected ornithologist with many years of field experience to call upon, and a number of other observers have noted agitated behaviour of apparently breeding adults at several places along the Hudson Bay Coast.

CALIFORNIA GULL – A bird sitting on a nest with eggs was photographed by J.E. Mason at the Eastern Headland, Toronto, York R.M. on 31 May 1982 (ROM PR 1348-1349). This bird was about 1500 km east of the species' normal range in the central prairies (see also James 1983).

GREAT GRAY OWL – A nest with young was photographed at Pickle Lake, Kenora District on 6 June 1977 (ROM PR 810-821) and an eggshell was collected (ROM 12340) (James 1977). Additional records are listed in Peck and James (1983).

CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW – An incubating male with two eggs was photographed by A. Wormington



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*Great Gray Owl, May 1980,
Main Duck Island.*

in Point Pelee National Park, Essex County, on 5 June 1977 (ROM PR 826-828) (see Goodwin 1977, Peck and James 1983). No additional nests have been found although the species still occurs regularly at Point Pelee, Rondeau Provincial Park and St. Williams, Haldimand-Norfolk R.M., indicating that it probably breeds annually.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE – Two nests were photographed north of Rainy River, Rainy River District by W. Wilson, 6 July 1980 (ROM PR 1169-1170) (see Lamey 1981). Additional nests have been found in subsequent years, as the birds have become resident in that part of the province.

TUFTED TITMOUSE – In the early part of this century the Tufted Titmouse became a rare and local resident in the extreme south of Ontario. Although reports of breeding extend back to 1936

(Baillie 1960) not until 1977 were photographs obtained by the ROM (PR 1006-1011) documenting breeding by this species. These photographs were obtained in the summer of 1971, by D. Workman, at a nest in a pipe in his backyard at Port Colborne, Niagara R.M.

NORTHERN SHRIKE – A single immature (ROM 139897) from a family group was collected 12 July 1981 in the western end of the Sutton Ridges, Kenora District (James 1981). An additional record at Moosonee in 1975 is provided by Manning (1981). The species may be more widespread in the Hudson Bay Lowlands than present records suggest.

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER – Available information suggests that this species may have nested at a number of localities in Ontario. During 1916, Dr. P. Harrington and Dr. F.A.E. Starr were stationed at the Petawawa Military base, Renfrew County. Both were active birders and egg collectors and kept diaries of their observations. They noted Kirtland's Warblers singing over a "fairly large area" and considered them to be "not uncommon" on the sandy Jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*) plains there. Although they never found a nest, they "felt sure" that the birds were breeding there (Harrington 1939).

From this account, it seems reasonable to assume that at one time this species, which presumably was once far more common than it is today, was breeding in Ontario (at about the same latitude as its present range

in Michigan and in typical Jack pine habitat that was as extensive here as in Michigan). But the population of these warblers became much reduced during the early part of this century. When Harrington returned to Petawawa during World War II, he saw only a single bird after a considerable search of the area.

As recently as 1977 a male Kirtland's Warbler was found at Petawawa, singing for several weeks as if prepared to nest if a mate were found. Males have also been observed singing over a period of weeks in 1954 near Barrie, Simcoe County and on the Bruce Peninsula. But the most convincing evidence accepted by the OBRC as evidence of breeding in Ontario was noted near Barrie in the summer of 1945. Twenty-eight pages of unpublished notes from the files of D.H. Speirs (copy in ROM) describe in considerable detail the presence of two adult birds with at least one immature still showing natal down in its plumage and apparently still being fed by the adults. These birds were present for at least 6 days (from 8 to 13 August) and begging calls of young birds that were heard prior to these dates suggest that this family group was present for a number of days prior to their being positively identified.

These warblers were observed on a number of occasions, and identified by D.H. Speirs, Dr. J.M. Speirs and Dr. E.L. Brereton. Since warblers do not migrate in family groups, it is highly unlikely that these birds had moved very far from the nest in which the young was raised. Extensive

stands of Jack pines were present in more than one area as close as 10 km away, but pines were also present at the site of observation.

CONNECTICUT WARBLER – On 15 August 1939 a juvenile Connecticut Warbler was collected at Lake Attawapiskat, Kenora District. However, this was a flying young. Although taken near the geographic centre of northern Ontario, suggesting that it was locally raised, at that time of year it could have travelled a considerable distance. In the ROM there are reports on file of adults feeding young out of nests from Algoma (1923), Cochrane (1949), Timiskaming (1959) and Thunder Bay (1978) districts. In 1971 young were flushed from a nest in Sibley Provincial Park, Thunder Bay District. The nest was reported to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme, but no documentation was secured. The above sightings might be viewed with suspicion since the identification of this species may be difficult. However, during late spring when males are singing on territory they are easily identified, and it is known to occur every summer in considerable numbers all across Ontario north to at least Sandy Lake and Fort Albany and south to Quetico and Lake Superior Provincial Parks and Cochrane. It seems improbable that Connecticut Warblers would occur annually in large numbers in Ontario without ever having nested.

HARRIS' SPARROW – During the summer of 1983, birds were

observed about Fort Severn, Kenora District, on several occasions. On 4 July a nest was found and photographed by Tim and Doris Nowicki (PR 1447-1449) to provide the first provincial nest record. On 25 July Bob and Terri Thobaben also observed two adults feeding one or two fledged young at Fort Severn.

PINE GROSBEAK – Pine Grosbeaks have been observed at numerous locations in summer all across Ontario, from the Hudson Bay coast south to northern Hastings County. Nests were reported from Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts, both in 1940, but neither was documented. A female bird with an unshelled egg in the oviduct (not preserved) was collected in northeastern Ontario at Howley Lake, Kenora District, in 1958. A female of a nonmigratory species preparing to lay an egg in less than 24 hours would certainly seem to have been a locally-nesting bird. As a nonmigratory species, they must be breeding in Ontario or they also would have vanished long ago.

HOUSE FINCH – This species is expanding rapidly in Ontario. The first nesting was documented in 1978 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara R.M., (James 1978) but they are now nesting regularly at least as far north as Kingston, Toronto and London.

There are a number of other species whose breeding has been reported (or suggested), but the OBRC felt that at present the evidence for including them was

not conclusive enough. These species will not be listed, but their inclusion will be considered if further information is obtained.

Information wanted: For a number of species already on the list of breeding birds additional information about their nesting is highly desirable. These are species for which no nest has been found; or breeding is based on a single nest or a very few breeding records; or the species has become (or is still) very rare in a part or all of the province.

If you find a nest, or evidence of breeding, for any of the species on the following list, or for any species not on the breeding bird list, please forward details and/or documentation to the author. For these records please provide a complete description and/or photograph of the adult birds, as the identification of the species relies mainly on this, rather than on the identification of eggs or young that are often much more difficult, if not impossible, to identify with certainty.

In northern Ontario (north of the 4°C isotherm): Red-throated Loon, Horned Grebe, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Ross' Goose, Greater Scaup, King Eider, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Cooper's Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Gray Partridge, Piping Plover, American Avocet, Hudsonian Godwit, Marbled Godwit, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Caspian Tern, Black Guillemot, Boreal Owl, Northern Shrike, Orange-crowned Warbler, Connecticut

Warbler, Lark Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak.

In southern Ontario: Horned Grebe, Cinnamon Teal, Canvasback, Peregrine Falcon, Greater Prairie-Chicken, Wild Turkey, Piping Plover, California Gull, Chuck-will's-widow, Bewick's Wren, Kirtland's Warbler, Dickcissel, Lark Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak.

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