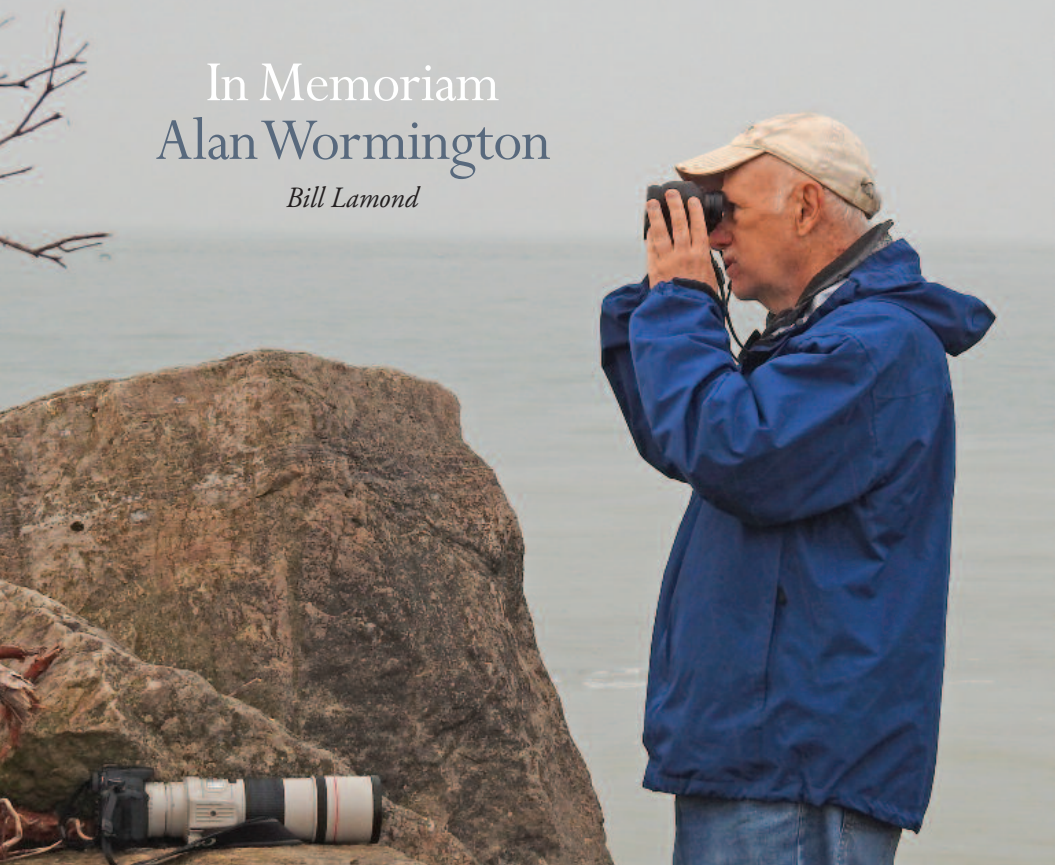


# In Memoriam Alan Wormington

*Bill Lamond*



Alan Wormington at the Tip of Point Pelee, his favourite place on earth, 12 May 2015. *Jean Iron*

The Ontario birding community received a severe blow with the passing of Alan Wormington on 3 September 2016. Alan had been diagnosed with bone cancer in December 2013 but was able to lead a fairly normal life until a couple of weeks before he finally succumbed. Alan was likely the most accomplished birder of his generation in Ontario. Jim Richards of Orono said “Ontario ornithology has lost the single most important figure since the passing of James L. Baillie in 1970.” I couldn’t agree more.

Alan Wormington was born on 20 June 1954 in Hamilton. His interest in nature began very early on with an intense interest in butterflies in his early teenage years. He remembered his mother dropping him off in rural areas of Hamilton for him to explore and collect butterflies. A friend of Alan’s sister remembers that his bedroom was “an absolute disaster, covered in butterfly boards and books.” Soon after, he became interested in birds and from then on they occupied him constantly. He was expelled from high school when he was 15 because



Alan Wormington at Moosonee, 24 September, 2014. *Josh Vandermeulen.*

of recurrent truancy, much to the chagrin of his parents. However, this was delightful news to Alan as it allowed him to look for birds whenever he wanted (which was most of the time). He never went back to school.

Hamilton birder Bob Curry notes that people assume he was a mentor to Alan. Although Alan did get ‘training’ from Bob, George North and Alf Epp, Curry reminds us that “Alan was a wonderkind who almost immediately could find more birds and ‘better birds’ than any of us.” And what birds! Over his life he found seven species new to Ontario: Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*) (1974), Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*) (1974), Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*) (1978), Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*) (1989), Plumbeous Vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*) (1997), Sooty/Short-tailed

Shearwater (*Puffinus grisea/tenuirostris*) (2010) and Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) (2012). Most of us would be lucky to find and add one new species to the Ontario list in our lifetime. Not surprisingly, he also found the first nests of both Chuck-will’s-widow (*Antrostomus carolinensis*) and Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*) in Ontario.

Within a few years, Hamilton birding was not satisfying enough and Alan was looking for more. He wondered if there were areas in the north that might be outstanding ‘migrant traps’. Veteran birder Doug McRae remembers that “In many ways [Alan] was a pioneer. While he wasn’t necessarily the first to visit James Bay or the north shore of Superior for birding, I think he was the first to realize the incredible vagrant potential in the ‘off’ season and where to find [birds].” In late

August 1971, a 17-year-old Alan, along with Mark Jennings, made his first trip to Moosonee. Mark, on replying to my question of why Moosonee, responded, “You know how Alan's mind worked. He probably noticed how Hudson Bay and James Bay created a funnel south and realized Moosonee, being at the narrow end, would be a good birding trap.” Soon after, this area was broadened to other areas of southern James Bay, especially Netitishi Point between Moosonee and the Quebec border. At this time, Alan also began exploring the north shore of Lake Superior on an almost annual basis and even once explored Caribou Island in Lake Superior, a small island about 85 km offshore from Agawa Bay.

However, to most birders Alan will always be linked with Point Pelee, a place which he called home after moving there in 1979. He wanted to live in the best place in Ontario for birding and he more or less adopted Point Pelee as his ‘kingdom’. His meticulous record keeping of Point Pelee birds is legendary, as his many annual summaries of Point Pelee birds bear out. There is no one who has birded more within Point Pelee National Park and its environs — not even close. Not surprisingly, his Pelee list is head and shoulders above anyone else's, and at 368 species, is 94% of all the species ever recorded there (393).

Alan was not strictly an Ontario birder and he ‘adopted’ Texas as one of his favourite places to bird outside of the province. He made dozens of trips to Texas over the years and many birders have fond memories of accompanying Alan on these trips. For a long time, he

had the highest Texas list for an out-of-state birder — something of which he was quite proud. Of course, Alan was not solely a birder. He had an intense interest in butterflies. He probably had a better understanding of the status and distribution of Ontario's butterflies than anyone else. He had seen almost all the resident butterfly species in Ontario and a good percentage of the strays that have occurred in the province. His personal collection of butterflies is possibly the finest of any lepidopterist in the province. Alan was also a fine photographer of birds in the analog photo era. His collection of black and white photographs of rare Ontario birds is simply amazing in scope and quality.

Alan never liked to be called a ‘lister’ but his achievements are hard to deny as he has the top Ontario list (447) and top (by far) all-time winter list (295). Some of Alan's expeditions to see rare Ontario birds are legendary, including his death-defying “race” to see the Lesser (Mongolian) Sand-Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*)



Mark Jennings, Bob Curry and Alan Wormington, Ship Sands Island, James Bay, August 1977.

*Mark Jennings (timer)*

at Presqu'ile Provincial Park and his expedition to see a reported Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*) in Dryden — in the dead of winter — which turned out to be only a mockingbird.

To me, listing was his hobby. His career was field ornithology, especially his pursuit of understanding the status and distribution of birds in Ontario. There was no one who could evaluate a bird record better than Alan; such was his devotion to the documentation of Ontario's bird life. Alan was instrumental in the formation of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) in 1982. Glenn Coady has remarked that "He almost single-handedly raised the bar on the adequate documentation of rarities. By doing such an exemplary job himself, Alan provided the impetus for everyone to 'improve their game'. He truly led the way in 'moving the yard-sticks' in the documentation of rarities." He served on the OBRC for 19 years and for six years he wrote or co-authored the OBRC annual reports that were published in *Ontario Birds*. He also wrote many seasonal summaries of the Ontario region for *North American Birds* right up until the present. Alan wrote numerous papers outlining the status of Ontario's birds many of which have been published in *Ontario Birds*. He had been working on his 'life's work', namely the *Birds of Point Pelee* for many years. Unfortunately, although all the data have been assembled into paper files, it was not close to being finished at the time of his death. It is hoped that it can be published in some form in the coming years.

Alan had an intriguing persona. He could be a contrarian, often taking opposing views from the mainstream. He never met a conspiracy theory he didn't like and he was always ready to question commonly held views. He would have been pleased by the Trump election but he in no way held the disturbing views of Donald Trump. His support of this candidacy was more in the vein of upsetting the apple cart. There are certainly birders around who have told unflattering stories about Alan. However among those who really knew him, Alan was well-liked and respected, as shown by the number of friends surrounding his deathbed. I think Willie D'Anna said it well: "Alan was great, in many ways, and I have been a fan of his almost since I started birding. I met him at Pelee on my first trip there in the mid-eighties. Like all of us, he had his faults as well and he could be off-putting to people who did not appreciate his blunt honesty. However, I think he appreciated those people who were just as honest and upfront with him."

He will be profoundly missed by many birders across the continent and by his sister Janne Hackl (husband Leo), nephew Jonathan Hackl (wife Elizabeth), and great nephews Ethan and Ryan and great niece Julia.

#### **Below is a selected bibliography of Alan's publications:**

**Wormington, A.** 1976. The big May day. *Wood Duck* 29:148-149.

**Wormington, A.** 1977. Nesting of Acadian Flycatcher near Hamilton, Ontario. *Ontario Field Biologist* 31:77.

- Wormington, A.** 1978. A hunch pays off-- Great Cormorant! Wood Duck 31:111-112.
- Wormington, A.** 1978. Point Pelee National Park, First Annual Spring Migration Report (1978), mimeo, 23 pp.
- Wormington, A.** 1982. The Rare Breeding Birds of Point Pelee National Park – a status report, 1982 census and recommendations for resource management. Parks Canada, Cornwall. 30 pp.
- Wormington, A.** and **R.D. James.** 1984. Checklist of the Birds of Ontario. Ontario Birds 2:13-23.
- Wormington, A.** 1985. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1984. Ontario Birds 3:2-17.
- Wormington, A.** 1985. Partial albinism and the determination of local movements in an American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*). Ontario Birds 3:106-108.
- Wormington, A.** 1986. An observation of “Richardson’s” Merlin in Ontario. Ontario Birds 4:62-64.
- Wormington, A.** 1986. Fall vagrancy of the Indigo Bunting in northern Ontario. Ontario Birds 4:104-109.
- Wormington, A., J.R. Nisbet** and **R.G. Finlayson.** 1986. Some aspects of bird migration at Caribou Island (Lake Superior), Ontario. Ontario Birds 4:85-97.
- Wormington, A.** 1987. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1986. Ontario Birds 5:42-63.
- Wormington, A.** 1987. White-eyed Vireo: New to northern Ontario. Ontario Birds 5:29-31.
- Wormington, A.** and **W. Lamond.** 1987. Orchard Oriole: New to northern Ontario. Ontario Birds 5:32-34.
- Graham, D.S.** and **A. Wormington.** 1988. First Breeding Record of the Lawrence's Warbler in Ontario. Ontario Birds 6:99-101.
- Coady, G.** and **A. Wormington.** 1989. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1988. Ontario Birds 7:43-54.
- Wormington, A.** and **R. Curry.** 1990. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 1989. Ontario Birds 8:4-33.
- Wormington, A.** 1992. Cave Swallow: New to Ontario and the Great Lakes region. Birders Journal 1:176-180.
- Wormington, A.** and **J.H. Leach.** 1992. Concentrations of diving ducks at Point Pelee National Park, Ontario, in response to invasion of zebra mussels, *Dreissena polymorpha*. Canadian Field-Naturalist 106:376-380.
- Graham, D.S.** and **A. Wormington.** 1993. Inca Dove: New to Ontario and Canada. Birders Journal 2:153-159.
- Wormington, A.** 1993. The status and distribution of Mississippi Kite in Ontario. Birders Journal 2:90-94.
- Wormington, A.** 1997. Letter to Editor: More “white-crested” cormorants. Ontario Birds 15:3.
- McLaughlin, K.A.** and **A. Wormington.** 2000. An Apparent Dunlin x White-rumped Sandpiper hybrid. Ontario Birds 18:8-12.
- Wormington, A.** 2001. Early migrants at Point Pelee: Spring 2001. Point Pelee Natural History News 1:9-11.
- Wormington, A.** 2001. Eurasian Teal: A new species for Point Pelee? Point Pelee Natural History News 1:14-15.
- Wormington, A.** 2001. Point Pelee Little Gull banded in Finland! Point Pelee Natural History News 1:82.
- Wormington, A.** 2001. “Western” Solitary Sandpiper: New to Ontario. Point Pelee Natural History News 1:81.
- Wormington, A.** 2001. Wood Stork: New to Essex County. Point Pelee Natural History News 1:45-48.

- Wormington, A.** 2002. Chuck-will's-widow: a nest found! Point Pelee Natural History News 2:31.
- Wormington, A.** 2002. Sandhill Crane: A new breeding species for Point Pelee. Point Pelee Natural History News 2:33.
- Wormington, A.** 2002. Spring migration 2002: The best ever? Point Pelee Natural History News 2:34.
- Wormington, A.** 2002. The Point Pelee Lesser Nighthawk: a unique record for Ontario and Canada. Point Pelee Natural History News 2:1.
- Wormington, A.** 2003. Brown Pelicans on the Great Lakes. Birders Journal 11:228-240.
- Wormington, A.** 2003. Record-late Carolina Wren nest for Point Pelee. Point Pelee Natural History News 3:50.
- Wormington, A.** 2003. Ross's Gull: second record for Point Pelee. Point Pelee Natural History News 3:67.
- Wormington, A.** 2006. The Breeding Birds of Point Pelee National Park, with an emphasis on Species-at-Risk. Unpublished report, Parks Canada, Leamington, ON. 77 pp.
- Sutherland, D.A.** and **A. Wormington.** 2007. Chuck-will's-widow. Pages 310-311 in Cadman, M.D., D.A. Sutherland, G.G. Beck, D. Lepage, and A.R. Couturier (editors). Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario: 2001–2005. Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Ontario Nature, Toronto. 706 pp.
- Wormington, A.** 2007. Gulls of Point Pelee: record 18 species in 2006. OFO News 25:2-6.
- Wormington, A.** 2008. Point Pelee Birds – Annual summary for 2007. The Egret 24:16-24.
- Wormington, A.** 2010. Ontario. North American Birds 64:413-419.
- Wormington, A.** 2011. Point Pelee Birds – Annual summary for 2010. The Egret 27:26-33.
- Wormington, A.** and **M.H. Cranford.** 2011. Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2010. Ontario Birds 29:106-148.
- Wormington, A.** 2012. Expedition to Netitishi Point, southern James Bay. Unpublished. 3pp.
- Wormington, A.** 2013. Historical overview, seasonal timing and abundance of Bonaparte's Gull at Point Pelee, Ontario. Ontario Birds 31:101-119.
- Wormington, A.** 2013. Spring Migration; March through May 2012. Ontario Regional Report. North American Birds 66:471-478.
- Wormington, A.** 2014. Spring Migration; March through May 2013, Ontario Regional Report. North American Birds 67:583-592.
- Wormington, A.** 2015. Spring Migration March through May 2014, Ontario Regional report. North American Birds 68:339-345.
- Wormington, A.** 2015. Historical overview, seasonal timing and abundance of Little Gull at Point Pelee, Ontario. Ontario Birds 33:2-21.

---

*Bill Lamond*

238 St George St.

Brantford, Ontario N3R 1W7

E-mail: bill-lamond@hotmail.com

---

## Correction

August 2016, Volume 34(2), page 144. **How biochemical indicators can be used to detect changes in food webs of gulls** by Craig Hebert. On the Y-axis of the lower graph, 'd13N' value should read 'd13C'.