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## Notes

### Observations of Boreal Owls Feeding on Flying Squirrels

The Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*), a small owl (25 cm) of the northern coniferous forest, feeds mainly on small rodents and occasionally small birds, according to sources quoted in Bent (1938). The small rodents consist of mice and voles; nowhere is there any mention of squirrel species being taken. In this note I report three instances of a Boreal Owl feeding on a flying squirrel (*Glaucomys* sp.).

On 15 January 1973, at Clarke Lake, Airy Township (Algonquin Park), Ontario, Ron Tozer observed a Boreal Owl at 08:00 hrs being harassed by Gray Jays (*Perisoreus canadensis*) Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*), Black-capped Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*), Boreal Chickadees (*P. hudsonicus*) and a Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*) as it roosted unconcernedly in a large White Spruce (*Picea glauca*). Howard Coneybear observed the same owl at 10:30 hrs and noted that it was feeding on the carcass of a flying squirrel. The Boreal Owl was

on exactly the same perch as when discovered earlier (when the squirrel carcass was not visible). The owl had apparently been "settled down" on the squirrel carcass in its talons, making the carcass not visible to Mr. Tozer in the early morning light. The owl may have been exhibiting the "prey thawing" behaviour described by Bondrup-Nielsen (1977) for the species in captivity. At 1700 hrs, the Boreal Owl was captured by hand by Dan Brunton (and subsequently photographed). A pellet and the flying squirrel carcass were collected. That material was confirmed as Northern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*) by Dr. Donald A. Smith, Carleton University, Ottawa.

A second instance of a Boreal Owl feeding on a flying squirrel also occurred in Algonquin Park. On 25 January 1974, near the Park Museum (Peck Township), Howard Coneybear discovered a roosting Boreal Owl being mobbed by Black-capped

Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches (*Sitta canadensis*), Gray Jays and Blue Jays. That owl was later shown to Dan Brunton, Ron Pittaway, Dan Strickland and Ron Tozer, and was seen to be holding part of a Northern Flying Squirrel in its talons, which it carried off when flushed.

Just after dusk, on 2 January 1978, in North Elmsley Township, near Smiths Falls, Ontario, I observed a Boreal Owl on the ground feeding on a flying squirrel, in an area illuminated by an outdoor floodlight. The squirrel had been noticed, dead, at

noon of that day beneath a parked automobile, in the exact spot where I later saw the owl feeding on it. The squirrel had not been there the previous evening, when the automobile was parked. It is possible that the squirrel had been attacked and injured by the owl during the night, but had escaped beneath the automobile, where it died. Flying squirrels were occasional nocturnal visitors to the bird feeding station maintained at that location by G. and L. Johnston.

When I approached to within three metres of the feeding owl, it



PHOTO: AL. WORMINGTON

*The Boreal Owl usually feeds on mice, voles and small birds.*

attempted to fly off with the squirrel carcass, but was unable to do so, since the carcass was frozen to the snow. When I approached about one metre, it abandoned the carcass and flew to a nearby White Pine (*Pinus strobus*).

Within 15 minutes the owl had returned to resume feeding on the carcass. Then it sat over the carcass, eyes closed, or nearly so ("prey thawing"?), for about 30 minutes before continuing to feed. Later, the owl tugged the carcass loose from the snow and flew off with it.

Flying squirrels would appear to constitute the only mammalian prey species other than mice and voles normally available to a small northern

nocturnal raptor such as the Boreal owl. The Varying Hare would be too large to be taken.

#### Acknowledgements

I thank R. Tozer for the Algonquin Park observation data, and D.V. Weseloh for his critical comments on the manuscript.

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## The First Substantiated Record of the Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) in Ontario

The Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) is resident in Texas and its bordering states, as well as along a thin strip of the east coast from Florida to North Carolina. It is accidental in New England (Peterson 1980). Before enactment of the Migratory Bird Treaty in 1916 many sightings of Painted Buntings in the northern states were assumed to be of birds which had escaped from captivity (Bull 1974). In recent years three Painted Buntings have been observed at feeders in western New York — a pair in May 1967 in Delaware County and a male

in May 1970 in Erie County. Bull (1974) questioned the validity of the pair seen in Delaware County as being possible escapees.

There are four previous Canadian records, three of these are from Ontario (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Goodwin 1975 and Kelly 1978). None of these records have been accepted for the Ontario Checklist. In 1978 a Painted Bunting was seen on the Toronto Islands in winter. This report was not accepted by the former Ontario Ornithological Records Committee (Goodwin 1980).

On 21 May 1979 I sighted a single male Painted Bunting on Long Point, Ontario, five km east of the Long Point Provincial Park Boundary. The bird was perched on a twig one metre above the ground on the edge of a clearing in a cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) grove. I immediately wrote in my field notebook a detailed description which included reference to a lime green streak on the flank. The streak contrasted sharply with the brilliant red breast. Otherwise the bird had all the plumage characteristics indicated in Robbins *et al.* (1966), *Birds of North America*, of a male Painted Bunting. The bird's feathers were very fresh, with no apparent wear.

Warren Russell and I returned to the site one hour later and relocated the bird. At that time the bunting had moved to an adjacent meadow where it was perched on the ground. We flushed the bird several times and Russell was able to get three good photographs. These have been deposited in the Royal Ontario Museum, Department of Ornithology as photo specimens, numbers 1118 to 1120.

On 23 May 1979, Russell and Harold Richards relocated the bird on Courtright Ridge, two km north of the Long Point Bird Observatory cabin. The bird was observed 'fly-catching' from a dead branch for about one-half hour. W. Russell, H. Richards, Peter Lockhart and I unsuccessfully attempted mist-netting it, at which time it flew high into the canopy of the trees and was not observed again. This sighting consti-

tutes the first substantiated record for this species in Ontario.

I thank the Long Point Bird Observatory for permission to use the cabin on Long Point for my research.

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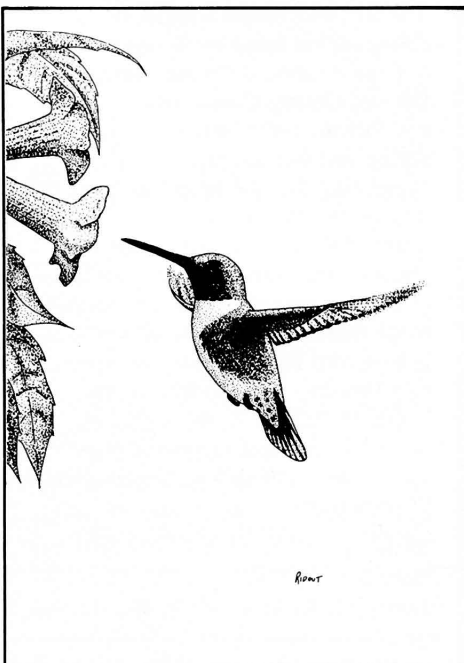
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## A Hummingbird Migration, 3 September 1982

Weather conditions appeared favourable, a cold front with its associated showers moved through southwestern Ontario late in the afternoon of 2 September 1982, and the weather forecast for 3 September promised lower temperatures, clear skies in the morning with clouds and moderate winds developing by noon. August had been exceptionally cool. Conditions were favourable for an early hawk flight at Hawk Cliff, Elgin County.

At 7:45 A.M. on 3 September the sky at Hawk Cliff was cloudless, the temperature only 9°C and the wind was about 19 km per hour. Unfortunately the wind was from the west and southwest directly opposite to the flight path of any birds migrating along the lakeshore. By noon the sky was almost completely covered by darkening clouds and the wind (still from the west and southwest) had increased noticeably.

Swallows were the most conspicuous migrants of the day and moved on a broad front inland from the lakeshore. The outstanding migrant of the day was the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*). These birds had a slow start in the morning with an average of one and one-half hummingbirds passing the cliff every fifteen minutes from 7:45 to 9:45. Between 10:00 and 10:30 they averaged five every fifteen minutes. From 10:30 to 10:45 an average of one hummingbird every minute moved through Hawk Cliff. This movement continued at least



until 1:00 (when I had to leave) with peaks of 50 (12:30 to 12:45) and 40 (12:00 to 12:15) hummingbirds in a fifteen minute period. The total count for the day was 255 hummingbirds (243 of these were in three hours).

The migration was concentrated in a very narrow lane along the lakeshore, with many of the hummingbirds moving along the cliff face below the top of the cliff. The birds regularly passed by in pairs and frequently in threes.

A similar hummingbird migration at Hawk Cliff was reported by W.E. Saunders in *The Auk*, Vol. 59, pages 587-589 in 1942.

## An Addition to the Breeding Birds of Prince Edward County, Ontario

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) is listed by Sprague (*Birds of Prince Edward County*. Prince Edward County Conservation Authority, Picton. 1969:149) as a common spring and fall migrant and while suggesting that the breeding range of this species falls in an area somewhat north of Prince Edward County, Ontario, the author fails to provide or suggest records of summer occurrence there. The purpose of this note is to record and establish this species as a breeding bird for the county.

On 25 July 1976, the writer observed a male and female of this species frequenting a particular grove of spruce (*Picea* spp.) trees in a camping area of Sandbanks Provin-

cial Park. Further observations of both adults (both carrying food) disclosed a nest, located in a spruce tree at a height approximately 11.5 m above the ground. The somewhat pensive nest, a globular affair of fine twigs and mosses, was situated about 2.5 m from the trunk, near the end of a horizontal limb. Both adults were observed feeding the young at this time. Close inspection of the nest revealed the presence of five well-feathered young, which showed no sign of fledging at this point.

This would appear to be the first recorded breeding of Ruby-crowned Kinglet for Prince Edward County, Ontario.

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## Crepuscular Fall Flight of American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*)

The spring courtship flights of the American Woodcock are all too familiar with naturalists to attempt to describe this behaviour in detail here. However I would like to record and note briefly the occurrence of this almost ritualistic (in spring) phenomenon as it occurred on 22 October 1982, at approximately 1800 hrs. with the temperature at about 4°C near Orono, Ontario. (R.M. Durham).

The bird was observed to rise from a grain (stubble) field and ascend to

great height, accompanied by the usual familiar "twittering" calls. Then, the bird began a normal descent complete with the usual spiralling flight and musical notes which accompany the spring courtship flights. Upon landing, the expected nasal "peent" was not heard or was inaudible. I moved closer to the bird and after about four minutes, the entire pattern was repeated. Again, I could not detect the low "peent" call which normally follows the spring flights. The bird

ceased this activity after I witnessed two full flights.

In almost 30 years of observation, I have never before noted this behaviour (courtship flight pattern) during

the fall months. An initial search of the literature failed to reveal anything to indicate the regularity of this occurrence.

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## Book Reviews

**A Bird-finding Guide to Ontario.** 1982. By *Clive E. Goodwin*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto. viii + 248 pp. \$12.00.

If our membership numbers in the American Birding Association and interest in OFO are valid indicators, this sport of ours is growing by leaps and bounds. What has been needed for these new legions is an easy-to-use, precise guide not only to the best bird locations in Ontario but also to many out-of-the-way but, nonetheless, fruitful sites. Now we have it in this book, written by Clive Goodwin, whose more than 15 years of experience as Ontario Regional Editor for *American Birds* eminently qualifies him for the task. Long-time birders and neophytes alike will find much of interest in the book.

This is a book to be used, not left on the shelves of a bookcase. Just slightly larger than a standard field guide, it has an attractive soft cover highlighted by a Donald Gunn photograph of an Evening Grosbeak. Most copies will find their way to the rear window-ledge of birders' cars. The soft paper of the text is ideal for

jotting notes of route changes, habitat alteration, differences in the status of the species at particular locations and the like in the margins.

Goodwin follows a tried-and-true format: an overview of Ontario, six chapters each dealing with a separate region of the Province, a short chapter with special advice for the visitor and systematic lists of the birds at the end.

The second or overview chapter, after the obligatory "How To Use This Book" is in many ways my favourite. In "Ontario and Its Bird-life", Goodwin presents a succinct description of our natural and human landscapes which would do justice to any student of geography. Writing in a relaxed, breezy style, he transmits significant information, "Along the lower Great Lakes it is always rather a toss-up whether Christmas will be white or green. . .". An account of the changing seasons in Ontario would be of particular use to