

A TRIBUTE TO OUR OUTGOING EDITORS

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Ron Pittaway, Ron Tozer
and Bill Crins

WELCOME TO CHAPTER 5 in the editorial history of *Ontario Birds*. With the immediate last issue of *Ontario Birds* (December 2006, Volume 24, No. 3, 68 pp), Bill Crins, Ron Pittaway and Ron Tozer closed Chapter 4, the longest chapter in the editorship of our journal. And it is truly amazing what they have accomplished and the transformation they have produced. Natural history journals, like *Ontario Birds*, may be a breed of journals unto themselves. Nearly always edited and put together by volunteers, they are almost always also in a state of evolution. In the early days of any such journal, the biggest job is usually finding the material to publish. Editors are always on the lookout for new material, new authors and, often, writing material themselves. As the question of securing material becomes less of a challenge, new questions crop up. Are we happy with the way our journal looks? Should we accept (or solicit) advertising? Should we include photos? Who is going to design the next cover? Etc...etc.

When Bill, Ron and Ron took over the journal, OFO membership stood at 488; today it is 1,067. Therefore, more than half of the current membership may not have seen *Ontario Birds* in its pre-Crins, Pittaway and Tozer days. The first issues of *Ontario Birds* were in black and white only, and Volume 1, No. 1 consisted of 40 pages. The first full volume was two issues (numbers) and totalled 76 pages. Our three editors took over *Ontario Birds* in April 1991, from then-editor Al Sandilands.

In 1990, Al had produced 3 issues totalling 118 pages and had begun a series on site-guides to birding in Ontario. Site-guides were a logical evolutionary progression for *Ontario Birds*. In 1991, the new editors continued the production of 3 issues and the site guide but they also instituted two new features: Recognizable Forms and the Photo Quiz. In their last issue, December 2006, they had their 48th Photo Quiz, never having missed a single issue! They also did a wonderful job of keeping readers abreast of current ornithological literature with regularly appearing book reviews, also averaging nearly one/issue over their 48 issues.

When they took over the editorship in 1991, OFO was going through a low period, membership was declining and the future of OFO and *Ontario Birds* was in doubt. In taking over the editorship, they acknowledged, "Our priorities were content and appearance. We sought articles from our many contacts in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Canadian Wildlife Service, universities, the Royal Ontario Museum, Canadian Museum of Nature, and among OFO members."

In following their priorities, the new editors lost little time in putting their own stamp on the physical appearance of *Ontario Birds*. With their first issue, Vol. 9(1), the format of having a narrow line border around the four edges of each page of the journal was dropped in favour of a more professional borderless page. Issue 11(2) saw the placement

of advertising on the back cover. With issue 12(1), a whiter cover stock was introduced, and with issue 13(3), the narrow line border on the cover was deleted. These may not seem like very noticeable changes but they are all part of the evolution of a more professional looking journal. If you carefully page through the journal from issue 14(1) to 20(1), you'll notice a host of other changes and new items: the first advertisement inside the journal itself (more revenue), the change to red letters for the title, glossier cover stock and colour photos inside, coloured Photo Quiz, entire colour format for the inside and outside (front and back) cover pages and the movement of the Table of Contents to the first inside page. By Volume 20(1), we have the journal pretty much the way we see it today.

During the Crins-Pittaway-Tozer tenure, the journal increased in size from an average of 116 pages/yr during their first 4 years to 165 pages/yr during their last 4 years. They produced 2,284 journal pages or an average of about 143/year and 48 per issue. Interestingly enough, the growth did not result from an increase in the number of contributions but rather from an increase in the length of contributions. In their first four years (Volumes 9-12), there was a total of 124 contributions listed in the Tables of Contents, for an average of 3.7 pages per contribution. In their last four years (Volumes 21-24), there was a total of 96 contributions for an average of 6.9 pages per contribution. The lengthy

OBRC report remained relatively unchanged between those two periods, averaging 21.0 and 21.8 pages, respectively.

Since colour photos started with 18(1), they have averaged approximately 12 photos/per issue which translates into about 6.5 pages of photos/issue. So, some of the increased length of the contributions has resulted from the inclusion of more photographs, which makes the journal more pleasurable and interesting to read. Another obvious contribution that the three editors have made to *Ontario Birds* is their writing. As editors are wont to do, if material is lacking, they simply put pen to paper. By my count, Ron Pittaway made exactly 48 contributions during his 48 issue joint-editorship. Together, the three editors made at least 92 contributions to the journal.

The editors also instituted many intangible qualities to the editorship of *Ontario Birds*. Through their encouragement, mentoring and tutelage, they developed a productive “stable” of regular contributors as well as new writers. New writers are often reluctant to put pen to paper, thinking that they can not really make a contribution. Or, that their observations are not really of note. The editors worked tirelessly to show the new writer that that was not the case. They spent a large part of their time helping writers improve their manuscripts, providing literature references and getting outside reviewers to develop and maintain the high quality

journal we have today. So, the change in physical appearance of *Ontario Birds* tells some of the story of the editors’ tenure but not all of it. The extent to which we see contributors from the last 16 years continuing to provide material to *Ontario Birds* will tell another side. It will tell of the legacy that Bill, Ron and Ron have left among OFO members and journal contributors. So, Chapter 4 in the history of *Ontario Birds* comes to a close, and a very significant and wonderful chapter it has been. The birders of Ontario can be mighty proud of their journal...and we all owe the outgoing editors... and the design and production workers...a huge THANK YOU for the wonderful job they have done in bringing *Ontario Birds* to the forefront of provincial natural history journals in Canada; Jon Dunn says to the forefront of such publications in North America! As new editors, we look forward to carrying on their tradition in as smooth a manner as possible... but what large pairs of shoes we have to fill!

Luckily, our retired editors have offered to give us a helping hand as we start Chapter 5 and, hopefully, we haven’t heard the last from them.

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