

# ONTARIO BIRDS

The Journal of the  
Ontario Field Ornithologists

Volume 4 Number 3  
December 1986



S. L. HOUSE



## Ontario Birds

*Editor:* Donald M. Fraser

*Design/Production:* Ron Ridout

*Copy Editor:* Chip Weseloh

*Book Review Editor:* William J. Crins

*Editorial Assistants:* R.D. McRae,  
William J. Crins, Donald A.  
Sutherland, Alan Wormington

Reports of rare birds (those for which the OBRC requires documentation – see *Ontario Birds* (Vol. 2, No. 1) should be sent to: Secretary, Ontario Bird Records Committee,  
c/o Ontario Field Ornithologists,  
Box 1204,  
Station B,  
Burlington, Ontario,  
L7P 3S9

Publication costs of *Ontario Birds* are partially offset by an annual grant from the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund. OFO gratefully acknowledges this generous support.

All items for publication should be sent to:

**The Editor**

c/o Ontario Field Ornithologists,  
Box 1204,  
Station B,  
Burlington, Ontario,  
L7P 3S9

Material should be double-spaced and type-written if possible.

## Editorial Policy

*Ontario Birds* is the journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Its aim is to provide a vehicle for the documentation of the birds of Ontario. We encourage the submission of full length articles or short notes on the status of bird species in Ontario, significant provincial or county distributional records, tips on bird identification, behavioural observations of birds in Ontario, location guides to significant birdwatching areas in Ontario, book reviews and similar

material of interest on Ontario birds. We do not accept submissions dealing with "listing" and we discourage Seasonal Reports of bird sightings as these are covered by *Bird Finding in Canada* and *American Birds*, respectively. Distributional records of species for which the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) requires documentation must be accepted by them before they can be published in *Ontario Birds*.

**Table of Contents****Editorial**

A Distant Call /

*Ross D. James*

81

**Letters to the Editor**Reviews of *Birds of Ontario* /*J. Murray Speirs*

82

OBRC Guidelines "too rigid" /

*William C. Mansell*

84

"Thunderbirds" Near Ramore /

*Benoit Crevier*

84

**Articles**

Some Aspects of Bird Migration at Caribou Island

(Lake Superior), Ontario /

*Alan Wormington, J. Robert Nisbet and Robert G. Finlayson*

85

Thunder Bay's Nesting Merlins /

*N.G. Escott*

97

Are Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos Always

Interspecifically Territorial? /

*Ross D. James and Mark K. Peck*

101

Fall Vagrancy of the Indigo Bunting in Northern Ontario /

*Alan Wormington*

104

A Phenology of Ring-billed Gull Activities in Thunder Bay District /

*Vicky K. Johnston*

109

**Notes**

Little Gull Nesting on the James Bay Lowlands, Ontario /

*A. Geoffrey Carpentier*

112

A Melanistic Broad-winged Hawk at Thunder Bay, Ontario /

*N.G. Escott*

114

An Unusual Black-billed Magpie Nest Location /

*David H. Elder*

116

Solitary Sandpiper Breeding Records in Northwestern Ontario /

*Dan A. Tallman and Erika J. Tallman*

118

American Robin Nestling Predation by an American Red Squirrel /

*Rob Dobos*

119

**OFO Announcements /**

120

Cover Illustration: Northern Shrikes by *Suzanne House*

# Editorial

## A Distant Call

The charter of The Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson Bay began, in 1670, an era of continuous occupation of northern Ontario by Europeans. But it was not for almost another 300 years that a single road finally passed uninterrupted across this land, and then only on its southern fringes. It could be said that canoes and snowmobiles or snowshoes still constitute the principal modes of ground transportation in most of northern Ontario.

Containing nearly four times the land area, but a mere fraction of the number of people, Ontario north of about the latitude of Sudbury (see *Ontario Birds* 2:13-23) continues to bar entry to its secrets. There are vast areas with no roads and no lakes large enough to land an airplane. Muskeg covering huge regions defies any attempt at transportation, except perhaps when locked in the grip of winter. Extremely cold temperatures daunt all but a few for most of the year, when bird life is scant at best. And when summer comes, and tropical migrants abound for a few weeks, the swarms of biting flies probe the sanity of those few who would venture forth.

The recently completed breeding bird atlas has performed an almost undreamed of feat of enticing government, industry, business and adventurous souls to cooperate in a venture that saw fieldwork in virtually every one of

over 100 blocks of land in northern Ontario. The first nests of Little Gull and Greater Scaup were reported. Bohemian Waxwings and Northern Shrikes were finally confirmed as breeders. Snow Buntings and Hoary Redpolls were added to the list of breeding birds. The ranges of many species have been defined with more precision than ever before. We have information that might well have taken another 100 years to gather, had it not been for the organized effort.

But for all we have learned, we are still grossly ignorant of much of the bird life in the north. Consider, for example, that there may be 70,000 or more Black Scoters summering off our northern coast. There is a high probability that most of these are moulting males and that the females are inland incubating eggs and rearing broods. Yet we still do not have a single confirmed breeding or nesting record for Ontario. Connecticut Warblers occur in summer over thousands of square kilometres of this province, but likewise, we have no confirmed nest records.

Do the Ruffs that occur in increasing numbers in Ontario nest somewhere within our borders? What is the real range of species such as Common Redpolls and Gray-cheeked Thrushes that may be present one year and gone the next? It is only in the last

decade that we have confirmed the vital importance of areas of the north coast for the incredible migrations of shorebirds. We have only an inkling of the migratory habits of many other species in the north. There are few detailed studies of birds from the north. A study of Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireos revealed an important instance of interspecific territoriality, yet casual observations suggest that this is not always the case (see article in this issue). Was this a local phenomenon that varies from place to place? We have relatively few submissions of rare species sightings from northern regions, but would there

not be many more if there were observers to record them?

Northern Ontario is in many ways a frontier. For those who would venture there, every day can be one of discovery. The devotion of this issue of *Ontario Birds* to articles from this region is a significant attempt to elicit information on the north. The articles, although important, seem but a small step compared to the extent of contributions yet to be made. The forests and muskegs are not silent. They beckon to those who would listen. Let us hope that these articles will stimulate others to study there and to make their observations available in similar fashion.

Ross D. James, Department of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C6

**Editor's Note:** Due to the overwhelming response to our request for articles and notes dealing with the birdlife of northern Ontario, a considerable portion of the next issue of *Ontario Birds*, Vol. 5 (1), will also be devoted to this fascinating area. I would like to thank all those authors who submitted manuscripts and apologize for the fact that not all the material could appear together in a single issue.

## Letters to the Editor

### Reviews of *Birds of Ontario*

I was interested to read the reviews of my book entitled *Birds of Ontario* in *Ontario Birds* (Vol. 4:73-79) and believe a few comments are warranted.

Most of the constructive criticisms in both reviews were well called for and I trust that owners will make the necessary corrections to their volumes. Some of

these errors were caught before the volumes were released, but too late to stop the presses, which were located in Manitoba. For various personal reasons, it was impossible for me to oversee things there.

I can vouch for the identity of the Lincoln's Sparrow (p. 492). I photographed it through my telescope, which accounts for the shallow depth of focus, but the

photo does show the diagnostic features of the species as detailed on p. 493. I personally like the Purple Sandpiper photo on p. 184; the weather when they show up in the Toronto region seldom allows a clear view in sunny conditions.

Both reviewers take exception to the blanks left for "species not illustrated". We are trying to fill these blanks by inserting prints as they become available and hope that others might consider the blanks a challenge to do likewise. To date, we have filled about twelve, as well as replacing the Hairy Woodpecker with a proper photo. As Geoffrey Carpentier has intimated, Vol. 1 was intended more for those who appreciate birds for their beauty, rather than for the dedicated birdwatcher for whom Vol. 2 was intended. Less than a dozen of the common Ontario birds were not illustrated. We would appreciate slides of these birds to fill in the gaps in our own volumes, and perhaps, make them available for others, if so desired.

Neither reviewer had much to say about the quantitative distribution maps for both the breeding season and the Christmas season. This was the main ornithological contribution of Vol. 2. So far as I am aware, no such quantitative maps have been published for any other major geographic area anywhere. I am aware of their shortcomings but it is still a beginning, and, I believe, an improvement on the mere presence and absence as given in most atlases.

Carpentier has pointed out that I did not indicate the meaning of a

"+" sign on some of the maps. Perhaps you could insert this in your copies on p. 975 of Vol. 2. The "+" sign indicates values below 0.1 in the square, mostly single records in heavily worked areas during the 10-year period mapped.

Bruce Di Labio apparently did not read my introduction on p. x of Vol. 1, where the pattern of migratory sightings was given as south to north in spring, and north to south in fall. In the summer sightings, breeding records were given more attention than details of rarities, which appear to be the main interest of Di Labio. I admit to considerable interest in the pursuit of rarities myself, but one must also admit that rarities are of less importance than populations in the overall scheme of things. If I have failed to list all that came to my attention, it is partly because of this belief and partly due to the fact that the volumes were written over a 6-year period. As a result, more detail was available for the accounts written most recently, as new local lists and new volumes of such sources as *American Birds* became available. I could not rewrite each species account as these new sources became available and hope to live to see publication.

Finally, I will admit that the Ottawa region is not well served in these volumes. Perhaps Di Labio could devote some of his energy to remedying the lack of an up-to-date account of the birds of the Ottawa region along the lines of publications by Kingston ornithologists, or others of similar calibre. In this endeavour, he may discover that the task is very time-

consuming and money-consuming,  
but not without its satisfactions.

Dr. J. Murray Speirs  
Pickering, Ontario

### **OBRC guidelines "too rigid"**

With reference to the "Letters to the Editor" from Dan Brunton and the combination of Dennis Rupert and Alan Wormington (*Ontario Birds* 4:41-42), I am inclined to cast my lot with Mr. Brunton.

Like the latter two, I don't know G.R. White, W.H. Scott or E.G. White either, but I have a hazy idea they were prominent members of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club of long ago. I must also admit I never met Percy A. Taverner but did know J.H.

Fleming and W.E. Saunders and include W. Earl Godfrey as a correspondent. Frankly, I'd accept the word of any one of them. I think the fault is in the OBRC's too rigid guidelines rather than Mr. Brunton's interpretation.

One thing about the Rupert-Wormington letter I disagree with is their reference to the "official list" of Ontario birds. Many years ago Lester L. Snyder told me that there is no official Ontario list for, I suppose, the simple reason that my feeling about a certain record

may be at variance to Les Snyder's, who was the official compiler in his day. There are many ornithologists who do not accept, unequivocally, the current or any preceding AOU Checklist.

William C. Mansell  
Mississauga, Ontario

### **"Thunderbirds" near Ramore**

Concerning your impending northern Ontario issue, I can no longer restrain the wish that serious ornithologists should check the alleged reports of "Thunderbird" (not the car, but the flying fella) for Ontario, as it is supposed to have been seen on different occasions and by various people in 1947 and 1948 near Ramore (which is between Iroquois Falls and Kirkland Lake) and at some other time in the Thunder Bay area. Although it doesn't appear on the A.O.U. checklist, it might be interesting for Ontario bird-watchers to have some independent conclusion about the identity of the birds involved in these specific cases. Does anyone from around Ramore remember anything about such unusual events?

Benoit Crevier  
Laval-des-Rapides, Québec

## ***Ontario Birds in 1987***

OFO will continue to publish three issues of *Ontario Birds* in 1987. Issues will appear in April, August and December. Deadline for the submission of material for inclusion in *Ontario Birds* Vol. 5 (1) is 28 February 1987. Deadlines for Vol. 5 (2) and (3) are 30 June 1987 and 31 October 1987, respectively. Authors producing manuscripts on personal computers are requested to submit a copy of the floppy disk along with a hard copy of the manuscript to facilitate typesetting. All disks will be returned to the author following typesetting.