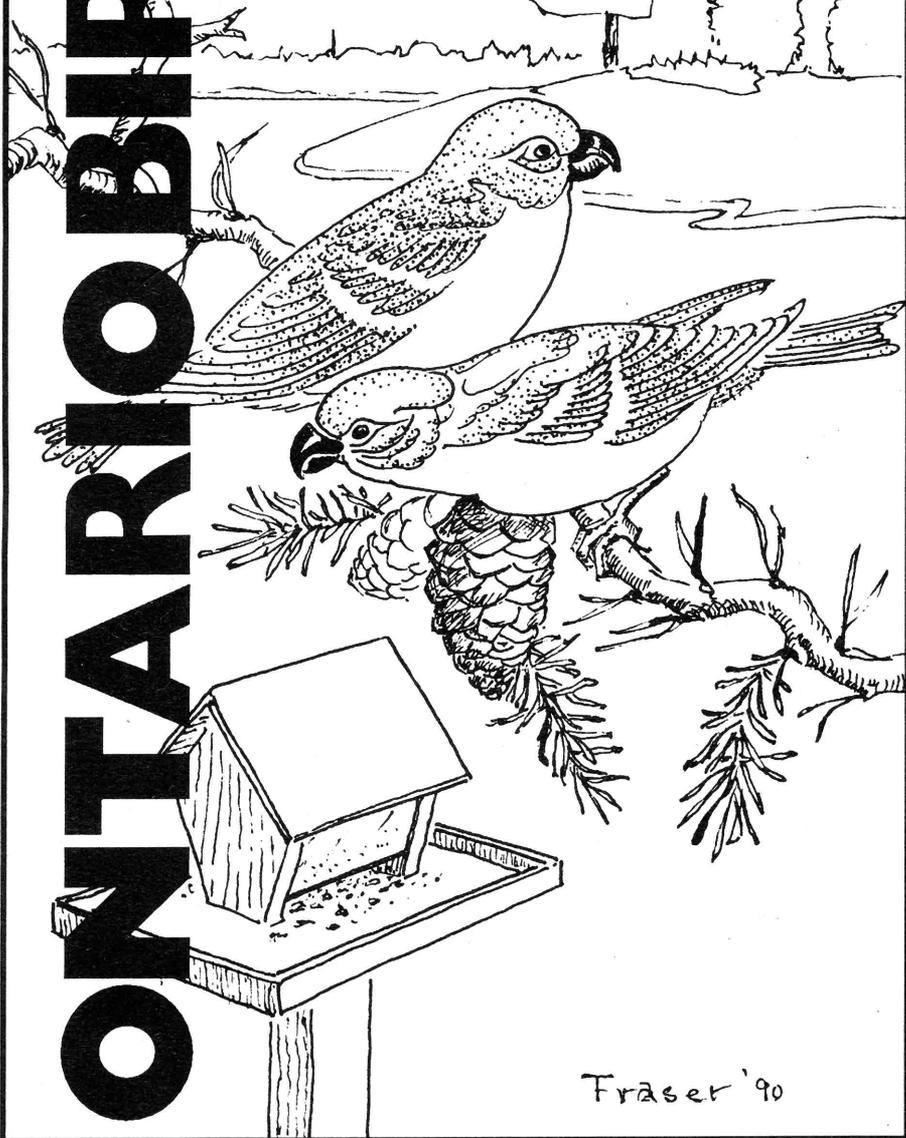


# ONTARIO BIRDS

The Journal of the  
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Ornithologists

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Fraser '90



Reports of rare birds (those for which the OBRC requires documentation—see supplement to *Ontario Birds* 5[3]) should be sent to:

**Secretary, Ontario Bird Records Committee**

c/o Ontario Field Ornithologists  
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## Ontario Birds

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## 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*.

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## In Memoriam Doris Huestis Speirs 1894 - 1989

Doris Huestis Speirs, besides being a naturalist and a nature-writer, was a painter, a poet, a translator and an editor. Nevertheless, she still found time to be a supremely congenial socializer. Her friendship was unfailing and her enthusiasm infectious. Her generous assistance to all manner of artistic, scientific and academic aspirants was legendary.

Doris started her artistic career as a painter. As a young woman she became acquainted with a number of members of the Group of Seven, particularly Lawren Harris, with whom she formed a lifelong friendship. She often went out sketching with Group members, and her style, while remaining essentially her own, came to have a distinct Group of Seven flavour.

Doris' deep and abiding interest in nature began in her pre-teen years, but it was on first seeing a flock of Evening Grosbeaks, in her early twenties, that she first began to take a serious interest in birds — an interest which stayed with her with unabated warmth to the end of her days.

In 1916, at the age of 22, Doris married the Eaton's executive and poet W. Gordon Mills, and became the mother of two daughters, Barbara and Iris. A collection of Mills' poems, entitled *Timberline*



Doris Huestis Speirs 1894 - 1989

*and Other Poems*, was edited by Doris Speirs, and published in 1985. This union was dissolved in the spring of 1939. In the fall of that year, Doris married J. Murray Speirs, the now renowned ornithologist and author of *Birds of Ontario*. Their common love of nature, Murray's ornithological expertise, and Doris' ever deepening fascination with the world of birds combined to induce her to undertake a systematic study of her favourite species, the Evening Grosbeak. The results of her research are recorded in A.C. Bent's *Life Histories of North*

*American Cardinals, Grosbeaks and Finches.*

Two woman friends were especially important in her life because of their great gifts in interpreting nature and in communicating their observations and insights to others.

The first of these was the eminent Swedish-born Canadian nature writer Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, whose knowledgeable and beautifully written books on nature in general and birds in particular have found a wide and appreciative readership among literate nature lovers. Although Louise Lawrence lived in a rural retreat north of North Bay, there was constant communication between the two friends, and Doris often regaled the members of her ornithological club with readings of Louise Lawrence's delightful, nature-filled letters.

The other special friend was Margaret Morse Nice, an enthusiastic and indefatigable American naturalist, whose most important contribution to ornithology was *Studies in the Life History of the Song Sparrow*, published in two volumes. Doris met this dedicated woman in 1938 and a lifelong friendship was formed. In 1952, in collaboration with Margaret Marsh and Olive Barfoot, Doris founded the Margaret Nice Ornithological Club (MNO), for women only, in honour of Mrs. Nice.

The 12 charter members of the

club came together at monthly meetings to pool their observations of bird life in the Toronto area. These meetings normally followed a daylong birding expedition. Doris herself was an especially careful recorder and minute observer of birds. She and Murray kept a well-stocked and well-frequented feeding station at their lovely rustic place at Cobble Hill, Pickering.

In 1979 the MNO sponsored the publishing of Margaret Nice's autobiography, *Research is a Passion with Me*. Doris Speirs was the instigator, the editor and the moving spirit behind this publication.

The club also contributed to the Dorcas Bay Nature Preserve (Federation of Ontario Naturalists) in the Bruce Peninsula, and was influential in the preserving of the Cranberry Marsh (Whitby), now part of the Lynde Shores Conservation Area.

Doris Speirs was a notable patron of the arts. She donated a number of important paintings and sketches by members of the Group of Seven and others to the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto and to the McMichael Gallery in Kleinburg. She was also a knowledgeable amateur of music and drama, was widely read in natural history and English literature, and was an accomplished reader of verse.

Doris Speirs was a personality larger than life. A handsome woman with sparkling blue eyes and

an engaging smile, she looked and sounded like a duchess and usually dressed the part. Indeed, she once arrived at a winter woodland outing of the MNOC in a platinum mink jacket, violet suede gloves and a Lily Daché hat. Only Doris could have carried this off — and she did, with panache. On another occasion, she fell down a steep wooded slope near her home at Cobble Hill and sustained a badly dislocated shoulder, but she was alright, she said, because “the chickadees came and ministered to me”.

Everybody has a whimsical Doris story — the whimsicalities were part and parcel of her *joie de vivre*, which also manifested itself in her quick affection for all men and women of good will and in her generous recognition of their talents. It

manifested itself too, of course, in her abounding love of nature.

She died in the night of the 24th of October, 1989, and was buried on the morning of the 27th, which would have been her ninety-fifth birthday. It was a surprisingly golden morning, and a late robin, perched high over her grave, sang a full-throated summer song which seemed to her assembled friends a most appropriate requiem. Thinking fondly of Doris at this moment of farewell, we could almost hear her intoning those lines of Landor she used to like:

*Nature I loved and, next to nature, art:  
I warmed both hands before the fire of  
life;  
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.*

Naomi Le Vay  
Toronto, Ontario

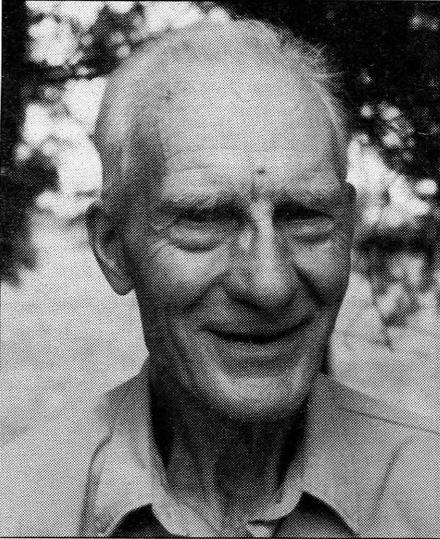
## In Memoriam Wilfred Botham 1908 - 1989

The Ontario Field Ornithologists lost one of its esteemed members and the Ontario naturalist community lost one of its most beloved practitioners when Wilf Botham passed away late last fall.

Young and old naturalists from around the province will remember Wilf for his keen love of nature and his willingness to pass on everything he knew to any interested observer. Perhaps one of the top field botanists in

southwestern Ontario, Wilf was for the most part self-taught, studying birds, plants, mushrooms and mosses.

Wilfred was motivated by a fundamental love of nature, beholding the environment with curiosity, respect and love. He was inspired by the 19th century naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton, whom he quoted to me often. It was Thompson's writing which prompted Wilfred's study of plants



Wilfred Botham 1908 - 1989

in 1938 on his farm in Gosfield North, and which ultimately led to his donation of over 2500 plants from his personal collection of Essex County vegetation to the National Museum of Canada in Ottawa.

A Pelee Island native, Wilf spent

his youth in Manitoba before moving back to Ontario in the late 1930s. Wilfred was tremendously active in conservation and environmental issues as a whole. He was a founding member of the Sun Parlour Naturalist Club and Essex County Field Naturalists Club. He was also a member of the Ontario Field Botanists, Canadian Nature Federation, Friends of Point Pelee and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. Wilfred is survived by his wife Anna Marie and his daughter Lynn Imeson of Cottam; a sister Beth and brothers John and Edward.

On a personal note, I will miss Wilfred dearly. He taught me so much, was always more than willing to answer my myriad of questions, and generally treated me like a son. A very dear friend will be sadly missed.

Lynn H. Vernon  
West Bloomfield, Michigan

## Letters to the Editor

### Harassment of owls on Amherst Island

Amherst Island is well known to birders as an "owl haven" in wintertime. With access to the island simple, and adequate roosting sites limited, the owls are easy to find. This gives many people the opportunity to observe and photograph them close at hand. Better communication with such

agencies as the North American Rare Bird Alert has enabled birders and photographers from all over Canada and the U.S.A. to visit Amherst. However, this same "owl haven", known and beloved by all, is becoming somewhat threatened by the lack of respect for nature shown by these same people who frequent the area. Branches strewn on the ground and trees showing

signs of having been climbed are not hard to find. One photographer/birder was recently caught perched halfway up a tree in which a Boreal Owl was roosting and was promptly removed from the tree.

The intent of this letter is not to imply that all visitors to Amherst are irresponsible, nor are these activities restricted to the Amherst area exclusively. Birds being flushed from perches and branches snapped off for better angles are all common occurrences.

The Boreal Owl is the recipient of most of this abuse and unless birders and photographers voice their displeasure at this lack of respect for the habitat of wildlife, it appears the occurrences will remain unreported in the future. Innocent photographers and birders also risk being painted with the same brush as these unscrupulous "pros" who must have the photograph or view at any cost. It is a situation that has been too long ignored.

A common philosophy must be reached amongst birders and photographers alike if beauty, tranquillity and, most importantly, wildlife habitat is to be preserved. Common sense must dictate actions. These public areas are for the enjoyment of all, thus acts of destruction and harassment only serve to harm ourselves in the long run.

Bruce M. Di Labio  
Ottawa, Ontario

### **Birding ethics**

*Ontario Birds* often publishes articles on rare birds. The recent OBRC report was, of course, essentially a list of rare birds. Unfortunately, if we birders do not improve our behaviour the only viewer of a rare bird will be its discoverer.

The recent sighting of the Broad-billed Hummingbird is a good example of the worst impacts of "twitching". The poor bird seemed to be heaven-sent to perk up a slow weekend; it was extraordinarily rare and it was reliable. Unfortunately, the bird and the property owners became so harassed by the crowds that the "event" was closed.

What did we do wrong? We didn't respect either the bird's or the property owner's rights to food, shelter and privacy.

Perhaps the hot lines should consider assisting property owners in similar situations. They could help to organize a system of volunteers to marshall car parking, demarcate appropriate viewing distances, and control over-zealous photographers. We are, presumably, civilized adults. As such, we should not need to be told where to stand. But when we behave as a crowd of impatient preschoolers we should be treated as such.

Victoria Carley  
Toronto, Ontario

### Further notes on Pine Grosbeaks at feeders

Ron Pittaway's note on Pine Grosbeaks at feeders (*Ontario Birds* 7:65) sent me searching through my computer records and notes to see whether or not 1985 was the first big year in southern Ontario for such visits. Briefly, the answer is "no", if Deep River is included in that geographical region.

Table 1 shows a summary of my records for Pine Grosbeaks at my feeder.

There appears to be little correlation between the number of birds present in the area and the number visiting my feeder. It is also interesting that, although Pine Grosbeaks began arriving as early as

15 October, the earliest visit to my feeder was 20 January, lending support to Pittaway's suggestion that a shortage of natural food is a factor.

A better illustration of that can be seen from my 1986 records. The preceding summer had seen a particularly heavy production of crab apples that attracted more Bohemian Waxwings than usual and sustained at least one American Robin throughout the winter. Within a week of their first appearance (23 October 1986), there were two Pine Grosbeaks feeding on my crab apples, with infrequent visits thereafter until 13 January 1987, when 10 to 15 began feeding there almost daily for the

*Table 1:* Summary of records for Pine Grosbeaks at feeder, Deep River, Renfrew County

Winter*	Deep River area		At feeder		
	No. of records	No. of birds	No. of records	Date(s)	No. of birds/visit
1970	41	200	—		
1971	—	—	—		
1972	50	300	—		
1973	47	80	1	2 Mar.	2
1974	22	100	1	2 Feb.	3
1975	33	150	1	2 Mar.	1
1976	55	380	12	22 Feb.—19 Mar.	2 to 15
1977	32	140	—		
1978	41	400	6	20 Jan.—12 Mar.	1 to 10
1979	26	270	1	4 Feb.	1
1980	1	2	—		
1982	14	134	10	30 Jan.—18 Mar.	1 to 15
1983	—	—	—		

\* Centred on January of year shown (15 Oct. to 15 April).

next month, then less frequently, but in larger numbers (up to 30), for another month. In that time, my notes mention visits to the feeder only four times, the first on 31 January (two birds), but it is

certainly possible there were other visits that went unrecorded.

Bill Walker  
Deep River, Ontario

## Are Pine Grosbeaks Increasing at Bird Feeders in Ontario?

by  
Erica H. Dunn

A suggestion has been made that Pine Grosbeaks (*Pinicola enucleator*) may now be using bird feeders to a greater degree than in the past (Pittaway 1989). Most of the supporting observations, however, were from a restricted area between Lake Simcoe and Algonquin Park. Here I look at the entire province, for the period 1976-88, using data from Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) and the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey (OBFS). These resources allow us to say whether Pine Grosbeaks are now attending feeders in greater numbers relative to their abundance in the wild (as measured by CBCs), as well as to comment on the hypotheses proposed by Pittaway to explain his observations.

### Methods

OBFS counts were obtained from the organizing body, the Long Point Bird Observatory. Each year, 400-500 people across the province tallied the birds observed at their feeders during a one to two day period, every second week from November to April. Observers recorded the peak count of each species seen in the observation period. For further details, see Dunn (1986).

OBFS counts and CBCs were divided into three regions: Southern Ontario extended roughly to a line through Lake Simcoe to Belleville, including the Bruce Peninsula, Barrie and Peterborough. Central Ontario was defined as the area between the South and a line north of Parry Sound that passes through

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