

With cool and wet conditions prevailing most of the time, the summer 2004 weather was quite at a variance with that of the past three seasons. As usual, the first part of June produced a few surprises, but the rest of the season was rather lackluster. In most of the Region, there were no natural phenomena—such as fires, storms, flooding, or outbreaks of disease—with notable negative impacts on birds. Thus breeding success was presumed to be good for most of the bird families. An exception was the northern Hudson Bay coast, where summer was late by as much as three to four weeks, reducing the reproductive success of many species in this region. Moreover, an avian cholera outbreak at Ivujivik killed most of the local Common Eiders (T. Gaston, *vide* YA).

### GREBES THROUGH TERNS

A Horned Grebe at Rivière-Ouelle 18 Jul (CG, CA) and a Red-necked Grebe at Pointe-au-Maquereau, Gaspésie 23 Jun (PP) were out of season. An American White Pelican showed up at L. Tiblemont, near Senneterre 20 Jun (J. Bélisle). The weakening pelican was easily caught and taken to Refuge Pageau 21 Jun (J. Ferron). Also in Abitibi, an ad. turned up at L. Dufault, Rouyn-Noranda 28–30 Jun (A. Fradette et al.). Up to 37 Least Bitterns, an exceptional count, were tallied 30–31 May in the ponds maintained by Ducks Unlimited on the National Defense territory near Nicolet (BJ, LR). A Great Egret at Sept-Îles 5–7 Jun was out of range (JFL). More than 50 individuals were feeding on Île Saint-Bernard (Châteauguay) 18 Jun (L. Lord). These were presumed to have come from the expanding colony located at nearby Herons' I. in the Lachine rapids. A Snowy Egret was located at Beauport 4 Jun (JM. Giroux, JP. Ouellet, M. Lafleur). A Tricolored Heron graced Baie-Trinité 5–6 Jun (JFL, m. ob.), and most probably the same bird was rediscovered at Sept-Îles 15–25 Jun (JFL). A Black Vulture at Saint-Thècle 6 Jul was a good find (J. Brunelle).

Two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks lingered at Ayer's Cliff from mid-May to 12 Jun (S. Leblond, *vide* B. Turgeon). Because of their unwary behavior, these were thought to be potential escapees. An ad. Greater White-fronted Goose at Grosse Île, Magdalen Is. 23 Jun–3 Jul was rather unexpected at this time of the year (F. Shaffer et al.). The designation of Cackling Goose as a full species (*Auk* 121: 985–995) has stirred interest about its status in the Region. We have been informed that, in recent years, biologists of the Canadian Wildlife Service have banded goslings of this species in the Puvirnituq region, along the n. Hudson Bay coast, establishing that the species is nesting in the Region, a fact previously unpublished (J. Hughes). In Jun of this year, 2 ads. were killed by hunters at Ivujivik (ph. YA). Single

# Québec



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Mute Swans visited L. Boivin, Granby 1–17 Jun (MB, MM) and Yamachiche 4–31 Jul+ (JG, m. ob.). The description and a photograph of a yearling swan seen at Lac-Brome 13 Jun pointed to a Trumpeter Swan, the 4th modern record for the Region (J. & I. Ferrier). The only Eurasian Wigeon of the season was a male at LaSalle 21–26 Jun (D. Paquette, m. ob.). A male Garganey on the

shores of Park Ferland at Sept-Îles 3–5 Jun represented about the 15th record for the Region (JFL). A female Common Eider at Boucherville, near Montréal 9–12 Jun was locally rare (R. Calderoni, m. ob.). A male Harlequin Duck was still present at Sainte-Catherine on the late date of 4 Jun (JP. Toussignant). Four female Red-breasted Mergansers with young at LaSalle (Herons' I.) in

mid-Jul represented a high count for the Montréal area (J.C. Sorel, R. Rousselle).

Ospreys appear to have reoccupied the Montréal area. Active nests were found near Valleyfield (D. Lapière) and at Pointe-Fortune (C. Plaisance). Two ad. Golden Eagles were feeding at least one eagle in a nest in the Gaspésie N.P. 16 Jun, providing the first confirmation of a nest for this species in the park (D. Desjardins). At least 8 Merlin nests were reported for the Montréal-Laval area, with five for Sherbrooke, two for Saint-Hyacinthe, and two for Trois-Rivières this summer—an incredible success for this new city dweller (*vide* PB). The species was also seen regularly in the Québec City region (YA).

A Northern Bobwhite heard w. of Huntingdon 10 Jun was almost certainly escaped from captivity (GF). An American Coot at Havre Saint-Pierre 12 Jun was worthy of mention (J. Poirier, R. Benoit, A. Maloney). Out-of-range Sandhill Cranes included 2 at Saint-André-de-Kamouraska 12 Jul (M. Harton, M. Robichaud, *vide* L. Forest), one near Charteris 5 Jun (GF), 3 in the n. part of Île du Grand Calumet 5 Jun (BJ), 5 at the same location 17 Jul (BJ, LR), and 5 at Aylmer 29 Jul (P. Blain). A late Marbled Godwit was discovered at Saint-Barthélemy 5 Jun (Y. Gauthier, S. Morand). Ruddy Turnstones also lingered late, with 5 individuals 14 Jun at Pointe-Yamachiche and one still present there 24–25 Jun (JG, MB), unprecedented so late in Jun. At least 15 ad. Stilt Sandpipers gathered at Baie-du-Febvre 29 Jul (PB). A molting male Ruff also stopped at Baie-du-Febvre 27–31 Jul (MRG, m. ob.). An ad. Short-billed Dowitcher of the *hendersoni* race at Sainte-Martine 12 Jul was noteworthy (PB, G. Laperrière). Ad. Long-billed Dowitchers at Baie-du-Febvre totalled 8 on 27 Jul (MRG) and 10 on 29 Jul (PB).

Single ad. Laughing Gulls appeared at Havre-Saint-Pierre 9 Jun (SD), Métabetchouan 19 Jun (CC, GS), La Malbaie 24 Jun (R. Gingras), and Pointe Yamachiche 25 Jun (MB, JG). An ad. Franklin's Gull was noted at Saint-Gédéon 6 Jun (CC, GS), followed by 2 at the mouth of Belle Rivière, Métabetchouan 11 Jun (SB). Single ads. at Pointe-Yamachiche 26 Jun (JG) and at Aylmer 6 Jun (J. Dubois, D. Dallaire) completed this species' seasonal total. Three ad. Black-headed Gulls at Pointe-au-Père 6 Jun were notable (J.

Larivée, R. Bélanger). Ad. Lesser Black-backed Gulls included singles at Lorrainville 2 Jun (J. Fréchette), Saint-Irénée 11 Jun (LM), La Malbaie 13 Jun (LM), Pointe-Yamachiche from 24 Jun–31 Jul + (JG, MB, m. ob.), and Hopetown 31 Jul (B. Arsenaull). The most intriguing gull of the season was a molting third-summer bird thought to be a possible Slaty-backed Gull at Port-Daniel, Gaspésie 8 Jun (ph., S. Belleau, PP, G. Roy, J. Croteau). Experts who have looked at the photographs did not agree



The most intriguing gull of the season in Québec was this molting third-summer bird found at Port-Daniel, Gaspésie 8 June 2004. It was thought to be a pale Slaty-backed Gull or a hybrid of some sort, possibly Slaty-backed Gull x Vega Gull. Photographs by Samuel Belleau.

on its identity: *vegae*, pale *schistisagus*, or a hybrid of some sort were all suggested. Caspian Terns were widely reported in the s. part of the Region, but one at L. Boivin, Granby 8 Jun was locally rare (MB, MM). Another appeared at La Malbaie 18 Jun (M. Robert), while one at Saint-Gédéon 23 Jun provided a 6th record for Saguenay-Lac Saint-Jean (SB).

**DOVES THROUGH BLACKBIRDS**

A White-winged Dove at Saint-Augustin 19 Jun furnished the 11th Regional record (G. Cyr). A Yellow-billed Cuckoo, always rare in summer, was present well into Jun near Huntingdon

(m. ob., *vide* PB). Single Great Gray Owls were identified at Sainte-Gertrude-Manneville, Abitibi 13–15 Jun (C. Perreault et al.) and at Laverlochère, *Témiscamingue* 10 & 18 Jul (E. & J. Fréchette). Surveys conducted at night in the Rouyn-Noranda area (Belleville, Rollet, Beaudry, Arntfield, MontBrun, Évain, Cléricy, L. Duparquet) resulted in 10 records of Northern Saw-whet Owl. A nest with three eggs was found at L. Duparquet, establishing the first confirmed breeding record for Abitibi (R. Deschênes, A. Giroux). This owl is obviously more widespread than believed in the mixed boreal forest of s. Abitibi (*vide* LI). Following last spring's trend, single Red-bellied Woodpeckers were found at Île Bizard, Saint-Bruno and at Cap Tourmente in Jun (*vide* PB).

An ad. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher brightened Longue-Rive 19 Jun (R. Gilbert, A. Gosselin), while another one (or the same) appeared at Baie-Comeau 27–28 Jun (B. Pelletier, Y. Rouillard et al.). Seven captive-raised Loggerhead Shrikes were released at Breckenridge 30 Jul & 5 Aug, as a first attempt to reintroduce this species in the Region (G. Desjardins et al.). This season's only Carolina Wrens were 2 singing males at Léry

6 Jun (PB). Three young Blue-gray Gnatcatchers fledged from a nest at Carignan in Jun (R. Belhumeur). Ten American Pipits 8 Jun at La Pocatière were late (CG). Following last year's first Regional breeding record, at least two pairs of Blue-winged Warblers nested again at Lac-Brome in Jun (JP. Santerre et al.). A Prairie Warbler heard in the Mount-Royal cemetery 15 Jun (PB) and one in Mount-Royal Park 2 Jul (P. Wery) most probably involved the same individual. Unreported for at least a decade at this locality, a Cerulean Warbler was singing on Mount Saint-Hilaire 6 Jun (C. Côté).

A male Scarlet Tanager in Jun at Lourdes-Blanc-Sablon was well n. of its range (M. Denis). Perhaps a straggler from the spring's invasion, a male Western Tanager was a surprise at Longueuil 17 Jul (N. Dubé, D. Daigneault, P. Casavant, P. Dubuc). A pair of Clay-colored Sparrows was feeding young at Saint-Philippe in Jun (PB), while a pair nested at Chesterville (J. Ducharme). A singing male at Jonquière 29 Jun–17 Jul (B. Dumont et al.) was found feeding young in the nest in the company of an ad. Chipping Sparrow (J. Ibarzabal). During a Canadian Wildlife Service project to define more clearly the status of Grasshopper Sparrow in the Region, 64 singing males were recorded 3–23 Jun at 22 different stations between Chichester and Quyon in the Pontiac region (BJ, GF). A Le Conte's Sparrow heard and seen 1 & 3 Jun at Saint-Elzéar-de-Beauce (Y. Maheu) and one 16–18 Jun at La Pocatière (CG, CA) were s. of their usual range. A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak (A. Paquet, *vide* BJ) and a Common Grackle (BJ) in late Jun at Fermont were both n. of their range.

**Escapees:** a pair of Chiloee Wigeon took up residence at Masson 25 Jul+ (D. Toussaint, R. Vanasse, ph. A. Cloutier). A Zanzibar Red Bishop visited a feeder at Longueuil in Jul (G. Kucharski, *vide* P. Gingras).

**Corrigendum:** The record-late Magnolia Warbler at l. Sainte-Hélène last fall was seen until 12 Nov, not 11 Nov as reported in N.A.B. 58: 35 (S. Mathieu).

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# State of the Region

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Québec's enormous land mass stretches from the Montréal area in the south some 1700 km into the Far North, where little is known about the conservation status of most of the species nesting there. In addition to some species that are of high concern or at risk of extirpation in Québec (Table 1), we have identified three groups of birds that merit specific attention because of their declines and documented, ongoing degradation of their habitats: the boreal birds, the prairie birds, and the shorebirds.

## The threat to boreal birds

Regions of boreal hardwood/transition and coniferous forest extend over one-half of Québec's land area, largely in continental Bird Conservation Regions [BCR] 12, the Boreal Hardwood Transition, and 8, the Boreal Softwood Shield. The threat to the boreal forest and its birds is perhaps one of the most disturbing conservation challenges in Québec or elsewhere in Canada. The Québec boreal forest is home to millions of migratory birds, many of which are Neotropical migrants such as warblers, thrushes, sparrows, flycatchers, and vireos. Data from the Breeding Bird Survey and the Québec data bank (EPOQ—Étude des populations d'oiseaux du Québec) have documented decreases in some boreal species, some of these very sharp decreases. Olive-sided Flycatcher, Rusty Blackbird, and warblers such as Palm, Tennessee, Cape May, Bay-breasted, and Blackpoll have all shown declines to varying degrees. Even White-throated Sparrow appears to be decreasing in the province. The various threats to the boreal forest are clear-cutting, road construction, and the building of new hydro-reservoirs and related facilities. It is estimated that in each of the past fifty years, an area of boreal forest equivalent in surface area to the island of Montréal—approximately 300 km<sup>2</sup>—was cut annually in Québec.

In 2000, the shock documentary *L'Erreur boréale* produced by writer-composer Richard Desjardins caused a stir in the population. Few people knew how bad was the situation of the forest, and many were sensitized for the first time to the importance of having a healthy forest. If nothing is changed in the near future, the fragmentation of this habitat is likely to increase. *Twenty-five years from now, all commercial virgin coniferous forests will have been*



**Clearcut and fragmentation north of Amos, in the Abitibi region.** About 300 km<sup>2</sup> of boreal forest, the equivalent of the surface of the island of Montréal, has been cut each year for the past 50 years in Québec. At this pace, all commercial virgin evergreen forests will have been cut by 2030. This will negatively affect countless birds: up to five billion landbirds migrate out of the boreal woods each year, and 40% of the continent's waterfowl use its wetlands. Photograph by Pierre Drapeau.

cut. In addition to the fragmentation of the forest that results from such activities, the increase in air pollution and thus the acid level of the rain (and ultimately the waterways) is altered, which has the potential to poison the bogs, lakes, and streams of the north country, making them unusable for many species that require waterbodies for nesting.

## The threat to prairie birds

Among the species that have exhibited a decline in Québec, about 15 or so are associated with the rural areas in the southernmost part of the province along the St. Lawrence Plain (Bird Conservation Region 13). Widespread conversions of multiple-use agricultural land to large-scale corn monoculture in recent years, as well as urbanization, seem to be responsible for this decline. Although some of these species are still relatively numerous—e. g., Barn Swallow, Savannah Sparrow, American Kestrel, Bobolink, and Eastern Meadowlark—their declines have been steady for over 20 years. Some of these species have really plummeted locally, especially in the greater Montréal area, where Upland Sandpipers and Short-eared Owls are no longer typical silhouettes along farm roads. Others, such as Loggerhead Shrikes, have been completely extirpated. A project is now underway to release captive-reared Loggerhead Shrikes.

## The threat to shorebirds

Various threats to shorebirds have been identified, from their far-northern nesting areas (especially BCR 7, the Taiga Shield and Hudsonian Plains, and BCR 3, the Arctic Plains and Mountains), to stopover and staging sites, to the wintering grounds—a span that may include dozens of sites in scores of different countries for some species—but it is often impossible to pinpoint a specific reason for the decline documented in a given shorebird species. *It is clear that the total number of*

*shorebirds stopping at staging areas during fall migration in southeastern Québec has declined markedly in the past several decades.* The loss or degradation of essential staging areas remains a major threat to shorebirds, and Québec contains many such pivotal areas. The James Bay ecosystem, for instance, is a vitally important avian staging area for waterbirds and shorebirds during spring and fall migrations (see Rimmer, C. 1992. *American Birds* 46: 216–219). Such areas are susceptible to changes associated with hydro-energy projects, pollution, and probably also sea-level rise, which could also negatively impact important populations of Yellow Rail, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and other marsh-nesting species.

## Efforts made by the AQGO and other organizations

The AQGO (Association québécoise des groupes d'ornithologues), which represents more than 30 local chapters as well as hundreds of individual members, and the Canadian Wildlife Service jointly employ a full-time biologist to conduct an annual census of 20 different species of concern (Table 1) and to study their breeding sites. Eight of these species have fewer than 50 breeding pairs in the province, and two species, the Loggerhead Shrike and the Red-headed Woodpecker, are probably extirpated as breeders. The data generated by this ongoing study are very important for defining the most important nesting areas for these species. The ultimate goal of the AQGO is to sensitize the population and political authorities to the necessity to preserve some of these sites. Several other organizations, governmental as well as private, contribute to the conservation efforts through land purchases, habitat management, and information programs: Fondation de la faune du Québec, Ducks Unlimited, Province of Québec Society for the Protection of Birds, The Nature Conservancy, Union québécoise pour la conservation de la nature, Environnement Canada, Hydro-Québec, and La Ministère des ressources naturelles, de la faune et des parcs (MRNFP).

**Table 1. Bird species of concern in Québec.**

Horned Grebe*	Roseate Tern*
Least Bittern	Short-eared Owl
Harlequin Duck	Red-headed Woodpecker*
Barrow's Goldeneye	Sedge Wren*
Bald Eagle	Loggerhead Shrike*
Golden Eagle	Bicknell's Thrush
Peregrine Falcon	Golden-winged Warbler*
Yellow Rail	Cerulean Warbler*
Piping Plover	Grasshopper Sparrow
Caspian Tern*	Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow

(\* = species with probably fewer than 50 breeding pairs)