

Notes

George K. Peck: Distinguished Ornithologist

Jim Richards

Usually, the publication of a major work in ornithology signals the culmination of years of work and much research. However, when *Breeding Birds of Ontario: Nidiology and Distribution. Volume 1: Nonpasserines* was released by the Royal Ontario Museum in 1983, followed by *Volume 2: Passerines* in 1987, it was just the beginning. These very pertinent publications, authored by George Peck and his close friend Ross D. James, have been continuously updated in *Ontario Birds* (in seven installments from 1993 to 1999).

The Ontario Nest Records Scheme (Royal Ontario Museum) was 10 years old (with 1800 cards) when George assumed leadership as its volunteer coordinator in 1966. Since that time, through his hard work, dedication and networking, he has built the scheme to over 115,000 cards and the most complete record in existence of the breeding biology of Ontario birds. He has authored 29 annual reports during this time, keeping participants informed as to the status of the work, which is co-sponsored by the Canadian Wildlife Service.

The works noted above form only a part of the 98 titles in his published bibliography. He has contributed much to the scientific

knowledge of Ontario birds through papers published in *The Wilson Bulletin*, *Canadian Field-Naturalist*, *Ontario Birds*, and *Ontario Field Biologist*. As well, he authored eight species accounts in *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* (1987), and co-authored (with Jim Richards) a chapter in *Ornithology in Ontario* (1994).

His attention to detail, evident in his meticulous field journals, is legendary; a trait self-imposed but enhanced through association with others like James. L. Baillie, Rev. Charles Long, Terry Shortt and Ross James. An active member of numerous organizations (some since 1939), national, international and local, he was appointed as Research Associate at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1976. He received a Conservation Achievement Award from the Federation of Ontario Naturalists in 1988, and was nominated a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union in 2000.

Having earned respect and recognition through his research and writing activities, George is even better known as a wildlife photographer with a penchant for birds. His acclaimed images (about 2,500 to date) have been published in 71 books and numerous magazines and journals. In addition, his photo-



Figure 1: Presentation of the OFO Distinguished Ornithologist Award at the Annual General Meeting in Leamington on 29 September 2001. Left to right: Jim Richards, Jean Iron, Chris Escott, and George Peck. Photo by Sam Barone.

graphic art graces the pages of many textbooks and various series by Grolier, Readers Digest and Natures Children, numerous post-cards, calendars, newsletters, bulletins and brochures. George is a major contributor to the CWS Wildspace website, with over 1,400 of his images being used, and to the Royal Ontario Museum's Biodiversity website.

George has enjoyed participating in several photo exhibitions open to the public in Burlington, Hamilton, Ottawa, Craigeith, Collingwood, Thornbury, Kitchener, Owen Sound and Toronto. He was one of three artists (along with son Mark Peck and friend Jim Richards) who had their works displayed by the Royal Ontario Museum for several months to commemorate the

opening of the new bird gallery in 1989–90. While his photography is driven by his passion for birds and other wildlife, he admits to being influenced by the works of masters such as Vic Crich (an early field companion), Eliot Porter, Eric Hosking and John Shaw.

In addition to amassing an army of dedicated volunteers for the ONRS, writing, speaking, researching, and creating magnificent photographic images, perhaps one of his most valuable contributions has been the ability to infect and inspire others with the same passion he has enjoyed, through personal contact. George is truly a Distinguished Ornithologist. I am proud to have nominated him for this award and equally proud to include him as a friend.

Jim Richards, 14 Centre Street, Orono, Ontario LOB 1M0

A Northern Shoveler–Mallard Pair

George Fairfield

Hybridism between duck species is common. Kortright (1942) named the Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) as one of the many species that occasionally interbreeds with the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). The following observations illustrate how a male Northern Shoveler can dominate a male Mallard in protecting his association with a female Mallard.

On 23 May 1987, I was standing on the concrete abutment that borders the western side of the filtration plant at Toronto Island and overlooks a small bay off Toronto Harbour. The deck of the abutment is about 1.5 m above the water. On the far side of the bay, I saw a male Northern Shoveler swimming with a female Mallard. The female Mallard swam over to me, no doubt to solicit food. The Northern Shoveler followed her over. I threw some bits of sandwich into the water and the Mallard female ate them.

A male Mallard appeared and swam toward the other two ducks. The Northern Shoveler placed himself between the male and female Mallards. The Northern Shoveler then attacked the male Mallard, bobbing his head vigorously. The male Mallard flew off with the Northern Shoveler in close pursuit. The Northern Shoveler's bill was open as he chased the Mallard. The male Mallard circled and landed

close to the female. The Northern Shoveler landed on the male Mallard and chased him across the water, bobbing his head. There was a second aerial chase similar to the first one. The male Mallard again landed close to the female. The Northern Shoveler landed beside him and chased him until he escaped by flying up and landing beside me on the deck. The Northern Shoveler then returned to the female Mallard, and the male Mallard returned to the water, a short distance away. When I left, the Northern Shoveler was again between the male and female Mallards.

During this episode, the female seemed to pay no attention to the conflict and swam quietly around near me, apparently hoping for more handouts. The observations described above covered a span of about 20 minutes. I observed the action from within 30 m, except when the aerial chases were underway.

The following day, 24 May, at 1045h, I returned to the same place with my camera and obtained the photos that accompany this note. When I arrived, the male Northern Shoveler was resting with the female Mallard on the shore on the far (west) side of the bay. The female Mallard entered the water and swam over to me, with the Northern Shoveler about 20 m behind her. I threw some bread into the water.



Figure 1: Male Northern Shoveler placing itself between the male and female Mallards, 24 May 1987. Photo by *George Fairfield*.



Figure 2: Male Northern Shoveler chasing male Mallard, 24 May 1987. Photo by *George Fairfield*.

Two male Mallards then appeared and swam over. Immediately, the contest started between the Northern Shoveler and one of the male Mallards. The second Mallard left and was not seen again.

The female Mallard seemed only interested in the bread and was much more aggressive than the males at getting it. If a piece landed close to one of the males, she would rush over and he would let her take it. The Northern Shoveler kept himself between the female and male Mallards (Figure 1). When the male Mallard came close to the female, the Northern Shoveler swam toward him, bobbing his head and uttering low "clucks". Occasionally, this became a chase across the water, with the Northern Shoveler right behind the Mallard with his beak open (Figure 2). I saw no aerial flights this day. When I left at 1130h after obtaining my photographs, the contest was still going on.

Throughout my observations I did not see any courtship display by the female Mallard but she seemed to accept the close association with the male Northern Shoveler.

I returned to the same spot a year later, on 28 May 1988, and found a male Northern Shoveler, which I presumed to be the same bird, keeping a male Mallard away from a female Mallard in the same manner described above.

Discussion

Both Northern Shovelers and Mallards form courtship trios.

Kortright (1942) stated that "polyandry is very prevalent with this species (the Northern Shoveler) and the amiability with which this unusual matrimonial arrangement is accepted by both husbands is astounding. ... Polyandry is also practised to some extent by the Mallards, but the males ... object strongly." The present Northern Shoveler male did not accept a second "husband" with amiability, perhaps because he was not another Northern Shoveler.

Martz (1964) described similar behaviour to that observed by the writer, involving a male Northern Shoveler and a pair of Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*): "The Shoveler continuously head pumped. He rushed repeatedly with bill open at the Blue-winged Teal who persistently tried to reach the female." Dzubin (1959) observed a male Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) keeping a male Mallard apart from a female Mallard in a similar manner. Nellis (1970) recorded two instances of male Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*)–Mallard pair associations. In one, the teal attacked the male Mallard when he attempted to copulate with the female. In the other, no aggressive behaviour was seen.

The Northern Shoveler is an uncommon breeding bird in Ontario and no evidence of breeding was reported for Toronto in *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* (Sandilands 1987). It is unlikely that this male Northern Shoveler could find a mate of its own species.

The writer saw no evidence of interbreeding between the Northern Shoveler and the Mallard. However, where such interbreeding does occur, the above observations demonstrate that a male Northern Shoveler, in spite of its smaller size, does not necessarily need to sneak in and surreptitiously inseminate the Mallard. In the present case, the male Northern Shoveler was quite capable of dominating the larger male Mallard and forming a pair with the female.

Acknowledgements

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