

Distinguished Ornithologist Dan Strickland

Ron Tozer

Dan Strickland received the Ontario Field Ornithologists' (OFO) Distinguished Ornithologist Award for 2017. It was my honour and pleasure to present this award to Dan, my long-time friend and Algonquin Provincial Park colleague, during the OFO Convention at Long Point in September. His outstanding record of scientific research on the Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*) and his long and accomplished career in communicating Algonquin Park's natural history make him a very worthy recipient of this award.

Dan was born in Toronto in 1942 and moved to Burlington when he was four years old. His birding skills developed as a member of the Juniors in the Hamilton Naturalists' Club during the late 1950s. Dan recalls finding a Razorbill (*Alca torda*) with Red-necked Grebes (*Podiceps grisigrena*) off Brant Street in Burlington on 31 May 1957 when he was just fifteen years old. He also remembers his relief and satisfaction when George North, the Dean of Hamilton birders, later came to view the bird through his old telescope and pronounced that it was indeed a Razorbill.

He first worked as a seasonal park naturalist in 1960, in Quetico Provincial

Park. Dan became a summer naturalist in Algonquin Provincial Park in 1965. He was the Chief Park Naturalist in Algonquin by 1970, a post which he held for thirty years until his retirement in 2000. Dan mentored many seasonal naturalists over the years who went on to distinguished careers involving the environment. In one of his greatest accomplishments, Dan was responsible for the overall concept, site, story line, exhibit planning and writing for the Algonquin Park Visitor Centre, a 26,000-square foot, diorama-based natural and human history museum opened in 1993 to celebrate Algonquin Park's centenary.

Dan has been recognized for his park naturalist work through the presentation of a number of awards. In 1976, he received the Richards Education Award from the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (now Ontario Nature) for work in Algonquin Park promoting greater public understanding and appreciation of Ontario's natural history and resources. Dan was given the Amethyst Award (for "outstanding achievement by Ontario Public Servants") "in recognition of (his) professional work to make Algonquin Park an educational natural attraction and a model for other parks in Canada."



Ron Tozer (left) presents OFO's Distinguished Ornithologist Award for 2017 to Dan Strickland.

Photo: Jean Iron.

In 1999, the Shan Walshe Award was presented to him for “excellence in interpretation in Ontario’s Provincial Parks.” In that same year, he was given the MNR Excellence in Leadership Award for “outstanding dedication and commitment to the ongoing recovery of Ontario’s Peregrine Falcon population” in recognition of his contributions to the reintroduction program in Algonquin from 1977 to 1986. Dan received the Federal Provincial Parks Council Merit Award for “Meritorious Service to Canadian Parks” in 2000.

Seasonal naturalist Russ Rutter began colour-banding Gray Jays in Algonquin Park during 1964, starting one of the world’s longest-running studies of an individually marked bird population (54 years, from 1964 to 2017, and counting). Rutter’s research inspired Dan to undertake his own Gray Jay study in Quebec during the late 1960s, for which he earned a Master’s Degree in 1969 from

the University of Montreal. After Russ’s death in 1976, Dan took over and expanded the Algonquin Park Gray Jay study. More than 1500 birds have been colour-banded and over 950 nests have been found during this research. Dan’s Gray Jay study has revealed significant features of its life history. For example, partial dispersal of juveniles occurs in June. The dominant juvenile (usually a male) drives its siblings away from the parental territory. This behaviour reflects the limitation of a territory to support Gray Jays through the long winter. Adults actively prevent the surviving juvenile on their territory from helping feed nestlings, but allow the juvenile to feed the young after they leave the nest. This behaviour probably helps reduce the attraction of land-based predators (such as Red Squirrels) to the nest. Finally, Gray Jays survive up to six months of boreal winter by living off food they have stored during late summer and fall. Climate

change (especially winter thaws) is apparently causing the rotting of stored food and a decline in the Gray Jay population at the southern edge of its Ontario range, including along the Highway 60 Corridor of Algonquin Park. As of 2014, only 19 (44%) of 43 Gray Jay territories occupied in 1970 were still active in the Corridor. Occupied territories had extensive conifers, especially black spruce. Formerly occupied mixed conifer-hardwood forest territories were vacant by 2014. Dan's research showed that stored food survived longer and retained more food value when placed against the bark of black spruce and other conifers, indicating the anti-bacterial effect of exposure to the resin of these trees.

Dan Strickland is the recognized world authority on the Gray Jay. He wrote the Gray Jay species accounts in both of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlases and in the Quebec atlas. In 1993, Dan and coauthor Henri Ouellet wrote the Gray Jay account in *The Birds of North America*, and Dan updated and revised the account in the online version in 2011. Based on his study of the Gray Jay, he has authored or coauthored 22 peer-reviewed research papers. From 1974 to 2009 (36 years), Dan wrote 34 popular books and 368 articles in *The Raven* (Park newsletter) about Algonquin's natural and cultural heritage, including birds. He has authored five articles in *Ontario Birds*. The most recent was a detailed account of why there was no valid taxonomic or nomenclatural reason for the American Ornithologists' Union to have changed the name Canada Jay to Gray Jay.

Dan has studied jays far beyond Algonquin Park since his retirement. In 2001, he was invited to assist in field work on the rare Sichuan Jay (*Perisoreus internigrans*), sponsored by the Chinese Government. Dan conducted research during the fall of 2001 and the spring and fall of 2002 on Anticosti Island in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to assess Gray Jay nesting behaviour there in the absence of Red Squirrels. At 75 years of age, Dan has now launched a new Gray Jay research project in Strathcona Provincial Park on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, involving *Perisoreus canadensis obscurus/griseus* subspecies. These Gray Jays have notably different appearance, genetics, behaviour and social organization than the boreal/eastern subspecies (*P. c. canadensis*) which occurs here in Ontario. Dan believes there may be sufficient evidence to support these western jays being restored to their former status as a distinct species, *P. obscurus*, separate from *P. canadensis*.

After reading this brief overview concerning some of Dan Strickland's accomplishments, I am confident you will agree that he is indeed an outstanding recipient of the Distinguished Ornithologist Award.

Selected Publications

Strickland, D. 1987. Gray Jay. Pp. 284-285 *In* Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario (M.D. Cadman, P.J.F. Eagles, and E.M. Helleiner, eds.). Federation of Ontario Naturalists and Long Point Bird Observatory, University of Waterloo Press, Waterloo, Ontario. xxii + 617 pp.

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- Strickland, D. and R. Rutter.** 1993. The Best of The Raven. The Friends of Algonquin Park. Whitney, Ontario. iv + 220 pp.
- Strickland, D.** 1996. Gray Jay. Pp. 718-721 In The Breeding Birds of Quebec (J. Gauthier and Y. Aubry, eds.). Association québécoise des groupes d'ornithologues, Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Quebec Region, Montréal, Quebec. xvii + 1302 pp.
- Tozer, R., D. Strickland and D. Tozer.** 1996. Unusual nesting of the Swainson's Thrush. Ontario Birds 14:117-119.
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- Strickland, D.** 2007. Gray Jay. Pp. 376-377 In Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005 (M.D. Cadman, D.A. Sutherland, G.G. Beck, D. Lepage, and A.R. Couturier, eds.). Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and Ontario Nature, Toronto. xxii + 706 pp.
- Yu Jing, Yun Fang, D. Strickland, Nan Lu and Yue-hua Sun.** 2009. Alloparenting in the rare Sichuan Jay (*Perisoreus internigrans*). Condor 111:662-667.
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- Strickland D., B. Kielstra and R. Norris.** 2011. Experimental evidence for a novel mechanism driving variation in habitat quality in a food-caching bird. Oecologia 167:943-950.
- Norris, D.R., D.T.T. Flockhart and D. Strickland.** 2013. Contrasting patterns of survival and dispersal in multiple habitats reveal an ecological trap in a food-caching bird. Oecologia 173:827-835.
- Derbyshire, R., D. Strickland and D.R. Norris.** 2013. Experimental evidence and 43 years of monitoring data support the food limitation hypothesis in a boreal food caching songbird. Ecology 96:3005-3015.

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