

# Notes

## Sharp-shinned Hawk Preys on Bat

by  
Libor Michalak

At 2035h on 30 May 1996, Antonio Salvadori and I, enroute north, stopped along the Trans-Canada Highway below Lake Superior Provincial Park for the night. Taking time to do some birding before retiring as the sun set, one of our observations was of a small bat (probably *Myotis* sp.) fluttering above the tree canopy, moving to about 15-20 m above the road. While focussing our binoculars on it for a closer look to identify it, out of nowhere a Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) bolted out of the tree canopy only to appear in our binocular view, impaling the mammal with its talons. In continuous motion after the catch, readjusting its flight pattern, it flew to the opposite side of the road where it landed in some aspen trees, seemingly to adjust its prey. Only seconds later, it continued its flight to the side from which it came. Amazed at what we had just witnessed, we tried to follow the hawk but lost it due to the dense tree cover.

Among the three accipiters, this species shows a strong preference for areas of regenerating young forest which have a variety and abundance of small birds. It takes mostly birds as prey; only rarely does it make other food a choice (Evans 1982, Ehrlich et al. 1988). It is agreed that birds comprise over 90% of the Sharp-shinned Hawk's diet, but other prey to a much

lesser extent consists of herptiles such as frogs, snakes and lizards (Palmer 1988). Bent (1937) and Palmer (1988) note that mammals such as meadow voles (*Microtus* spp.) and bats are also taken, and Snyder and Wiley (1976) state that food species proportions of 93.1% birds, 2% mammals, 0.6% lower vertebrates and 4.3% insects have been observed. Insects taken consist mainly of grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, large lepidopterans and caterpillars (Palmer 1988). Mature Sharp-shinned Hawks have been known to spend an entire day capturing grasshoppers from an open, high perch in exactly the same way as an American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), as noted by Beebe (1973). Lastly, with bats not being common, an interesting observation was reported by Sprunt (in Palmer 1988), involving Sharp-shinned Hawks arriving at a Texas cave to await the evening emergence of free-tailed bats (*Tadarida* spp.).

### Acknowledgements

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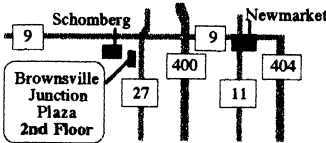
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# A Collision of Oldsquaws

by

Kenneth F. Abraham and Nancy Wilson

## Introduction

Oldsquaw ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*) are regular but relatively inconspicuous migrants in southern and western James Bay (Figure 1). They are most noticeable in spring and autumn when they traverse northeastern Ontario and western Quebec between James Bay and the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River, using major rivers as inland flight corridors. In May, flocks are seen flying low over the river ice, often at day break, or swimming in open water reaches of rivers at the time of ice break-up. In autumn,

migrants concentrate in James Bay and can be observed passing headlands on the coast (Sinclair 1986; D. McRae, pers. comm.) en route to rivers such as the Harricanaw and Moose which enter extreme southern James Bay. Oldsquaw migration over land in spring is made at high altitude and may commence in the afternoon, thus spanning the night (Palmer 1976). Both altitude and night flights help explain their relative inconspicuousness during migration.

Little is known about the characteristics of migration in James Bay



Figure 1: Male Oldsquaw. Photo by Don Gunn.

other than a few dates of occurrence (Lewis and Peters 1941, Smith 1957, Todd 1963). Here, we add a summary of observations over the past 20 years from the Moosonee and southern James Bay region (Table 1). The earliest observation was a flock of 24 in Hannah Bay on 16 April 1987. The majority of observations occurred in the latter two weeks of May (13th-

26th). Such timing coincides with both observations of peak numbers and departures from Lake Ontario and Lake Erie (late April and first week of May) and major movements in Georgian Bay near Manitoulin Island and Killarney (17-24 May) (Goodwin 1975). It suggests a rapid movement from wintering areas to spring staging areas in James Bay.

Table 1. Oldsquaw migration dates in the Moosonee area, including southern James Bay shoreline at Shipsands Island, Netitishi Point, Hannah Bay and East Point.

	Day migration was reported in:					
	April	May	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
1977		13				
1978		14				
1980		15		2		
1981		16, 23		<u>28</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>20</u>	
1982		16		16,25		
1983					3, 4, 10	
1984		19		20,21		
1985				<u>25, 27</u>	<u>5, 8, 9</u>	
1986		26				
1987	16	16				
1988		21, 22				
1990		1, 18, 20, 22				
1992		6	25			
1993		21, 30				
1994		7, 21				4
1995		19				
1996		22				3
Total Obs.	1	22	1	8	8	2
Ave. Date	-	17-18	-	20-21	7-8	3-4

<sup>1</sup> Underlined dates had more than 1000 birds reported; maximum was 14, 800 on 28 October 1981.

Fall migration observations were concentrated from about 20 October to 10 November, with two notable later dates. The earliest observation was on 25 September 1992, and the latest date of occurrence was 4 December 1994. Exceptional migrations were recorded at Netitishi Point by Doug McRae and Alan Wormington when 33,000 were recorded between 13 October and 24 November 1981 (Goodwin 1982). Peaks of 14,800 and 3000 were recorded on 28 October and 20 November. Similarly impressive numbers were recorded by Doug McRae and Pam Sinclair in 1985 (total of 15,640 recorded from 25 October to 9 November). A major night movement on 3-4 November 1983 (Abraham) coincided with peak numbers three days later at Long Point, Lake Erie and Prince Edward Point, Lake Ontario (Weir 1984), again suggesting rapid and perhaps non-stop movements between James Bay and the lower Great Lakes.

A regular feature of fall bird migration at Moosonee, Ontario (51° 17'N, 80° 38'W), is the movement of Oldsquaws along the Moose River in late October and early November. They are often heard rather than seen because the passage frequently occurs at night. Further, the movements often occur in association with periods of inclement weather, when low overcast and fog creates poor visibility. We have witnessed these night passages in most years since 1982, when one or the other of us resided in Moosonee.

Similar movements associated with inclement weather have been noted during spring migration, and night migration in spring was noted on at least three occasions. On 21 May

1993, Wilson witnessed a night migration of Oldsquaws at the Moosonee townsite. Low cloud cover conditions existed, and Oldsquaws could be heard calling for several hours that evening. It seemed that the birds were flying in circular or erratic patterns above the community. Although not visible, the numbers were estimated to be at least 100, but could have been substantially more.

### An Unusual Event

On 5 November 1985, Oldsquaws passed conspicuously along the river and over the Moosonee townsite. In the darkness of early evening, Abraham listened to the calling birds and observed them from several vantage points along Revillion Road, which runs adjacent to the river. Oldsquaws were visible in the reflected light at the lower edge of the low clouds. Other birds, including Killdeers (*Charadrius vociferus*) and yellowlegs (*Tringa* spp.) were also heard. One notable aspect of the movement was that there was no average direction of flight. Indeed, birds crisscrossed in flight over the townsite in all directions. We could not tell how many birds were involved, although several flocks of 20-40 birds were visible simultaneously. At the time, we thought that the birds were probably disoriented by the town's lights.

Moosonee residents, Tommy Moore and Grant Churcher, also observed the flight that night, and Abraham watched and discussed the phenomenon with them at about 2000 h, then returned home. At 2030 h, Grant Churcher arrived at Abraham's house with a dead Oldsquaw. He explained that he and Tommy Moore had been watching the crisscrossing

birds when they heard a dull clap from above and were startled a few seconds later as two birds (one adult female, one adult male) fell from the sky and landed nearly at their feet. Abraham dissected the female and found that it was in good condition with abundant body fat, including heavy abdominal cavity fat. Haematomas were visible in the neck region, but these were the only signs of trauma. As there were no tall structures present, we concluded that the birds collided with each other in the air, and either the collision or the subsequent impact with the ground caused their deaths.

### Discussion

Fatal collisions between birds in migrating flocks must be rare. However, disorientation and bird collisions with human built structures, particularly by night migrants in inclement weather, are not unusual (Weir 1976, Ogden 1996). Night migrants are thought to navigate using multiple cues, including visual cues such as star patterns, the moon and topographical features (e.g., coastlines and rivers) and as such are subject to disorientation. The incidence of waterfowl in such kills is relatively low and usually associated with structures on or near waterbodies, such as dams, power lines and lighthouses. An example involving Oldsquaws occurred at Smoky Falls, Ontario, on the Mattagami River, on 26 October 1986, when at least 27 Oldsquaws were killed when they struck transmission wires associated with the hydroelectric dam (Leafloor et al. 1996). Abraham received a report of ducks falling from the sky at Detour Lake, Ontario, in December 1987. This was reported by an employee at

the Detour Lake gold mine, and included Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), Bufflehead (*B. albeola*), and Common Loons (*Gavia immer*). The weather on all three occasions was inclement, with either fog or low cloud. Moosonee, Smoky Falls and Detour Lake are all in remote northern areas, where artificial light sources are uncommon and isolated. The Moosonee and Smoky Falls events indicate either that the Oldsquaws were travelling at relatively low altitudes or that they were attracted to the light source from higher altitudes, and thus to their deaths. Those that did not die in collisions may have been harmed by the aimless flying through the waste of energy reserves or exhaustion. In addition to the documentation of an unusual event, these observations serve as a warning that the hazards associated with artificial light sources are not limited to urban areas.

### Acknowledgements

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## Nesting of the Yellow-throated Vireo in the Sudbury District

by  
Charles J. Whitelaw

The Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*), a hardwood-loving species, has been found breeding on Manitoulin Island (for several years at the same location), and was listed as a probable breeder in the Sault Ste. Marie region and as a possible breeder a short distance south of the French River during the Breeding Bird Atlas Project (James 1987). In the Sudbury District, the species has been recorded on only one previous occasion, on 13 May 1984 at a location east of Espanola near Hanna Lake. This locality is less than 32 km distant from the site discussed in this note.

During July of 1995, when several of us were searching for species such as Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) to bolster our year lists, information was passed on to me by Chris Bell that a fairly extensive hardwood existed along the Bay of Islands Road, west of Whitefish Falls, Ontario. A brief examination of this hardwood in Mongowin Township during early October of 1995 revealed that this area was indeed an attractive and mature hardwood forest containing species such as Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), Yellow Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*), Striped Maple (*A. pensylvanicum*), Mountain Maple (*A. spicatum*), and a good sprinkling

of mature Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). At this time it was considered worthy of further examination in the spring of 1996, in the hope that some southern hardwood-type species of birds could be found during the breeding season. In early May of 1996, before any leaves were on the trees, a hike was undertaken to further determine the extent of the hardwoods and accessibility to the area.

On the evening of 29 May 1996, I received a phone call from Floyd Cosby saying that he had found what he believed to be a Yellow-throated Vireo along the main trail, a considerable distance into this hardwood. The bird was not in song and was feeding at medium height on the outer branches of some of the larger maples, right beside the trail. Floyd's description sounded very good and I suggested that he submit a rare bird report based on his sighting to the Sudbury Committee, which he did at a later date.

I had been planning to follow that particular trail soon at any rate, so on 31 May about mid-morning, I made my way along the trail. After descending the hill to a point near to where Floyd had made his sighting, species such as Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*), Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*), Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*), Eastern Wood-Pewee



(*Contopus virens*), and Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) were in full song. I had just found the freshly constructed nest of a Least Flycatcher, and one of the Scarlet Tanager a little farther on, when I heard it: a vireo song with a distinct hoarseness and the phrases separated by very long pauses. I recognized the song right away as that of the Yellow-throated Vireo, having learned it at an earlier time many years ago in an oak-hickory woodland near Komoka, west of London, Ontario, where the Yellow-throated Vireo bred each year along with the Cerulean Warbler (*D. cerulea*).

The singer was located high in a Large-toothed Aspen (*Populus grandidentata*) which was not leafed out as yet. The plumage was distinctive: plain olive-brown above; white wing bars; and prominent yellow spectacles around the eye, with yellow extending through the lores to the base of the bill. The throat and the breast were a bright yellow, and the belly was white. As I watched this bird at an estimated height of about 20 m, a typical vireo-type nest appeared in the field of view, a little to the right of the singer. Right

away, a second vireo appeared with plumage similar to the first bird. This second bird immediately began fidgeting about the nest, and then the two birds flew off together.

I returned on 10 June, at which time one bird was sitting on the nest, apparently incubating. The second bird was silent and not to be seen. At this time, two photographs were taken of the nest with the incubating bird. On 14 June, Igor Konikow visited the site, saw both birds at the nest and heard one bird in song. Heather Baines, Chris Bell, and Rodney Campbell, accompanied by Floyd Cosby, saw the nest and birds, but heard no song, on 16 June.

### Acknowledgements

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## *Recognizable Forms*

This regular feature will appear again in the August issue of *Ontario Birds*.

## Nest Re-used by Wood Thrush

by  
Valerie E. Wyatt

The Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) is typically double-brooded, building two nests and laying two clutches of 3-4 eggs each summer (Bent 1949, Terres 1980, Peck and James 1987). In many multi-brooded species, the second nest may be built by the female while the fledglings from the first are still being fed by the male (Martin and Geupel 1993). In the course of searching for Wood Thrush nests for a study of nesting productivity in the summer of 1996, we discovered seven probable occurrences of double-brooding, where second nests were built within 6-50 m of the first successful nest. We also observed a single Wood Thrush nest in which two broods were raised. Although nest re-use has been documented for other passerine species (Nickell 1957, Briskie and Sealy 1988, Curson et al. 1996), it is apparently very rare in the Wood Thrush (Bent 1949, Harrison 1975). In a 19 year study of a colour-banded Wood Thrush population in Delaware, Roth reported just three cases of nest re-use out of 389 nestings (Roth et al. 1996).

The nest was found on 31 May, in a stand of maple saplings in a woodlot near Elmira, Ontario. The contents, three Wood Thrush eggs, were easily viewed with a mirror attached to the end of a telescoping painter's pole. Three young hatched on approximately 10 June, and fledged from the nest

as it was approached by us on 20 June. Young Wood Thrushes were observed in the area for the next two weeks, and an adult was observed feeding a fledged youngster in the area on 2 July.

A new Wood Thrush nest was located on 10 July, 56 m north of the original nest. This area had been carefully searched one week earlier, specifically to find a second brood of the same pair, as the male had been singing above the sapling stand nearly continuously. There was no other singing male in the area, suggesting the nest was built by the same pair. The new nest contained one Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) egg, but although a singing male and fledged young were in the area, no adults were observed on or near the nest. The cowbird egg remained, apparently abandoned, until 26 July when it disappeared.

We also checked the first nest with the mirror on 10 July, but it was empty. To our surprise, a visit to the nest on 12 July revealed three Wood Thrush eggs, with the male Wood Thrush singing nearby. On 18 July, we flushed a large unidentified bird, perhaps a Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) or a Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*), from near the nest, and discovered that only two eggs remained. Another egg disappeared before 22 July, leaving only one tiny featherless

young in the nest. The agitated parent was seen frequently. The single youngster fledged on 1 or 2 August.

The nest was located at a height of 2.75 m, in the fork of a 4 m Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*) sapling (dbh = 3.0 cm). The nest tree was surrounded by nearly uniform dense maple saplings of similar size. There was a sparse ground cover of maple seedlings and a canopy of maple and Hop Hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) trees, approximately 15 m in height. Nest position, nest tree size, and surrounding vegetation were typical of most of the 61 Wood Thrush nests found in Waterloo Region woodlots this summer.

There are several possible reasons why passerines avoid re-using old nests, including predator knowledge of the site and parasitic insect infestations. However, in this case it may be that the second nest constructed was abandoned due to Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism (Harrison 1975). The subsequent re-use of the original nest represented a saving of time and energy for the Wood Thrush (Briskie and Sealy 1988, Curson et al. 1996), or reflected a shortage of high quality nest sites, although to us, the sapling stand appeared uniform (Briskie and Sealy 1988, Curson et al. 1996).

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