

Brambling: New to Ontario

by
David H. Elder

In the afternoon of 23 October 1983, I flushed a small white-rumped bird that had been feeding on millet placed in a flower bed in the backyard of my residence in Atikokan, Rainy River District. The bird flew into a White birch (*Betula papyrifera*) tree in a neighbouring yard and remained there until I was able to get my binoculars to study it further. Unfortunately it was directly in line with the afternoon sun and, except for some odd-appearing head markings, I could see little else in the way of distinguishing features. The bird then flew back into my yard and landed, giving me a slightly better view. The bird flew again, this time to a tree in front of my house and I noted that it flew very swiftly and directly. I scattered some more millet in the flower bed and went inside to tell my wife Mary that I thought we had a 'good' bird and hoped it would return. I went to get a camera and sat by a window that overlooked the flower bed about 4 m away. The bird immediately returned to feed and I quickly took about 20 colour photographs which have since been placed on

file with the Ontario Bird Records Committee.

In preparation for a trip to Germany in 1982, I had studied a number of European field guides in depth and, as I watched the bird, I thought it might be a Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*). I then gathered up several guides and after comparing the bird to the various illustrations, Mary and I came to the conclusion that the bird was indeed a Brambling, an adult male in winter plumage.

During the four-day period that the bird was present (23-26 October) it seldom was away from the flower bed for long; it arrived each morning just at daybreak at 0715 h and left in the evening about 1730 h. Others who observed the Brambling, including Tom Nash, Al McTavish, Norm Chesterfield, David Mark and Tom Hince, concurred with my identification. On the morning of 27 October the Brambling failed to appear and many of the other birds with which it had been feeding had likewise departed.

The Brambling fed in the company of Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*), Purple Finches

David H. Elder, 571 O'Brien St., Box 252, Atikokan, Ont. P0T 1C0

(*Carpodacus purpureus*), White-throated Sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*), Fox Sparrows (*Passerella iliaca*) and House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*). The most obvious features of the bird, which was slightly larger than a House Sparrow, were the bright orange breast and shoulders, and the black-and-light wing pattern. The sides of the head were an unmarked 'mouse' grey colour, becoming brownish on the crown, nape and back. When alarmed the bird displayed a distinct crest. The bill, finch-like but quite pointed, was light horn-coloured with a black tip. In flight the brilliant white rump and lower back were most obvious. The best illustration of the species was found on Plate 15 of the *Pocket Guide to British Birds* (Fitter and Richardson 1966).

The Brambling is a widespread Eurasian species that breeds from northern Europe to eastern Russia. It is found most abundantly near the limits of tree growth, either at high latitudes or high altitudes. In winter, the Brambling is found throughout the remainder of Europe and most of Asia. At this season it is highly nomadic and flocks numbering in the thousands (occasionally millions) congregate in areas where beechmast (its preferred winter food) is abundant (Newton 1973).

In North America the Brambling occurs regularly only in the western Aleutian Islands of Alaska, where it is found annually during spring and fall, usually in small numbers. Elsewhere in the state individuals have been recorded widely (Kessel & Gibson 1978; Roberson 1980).

Truly extralimital Bramblings have occurred in coastal British Columbia (twice), Oregon, Nevada, Montana, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, coastal New York and Massachusetts (A.O.U. 1983) and Nova Scotia (Nikula 1983). All records pertain to late fall/winter occurrences with the exception of the Nova Scotia bird, which occurred in spring. The Atikokan Brambling, although the first to be recorded in Ontario, fits the species' pattern of occurrence in North America as a whole.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to Alan Wormington for his assistance in preparing this paper.

Literature Cited

- A.O.U. 1983. Check-list of North American Birds, 6th Edition. Lawrence, Kansas.
- Fitter, R.S.R. and R.A. Richardson. 1966. Collins Pocket Guide to British Birds, Revised Edition. Collins, London.
- Kessel, B. and D.D. Gibson. 1978. Status and Distribution of Alaska Birds. Studies in Avian Biology, No. 1, Cooper Ornithological Society.
- Newton, I. 1973. Finches. Taplinger Publishing Co., New York.
- Nikula, B. 1983. Northeastern Maritime Region, American Birds 37: 844-849.
- Roberson, D. 1980. Rare Birds of the West Coast. Woodcock Publications, Pacific Grove, California.