

Recognizable Forms

Checklist of Recognizable Ontario Bird Forms

by
Ron Pittaway

The purpose of this checklist is to stimulate interest among field ornithologists in the large number of recognizable bird forms in Ontario. The term "recognizable form" is used here to include subspecies (races), intergrades, morphs (phases), variants, and well-known hybrids which are potentially identifiable in the field. Most birders do not report or document these forms because they are not full species, and therefore they go largely unnoticed despite the fact that they are distinct morphological entities. In Britain and California, birders consider rare subspecies and morphs as significant records. As identification skills increase, birders look for more challenges, and what better way than looking for subtle and often not so subtle variations in plumage, soft part colour, and structure. This aspect of birding is also a lot of fun, and adds to our knowledge of birds. Most of the forms in the checklist can be found in Godfrey (1986), James (1991), and the National Geographic Society Guide (Scott 1987). In future issues of *Ontario Birds*, I will be discussing the identification, nomenclature, and taxonomy of the forms on the checklist. In the meantime, please contact me for more information on any of the forms listed here.

Researching and compiling the checklist was a very rewarding

experience. I struggled with various concepts, what to include, how to name the forms, and the format to use. There were few rules to guide me. I had the help of the many people listed in the Acknowledgements. In the end, I had to make some difficult choices or else the checklist would never have been published. I hope the checklist is welcomed by birders. Be sure to let me know what you think of it; I encourage your comments and suggestions for revisions and improvements.

The following definitions will serve to explain the terminology of the checklist:

Names: The order and English species names, and the scientific names of subspecies follow Godfrey (1986) and James (1991), with minor exceptions. The English names of subspecies, morphs, variants and hybrids came from many sources. Where a good name was apparently lacking, I attempted to provide a descriptive one.

Subspecies or Race: Subspecies is the formal name for geographical race. The terms are interchangeable. Subspecies are recognized taxonomic units, and have formal, Latin scientific names, whereas morphs and variants do not. For example, the Inland race of the Short-billed Dowitcher is *Limnodromus griseus hendersoni*. The third part of the

is given an English name followed by its scientific name in italics. In the few cases where a form consists of two or more very similar races, the form is given a group name of one of the races. For example, Slate-coloured races of the Dark-eyed Junco are in the *hyemalis* group. If a race has more than one morph, the name of the morph is listed ahead of the subspecific name. An astrisk (*) beside a subspecies name means the race, or morph of that race, has not been reported in Ontario to my knowledge, but is listed because it may occur and should be looked for.

Intergrade: This term is used to describe the crosses and intermediate populations produced by the interbreeding between subspecies. In the checklist, intergrades are identified by an "X" sign between the races. For example, Eastern X Inland intergrade is used for the intermediates between the two races of the Short-billed Dowitcher found in Ontario. Well-marked intergrades are often recognizable in the field, but consider that many are not. In short, intergrades are crosses between subspecies, whereas hybrids are crosses between species.

Hybrid: When two species cross, the offspring are called hybrids. Only rarely do hybrids cross with similar hybrids, or backcross with either of the parent species. The offspring of these crosses are also termed hybrids. For example, "Lawrence's Warbler" can result from the crossing of two "Brewster's Warblers", or from a "Brewster's" backcrossing with either a Golden-winged Warbler or a Blue-winged Warbler. In the checklist, hybrids are identified by an "X" sign between two species. For example, White-throated Sparrow X

Dark-eyed Junco indicates a hybrid. Only well-marked, regularly occurring hybrids are included in the checklist. More could have been included, but hybrids are a separate topic in themselves. A complete checklist of hybrids is planned for a future issue of *Ontario Birds*.

Morph: The term morph has the same general meaning as "colour phase". Morph has been gradually replacing the term phase in the birding literature because phase suggests the birds go through different phases or colour changes over time. It is a common belief that individuals of a species are identical in their morphology, physiology and behaviour. Even single genes vary considerably among individuals in a population. This genetic variation is called polymorphism. Where there is continuous variation between morphs, the plural "intermediate morphs" is used to cover the variation. In most species, morphs can be easily assigned to one of the categories. Some species like the Ruff are highly variable, so the categories chosen are somewhat arbitrary. Crosses between discrete morphs which produce distinct intermediates are identified by an "X" sign. An example is the White X Blue morph of the Snow Goose. Where a recognizable race has more than one morph, the morphs are listed first, followed by the English and scientific names of the subspecies.

Variant: Many variants could also correctly be called morphs. I prefer to use the term to describe forms which are extremes in natural variation from the typical or normal bird. It is also used for forms which are due to diet, or have different soft part colours.

Taxonomy: The status of a few of the recognizable forms on this checklist is not fully understood or agreed upon by all authorities. For example, is the "Thayer's Gull" a full species, or a subspecies of the Iceland Gull? Are the American Black Duck and the "Harlan's Hawk" species, subspecies or morphs? "Bicknell's Thrush" will likely soon be elevated to a full species! Most authorities now consider the two races of the Lesser Golden-Plover as separate species. Currently, most ornithologists follow the Biological Species Concept (BSC) which means that populations that freely interbreed, or if separated, could

potentially freely interbreed with one another, are one and the same species. Recently, a new species concept called the Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC) has been gaining wider acceptance. The PSC recognizes as separate species those populations and subspecies which have distinctive traits and are evolving along separate evolutionary lines. Under the PSC, many of the forms on this checklist would be considered species!

An asterisk (*) after a form means that form has not been reported in Ontario to my knowledge, but is listed because it may occur.

CHECKLIST OF RECOGNIZABLE ONTARIO BIRD FORMS

Northern Fulmar:

- Light morph
- Intermediate morphs *
- Dark morph *

Least Bittern:

- Light morph
- Dark morph (Cory's Least Bittern)

Double-crested Cormorant:

- Dark-crested race (*auritus*)
- White-crested races (*albociliatus* group)

Tundra Swan:

- Whistling race (*columbianus*)
- Bewick's race (*bewickii*)

Mute Swan:

- Gray morph
- White or "Polish" morph

Greater White-fronted Goose:

- Tundra race (*frontalis*)
- Greenland race (*flavirostris*)

Snow Goose:

- White morph, Lesser race (*caerulescens*)
- Blue morph, Lesser race (*caerulescens*)
- White x Blue morph, Lesser race (*caerulescens*)
- White morph, Greater race (*atlanticus*)
- Blue morph, Greater race (*atlanticus*)*
- White x Blue morph, Greater race (*atlanticus*)*

Ross's Goose:

- White morph
- Blue morph *

Snow Goose x Ross's Goose:

- Hybrid

Brant:

- ___ Atlantic race (*horta*)
- ___ Pacific race (*nigricans*) *
- ___ Atlantic x Pacific intergrade *

Canada Goose:

- ___ Giant race (*maxima*)
- ___ Todd's race (*interior*)
- ___ Lesser race (*parvipes*)
- ___ Richardson's race (*hutchinsii*)

Green-winged Teal:

- ___ American race (*carolinensis*)
- ___ Eurasian race (*crecca*)
- ___ American x Eurasian intergrade

American Black Duck x Mallard:

- ___ Hybrid

Mallard x Northern Pintail:

- ___ Hybrid

Mallard x Gadwall:

- ___ Brewer's Duck (hybrid)

Eurasian Wigeon:

- ___ Rufous morph female
- ___ Gray morph female *

Common Eider:

- ___ Hudson Bay race (*sedentaria*)
- ___ South Atlantic race (*dresseri*)

Barrow's Goldeneye:

- ___ Orange-billed female
- ___ Yellow-tip-billed female *

Common Goldeneye x Barrow's Goldeneye:

- ___ Hybrid

Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser:

- ___ Hybrid

Broad-winged Hawk:

- ___ Light morph
- ___ Dark morph

Swainson's Hawk:

- ___ Light morph
- ___ Rufous morph *
- ___ Dark morph

Red-tailed Hawk:

- ___ Light morph, Eastern race (*borealis*)
- ___ Light morph, Krider's race (*kriderii*)
- ___ Light morph, Western race (*calurus*)
- ___ Rufous morph, Western race (*calurus*)
- ___ Dark morph, Western race (*calurus*)
- ___ Dark morph, Harlan's race (*harlani*)
- ___ Light morph, Harlan's race (*harlani*) *

Ferruginous Hawk:

- ___ Light morph
- ___ Dark morph *

Rough-legged Hawk:

- ___ Light morph
- ___ Intermediate morphs
- ___ Dark morph

Merlin:

- ___ Eastern race (*columbarius*)
- ___ Richardson's race (*richardsonii*)
- ___ Bendire's race (*bendirei*)

Peregrine Falcon:

- ___ Continental race (*anatum* & released mixed races)
- ___ Tundra race (*tundrius*)

Gyrfalcon:

- ___ White morph
- ___ Intermediate morphs
- ___ Dark morph

Spruce Grouse:

- ___ Gray morph female
- ___ Red morph female

Ruffed Grouse:

- ___ Gray morph
- ___ Red morph

American Coot:

- ___ Typical morph
- ___ White-shielded or "Caribbean-type" variant

Lesser Golden-Plover:

- ___ American race (*dominica*)
- ___ Pacific race (*fulva*) *

Willet:

- ___ Inland race (*inornatus*)
- ___ Coastal race (*semipalmatus*)

Whimbrel:

- ___ American race (*hudsonicus*)
- ___ White-rumped races (*phaeopus* group)

Baird's Sandpiper:

- ___ Typical or buff morph
- ___ Gray morph

Dunlin:

- ___ Hudson Bay race (*hudsonia*)
- ___ Short-billed races (*schinzii* group) *

Ruff:

- ___ White morph
- ___ Rufous morph
- ___ Black morph
- ___ Intermediate morphs
- ___ Typical juvenile
- ___ Variant juvenile *

Short-billed Dowitcher:

- ___ Eastern race (*griseus*)
- ___ Inland race (*hendersoni*)
- ___ Eastern x Inland intergrade

Wilson's Phalarope:

- ___ Dull morph male
- ___ Pied morph male

Pomarine Jaeger:

- ___ Light morph
- ___ Intermediate morphs
- ___ Dark morph

Parasitic Jaeger:

- ___ Light morph
- ___ Intermediate morphs
- ___ Dark morph

Long-tailed Jaeger:

- ___ Light morph
- ___ Dark morph *

Bonaparte's Gull:

- ___ Typical immature
- ___ Dark variant immature

Mew Gull:

- ___ American race (*brachyrhynchus*)
- ___ European race (*canus*) *

Iceland Gull:

- ___ Greenland race (*glaucoides*)
- ___ Kumlien's race (*kumlieni*)
- ___ Thayer's race (*thayeri*)

Lesser Black-backed Gull:

- ___ British race (*graellsii*)
- ___ Intermediate race (*intermedius*)
- ___ Scandinavian race (*fuscus*)

Herring Gull x Glaucous Gull:

- ___ Nelson's Gull (hybrid)

Herring Gull x Great Black-backed Gull:

- ___ Hybrid

Black-legged Kittiwake:

- ___ Typical morph
- ___ Pink-legged variant

Eastern Screech-Owl:

- ___ Gray morph
- ___ Brown morph
- ___ Red morph

Great Horned Owl:

- ___ Southern race (*virginianus*)
- ___ Northern Ontario race (*scalariventris*)
- ___ Arctic race (*subarcticus*)
- ___ Labrador race (*heterocnemis*)

Northern Flicker:

- ___ Yellow-shafted races (*luteus* group)
- ___ Red-shafted races (*collaris* group)
- ___ Yellow-shafted x Red-shafted intergrade

Horned Lark:

- ___ Prairie race (*praticola*)
- ___ Northern race (*alpestris*)
- ___ Hoyt's race (*hoyti*)

Cave Swallow:

- ___ Greater Antilles race (*fulva*) *
- ___ Mexican race (*pallida*) *

Veery:

- ___ Eastern race (*fuscescens*)
- ___ Western race (*salicicola*)

Gray-cheeked Thrush:

- ___ Northern race (*aliciae*)
- ___ Bicknell's race (*bicknelli*)

American Robin:

- Northern race (*migratorius*)
- Black-backed race (*nigrideus*) *

Cedar Waxwing:

- Typical morph
- Orange-banded variant

Blue-winged Warbler x Golden-winged Warbler:

- Brewster's Warbler (hybrid)
- Lawrence's Warbler (hybrid)

Black-throated Blue Warbler:

- Northern race (*caerulescens*)
- Appalachian race (*cairnsi*)

Yellow-rumped Warbler:

- Myrtle races (*coronata* group)
- Audubon's races (*memorabilis* group)

Yellow-throated Warbler:

- Yellow-lored race (*dominica*)
- White-lored or "Sycamore" race (*albilora*)

Palm Warbler:

- Eastern race (*hypochrysea*)
- Western race (*palmarum*)

Scarlet Tanager:

- Typical male
- Orange variant male

Rufous-sided Towhee:

- Eastern race (*erythrophthalmus*)
- Spotted races (*arcticus* group)

Savannah Sparrow:

- Southern Ontario race (*mediogriseus*)
- Northern Ontario race (*oblitus*)

Sharp-tailed Sparrow:

- James Bay race (*alterus*)
- Nelson's race (*nelsoni*)

White-throated Sparrow:

- White-striped morph
- Tan-striped morph

White-crowned Sparrow:

- Eastern race (*leucophrys*)
- Gambel's race (*gambelii*)
- Eastern x Gambel's intergrade

Dark-eyed Junco:

- Slate-colored races (*hyemalis* group)
- Oregon races (*montanus* group)
- Pink-sided race (*mearnsi*)
- Gray-headed race (*caniceps*)

White-throated Sparrow x Dark-eyed Junco:

- Hybrid

Brewer's Blackbird:

- Typical fall male
- Variant fall male

Common Grackle:

- Bronzed race (*versicolor*)
- Purple race (*stonei*) *

Northern Oriole:

- Baltimore race (*galbula*)
- Bullock's race (*bullockii*)
- Baltimore x Bullock's intergrade

Rosy Finch:

- Gray-crowned race (*tephrocotis*)
- Hepburn's race (*littoralis*)

Pine Grosbeak:

- Typical morph
- Russet variant

House Finch:

- Typical male
- Orange variant male
- Yellow variant male

Red Crossbill:

- Small-billed race (*sitkensis*)
- Resident race (*minor*)
- Newfoundland race (*pusilla*)
- Bendire's race (*bendirei*)
- Bent's race (*benti*)

Common Redpoll:

- Southern race (*flammea*)
- Greater race (*rostrata*)

Hoary Redpoll:

- Southern race (*exilipes*)
- Hornemann's race (*hornemanni*)

Pine Siskin:

- Typical morph
- Green variant

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Photo Quiz

by
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One thing that always drives me crazy about quiz shots is that they won't tell you what the bird is right away. You have to read through the entire account to "find the answer". To have people madly skimming through the "instructional" part of the quiz looking for the answer never struck me as particularly instructional! So here is the answer: it's a female **Brewer's Blackbird**.

Now why? Well, it is a blackbird. The bill is not conical enough for any sparrow or finch and the plumage is generally uniform. Due to the lack of gloss on any part of the plumage, and the fact that it is a June photograph, thereby ruling out a young bird, we can assume it's a female blackbird.

Some of our choices can be eliminated quickly. The bill is too fine and the tail is not long enough for a female grackle of any species.

The dark eye also helps rule out Great-tailed and Common Grackle. Yellow-headed Blackbird can also be ruled out by the uniformity of the plumage colour, particularly on the sides of the breast, and the lack of a small area of white near the base of the primaries. Brown-headed Cowbird is ruled out by the fine bill and longer tail alone. Red-winged Blackbird can also be eliminated by the lack of streaking on the under surface and the lack of an eyeline.

This leaves us with two choices: Rusty and Brewer's. The female Rusty can be eliminated by eye colour alone at this time of year. All Rusty Blackbirds should have pale yellow eyes in June whereas all female Brewer's should have dark eyes, as this bird does. Young Rusty Blackbirds have dark eyes in the first few weeks after fledging, but are also