

Notes

Eastern Kingbird nesting in a tundra area

by

Ross D. James and Mark K. Peck

The Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) as a nesting bird, is most characteristically associated with various types of open habitats, with scattered trees and shrubs, often near or over water. It is thus most commonly found in southern agricultural areas across Canada. It becomes much rarer in more forested regions farther north, where it is associated with beaver ponds and meadows or cutover and cleared land. It can be expected to nest fairly regularly at scattered locations through the Boreal Forest region north to western central Mackenzie District, northern Saskatchewan, southern James Bay and the Gaspé Peninsula (Godfrey 1986). The usual northern extent of breeding, however, is well within the northern limits of the boreal forest. In Ontario prior to 1984, the northernmost nesting reports had come from Pickle Lake and Moosonee (Peck and James 1987).

For a species that is searching rather vast stretches of forest for small patches of open area suitable for nesting, and for a mate within this expanse, it is probably reasonable to think that it might wander rather widely. In Ontario, it has been seen north to the Hudson Bay coast (James 1991), as it has in Manitoba (Jehl and Smith 1970), and to the east and west it has been taken well north of that, at Port Burwell at the northern extreme of the Labrador Peninsula

(Todd 1963), and on the west side of Bathurst Inlet in the Northwest Territories (Snyder 1957).

In the summer of 1984, we spent about three weeks in the Cape Henrietta Maria region in the northeastern corner of Ontario. We worked out of abandoned radar Site 415, located about 35 km south of the base of the Cape itself, within Polar Bear Provincial Park. This is an area of tundra (Peck 1972) with shrubs and very thinly scattered trees that manage to reach heights of more than 2 m in sheltered spots below the banks of lake edges and small ridges. This tundra is the most southerly in the world, maintained by the cold waters of Hudson Bay that retain floating ice cover through most of the summer.

We had seen single Eastern Kingbirds on two occasions in the Sutton Ridges in the summer of 1981, and so were not unduly surprised to see the species on the tundra in 1984. What was remarkable, however, was that we encountered two birds together when we first saw them on 1 July, and that they remained there. Then on 6 July they were observed in the early stages of nest building.

The site was located beside a tundra pond just west of the old airstrip about 2.5 km north of Site 415 (UTM - 17 ML 092681, map 43J; 55° 44' N, 82° 25' W). The pond was about 100 m long and 20 m wide.

Along the western side in the lee of an embankment, between open tundra and the pond, was a dense strip of willow shrubs reaching about 3 m high. The nest was right at the lake edge, about 1.5 m high saddled between and on two main horizontal branches adjacent to the main upright but leaning stem of a willow. The nest was open to the lake on the east side only, being rather well surrounded and canopied by shrub growth, somewhat less exposed than is typical of many Eastern Kingbird nests.

The nest itself was fairly typical, with a rough exterior of tiny twigs, coarse plant and grass stems, a few bits of moss, horsetail stems and fine rootlets. Some of the grass used was cotton-grass (*Eriophorum* sp.) with the downy heads still attached. The rim of the nest was more compacted and neat, of the same but finer materials. The nest walls were perhaps somewhat thicker than usual. There was very little lining beyond that of the other materials, but a few finer grasses, some willow fluff and a couple of white feathers completed the structure. There were two eggs in the nest on 12 July, and four on 14 July, when it was collected (ROM 12901). A few days later the pair was apparently building a second nest, but we were unable to remain to witness the outcome.

This is apparently the first record of an Eastern Kingbird nesting in a tundra area. It was some 400 km north of any previously reported nest in Ontario. However, given that these

birds wander north to Hudson Bay with some regularity, and certainly nest much farther north in western Canada, on occasion at least, they may be expected to be found nesting virtually anywhere in northern Ontario.

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Ross D. James and Mark K. Peck, Department of Ornithology,
Royal Ontario Museum,
100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C6.

Sharp-shinned Hawk and Common Crow Migration Along Georgian Bay

by
Ken P. Morrison

On 14 October 1994, weather conditions were suitable for southeasterly bird migration along the Georgian Bay shoreline of Lake Huron near the mouth of the Naiscoot River. This river empties into the bay approximately 60 km northwest of Parry Sound and five km northwest of Bayfield Inlet, Ontario. The topography near the river mouth is generally flat with numerous small islands and bays extending inland from Georgian Bay. Vegetation consists of scattered Jack Pine, White Pine, and White Birch growing on thin soils with a considerable amount of exposed bedrock. Winds between 40 and 50 kph from the northeast were evident at 0530 h, and continued throughout the day. This was a reversal from the 25 to 35 kph winds that blew from the south and southwest the previous day. Skies were sunny with light scattered clouds and the temperature was mild at 10° to 15° C by noon.

The first movement of Sharp-shinned Hawks (*Accipiter striatus*) began around 0700 h and by the time it was over at 1100 h, 80 to 90 had passed by within one kilometre of the Georgian Bay shoreline. These hawks flew five to 30 m over the tree tops without circling. There was a mixture of juveniles and adults based on plumage, with both sexes represented based on relative size difference.

Mills (1981) reported fall migrations of Sharp-shinned Hawks

closer to the south end of Georgian Bay. Fourteen were observed on 13 October 1974 at Go Home Bay, approximately 10 km southwest of Mactier. An unknown number were seen (no date) moving south from the Limestone Islands, located about 20 km west of Mactier. The largest daily movement reported was on 17 September 1976 when a loose flock of 160 Sharp-shinned Hawks was seen at Beausoleil Island approximately 10 km north of Midland.

In 15 years of observing fall migrations a few kilometres inland from the mouth of the Naiscoot River, Kubisz (pers. comm.) reported a maximum of 15 Sharp-shinned Hawks seen over a two-hour period near Highway 529.

Nicholson (1981) recorded a single-day maximum of 350 Sharp-shinned Hawks on 22 September 1977 at Great Duck Island, 15 km south of Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron. That fall, Sharp-shinned Hawk numbers dropped steadily during seven visits to the island, to only one bird on 1 November. On 14 September 1979, he saw 290 Sharp-shinned Hawks at that location. Nicholson (pers. comm.) observed 230 Sharp-shinned Hawks at Mississagi Light at the western end of Manitoulin Island on 17 September 1994, and an additional 152 at the same location the next day. By early October 1994, movement of these hawks had dropped to between 30

and 50 per day at Mississagi Light.

These impressive fall movements observed by Nicholson were always with either a north or northwesterly wind. The large flights to Great Duck Island in 1977 left that island early in the morning heading southeast, but by mid-morning the birds would usually re-track to the north toward Manitoulin Island (Nicholson 1981). Those birds that continued moving southeast could eventually reach the tip of the Bruce Peninsula by following the southern shore of Manitoulin Island and then "island-hopping" to the peninsula. The Mississagi Light Sharp-shinned Hawks all moved north and northwest during the fall 1994 flights, directly into light headwinds (Nicholson pers. comm.). If these birds continued in a northwesterly direction, they might have moved along the northern shore of Cockburn, Drummond and St. Joseph Islands and eventually ended up near Sault Ste. Marie. A northern movement across the North Channel of Lake Huron would land them somewhere between Thessalon and Blind River where they could have flown either east or west along the shore of the mainland.

In addition to the raptors seen on 14 October 1994, there was a large movement of Common Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*). Between 0700 h and 1500 h, approximately 3000 crows flew southeasterly within a one kilometre distance of the shoreline. The majority moved by in loose flocks of up to 50 birds, 20 to 50 m above the tree tops. There was no obvious interaction with these crows by any of the Sharp-shinned Hawks, three Northern Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*), two Merlins (*Falco*

columbarius) and one Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) which were also observed, perhaps because most of the raptor flight was farther inland from that of the crows.

Mills (1981) reported a heavy migration on 12 October 1974 of an estimated 1000 crows off Pointe Au Baril. This sighting was approximately 10 km southeast along the shoreline from the mouth of the Naiscoot River. On 30 October 1977, 53 crows were seen at Go Home Bay (Mills 1981). Nicholson (1981) considered the crow to be a "common migrant" in the Manitoulin Island area. He stated that large flocks gathered there during October and moved easterly in a fluid and ill-defined manner along the south shore of the island. Great Duck Island also had reports of sizable flocks of crows migrating during October.

Discussion

The Sharp-shinned Hawk has the most prolonged and continuous migration of any raptor (Flood and Bortolotti 1986). Based on banding records of more than 15,500 Sharp-shinned Hawks from Hawk Cliff near Port Stanley, Ontario, juveniles migrated earlier than adults, and males generally later than females (Duncan 1982). Along the Lake Erie shoreline, 79 per cent of these hawks were juveniles, and average peak migration dates were from 19 to 25 September for juveniles, and from 30 September to 9 October for adults (Flood and Bortolotti 1986). Sharp-shinned Hawks have been aged on the wing since 1988 by observers at Holiday Beach, Ontario. During September, juveniles averaged 80 to 90 per cent of the Sharp-shinned

Hawks aged, but dropped to 25 to 65 per cent in October (Chartier 1994).

My observations were limited in scope from a fixed vantage point over a four-hour period. Sex identification was restricted to a relatively small sample of the total flight when birds were flying together and adequately close. Similarly, aging was limited to birds passing close by under good light conditions. The Hawk Cliff results omitted these potential sources of error as those birds were aged and sexed when banded. Mueller et al. (1981) speculated that differences in migration behaviour between the sexes and between the age classes could be the result of aerodynamic differences caused by age - and sex-specific body size and feather length. Perhaps the abnormally mild Ontario weather conditions from mid-September to mid-October 1994 may have influenced Sharp-shinned Hawk migration patterns along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay (Heintzelman 1975).

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Ken P. Morrison, 847 Riverlea Subdivision, R.R. 2, Huntsville, Ontario P0A 1K0.