

Author's note

This paper is only one example of how the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey can be used, and the data are available to anyone for analysis. In 1987-88, the survey was expanded continent-wide under the name Project FeederWatch. Over 7,500 now report from all parts of North America, and the data allow us to examine questions

about birds at feeders on a much larger scale. For further information on these surveys, or to take part, contact the author.

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Bird Observations on Fighting Island, Detroit River, Spring 1988

by

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Introduction

Fighting Island lies in the Detroit River, south of Windsor, Essex County, Ontario, extending from north of La Salle to south of River Canard (Byers 1980: entry 86). As the border between the U.S.A. and Canada lies in the river immediately to the west of the island (Figure 1), it is of interest to naturalists as one of the westernmost points of land in extreme southern Ontario.

Although data on birds have been collected for many years at Point Pelee and more recently at Holiday Beach and Pelee Island, relatively few details have been

published for other parts of Essex County except in brief notes and in wider regional works by A.H. Kelley. Her most recent compilation of records for the provincial and state counties surrounding the Detroit River is now over a decade old (Kelley 1978), although she publishes occasional updates (Kelley 1983). An updated compilation of data on birds in Essex County would be desirable, especially in light of the high degree of change that has taken place in bird populations in the region surrounding the western end of Lake Erie (Kelley 1972; Mayfield 1988-1989).

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Fighting Island is the site of one of several Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) colonies used by the Canadian Wildlife Service to monitor levels of various contaminants in the Great Lakes (Ellenton *et al.* 1985; Struger *et al.* 1985). In 1988, I visited the island on 27 April and once or twice daily from 29 April to 25 May inclusive while conducting contract research for the Canadian Wildlife Service as part of their ongoing studies. These daily visits allowed me to document patterns of use of the southern end of the island by all bird species for approximately one month in late spring. I hope that such a record will be of use to others in compiling an updated account of the birds of Essex County and also encourage others who visit a prescribed area on a regular basis to keep a record of daily bird observations.

As access to the island is controlled strictly by the owners, who visited the southern end only rarely during the period of my study, disturbance was restricted to my presence and off-island boat traffic. The Herring Gull colony occupied dikes along the eastern and western shores of the island, with a few nests on the southern dike. These three dikes surrounded a lagoon, which dominated the southern part of the island. Habitat on this portion of the island consisted of the edge of the lagoon, heaps of rocks forming the dikes, grass and other low vegetation (mostly clover), three stands of

redgrass (*Phragmites australis*), at the southeast and southwest corners of the lagoon and along one portion of the south shore, a row of trees (mostly willows, *Salix* sp.) along the south dike, a row of trees (mostly honey locust, *Gleditsia triacanthos*) on the west dike, and a few other scattered trees of these two species. Thus, this portion of the island is unsuitable for regular use by woodland bird species and others that prefer extensive cover, and many species common on the nearby mainland were not observed on the island. Three small islets off the south shore were also visited frequently. In the following account, "south channel" refers to the channel between these islets and the southern shore of Fighting Island.

A detailed analysis of the 64 species in the following annotated list would be premature without data from further north on the island, data from other times of the year and/or data from additional years. However, I checked the status of each species seen in the region generally in Kelley (1978) and compared dates seen with spring migration dates for Point Pelee given by Stirrett (1960, 1973) and for two more recent years (1982 and 1983) as summarized in annual bird reports for the Point Pelee area (Wormington 1982; Runtz 1983). These comparisons place my observations in perspective with knowledge of birds in the area generally. Migrants in spring would

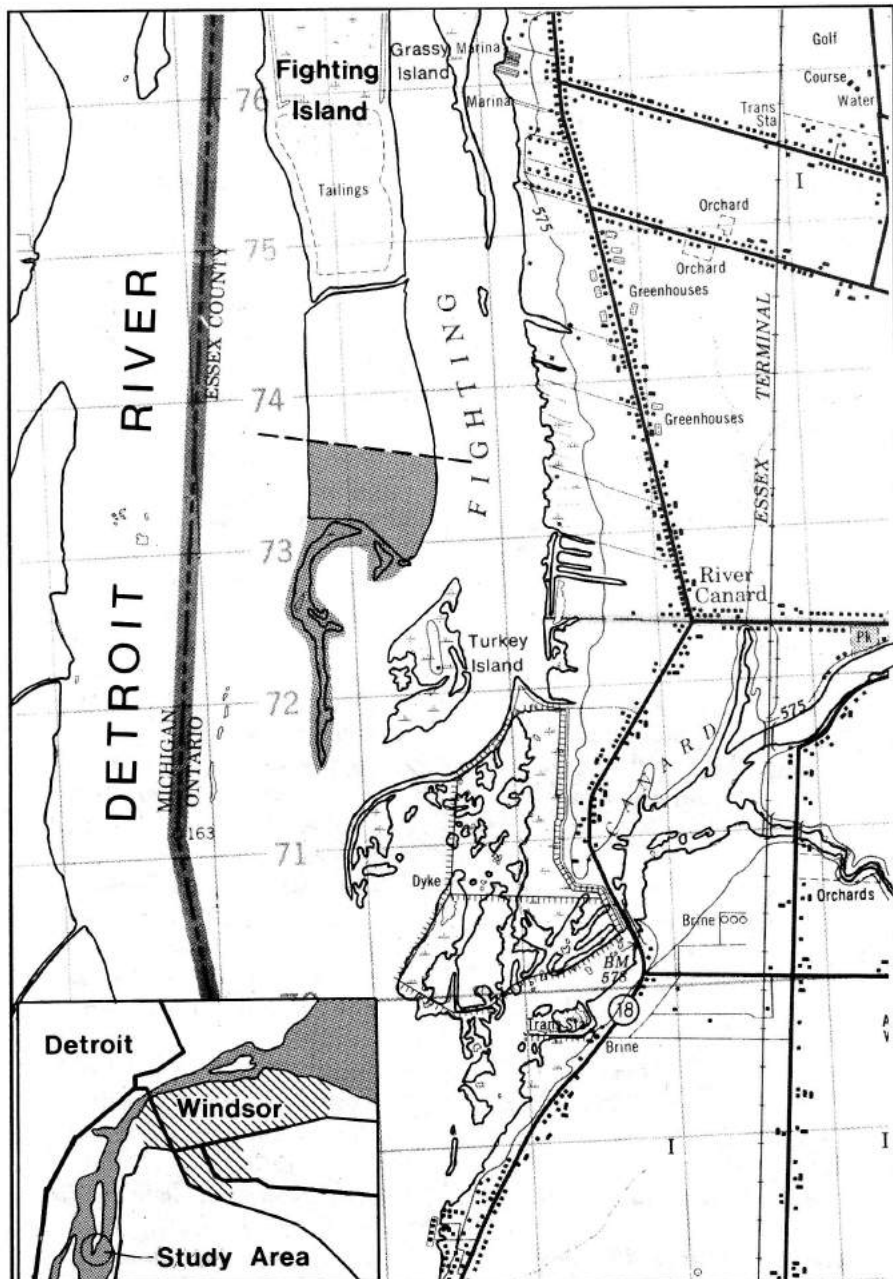


Figure 1: Fighting Island, Detroit River, Essex County, Ontario. Study area south of dashed line. Inset shows relation to Windsor. Map drawn by Michael Slaven.

be expected to arrive about the same time or a few days later than those at Point Pelee. Unless indicated otherwise, dates of occurrence and numbers seen on Fighting Island in 1988 conform to those that would be expected according to the sources mentioned above.

Species Accounts

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) -

One was observed on the river just offshore from the west dike on 1 May.

Double-crested Cormorant

(*Phalacrocorax auritus*) - Single birds were observed off the west dike on 6 May, off the eastern shore on 24 May and overhead on 8 and 14 May. Two flew over on 17 May and a raft of one adult and 17 subadults was off the south end of the island later on 8 May. Although Kelley (1978) indicated a recent decline of this species in the region with a "slight indication" of a more recent increase, it has since increased substantially throughout much of the Great Lakes (Ludwig 1984; Price and Weseloh 1986).

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) -

One was seen overhead on 7 and 21 May and two on 8 and 13 May. This heron was seen virtually daily on nearby areas of the mainland.

Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*) -

One was seen over the lagoon on 19 and 21 May. Although

seen only twice on the island, one frequently foraged in a bay visible from the island and one or two could predictably be seen in a marshy area by River Canard.

Black-crowned Night-Heron

(*Nycticorax nycticorax*) - One flew over the offshore islets and then the island on 10 May, four over the island on 16 May and one on 20 May. This species is known to breed on Stony Island, also situated in the Detroit River (Kelley 1978).

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) -

Twelve were in the bay south of the island on 30 April, six off the east shore on 16 May, ten near there on 17 May and two there on 22 May. I also saw six off nearby Turkey Island on 3 May. Although these were the only occasions when I saw swans away from the mainland shore, I did see them virtually daily on the river close to shore and suspect that a careful search would confirm nesting in this atlas square, where they are shown as possible nesters in the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (Lumsden 1987a).

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) -

Canada Geese were seen daily on the island and at least four pairs were known to raise goslings. Breeding in Southern Ontario was once unusual (Speirs 1985) and considered to involve only injured or semi-domesticated individuals (Baillie

and Harrington 1936). Although now abundant in the region (Kelley 1978), there were still no nesting records in the Ontario Nest Records Scheme for Essex County when Peck and James (1983) prepared their nonpasserine volume on breeding birds in Ontario. Nests have been reported since (Peck and James 1987) and breeding was confirmed in all three atlas squares bordering the Detroit River (Lumsden 1987b). The first young were noted on 8 May, when two pairs were each seen with four downy goslings. Three broods had crèched together with at least 12 goslings on 9 May and 12 to 15 goslings on 18

May. Later brood counts of five, six, seven and eight goslings may have involved additional pairs and/or mixed broods, as all the geese wandered widely once the young hatched.

Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) - A pair plus one male seen with a male Blue-winged Teal and a pair of Gadwall on the lagoon on 22 May and another independent male there the same day were my only observations. Although this date is a bit later than indicated for spring migration of this species by Kelley (1978), Stürrett (1960, 1973) reported spring records at Point Pelee to 1 June, and Wormington (1982) reported



Semipalmated Plover. Photo by R. D. McRae.

two there as late as 20 May in 1982.

American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) - Two pairs on the lagoon on 30 April were the only American Black Ducks seen.

Although considered common in the region by Kelley (1978), this species has declined sharply in the area generally (Mayfield 1988-1989), with the decline in Ontario most marked in the westernmost parts of the extreme south (Dennis *et al.* 1984).

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) -

Mallards were seen on the island daily, with one to three pairs seen most days. Groups of males ranged from two to eight, often accompanied by one or two additional pairs. Two nests were found: one contained seven eggs on 3 and 7 May, but only two eggs on 8 May and none on 16 May. The second nest contained six eggs on 7 May, only five on 10 May and none on 17 May. Both nests were in the vicinity of Herring Gull nests and discovered by the flushing of the female, presumably revealing the location of the nest to the gulls as well as me. An egg was found on the ground with no nest structure when a female flushed on 21 May, and the next day a hen flushed from the same spot. No egg was present, but a large fox snake (*Elaphe vulpina*) with an egg-shaped lump in its throat was less than one metre

away. A group of 11 ducklings was seen on the lagoon with no adults nearby on 11 May and again on 17 May, but on the latter date they were joined by a female. Another female performed a broken-wing display in front of me on 22 May, after which I found at least six newly-hatched ducklings in nearby clover. A female with 14 very large ducklings on 25 May may have been involved in cr ching. All these nesting dates are well within the range documented for Ontario (Peck and James 1983) of 2 April to 20 July. Mallards now breed commonly in the region, having eclipsed the American Black Duck in the 1960s (Speirs 1985) and are increasingly outnumbering the latter (Dennis *et al.* 1984; Mayfield 1988-1989).

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) -

One male seen with two male American Wigeon and a Gadwall on 20 May was the first noted for the island. In addition to the male seen with Green-winged Teal and Gadwall on 22 May mentioned above, two more males were seen on the lagoon the same day. One male was also seen on 23 May. No females were observed.

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) -

The only shovelers seen were a pair on the lagoon on 30 April.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) - No

Gadwalls were seen on the island

in April, but a pair was present on the lagoon on 1 May and at least one bird every day thereafter, a pair every day except 20 May. Two pairs were present on 10, 14, 18 and 21 May, two pairs plus another male on 24 May and four pairs on 16 May. Single males were seen with the (presumably usual) pair on six dates and a single female with the pair on 13 May. As indicated in some of the species accounts above, Gadwall often associated with other dabbling ducks. Like them, Gadwall usually frequented the lagoon, but unlike any other dabblers were also sometimes seen in the river or the south channel. Kelley (1978) regarded this species as "regular" through May in the area, but some of the dates on which I saw them are later than the latest spring records given for Point Pelee in 1982 and 1983 by Wormington (1982) and Runtz (1983). Although not shown as nesting in Essex County by Peck and James (1983), breeding evidence has since been obtained for the county (Peck and James 1987), including confirmed breeding along the Detroit River (Sandilands 1987). Some of my observations may thus have involved breeding birds. In light of increasing populations in eastern North America generally (Henny and Holgersen 1974) and Ontario specifically (Curry,

in press), nesting may be expected to become more frequent.

American Wigeon (*Anas americana*)

- The two males seen on the lagoon with Blue-winged Teal and Gadwall on 20 May were the only wigeon seen on the island. This date is one day earlier than the last spring migration date for 1982 recorded by Wormington (1982) at Point Pelee, though Stirrett recorded as many as 50 there on 21 May and six on 1 June.

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) -

Lesser Scaup were seen daily from 27 April to 8 May in numbers ranging from one male (4 May) to five males and three females, except that about 30 were present on 30 April. The latter group was seen in the channel in the morning and on the lagoon in the afternoon, and other sightings of this species were about equally divided between the lagoon and the river. None was seen on 9 May, but 18 were on the lagoon on 10 May and four on 11 May. From 12 to 16 May, only one male was present on two days, but eight males and two females appeared on 17 May, with only one male there the next day. Three males in the channel on 20 May were the last seen. Latest spring migrants at Point Pelee in both 1982 and 1983 (Wormington 1982; Runtz 1983) were on 16 May, though

Stirrett (1973) reported as many as 100 there as late as 20 May, and six as late as 10 June. Of three diving duck species wintering on the Detroit River, this was the main species that was examined for the presence of organochlorine contaminants (Smith *et al.* 1985).

Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) - The only goldeneye I saw at the island was a male with two Buffleheads in the river just off the southwest corner of the island on 2 May.

Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*) - A pair and four additional females were in the channel in the morning of 30 April and on the lagoon that afternoon. My only other observations of this species were the pair with the goldeneye on the river on 2 May and a pair on the lagoon on 13 May.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) - A pair was seen on the river off the south end of the island on 30 April and a male was there on 3 May. A male was with five females off the west dike on 6 May. The last observation was of a female on 12 May, the only merganser seen on the lagoon.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) - The only Ruddy Ducks seen were a male on the lagoon on 2 May and a female in the channel on 6 May.

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) - Although this species

suffered a major decline in the region in the late 1970s (Kelley 1983), I saw and heard more in the general vicinity of Windsor in the month that I was there than I have noted in the last five or six years elsewhere in southern Ontario. Nevertheless, the lack of cover on the southern part of Fighting Island made a female that I flushed there on 10 May very surprising.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) - One on the shore of the lagoon on 18 May, one on the shore of the channel on 19 May and three at the edge of the lagoon on 23 May were the only observations.

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) - Three to four pairs were seen daily in predictable sites, where they routinely performed "broken-wing" distraction displays, suggesting they were nesting, as would be expected (Kelley 1978; Peck and James 1983).

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) - One Greater Yellowlegs was on the lagoon on the morning of 30 April and two were there later the same day. One was with a group of shorebirds that appeared on the afternoon of 3 May, most of which were absent that morning (see Solitary Sandpiper). One was also on the lagoon on 5 and 14 May.

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) - This species was seen on most

days from 29 April to 15 May, usually one or two on the lagoon. Three to four were there on 2 May and four were present all day on 3 May, with an additional two in the group of shorebirds that appeared on the lagoon that afternoon. One on the south shore on 8 May and one on the west dike the same day were the only yellowlegs seen away from the lagoon.

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*)

- The only Solitary Sandpiper seen was in a group of shorebirds that appeared on the lagoon on the afternoon of 3 May, also including three Pectoral Sandpipers, one Greater Yellowlegs, two Lesser Yellowlegs, one Spotted Sandpiper and one Wilson's Phalarope.

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) - One to four Spotted Sandpipers were seen daily at the edge of the lagoon except on 7 May. I suspect that this species nests on the island, especially as I saw two in a territorial dispute on 6 May, but my visits were before most nesting in the province (Peck and James 1983), although within the range of earliest nesting dates. Sixteen on 22 May constituted the only flock seen.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) - The first turnstone seen was on the lagoon on 14 May, after which one to eight birds were seen on seven other

days to 25 May.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) - The only Sanderling seen was on the lagoon on 24 May.

Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) - One on the lagoon on 24 May and five there the next day were my only observations of this species.

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)

- One on 4 May matched the earliest record given for the region by Kelley (1978). Three on 23 May were the last observed, coinciding with the last spring date at Point Pelee for both 1982 and 1983 given by Wormington and Runtz, although later spring dates for Point Pelee are given by Stirrett (1973) and for the region as a whole by Kelley (1978). One was also seen on 8 and 14 May, two on 6 May and three on 18 and 19 May.

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)

- One to three Pectoral Sandpipers were seen on seven dates from 27 April (1) through 14 May (3), all on the lagoon except for three on the westernmost islet on 2 May and two flying over the south dike on 4 May.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) - Eight on the lagoon on 24 May, two there on the morning of 25 May and ten there that afternoon were the only Dunlins seen on the island.

Short-billed Dowitcher

(*Limnodromus griseus*) - One on a



Female Wilson's Phalarope. Photo by R. D. McRae.

sandbar attached to the middle offshore islets on 9 May matched Stirrett's (1973) earliest spring date for Point Pelee, although there were earlier records for Point Pelee for both 1982 (3 May) and 1983 (6 May) listed by Wormington and Runtz, respectively.

Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) - A female was on the lagoon on 3 May with the group of shorebirds listed under Solitary Sandpiper. Although Stirrett did not list this species among spring migrants at Point Pelee in his 1960 report, he later reported one there on 11 May 1967 (Stirrett 1973) and Kelley (1978) reported that it has become a regular migrant since

1964.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) - A female was on the lagoon on 24 May with eight Dunlins and a Semipalmated Sandpiper. Although Kelley (1978) regarded this species as rare in spring, and Stirrett (1973) listed no spring records for Point Pelee, there are several spring records in recent years elsewhere in southern Ontario, including a 1978 observation by A. Wormington at Essex, Essex County (Speirs 1985).

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) - Although considered an abundant permanent resident in the region by Kelley (1978) and reported by Mayfield (1988-1989) to now outnumber

Herring Gulls at the western end of Lake Erie, this species was virtually absent at the southern end of Fighting Island. My only records there were of a sick-looking bird seen on the westernmost offshore islet on 9 May and a dead gull found on the edge of the lagoon on 25 May. This absence was very striking, as I noted this gull frequently in nearby areas, and is especially noteworthy in view of the fact that a colony of more than 20000 pairs breeds farther north on the island (D.V. Weseloh, pers. comm., 1989).

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) - As mentioned above, Fighting Island hosts one of several Herring Gull colonies visited annually by the Canadian Wildlife Service for biomonitoring purposes (Ellenton *et al.* 1985; Struger *et al.* 1985). During my period of study, I observed 154 nests, at least 118 of which were known to be active. Details have been reported elsewhere (McNicholl 1988).

Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) - Two seen flying over Fighting Island on 25 May constituted my only observation there.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) - A flock of about ten Common Terns flying around the south shore on 30 April, including one carrying a piece of grass, were the first I saw at the island, but they were seen on all but two

days thereafter, and I was rarely out of sight of at least one. Common Terns nest on Fighting Island (Weseloh *et al.* 1989), but had not begun to do so on 25 May, a date later than other colonies with which I am familiar in southern Ontario, but earlier than half the egg dates reported by Peck and James (1983) for the province as a whole.

Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) - One in winter plumage with Common Terns off the south dike on 11 May was the only Forster's Tern I saw at Fighting Island. Although now locally common in the region, with indications of possible breeding along the Detroit River (McNicholl 1987), its confirmed nesting areas in Ontario are all somewhat further east, especially around Lake St. Clair.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) - I saw Black Terns five times: one on each of 6, 10, 20 and 22 May and five on 14 May. These were observed over the lagoon, south shore and west dike.

Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) - Although a common permanent resident in the region, the sparsity of trees on the southern portion of the island is not conducive to their regular occurrence there. One apparently feeding on the ground at the corner of the southern and western dikes on

13 May was the only dove I saw actually on the island. I also saw one fly over the island on each of 16, 17, 18 and 22 May, and three on 25 May.

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) -

One crossing from the mainland to the east side of the island on 8 May was the only swift I saw over the island itself, although I often saw them nearby.

Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) -

Although this common summer resident was often seen in nearby areas, a male over the lagoon on 30 April was my only record for the island.

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) -

Flickers were observed in the grass along the south dike (never in trees) on 2, 6, 7, 11, 14 and 20 May. All observations were of single birds except on 6 May, when two were seen there and another two on the east dike. The sparsity of trees likely precluded more regular occurrence on the island.

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus*

tyrannus) - My only observations of a flycatcher on the island consisted of one Eastern Kingbird on 17 and 20 May and two on 25 May, all in trees along the south dike.

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) -

Martins were seen only twice at the island: both a male and a female on 20 May and a male the next day, all over the south channel.

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) -

The first Tree Swallows seen were about 40 hawking insects over the south channel along with six Bank Swallows and four Barn Swallows on 30 April.

Thereafter, Tree Swallows were seen almost daily, missing only on 4, 12 and 13 May. Usually one to ten could be seen or heard at almost any time I was on the island. On foggy or misty days, large numbers concentrated over the south channel and along the south dike. On the morning of 17 May, I noted large numbers feeding there with large numbers of Bank and Barn Swallows and two Northern Rough-winged Swallows. That afternoon I counted about 50 swallows perched in the branches of a dead tree anchored in the channel. These were mostly Tree and Barn Swallows, but also included 15 Bank Swallows and one Cliff Swallow. About 500 additional swallows were feeding over the channel, with Tree and Bank Swallows predominating, but also many Barn Swallows. Swallows were back to normal small numbers on the 18th, but on the 19th, between 400 and 500 were feeding along the south channel and perching in the dead tree again, and large numbers were there again on 20 May. Tree, Bank and Barn Swallows were the predominant species again on both days, but three Cliff Swallows were noted

on the 20th. A smaller group of 60 Tree, 20 Bank and 30 Barn Swallows were present on 25 May.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) - The two seen in the large concentration of swallows on 17 May mentioned under Tree Swallow constituted my only observations.

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) - The six seen on 30 April mentioned under Tree Swallow were the first I noted on the island. They were seen on 16 days thereafter, usually between one and five birds at a time, but in larger concentrations on 17, 19, 20 and

25 May as described under Tree Swallow.

Cliff Swallow (*Hirundo pyrrhonota*) - In addition to the single bird in the mixed group on 17 May and the three on 20 May mentioned in the Tree Swallow account, one was seen over the south dike on 2 May, a day before the earliest record listed by Stirrett (1960) for Point Pelee, but well after more recent April records there (Stirrett 1973; Wormington 1982; Runtz 1983).

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) - The four seen with Tree and Bank Swallows on 30 April were the first I saw on the island, but



Adult Forster's Tern. Photo by R. D. McRae.

this species was seen on most days (18 of 25) that I visited the island in May. Usually, only one to three birds were seen at a time, but larger numbers were present on 17, 19, 20 and 25 May.

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) - Little habitat suitable for this "common summer resident" was available in the study area, but two were in a patch of old (previous year's) *Phragmites* on 27 April, presumably en route to better cover.

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) - Starlings were seen feeding along the dikes on ten dates from 30 April to 16 May and on 25 May. Usually only two to four were present, but a group of about 30 were seen on 30 April, 15 on 11 May and ten on 16 May.

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) - A singing male in the willows on the south dike and another in the *Phragmites* patch at the southeast corner of the lagoon on 7 May suggested that this species may nest on the island, but no others were seen except one male at the southwestern corner on 21 May.

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) - The only other warblers seen on the island were a male yellowthroat on the south dike on 9 May and another male in the *Phragmites* patch in the southwestern corner of the lagoon on 22 May.

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) -

One at the southeastern corner of the island was my only record. Most of the habitat on the southern part of the island seemed too open for this species.

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) - The grassy nature of much of the study area appeared suitable for this sparrow, and one or two were seen on seven days from 30 April to 9 May, including one singing on 5 and 6 May. However, only one bird was observed after this date, singing on the westernmost offshore islet on 16 May, possibly because the grass never became very dense.

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) - Song Sparrows almost certainly nested on the island, as five to six were observed singing on 27 April and two to six were seen and heard daily until 23 May, though oddly missed on 24 and 25 May. Thick patches of clover close to honey locust trees and *Phragmites* stands were frequented by this species.

Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*) - Two sparrows observed north of the Herring Gull nesting area on 30 April appeared to be Swamp Sparrows, but my view of them was not adequate to confirm their identity. Twenty were seen in the *Phragmites* patch of the southeastern corner of the lagoon about 20 minutes later,

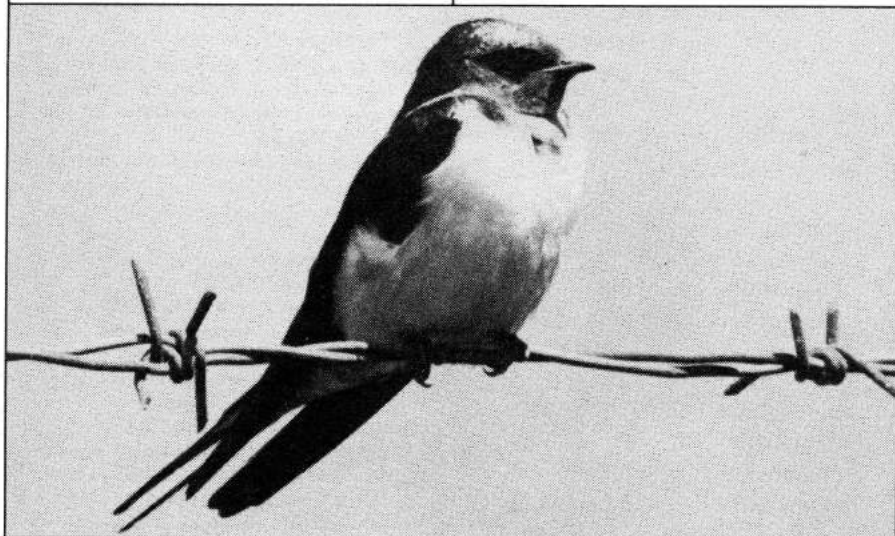
and 10 to 15 were still there on 1 May, but none thereafter.

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) - A female on the south dike on 17 May was the only Bobolink seen on the island.

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) - As expected, this species was seen on the island daily. On our first visit on 27 April, a flock of 50 to 60 males inhabited the row of willows on the south dike, but a few independent singing males elsewhere appeared to be establishing territories. On 29 April, the flock contained about 20 males, but a pair was also seen. Several pairs were conspicuously defending territories on 30 April and at least a dozen pairs were seen thereafter at regular sites that suggested they nested. In

addition to these apparently territorial birds, ten to 20 males remained in the flock on 1 and 2 May. On 3 May, the flock consisted of two groups, one of four females and 15 males, the other of 36 males. On 4 May, the flock consisted of 18 males and four females, increasing to 28 males and 18 females on 6 May. On 7 and 8 May, 20 males and 15 females were still in the flock. There was no indication of the flock on 9 May, but 15 males were there on 10 May, the last date on which the south dike flock was apparent. About ten to 15 males on 25 May in the dead tree used by the swallows in the channel was the only other concentration of blackbirds seen.

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) - Grackles were seen on



Barn Swallow. Photo by R. D. McRae.

the island daily from 30 April to 8 May, sometimes singly, but usually in groups of three to ten. One was also present on 10 May, two on 17 May, and one on 20 May.

American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) - Goldfinches were not seen on the island regularly, but one male was seen flying over on each of 1, 14, 18, 20 and 21 May, and four were in the honey locusts on the west dike on 22 May.

Concluding Remarks

Although data from daily observations for one month of one year are insufficient to allow meaningful conclusions, the number of species seen only once or twice in inappropriate or marginal habitat suggests that many birds may rest or feed on the island temporarily during migration, while some that do not nest there (e.g., the swallows, flickers, starlings and grackles) may feed there quite frequently. As is typical of small islands, the breeding avifauna was sparse compared to mainland populations. Breeding was confirmed for four species (Canada Goose, Mallard, Herring Gull and Common Tern) and suspected for six others (Gadwall, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrow and Red-winged Blackbird).

Additional observations in other months and other years would be of interest and would undoubtedly

add to the list of birds that at least occasionally visit the island.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

Marsh Nesting by Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) in the Toronto Area

During 1988 and 1989, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority conducted a survey of colonial nesting birds in the Toronto area. Marsh nesting by Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) was observed during both years of the survey. In 1988, one pair of Common Terns was observed nesting in a wetland on the shores of Lake Ontario. In 1989, four pairs were observed nesting at the same site.

Common Terns ordinarily nest on sand, gravel and pebble

beaches, sand dunes, and on islands (Cramp *et al.* 1974). Marsh nesting in Common Terns is rare and is often an indication of a shortage of more typical nesting habitat (Nickell 1966). In a study on Long Island, New York, in the 1970s, a large number of Common Terns were observed nesting in marsh habitat. The number of pairs engaged in marsh nesting usually represented a small proportion of the total number of birds nesting on Long Island (Buckley and Buckley 1980). The authors concluded that Common terns