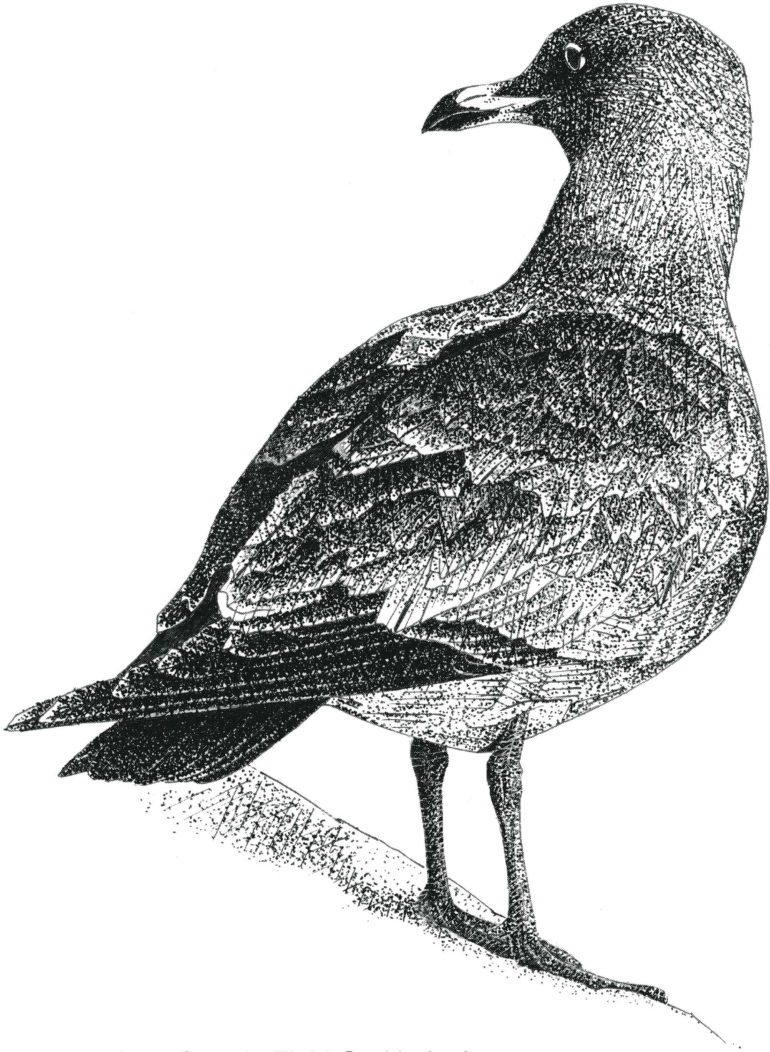


ONTARIO BIRDS



Journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists
Volume 18 Number 1 April 2000

Ontario Field Ornithologists

President: Jean Iron, 9 Lichen Place, Toronto, Ontario M3A 1X3
(416) 445-9297 E-mail: jeaniron@globedirect.com

Ontario Field Ornithologists is an organization dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It formed in 1982 to unify the ever-growing numbers of field ornithologists (birders/birdwatchers) across the province, and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among its members. The Ontario Field Ornithologists officially oversees the activities of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC), publishes a newsletter (*OFO News*) and a journal (*Ontario Birds*), operates a bird sightings listserve (ONTBIRDS, coordinated by Mike Street), hosts field trips throughout Ontario, and holds an Annual General Meeting in the autumn.

All persons interested in bird study, regardless of their level of expertise, are invited to become members of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. Membership rates can be obtained from the address below. All members receive *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News*. Please send membership enquiries to: **Ontario Field Ornithologists, Box 455, Station R, Toronto, Ontario M4G 4E1**

E-mail: ofo@interlog.com Website: www.interlog.com/~ofo

Ontario Birds

Editors: Bill Crins, Ron Pittaway, Ron Tozer

Editorial Assistance: Nancy Checko, Jean Iron

Consultants: Earl Godfrey, Michel Gosselin, Ross James

Art Consultant: Christine Kerrigan

Photo Quiz: Bob Curry

Design/Production: Aben Graphics, Dwight

The aim of *Ontario Birds* is to provide a vehicle for documentation of the birds of Ontario. We encourage the submission of full length articles and short notes on the status, distribution, identification, and behaviour of birds in Ontario, as well as location guides to significant Ontario birdwatching areas, book reviews, and similar material of interest on Ontario birds.

Material submitted for publication should be on computer disk, or type-written (double-spaced). Please follow the style of this issue of *Ontario Birds*. All submissions are subject to review and editing. Submit items for publication to the Editors at the address noted above.

Table of Contents

Letters to the Editors

- Thayer's Gull / Crows Preening 1

Articles

- Heermann's Gull in Toronto: First For Ontario 3
Bob Yukich

- An Apparent Dunlin x White-rumped Sandpiper Hybrid 8
Kevin A. McLaughlin and Alan Wormington

- The November 1999 Cave Swallow Invasion in Ontario
and Northeastern North America 13
Bob Curry and Kevin A. McLaughlin

- Plumage and Molt Terminology 27
Ron Pittaway

Notes

- Breeding Record of Great Gray Owl in Bruce County:
Southernmost in Canada 44
Michael Turisk

- First Verified Nesting of Brewer's Blackbird in
Muskoka District Municipality 46
Kenneth Walton

Product Notice

- The Small Gulls of North America 47
Ron Pittaway

Photo Quiz

- Willie D'Anna* 48

Cover Illustration: Heermann's Gull (*Larus heermanni*)
by *Michael King*

Letters to the Editors

Thayer's Gull

The article by Banks and Browning in the December 1999 issue (*Ontario Birds* 17: 124-130) raises some interesting questions on Thayer's Gull. However, on page 126, it contains several errors, misinterpretations and misleading statements concerning a 1969 paper of mine (*Auk* 86: 106-109) on this form, which I wish to correct and clarify.

These are: 1) the specimen secured in 1945 was from the Fuhrmann Boulevard landfill in Buffalo Harbor, not the "Niagara Falls area"; 2) it was sent to Ludlow Griscom, whose opinion was that it was "probably" a "Kumlien's Gull", as noted in *Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region* (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965: 244), not just "identified as *L. glaucoides kumlieni*"; 3) the gull collected in 1957 that I stated was "almost identical in size and coloration" to the 1945 bird (Andrle 1969) was secured along the Niagara River at Squaw Island, not "the same area" as the 1945 specimen. This 1957 specimen was considered a probable Kumlien's or Iceland Gull, albeit a dark individual, from our extensive field experience on the Niagara River with these gulls, not solely from the also dark 1945 specimen. At that time, we had no other first year plumage Iceland specimens on hand and had not yet compared ours with the

Canadian museums' specimens; and 4) my 1969 paper referred only to *Larus argentatus thayeri*, not to *Larus thayeri*, because it was before the American Ornithologists' Union recognized Thayer's Gull as a species. Consequently, my paper used "Thayer's" Gull only in quotes in the title, and the word "form" to refer to it as *L. a. thayeri*, a subspecies of the Herring Gull. Thus, all specimens referred to in my paper were considered by us (including W.E. Godfrey) at that time to be *L. a. thayeri* from comparing them to specimens in the Royal Ontario Museum and the National Museum of Canada. Banks and Browning's statement that "After Thayer's Gull was recognized as a species, those specimens were considered to be the first records of *Larus thayeri* for the Niagara Frontier region" is incorrect. We did not re-identify them subsequently as *L. thayeri*. Thus, their question why "if the first was Thayer's Gull after 1973" is not correct, and then their following query why "it was not identified as *L. argentatus thayeri* originally" is also in error, as we did conclude that the first specimen was that subspecies after Griscom's first determination of it. Of course, further research could lead to changes in previous determinations of specimens, particularly birds in their first year plumage.

I hope that the stimulating discussions, speculations and papers by both birders and taxonomists on *L. thayeri* will eventually lead to a resolution of the problem. Perhaps a solution to it will come from genetic research. More investigation in the northern gull colonies may help as I suggested in my 1977 paper on "Gulls on the Niagara Frontier" (*The Kingbird* 27: 134-188). A pilot birder friend and I discussed such an endeavor in the 1970s by planning to use an amphibious aircraft, combined with other means, in order to cover more area and examine more gull colonies from Greenland across the Canadian Arctic archipelago than have heretofore been studied.

Robert F. Andrie
Eden, NY

Crows Preening

During February 1999, I watched the courtship of our local pair of crows. I did not see the dramatic "aerial gyrations of diving and wheeling" described by A.G. Gross in Bent's (1946) *Life Histories of North American Jays, Crows and Titmice*. Rather, the courtship con-

sisted of the pair sitting side by side on the branches of the big American Elm and Silver Maple trees that form the backdrop of our yard. Perhaps the pair bond was so well established that this pair skipped the aerobatics.

However, on 22 February 1999, while watching the pair in full view on the branch closest to our house (and using 8X40 binoculars), I saw an example of courtship preening. The behaviour was initiated by (what I took to be) the female. She bowed her head until her beak was between her legs, thus presenting the back of her head to her mate. He then preened the back of her head, hind neck and upper back. They stayed on the same limb for about 15 minutes, and the performance was repeated several times. The female did not preen the male.

It is impossible for a bird to reach the back of its head for preening. However, judging by the time of year and the close association of the two birds, I am sure that what I was watching was courtship behaviour and a way of strengthening the pair bond.

George Fairfield
Toronto, Ontario