

ONTARIO BIRDS

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JOURNAL OF THE ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) is dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario

OFO was 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 this journal (*Ontario Birds*); operates a bird sightings listserv (ONTBIRDS), coordinated by Mark Cranford; hosts field trips throughout Ontario; and holds an Annual Convention and Banquet in the autumn. Current information on all OFO activities is on the OFO website (www.ofo.ca), coordinated by Doug Woods. Comments or questions can be directed to OFO by e-mail (of@of.o.ca).

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 found on the OFO website. All members receive *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News*.



Ontario Field Ornithologists

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Ontario Bird Records Committee Report for 2016

Mike V.A. Burrell, Barbara N. Charlton and Kenneth G.D. Burrell

Introduction

This is the 35th annual report of the Ontario Bird Records Committee (hereafter ‘OBRC’ or ‘Committee’) of the Ontario Field Ornithologists. The OBRC reviews rare bird reports in Ontario based on documentation that has been submitted by the birding community. Species and subspecies evaluations are based on the Review Lists for Ontario, which can be found on the OFO website (www.ofo.ca). Any new species, subspecies or first breeding records for Ontario are also reviewed. This report deals with the review of 191 records by the OBRC in 2016, of which 161 (84%) were accepted. All reports reviewed by the 2016 Committee will be added to the permanent file kept at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM).

The members of the 2016 Committee were Kenneth G.D. Burrell (chair), Mike V.A. Burrell (non-voting secretary), Barbara N. Charlton (non-voting assistant to the secretary), William J. Crins, Timothy B. Lucas, Paul D. Pratt, Donald A.

Sutherland, Joshua D. Vandermeulen and Ross W. Wood (Figure 1). Mark K. Peck acted as the ROM liaison for the OBRC.

Changes to the Checklist of Ontario Birds

Two new species were added to the Ontario list, bringing the total to 496 species. These species were Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) and Grace’s Warbler (*Setophaga graciae*).

Changes to the Review Lists

Beginning with the 2014 report (Burrell and Charlton 2015), the OBRC split the province into three review zones. See Holden (2014) for more details.

No new species were added to the Lowlands Review List, leaving the total number of species recorded in this review zone at 331.

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) was added to the Central Review List following acceptance of the first record for the region; this addition brings the total number of species recorded in this review zone to 383. Beginning in 2017, reports



Figure 1: Ontario Bird Records Committee for 2016. Left to right (standing): Donald A. Sutherland, William J. Crins, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, Ross W. Wood, Timothy B. Lucas. Left to right (sitting): Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Mike V.A. Burrell, Barbara N. Charlton. (Absent: Paul D. Pratt) Photo: Barbara N. Charlton.

of Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) in the Central Review Zone are no longer requested, based on a documented pattern of occurrence and a vote by the Committee. Reports prior to 2017 are still requested for review.

Beginning in 2017, reports of Glossy Ibis, Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) and Kirtland's Warbler (*Setophaga kirtlandii*) in the South Review Zone are no longer requested, based on more than twenty records occurring in the previous five years and a vote by the Committee. Reports prior to 2017 are still requested for review. Also, beginning in 2017, reports of Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*) and Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) in the South Review Zone are now requested for review, as

both species have occurred fewer than the allotted threshold in the previous five years. Both species new to Ontario, as listed above, were recorded in the South Review Zone, bringing the total number of species recorded in this review zone to 486.

No changes were made to the Subspecies Review List or the list of species known to have bred, leaving the total number of breeding species at 290.

Listing of Records

For accepted records and records for which the identification was accepted but the origin is questionable, the following information is provided where known: year and date(s) of occurrence, location, number of birds, plumage and sex of each

individual, names of contributors and OBRC file number. For accepted records, the total number of records for the province (including 2016 reports) is indicated in parentheses after the species name. All contributors who have provided reports are listed; if a contributor is also a finder of the bird(s), their name is underlined. Additional finders of the bird(s) are also listed, where known, even if they did not provide documentation for review. Place names in italics refer to the county, regional municipality or district in Ontario. Common and scientific names, as well as taxonomy, follow the seventh edition of the Check-list of North American Birds published by the American Ornithologists' Union (1998), along with its annual supplements published in *The Auk: Ornithological Advances*, up to the 57th supplement (Chesser *et al.* 2016) inclusive.

Plumage terminology follows that of Humphrey and Parkes (1959). For a detailed explanation of plumage and molt terminology, see Pittaway (2000). Beginning in 2017, plumage terminology will follow a modified Humphrey and Parkes (1959) system following Howell (2010); regular contributors are encouraged to begin using this system with submissions to the committee.

All records that were not accepted due to either insufficient evidence or questionable origin have been listed separately. Contributors of all "not accepted" records are notified in writing by the Committee. Reasons for the decision are explained, using information provided by voting members on their voting slips. Any "not accepted" record can be reconsidered

by the OBRC if new or additional documentation is provided.

All documentation provided to the OBRC is permanently archived at the ROM. Researchers and other interested parties are welcome to examine any of this material evidence, by appointment. Please contact Mark Peck in writing at Department of Natural History, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2C6, by email at markp@rom.on.ca or by telephone at 416-586-5523. Over the past several years volunteers have been working to digitize the OBRC rare species documentation.

Acknowledgements

The OBRC appreciates the efforts of the 214 observers who took the time to submit documentation of rare birds for consideration by the 2016 Committee. We also thank the following people who assisted the Committee in the acquisition of additional data and other material evidence that supplemented the information submitted directly by observers and Committee members, or by providing expert opinions on material evidence submitted to the Committee: Peter Adriaens, David M. Bell, David Brinkman, Peter S. Burke, Glenn Coady, Willie D'Anna, Bruce M. Di Labio, Christian A. Friis, Marcel Gahbauer, Jean Iron, Alvaro P. Jaramillo, Tony Leukering, Stuart A. Mackenzie, Leonard P. Manning, Kevin McLaughlin, Shaibal Mitra, Jim Pawlicki, Ron Pittaway, Peter Pyle, Brian D. Ratcliff, Michael L.P. Retter, Ron Ridout, Kayo J. Roy, Jon P. Ruddy, Jeff H. Skevington and Sara Jean Street.



Figure 2: Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at Hamilton, *Hamilton* on 13 July 2016. Photo: Barbara N. Charlton.

Accepted Records

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna autumnalis* (6)

- 2016 – five, definitive basic, 13 July, Hamilton, *Hamilton* (Eric W. Holden, Barbara N. Charlton, Joanne Redwood, Luc S. Fazio, J. Brett Fried; 2016-010)
– photos, video on file.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* (3)

- 2016 – one, definitive basic, 11 March, Wolfe Island, *Frontenac* (Mark D. Read, Justin White, found by Erwin Batalla, Paul Mackenzie; 2016-123) – photos on file.
– one, definitive basic, 31 October-7 November, Tayside, *Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry* (Brian L. Morin, Robert H. Curry; 2016-122) – photos on file.

The Tayside bird is almost certainly the same returning individual that furnished the first provincial record in 2015 (Burrell and Charlton 2016) as it appeared at the same location with large flocks of Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens*).

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* (2)

- 2015 – two, definitive basic, 3-4 May, Mohr Corners, *Ottawa* (Gary Milks, Arnie Simpson, Jamie Spence, Lacey Dolan, found by Richard Waters, Raymond P. Holland; 2016-145) – photos on file.

This record was originally considered by the 2015 Committee as record 2015-026 (Burrell and Charlton 2016) at which time the identification was accepted but its origin was considered unknown. Subsequently the record was resubmitted in accordance with section 6.5 of the OBRC operating guidelines. Burrell (*in prep*) is summarizing the status of this

species in northeastern North America. In light of the results of this summary, the Committee has decided there is now adequate evidence to suggest records of this species in southeastern Ontario should be assumed to constitute wild individuals, unless evidence to the contrary is presented.

“Bewick’s” Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* (4)

- 2016** – one, definitive basic, leucistic, 6-9 February, Shrewsbury, *Chatham-Kent* (Blake A. Mann, Andrew E. Keaveney, Lev A. Frid; 2016-008) – photos on file.
- one, definitive basic, 6-9 February, Shrewsbury, *Chatham-Kent* (Andrew E. Keaveney, Michael D. Williamson, found by Reuven D. Martin, Pilar Manorome; 2016-009) – photos on file.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Central and Lowlands only (75)

- 2016** – one, definitive alternate male, 12-17 June, South Porcupine, *Cochrane* (Roxane D. Filion, also found by Jeffrey B. Parnell, Gary T. Dowe; 2016-030) – photos on file.
- one, definitive alternate male, 3 November, Netitishi Point, *Cochrane* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen, also found by Todd R. Hagedorn; 2016-039) – photos on file.

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera* (17)

- 2016** – one, definitive alternate male, 11 June, Rainy River, *Rainy River* (David S. New, found by Mark K. Peck; 2016-020) – photos on file.

This is only the second provincial record since 2004, and the first since 2012.

“Eurasian” Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca crecca* (9)

- 2016** – one, definitive alternate male, 20 March, Townsend, *Haldimand* (Adam J. Triska; 2016-029) – photos on file.
- one, definitive alternate male, 19 April, Stoney Creek, *Hamilton* (Leonard P. Manning, Richard D. Poort; 2016-028).

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* Central and South only (25)

- 2016** – one, *dresseri*, basic female, 31 May-14 June, Oakville, *Halton* (Mark W. Jennings; 2016-026) – photos on file.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* Central and Lowlands only (30)

- 2015** – one, first basic male, 26 December, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Mike Childs, also found by Bruce Childs, Marion Childs; 2016-101) – photo on file.
- 2016** – one, basic, 12 October, Thunder Cape Bird Observatory, *Thunder Bay* (Mark H. Dorriesfield, also found by Kate Prince, Rinchen Boardman; 2016-064).
- three, basic, 30 October, Netitishi Point, *Cochrane* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen, also found by Todd R. Hagedorn; 2016-063) – photos on file.

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica* Central only after 2014 (66)

- 2012** – one, basic, 24 November, Cadigan Point, *Peterborough* (Donald A. Sutherland; 2016-091).



Figure 3: Pink-footed Goose with Snow Goose at Tayside, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry on 31 October 2016. *Photo: Brian L. Morin.*



Figure 4: Eurasian Wigeon at South Porcupine, Cochrane on 12 June 2016. *Photo: Roxane D. Filion.*



Figure 5: Common Eider *dresseri* at Oakville, Halton on 31 May 2016. *Photo: Mark W. Jennings.*

Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis* (48)

- 2016 – one, basic, 25 March-9 April, Port Credit, *Peel* (Dominik Halas, J. Brett Fried, Greg J. Lavery, found by Reuven D. Martin; 2016-189) – photos on file.
– one, basic, 3-8 December, Midland, *Simcoe* (Jean-Francois Robitaille, J. Burke Korol, David E. Szmyr, Barbara N. Charlton, Lucas J. Foerster, Peter S. Burke; 2016-188) – photos on file.

A Western Grebe has appeared in the west end of Lake Ontario each spring since 2006 (with the exception of 2008 and 2014), strongly suggesting a returning bird each year.

Western/Clark's Grebe *Aechmophorus* sp. (9)

- 2016 – one, basic, 11 November, Netitishi Point, *Cochrane* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2016-159).
– one, basic, 18 December, Toronto Islands, *Toronto* (Gavin C. Platt; 2016-053).

Shearwater sp. *Calonectris/Ardenna/Puffinus* sp. (1)

- 2016 – one, basic, 28-29 September, Hamilton, *Hamilton* (Robert H. Curry, Robert Z. Dobos, found by Barry S. Cherie; 2016-070).

The Committee felt that while the evidence provided was convincing that a shearwater was observed, the specific (or even generic) identity could not be established due to the distances involved and the brevity of the observation.

Frigatebird sp. *Fregata* sp. (5)

- 2016 – one, basic, 8 October, Pinery Provincial Park, *Lambton* (Kai A. Millyard; 2016-045).

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* (50)

- 2014 – one, definitive basic, 28 September, Netitishi Point, *Cochrane* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen, also found by Kory J. Renaud, Alan Wormington; 2016-075).
2015 – one, juvenal, 15 October, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (Erika K. Hentsch, J. Brett Fried; 2016-077).
2016 – one, juvenal, 29 October, Jockvale, *Ottawa* (Bruce M. Di Labio, found by unknown finder; 2016-076) – photo on file.

The *Ottawa* bird was picked up in a weakened condition and transferred to the Ottawa wild bird care centre.

Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* (16)

- 2016 – one, basic, 1 April-4 May, Stoney Creek (1 April and 2 May) and Hamilton (4 May), *Hamilton* (Robert H. Curry, found by Brandon R. Holden; 2016-109).
– one, basic, 13-14 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Robert L. Waldhuber, Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2016-110) – photos on file.
– one, second basic, 4-24 August, Windermere Basin, *Hamilton* (David I. Pryor; 2016-093).

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga* (5)

- 2016 – one, basic, 23 October, Woodbridge, *York* (Alfred L. Adamo; 2016-071).



Figure 6: Little Blue Heron at Wye Marsh, *Simcoe* on 25 May 2012. Photo: Catherine Lewis.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Central and Lowlands only (19)

- 2009** – one, basic, 10 July, North Whitetop Creek, *Cochrane* (Donald A. Sutherland, Samuel R. Brinker, also found by Colin D. Jones, Charles Latremouille, Bill Spiers; 2016-085) – photo on file.
- 2016** – one, basic, 3-11 September, Balmertown, *Kenora* (Devin Turner, also found by Danielle Gough; 2016-062) – photos on file.
- one, basic, 25 September, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Allan F. Gilbert; 2016-142).

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* Central and Lowlands only before 1991 and after 1996 (33)

- 1991** – one, definitive basic, 24-30 May, Beckwith (24 May) and Carleton Place (30 May), *Lanark* (Mike Jacques, found by Joyce Jacques; 2016-134).

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* (79)

- 2012** – one, definitive alternate, 25 May, Wye Marsh, *Simcoe* (Catherine Lewis; 2016-089) – photo on file.

Cattle Egret *Bulbulcus ibis* Central and Lowlands only (30)

- 2016** – one, definitive basic, 5-10 May, Kakabeka Falls, *Thunder Bay* (Curtis Craig, Samantha Krause; 2016-018) – photos on file.
- one, definitive basic, 14 July, Dinorwic, *Kenora* (Ellen M. Riggins, found by Peter Brunner; 2016-035) – photos on file.
 - one, basic, 17-24 October, Geraldton, *Thunder Bay* (Karen I. Donio, Joseph F. Donio; 2016-037) – photos on file.
 - one, definitive basic, 23 October, Sioux Lookout, *Kenora* (Debra L. Carter, found by Lois B. Gray; 2016-023) – photos on file.
 - one, basic, 30 October-11 November, Dinorwic, *Kenora* (Carolyn Bowman; 2016-036) – photo on file.

- one, basic, 9-11 November, Moose Factory, *Cochrane* (John V. Turner, also found by Linda Turner; 2016-024) – photos on file.

With six records, 2016 eclipses the previous high of four records in “northern” Ontario set in 2003 (Crins 2004).

Green Heron *Butorides virescens* Central and Lowlands only (12)

- 2016** – one, definitive basic, 5 July, Latchford, *Timiskaming* (David E. Szmyr; 2016-086).

Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Central and Lowlands only (12)

- 2016** – one, definitive basic, 4 June-18 July, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Glenn C. Stronks, found by Lindy Wagenaar; 2016-051).
 – one, definitive basic, 8 October, Little Pigeon Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Allan G. Harris; 2016-021).

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Central and Lowlands only after 2016 (76)

- 2011** – one, basic, 23 July-10 August, Lakeview Heights, *Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry* (Robert B. Scranton, Dawn Scranton, Jacques M. Bouvier, Paul R. O’Toole; 2016-144) – photos on file.
2016 – one, first basic, 13-16 October, New Liskeard, *Timiskaming* (Michael J. Werner; 2016-046) – photos on file.
 – one, first basic, 26-29 November, Port Hope, *Northumberland* (Gary Little, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, found by Delaney Anderson, Debbie Anderson; 2016-048) – photos on file.

The *Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry* bird was originally considered by the 2011 committee as record number 2011-038; at the time, the photos provided were insufficient to rule out White-faced Ibis, so the Committee accepted the record as *Plegadis* sp. only (Cranford 2012). New photographs provided by J. Bouvier leave no doubt as to the identity of the bird.

The *Timiskaming* bird becomes the first record outside southern Ontario.

The committee no longer requests documentation of this species in the Southern Review Zone.

Ibis species *Plegadis* sp. Central and Lowlands only after 2016 (76)

- 2015** – one, basic, 28 April, Turkey Point, *Norfolk* (Erika K. Hentsch, also found by J. Brett Fried, Barbara N. Charlton; 2016-128).
2016 – one, basic, 26 August, Caledonia, *Haldimand* (George M. Naylor; 2016-124).
 – one, juvenal, 15-18 September, Shirleys Bay, *Ottawa* (J. Michael Tate, Sue Milks, Jon P. Ruddy, found by unknown finder; 2016-127) – photos on file.
 – one, basic, 17-22 October, Holiday Beach, *Essex* (Sean M. Jenniskens; 2016-125) – photos on file.
 – one, basic, 12 November, Lindsay, *Kawartha Lakes* (Chris Ellingwood; 2016-126).



Figure 7: Glossy Ibis at New Liskeard, *Timiskaming* on 15 October 2016. Photo: Michael J. Werner.

Turkey Vulture *Colaptes aura* Lowlands only (1)

2016 – one, definitive basic, 14 July, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Ross W. Wood, also found by Ryan Burrell, Janine M. McManus; 2016-173).

Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis* (60)

- 2016** – one, first basic, 13-15 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Bruce M. Di Labio, Jon P. Ruddy, found by Jeremy M. Bensette, Tim R. Arthur; 2016-115)
– photos on file.
- one, definitive basic, 13-15 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Ron Ridout, found by G. Tom Hince; 2016-117).
 - one, first basic, 19-23 May, Port Colborne, *Niagara* (Kayo J. Roy, Marcie L. Jacklin, Liz Peters-MacDonald, Winnie W.M. Poon, J. Kit Liew, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, found by Blayne E. Farnan, Jean M. Farnan; 2016-119)
– photos on file.
 - one, first basic, 22 May, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Richard B. McArthur, found by unknown finder; 2016-118) – photo on file.
 - one, first basic, 28 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Paul D. Pratt, Stephen T. Pike; 2016-116) – photo on file.

The five records in 2016 make for 16 in just the past three years, a remarkable run for this species in the province.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni* (69)

- 2016** – one, definitive basic, light morph, 30 May, Boulevard Lake, *Thunder Bay* (Allan G. Harris, also found by Brian D. Ratcliff; 2016-153) – photos on file.
- one, juvenal, 21 October, Holiday Beach, *Essex* (Paul D. Pratt, found by Scott Dickson; 2016-138) – photo on file.
 - one, juvenal, 22 October, Renwick, *Chatham-Kent* (Kenneth G.D. Burrell, also found by Brandon R. Holden, James G. Burrell; 2016-139).
 - one, juvenal, 22 October, Holiday Beach, *Essex* (Sean M. Jenniskens; 2016-140) – photos on file.

Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinicus* (20)

- 1973** – one, definitive basic, 5-9 May, Rattray Marsh, *Peel* (Luc S. Fazio, also found by Donald E. Perks, John G. Keenleyside; 2016-099) – specimen in Canadian Museum of Nature.
- 2016** – one, definitive basic, 5 November, North Oshawa, *Durham* (Tyler L. Hoar, found by Charlene Daniels; 2016-100) – photo on file, specimen at ROM.



Figure 8: Purple Gallinule at North Oshawa, *Durham* found dead on 5 November 2016.

Photo: Tyler L. Hoar.



Figure 9: Common Ringed Plover at Toronto (Tommy Thompson Park), *Toronto* on 20 August 2016.

Photo: Jean Iron.

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* (19)

2016 – one, definitive basic female, 30 April-3 May, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Derek J. Lyon, Jeremy L. Hatt, Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Bruce M. Di Labio, J. Brett Fried, Erika K. Hentsch, also found by Jennifer L. Lyon; 2016-017) – photos on file.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (1)

2016 – one, definitive alternate male, 20-25 August, Toronto (Tommy Thompson Park), *Toronto* (Paul N. Prior, Jean Iron, Gavin C. Platt, Luc S. Fazio, Dominic Halas, A. Geoffrey Carpentier; 2016-027) – photos, videos on file.

A first for the province, this individual was enjoyed by many during its stay and was well-documented with videos capturing its call, in addition to being in prime plumage for visual identification.

Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* Central and Lowlands only after 2013 (90)

2015 – one, alternate male, 27 June, Windy Point, *Rainy River* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2016-097).

“White-rumped” Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus phaeopus/variegatus* (3)

1969 – one, basic, 24 May, Amherst Island, *Lennox and Addington* (Fred W. Cooke; 2016-161).



Figure 10: Ruff at Brighton, Northumberland on 11 May 2016. Photo: Joshua D. Vandermeulen.

Ruff *Calidris pugnax* South after 2013 only (5)

2016 – one, definitive alternate male, 9-12 May, Brighton, *Northumberland* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen, found by William D. Gilmour, Mark Ansell; 2016-130) – photos on file.

- one, definitive alternate male, 17 May, Hillman Marsh, *Essex* (Robert J. Cermak, Lee Collins; 2016-131) – photo on file.

Historically this species was a rare but regular spring vagrant in southern Ontario; however, observations of this species have declined dramatically over the last decade and subsequently it was added to the review list in 2013. These records represent the first since its inclusion on the southern review list.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* (32)

2016 – one, definitive alternate male, 11 August, Shegogau Creek, *Cochrane* (Ross W. Wood; 2016-133).

This is the first record for the province since 2012 (Cranford 2013) and only the second outside southern Ontario.

Willet *Tringa semipalmata* Central and Lowlands only (23)

2015 – one, basic, 5 June, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Brian J. Moore; 2016-166).

2016 – one, definitive alternate, 13 May, New Liskeard, *Timiskaming* (Michael J. Werner, also found by Serge M. Gendron, Mark W. Milton; 2016-167) – photos on file.

- one, basic, 22 August, Longridge Point, *Cochrane* (R. Douglas McRae, Liam D. Curson; 2016-168).



Figure 11: Thick-billed Murre at Muskrat Lake, *Renfrew* on 26 November 2016. *Photo: Kevin C. Hannah.*

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia* (4)

2016 – one, first basic, 25-28 November, Muskrat Lake, *Renfrew* (J. Burke Korol, Bruce M. Di Labio, Jacques M. Bouvier, Kevin C. Hannah, Richard E. Lauzon; 2016-150) – photos on file.

This adds Thick-billed Murre to the already impressive list of ocean-going birds documented for *Renfrew* and neighbouring *Lanark* counties, which includes Dovekie (*Alle alle*), Razorbill (*Alca torda*), Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*), Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*), Northern Gannet and Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – quite impressive when one considers the density of birders in the area!

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* Central and Lowlands only (10)

2016 – one, definitive alternate, 31 August, Longridge Point, *Cochrane* (Liam D. Curson, also found by Greg Stuart; 2016-184).

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* Central and Lowlands only (2)

2016 – one, definitive pre-basic molt, 11 November, Netitishi Point, *Cochrane* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2016-132).

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* South after 2015 only (2)

2016/17 – one, definitive basic, 3 December-4 February, Niagara-on-the-Lake (3 December), Niagara Falls (4 December-14 January), Thorold (17 January), and Port Weller (2-4 February), *Niagara* (Edward B. Poropat, Jean Iron, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, William C. D'Anna, Dean DiTommaso, found by Alex Wiebe, Augie Kramer, Eric Sibbald, Jeremy Collison, Max Kirsch, Read Barbee and Sarah Toner; 2016-082) – photos on file.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* Central only (3)

2016 – one, definitive basic, 16 October, New Liskeard, *Timiskaming* (Jonathan Frechette; 2016-047).



Figure 12: Franklin's Gull with Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* at Longridge Point, Cochrane on 31 July 2016. Photo: Barbara N. Charlton.

Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* Lowlands only (1)

2016 – one, second prebasic molt, 28 July-7 August, Longridge Point, *Cochrane* (Barbara N. Charlton, Jean Iron, found by Dan Froehlich; 2016-042) – photos, video on file.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* Lowlands only after 2016 (21)

2014 – one, juvenal, 11 October, Kapuskasing, *Cochrane* (Jeremy M. Bensette, also found by Alan Wormington, Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2016-111)
– photo on file.

2016 – one, definitive alternate, 22 April, Sharp Lake, *Timiskaming* (Michael J. Werner; 2016-113).

– one, definitive basic, 31 October, Netitishi Point, *Cochrane* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen, also found by Todd R. Hagedorn; 2016-112).

With the increasing frequency of sightings in the Central Review Zone, the OBRC no longer requests documentation within this zone.

Least Tern *Sternula antillarum* (6)

2013 – one, first basic, 20 September, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (J. Michael Tate, also found by Alan Wormington, Michael J. Nelson; 2016-068).

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* South and Central only (25)

2016 – one, second basic, 6 June, Ottawa (Britannia), *Ottawa* (J. Michael Tate; 2016-080).

– one, definitive alternate, 6 June, Ottawa (Britannia), *Ottawa* (Michelle A. Martin, also found by Mark A. Gawn, Paul A. Martin; 2016-081)
– photo on file.

– one, definitive alternate, 23 June-2 July, Cobourg, *Northumberland* (Clive E. Goodwin, Luke H. Berg, David I. Pryor; 2016-005) – photos on file.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (27)

- 2016** – one, definitive basic, 6 February–4 March, Earleton, *Timiskaming* (Serge M. Gendron, Donald A. Sutherland, Mike V.A. Burrell; 2016-034) – photos on file.
- one, definitive basic, 6 May, Peterborough, *Peterborough* (Donald A. Sutherland, also found by Lori Humphrey; 2016-059).
 - one, basic, 23 May–7 June, Niagara Falls, *Niagara* (Kayo J. Roy, found by Mark F. Doyle, Joan P. Doyle; 2016-003) – photos on file.
 - one, definitive basic male, 8 July–8 September, Guelph, *Wellington* (Mike Lepage, Dan J. MacNeal, Bonnie Kinder, Quinten Wieggersma, Charmaine Anderson, Barry Coombs, Erika K. Hentsch, J. Brett Fried; 2016-033) – photos on file.
 - one, basic, 9 September, Erie View, *Norfolk* (Kenneth G.D. Burrell; 2016-032).
 - two, definitive basic male and female, 10 October–17 November, Innisfil, *Simcoe* (Caleb H. Scholtens, David E. Szmyr, J. Burke Korol, also found by Peter Scholtens; 2016-031) – photos on file.

This species continues to increase in the province and confirmed nesting seems likely in the near future.

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* (58)

- 2015** – one, basic, 22-23 October, Long Point, *Norfolk* (J. Brett Fried, Erika K. Hentsch, also found by Mark A. Conboy, Ross W. Wood; 2016-162).
- one, basic, 23 October–5 November, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Clinton J. Kuschak, Brian D. Ratcliff, also found by Barbara J. Kuschak; 2016-179) – photos on file.
- 2016** – one, definitive basic male, 2 May–15 August, Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Stephen R. Charbonneau, Bruce M. Di Labio, J. Brett Fried, Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Glenn Coady, Mark S. Field, Jeremy L. Hart; 2016-176) – photos, audio on file.
- one, definitive basic male, 22 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Michael J. Nelson; 2016-169) – photo on file.
 - one, definitive basic, 25-30 May, Dorion, *Thunder Bay* (Norma J. Maurice, found by Jim Edmond, Dorothy Edmond; 2016-180) – photos on file.
 - one, definitive basic, 2 June, Schreiber, *Thunder Bay* (Peggy M.L. Campbell, Mark Campbell; 2016-177) – photo on file.
 - one, basic, 22 June, Atikokan, *Rainy River* (Darryl J. Warkentin; 2016-191) – photo on file.
 - one, definitive basic, 5 July, Ormond Beach, *Elgin* (Ron J. Kingswood; 2016-174) – photos on file.
 - one, definitive basic, 5-14 September, Dorion, *Thunder Bay* (Brian D. Ratcliff, found by Jack A. Mertens, Maureen Mertens; 2016-178) – photos on file.
 - one, basic, 1 November, Mission Island, *Thunder Bay* (Brian J. Moore; 2016-175).
 - one, basic, 3 November, Toronto, *Toronto* (Andrew E. Keaveney, Iain D.M. Fleming, Hugh G. Currie, Elias J. Takacs, found by Tim McCarthy, Ian Malone; 2016-170) – photos on file.

This species continues to increase at an impressive rate and may soon reach numbers warranting its removal from either/both of the Southern and Central Review lists; something that would have seemed unthinkable just a few years ago.

Black-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus* **Lowlands only (2)**

2016 – one, basic male, 14 August, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Donald A. Sutherland, also found by Barbara N. Charlton, Ron Ridout, Jean Iron; 2016-054).

Chuck-will's-widow *Antrostomus carolinensis* **(36)**

2015 – one, male, 12 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Timothy B. Lucas, found by Will Weber; 2016-019).

– one, male, 18 May-30 June, South Bay, *Prince Edward* (Kevin Empey, Aaron Hywarren, found by John Blaney; 2016-025) – audio on file.

The *Prince Edward* bird marks the fourth consecutive year a singing male has been observed at this location (Holden 2014, Burrell and Charlton 2015 and 2016), strongly suggesting it is the same bird returning each year.

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus* **(31)**

2015 – one, first basic female, 30 September-9 December, Roseneath, *Northumberland* (Carolyn Smoke, M. Elizabeth Kellogg; 2016-002)
– photos on file.

Lewis's Woodpecker *Melanerpes lewis* **(10)**

2016 – one, basic, 9 June, Gravel, *Thunder Bay* (Malcom Boon, Shirley Boon; 2016-069) – photos on file.

Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway* **(4)**

2016 – one, definitive basic, 28 November-5 December, Michipicoten River, *Algoma* (Chris Eagles, Luc S. Fazio, Kai A. Millyard, Jeremy L. Hatt, Mark S. Field, Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2016-057) – photos, video on file.

This species appears to be increasing in frequency in northeastern North America with records from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Michigan, all since 2014 (eBird 2017). The Michigan record likely pertains to the same individual observed in Ontario, due to details of feather wear and lack of overlap in dates. The same may be true of the Wisconsin record.

Prairie Falcon *Falco mexicanus* **(4)**

2016 – one, juvenal, 26 July-11 August, Longridge Point (26 July and 6 August) and Little Piskwamish Point (1, 2, 10, 11 August), *Cochrane* (Barbara N. Charlton, Jean Iron, found by Dan Froehlich; 2016-098) – photos on file.

This follows another record at the same location and similar time of year (Holden 2014), suggesting that this species may be a somewhat regular vagrant to the area coinciding with fall shorebird migration.



Figure 13: Rufous Hummingbird at Roseneath, Northumberland on 24 November 2015. *Photo: Carolyn Smoke.*



Figure 14: Crested Caracara at Michipicoten River, Algoma on 30 November 2016. *Photo: Joshua D. Vandermeulen.*



Figure 15: Prairie Falcon at Longridge Point, Cochrane on 6 August 2016. *Photo: Barbara N. Charlton.*

Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya* (20)

2014 – one, first basic, 22 September, Pays Plat, *Thunder Bay* (Alan Wormington; 2016-001) – photo on file.

2016 – one, first basic, 19 September, Sibley Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Jennifer A. Lane, also found by Brian J. Moore; 2016-141) – photos, video on file.

Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus* (7)

2016 – one, alternate male, 11 July, New Carlow, *Hastings* (Judy I. Robinson, also found by Eduard Hovinga; 2016-158).

Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens* (13)

2016 – one, alternate, 8 May, Thunder Bay (McKellar Island), *Thunder Bay* (John M. Woodcock, also found by Maureen E. Woodcock; 2016-006) – photos on file.

This is just the second record outside Southern Ontario, the first being at Thunder Cape, *Thunder Bay* on 26 April 2006 (Crins 2007).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus* (76)

2016 – one, definitive alternate, 7 May, north of Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Gordon J. Atkins, also found by Marie Ostrander, Ruben Marchena; 2016-143) – photos on file.

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus* **Central and Lowlands only** (13)

2016 – one, first alternate, 19 May, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (A. Gregg Kendall; 2016-090) – photo on file.

Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva* **South pre 2010 and post 2015 only** (65)

2016 – one, basic, 20 November, Holiday Beach, *Essex* (Jeremy L. Hatt, Marianne B. Balkwill; 2016-043).

– one, first basic, 1-2 December, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (Mark A. Conboy, Eric Giles; 2016-055) – photo on file.

This species continues to be irregular in the province. As such, the OBRC has adopted a special policy for dealing with records of this species whereby documentation will not be required during irruption years (see OBRC operating guidelines on the OFO website for details).

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus* **Central and Lowlands only** (7)

2016 – one, basic, 8 October-8 December, New Liskeard, *Timiskaming* (Joanne C. Goddard, Michael J. Werner; 2016-022) – photos on file.

Mountain Bluebird *Sialia currucoides* (43)

2016 – one, first basic male, 8 November, Dyer's Bay, *Bruce* (Michael T. Butler; 2016-074) – photos on file.

– one, basic female, 14 November, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Todd R. Hagedorn, Joshua D. Vandermeulen; 2016-073).

Townsend's Solitaire *Myadestes townsendi* Lowlands only after 2016 (86)

- 2015/16** – one, basic, 30 December-6 January, Leaside, *Toronto* (Owen Strickland, David D. Beadle, David I. Pryor, Greg Stuart, Howard S. Shapiro, Noam Markus; 2016-187) – photos on file.
- 2016** – one, basic, 21 January, Ottawa, *Ottawa* (Mario Botros; 2016-079).
– one, first basic, 6 February, Long Mountain, *Leeds and Grenville* (Justin F.B. Peter; 2016-155) – photo on file.
– one, first basic, 26 April, Rattray Marsh, *Peel* (Sophie Matta; 2016-156) – photos on file.

The species has a long and well-documented pattern of occurrence in southern Ontario and as such, the Committee has voted to remove it from the South Review List, effective 1 January 2017.

Smith's Longspur *Calcarius pictus* Central and South only (6)

- 2016/17** – one, first basic female, 17 December-9 January, Port Royal, *Norfolk* (Ron Ridout, A. Geoffrey Carpentier, also found by Adam P. Timpf, Matt T. Timpf; 2016-148) – photos on file.

Swainson's Warbler *Limnothlypis swainsonii* (11)

- 2016** – one, basic, 14 May, Cambridge, *Waterloo* (William G. Wilson, Jerry Guenther, J. Brett Fried; 2016-154).

Amazingly, this is the second record for *Waterloo*. Even more amazing — the first record was found at the same location by the same observer — on 6 May 1982 (Cranford 2012).

Kirtland's Warbler *Setophaga kirtlandii* Central and Lowlands only after 2016 (75)

- 2016** – one, first alternate male, 9 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Timothy B. Lucas, found by Michael P.J. Bouman; 2016-106) – photos on file.
– one, first alternate male, 9 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (John R. Carley, Victoria L. Carley, Garth V. Riley, Nancy L. Barrett, Bruce M. Di Labio; 2016-107) – photos on file.
– one, definitive alternate male, 11-12 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Marvin C. Medelko, Kenneth G.D. Burrell, also found by Janet M. Medelko; 2016-104) – photo on file.
– one, alternate male, 12 May, Oakville, *Halton* (Dominik Halas; 2016-103) – audio on file.
– one, alternate female, 12 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Robert L. Waldhuber, Sarah Lamond, Bruce M. Di Labio; 2016-105) – photos on file.
– one, alternate male, 17 May, Inverhuron Provincial Park, *Bruce* (Robert N. Taylor, also found by Anne-Marie Benedict; 2016-102).
– one, first alternate female, 24 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Cory Chiappone, found by Alan Wormington; 2016-108) – photos on file.

This species shows no signs of decreasing in the province and the OBRC has accepted two records in the past five years (with additional reports undocumented), meeting the

threshold for removal from the South Review List. In addition to the numerous reports, recent research suggests that a large proportion of the Michigan population passes through and stops over in central Ontario during fall migration (Cooper *et al.* 2017).

“Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata auduboni* (21)

2015/16 – one, first basic, 28 November-12 March, East York, *Toronto* (Margaret J. Catto, John Catto; 2016-014) – photos on file.

2016 – one, basic, 5 February-2 March, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Jeremy L. Hatt, Blake A. Mann, found by Jeremy M. Bensette; 2016-011) – photos on file.

– one, alternate male, 16-22 April, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Jeremy L. Hatt, Blake A. Mann, Mike D. Williamson, found by Emma Buck; 2016-012) – photos on file.

– one, alternate male, 16 April, Sarnia, *Lambton* (Deryl D. Nethercott; 2016-015) – photos on file.

– one, alternate female, 1 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Dan J. MacNeal, also found by Paul K. MacNeal; 2016-013) – photos on file.

Prior to 2016, the most records in a single year was two, occurring in five different years.

Grace’s Warbler *Setophaga graciae* (1)

2016 – one, first alternate male, 4 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (William C. D’Anna, Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Timothy B. Lucas, Joseph Minor; 2016-060) – photos on file.

This bird represents the first record for the province. The species was certainly on many birders’ radar but it was still rather unexpected as there are only two previous records in eastern North America (Illinois and New York) and none previously in Canada (eBird 2017).



Figure 16: “Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler at Sarnia, *Lambton* on 16 April 2016.

Photo: Deryl D. Nethercott.



Figure 17: Grace's Warbler at Point Pelee National Park, Essex on 4 May 2016. Photo: William C. D'Anna.



Figure 18: Black-throated Gray Warbler at Blenheim, Chatham-Kent on 12 December 2016. Photo: Stephen R. Charbonneau.



Figure 19: Townsend's Warbler at Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent on 2 June 2016. Photo: Stephen R. Charbonneau.

Black-throated Gray Warbler *Setophaga nigrescens* (20)

2016 – one, basic male, 12 December, Blenheim, Chatham-Kent (Keith J. Burk, Stephen R. Charbonneau; 2016-072) – photos on file.

With six records, December is the most frequent month of occurrence for this species in the province.

Townsend's Warbler *Setophaga townsendi* (10)

2016 – one, definitive alternate male, 2 June, Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent (Stephen R. Charbonneau, Kenneth G.D. Burrell; 2016-157) – photos on file.

Henslow's Sparrow *Ammodramus henslowii* (47)

- 2016 – one, definitive basic, 5-7 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Kenneth G.D. Burrell, also found by James G. Burrell, G. Carol Gregory; 2016-121).
– one, basic, 26 May, Point Pelee National Park, *Essex* (Michael Austin; 2016-065).



Figure 20: “Gray-headed” Dark-eyed Junco at Pinery Provincial Park, *Lambton* on 18 May 2016.
Photo: A. Beverley Rock.

“Gray-headed” Dark-eyed Junco

Junco hyemalis caniceps (4)

- 2016 – one, definitive alternate male, 18 May, Pinery Provincial Park, *Lambton* (A. Beverley Rock, also found by B. Dennis Rock; 2016-061) – photo on file.

This is an extremely rare subspecies in the east, with only a single record outside Ontario, *per* eBird (2017), east of the Mississippi River, so it is somewhat surprising that Ontario now has four records. All of the Ontario records fall within the period of 9-25 May, indicative of spring migrants (versus overwintering individuals).

Golden-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia atricapilla* (15)

- 2016 – one, definitive alternate male, 26-27 April, Burlington, *Halton* (Benjamin G. Oldfield, Robert H. Curry, David R. Don; 2016-049) – photo on file.

This becomes the earliest date for a spring migrant for this species in the province. Spring dates now span 26 April to 19 May, with the majority occurring in early May.

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculata* (29)

- 2016 – one, basic male, 7-22 February, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (Connie M. Lamothe; 2016-186) – photos on file.

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra* Central and Lowlands only (23)

- 2016 – one, first basic, 11-15 October, Hurkett, *Thunder Bay* (Kristen J. Spence; 2016-181) – photos on file.
– one, basic female, 31 October-7 November, Manitouwadge, *Thunder Bay* (Brian D. Ratcliff, found by Michel E. Begin, Kris Begin; 2016-136) – photo on file.
– one, first basic female, 7 November-4 December, Rosspoint, *Thunder Bay* (Colleen M. Kenney; 2016-183) – photos on file.

Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana* (47)

- 2016 – one, first alternate male, 14-18 May, Thunder Bay (McKellar Island), *Thunder Bay* (Maureen E. Woodcock, also found by John M. Woodcock; 2016-190) – photos on file.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* Lowlands only (1)

2012 – one, basic female, 30 September, Moosonee, *Cochrane* (Joshua D. Vandermeulen, also found by Alan Wormington, Mark W. Jennings; 2016-067).

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* (43)

2016 – one, definitive alternate male, 21-22 April, Horseshoe Bay, *Algoma* (Marguerite Waite; 2016-094) – photos on file.
– one, definitive alternate male, 11 June, Golden City, *Cochrane* (Christina L. Rigney; 2016-096) – photos on file.
– one, first basic, 12 September, Courtright Ridge, *Norfolk* (Kyle Cameron, also found by Sarah Bonnett, Bruce Harlow; 2016-095) – photos on file.

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus* Lowlands only (2)

2015 – one, first basic male, 5 October, Fort Severn, *Kenora* (James Janzen; 2016-016) – photo on file.

Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius* Central and Lowlands only (13)

2015 – one, definitive alternate male, 23-24 May, Dryden, *Kenora* (Barbara A. Nickel, Angela Massey; 2016-078) – photos on file.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* (9)

2016/17 – one, first basic, 5 December-18 March 2017, Brockville, *Leeds and Grenville* (Brenda L. Evers, V. Paul Mackenzie, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, also found by Ronald W. Evers; 2016-052) – photos on file.

This bird was seen 5 December at the first location in Brockville and then was rediscovered at a second location 14 February, reappearing there again on 9-18 March.



Figure 21: Orchard Oriole at Dryden, *Kenora* on 23 May 2015. Photo: Barbara A. Nickel.



Figure 22: Brambling at Brockville, Leeds and Grenville on 12 March 2017. Photo: Paul Mackenzie.



Figure 23: Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch showing intermediate characteristics between *tephrocotis* and *littoralis* subspecies at Ear Falls, Kenora on 4 February 2016. Photo: Carolle D. Eady.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch *Leucosticte tephrocotis* (26)

- 2015** – one, basic, *littoralis*, 17-20 December, Stepstone, *Thunder Bay* (James F. Brewer, also found by Lorena Brewer; 2016-185) – photos on file.
- 2016** – one, first basic male, *littoralis/tephrocotis* intergrade, 13 January-21 February, Ear Falls, *Kenora* (Carolle D. Eady, found by Kenneth A. Kay, Dorothy M. Kay; 2016-084) – photos on file.

Not Accepted Records: Identification Accepted, Origin Questionable

Birds in this category are considered by the OBRC to be correctly identified but their origin is questionable. Over time, some instances involve birds that have a high certainty of previous captive origin, whereas some records placed in this category have caused considerable debate among past voting members. If new evidence suggesting wild origin becomes available, such reports may be reconsidered by the OBRC.

- 2016** – Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*), one, definitive basic, 26 October, Elsinore, *Bruce* (Cindy E.J. Cartwright; 2016-165).
- European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), one, definitive alternate, 3-4 April, Chesterville, *Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry* (Jay Netherwood, also found by Elaine Smith; 2016-040) – photos on file.
 - European Goldfinch, one, basic, 16 December, Bailieboro, *Peterborough* (Cheryl L. Daniels; 2016-083) – photo.

Not Accepted Records: Insufficient Evidence

The documentation received for the following reports generally was found not to be detailed enough to eliminate similar species unequivocally or simply lacking enough detail to properly describe the individual. In many cases, OBRC members felt that the species being described was likely correctly identified by the observer but the report received for voting was simply too limited for acceptance. These circumstances sometimes arise from unavoidable situations such as poor viewing conditions or brevity of observation.

- 2006** – Swainson's Hawk, one, 15 July, McKerrow, *Sudbury* (2016-151).
- 2014** – Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), one, 25 May, Thunder Cape Bird Observatory, *Thunder Bay* (2016-164).
- 2015** – Harlequin Duck, one, 5 June, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (2016-087).
 – Neotropic Cormorant, one, 26 August, Long Point (Tip), *Norfolk* (2016-092) – photos on file.
 – Eurasian Collared-Dove, one, 9 November, Fort Frances, *Rainy River* (2016-044) – photo on file.
 – Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*), one, 7 May, Hamilton, *Hamilton* (2016-041).
 – Smith's Longspur, four, 16 October, Silver Islet, *Thunder Bay* (2016-149).
- 2016** – Anhinga, two, 20-21 May, Dundas, *Hamilton* (2016-004).
 – Little Blue Heron, one, 9 June, Etobicoke, *Toronto* (2016-088).
 – Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), one, 5 June, Walsingham, *Norfolk* (2016-172).
 – Swainson's Hawk, one, 14 September, Holiday Beach, *Essex* (2016-137).
 – Swainson's Hawk, one, 18 September, Uttoxeter, *Lambton* (2016-152).
 – Common Ringed Plover, one, 26 August, Port Burwell, *Elgin* (2016-056).
 – Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*), one, 21 October, Stromness, *Haldimand* (2016-146) – photos on file.
 – Western Sandpiper, one, 30 October, Netitishi Point, *Cochrane* (2016-160).
 – Lesser Black-backed Gull, one, 7 October, Timmins, *Cochrane* (2016-114) – photos on file.
 – Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*), one, 26 December, Thunder Bay, *Thunder Bay* (2016-147) – photos on file.
 – Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*), one, 4 September, Long Point, *Norfolk* (2016-129) – photos on file.
 – Eurasian Collared-Dove, one, 12-18 December, Kingston, *Frontenac* (2016-058) – photos on file.
 – Chuck-will's-widow, one, 19 May, Mississauga, *Peel* (2016-038).
 – Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*), one, 18 May, Long Point, *Norfolk* (2016-171).
 – Bell's Vireo, one, 27 May, Pinery Provincial Park, *Lambton* (2016-007).
 – “Pink-sided” Dark-eyed Junco (*J. h. mearnsi*), one, 10 October, Devlin, *Rainy River* (2016-120) – photos on file.
 – “White-winged” Dark-eyed Junco (*J. h. aikeni*), one, 27 September, Devlin, *Rainy River* (2016-163) – photos on file.
 – Golden-crowned Sparrow, one, 10 October, Mackey, *Renfrew* (2016-050) – photos on file.
 – Summer Tanager, one, 13-15 October, Marks Township, *Thunder Bay* (2016-182).
 – Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*), one, 17 May, Scarborough, *Toronto* (2016-066).

Corrections/Updates to Previous OBRC Reports

2015 report (*Ontario Birds* 34:50-81)

Under Pink-footed Goose change “Jacques M. Bouvier, Christopher J. Escott, Jeremy L. Hatt, David I. Pryor, David E. Szmyr, J. Michael Tate, Bruce M. Di Labio” to “Jacques M. Bouvier, Christopher J. Escott, Jeremy L. Hatt, David I. Pryor, David E. Szmyr, J. Michael Tate, Bruce M. Di Labio, Mark S. Field”.

Under Mottled Duck change “Jeremy L. Hatt, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, Jarmo V. Jalava, also found by Alan Wormington, Jeremy M. Bensette, Rick Mayos” to “Jeremy L. Hatt, Joshua D. Vandermeulen, Jarmo V. Jalava, also found by Alan Wormington, Jeremy M. Bensette, Rick Mayos” and change year to 2015.

Under “Eurasian” Green-winged Teal change “*Anas fulvigula*” to “*Anas crecca crecca*”.

Under Northern Gannet change the year to 2014.

Under Chuck-will’s-widow (2015-087) change “David R. Don, Cheryl E. Edgecombe” to “David R. Don, Cheryl E. Edgecombe, Robert Z. Dobos”.

Under Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (2015-111) change “*Kenora*” to “*Rainy River*”.

Under Western Kingbird change the year to 2012.

Under Vermilion Flycatcher change “*West Becher*” to “*Wallaceburg*”.

Under Fish Crow (2015-142) change “Nathan G. Miller, Garth V. Riley” to “Nathan G. Miller, Garth V. Riley, David I. Pryor”.

Under Kirtland’s Warbler (2015-055) change the last date to 15 May.

Under Henslow’s Sparrow (2015-030) change “Bryan Teat, Dan Riley, found by Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Richard Pope” to “Kenneth G.D. Burrell, Bryan Teat, Dan Riley, also found by Richard Pope”.

Under Painted Bunting (2015-058) change last date to 14 May.

Under Figure 17, change “Eleanor Kee Wellman” to “Joshua D. Vandermeulen”.



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The conservation of chimneys used by Chimney Swifts in London, Ontario, 2004 to 2015

Winifred Wake

Introduction

From 1970 to 2012, populations of Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) in Canada declined by 95%, the average annual decline in Ontario being 7.77% (North American Bird Conservation Initiative 2012, Environment Canada 2014). In 2007, the Chimney Swift was assessed as “Threatened” by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). The species was subsequently accorded the same assessment by the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO). In 2009, the Threatened designation became official under both Ontario and Canadian legislation to protect species at risk. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (2009) indicated that habitat of the Chimney Swift in Ontario was protected “from damage and destruction” and identified chimneys used by swifts as a component of their habitat. In June 2013, the provincial cabinet approved regulations that detailed new approaches for the Chimney Swift: protection of chimneys used by swifts

was exempted from legislative requirements, provided that certain conditions of compensatory mitigation were met (Government of Ontario 2013). A key component of the new regulations was that protection of chimneys and/or mitigation was to be proponent-led (i.e., it was up to the chimney owner to note the presence of swifts and to initiate and undertake mitigation if the owner intended to damage or destroy habitat). The current approach is described in Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (2017).

Chimney Swifts are present in Ontario from late April to early October. They nest and roost inside hollow shafts that have relatively low light levels and a rough interior surface to which they cling by their strong claws (Figure 1). In earlier times, swifts relied primarily on large-diameter hollow trees for nesting and roosting. With the arrival of European settlers, swifts began using built edifices, especially unlined brick chimneys, for these purposes. As old-growth forests and large, aging trees became less common,



Figure 1. Adult Chimney Swift clinging to a vertical brick surface, London, Ontario, 21 June 2015.

Photo: David Wake.

swifts increasingly came to depend on human-made structures. Swifts mate for life and return to the same chimney each year to nest — one pair per chimney (Kyle and Kyle 2005). Non-breeding individuals often spend the night in large communal roosts, particularly during migration.

A significant factor behind the decline of swifts is believed to be problems with the food supply — insects captured during flight. Following the post-war introduction of DDT (dichlorodiphenyl-trichloro-ethane), the structure of insect communities was substantially altered, a situation that did not reverse itself after DDT was banned in Canada in the 1970s (Nocera *et al.* 2012). Consequently, for many decades, swifts may have been surviving on a less-than-optimal diet. In more recent times, many other factors, including habitat loss, pesticide use, timing of peak insect abundance and extreme and changing weather patterns associated with climate change, may also be exacerbating the swifts' problems and contributing to the continued downward slide in numbers.

A scarcity of chimneys for nesting and roosting is often mentioned as a possible cause of population losses in swifts. Indeed, very few suitable chimneys have been built since the 1960s, while older chimneys are increasingly falling into states of disrepair or becoming victims of capping or demolition. A shortage of chimneys is, however, not limiting swift numbers in this province at present, with just 24.4% of apparently suitable chimneys being occupied by swifts (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2014). Nevertheless, Ontario's swifts

currently depend heavily on chimneys and will do so into the foreseeable future. Even as the stock of suitable chimneys dwindles, accommodation continues to be required by swifts occupying still-extant chimneys, swifts displaced from newly capped or demolished chimneys and recently paired young swifts. Retaining existing chimneys used by swifts (hereinafter called swift chimneys) may also reduce stress and increase productivity for established pairs.

It has been suggested that artificial swift towers might replace chimneys that are being lost. Yet, out of more than 60 such structures erected in five provinces, only a single heated shaft in Quebec was successful in attracting nesting swifts (Steeves *et al.* 2014). At least in the near future, it seems that preserving known swift chimneys is the most viable way to ensure availability of optimal nesting and roosting sites for Ontario swifts.

From 2004 to 2013, volunteers from Nature London (McIlwraith Field Naturalists) identified 162 active swift chimneys in London. The bulk of the search effort was carried out from 2007 to 2009, when 108 (67%) of the chimneys were discovered. In the quest to find active chimneys, no comprehensive survey of potential swift chimneys was undertaken. Nature London focused mainly on a sampling of business, institutional and industrial buildings. Chimneys on private residences and on many other types of buildings were not targeted for checks. Therefore, numerous additional London chimneys are likely also seasonally occupied by swifts.

During the second half of 2015, Nature London's Chimney Swift Liaison revisited the 162 chimneys referred to above to document their then-current status. Results are presented in Wake (2016) and are briefly summarized here. One hundred and fifteen chimneys (71%) were considered to be still suitable for occupancy by swifts. The remaining 47 chimneys (29%) had been capped or demolished (with approximately equal numbers experiencing each fate). Unfortunately, limitations in the assessment methodology made it difficult to determine whether some chimneys remained open or had been capped. Thus, the 29% loss of swift chimneys is likely an underestimate. Of 31 active chimneys found from 2004 to 2006, 16 (52%) remained available to swifts. Of 108 chimneys located from 2007 to 2009, 80 (74%) were accessible to swifts. For the 2010-to-2013 period, 19 (83%) of 23 chimneys could still accommodate swifts.

Realizing that old brick chimneys used by Chimney Swifts were disappearing from Ontario's built landscape, Nature London carried out several initiatives in the hope of helping to conserve these chimneys. Addresses of known swift chimneys were passed on to relevant agencies thought to be in a position to take action towards their preservation. Nature London undertook numerous educational outreach endeavours aimed at the general public. From 2007 to 2009, the club operated an appreciation and education program for owners of swift chimneys. When opportunities arose or when Nature London became aware that particular swift chimneys might face

demolition or other threats, representations were made to appropriate government and other authorities. This paper reports on the successes and failures of Nature London's efforts to promote the conservation of swift chimneys during the 12-year period from 2004 to 2015.

Methods

Beginning in 2004, Nature London began developing and refining protocols for detecting and monitoring chimneys used by Chimney Swifts in London. When Bird Studies Canada (BSC) launched Ontario SwiftWatch in 2010, London volunteers adopted BSC protocols, which varied slightly from those pioneered by Nature London. In general, with the targeted chimney silhouetted (if possible) against the northwest sky, a person on the ground carefully observed and noted all swift entries and exits during the 40-to-60-minute-period bracketing official sunset. Rarely were building owners or occupants aware their chimneys were being monitored. In conjunction with its program to identify and selectively monitor a sampling of London swift chimneys, Nature London undertook a number of initiatives whose ultimate goal was the protection of such chimneys. All swift-related activities were carried out under the auspices of the club's volunteer Chimney Swift Liaison. Chimney conservation efforts are described below, in four categories.

Sharing of data with relevant agencies

At regular intervals, data collected on the activity of swifts in London chimneys were forwarded to selected recipients.

These consisted of municipalities, agencies, organizations and other entities that were believed to have the potential to use the information in ways that would assist in the conservation of Chimney Swifts and/or the chimneys they were occupying. Addresses of swift chimney locations were forwarded to relevant employees at the City of London Planning Department (heritage or ecological planner), the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) in Aylmer (species-at-risk biologist), and the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) (species-at-risk biologist). The hope was that possession of knowledge of some London chimneys used by swifts might encourage these civil servants to act proactively if an issue or threat arose concerning any of the chimneys on the list. Nature London also regularly urged City of London officials to check all promising-looking chimneys (especially those not yet known to Nature London) for activity by swifts prior to issuing permits for demolition or alteration of older buildings. All chimney-monitoring data were submitted to Bird Studies Canada.

Education aimed at the general public

Nature London carried out a number of initiatives to inform the general public about local Chimney Swifts and their conservation needs. These efforts included reports, pamphlets, newspaper and magazine articles, materials posted on the Nature London website, PowerPoint presentations delivered to schools and community groups, guided walks in parts of the city where populations of swifts tended to be highest, displays set up in public spaces such as libraries and

neighbourhood fairs and provision of information on conservation of swifts. The hope was that greater community awareness of swifts, their needs and Threatened status would lead to better protection of swifts and their chimneys.

Recognition and education program for owners of swift chimneys

From 2007 to 2009, Nature London operated a stewardship program aimed at landlords (owners, managers or other representatives) of swift chimneys. In general, landlords chosen for contact were thought likely to be sympathetic to the concept of protecting Chimney Swifts on their premises. Two categories were particularly targeted: educational institutions (in the knowledge that environmental science was a component of their curriculum) and religious institutions (ones known to have an interest in environmental issues). Other landlords were selected on the basis of personal knowledge; for example a swift monitor was aware that her apartment superintendent would respond positively. In one case, a business owner who discovered a monitor observing his chimney was included in the stewardship program.

A representative of Nature London approached each selected landlord, advising of the presence of swifts in the chimney and explaining that the birds posed no health or fire hazard. It was suggested that it was an honour to provide accommodation for an unobtrusive but charismatic species whose numbers were in steep decline. Nature London then expressed the desire to present the business or institution with a framed certificate of appreciation for its contribution

to the conservation of the Chimney Swift. Almost all landlords responded positively, although a few chose not to participate. One business owner declined to accept a certificate because, although he was happy to accommodate swifts at that time, he did not wish to be embarrassed if he changed his mind later. His building has since been sold and demolished.

When feasible, a thank-you-certificate-presentation event was organized where a Nature London representative gave a five-minute talk about the conservation of swifts and left behind locally produced pamphlets about swifts. In addition, customized information about the owner's chimney and on how to be a good landlord to swifts was usually provided (e.g., information on chimney cleaning). Whenever it could be arranged, certificate-presentation events were held in the buildings in which the swift chimneys were located and with a number of people in attendance (e.g., during a gathering of staff, a church service, or a school assembly). Owners were encouraged to hang certificates in a highly visible or well-trafficked part of their premises.

Certificates were presented to 22 Chimney Swift landlords representing 38 chimneys. The locations of chimneys involved in the program fell into the following categories: high-rise apartments (2), businesses/offices (8), churches (10) and educational institutions (18). The duration of Nature London's landowner-contact program approximately coincided with the interval between the assessment of the Chimney Swift as Threatened in 2007 and the official designation in 2009. The program ended at a time when many Nature London initiatives for swifts

were being wound down to make way for expected new swift programs under the auspices of Bird Studies Canada. At that point, it was also anticipated that federal and provincial governments and other partners would soon be adopting strategies to protect the Chimney Swift and its habitat and that a recovery plan for the species would be in place by 2011.

Representations to government or other authorities

In an effort to protect known swift chimneys, Nature London made direct contact with head personnel at selected public institutions, and with elected federal, provincial and municipal officials, as well as with relevant employees. Sometimes the contact involved advocacy on behalf of swifts in general, and at other times on behalf of specific swift chimneys. An overview of such activities follows.

In the spring of 2013, a delegation from Nature London met with Deputy Premier Deb Matthews to urge strengthening rather than weakening of provincial legislation and regulations relating to the protection of the Chimney Swift and its habitat. Nature London made submissions to London City Hall and MNR (Aylmer office) when it learned that renovation, demolition or zoning changes were being considered for specific London buildings that were on record for harbouring swifts. In this manner, Nature London made representations (in writing, by telephone, and/or at public meetings) to the appropriate authorities on behalf of 16 swift chimneys after the Chimney Swift was officially designated as Threatened in 2009. In two of the 16 cases, the chimney had just been cut down and

capped when Nature London contacted MNR. For the other 14 chimneys, Nature London made representations, sometimes a number of times for a particular chimney, to authorities well before any action was taken to demolish or cap the chimney. Two examples are highlighted here. In 2009, the public was invited to make input regarding the future of the old London Psychiatric Hospital complex and grounds on Highbury Avenue, which was owned by Ontario Realty Corporation (later by Infrastructure Ontario). Because, at the time, the public was not permitted on the property at dusk, volunteers could not assess the chimneys for swift occupancy. Therefore, early in the process, at the urging of Nature London, a consultant was retained and the buildings investigated for use by swifts. In 2014, Nature London made representations to staff and elected officials at City Hall, as well as the CEO of a large public institution, which owned a building whose chimney annually harboured a successful swift nest and a significant fall roost of up to 250 birds. The case for preserving the chimney was also publicized in the print news media and on social media.

Results

During the 12-year period, Nature London was not aware that any of the government agencies with which it had shared swift data ever used such information to proactively protect a swift chimney. It was not possible to quantify the effectiveness of Nature London's diverse array of public outreach initiatives on behalf of Chimney Swifts. Generally,

however, in the cases of direct-contact activities (e.g., talks, walks, staffed displays, and responses to e-mailed inquiries), information seems to have been positively received.

Recognition and education program for owners of swift chimneys

Although owners were not specifically requested to do so, at the time of the certificate presentations most made voluntary verbal commitments to continue to maintain and protect their chimneys for future use by swifts. Information (as of late 2015) on the status of the 38 chimneys whose owners received framed certificates and stewardship information is presented in Table 1. Twenty-three chimneys (61%), representing 16 owners, remain intact and accessible to swifts. Of the other 15 chimneys (39%), seven were capped or taken down relatively soon after the certificate presentations (though one demolished chimney was subsequently replaced following intervention by Nature London with MNR). One institutional owner of eight chimneys demolished one a few years after receiving a certificate and capped five in the past few years, leaving just two of the original chimneys available to swifts. In at least a few cases, receipt of a certificate and educational materials caused some landlords to take better care of their chimneys and to ensure swifts continued to be accommodated; e.g., one owner refurbished a deteriorating chimney (Figures 2 and 3). Another continues to contact Nature London for advice relating to the timing and appropriateness of roof and chimney maintenance.



Figure 2. A swift chimney not long after a November 2009 certificate presentation, showing upper portion of the shaft in very poor condition, with missing mortar, loose bricks and lime deposits, London, Ontario, 21 April 2010.

Figure 3. The chimney in Figure 2, now externally clad in metal, emergent tile liner retained, annually used by nesting swifts, London, Ontario, 11 December 2015.

Photos: Winifred Wake.

Since all chimneys receiving certificates were identified in 2009 or earlier, it is instructive to examine the status, in 2015, of all 139 chimneys first identified during this period (Table 1). Forty-three (31%) of the 139 chimneys have been lost. For the 101 chimneys that were not recognized with certificates, 28% were lost compared to 39% (15 of 38) for chimneys whose owners received certificates.

Table 1. Status in 2015 of 139 London swift chimneys first identified in 2009 or earlier.

Total chimneys	Building demolished	Chimney cut down and capped	Chimney extant and capped	Chimneys (%) intact and available to swifts	Chimneys (%) unavailable to swifts
Certificate recipients (38)	2	5	8	23 (61%)	15 (39%)
Non-recipients of certificates (101)	5	8	15	73 (72%)	28 (28%)
All chimneys (139)	7 ¹	13 ²	23 ³	96 ⁴ (69%)	43 (31%)

¹ Three buildings including chimneys, one free-standing chimney, plus three free-standing silos, were razed to ground

² Chimney removed to approximately roof level and capped

³ Chimney covered in a way that renders it inaccessible to swifts (11 chimneys blocked by installation of visible metal superstructures, eight by flat metal coverings, two by wire mesh animal guards, and two blocked internally)

⁴ Includes one chimney that was demolished to roofline and later replaced; may include an unknown number of chimneys that are blocked internally

Table 2. Status in 2015 of 124 London swift chimneys identified from 2004 to 2013 whose owners did not receive thank-you certificates.

Total chimneys	Building demolished	Chimney cut down and capped	Chimney extant and capped	Chimneys intact and available to swifts	Chimneys unavailable to swifts
124	4	10	14	96 (77%)	28 (23% loss rate)

A look at the status of all swift chimneys identified from 2004 to 2013 reveals an even greater disparity in rate of loss between chimneys whose owners received certificates and those whose owners did not (Table 2). By 2015, of 124 chimneys whose owners did not receive certificates, 28 (23%) had been lost, compared to 15 of 38 chimneys (39%) whose owners had received certificates.

One positive long-term outcome of Nature London’s chimney-owner stewardship initiative is noteworthy. King’s University College, whose two active swift chimneys annually host a nesting pair and a large roost (up to 1600 swifts), respectively, has enthusiastically embraced the swift presence on campus. In addition to welcoming volunteer swift monitors, the college often serves as the release site for orphaned swifts raised by wildlife rehabilitation centres that specialize in the care of aerial insectivores (birds, including swifts, that feed by capturing insects on the wing). Dozens of hand-reared swifts from London-based Swift Care Ontario and elsewhere have

been released from the King’s University College rooftop adjacent to the roost chimney.

Representations to government or other authorities

Nature London has been unable to discern any positive actions to protect swifts or their chimneys as a result of its communications with elected municipal, provincial or federal officials. Nature London’s representations to civil servants yielded few positive results, with one notable exception. Before revised regulations were implemented in 2013, in two cases, Nature London contacted MNR (Aylmer) about chimneys that had just been cut down and capped. In the first instance, in the autumn of 2009, MNR compelled one owner, a certificate recipient aware of the implications of the swift’s Threatened status, to build a replacement structure above the original chimney shaft. In the second instance, however, a freshly capped swift chimney reported by Nature London to MNR in early August of 2011 remains capped.

Table 3. Status in 2015 of 14 London swift chimneys for which Nature London made early representations to the City of London and/or the Ministry of Natural Resources requesting they be protected (2009 or later).

Total chimneys identified	Building demolished	Chimney partly torn down and capped	Chimney extant and capped	Chimneys available to swifts	Chimneys unavailable to swifts
14	2	1	7	4 (29%)	10 (71% loss rate)



Figure 4. A swift chimney occupied annually by swifts during the nesting season, London, Ontario, 19 July 2007.



Figure 5. The chimney in Figure 4 after it was cut down and covered by the roof of the building, rendering the shaft inaccessible to swifts, London, Ontario, 12 December 2015.

Photos: Winifred Wake.

The status in 2015 of 14 chimneys for which Nature London made early requests for protection is shown in Table 3. Just four chimneys (29%) are currently available to swifts. A synopsis of the fates of the 14 chimneys follows. Two buildings, along with their chimneys, were razed prior to 2013, leaving behind empty spaces. One of these demolished chimneys was among five known swift chimneys located within a defined city planning area; the remaining four chimneys will likely be protected. One chimney was cut down to roof level and the roof extended over it (Figures 4 and 5). One chimney reported as “extant and capped” has since been demolished (2016), with the owner, at Nature London’s urging, undertaking voluntary reporting to provincial authorities and follow-up mitigation. Six other capped chimneys are located on the old London Psychiatric Hospital infirmary. Identified

as active swift chimneys during the summer of 2009, they were capped prior to the 2010 nesting season and remain so.

Discussion

It will require a stronger commitment from political leaders or government officials before the conservation of swifts and their chimneys becomes a higher priority for civil servants. Nature London remains hopeful that 13 years of London swift-monitoring data submitted to Birds Studies Canada will help to inform conservation action on behalf of the Chimney Swift.

While their effectiveness cannot be quantified, outreach activities directed towards the general public have been considered to be useful, even though London’s stock of swift chimneys continues to dwindle. It might have proved more productive, however, to have also targeted specific audiences that may hold more

potential for actual action to conserve chimneys. Included among these are home and commercial building renovators, brick layers, stone masons, chimney cleaners, furnace installation and maintenance companies, and planners, consultants and others who facilitate zoning changes and/or building alterations and demolitions. Groups interested in historic buildings and architectural heritage, and business and community associations in older urban areas might also have been receptive to learning about Chimney Swifts and their conservation needs.

Recognition and education program for owners of swift chimneys

The higher rate of loss of viable swift chimneys on buildings whose owners received certificates invites attempts at explanation. Given the relatively small number of chimneys involved, the difference might be random. It is also possible the result was influenced by the fact that more than half the chimneys lost had just two owners or by an inherent bias in the selection of swift landlords. For the most part, chimneys in the certificate program were located on buildings that were well maintained, while many chimneys whose owners did not receive certificates were found on less-well-maintained buildings. The lower rate of capping or demolition for less-well-maintained buildings might be an artefact of neglect.

It is useful to reflect on other possible reasons why landowner recognition seems to be associated with higher losses of swift chimneys and to identify weaknesses in the program that might be

addressed in any future undertakings of this sort. Prior to contact by Nature London, almost all owners of swift chimneys were unaware they were harbouring swifts. Upon so learning, some welcomed or tolerated the swifts, while others took action to exclude them. It is assumed that owners of swift chimneys not contacted by Nature London were equally likely to be oblivious to the presence of swifts in their chimneys. In the absence of such knowledge, they would, by definition, not take action to eliminate any birds using chimneys from their premises.

Given that Nature London took considerable care to try to contact only landlords whom it had reason to believe would exhibit positive attitudes towards swifts, the results of the certificate program are particularly disappointing. Had Nature London contacted additional landlords who were considered more likely to react negatively to news of birds in their chimneys, it is possible the chimney-loss rate associated with the landowner-contact program might have been even higher.

When certificates were presented, efforts were made, as much as possible, to ensure they were given to the actual owner or CEO of the institution or business. The hope was that buy-in at the top level would be more likely to ensure cooperation from other arms of an organization. Within a relatively short time, Nature London discovered that this expectation did not necessarily hold. In the case of two large institutions that each owned a number of chimneys, the club learned that facilities management personnel did not agree with having

swifts in chimneys, and their views tended to prevail. One CEO, who had been very positive about accepting a certificate and committing to chimney conservation a short time earlier, when contacted about a pending swift chimney demolition, indicated he had no interest in or jurisdiction over building maintenance issues.

The most frequent reason for the later loss of chimneys owned by certificate recipients related to furnace upgrades to improve energy efficiency, which resulted in a lined and capped chimney. Some unused and/or unstable chimneys were cut down and capped. Some chimneys were demolished to make way for urban renewal. One chimney was covered with wire mesh to keep out raccoons and squirrels, while another was covered specifically to exclude swifts. Most of these losses occurred after the Chimney Swift was designated as Threatened.

From 2007 to 2009, when Nature London's chimney-owner contact program was in operation, swift chimneys had not yet acquired protection under species-at-risk legislation. Thus, when volunteers approached swift chimney landlords, they were trading totally on their ability to generate lasting goodwill from owners towards swifts. Although Nature London advised swift landlords of the pending designation of the Chimney Swift as Threatened, it had no incentives to offer, no authority to require long-term cooperation from owners and no possibility of back-up enforcement from government officials.

A very significant shortcoming of the Nature London chimney-owner contact program was a lack of follow-up. Annual contact (e.g., providing updated information on swift presence and protection policies, advice as needed, and perhaps opportunities for people frequenting the building to actually see swifts) might have helped keep owner interest and commitment high. Two owners that maintain regular contact with Nature London (for different reasons) continue to be committed to preserving their chimneys for swifts.

Nature London's owner-contact program was conceived and delivered entirely by volunteers. The program was very time consuming to operate and, even if there had not been other reasons for terminating it in 2009, it is unlikely it could have been sustained indefinitely by volunteer labour. Nature London was disappointed that, after its chimney-owner contact program ended, no other player picked up the ball on any similar project. No recovery plan or strategy has yet been unveiled.

In the years following the official designation of the Chimney Swift as Threatened in September 2009, had there been a consistent, effective program of enforcement by provincial authorities, it is possible Nature London's initial two-year-long effort to preserve swift chimneys through landowner contact might have yielded more positive long-term results. For example, later in the fall of 2009, a certificate recipient, aware of the protection recently afforded the Chimney Swift, took down a swift chimney. Following a tip from Nature London, MNR required that the chimney be replaced.

Representations to government or other authorities

An assessment of Nature London's interventions to the London Planning Department and/or MNR shows the rate of success to be relatively low, with one significant exception in which MNR required the construction of a replacement chimney. Nature London has been unable to learn of any other significant enforcement action by MNR relating to London swift chimneys. Of 14 chimneys for which Nature London made early representations to municipal authorities, four survive; these are thought likely to be protected during future development. All exhibit signs of deterioration and maintenance issues will need to be addressed if they are to survive in the long term.

Nature London's request that chimneys on the buildings of the old London Psychiatric Hospital be checked for swift occupancy may have abetted the loss of six chimneys, which were capped soon after it was learned they were being used by swifts. Had Nature London not alerted the land managers to the potential of swifts in these chimneys, it is possible they might still be available to swifts.

At Nature London's urging, the institutional owner of one chimney that the club's efforts failed to save undertook voluntary compensatory mitigation. The artificial chimney, constructed at great expense on the roof of a nearby building, did not attract swifts during its first two seasons (2015 and 2016). MNR has declined to share data regarding other mitigation that may have taken place in London, indicating that information related to capping, removal and alteration

of swift chimneys is confidential. To date, volunteers for conservation of London's swifts have failed to detect evidence of compensatory mitigation of other lost swift chimneys and it is possible that no mitigation has been undertaken for the remaining nine chimneys on Table 3. For more information about the mitigation process, see <https://www.ontario.ca/page/alter-chimney-habitat-chimney-swift>.

Nature London is aware of 33 London swift chimneys that have been demolished or capped since the 2009 provincial designation of the Chimney Swift as Threatened. Although the species and its habitat (including chimneys) are protected by federal and provincial species-at-risk legislation, in practice, it appears that known nest and roost sites rarely receive any protection beyond that which applies to any migratory bird, i.e., the prohibition of destruction of nesting sites when occupied. It is unclear, however, how frequently even that basic tenet is enforced. Observations by London swift volunteers during the period in question suggest that, in the face of weak or no enforcement of legislation, owners of chimneys used by swifts are almost always free to cap or demolish swift chimneys with impunity.

It is of interest to look at losses of swift chimneys during three somewhat arbitrarily and approximately defined periods of time, when differing protection approaches were in place (Table 4). The first period covers six years, starting in 2004, when Nature London began developing an inventory of swift chimneys, and continuing to the end of 2009, shortly after the Chimney Swift was designated as Threatened under provincial

Table 4. Number of London swift chimneys lost during three periods of differing protection approaches.

	2004 to 2009 (prior to SARA designation)	2010 to 2013 (approx between SARA designation and Ontario regulations)	2014 and 2015 (after Ontario regulations and compensatory mitigation implemented)
Cumulative number of chimneys known by end of period	139	162	166
Total number of chimneys lost (n = 47)	14	16	17
Average loss of chimneys per year	2.3 (n = 6 yr)	4 (n = 6 yr)	8.5 (n = 2 yr)

legislation. The average rate of loss was 2.3 chimneys/year (Table 4). The second period runs for four years from 2010 to the end of 2013, the year in which new regulations were implemented; the average rate of loss was 4.0 chimneys/year. The third period encompasses two years, 2014 and 2015, during which the 2013 regulations, including proponent-led compensatory mitigation for harmed swift chimneys, were in effect during both entire years; the average rate of loss during this period was 8.0 chimneys/year. It appears that the rate of loss of swift chimneys in London may be higher now than it was before the Chimney Swift and its habitat were protected under species-at-risk legislation and that the loss may have accelerated since the implementation of cabinet-approved regulations in 2013. In total, 47 swift chimneys were lost during the 12 years presented in Table 4. An additional chimney that was cut down and capped but later replaced is not included. Despite hundreds of hours of dedicated observations at and around London's known swift chimneys over many years, evidence of compensatory mitigation has been detected for only one of the 47 chimneys.

General Summary and Conclusions

With few exceptions, Nature London's various endeavours aimed at promoting the conservation of Chimney Swifts and their chimneys in London appear to have been largely ineffective or even counter-productive. During most of the 12 years under consideration, Nature London was essentially working alone in its efforts to advance the conservation of swift chimneys in London. Without meaningful enforcement from regulatory agencies since swifts were designated as Threatened in 2009, the club, despite being well-intentioned, was unable to make significant progress in achieving the kinds of outcomes it sought.

As no viable designs for artificial chimney structures are currently available, swifts must continue to rely on real chimneys in the near/foreseeable future. Mechanisms or incentives for effectively preserving traditionally used chimneys are needed. Old, unlined, open-topped brick chimneys are becoming obsolete in the modern world. They are expensive to maintain and often do not meet the needs of present-day heating systems. Chimneys that currently survive likely do so only because they do not yet require significant structural work or alterations.

Observations made in 2015 suggest that the majority of chimneys used by swifts in London need repairs. Without intervention (possibly including financial assistance), it can be expected that many of these will disappear, likely at an accelerating rate.

Swift populations in Ontario currently appear to be declining more rapidly than swift chimneys are, but this may not hold true indefinitely. Bird Studies Canada (2017) expects that “without conservation efforts, there may not be many, if any, swift-appropriate chimneys left in Canada in the next 25 years.”

One current impediment to the protection of swift chimneys appears to be the lack of an appropriate protocol for determining when it can be concluded that a chimney is no longer being used by swifts. This is complicated by a scarcity of data on two particular patterns of chimney usage by swifts that have been observed in London: occupancy during a limited portion of the nesting season (e.g., late returning spring migrants, temporary residents and swifts that experience early nest failure) and intermittent annual occupancy (e.g., chimney occupied some years but occasionally empty for a year).

With current mitigation procedures seemingly rarely adhered to and, when followed, of questionable benefit to swifts, a re-examination of the mitigation process is in order. Swift conservation is in urgent need of research and action at provincial, national and international levels. Locally, if swift numbers keep declining and the stock of old brick chimneys continues to dwindle, the days in which swifts soar and chatter over the streets of downtown London and other Ontario

cities may well be finite. For meaningful action to happen, a compatible political climate must be in place and organizations equipped with greater resources and authority than Nature London will need to vigorously pursue the cause.

Acknowledgements

I thank all the volunteers from Nature London and the London community who helped monitor and protect London swifts since 2004. Special thanks go to Karen Auzins who initiated two Nature London swift outreach endeavours — development of a brochure and the chimney-owner certificate program. Thanks also go to Upper Thames River Conservation Authority for assistance with brochures and certificates. I thank Dave Wake for photographs, field assistance and much other support. I thank Bird Studies Canada for ongoing collaboration. Thanks are also extended to all landowners and land managers who are protecting chimneys for swifts.

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To the death: A Red-winged Blackbird defends his territory

John Sabean and Carol Sabean



Male Red-winged Blackbird displaying.
Photo by Eleanor Kee Wellman

To observe a red-wing pursuing another red-wing to its death is a rarity and has not, to our knowledge ever been reported in the literature.

Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) are well known as fierce protectors of their territories and nests. Males will attack other males of their own species, American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) and Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) among other bird species; they will also attack animals such as raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) and even humans (Knight and Temple 1988, Piunno 2015). The intention, however, is usually to drive these intruders away from the territory. In a study conducted in the 1950s, Nero (1956) found that “Resident males responded to strange males by first giving song-spread, then bill-tilting, and then flying to attack (but usually displacing the intruder without actual contact).” To observe a red-wing pursuing another red-wing to its death is a rarity and has not, to our knowledge ever been reported in the literature.

On Wednesday afternoon, 19 April 2017, at about 15:30, we set out to walk our daughter’s dogs. We chose this day to walk along the boardwalk that follows the barrier beach that separates Lake Ontario from the Hydro Marsh at the south end of Liverpool Road in Pickering, Ontario. The sky was overcast, there was a slight breeze and the temperature hovered about 7° C.

About 100 m along the boardwalk east of Liverpool Road, we spotted a male Red-winged Blackbird aggressively attacking another male of the same species. No females were observed in the immediate vicinity and there was as yet

no sign of females in the marsh, although they were expected any day. Like all birders, over the years we have seen red-wings protecting their territories against a variety of intruders. They can be very aggressive, indeed.

When first observed, the birds were locked in an aerial combat that did not immediately cause us to pay special attention. When the bird assumed to be defending its territory forced another bird (assumed to be an intruder) down and into the water of the marsh, we began to pay them more attention. The intruder was clearly in some difficulty. He was on his back struggling to get out from under the territorial defender. The aggressor was stomping on the intruder with his feet and pecking him repeatedly with his beak. The intruder was forced under water several times.

Our concern was such that we threw a stick and a few stones in the water to attempt to scare off the aggressor and our action convinced him to fly off to a nearby tree. The other bird struggled to rise from the water, flapping his wings but to no avail. In about 30 seconds, the dominant bird returned to continue its attacks. After a few more vigorous attacks with his beak, and after forcing his opponent under the water again, it was only a matter of seconds before the latter was completely overcome. After the defender flew off to a nearby tree, we watched for several minutes to see if the intruder would recover, but it showed no signs of life and its body drifted away.

Having never experienced such behaviour before, despite many years of observation, we were curious to know whether this battling to the death was common among Red-winged Blackbirds. After talking to a couple of other birders, we thought the matter significant enough to pursue it further. Stokes (1979) has a chapter on red-wings but does not make any reference to fatal territorial disputes. Apart from that, we found three articles that discussed red-wing behaviour relevant to our incident. Knight and Temple (1988) are concerned more with call types as defensive manoeuvres and the intensity of defense in the success of breeding. Nero (1956) is more to the point, but he cites no record of red-wings pursuing defense to the death. Moskoff and Sundberg (2002) report an incident where a male red-wing attempted to drown another bird, but a bird of a different (and smaller) species, a male Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*). The red-wing knocked the yellowthroat into the water and, "As the yellowthroat struggled in the water, the blackbird pecked at it and then began to attack with its feet, using them to push the yellowthroat underwater." These were exactly the manoeuvres we observed. In this previous case, however, the yellowthroat was able eventually to gain its freedom and was able to fly away, while the red-wing "flew back into the reeds without giving further chase."

In a personal comment to us, R.J. Robertson stated: "In my own red-wing studies I would often witness vigorous chases, and some to the point of vigorous physical attacks, but never to the extent that you describe." He also contacted

one of his former Ph.D. students, P.J. Weatherhead, who worked with him on red-wing research in the 1970s; he confirmed that "he, too, has never seen such an incident, nor heard of one reported." At this point we can find no precedent for a Red-winged Blackbird actually pursuing another bird of its own species to its death.

Acknowledgements

Agreeing that the occurrence was unusual, Dennis Barry and Barry Kent MacKay spurred us to report this sighting to *Ontario Birds*. We thank the editors for their assistance in locating pertinent literature.

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Observations on multiple-year tree-nesting by Canada Geese in southern Ontario

Ted (E.R.) Armstrong, David Armstrong and Tom Armstrong

Photos by Ted Armstrong

Introduction

The giant Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis maxima*) was once an uncommon nesting species in southwestern Ontario, and was likely extirpated in Ontario during the period of European settlement (Hughes and Abraham 2007). It was thought to have been extirpated from most of its range by the 1930s (Baldassarre 2014). Its successful reintroduction has made it more widely distributed and more common, and it is now found almost continuously throughout much of southern Ontario, as far north as the north shore of Lake Huron and sporadically further north (Hughes and Abraham 2007), as well as throughout the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways (Baldassarre 2014). The giant Canada Goose adapts readily to urban and agricultural landscapes (Baldassarre 2014).

Breeding Canada Geese are always associated with grasses and sedges as a primary food supply, but they nest in a great diversity of habitats, typically close to waterbodies, with islands suitable for nesting sites (Peck and James 1983,

Sandilands 2005, Baldassarre 2014); islands include muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*) houses in marshes and hummocks in the Arctic. In some areas they also nest on cliffs, haystacks and elevated nest sites in trees or on poles (Bellrose 1976). Both the western (*B. c. moffitti*) and the giant Canada Goose have readily adapted to elevated nest structures such as platforms in trees (Yocom 1952, Bellrose 1976) and wildlife managers will often erect elevated nest platforms on poles specifically for nesting geese (Will and Crawford 1970, Cooper 1978).

Most reports of elevated nesting by the Canada Goose relate to low platforms, with trees being used more rarely and with the nests usually in old raptor stick nests. Such use occurs more commonly in western North America. We had the opportunity to observe tree-nesting of a Canada Goose pair over several years in southwestern Ontario. While this was not a rigorous study, we obtained observations that shed some light on this unusual tree-nesting behaviour.

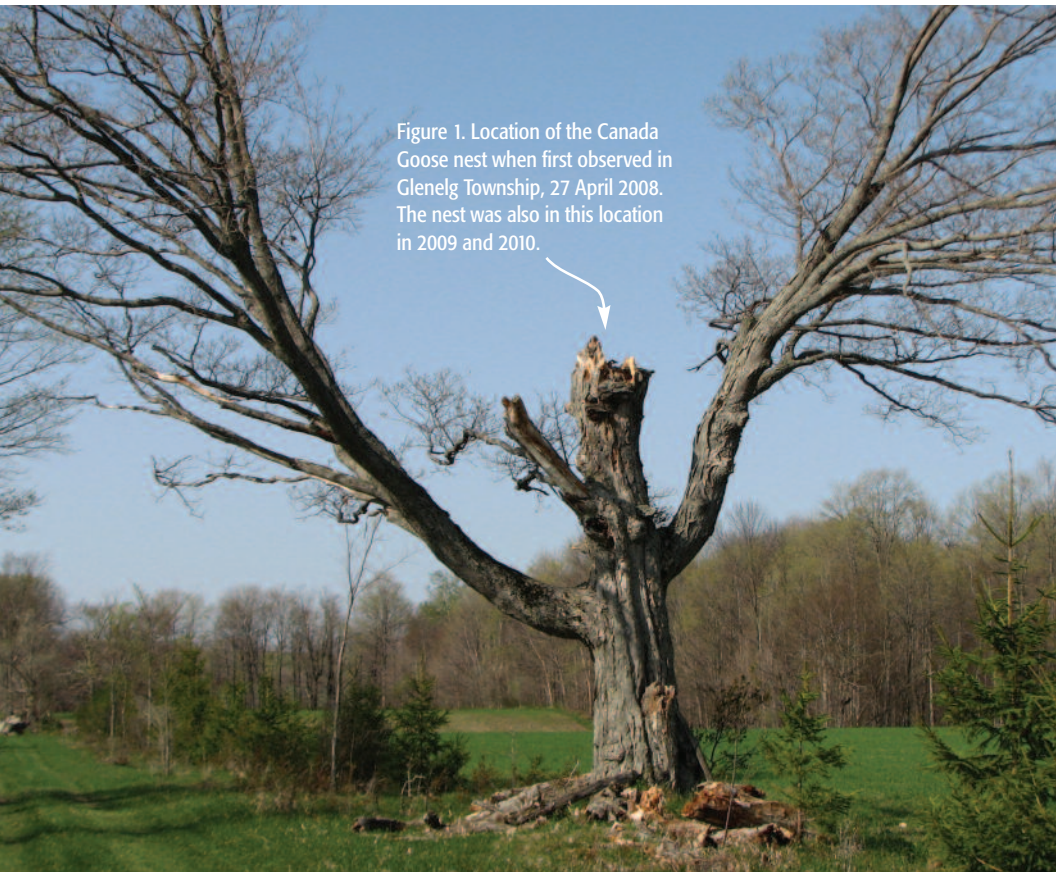


Figure 1. Location of the Canada Goose nest when first observed in Glenelg Township, 27 April 2008. The nest was also in this location in 2009 and 2010.

Study Area

The tree nest was located on a farm in Glenelg Township, Grey County in southern Ontario (44°17'33"N, 80°39'29.6"W). It was adjacent to a farm lane and actively farmed agricultural land. The Canada Goose has been a common resident breeding bird in this area for the past several decades, although this would not be considered a high density population area and this appeared to be the only active nest on the 40.5 ha farm.

Methods

Nesting observations

When possible, observations that we attempted to collect included nesting status and outcome, behaviour of the breeding pair in response to observers and the state of the nest tree. Continuous observations could not be conducted throughout each nesting season, but the nesting site was observed daily for approximately a one-week period (6-8 days) each spring from late April and mid-May between 2008-2017 (except for 2009 when the nest was observed only briefly).



Figure 2. Incubating Canada Goose on tree nest in Glenelg Township, 27 April 2008.

Observations on nesting success were usually possible because this was a working farm and the nest and adjacent fields were observed periodically throughout the spring (DA). Actual observations of nest contents were only made occasionally

because of the almost continuous presence of American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) in the vicinity. Observations were usually made from some distance away so as to minimize disturbance to the incubating goose, except for 2008 and 2015 when nest measurements and nest content observations were made. Some disturbance was unavoidable as the nest tree was directly alongside the farm lane-way. As the quality of the nest tree as a nesting substrate deteriorated, efforts were made to secure and support the base of the nest.

Results and Discussion

Nesting observations

Evidence of goose breeding activity and/or presence at the nest tree was observed every spring from 2008-2016, although there was no actual nesting attempt in 2016 (Table 1). When first observed on 27 April 2008, the nest was located 5.8 m high in a recess in the center of the snapped-off main trunk of a dead sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) (Figures 1 and 2). It was located 338 m from the nearest fresh water, a coldwater stream, although typically nests are very close to water (Baldassarre 2014). Several stream-fed ponds are located within an 850 m radius of the nest, providing potential brood habitat. Giant Canada Geese in South Dakota moved an average of 1.5 ± 1.8 km from the nest site wetland to the wetland where they moulted (range 0.1-4.1 km) (Dieter and Anderson 2009).

Table 1. Summary of observations at Glenelg Township Canada Goose tree nest, 2008-2017

Year	Nesting behaviour, nest tree and predator observations	Nest outcome
2008	Occupied, incubation, 5 eggs Down mostly blown away Female very alert and nervous – head up, flushed quickly when observers still distant (~ 100 m) Female back on the nest less than 5 minutes after observers left.	Unsuccessful
2009	Occupied, apparent incubation Observed only briefly	Uncertain, but apparently unsuccessful
2010	Occupied, incubation Adult very alert; neck high when observers still far away Same nest position as 2008 although main bole had degraded and eroded; 1 egg visible below and away from nest American Crows in vicinity and the likely cause of nest failure	Unsuccessful
2011	Occupied, apparent incubation Nest no longer in main bole of tree, in crotch between main trunk and large lateral branch, most down blown away Adult very attentive to nest, hidden and head low even when observer approaching close to nest	Unsuccessful
2012	Occupied, apparent incubation Adult very attentive to nest, hidden and head down low even when observer approaching close to nest One of two main lateral branches fallen off	Unsuccessful
2013	Occupied, apparent incubation Adult very attentive to nest, hidden and head down low even when observer approaching close to nest Main trunk severely degraded, minimal down in nest	Unsuccessful
2014	Occupied, apparent incubation Adult flattened and tight on nest when observers <50 m away Downy young observed in field (DA)	Successful
2015	Occupied, 5 eggs, incubation Adult very attentive to nest, hidden and head down low even when observer approaching close to nest	Uncertain, but apparently unsuccessful
2016	Pair active in area throughout one-week period Nest site was visited but not occupied; pair at nest site on only one day – both geese standing on remnant of nest base and calling loudly Appeared to no longer be suitable structure to support a nest	No nesting attempt
2017	No Canada Goose presence at nest tree or adjacent farm fields during regular late April/early May observation period	No nesting attempt



Figure 3. Tree-top perspective of the 2008 Canada Goose nest in a dead sugar maple tree, Glenelg Township.

In 2008, the nest contained five eggs, with a base of wood litter and debris (Figure 3). The nest site provided an almost-360° view of the surrounding agricultural landscape, meeting one of the prime Canada Goose nesting requirements which is good visibility over the surrounding terrain (Baldassarre 2014). There was very little down in the nest, as the site was wind-exposed and most of the down had blown away. Eggs of giant Canada Geese in elevated nests, such as those in nest boxes in Manitoba, typically cool more quickly than those in ground nests (e.g., Cooper 1978). Nest sites are more typically selected to minimize wind exposure and maximize retention of solar energy (Mowbray *et al.* 2002).

Predators

American Crows were typically in the vicinity of the nest tree daily, usually on the ground in the adjacent farm fields and rarely more than 200 m away. Crows were seen at the nest site in 2010 after nest failure and abandonment by the breeding pair. No other predators that could affect a tree nest were observed although raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) were common in the area. Canid predators were also common.

Behaviour of the Breeding Pair

While the nesting pair was not banded and we cannot confirm that the same individual(s) were involved annually, the repeated selection of the same site strongly suggests that at least the same female was likely involved in all nesting attempts.



Figure 4. Incubating Canada Goose on nest in lower crotch of tree, exhibiting low profile, 29 April 2013.

The female generally selects the nest site and incubates the eggs (Baldassarre 2014), although males typically remain in the vicinity of the nest site throughout incubation (Mowbray *et al.* 2002). During our observations, while the female was on the nest, there was almost always a sentinel bird in the adjacent pasture or crop field. Usually this bird, presumably the pair male, was between 50-200 m away from the nest tree. While this bird would sometimes flatten down to the ground and remain hidden when observers initially arrived, it would more typically become quite alert, vocal and excited upon arrival of the observers. However, it never approached close to the nest while the observers were in the vicinity, and never displayed the aggressive nest defense behaviour more typical of male behaviour at ground nests. Both birds were seen together in the tree only once, in 2016.

If it was the same female that returned to the nest site annually, her behaviour in

response to human disturbance changed substantially over the course of the study. During the first few years (2008-2010), the goose was very alert on the nest, typically stretching her neck high when the observers were first noticed (see Figure 2) and in the first year, flying off while observers were still greater than 100 m away. After the third year (2011 and beyond), the behaviour of the female on the nest changed noticeably. While still very alert upon the observer's approach, she rarely raised her neck, instead flattening down in the nest bole (Figure 4) and remaining much less likely to flush even when people passed along the laneway directly beside the nest tree. Thus, nest tenacity, a measure of the distance at which an incubating bird flushes from the nest (shorter distance equating to greater tenacity), appeared to increase over time at this nest site, although it typically does not increase with increasing age of the female (Sjoberg 1994).



Nest Tree Changes

The suitability of this tree as a nest site, and thus the location of the nest, became more marginal over time. When first observed in 2008, the nest was securely located in the recessed centre of the trunk where the main bole of the tree had snapped off (see Figure 1). A tree-nesting Canada Goose pair in Calgary, Alberta, appeared to select an almost identical microhabitat in the centre of a snapped-off balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera*) (Arndt 2016, B. Lefebvre, pers. comm.). The Glenelg Township nest site was heavily wind-exposed and the down mostly blown away, reducing the insulating effect of the nest material. In subsequent years, the site became ever more exposed as the main trunk and lateral branches deteriorated. While it was still located in the centre of the trunk in 2010, by then the edges of the bole had started to decay and there was less structure to keep the nest intact. As a result, the nest was more exposed and an egg



Clockwise:
5a. 2011
5b. 2012-2015
5c. 2016-2017

Figure 5. Changes in condition of the Canada Goose nest tree and the location of the nest over time (arrows) in Glenelg Township.

slipped out of the nest and became lodged below the nest, remaining exposed (Table 1). The nest site appeared to become less suitable and less secure as the tree continued to deteriorate. By 2011, the main trunk bole decayed to the point where it was apparently no longer suitable as a nesting substrate and the nest was located in a lower crotch between the trunk and the highest major lateral branch (Figure 5a). As this site was heavily wind-exposed, some effort was made (DA) to attach poultry mesh along the side of the nest to secure it (Figure 5b). Despite deteriorating conditions, the pair continued to show fidelity to the site even

in 2016 (Table 1). By then, after the lateral branch had been used for several years, the structure of the tree had declined to the point where it did not appear capable of supporting a nest (Figure 5c). The nest tree was unoccupied in 2016 and 2017.

Multiple-year Nesting and Site Fidelity

Canada Geese typically show strong site fidelity to a nesting area, returning annually and frequently re-using the same nest site (Baldassarre 2014). Although there is a great deal of variability, a relationship is sometimes found between nesting success and nest fidelity in subsequent years, with pairs sometimes showing greater fidelity to previously occupied nest sites at which they were successful (e.g., see Maggiulli and Dugger 2011). This nest site was occupied every year from 2008-2015, despite a very low nest success rate. Successful hatching was confirmed in only one year when a young brood was observed in the adjacent field. In all other years, the nest was confirmed or presumed to have failed.

Frequency of Tree-nesting

Tree-nesting by Canada Geese is an unusual but not uncommon nesting behaviour and it is not a recent phenomenon (e.g., Davison 1925). Recognition of this behaviour has led wildlife managers to place nesting platforms in elevated locations to enhance goose nesting success (e.g., Craighead and Stockstad 1961, Will and Crawford 1970). However, tree-nesting appears to be more commonly reported from western North America, primarily for the giant and western subspecies (Baldassarre 2014). Tree-nests in

western North America are most often in old stick nests of birds of prey such as Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) and Swainson's Hawk (*B. swainsonii*), but also in old nests of Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) (Geis 1956, Baldassarre 2014). Geis (1956) noted that 6% of 432 Canada Goose nests in the Flathead Valley, Montana, were in Osprey or Great Blue Heron nests. In the Calgary area, Canada Geese have nested in high densities in trees near the Bow River (B. Lefebvre, pers. comm.), in particular after a violent wind storm that snapped off many trees and limbs and created multiple suitable elevated nesting sites (G. Yaki, pers. comm.). Brakhage (1965) placed artificial nesting structures from 1-20 feet (0.3-6.1 m) high on elevated structures (including trees) in Missouri, but found no correlation between placement height and the use of the nesting structures by geese. However, elevated nesting structures (6-13 m high) in Montana had higher nesting success rates than ground nests (Mackey *et al.* 1988). Elevated nest locations on anthropogenic structures such as balconies, ledges and roof tops are also not uncommon, e.g., building rooftops in downtown Calgary (T. Armstrong, pers. obs.).

Tree-nesting appears to be rare in Ontario. We reviewed Ontario nest record data to determine past records of tree-nesting by Canada Geese (Bird Studies Canada 2017). Some of the historical nest records have not had their nest record cards fully digitized, so some habitat information may not have been available (C. Jardine, pers. comm.). Of the 490 digitized Project NestWatch records

with nest site information for the period 1976-2016, none (0.0%) were reported as being in trees. Seven nests (1.4%) were reported as being slightly elevated and associated with trees, including being among the upturned roots of a fallen tree (3), the trunk of a fallen tree (2), a stump (1) and a root mound at the base of a tree (1). An additional Canada Goose nest (not in the digitized Project NestWatch database) was observed 1.5-2 m high on the fallen trunk of a willow (*Salix* spp.) tree in the Dundas Marsh, Ontario, in 1977 (B. Crins, pers. comm.). In their summary of 541 Ontario nest records, Peck and James (1983) reported Canada Goose nests that were between 0.5-2.5 m high in tree crotches, although they did not reference how many tree nests were involved. At almost 6 m high, the Glenelg Township nest we report here was considerably higher than any of those previously reported. We could not find any other records of tree-nesting by Canada Geese in Ontario.

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American Bittern depredation of Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark nests: An unusual predator of two threatened grassland birds

Alice Pintaric

The Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) and Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) are Threatened species in Canada (COSEWIC 2010, 2011), their population trends corresponding with the steep and constant decline of the grassland bird guild in North America (Brennan and Kuvlesky 2005). These ground-nesting species rely heavily on agricultural land in Ontario, such as hayfields, to provide nesting habitat during the breeding season (Cadman *et al.* 2007). Unless nests are situated in habitats of high agricultural intensity such as mowed hayfields or pastures with high livestock densities, predation is the leading cause of nest mortality for most ground-nesting birds (e.g., Dion *et al.* 2000, Winter *et al.* 2004, Kerns *et al.* 2010, Perlut and Strong



Figure 1. American Bittern nest found on 1 June 2015 in a hayfield where Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark nests were being monitored in the Carden Alvar. Photo by Alice Pintaric

2011). Other factors such as distances to habitat edges, vegetation structure and height can also affect rates of nest loss (Dion *et al.* 2000, Kerns *et al.* 2010). The recorded nest predators of ground-nesting grassland birds are typically mammals, including ground squirrels (*Idiomys* spp.), raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), weasels (*Mustela* spp.), canids such as foxes and coyotes (*Vulpes* or *Canis* spp.), striped skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*), domestic cats (*Felis catus*), cows (*Bos taurus*) and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). Other occasional predators include snakes, and birds such as Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), Northern Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*), *Buteo* spp. and if mowing occurs, Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*), American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) and Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*) (Dion *et al.* 2000, Renfrew and Ribic 2003, Perlut *et al.* 2006, Ribic *et al.* 2012).

The American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), a secretive bird typically associated with wetlands, sometimes nests in grasslands and hayfields (Svedarsky 1992, Dechant *et al.* 2002, Lor and Malecki 2006). Its breeding season often overlaps with that of Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark (COSEWIC 2010, 2011). The American Bittern has been recorded as a carnivore, insectivore, crustacevore and piscivore water ambusher with small fish, amphibians, crayfish, aquatic insects, small mammals and some birds included in its diet (DeGraaf *et al.* 1985, McBride 1993, Austin and Slivinski 2000, Lowther *et al.* 2009, Baschuk *et al.* 2012). I report here a previously unrecorded type of interaction between American Bittern, and Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark.

Observations

These observations were recorded while conducting a study in an Important Bird Area, the Carden Alvar, near Kirkfield, Ontario which is a region characterized by limestone bedrock with shallow soil (Wildlife Preservation Canada *et al.* 2008). The study involved determining the reproductive success of Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark in hayfields and pastures from 2015-2016. On 1 June 2015, while searching for Bobolink nests in a hayfield site (H4), I discovered an American Bittern nest containing five eggs (Figure 1). The nest was later depredated by an unknown predator. During the same breeding season, a field technician and I frequently observed what we assumed to be a second pair of American Bitterns in a marshland bordering another hayfield site (H2) (4 kms away from H4) as both

pairs were commonly active during morning point counts.

The following year, 2016, my field technicians and I continued the study searching for Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark nests at the same sites. Once again, we observed two pairs of American Bittern which we assumed to be the same individuals that had been seen the preceding year as American Bitterns have relatively high site fidelity (Lor 2007). Two Bobolink nests (H4-1 and H4-2 both containing five eggs found on 2 June 2016) were being monitored in the H4 hayfield in the same area where a pair of American Bitterns was usually spotted. On 17 June 2016, while doing normal nest checks, we noticed prominent trails in the hayfields which led us to an American Bittern which we flushed. When we went to monitor H4-1 and H4-2, the trails arrived at these points and much of the grass was flattened around the nests. We interpreted the flattened grass as evidence of the American Bittern(s) potentially searching for the Bobolink nests or landing in that location. H4-1 only contained one nestling and one egg, although it had five offspring on 12 June 2016 during the previous nest check. Similarly, H4-2 was left with three nestlings and one egg although it contained three nestlings and two eggs on 12 June 2016. The next subsequent nest monitoring day, 19 June 2016, we once again saw signs of the tracks left by the American Bittern(s) and both nests were empty.

At the other hayfield site (H2), where the second pair of American Bitterns had commonly been observed in the bordering wetland, we were monitoring an



Figure 2. Eastern Meadowlark nest H2-M1 found on 12 June 2016, presumably depredated by an American Bittern. All four eggs had large puncture holes.

Figure 3. American Bittern feather found in front of the depredated Eastern Meadowlark nest H2-M1 (Figure 2) at a hayfield in the Carden Alvar.

Photos by Alice Pintaric

Eastern Meadowlark nest, H2-M1, which was found on 31 May 2016 with four eggs. During our regular nest monitoring on 12 June 2016, we arrived at H2-M1 to find all four eggs punctured with the contents removed (Figure 2) and an American Bittern feather in front of the nest (Figure 3). This was the only nest of 47 depredated nests in the study which was found with large puncture holes in the eggs. All other nests had the contents removed or offspring crushed due to cattle trampling. Typically, nest

contents are removed by predators with little to no disturbance to the nest. Mice, weasels and avian predators will occasionally leave eggs at the nest with puncture marks (Wilson *et al.* 1998, Pietz and Granfors 2000, Renfrew and Ribic 2003).

Discussion

American Bitterns are known as generalist ambush predators which forage in wetlands (De Graaf *et al.* 1985). Although American Bittern have previously been observed feeding on Sora (*Porzana carolina*) and sparrows (McBride 1993, Austin and Slivinski 2000), this is the first observation of an American Bittern possibly depredate Bobolink or Eastern Meadowlark nests. That both of the prey species were Threatened obligate grassland birds makes the observation even more notable. This observation highlights the range of threats that grassland birds are currently facing. Apart from human induced threats such as mowing, pasture management and other forms of habitat loss, these Threatened species may be depredated by a broader range of predators than previously assumed. Peterjohn (2003) summarized the population trends of North American birds and emphasized the need for further studies on the interactions of predator populations of nesting birds. Considering that in a great number of grassland bird species, including Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark, productivity can be substantially reduced by predation (e.g., Renfrew and Ribic 2003, Klug *et al.* 2010, Vickery *et al.* 2017), having an

understanding of predator species is valuable. Studies that have directly identified the predators of Bobolink and Meadowlarks have been conducted in the United States (Pietz and Granfors 2000, Renfrew and Ribic 2003, Ribic *et al.* 2012). Depending on the specific geography of the study, the range of potential predator species could be different than in Ontario. Novel interactions such as the ones recorded here among the American Bittern, Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark are evidence that we still lack a thorough understanding of the dynamics of predation on grassland breeding birds. The long-term protection of Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark is a priority for bird conservation programs in Ontario (McCracken *et al.* 2013) but a better grasp of the drivers of productivity in agricultural habitats is needed for effective management.

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