



PART THREE

Species Accounts

Introduction

John E. Black and Kayo J. Roy

A TOTAL OF 368 SPECIES OF BIRDS have been observed and documented in the Municipality of Regional Niagara over the years that records have been maintained. Part 3 contains an account of each of these species. For the more common birds, our focus is on records from the period 1966 to 2006. In the case of rare birds, records prior to 1966 are also included. In 2007 and 2008, a number of exceptional observations have been recorded in Niagara; these observations are described in a Post-2006 Observation insert in the species accounts.

The order of the species accounts and the English and Latin names of each species follow the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list, 7th Edition (AOU 2008). Changes in nomenclature that have occurred after 2008 are not included.

Contributors

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Bald Eagle / *Brandon Holden*

Sources of Data Used

A rich and varied collection of sources was used in preparing these species accounts. Our starting points were Roy W. Sheppard's *Bird life of Canada's Niagara Frontier*, a three-part work that appeared in 1960, 1968 and 1970, as well as Clark S. Beardslee and Harold D. Mitchell's comprehensive *Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region*, published in 1965 and updated in 1970 by Harold D. Mitchell and Robert F. Andrie. Additional information was obtained from many other sources including the following:

American Birding Association, *Birding* (1966-2006)
Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario [1981-1985] (Cadman et al. 1987)
Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005 (Cadman et al. 2007)
 Bird Banding Office of the Canadian Wildlife Service (1966-2006)
Birder's Journal (1991-2004)
Birds of Hamilton and Surrounding Areas (Curry 2006)
 Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York
 Buffalo Ornithological Society
 April Count (1966-2006)
 August Shorebird Count (1952-1956 and 2001-2006)
 May Count (1966-2006)
 Noteworthy Records (1966-2006)
 October Count (1966-2006)
 Winter Waterfowl Count (1980-2006)
 Breeding Bird Survey (1966-2006)
 Hamilton Naturalists' Club Noteworthy Bird Records (1968-2005)
 Fifty-Point Conservation Area, Grimsby
 Grimsby sewage lagoons, Grimsby
 Smithville sewage lagoons, Smithville
 Vanderliek farm pond, Bismark (now farmed)
 Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey or Inventory (1984-2006)
 National Audubon Society publications (1966-2006 as well as earlier editions)
American Birds
Field Notes
North American Birds

Natural Heritage Information Centre Database (1890-1998)
 New York Mid-winter Waterfowl Count (1966-2006 except for 1968-1972)
 Niagara area birders' records
 John E. Black (1966-1992 and 1998-2006)
 Harold L. Lancaster (1966-1978)
 Kayo J. Roy (1983-2006)
 Daniel (Dan) R. Salisbury (1966-1971)
 Many other birders have contributed significantly to our knowledge of Niagara birds, but for the sake of brevity, they are usually not identified in the accounts.
 Niagara area Christmas Bird Counts
 Buffalo Ornithological Society (1966-2006)
 Niagara Falls (1966-2006)
 Port Colborne (1986-2006)
 St. Catharines (1982-2006)
 Niagara area club newsletters (1966-2006 and many earlier editions)
 Bert Miller Nature Club, *The Rambler*
 Buffalo Ornithological Society, *The Prothonotary*
 Niagara Falls Nature Club, *Nature Niagara News*
 Peninsula Field Naturalists Club, *The Peninsula Naturalist*
 Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch (1975-2006)
 Dave Copeland notes
Newsletter
 North American Breeding Bird Survey (1966-2006)
 Ontario Field Ornithologists *OFO News* (1966-2006)
 Ontario Bird Records Committee, *Ontario Birds* (1983-2006)
 Ontario Nest Record Scheme database (1956 to 2006)
 Ontario Shorebird Survey database (field data of Alan J. Smith) (1989-1997)
 Owl Prowl (1978-2006)
 Port Weller Migration Study (1993-1997) (Black 1997)
 Project Feederwatch (1976-2006)
 Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

The Accounts

With so many contributing authors, a single template for all species accounts seemed unnecessarily restricting. We have attempted, however, to establish some basic features in the accounts by which the species could be compared.

FREQUENCY, ABUNDANCE AND OCCURRENCE

Each account begins with a short statement on the frequency, abundance and occurrence of the species in Niagara. The terms used to define frequency, abundance and occurrence are based in part on those in the second edition of *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ontario* (James 1991).

Frequency and Abundance defined:

Very Common: Observed annually on most days at many locations, often in large numbers

Common: Observed annually on most days at many locations in small numbers

Uncommon: Observed annually on many days at a few locations in small numbers

Rare: Observed annually, or almost annually, at a few locations in very small numbers, often on only a few days and with difficulty unless the bird is at a known location

Occasional: Not observed annually but expected in some years, often only a single individual seen

Extremely Rare: An extraordinary observation; observed on only five or fewer occasions in Niagara, probability of recurrence very low

Occurrence defined:

Resident: Regularly spends one season or more in Niagara

Transient: Regularly migrates through Niagara while travelling to or from its breeding grounds

Straggler: Remains in Niagara after migration, usually in small numbers

Visitor: Irregularly wanders into Niagara, usually in small numbers

Extirpated: Formerly a resident in Niagara but no longer present

Extinct: Formerly present in Niagara but no longer alive anywhere

Introduced: Has had human assistance in establishing itself on the North American continent

Escapee: Birds of uncertain origin, possibly an escaped captive bird

The following species listed under hypothetical or uncertain status in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) are not included in the species accounts presented here because the authors feel they can add no further information to the material already in print. These are: Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*), Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*), Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*), Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*), Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*), Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) and Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*).

From 9 December 2006 to 7 January 2007 a Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) was found in Vineland. This bird was likely the same individual that returned to the Lake Ontario shoreline between Grimsby and Vineland in the winter months of 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. Its whereabouts during the summer months is unknown. Records committees have traditionally assumed that all Barnacle Geese were escapees rather than wild birds. Currently, at least with many Atlantic coast committees, the assumption is that perhaps most are not escapees. In Ontario this species is held in captivity in numerous aviaries and, while the identification of the bird is not disputed, the bird's origin remains questionable. In light of this uncertainty we are not including this bird in the species accounts.

TABLES IN THE ACCOUNTS

The tabulation below for the Yellow Warbler exemplifies the typical presentation of the basic features for each species.

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 355 birds in 1979

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 2003

St. Catharines CBC

Banding and Recovery Data: A Yellow Warbler banded at Long Point on 4 August 1985 was encountered on 20 August 1985 in Georgia. Another banded at Long Point on 12 May 1994 was encountered on 27 August 1999 in Louisiana.

Atlases: *The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* (first Atlas) and the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005* (second Atlas) provided data for atlas Region 11, an area encompassing most of Regional Niagara. (For the exact boundaries, see the map in the article by Michael Cadman in this book.)

The organizers of the atlases divided Region 11 into 25 squares, each 10 km on a side. Observers in each square reported the breeding status of every species encountered, designating the breeding status as confirmed, probable, possible or observed. The reader is referred to the point count data in the second Atlas for additional breeding data. Information on the breeding range of species in Ontario is taken from the second Atlas.

BOS April, May and October Counts: Each year the Buffalo Ornithological Society (BOS) organizes bird counts in April, May and October. The number of BOS counts during the years 1966-2006 on which each species was found in the Niagara Region and the maximum number of individuals of that species are tabulated. Of the 41 October counts conducted, only 40 are reported here because data for the 1977 October count for the Niagara Region were not available.

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Data for the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts indicate the total number of counts during the years 1966-2006 on which birds were observed on one or more of the four Christmas Bird Counts in the Niagara Region.

Banding and Recovery Data: The Bird Banding Office of the Canadian Wildlife Service provided information on distant encounters with birds (some as far away as Belize) that had been banded at Rock Point, Ruthven and Long Point in southern Ontario. Such information provides some idea of where birds passing through Niagara might spend their winter months. Where the date of the encounter is uncertain, the term 'about' is used with the date.

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: The survey started in 1984. Ducks on Lake Ontario are counted from Fifty Road in Stoney Creek east to the mouth of the Niagara River in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

BOS Shorebird Count 1952-1956 and 2001-2006: This August shorebird count was started in 1947 but was discontinued during the 1970s and 1980s. Counted are all shorebirds present on the Lake Erie

shoreline from the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie to the mouth of the feeder canal in Port Maitland. In the accounts the five year periods 1952 to 1956 and 2001 to 2006 are compared.

SEASONAL GROUPING

In the species accounts, the four seasons have been somewhat arbitrarily assigned dates as follows:

Spring: 1 March to 31 May

Summer: 1 June to 15 August

Fall: 16 August to 30 November

Winter: 1 December to 28 February

EXTREMELY RARE SPECIES

Approximately one hundred of the species accounts are of birds considered to be extremely rare in the Niagara Region. These accounts typically contain a description of the documented records for the species in Niagara followed by some information on where the species is normally seen.

The Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) keeps a Review List of rare species that require adjudication.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Our initial intent was to include only photographs taken in Niagara. We found fairly quickly, however that to obtain high quality photographs of many of the species required that we include images taken in locations outside Niagara. Most are from Ontario.

Additional Notes on Species Accounts

BIRD COUNTS (1966-2006)

The BOS April Count has been held for the past 41 years between 4 and 18 April on the second Sunday of the month unless Easter intervenes, in which case it is moved to the third Sunday. Only the results from the primarily Niagara portion of the BOS April, May and October Counts are reported in these species accounts (Sections 1, 2, 7 and 8). The western boundary of the Canadian portion of the counts is approximately a line extending from Beamsville to Dunville. The eastern boundary is the Niagara River.

The BOS May Count has been held for the past 41 years between 15 and 21 May on the third Sunday of the month. **The BOS October Count** has been held for the past 41 years between 8 and 16 October on the second Sunday of the month. (Niagara data is not available for 1977.)

The BOS and St. Catharines Christmas Bird Counts are held between mid-December and Christmas Day. The BOS CBC began in 1909 and the St. Catharines CBC in 1982. The results of the BOS CBC included here are only those obtained from the area on the Niagara side of the Niagara River. (Niagara data from the BOS count is not available for the years 1970, 1975-1978 and 1980.)

The Niagara Falls and Port Colborne Christmas Bird Counts are held between Christmas Day and the first week in January. The Niagara Falls CBC began in 1966 and the Port Colborne CBC in 1986. About one-half of the Niagara Falls CBC circle lies inside New York State. (For details, see the article "Christmas Bird Counts in Regional Niagara" by Marcie Jacklin in this book.)

BOS Noteworthy Records (BOSNR) for the Niagara Region were used. Note that only in cases of the rarer birds was an attempt made to identify multiple records for the same bird. Thus in some accounts the fact that 25 records exist for a species could include some duplicated records submitted by different observers.

SEASONAL GROUPING

Other than for rare birds the species accounts follow an approximately seasonal structure beginning with spring.

Spring: 1 March to 31 May. Note that the bulk of the passerine migration is over in the Niagara Region by 31 May, but a few stragglers are still present in the first week of June and are included in the spring section. Even fewer stragglers, or possible breeders, are found in the following weeks, but since at these later dates it is difficult to distinguish possible breeders from stragglers, those sightings reported after 7 June are placed in the summer portion of the species accounts. A few late May records from the second Atlas are also included in the summer section of the species accounts. In the description of bird occurrence, the absence of a spring transient designation does not mean that the bird does not migrate through our region in the spring, but only that its migration is difficult to recognize or has not been studied. In some cases, the large number of birds arriving to breed in the region makes it difficult to estimate the abundance of the spring transients; therefore, no spring transient abundance is given.

Summer: 1 June to 15 August. (A few late May birds are included in this period.)

Most of the breeding ranges described in the species accounts are taken from the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005*. The Royal Ontario Museum made available to us its Ontario Nest Record Scheme database, which we used to obtain early egg dates. Note that in the species accounts, dates of eggs found in the period 1966-2006 were included unless no eggs were found, in which case dates from earlier years were used.

Fall: 15 August to 30 November. The earliest and latest fall dates on which birds were seen have been supplied by local observers or taken from the BOS Noteworthy Records and the HNC Noteworthy Bird Records. Early dates reported from locations in Niagara where the species does not normally breed may indicate that the species is beginning its southward migration. In the description of bird occurrence, the absence of a designation of fall transient abundance does not mean that the species does not migrate through our region in the fall, but only that it has not been studied by the authors. In the fall, the authors and other birders in the region tend to concentrate on shorebirds rather than passerines. Consequently, there are fewer data for fall transient abundance than for spring transient abundance. The best measure of abundance we have for many species in the fall is the number of October counts on which a species has been observed. Note that there is no organized hawkwatch at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby in the fall.

Winter: 1 December to 28 February. BOSNR winter data and Christmas Bird Count data are used, along with the records of local and visiting observers.

LOCATIONS

In describing the locations of observations we identify the closest city, town or municipality in which the bird was seen. Descriptions of most of the locations cited in the species accounts can be found in the article "Hotspots and Day Trips" by Katherine Stoltz and Drew Campbell in this book. The notes below should prove helpful to those considering the locations frequently mentioned in the species accounts:



Adam Beck overlook: Note that this overlook lies in the Municipality of Niagara Falls, not in Queenston. Many of the gull observations reported in the BOSNR from this overlook describe it as being in Queenston. The overlook is actually in Niagara Falls.

Avondale sewage ponds: Now known as the Parmalat sewage ponds.

Cement Road in Wainfleet: Also known as Cement Plant Road, this road connects Highway 3 and Lakeshore road and lies at the boundary between Port Colborne and Wainfleet.

Fifty Point Conservation Area: Some of the Conservation Area is in Grimsby, but a portion is in Stoney Creek and, therefore, just outside the Niagara Region. Every effort has been made to ascertain if the Fifty Point records are of birds that were observed in the Grimsby portion of the conservation area. Note that the birds reported from the conservation area often move in and out of the Niagara Region, especially in flight over the lake.

Gate House building: The official title of the building is Gate House, Ontario Power Company. It is located south of the old Toronto Hydro building on the Niagara River.

Glendale sewage ponds: Also known as the Foster Wheeler sewage ponds, these ponds are now part of the Niagara College Wetland Ridge Trail.

Grimsby sewage ponds: Also known as the Grimsby sewage lagoons, the Winona ponds and the Winona lagoons.

International Niagara Control Works structure: Also known as the Control Weir, the Niagara Control Works structure or the International Control Weir, the gates in the river are used to reduce the flow of water over the falls thus diverting water to the power stations down the river.

Malcolmson Eco-Park: also known as Malcolmson Park.

photo top left: **Avondale /Parmalat sewage ponds:** The ponds are visible in lower right. The Welland Canal and the Port Weller piers are on the left.

photo bottom left: **Fifty Point Conservation Area and the Grimsby sewage ponds:** The Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) is in the foreground. Kelson Road runs from the QEW to Lake Ontario in the center. Most of the Fifty Point Conservation Area is visible to the left of Kelson Road. The western boundary of the Niagara Region lies in the conservation area as shown by the dashed line. The Grimsby sewage ponds are visible in the top right corner.

David Walker, 2009

Mud Lake, Port Colborne: Full name is Mud Lake Conservation Area.

Niagara: Used as a short form for the Niagara Region.

Old Toronto Hydro building: Also known as the Engineerium, the official title of the building is Electrical Co. Development of Ontario Limited 1906.

Port Weller piers: These two piers, known as the east and west piers, are located in St. Catharines and extend for about 1.3 km into Lake Ontario at the mouth of the Welland Canal north of Lock 1.

Rock Point Provincial Park: This park is located on Lake Erie about 6 km west of the Niagara Region. The point of land in the park is sometimes also referred to as Rockhouse Point. Mohawk Island lies 1.5 km to the southeast of the park in Mohawk Bay, also outside Niagara.

Rose Hill Road, Fort Erie: Harold Axtell's residence was just off Rose Hill Road on Rebecca Street in Fort Erie from 1966 to 1991. Axtell, and the many visitors to his property, submitted documentation on birds to the Buffalo Ornithological Society on which the location was given as Rose Hill Road (also Rosehill Road).

St. Davids sewage ponds: Also known as the Kraft sewage ponds and the Canada Cannery sewage ponds. (These ponds no longer exist and the property is up for sale.)

Smithville sewage ponds: Also known as Smithville lagoons.

ABBREVIATIONS IN THE ACCOUNTS

We have tried to keep abbreviations in the accounts to a minimum.

AOU	American Ornithologists' Union
BOS	Buffalo Ornithological Society
BOSNR	Buffalo Ornithological Society Noteworthy Records
first Atlas	<i>Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario</i> [1981-1985] (Cadman et al. 1987)
HNCNR	Hamilton Naturalists' Club Noteworthy Bird Records
JEB	Field Notes of John E. Black
KJR	Field Notes of Kayo J. Roy
OMNR	Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
OBRC	Ontario Bird Records Committee
SARA	Species at Risk Act
second Atlas	<i>Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario,</i> 2001-2005 (Cadman et al. 2007)



Fulvous Whistling Ducks
David Laliberte

Fulvous Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna Bicolor*

One historic record

The Fulvous Whistling-Duck, formerly known as the Fulvous Tree-Duck, is one of the most widespread species of waterfowl in the world. While it breeds across the world's tropical regions in four continents, distribution in North America is limited to the Gulf Coast of the United States (Hohman and Lee 2001). This local resident is known for some quite extensive seasonal movements and is also known to sometimes wander in small parties (Madge and Burn 1988).

The Fulvous Whistling-Duck is a very rare visitor to Niagara with only one reported sighting known to exist. On 20 August 1962, Richard Brownstein and Daniel Salisbury discovered two birds at Yacht Harbour, near Crystal Beach (Baillie 1964, Wormington 1986). Seen also by Harold Axtell, Arthur Clark, Harold Lancaster and Arthur Schaffner, the birds were photographed by Robert Andrlé on the same day. Note that Sheppard (1970) gives the date of this sighting as 10 August 1961, and there is other evidence to suggest the date should be 20 August 1961. The year of the sighting may be reviewed by the Ontario Bird Records Committee.

In the Americas, the Fulvous Whistling-Duck breeds in the lowlands of northern and eastern South America south to northern Argentina in the east, and to Columbia in the west. The range extends northward through Central America to the southern United States. It winters throughout its breeding range (Madge and Burn 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Extremely rare visitor (observations increasing in southern Ontario)

There are no Niagara records of Greater White-fronted Goose prior to 1966 in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965). Sheppard (1970), however, identifies a White-fronted Goose found on 22-23 February 1964 at Port Weller by Daniel Salisbury and others. The individual had been banded, which caused some initial concern about its status as a wild bird.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, only four known records exist for this extremely rare visitor to Niagara. Paul Benham, John Black and Dan Salisbury found a single bird on 29 October 1969 at the racetrack in Fort Erie. On 22 March 1989,



a flock of 18 Greater White-fronted Geese (14 adults and 4 immatures), all *frontalis*, were discovered in a ploughed cornfield near St. Ann's (Wormington and Curry 1990). These birds remained until at least 1 April 1989. The third record is of two definitive basic adult birds found on 29 November 1997 by Michael Morgante at the Sir Adam Beck Reservoir in Niagara Falls (not Queenston as in Dobos 1999). They remained long enough to be included in the 1997 Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count and were last seen on 22 February 1998 (Dobos 1999). The fourth record for Niagara of Greater White-fronted Goose is of 13 birds that Glenn Coady and Mark Peck discovered on 4 January 2004 at the Smithville sewage ponds (Curry 2006). The species has not been observed on any of the BOS April, May or October Counts.

Observations of Greater White-fronted Goose in Ontario have increased markedly since the 1980s, primarily in both the fall and the south (Curry 2006). Four subspecies of Greater White-fronted Goose breed in North America from western Alaska to the west coast of Hudson Bay and in northern Greenland (Godfrey 1986). The majority of North American birds belong to the mid-continent population (*frontalis*) and winter from the Mississippi River alluvial valley of eastern Arkansas west to eastern Mexico (Ely and Dzubin 1994). Greenland breeding birds winter in Europe (Cramp and Simmons 1977). The birds observed in Ontario likely come from the mid-continent population, which is much larger than the Greenland group. Its overall range has expanded eastward during the reporting period (Ely and Dzubin 1994), and its numbers have fluctuated widely (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008). This is in contrast to an apparent decline in numbers in Greenland.

Kenneth F. Abraham

Greater White-fronted Goose
Jukka Jantunen



Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens*

Occasional to rare spring and fall transient, occasional winter visitor

Spring migration of Snow Geese in Niagara is a March/April event. Earliest dates include a single bird on 1 March 1999 at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR) and 51 birds on 18 March 2001 at the Vanderliek farm pond in Bismark (HNCNR). The latter is also the high count for the region, and exceptional. The latest spring date is 12 May 1966, when one bird was at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). May is the time of peak passage through James Bay. There are no summer records for Niagara. The earliest fall date is 7 October 1967, when eight birds were observed at Port Weller in St. Catharines (BOSNR). Small numbers of birds are seen in all months from October through February (BOSNR, HNCNR, CBCs).

Since the early 1990s, Snow Geese have been observed in most years in Niagara, albeit in small numbers. Exceptional migration events of the Lesser Snow Goose (*C. c. caerulescens*) occurred in 1934-1936 as described in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Curry (2006). Over 10,000 birds were grounded in Niagara, probably owing to exceptional fog conditions; similar events have not recurred. The birds involved were predominantly of the blue morph. At that time, the blue and white morphs were more segregated than they are now, with the blue morph breeding and migrating along the eastern edge of the annual range of birds associated with the mid-continent region (Mowbray et al. 2000). Some migrated on a more or less direct line from James Bay to Louisiana (Cooch 1955), and it was likely these birds whose migration was interrupted by the inclement weather conditions.

The Snow Goose is observed in Niagara more frequently than either Ross's Goose or Greater White-fronted Goose, but has only recently become more regular. In adjacent Hamilton, Curry (2006) describes the change in status over time from an accidental or occasional transient to a migrant occurring annually in both spring and fall. The pattern is much the same for Niagara, as would be expected, and becomes clear by comparison with the account of Beardslee and Mitchell (1965). Furthermore, although Snow Geese have been observed in all seasons, 50% of the sightings have occurred in winter, and all but two of the records were attributed to the Lesser subspecies.

The change in status is likely a result of the population growth of the species across its range. The numbers of Lesser Snow Geese have more than quadrupled since the mid-1900s (Kerbes et al. 2006), and those of the Greater Snow Goose (*C. c. atlantica*) have increased nearly tenfold since 1970 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008). Niagara is not on a major migration corridor for either subspecies of Snow Goose. However, the migration of the Lesser Snow Goose has shifted eastward during the population increase, and that of the Greater Snow Goose has shifted westward such that both forms may be expected in small numbers (Pittaway 1992a). Morin reviewed the recent and increasing observations of Greater Snow Goose in eastern and southern Ontario (Morin 2004).

Kenneth F. Abraham

Snow Goose
Jukka Jantunen

BOS April Count: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1971

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 3 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1992, 1993 and 2004

Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds on the 1999 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 2 of 23 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1989

Ross's Goose *Chen rossii*

Extremely rare visitor

The number of Ross's Geese in North America has grown dramatically since the 1950s, when only a few thousand birds were counted on the Pacific coast wintering grounds, and all known breeding occurred in the Perry River region of the central Canadian Arctic. They had been rare for most of the century and were considered a species of the western part of the continent (Ryder and Alisauskas 1995).

Neither Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) nor Sheppard (1970) lists Ross's Goose for Niagara, and Curry (2006) lists only four records for Hamilton and the surrounding area. It is presently an extremely rare visitor to Niagara, where only four records exist between 1966 and 2006, all of white morph birds. The first was of an adult bird discovered in early November 1970 by Dan Salisbury and Harold Lancaster at the Zimmerman's farm pond on Casablanca Boulevard in Grimsby. This bird stayed until an unknown date in January 1971 (Curry 2006). On 27 January 1988, Mary Ellen Hebb, Edmund Johns and Kayo Roy carefully studied an adult Ross's Goose at Henley Island in Port Dalhousie, St. Catharines. The bird was observed feeding daily on the grassy shoreline of Martindale Pond and was last seen on 31 January 1988. From mid-December 2005 to at least 23 February 2006, Rick Cudney and Kayo Roy observed two adult Ross's Geese along the Lake Erie shoreline at Point Abino harbour (Crins 2007a). On 1 March 2006, Brad Clements discovered two adult Ross's Geese in the open water of the Welland River off Merritt Island in downtown Welland. These two birds were last seen on 5 March 2006 (Crins 2007a).

It was estimated that there were over 880,000 nesting adults in spring 2008 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008); and when yearlings and other non-breeding birds are included, that means there are now well over 1,000,000 Ross's Geese in North America. Simultaneously with the numerical growth, an eastward expansion of breeding grounds and migration routes has occurred such that Ross's Geese now breed in all areas of the central and eastern Canadian Arctic where Lesser Snow Geese breed (Kerbes et al. 2006), and more than 100,000 winter in the mid-continent area of the U.S. (Kelley et al. 2001). Observations of Ross's Geese were tracked by the Ontario Bird Records Committee until 2006, by which time sufficient documentation had accumulated to securely establish their presence as annual migrants in southern Ontario. They have been established as breeders in small numbers in the Hudson Bay Lowlands since 1975 (Prevett and Johnson 1977, Kerbes et al. 2006). In northern Ontario, the second Atlas reported "a relatively small population of perhaps a few hundred pairs" concentrated near Cape Henrietta Maria (Abraham 2007a).

Kenneth F. Abraham

Post-2006 Observation

An adult Ross's Goose was discovered and photographed in the Welland River in Chippawa on 8 December 2007 by Alan Wormington, Karl Overman, and others. It was also observed foraging along the shoreline of the river near the marina where it was noted to be associating with a large number of Canada Geese. It was not seen after 15 December 2007 (BOSNR).

Ross's Goose
Jean Iron



Brant *Branta bernicla*

Rare spring and fall transient, occasional winter straggler, extremely rare summer straggler

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 160 birds in 2002

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1995

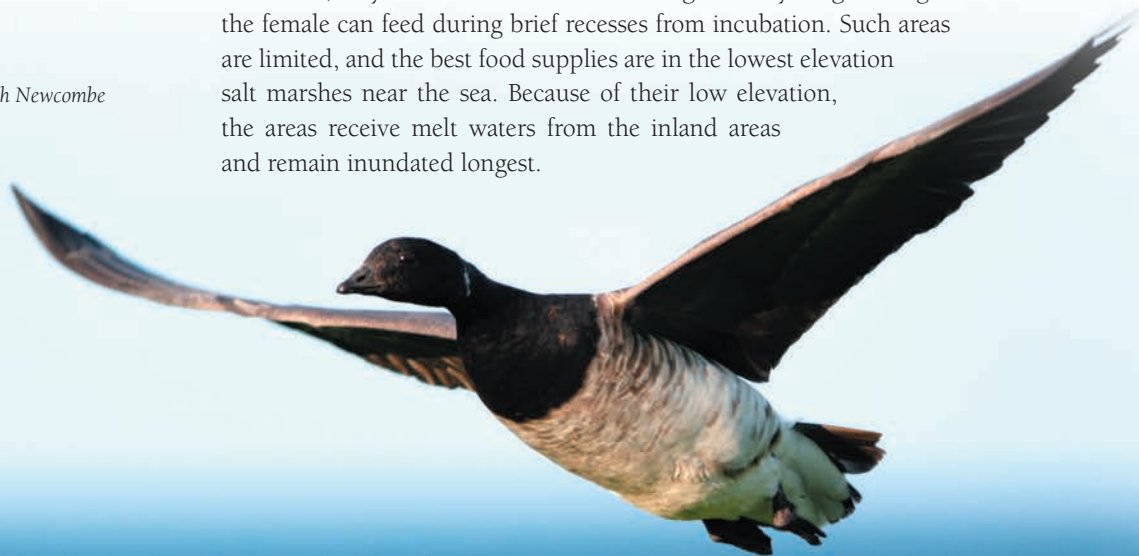
Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1987 and 1988 Niagara Falls CBC and the 1989 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1992

Ironically, the rare Brant, which is usually associated with ocean coasts, is the most abundant goose in Niagara after the Canada Goose. It usually occurs in small numbers on the days when it is seen. Spring migration occurs in a brief period from mid-May to early June, corresponding well with migration events across the rest of Ontario, including James Bay. The earliest date is 12 May 1993, when three birds were recorded at Niagara Falls (BOSNR), and the latest spring date is 5 June 1966, when seven birds were at the Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). One bird at Port Colborne on 25 June 1983 (BOSNR) was exceptional for summer. The earliest fall record is for 15 birds on 5 October 1995 at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR), and small numbers of birds are seen from October through January. Larger groups are observed in fall migration than in spring. The largest group was 350 on 10 November 1985 at the Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). Occasionally, a single or a few birds are recorded on winter waterfowl counts or Christmas bird counts, but there are no February, March or April records (BOSNR, HNCNR). The Brant is an annual migrant through Niagara.

Niagara's Brant belong to the Atlantic Brant population, a light-bellied subspecies (*B. b. hrota*), that winters on the mid-Atlantic coast of the United States (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008). The vast majority (80%) of observations in Niagara occur in May, October and November. The late spring passage is a reflection of their energy requirements and their migration and breeding strategies. They are the smallest in body size of all the arctic geese. This small size precludes their storing enough fat and protein to complete migration from wintering to breeding grounds without stopping at an intermediate staging ground to store nutrients for the final leg of the flight over Hudson Bay to their Arctic breeding range in Foxe Basin and farther north (Reed et al. 1998). The migration re-fuelling stop for Atlantic Brant is James Bay, where habitats with spring foods sufficient for the purpose do not regularly become available until mid- to late May. Even after re-fuelling for the final migration, they cannot complete egg laying and incubation duties without regular feeding during incubation to maintain body condition (Ankney 1984). To do this, they need to nest in areas with high density sedges and grasses where the female can feed during brief recesses from incubation. Such areas are limited, and the best food supplies are in the lowest elevation salt marshes near the sea. Because of their low elevation, the areas receive melt waters from the inland areas and remain inundated longest.

Brant
Kenneth Newcombe



Thus, while Snow Geese and Cackling Geese are initiating or incubating nests on higher ground in the upland areas, the Brant have to wait for their low elevation sites to be free of water, ice and snow before they can begin to nest. This usually occurs in mid-June or later, and as a consequence they are the last species of arctic goose to initiate nesting each year (Abraham and Ankney 1986).

The fall flight also follows a period of fall (late August to November) staging in James Bay during which they again store reserves for the migration leg from James Bay to the mid-Atlantic. The exodus from James Bay begins in mid- to late October, but peaks in the first 10 days of November, when ice begins to form on James Bay (OMNR unpubl. data). In both spring and fall, the main route from the mid-Atlantic to James Bay takes them across the southeastern part of Ontario, mainly over eastern Lake Ontario. Most migration is at night, so the birds observed on the ground in both seasons are just a small fraction of the population and probably represent birds that have fallen out of a main flight.

Kenneth F. Abraham

Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii*

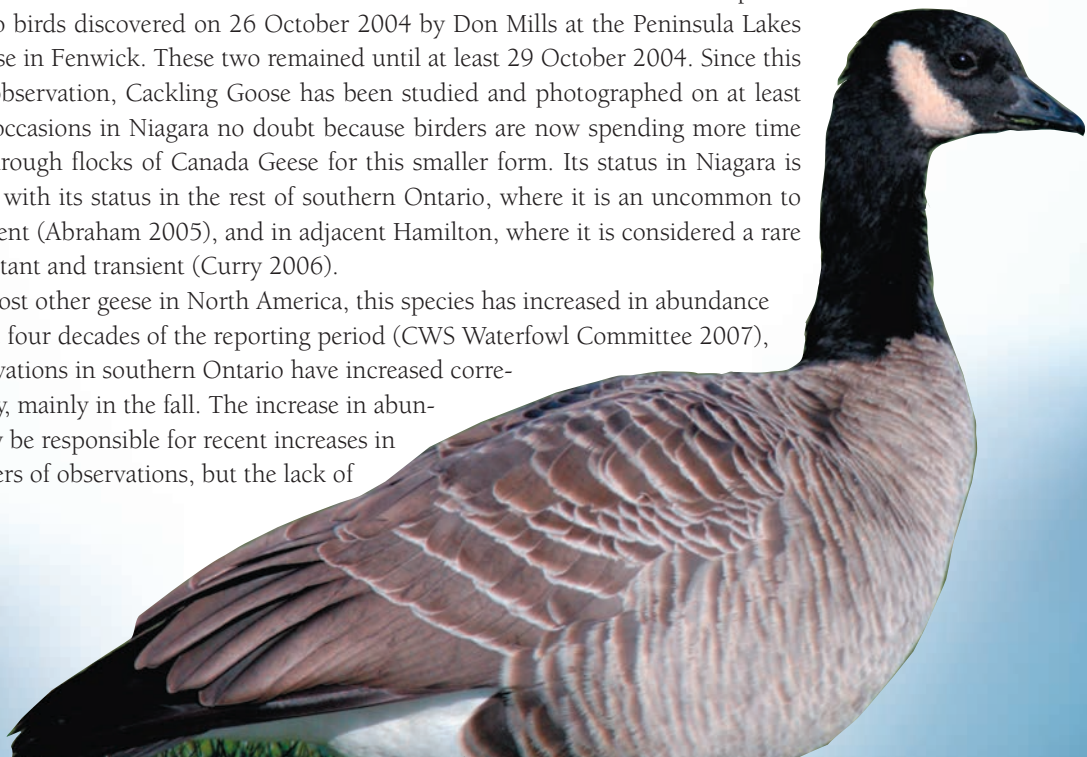
Rare fall transient, winter straggler

In 2004, the Cackling Goose was reclassified as a full species by the American Ornithologists' Union. It comprises four small subspecies that were formerly part of the Canada Goose (*B. canadensis*) (Banks et al. 2004). Only the nominate subspecies (*B. h. hutchinsii*) has been recorded in Niagara. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) carefully reviewed the status of small forms of Canada Geese in Niagara. They listed it as "Irregular, very rare" with only one winter record, but they provided details of several observations of small Canada Geese in surrounding areas of southern Ontario and New York State. Its abundance may have changed over the past several decades, but it is still uncommon in Niagara.

There are several records of Cackling Goose from Niagara during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. The first observation since the reclassification of this species was of two birds discovered on 26 October 2004 by Don Mills at the Peninsula Lakes Golf Course in Fenwick. These two remained until at least 29 October 2004. Since this Fenwick observation, Cackling Goose has been studied and photographed on at least six other occasions in Niagara no doubt because birders are now spending more time looking through flocks of Canada Geese for this smaller form. Its status in Niagara is consistent with its status in the rest of southern Ontario, where it is an uncommon to rare transient (Abraham 2005), and in adjacent Hamilton, where it is considered a rare winter visitant and transient (Curry 2006).

Like most other geese in North America, this species has increased in abundance during the four decades of the reporting period (CWS Waterfowl Committee 2007), and observations in southern Ontario have increased correspondingly, mainly in the fall. The increase in abundance may be responsible for recent increases in the numbers of observations, but the lack of

Cackling Goose
Brandon Holden





Cackling Goose following
a Canada Goose

Kayo Roy

historical observations may also be a reflection of its former subspecies status; in other words, it may have occurred more frequently in Niagara but was overlooked. As a result, the status of Cackling Goose in the region may change in the near future because birders are now looking for these birds in flocks of Canada Geese.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) were far-sighted in stating that “It seems best to confine our records of small Canada Geese, for the present, to *B. c. hutchinsii*.” Although Cackling Geese breed across Arctic North America, most Ontario birds (based on banding records) originate in the eastern Arctic (Nunavut), in northern Hudson Bay and the Foxe Basin especially Baffin Island, which is the range of the nominate subspecies *B. h. hutchinsii* (Abraham 2005).

Kenneth F. Abraham

First Atlas: 14 squares confirmed,
3 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 24 squares con-
firmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
37 of 41 counts (continuously
since 1982), maximum of
1,037 birds in 2003

BOS May Count: Reported on 31
of 41 counts (continuously since
1984), maximum of 541 birds in
2006

BOS October Count: Reported
on 35 of 40 counts, maximum
of 2,438 birds in 2003

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 32 of 41 counts,
maximum of 6,254 birds on
the 2006 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter
Waterfowl Survey: Reported on
22 of 23 counts, maximum of
1,848 birds in 2003

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Spring transient, very common permanent resident

The Canada Goose is a permanent resident throughout southern Ontario and a very common permanent resident in Niagara. While these birds may migrate through Niagara in the spring, it is difficult to determine the abundance of spring transients from existing data. In the late 1960s, Canada Geese were rare summer residents in Niagara. The familiar V-shaped formations of these “honkers” migrating north over Niagara were generally regarded as a harbinger of spring (Sheppard 1970). In current times, one sees an occasional flock of Canada Geese that are probably transients, but given the large numbers of local flocks also flying about at the same time, it is difficult to be sure which, if any, are migrating north. Niagara is not on a major migration corridor of any of the subarctic breeding populations of Canada Goose. For an interesting discussion of the migration, or lack of migration, of the various races of Canada Geese in southern Ontario, see Curry (2006).

There was a significant increase, more than 100%, in the probability of observing Canada Goose between atlases in the Carolinian region (Hughes and Abraham 2007). This increase is clearly manifested in Niagara. In the first Atlas, breeding was confirmed in 14 squares and in the second Atlas 24 squares, a substantial increase. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 14 April.

Presently a common bird on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts, Canada Goose was first seen on a CBC in 1970. Numbers on a single count first exceeded 20 in 1980, and by 1989 they had exceeded 1,000 birds. Sheppard (1970) states that “very occasionally small groups or flocks of Canada Geese may be seen on the Niagara River in mid-winter.” Numbers of this species in Niagara have continued to grow over the years. In southern Ontario, the 2007 spring breeding pair estimate was approximately 72,000 (144,000 adults), and when goslings and non-breeding birds are included, the fall population is approximately 500,000 (CWS Waterfowl Committee 2007).

John E. Black

Post-2006 Observation

On 25 January 2008, Rob Hanson and Kayo Roy independently located an all ‘white’ Canada Goose in the Welland River off Merritt Island in downtown Welland. The photographs were sent to Ken Abraham for his expert opinion, and he determined that the bird has a form of leucism. He suggests that the bird’s genetically based inability to produce pigments at normal levels (at least in feathers) or possibly a somatic inability to produce pigments (e.g., a developmental anomaly) or perhaps even hybridization may have caused this condition in the bird’s appearance. A true ‘albinistic’ Canada Goose is really a very rare bird (Kenneth Abraham pers. comm.). This individual was last seen on 29 January 2008.



Canada Goose
Raymond Barlow



Mute Swans
Kayo Roy

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Rare permanent resident

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 9 birds in 2006

BOS May Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 2002 and 2003

BOS October Count: Reported on 7 of 40 counts, maximum of 19 birds in 2003

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 14 of 41 counts, maximum of 25 birds on the 2006 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 6 of 23 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1987 and 1992

Mute Swans were introduced into Ontario during the early years of the 20th century. Widely kept in captivity, some escaped and bred in the wild, their numbers increasing as they gradually spread around the lower Great Lakes. They are currently resident around the shores of the lower Great Lakes, seldom appearing at inland sites. Individual reports by local birders (BOSNR) probably contain some duplication both by day and over time. Weather and season would also influence the number afield. From 1966 to 1979, 13 birds were reported, compared with 50 from 1980 to 1999 and 365 from 2000 to 2006 (BOSNR). Most of the observations occurred in Bertie Township, now Fort Erie. These data suggest a steady increase in Mute Swans over time, a trend consistent with the growing numbers on the lower Great Lakes (Petrie and Francis 2003).

According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the first record of breeding in Niagara for this species is of an adult on a nest on 3 May 2003. The nest was located on Martindale Pond in St. Catharines a few hundred metres south of the Queen Elizabeth Way. Since 1987 there had been a pair of Mute Swans wintering on the pond north of the Queen Elizabeth Way, and they were still there in January 2005. It is quite possible that this first nest to be discovered was theirs. The Mute Swan's nest is a huge structure often 3 metres in diameter and usually located in a stand of cattail or similar vegetation. Four to ten eggs are laid, which hatch in about 35 days in mid- to late May (Harry Lumsden unpubl. data). The fidelity of Mute Swans to their nesting sites is highly developed. Cygnets fly from 120 to 150 days, and the broods break up in late fall.

Mute Swans seldom seem to migrate, but local movements take place so that concentrations occur in winter at Coneseon Lake in Prince Edward County, the Toronto waterfront, La Salle Park in Burlington, Long Point and the Detroit River. The highest numbers tend to collect where the swans are fed.

The BOS CBC recorded only single birds in 1987 and 2002. The other CBCs first found six Mute Swans in St. Catharines in 1996. Every year since, they have been counted on the Port Colborne and St. Catharines CBCs. In January 2003, Jean and Blayne Farnan observed 37 Mute Swans on Gravelly Bay in Port Colborne.

Harry G. Lumsden

Trumpeter Swan *Cygnus buccinator*

Occasional winter visitor

The original population of Trumpeter Swan in southern Ontario was extirpated in the early 18th century. The Grimsby archaeological site contained six bone artefacts and a wingtip of Trumpeter Swan (Lumsden 1984b). Restoration of this species started in 1982 in southern Ontario. The species is now widespread in the Cambridge, Toronto and Midland areas, and it is at present an occasional winter visitor in Niagara.

On 21 February 1988, an immature Trumpeter Swan with no wing tag was observed on the Niagara River near Central Avenue in Fort Erie by Robert Andrie (KJR). In January 1997, a single bird was seen on Lake Erie at Point Abino (BOSNR). An immature bird was reported on the Welland River near Chippawa on 27 December 2004, observed there by John Miles during the Niagara Falls CBC. The BOS reported one bird at Niagara Falls on the CBC in 2005. From 18 December 2005 to 22 January 2006, a Trumpeter wearing the wing tag 928 was seen on the Niagara River on the brink of the Horseshoe Falls. This bird was hatched in 2003 and released at Lloydstown, Ontario, on 24 June 2005. It was joined by a wild hatched cygnet on 22 January. On 29 January 2006, there were four sightings of Trumpeter Swans on the river between Fort Erie and the Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls. Among them was a swan wearing the tag 847, too young to be the parent of the cygnet that was with it. Swan 847 was hatched in 2004 and released at Grand Valley, Ontario, on 2 September 2004. It was last recorded on the river on 27 February 2006.

Trumpeter Swan
Kayo Roy



Marked Trumpeter Swans invading from Minnesota and Wisconsin bred in the Kenora-Fort Frances Districts of western Ontario. The first case of breeding was recorded in 1989. Michigan releases are likely the origin of two broods seen on St. Joseph Island in 2005 and a brood on Wabatongushi Lake east of Franz, Ontario, in 2006. In Ontario between Sudbury and Lake Erie and from the Bruce Peninsula to Prince Edward County, there were estimated to be 776 Trumpeters as of 1 September 2006. In southern Ontario there is a small breeding population in the Brockville-Rideau Lakes area descended from invaders from New York, supplemented by releases at Brockville, Cataraqui Creek near Kingston and Portland, Ontario.

Most Trumpeters winter in Ontario; only a very small number move to the United States. They concentrate on open water, particularly at La Salle Park in Burlington, but some can be found along the north shore of Lake Ontario at Bluffers Park and Frenchman's Bay and at inland areas such as the Severn River mouth on Hudson Bay, the Wye Marsh in Midland, and Ramsey Lake at Sudbury.

All swans build huge nests, Trumpeters choosing a beaver house, a muskrat house in a marsh or sometimes a log or stump in drowned forest as a base. The nest is composed of stems of emergent vegetation close to the nest site. In a marsh the nest is often surrounded by a moat from which material has been collected. The nest may be as much as 3 metres in diameter at the base. Trumpeters take readily to artificial structures such as rafts for nesting. Unlike most other waterfowl, the Trumpeter does not use down to line the nest. Incubation is largely carried out by the female, but some males may cover the eggs when the female takes a recess to drink, feed and wash.

There is a good likelihood of Trumpeters breeding in Niagara in the future. A pair nested at Selkirk in 1999, and there is confirmed nesting to the west of Niagara and in the Hamilton area from the second Atlas. Wherever Mute Swans nest, there would be habitat for Trumpeters. They have nested in marinas and parks and are not bothered by people as long as they are left alone.

Harry G. Lumsden

Post-2006 Observation

There is only one record of Trumpeter Swan after 2006. On 13 April 2008, Kayo Roy observed and photographed an immature bird (as illustrated) feeding in Lake Gibson, Thorold (BOSNR). It was in the company of an adult Mute Swan. The Trumpeter was last observed on 22 May 2008. This sighting represents the only breeding season record for Niagara.

Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, uncommon to rare winter resident

The Tundra Swan is an uncommon transient across the Niagara Peninsula. The April, May and October BOS counts miss the peaks of migration, which occur in the late winter and early spring in February and March and in the fall in October and November. The BOS April Counts totalled 268 birds with a mean of 11 per year. The May count totalled 39 and the October count 16. An early fall record of a returning bird is of one seen at the Smithville sewage ponds on 9 October 1989 (HNCNR).

BOS Noteworthy Records indicate that Niagara yielded peaks of 1,328 in March and 2,775 in November. Of the total 6,081 birds, 35% were counted in February and March and 26% in November. Only in September were no Tundra Swans observed.

The BOS CBC reported sporadic sightings of single birds from 1967 to 1994. The numbers began to increase in 1996, and this trend continued until 2006, when 167 Tundra Swans were counted as compared with a total of 53 birds for all the previous years. The greatest numbers were seen at Port Colborne, the highest count being 171 in 2005. The St. Catharines CBC has recorded only one bird since its inception in 1982.



Tundra Swans have been steadily increasing in North America. They have more than doubled their numbers since 1950 so that the eastern population now exceeds 100,000 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2000). There has been a steady rise in the numbers recorded in Niagara, part of which may be attributed to the increasing numbers of naturalists participating in counts since 1966. The New York Winter Waterfowl Survey (January) yielded a total count of 640 Tundra Swans from 1987 to 2006, the highest number counted after that of February, March and November.

The Niagara Peninsula lies on the route of migrating swans heading for Long Point, an important refuelling stop for them. Few stop in Niagara, probably since their objective is relatively close. The western population breeds on the west coast of Alaska south of Point Hope. They winter from Alaska and British Columbia to California and Nevada.

Extirpated as a breeding species during fur trade days on the Hudson Bay coast of Ontario, the Tundra Swan has recently returned. The first nesting record was in 1973, when a brood of two was photographed from the air about 32 km east of the Sutton River mouth near the Hudson Bay coast (Lumsden 1975). In 1984, five broods were found on an aerial survey of a 3,284-km² study area in Polar Bear Park. Since only 32% of this area was sampled, 15 broods are estimated to have been present (Lumsden 1984a). Recently many broods have been found along the Hudson Bay coast and west into Manitoba (Kenneth Abraham pers. comm.).

In the Niagara Peninsula, the best places to look for Tundra Swans during the migratory periods are at Gravelly Bay in Port Colborne on Lake Erie, on the Niagara River and close to the shore of Lake Ontario. Up to several hundred birds can be found at Gravelly Bay (Blayne Farnan pers. comm.). During the winter months they can be found in smaller numbers at Gravelly Bay, on the Niagara River and on the eastern shore of Point Abino.

Tundra Swan
Sam Barone

BOS April Count: Reported on 24 of 41 counts, maximum of 68 birds in 1978

BOS May Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 32 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 12 birds in 2002

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 11 of 41 counts, maximum of 171 birds on the 2005 Port Colborne CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 2000

Large numbers of waterfowl are swept over Niagara Falls when certain weather conditions prevail. Foggy nights with a light downstream wind seem to be associated with such events, although occasionally losses occur without fog. Necropsy of dead ducks revealed that the sternum was cracked by the immense pressure of falling water at the bottom of the falls (Harry Lumsden pers. obs.). Some birds, however, survive this catastrophic ride, and Tundra Swans are frequently among the survivors. Fleming (1912b) records a loss of about 200 swans at Niagara Falls in 1912. There have been fewer casualties in recent years.

The eastern wintering population of Tundra Swans breeds in eastern Siberia (a few), the north slope of the Brooks Range in Alaska, and across the Canadian Arctic to Baffin Island and Ungava. These birds move south, crossing Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and southern Ontario in a relatively narrow band. They winter in the Atlantic coast states from New Jersey to South Carolina (Limpert and Earnst 1994).

Harry G. Lumsden



Wood Duck
Brandon Holden

First Atlas: 13 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 17 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 28 of 41 counts, maximum of 31 birds in 1995

BOS May Count: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 40 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 23 of 40 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 1987

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 11 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on the 1991 and 1998 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1989

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, occasional winter straggler

A male Wood Duck in breeding plumage is one of the most attractive of all Niagara's birds. The Wood Duck is probably an uncommon spring transient in Niagara, but it is not clear how to distinguish between transients and birds arriving in the area to breed. Two reported early dates of spring arrival are 16 March 1997, when five males were seen at the Port Robinson sewage ponds (KJR), and 27 March 1994, when four birds were seen at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR).

The Wood Duck, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 3 June.

There are seven BOSNR records for November. An occasional winter straggler, the Wood Duck has been seen on five BOS Christmas bird counts, four Niagara Falls CBCs, two Port Colborne CBCs and three St. Catharines CBCs. There are three December records, eight January records and five February records from the BOSNR.

The Wood Duck winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Spring and fall transient, occasional summer resident, rare winter straggler

It is not clear how to assign spring transient abundance or spring arrival dates to this species because the small number of possible migrant Gadwall cannot reliably be separated from the small number of birds that overwinter in the area.

The Gadwall is a scattered breeder throughout southern Ontario and an occasional summer resident or straggler in Niagara. In the first Atlas, breeding was confirmed in the square containing Mud Lake in Port Colborne, and in the second Atlas probable breeding was found in the same square, when a pair of birds was observed on 1 May 2003 in suitable habitat. A single bird was seen by an atlaser on 16 July 2004 in an area east of the Welland Canal in St. Catharines. In the BOS Noteworthy Records, Gadwall are often reported in the summer months. There are six records for June, six records for July and three records for August. There are five BOSNR records for November.

A rare winter straggler, Gadwall are seen on almost all BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs but less frequently on the St. Catharines and Port Colborne counts. Up to 20 birds are almost always found wintering on the river near the old Ontario Hydro building above Niagara Falls. On 21 December 1969, Harold Lancaster observed 26 Gadwall in the rapids above the falls. The Gadwall winters in the vicinity of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 67 birds in 2000

BOS May Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 14 birds in 1985

BOS October Count: Reported on 21 of 40 counts, maximum of 23 birds in 1988 and 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 35 of 41 counts, maximum of 120 birds on the 1991 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 13 of 23 counts, maximum of 24 birds in 1992 and 2003

Gadwall
Brandon Holden



Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Extremely rare visitor

A common, widespread bird of the Old World, the Eurasian Wigeon has become a regular visitor to all corners of North America. Two distinct populations exist: a few hundred birds in the Atlantic east, probably arriving from Iceland, and several thousand in the Pacific west, likely birds that moved eastward from Siberia (Bellrose 1976).

The Eurasian Wigeon, formerly known as European Widgeon, is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara at which times it is almost always found with its American counterpart, the American Wigeon. The date of the first recorded sighting for Niagara is difficult to ascertain as Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) identifies observations in the BOS study area in 20 out of 27 years, with no detail of dates or locations. One old record exists of a European Widgeon found “in March many years ago” by James Savage in Port Colborne. No exact date is known (Sheppard 1970).

There were five records of Eurasian Wigeon in Niagara during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. Robert Andrie, Richard Byron and Richard Knapton discovered a first-winter male on 15 November 1983 in Niagara Falls that remained there until 20 December 1983 (BOSNR), (not 15 November -18 December 1983 as in Wormington 1985). On 28 March 1987, Robert Curry identified a very rare rufous morph female at the Smithville sewage ponds (photographed by Kayo Roy) that was last seen on 30 March 1987 (Coady 1988, Curry 2006). On 27 March 1993, Jean and Blayne Farnan observed a breeding plumaged male Eurasian Wigeon in a wet field on Dixie Road in Wainfleet that was last seen the next day, 28 March 1993. Kevin McLaughlin studied a

molting male on 9 July 2000 at the Grimsby sewage ponds (Curry 2006). Barry Cheriére photographed an adult male on 20 May 2005, also at the Grimsby sewage ponds, that was last seen on 22 May 2005.

The breeding range for Eurasian Wigeon extends across northern Eurasia, and the species winters in southern Europe, northern Africa and southern Asia (Bellrose 1976). It is not known to breed in North America, but it is an annual spring and winter vagrant on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and more rarely inland (Madge and Burn 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Eurasian Wigeon
Harold Stiver





American Wigeon *Anas Americana*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, rare summer resident, rare winter straggler

The American Wigeon, formerly known as “Baldpate”, is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. An earliest date of arrival is 15 March 1969, when three birds were seen at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The American Wigeon breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a rare summer straggler in Niagara. In the first Atlas, breeding was confirmed in one square containing Mud Lake in Port Colborne; and in the second Atlas, probable breeding was found in the same square, when a pair of birds was observed on 1 May 2003 in suitable habitat. A single bird was seen by an atlasser on 11 June 2002 in the town of Fort Erie, an unlikely place for the bird to find suitable breeding habitat. In the BOS Noteworthy Records, American Wigeon is often reported in the summer months. There are 12 records in June, the maximum for these being 30 birds; nine records in July, the maximum being six birds; and four records in August, the maximum being nine birds.

There are six BOSNR records for November.

A rare winter straggler, the American Wigeon is seen on almost all BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs but less frequently on the St. Catharines and Port Colborne counts. As many as 20 wigeon can be found wintering in the gorge below Niagara Falls between the Maid of the Mist dock and an area a few hundred metres north of the Rainbow Bridge. Harold Lancaster observed an amazing number of wigeon (600) on the upper Niagara rapids on 1 January 1971. There are twelve December records, eight January records and five February records from the BOSNR. The American Wigeon winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

American Wigeon
Sam Barone

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 169 birds in 1990

BOS May Count: Reported on 26 of 41 counts, maximum of 19 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 31 of 40 counts, maximum of 427 birds in 1969

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 214 birds on the 1967 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 3 of 23 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1994

American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer and winter resident

First Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 5 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 97 birds in 1966 and 1967

BOS May Count: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 22 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 184 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 668 birds on the 1966 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 23 of 23 counts, maximum of 121 birds in 1998

The American Black Duck, once the most abundant dabbling duck in eastern North America, today is only half as numerous as in the 1950s. Strict harvest regulations have been in place in both Canada and the United States since the mid-1980s, which have helped slow down this population decline. The American Black Duck feeds mainly on plants, mollusks and aquatic insects by dabbling in shallow water and grazing on land. It is partially migratory; however, some remain year-round in the Great Lakes region. Unusual among dabbling ducks, the male and female American Black Duck are almost identical, distinguished in the breeding season only by the bright yellow bill of the male.

The American Black Duck is closely related to the Mallard, with which it regularly and extensively interbreeds (McCarthy 2006). About 5% of wild ducks that look like American Black Ducks in eastern North America are actually hybrids (McCarthy 2006).

The American Black Duck breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. While these birds migrate through Niagara in the early spring and fall, it is difficult to determine the abundance of transients because they cannot readily be distinguished from the residents.

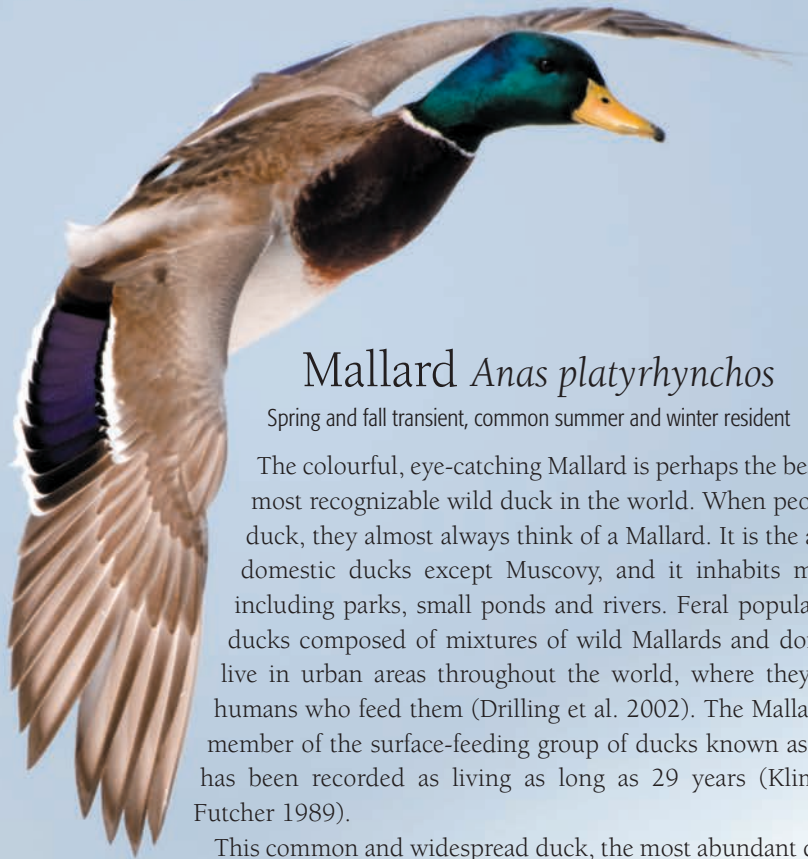
Summer resident numbers of this species have declined over the years covered in this book. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) state that “with the exception of the Blue-winged Teal it was until recent years our most common nesting duck.”

American Black Ducks are uncommon winter residents in Niagara. A good place to see them is in the rapids above the Horseshoe Falls by the Gate House building and in the ponds of Dufferin Island in Niagara Falls. This duck winters in the vicinity of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie and in the southern United States (*National Geographic* 2006).

American Black Duck
Kayo Roy

John E. Black





Mallard
Raymond Barlow

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Spring and fall transient, common summer and winter resident

The colourful, eye-catching Mallard is perhaps the best-known and most recognizable wild duck in the world. When people think of a duck, they almost always think of a Mallard. It is the ancestor of all domestic ducks except Muscovy, and it inhabits most wetlands including parks, small ponds and rivers. Feral populations of tame ducks composed of mixtures of wild Mallards and domestic breeds live in urban areas throughout the world, where they habituate to humans who feed them (Drilling et al. 2002). The Mallard is a typical member of the surface-feeding group of ducks known as dabblers and has been recorded as living as long as 29 years (Klimkiewicz and Futcher 1989).

This common and widespread duck, the most abundant duck in North America, is known to hybridize in the wild with American Black Duck, Mottled Duck, and less frequently with Gadwall, Northern Pintail, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal and Canvasback (Drilling et al. 2002). In Niagara, interbreeding occurs with American Black Duck more often than with other wild or domestic duck species.

The Mallard is a common summer resident in Niagara and is found everywhere in the region. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 3 May. While these birds migrate through Niagara in the early spring and fall, it is difficult to determine the abundance of transients because they cannot readily be distinguished from the residents.

The Mallard winters in the vicinity of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 22 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,191 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 230 birds in 2006

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 1,774 birds in 2002

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 2,327 birds on the 1999 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 23 of 23 counts, maximum of 1,879 birds in 1991

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*

Uncommon spring transient, rare summer resident, fall transient, extremely rare winter straggler

The Blue-winged Teal is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. An early date of arrival is 9 March 1969, when two birds were seen at Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are three other March sightings reported in BOSNR.

The Blue-winged Teal, which breeds in southern Ontario, is now a rare summer resident in Niagara. Sheppard (1970) described the Blue-winged Teal as a reasonably common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 16 June.



Blue-winged Teal
Raymond Barlow

First Atlas: 9 squares confirmed,
 2 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares con-
 firmed, 4 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
 36 of 41 counts, maximum of
 69 birds in 1991

BOS May Count: Reported on
 37 of 41 counts, maximum of
 36 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported
 on 26 of 40 counts, maximum
 of 35 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
 Not reported

In the BOS Noteworthy Records, there are six August reports; the one or two birds reported at various locations in Niagara between 1 August and 21 August could be migrants returning south from their breeding grounds. On 4 September 1982, 125 birds were observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). On 5 September 1971, 500 birds were observed at Mud Lake in Port Colborne by Harold Lancaster. On 19 September 1983, 250 were observed between Lowbanks and Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). One record exists in the HNCNR for November from the Grimsby sewage ponds.

An extremely rare winter straggler, the Blue-winged Teal has not been seen on any Niagara Christmas bird count. There are two December records, one January record and one February record in the BOSNR — all of single birds and all but one December record from Dufferin Island, Niagara Falls. A single female observed at Dufferin Island on 17 February 2000 was quite probably the same bird observed there on 7 January 2001 (KJR). The Blue-winged Teal winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, occasional summer resident, occasional winter straggler

The Northern Shoveler is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. An early date of arrival is 12 March 1990, when two birds were seen at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). There is one March BOS Noteworthy Record. While it was seen on 25 of 41 BOS April Counts, it was seen on only three of 41 May Counts. The latest date is 28 May 2000, when two birds were reported from St. Catharines (BOSNR).

While some Northern Shovelers breed in various parts of southern Ontario, the species breeds primarily in western Canada. It is an occasional summer resident in Niagara. In the first Atlas, there were no reports of breeding, and in the second Atlas, possible breeding was reported from one square and confirmed breeding from two squares. (Young birds were seen at Vanderliek farm pond in Bismark and on the Lake Erie shore near Fort Erie).

In the BOS Noteworthy Records, there are six August reports; the one or two birds reported at various locations in Niagara between 3 August and 25 August could be early returning migrants. There are two records in BOSNR for November and five records in HNCNR for November from the Grimsby sewage ponds.

An occasional winter straggler, the Northern Shoveler was first recorded on a Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count in 1986 and has been found on only one BOS count, five Niagara Falls counts and two St. Catharines counts since that date. BOSNR contains one December record, five January records and two February records. The Northern Shoveler winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, extremely rare summer resident, rare winter straggler

The Northern Pintail is one of the top 20 common species in decline as determined by the National Audubon Society (Audubon 2007). It is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. There are seven March records from the BOSNR. The earliest date of sighting is 18 March 1975, when Harold Lancaster observed 14 birds at Mud Lake in Port Colborne. The latest date is 30 May 1971, when one bird was reported from Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). Small numbers of these birds can often be found in Niagara on ponds and lakes during the migration period.

Northern Pintail, an extremely rare summer resident in Niagara, breeds from the lower great lakes north to Hudson Bay. There are no atlas breeding records. There is one record in the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data for Niagara, an earliest egg date for this species of 25 June 1969. There are six June records and eight July records from BOSNR.

In the BOSNR there are 15 August reports of birds that could be either early returning migrants or summer stragglers. There are four records in BOSNR for November.

A rare winter straggler, the Northern Pintail has been found on 14 BOS Christmas Bird Counts, 13 Niagara Falls counts, four Port Colborne counts and three St. Catharines counts. The largest number of birds reported on a count was 53 birds on the 2006 St. Catharines CBC. The Northern Pintail winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 1988

BOS May Count: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1990

BOS October Count: Reported on 6 of 40 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1994

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 18 birds on the 1987 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 2002

BOS April Count: Reported on 16 of 41 counts, maximum of 94 birds in 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1966

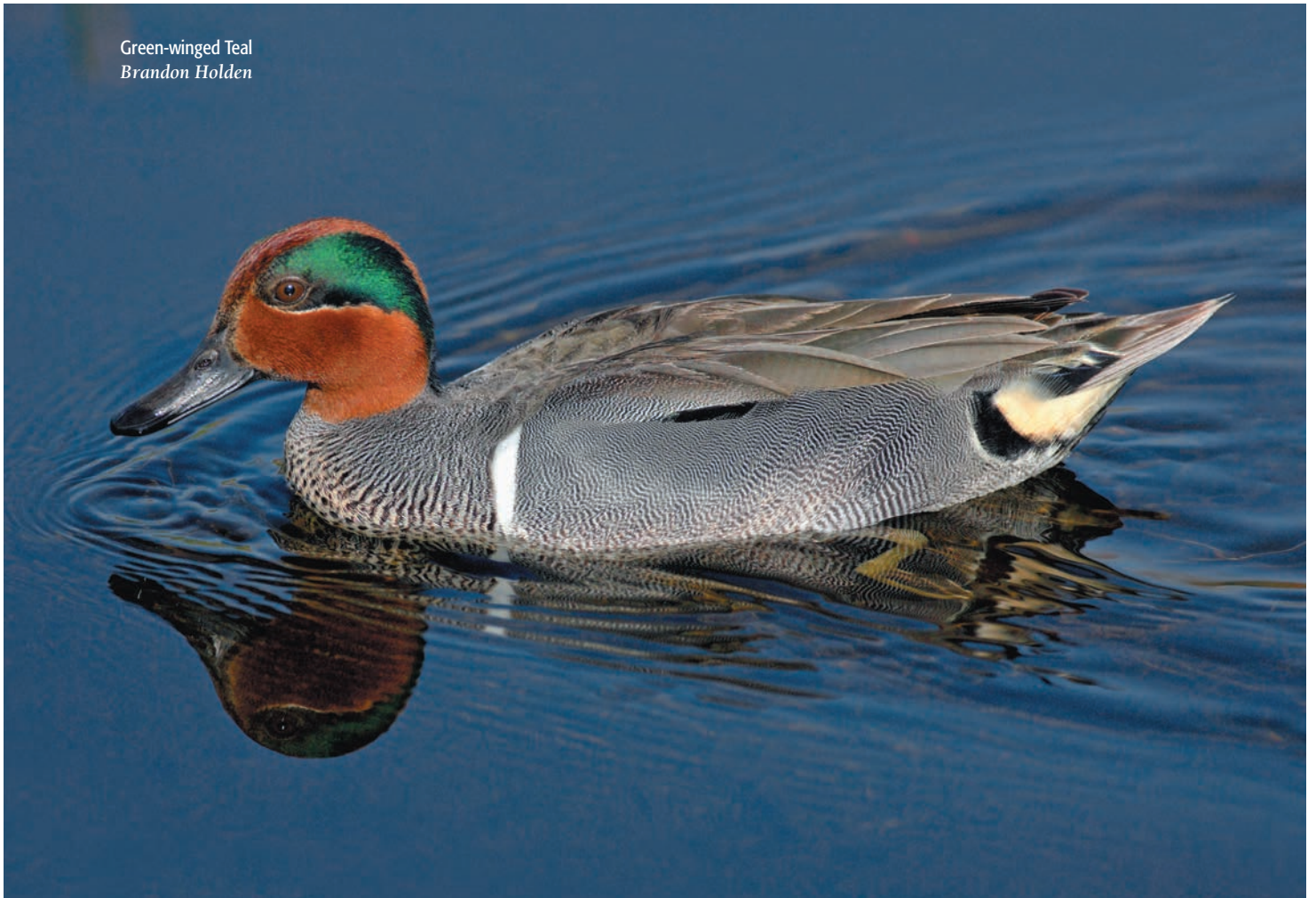
BOS October Count: Reported on 14 of 40 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 53 birds on the 2006 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1990



Northern Pintail
Brandon Holden



Green-winged Teal
Brandon Holden

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, occasional summer resident and winter straggler

The Green-winged Teal is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. It is the smallest and one of the fastest-flying North American dabbling ducks (Hughes 2007). The earliest date of arrival is 18 March 1990, when two birds were found in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest date is 30 May 2000, when one bird was reported from West Lincoln (BOSNR).

The Green-winged Teal, which breeds from the Great Lakes north to Hudson Bay, is an occasional summer resident in Niagara. There are two June and seven July records in BOSNR.

In the BOS Noteworthy Records, there are 16 August reports; the one to six birds reported at various locations in Niagara between 6 August and 29 August could be early returning migrants. There is one exceptional record — 26 birds observed at Windmill Point, Fort Erie, by Willie D'Anna on 21 August 1999 (BOSNR). For November, the BOSNR contains five records.

There are two records of the Eurasian race of the Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca crecca* from Niagara. On 20 April 1969 Harold Lancaster and Alan J. Smith found an adult male at Mud Lake in Port Colborne. On 28 November 2004 an adult male was found by Willie D'Anna, Jean Iron and others in the Hydro One impoundment cell just south of the old Gate House building in Niagara Falls.

An occasional winter straggler, the Green-winged Teal has been seen on only six BOS CBCs (five of these between 1999 and 2003), one Niagara Falls count, one Port Colborne count and two St. Catharines counts. There are seven December records, fifteen January records and five February records from the BOSNR. A pair of birds found on 27 February 1966 by Dan Salisbury at the Happy Rolph Bird Sanctuary in St. Catharines could have overwintered there or been early migrants. The Green-winged Teal winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

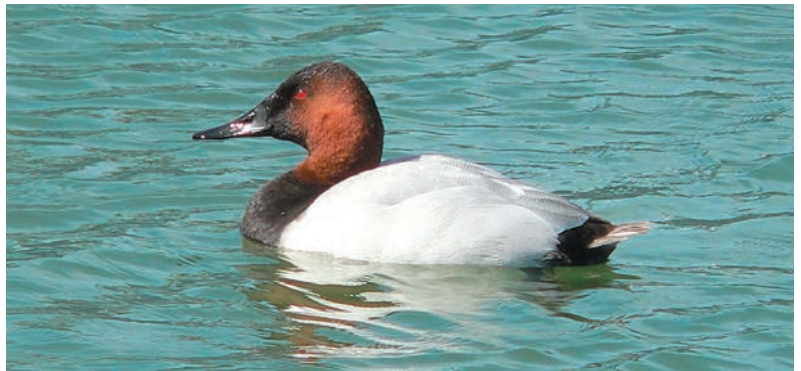
John E. Black

Canvasback *Aythya valisineria*

Very common (upper Niagara River) to uncommon winter resident, occasional summer straggler

The Canvasback is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. Arrival is usually in early to mid-March. However, exact arrival dates are difficult to determine because many of the birds seen in March and April are likely birds that have spent the winter on the Niagara River.

The Canvasback is a very rare breeder in Ontario. It breeds primarily west from Manitoba to British Columbia and north to Yukon and Northwest Territories in Canada (Coady 2007a). There was no breeding documented in Niagara in either atlas, and the closest nests were found on the Toronto Islands, on the Leslie Street Spit in Toronto, and in Oshawa. It is an occasional summer straggler in Niagara. There are only three summer records (all individual birds) from Niagara in the BOSNR and an additional three in the HNCNR.



First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 33 of 41 counts, maximum of 48 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 10 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1977 and 1991

BOS October Count: Reported on 24 of 40 counts, maximum of 302 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 10 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds on the 1996 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1996

Canvasback
Kayo Roy

BOS April Count: Reported on 28 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,031 birds in 1974

BOS May Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1971 and 1977

BOS October Count: Reported on 5 of 40 counts, maximum of 250 birds in 1985

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 41 of 41 counts,
maximum of 7,065 birds on the
1984 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter
Waterfowl Survey: Reported on
11 of 23 counts, maximum of
47 birds in 1985

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares con-
firmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
33 of 41 counts, maximum of
135 birds in 1967

BOS May Count: Reported on
10 of 41 counts, maximum of
10 birds in 1977

BOS October Count: Reported
on 13 of 40 counts, maximum
of 194 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 34 of 41 counts,
maximum of 194 birds on the
2003 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter
Waterfowl Survey: Reported on
10 of 23 counts, maximum of
410 birds in 2002

Redhead
Brandon Holden

There are no August or September BOSNR reports. Arrival is usually in mid- to late October. The earliest migrant return date is of a single bird at the Smithville sewage ponds on 9 October 1989 (HNCNR). On 31 October 1981, Arthur Schaffner observed 15,000 Canvasbacks on the Niagara River in Niagara Falls, the maximum count in the BOSNR.

Most common in late fall and winter, Canvasbacks are recorded nearly annually on the BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs, regularly on the Port Colborne CBC, but irregularly on the St. Catharines CBC. Flocks in the hundreds and (low) thousands can be found on the upper Niagara River each winter, where numbers seem to be increasing over time but are highly variable from year to year (New York Winter Waterfowl Count).

Michael M. Morgante

Redhead *Aythya americana*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, occasional summer resident or straggler,
uncommon to rare winter resident

The Redhead is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. There are five sightings for March in BOSNR. The latest spring dates are 26 May 2000, when one bird was reported from Long Beach (BOSNR), and 27 May 1990, when one bird was observed at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). The abundance of spring transients cannot be assigned because the small number of possible migrant Redhead cannot be readily distinguished from the small number of birds that overwintered in the area.

Although primarily a bird of western Canada, the Redhead is also found breeding in the vicinity of the lower Great Lakes. It is an occasional summer resident or straggler in Niagara. In the first Atlas, confirmed breeding was reported from Mud Lake in Port Colborne. In the second Atlas, no breeding was reported. There are four June records (all from the Port Colborne area, where they were known historically to breed) and one July record (BOSNR).



Three August reports of Redhead (BOSNR) could actually be an indication of early returning migrants. On 12 November 1972, Harold Lancaster observed 1,000 birds on the Niagara River off Chippawa.

An uncommon to rare winter resident, the Redhead has been seen in small numbers on many of the Niagara Christmas bird counts. A likely place to find these birds is on the upper Niagara River between Fort Erie and Niagara Falls. They are often with flocks of Canvasback or Greater Scaup. Harold Lancaster observed 250 birds on 10 January 1971 on the Niagara River above Niagara Falls. The Redhead winters in the vicinity of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario as well as in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Ring-necked Duck

Aythya collaris

Uncommon spring and fall transient, rare winter straggler

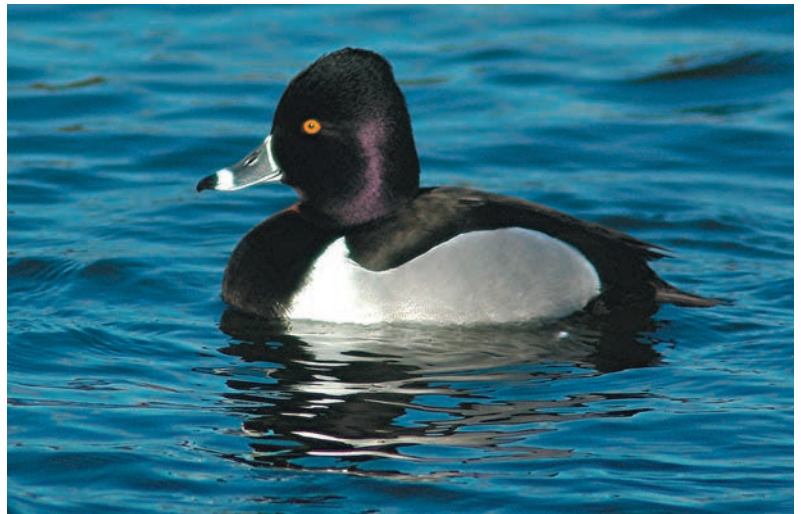
The Ring-necked Duck is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. Only five records appear in the March BOS Noteworthy Records. Early spring arrival dates are 6 March 1983, when four birds were found at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR), and 18 March 1992, when 87 birds were reported from the Smithville sewage ponds (BOSNR). On 30 March 1991, 200 birds of this species were reported from the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). The latest spring date is 25 May 1999, when one bird was reported from the Vanderliek farm pond in Bismark (BOSNR). A few individuals of this species can often be found on small ponds and lakes in Niagara during the migration period.

Ring-necked Ducks breed from north of Lake Ontario to Hudson Bay. There are no summer records for this species. There was a significant increase (58%) in the probability of observing this species between atlases in Ontario (Leckie 2007a).

On 25 August 1996 a Ring-necked Duck was observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). The next earliest date of return for a migrant is for a single bird on 11 September 1977 at Mud Lake in Port Colborne. There are 10 records in BOSNR for November.

A rare winter straggler, the Ring-necked Duck has been seen on six BOS Christmas Bird Counts, 17 Niagara Falls counts, five Port Colborne counts and one St. Catharines count. A likely place to look for these ducks in the winter is on the Niagara River between Fort Erie and Niagara Falls. They are often with flocks of Canvasback or Greater Scaup. Eight birds found on 25 February 2003 at St. Anns (Curry 2006) were probably early spring transients. The Ring-necked Duck winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black



Ring-necked Duck
Barry Cherriere

BOS April Count: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 476 birds in 1990

BOS May Count: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Reported on 11 of 40 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 24 of 41 counts, maximum of 58 birds on the 1999 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 2 of 23 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 2003



Tufted Duck
Brandon Holden

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Extremely rare visitor

The obvious black tuft at the back of the head gives this Old World, freshwater diving duck its name. Increasing numbers of Tufted Duck are reaching North America in fall migration and are winter visitors mostly on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. The species does wander inland on occasion and is usually found as a single individual mixed in with flocks of Greater Scaup or Ring-necked Ducks.

The Tufted Duck is clearly an extremely rare visitor to Niagara with only two known records. The first is that of a definitive alternate male bird found on 17 January 1999 by Michael Morgante in the Niagara River at Fort Erie. To the delight of many observers, this bird remained until 27 January 1999 (Roy 2001, BOSNR).

The second is that of another definitive alternate male found by Kayo Roy on 24 January 2004 in the Welland Canal near Lock 1 at Port Weller in St. Catharines. Persistently associating with a group of Greater Scaup, this Niagara rarity was not seen after 6 February 2004 (Crins 2005, BOSNR).

The Tufted Duck breeds widely across northern Europe and Asia, central Europe to northern Mongolia and northern Japan. It winters in the Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Sea lowlands and east to southern and eastern China and Japan (Madge and Burn 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Very common winter resident on large bodies of water

The Greater Scaup is a common early spring transient on large bodies of water in Niagara. It is much less common on inland lakes and ponds. Arrival is usually in early March. However, exact arrival dates are difficult to determine because many of the birds seen in March and April are likely birds that have spent the winter in Niagara. It is uncommon after late April.

There was no breeding documented in Niagara in either atlas. In Ontario, Greater Scaup nests within the Hudson Bay Lowlands (S.S. Badzinski 2007a). A circumpolar breeder, it is widely distributed from Alaska to Labrador across arctic and subarctic regions (S.S. Badzinski 2007a). The Greater Scaup is a rare summer visitor to Niagara with approximately 12 summer records (maximum of three birds) in BOSNR and an additional three in the HNCNR.

The bulk of fall transients return between mid-October and early November, with the earliest typically returning in late September and early October. The earliest migrant return date that can be separated from a summer visitor record is 1 September 1982, when one bird was seen at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). It is very common in fall migration on large bodies of water.

Greater Scaup are recorded nearly annually on all four Niagara Region CBCs. Impressive numbers of this diving duck can be found in winter on the upper Niagara River, especially when Lake Erie freezes. They are very common in winter in the waters between the ice boom and the Peace Bridge, near Strawberry Island and the southern tip of Grand Island, and near the water intakes above the International Niagara Control Works structure in Chippawa. Greater Scaup form large, compact flocks of hundreds and thousands of birds in these areas, often with other waterfowl species mixed in. The maximum count in the BOS Noteworthy Records is 30,000 birds reported by Brendan Klick on 17 January 1999 in Fort Erie.

Michael M. Morgante

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, uncommon winter resident

The Lesser Scaup typically arrives in mid-March and is an uncommon transient through April. It is more likely to be seen on smaller bodies of water in Niagara than its congener the Greater Scaup.

There was no breeding documented in Niagara in either atlas. The closest confirmed breeding during the second Atlas occurred near Lake St. Clair. Lesser Scaup is most common within the Hudson Bay Lowlands in Ontario (S.S. Badzinski 2007b). It is a widely distributed breeder with a core breeding range from Alaska through Manitoba (S.S. Badzinski 2007b). It is an occasional summer visitor with approximately 16 records (maximum of four birds) from Niagara in the BOSNR and an additional 14 in the HNCNR.

BOS April Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 5,539 birds in 1996

BOS May Count: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 86 birds in 2000

BOS October Count: Reported on 35 of 40 counts, maximum of 4,383 birds in 1979

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 7,800 birds on the 1996 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 12 of 23 counts, maximum of 5,130 birds in 2005



Greater Scaup
Jean Iron



Lesser Scaup
Brandon Holden

BOS April Count: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,871 birds in 1969

BOS May Count: Reported on 18 of 41 counts, maximum of 111 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 26 of 40 counts, maximum of 1,650 birds in 1990

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 94 birds on the 1986 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 7 of 23 counts, maximum of 9 birds in 2002

Fall arrival of this species typically commences in mid-September, and it is a common transient through mid-October.

The earliest return date in Niagara was that of a bird identified at Port Weller in St. Catharines on 31 August 1986 (BOSNR); however, it is difficult to distinguish between summer records and those of early returning transients.

Lesser Scaup are recorded nearly annually on the BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs and regularly on the Port Colborne and St. Catharines CBCs. In winter, on the large bodies of water in Niagara, it is much less common than the Greater Scaup, although it is increasing in regularity and numbers. A documented increase in the numbers of Lesser and Greater Scaup at Long Point, Ontario (on Lake Erie to the west of Niagara) was found to correspond with the introduction and increase of non-native zebra mussels and quagga mussels on the Great Lakes in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Petrie and Knaption 1999). The maximum Niagara count in the BOSNR is 539 at Fort Erie on 19 January 2003.

Michael M. Morgante

King Eider *Somateria spectabil*

Rare winter visitor

King Eider sightings in the spring are usually of birds that have overwintered in Niagara; however, the greatest numbers of eiders have been found in March. A group of 40 birds was observed on 29 March 1997 on Lake Ontario in Vineland, and 36 birds were counted at the same location on 1 April 1997 (BOSNR). A few adult males were identified in this group, a very rare occurrence for Niagara since most sightings are of females or immature males. Other than maximum counts in the low 20s at Vineland in 1998 and at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1967, all other sightings have been of eight or fewer birds, and usually just of one or two birds (BOSNR).



The King Eider breeds in the far north of Canada and was not documented as a breeder in Ontario in either atlas. There have been very few nests found in Ontario, the last one being at the Sutton River (Hudson Bay Region) in 1983 (Sutherland 2007a). There are no summer records within the time period (1966-2006) of this account.

It is occasionally observed in fall migration, most often in mid-November. The earliest migrant return date is for one bird seen at Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1976 and two seen at Niagara Falls in 1977, both on 31 October (BOSNR).

The King Eider is a rare winter visitor with even fewer sightings in other seasons. Usually there are only a handful of King Eider sightings each winter and those in small numbers. A breeding plumaged male spent the winter months of 1986-1987 at Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR). It is found only occasionally on the CBCs, and all sightings have been from Lake Erie, Lake Ontario or the Niagara River. In recent years, it has been most often picked out among flocks of scoters on Lake Ontario.

The King Eider winters on the east and west coasts of Canada and the United States (*National Geographic* 2006).

Michael M. Morgante

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*

Extremely rare visitor

The gregarious Common Eider, a Holarctic bird of northern seacoasts, is the largest duck in the northern hemisphere. Of the four North American subspecies, the most likely to be observed in Niagara is *sedentaria*, which breeds and winters on Hudson and James Bays. *Dresseri*, from the Atlantic coast, has also been recorded in southern Ontario. While Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) assign separate accounts in their publications for these two subspecies, all observations will be included in this account, and when known, the subspecies that were observed will be indicated.

King Eider, first year male
Jean Iron

BOS April Count: Reported on
2 of 41 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 1982

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 11 of 41 counts,
maximum of 7 birds on the
1990 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter
Waterfowl Survey: Reported
on 2 of 23 counts, maximum
of 1 bird in 1987 and 2004



Common Eider
Sam Barone

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) describe in detail the early observations of Common Eider in Niagara. The first record for Ontario and for Niagara is that of three young males observed on the Niagara River off the Canadian side of Navy Island, one of which was collected on 21 November 1936 (Sheppard 1937, 1960). This bird was forwarded to Percy A. Taverner who verified the identification and confirmed the bird to be *sedentaria*. The specimen is at the Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa (CMNAV # 27502).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, there are only four records of Common Eider from Niagara. On 28 December 1966 and also on 1 January 1967, Daniel Salisbury observed this extremely rare visitor in the Niagara River gorge, Niagara Falls. On 18 December 1969, Rachel and Harold Axtell discovered a first-winter plumaged male Common Eider on the Niagara River near Baker's Creek; it moved to the mouth of the Welland River in Chippawa, where it remained continuously for some 18 months, being last seen on 10 January 1971 (Bain 1994, BOSNR, m. obs.). This Chippawa Common Eider may have been incapacitated in some way that prevented it from leaving the area, and during the period of its presence, the bird molted into full alternate plumage, to the delight of many observers.

On 3 June 1995, Kevin McLaughlin found an adult male in the Lake Ontario waters of Niagara off Fifty Point Conservation Area that was last observed on 4 June 1995 (Dobos 1996). Denys Gardiner and William Smith reported four female Common Eiders in Lake Ontario, again off Fifty Point Conservation Area on 20 October 1995. These four birds landed in Niagara waters near the tip of the conservation area and were observed to swim east and out of view beyond the Department of National Defense rifle range in Grimsby (Curry 2006).

In North America the Common Eider breeds from Arctic Alaska and Canada south to southern Alaska and Massachusetts. The species winters in southern Alaska, Hudson Bay and in the northern Atlantic south to New Jersey (Goudie et al. 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

Harlequin Duck
Barry Cherriere

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

Rare winter visitor



The only spring sighting of Harlequin Duck in Niagara occurred in 1981, when one lingered at Fort Erie until 10 May (BOSNR).

The Harlequin Duck has never been documented as a breeder in Ontario. Those observed in Niagara are believed to be from the Atlantic breeding populations in the Maritimes

and northern Quebec. The eastern population of Harlequin Duck is designated as a Species of Special Concern in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). There have been no summer records in Niagara.

It is occasionally observed in fall migration, most often in mid-November. The earliest fall date for Niagara is 1 November 1970 at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Harlequin Duck is a rare but nearly annual winter visitor on the large bodies of water of Niagara. The majority of sightings are from the Niagara River in the vicinity of the Peace Bridge and in the rapids above Niagara Falls. The maximum count of three was reported at Fort Erie on 29 November 1975 (BOSNR). It is found only occasionally on the CBCs. The Harlequin Duck winters on the east and west coasts of Canada and the United States (*National Geographic* 2006).

Michael M. Morgante

BOS April Count: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1978, 1981 and 2003

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds on the 1994 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 3 of 23 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1995, 1996 and 2003

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*

Rare winter resident and spring transient, uncommon fall transient

A rare spring transient, the Surf Scoter appears in only a few spring BOS counts and BOS Noteworthy Records. The first spring arrival is often in the second week of April. The earliest date of a spring transient (as distinguished from a winter resident) in the BOSNR for Niagara is 27 March 1994, when Willie D'Anna recorded two birds at Port Weller in St. Catharines.

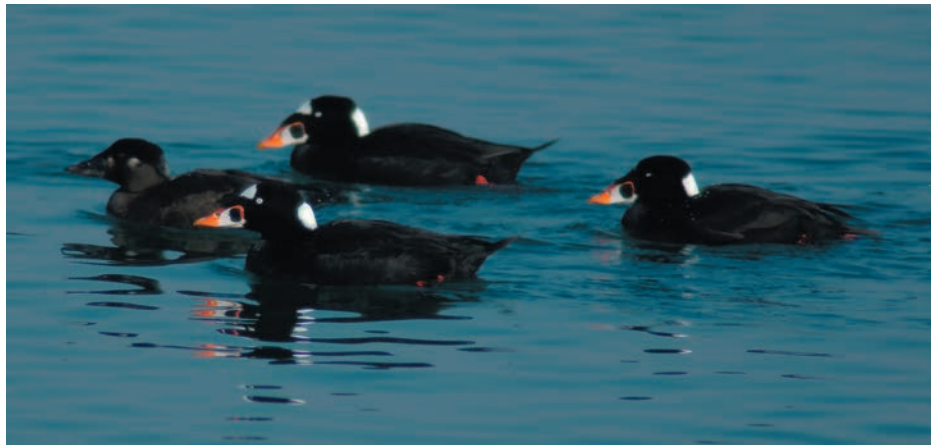
The Surf Scoter does not breed in Niagara. During the second Ontario atlas, all evidence of breeding was found in the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Ross 2007a). Its breeding range covers the boreal forest across North America. There are no summer records in the BOSNR. Fall migration represents the most common occurrence of Surf Scoter in Niagara. During this season, it is routinely found on Lake Ontario and Lake Erie but rarely in big flocks. The peak of migration takes place between the last week of October and mid-November. Birds usually arrive in the first or second week of October; the earliest arrival on record was of a single bird at the Smithville sewage ponds on 1 October 1989 (HNCNR). The maximum count for Niagara in the BOSNR is 130 at Fort Erie on 9 November 1968 as reported by Edward Rybczynski and others.

Only a few Surf Scoter remain in winter. It is recorded irregularly and in low numbers on the BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs, only rarely on the St. Catharines CBC and has not been recorded on the Port Colborne CBC.

The Surf Scoter winters on the east and west coasts of Canada and the United States. Some birds winter on the Gulf of Mexico (*National Geographic* 2006).

Michael M. Morgante

Surf Scoters
Barry Cheriére



BOS April Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 66 birds in 1997

BOS May Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 1974

BOS October Count: Reported on 18 of 40 counts, maximum of 159 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 16 of 41 counts, maximum of 14 birds on the 1967 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 2 of 23 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 2002

White-winged Scoter
Kenneth Newcombe



White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

Very common fall transient, common winter resident and spring transient (Lake Ontario), occasional summer visitor

The White-winged Scoter is Niagara's most common and widespread scoter species. It is less common during spring migration than in the fall. Spring migration intensifies in mid- to late March and most birds have left the area by mid-May. However, exact arrival dates are difficult to determine because many of the birds seen in March and April are likely birds that have spent the winter in Niagara.

Breeding within Ontario takes place mostly in the northern Hudson Bay Lowlands (Ross 2007b). No breeding in Niagara was documented in either atlas. In North America, the White-winged Scoter breeds from Alaska to Quebec just east of James Bay (Ross 2007b). It is an occasional summer visitor in Niagara. Six summer records exist — all of one or two birds — from Niagara (BOSNR, HNCNR).

The White-winged Scoter is very common on Lake Ontario during fall migration and in winter. It is present on Lake Erie and the Niagara River in much smaller numbers. The fall migration begins in mid-September, a few weeks before that of the other scoter species, and peaks in the month of October. A second migration peak occurs on Lake Ontario during the month of December, possibly from a separate migratory population (Ewald and Sherony 2001). The earliest report considered to be of a migrant return is of one bird at Fort Erie on 15 September 1996 (BOSNR).

The White-winged Scoter is now recorded annually on the Niagara Falls and St. Catharines CBCs, while only irregularly and in low numbers on the BOS and Port Colborne CBCs. As evidenced by the CBC data and the Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey, its numbers have increased in winter on Lake Ontario starting in the 1990s. The maximum number of White-winged Scoter, aside from those reported on CBCs and waterfowl counts, is 5,000 on 9 January 1994 at the Fifty Point Conservation Area by Kevin McLaughlin, William Lamond and George Naylor (HNCNR). Systematic watching on Lake Ontario during the peak of fall migration would also likely produce higher maximum numbers.

Michael M. Morgante

BOS April Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,006 birds in 1998

BOS May Count: Reported on 10 of 41 counts, maximum of 65 birds in 2002

BOS October Count: Reported on 23 of 40 counts, maximum of 116 birds in 1990

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 33 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,225 birds on the 2002 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 19 of 23 counts, maximum of 4,825 birds in 2000

Black Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Rare winter resident and spring transient, uncommon fall transient

There are only three spring records of Black Scoter in the BOSNR for Niagara and an additional two in the HNCNR. Only four BOS April Counts and no BOS May Counts reported sightings of Black Scoter. It is difficult to distinguish a spring transient from a winter resident since they are rare in both seasons; however, a possible spring arrival date in the BOSNR for Niagara is 28 March 1967, when one bird was observed at Fort Erie.

The Black Scoter does not breed in Niagara, and it was not confirmed as a breeder in Ontario until 2006 (Ross 2007c). During the second Atlas, there was some evidence of breeding in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The breeding range is poorly known but includes a population of birds on the taiga in Alaska and northwest Canada and a separate population in northern Quebec, from which the birds reaching Niagara likely originate. There is one late summer or early fall record of this species in Niagara. On 31 August 1969, Harold Lancaster observed a single Black Scoter off Morgan's Point near Burnaby.

The Black Scoter occurs in Niagara most frequently during fall migration, when it can be found on both Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The peak of migration falls between mid-October and mid-November. Arrivals are expected in the second week of October, the earliest in the BOSNR being nine birds at Fort Erie on 28 September 1981. This species is rarely found in very large numbers, and there are only two sightings for Niagara in the BOSNR that exceed 100 birds. The maximum count is of 450 birds observed by Robert Andrie and Richard Byron at Fort Erie on 31 October 1973, which greatly exceeds all other records. The maximum HNCNR count is 49 birds observed on 20 October 1985 by Denys Gardiner and Robert Curry at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR).

The Black Scoter is scarce in winter, especially beyond mid-January. It is recorded irregularly and in low numbers on the BOS, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines CBCs, and very rarely on the Port Colborne CBC.

Except for those that migrate to the Gulf of Mexico, this scoter winters on the east and west coasts of Canada and the United States (*National Geographic* 2006).

Michael M. Morgante

BOS April Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1994

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 22 birds in 1990

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds on the 1967 BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs and the 1990 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 5 of 23 counts, maximum of 14 birds in 2003

Black Scoters
Barry Cherriere





Long-tailed Duck
Barry Cherriere

BOS April Count: Reported on 35 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,046 birds in 2003

BOS May Count: Reported on 11 of 41 counts, maximum of 272 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 9 of 40 counts, maximum of 29 birds in 1979

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 9,500 birds on the 1993 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 23 of 23 counts, maximum of 2,528 birds in 2005

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

Very common winter resident (Lake Ontario and lower Niagara River), uncommon to common spring and fall transient, rare summer visitor

The Long-tailed Duck, formerly known as 'Oldsquaw', is a very common winter resident in Niagara. Spring migrants, identified as such because they appear at locations other than the common wintering areas, start to return in mid-March. Spring season sightings may be of arriving migrants, or they may be of wintering birds remaining in the region. The latest observations in spring are usually in mid- to late May.

The Long-tailed Duck does not breed in Niagara. In Ontario, it is believed to breed in low density in tundra along the Hudson Bay coast of Ontario (Abraham 2007b). In North America, it breeds well north in tundra from Alaska to Labrador. It now occurs in summer in Niagara with increased frequency, as a result of post-breeding dispersal. Nearly all summer reports, typically of one to two individuals, have come from Lake Erie in July and August.

The first fall arrivals usually appear in mid-October. Long-tailed Ducks are most common on Lake Ontario but are also regularly found on Lake Erie in the fall, sometimes in the hundreds near the Peace Bridge. They are rare at inland locations during fall migration.

The Long-tailed Duck is a part of the traditional winter scene on the lower Niagara River, as they can be found in large numbers from Queenston to the mouth of the Niagara River at Niagara-on-the-Lake. Their unusual calls fill the air and add to the ambience of this portion of the river through the winter months. They are also very common on Lake Ontario in winter, as evident from the numbers found annually on the Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey and the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls CBCs. They are much less common, not even an annual occurrence, on the BOS and Port Colborne CBCs. Gordon Bellerby estimated 15,000 on 20 December 1985 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, the maximum count in the BOSNR.

Michael M. Morgante

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*

Common transient and winter resident (very common on Niagara River), occasional summer visitor

The Bufflehead is a common spring transient in Niagara, usually arriving in early to mid-March. Exact arrival dates are difficult to determine, however, because many of the birds seen in March and April are likely birds that have spent the winter in Niagara.

The Bufflehead is increasing as a breeder in Ontario and throughout most of its range (Mallory 2007a). There was no breeding documented in Niagara in either atlas, and the closest nests were found southwest of Algonquin Provincial Park (Mallory 2007a). It is an occasional summer visitor in Niagara. There are seven summer records from Niagara in the BOSNR, all of one or two birds, and an additional five records in the HNCNR.

Fall arrival in Niagara is usually in mid-October. The earliest date of return for a migrant is 9 October, when single birds were seen at Fort Erie in 1970 (BOSNR) and at the Smithville sewage ponds in 1989 (HNCNR). Large numbers can be found on Lake Erie near the source of the Niagara River in early- to mid-November, when they stage there during fall migration. The maximum count from this area in the BOSNR is 10,000 birds reported by Fran Rew on 15 November 2003.

As a common winter resident, the Bufflehead is recorded annually in Niagara on all four CBCs and the Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey.

Michael M. Morgante

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,888 birds in 2002

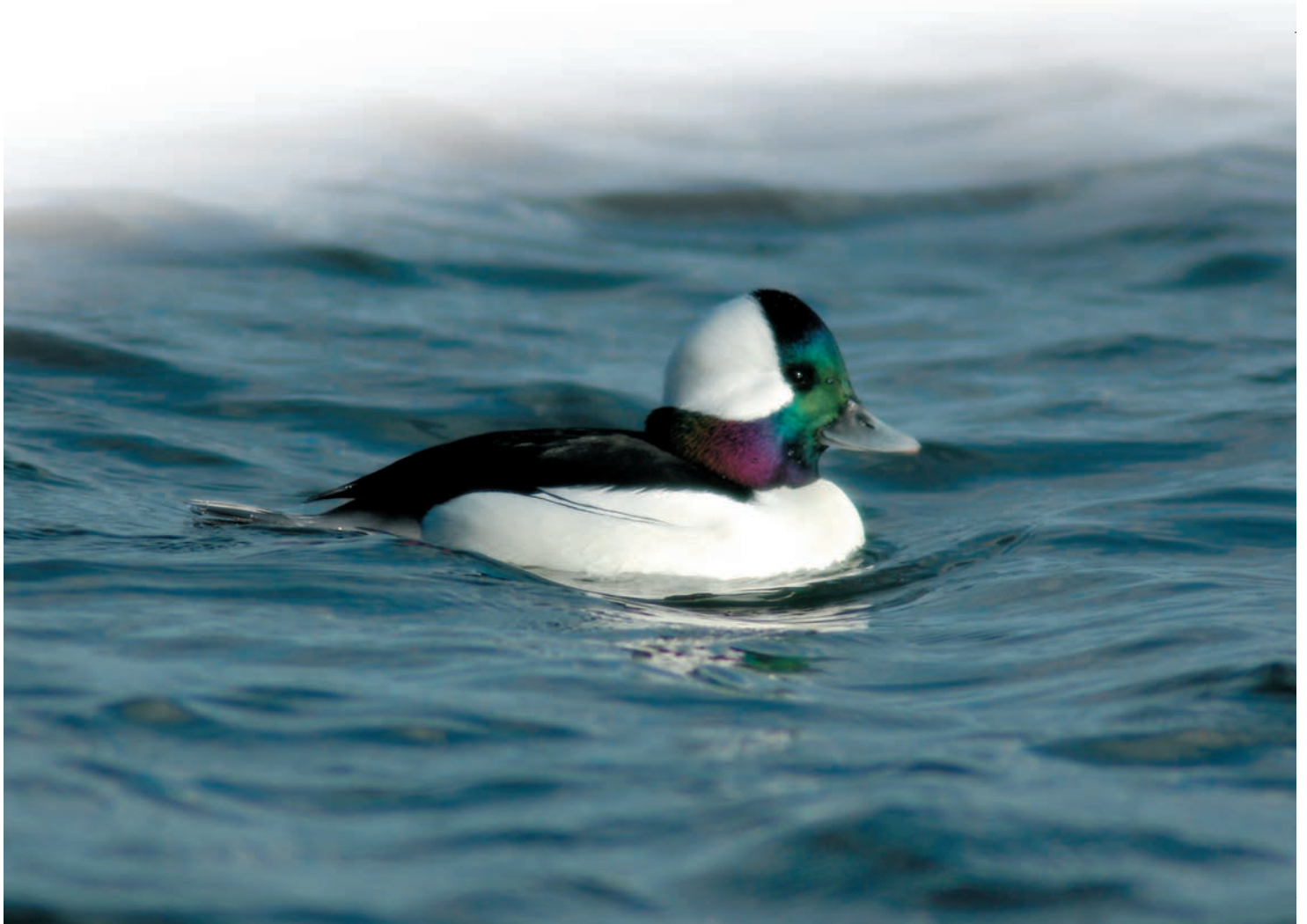
BOS May Count: Reported on 26 of 41 counts, maximum of 110 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 11 of 40 counts, maximum of 26 birds in 1985

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,243 birds on the 1973 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 22 of 23 counts, maximum of 1,043 birds in 2003

Bufflehead
Barry Cheriére



Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Common to very common (upper Niagara River) winter resident, rare summer visitor

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 2,387 birds in 1979

BOS May Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 18 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Reported on 7 of 40 counts, maximum of 40 birds in 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 2,830 birds on the 1976 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 23 of 23 counts, maximum of 4,204 birds in 1999

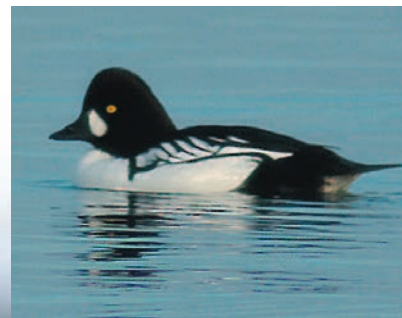
The Common Goldeneye remains common on the upper Niagara River well into April as wintering birds are joined by some returning migrants in March. It quickly becomes uncommon to rare in May.

There was no breeding documented in Niagara in either atlas. The closest nests were found in nest boxes at Hullett Marsh near Clinton (Mallory 2007b). It is a relatively common breeder on small lakes, ponds, and rivers in the boreal forests of Ontario (Mallory 2007b). Common Goldeneye is a rare summer visitor in Niagara, with most reports (all of one to three birds) in the BOSNR coming from Lake Erie.

The Common Goldeneye usually returns to Niagara in mid-October. The earliest report that likely represents a returning migrant is for 8 September 1985, when a bird was sighted at the Grimsby sewage ponds by Robert Curry, George Bryant and John Olmsted (HNCNR). Common Goldeneye has been recorded every year on the Niagara CBCs and usually in high numbers on the BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs as it is most common on the Niagara River. While still very common on the Niagara River, this species has declined in numbers through the decades (New York Winter Waterfowl Count). The maximum count in the BOSNR is 3,000 on 1 January 1966 on the upper Niagara River.

Michael M. Morgante

Hybridization is the interbreeding of two genetically different species, and generally involves closely related species-pairs. In Niagara the most frequent hybrid duck species observed is Mallard x American Black Duck. Illustrated here is a good example of an intermediate first generation male Barrow's Goldeneye x Common Goldeneye. Barry Cherierré photographed this individual on 21 November 2006 just west of Niagara along the Lake Ontario shoreline in Stoney Creek.



Common Goldeneye
Brandon Holden





Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*

Occasional winter visitor

Barrow's Goldeneye
Jean Iron

Named after the famed British Arctic explorer Sir John Barrow and for the brilliant golden colour of its irises, the Barrow's Goldeneye is primarily a bird of the western mountain regions of North America. There is a smaller eastern population of Barrow's Goldeneye that is Protected under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA 2008). Interestingly, no evidence has been found of any exchange or interaction between these two populations (Eadie et al. 2000).

The Barrow's Goldeneye is an occasional winter visitor to Niagara, and reported observations prior to 1966 are well documented in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970).

The eastern population of Barrow's Goldeneye breeds along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River estuary, where a good number also overwinter. A smaller number of wintering birds can be found along the Gaspé Peninsula, the Maritime Provinces and Maine in the United States (Eadie et al. 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

The following birds were observed in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book.

1970

1 January, female, Niagara River gorge, Niagara Falls (Daniel Salisbury).

21 November, 2 and 29 December, male, Niagara Falls (Rachel and Harold Axtell, Daniel Salisbury and others, BOSNR).

1971

1 January, male, above the falls, Niagara Falls (Harold Axtell, Daniel Salisbury, BOSNR).

20 February, male, above the falls, Niagara Falls (Rachel and Harold Axtell, BOSNR).

27 November, female, Niagara Falls (Joseph Grzybowski and others, BOSNR).

1978

3 November, male, in the Hydro One impoundment cell adjacent to the old Gate House building, Niagara Falls (BOSNR, m. obs.). This bird is believed to be the same individual that returned

annually to overwinter at the same location from 1978-1984. The bird was last seen on 22 January 1984 (BOSNR).

1987

16 January, adult, male, Frenchman's Creek, Fort Erie (Kayo Roy).

1993

5-6 April, two, Point Abino (William Watson, Michael Galas, Gerry Rising, Michael Hamilton, BOSNR).

7 November, adult, male, Frenchman's Creek, Fort Erie (Robert Andrie, Robert Brock, Kayo Roy, Alan J. Smith, BOSNR).

2000

6 February, adult, male, Fort Erie (Willie D'Anna, BOSNR).

2002

24 November, two, females, Niagara Falls (Dominic Sherony, Gary Chapin, BOSNR).

Smew *Mergellus albellus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Smew, a small Palearctic diving duck of the merganser family, is thought to have been in existence for some one and a half to two million years. Smew fossils from the earliest Pleistocene have been found in England (Mlikovsky 2002). This species has become an annual winter visitor in small numbers to the western Aleutian Islands and the Pribiloff Islands but is extremely rare outside of Alaska.

One well-documented record is known for Niagara of this extremely rare visitor. Initially found on 17 January 1960 by Robert Coggeshall, Robert Andrie and Joseph Thill in the Buffalo, New York harbour, the bird remained until 22 January 1960 when it was forced to leave as the harbour began to freeze over (Axtell 1960, Coggeshall 1960, Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

Nearly one month later, on 21 February 1960, James L. Baillie with others rediscovered the Smew on the Canadian side of the Niagara River just north of Fort Erie at Miller's Creek. This female bird was observed at various locations along the Niagara River: Miller's Creek (21-22 February, 13 March and 28-30 March), Frenchman's Creek (23 and 28 February) and Ussher's Creek (27 February). Many birders travelled to the Niagara River to observe this mega-rarity, which was last seen on 30 March 1960 (Baillie 1964, Sheppard 1970, James 1991, Roy 2001). It was photographed by Donald R. Gunn on 26 February 1960.

The breeding grounds for the Smew are widespread across the taiga zone of northern Europe and Siberia. It winters on sheltered seas and lakes in eastern Europe, China, Korea and Japan (Madge and Burn 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, uncommon winter resident, rare summer resident and visitor

The Hooded Merganser is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. It usually arrives in mid-March and transients have passed through by the end of April.

Only evidence of possible breeding was documented in Niagara during both atlases. In the first Atlas, evidence of possible breeding was discovered in one square in Welland; in the second Atlas, the same square, as well as Navy Island, yielded evidence of possible breeding. While rare in Niagara, the Hooded Merganser is a relatively common breeder in the shield of Ontario and is increasing in most breeding areas (Bouvier 2007). It is a secretive nester and could have been overlooked during atlas efforts. A rare summer visitor in Niagara, Hooded Merganser may show up on ponds in August.

Except for late summer visitors, fall migrants typically arrive in mid- to late October.

The Hooded Merganser is recorded nearly annually on the St. Catharines, BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs, but irregularly on the Port Colborne CBC. Of the four regional CBCs, the largest numbers are usually found on the St. Catharines Count. While uncommon in winter, Hooded Mergansers are increasing in numbers during that season based on the CBCs and New York Winter Waterfowl Count, although the Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey is not showing any upward trend. A few individuals are usually found above Niagara Falls throughout the winter. The maximum count from the BOSNR, as reported by James Pawlicki, Willie D'Anna and Betsy Potter at Niagara Falls on 13 January 2006, is 35 birds.

Michael M. Morgante

BOS April Count: Reported on 35 of 41 counts, maximum of 62 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 23 birds in 1999

BOS October Count: Reported on 13 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1993 and 2002

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 76 birds on the 1994 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 16 of 23 counts, maximum of 10 birds in 1988



Hooded Merganser
Sam Barone



Common Merganser
Sam Barone

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*

Very common (upper Niagara River) winter resident, rare to uncommon summer visitor

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 4,526 birds in 1973

BOS May Count: Reported on 27 of 41 counts, maximum of 72 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 31 of 40 counts, maximum of 120 birds in 2001

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 7,518 birds on the 1979 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 23 of 23 counts, maximum of 1,259 birds in 1997

Almost all Common Mergansers have departed from the Niagara Region by late April. While most of the birds seen in the spring are those that have overwintered here, some may be transients that are migrating through Niagara on their way north.

The Common Merganser does not breed in Niagara and is nearly absent as a breeder in southern Ontario. It is one of the most widespread and common waterfowl species in the boreal forest throughout Canada (Dunn 2007). As a rare to uncommon summer visitor in Niagara, the Common Merganser is most often sighted along Lake Erie or at Niagara Falls in this season. By mid-July summer sightings tend to increase, peaking in August. The summer season maximum in the BOS Noteworthy Records is 27 at Point Abino on 19 August 2001, seen by Brendan Klick and Don Harris.

Except for late summer visitors, fall migrants typically arrive in mid-October. The Common Merganser is one of the most abundant waterfowl species on the Niagara River in winter. It is found in the thousands on the upper Niagara River, especially in the vicinity of Strawberry Island. It is also very common on the Great Lakes in winter. Overwintering numbers are often variable, likely attributable to available prey and nesting productivity from the previous summer. Common Mergansers are recorded annually on all four regional CBCs, with the highest counts on the BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs. Harold Axtell observed 12,000 birds on 20-21 December 1974 on the upper Niagara River, the maximum count in the BOSNR for Niagara.

Michael M. Morgante

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Very common spring and fall transient, very common winter resident, rare summer visitor

Red-breasted Merganser
Brandon Holden

Unlike the Common Merganser, the Red-breasted Merganser is more numerous in spring migration than in winter. It is very common in spring in Niagara as transients augment the numbers of overwintering birds. The greatest number of birds usually occur early to mid-April, and remain common into late May.

It is easily the most common duck species on Lakes Erie and Ontario in April and May.



There was no breeding documented in Niagara in either atlas, and the closest nesting location was at Long Point (Craik 2007). Along extensive bodies of water outside southern Ontario, the Red-breasted Merganser is widely distributed as a breeder in the province. It breeds in tundra and boreal forest across Eurasia and North America (Craik 2007). It is a regular but rare summer visitor in Niagara. Summer reports are typically of six birds or fewer; larger groups, however, occasionally occur. A maximum of 74 birds was counted at Morgan's Point near Burnaby by William Watson on 3 June 2003 (BOSNR).

Aside from summer visitors, fall transients begin to arrive in September. Numbers increase in mid-October and usually peak in mid-November.

Red-breasted Merganser is recorded annually on the four regional CBCs, with the Niagara Falls CBC regularly achieving the highest count. There is general evidence from the New York Winter Waterfowl Count and BOS counts that numbers are increasing slightly. Since this species is abundant in late winter and during migration, accurate counts are rarely made by birders. The maximum count in the BOSNR for Niagara is 6,000 birds at Jaeger Rocks in Fort Erie on 21 February 2000.

Michael M. Morgante

Ruddy Duck

Oxyura jamaicensis

Uncommon spring and fall transient,
rare summer straggler, rare winter straggler

The Ruddy Duck is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. There are three March BOSNR records. The earliest spring arrival date is 12 April 2004, when 14 birds were reported from the Grimsby sewage ponds and 10 from the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). The latest spring date is 29 May 2000, when three birds were reported from West Lincoln (BOSNR). A few individuals of this species can often be found on small ponds and lakes in Niagara during the migration period.

The Ruddy Duck breeds in the vicinity of the lower Great Lakes but is mainly a bird of western Canada and a rare summer straggler in Niagara. There are 16 summer records in the HNCNR and two summer records in the BOSNR.

The earliest migrant return date is of a single bird on 11 September 2002 at West Lincoln (BOSNR). There are thirteen November records in BOSNR. Rare winter stragglers, Ruddy Ducks have been seen on only three BOS Christmas bird counts, six Niagara Falls counts, two Port Colborne counts and one St. Catharines count. A likely place to look for them in the winter is on the upper Niagara River between Fort Erie and Niagara Falls. The Ruddy Duck winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black



Ruddy Duck
Barry Cheriére

BOS April Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 10,101 birds in 1997

BOS May Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 992 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 32 of 40 counts, maximum of 251 birds in 1990

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,505 birds on the 1981 BOS CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 23 of 23 counts, maximum of 1,898 birds in 2005

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 9 of 41 counts, maximum of 14 birds in 2000

BOS May Count: Reported on 11 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 2000

BOS October Count: Reported on 19 of 40 counts, maximum of 19 birds in 1979 and 1999

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds on the 1999 Port Colborne CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 2002

Gray Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Extirpated in Niagara

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
1 of 41 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 1966

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

The Gray Partridge, prior to its extirpation from Niagara, was more prevalent near West Lincoln. Robert Lewies, a Niagara area biologist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) from 1978 to 1993, observed 15 to 20 birds near Caistor-Canborough Slough forest in the late 1970s. Historic records include two individuals observed on 28 May 1966 at Rainham Centre (BOSNR), 17 individuals observed near Rockway, St. Catharines on 27 December 1969 by Harold Lancaster and Gustave Yaki (Sheppard 1970), 21 during a Peninsula Field Naturalists count in the St. Catharines area on 19 December 1973, 12 on 1 January 1970 in Pelham and two on 12 March 1978 in Lincoln Township (BOSNR). According to Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the only known nest of a Gray Partridge was discovered by H. Lounsbury on 5 May 1968 six kilometres southwest of Beamsville.

The most recent records are of three birds observed on Sann Road on the north service road of the Queen Elizabeth Way in Beamsville on 24 January 1988 by John Black and Drew Campbell. Two birds were observed at the same location on 18 March 1989 by Edmund Johns and Kayo Roy, and again on 19 March (BOSNR). The only record after 1989 was of a dead bird found by Richard Knaption on 26 October 1995 at the side of Regional Road 24 near 15 Road, Fenwick.

The very small number of recent observations from any source indicates a declining trend for this species in Niagara. Winter severity, removal of hedgerows, intensive farming and use of pesticides have adversely affected the distribution and abundance of this species throughout Ontario. Currently, the Gray Partridge closest to the Niagara Region are located at the Brantford Airport. Without active intervention on the part of the OMNR and/or other concerned parties, Gray Partridge will not reappear in Niagara.

Release programs undertaken in Niagara by the OMNR were not successful. There are several possible reasons for their failure, the most likely being low release numbers (<200 overall), poor genetic quality (birds reared in captivity), high predation, unsuitable habitat, herbicide and insecticide application and winter severity. Predation was determined to be the primary cause of a release failure in France (Bro et al. 2001) and in Scotland (Parish et al. 2007). The latter also attributed the high incidence of nest site predation to the release of birds reared in captivity.

Gray Partridges
Harold Stiver



Studies completed in Europe and midwestern North America attribute the decline of Gray Partridge to intensive agricultural practices, removal of hedgerows and use of pesticides (Allen et al. 1984, Rands 1985, Borg and Toth 2000). Winter severity may have played a role in the early 1970s as the region experienced higher than usual total snowfall and extreme minimum temperatures during the time of release. The release of Gray Partridge in 1969 was followed by the two consecutively severe winters of 1970/1971 and 1971/1972, when over 200 cm of snow fell. A 1973 release was followed by an average winter (154 cm), then the two consecutively severe winters of 1974/1975 and 1975/1976. (See also the article by Anne Yagi in this book.) However, Sandilands (2005) reports that cold weather and deep snow are not necessarily limiting factors because Gray Partridge are capable of tunnelling down 15 cm in snow to obtain food. Even so, freezing rain or prolonged blizzards may cover food supplies and result in high mortality. A reasonable hypothesis is that small release sizes coupled with winter storm events precipitated the release failure in Niagara.

This native of Europe is also known as “European” or “Hungarian” Partridge. It is a favoured game bird in much of the Midwestern United States and eastern Ontario and remains a species of Conservation Concern in Europe. It inhabits early successional lowlands, grasslands or abandoned farmland habitats. Adults are herbivorous, chicks insectivorous. The species requires an adequate food source all winter. For thermoregulatory purposes, the birds often form large coveys (aggregations), especially during winter conditions.

Anne R. Yagi

Chukar *Alectoris gracea*

Occasional (released or escaped)

This colourful, attractive game bird has made an occasional appearance in Niagara during the last 50 years. The birds that have been observed over the years are believed to be released individuals or escaped pets. It is a normal practice to raise game birds for the purpose of training hunting dogs. Permits from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) are required in order to use these birds for training purposes. Normally, only small numbers are released at any one time. Historic observations include two birds at Sugarloaf Point in Port Colborne on 1 September 1959. Five birds were released (although three were immediately killed on the road) near Stanley Avenue in Niagara Falls in September 1963 (Frank Folemsbee), (Sheppard 1970). During the second Atlas, two Chukars were observed on 2 April 2004 in Beamsville by Paul and Elizabeth Akitt, and one was observed by Nancy Smith on 5 June 2005 in Beamsville. All were recorded as released individuals and not submitted to the Atlas.

Chukar is native to Europe and Central Asia. A search of the records at OMNR indicates no historic attempts to establish a naturalized population in Ontario (OMNR, Natural Heritage Information Centre, Mike Oldham pers. comm.). Neither is there today any potential to establish self-sustaining populations of this species.

Anne R. Yagi



Chukar
Ann Brokelman



Ring-necked Pheasant
Sam Barone

First Atlas: 14 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 7 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 30 of 41 counts, maximum of 18 birds in 1974

BOS May Count: Reported on 30 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 1967 and 1969

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 19 birds in 1973

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 140 birds on the 1968 and 1972 Niagara Falls CBC

Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Rare permanent resident

Ring-necked Pheasants in Niagara originated from introduced individuals that adapted and became self-sustaining in some areas, especially below the escarpment. R.W. Sheppard (1970) reported them to be “quite common and well distributed... [with] numbers augmented by annual releases to compensate for hunting.” In 1922 the Ring-necked Pheasant was declared a provincial game bird, and in the 1950s and 1960s it was in high demand by local hunters in Niagara. In order to meet this recreational demand, supplemental stocking by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) was initiated. The OMNR supplied local conservation clubs with ten to eleven thousand pheasant poults per year to raise and release. During that time, the Association of Welland County Conservation Clubs released between six to eight thousand pheasants into the former townships of Bertie, Crowland, Humberstone, Pelham, Stamford, Thorold, Wainfleet and Willoughby. During the same period, the St. Catharines Game and Fish Club released over 1,000 pheasants per year, with the majority released in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Louth, Clinton, Gainsborough and South Grimsby. Townships sold pheasant hunting licenses to help raise funding for the ongoing release projects. After the 1950s the ministry gradually reduced its contributions to pheasant stocking, and by the 1980s, local releases by conservation clubs diminished to a few hundred birds per year (Robert Lewies pers. comm.).

Historically, pheasant hunting was more popular than it is today. Pheasant populations were probably supported entirely by the release of pen-reared birds. Robert Lewies (OMNR biologist in 1989) claimed that “current self-sustaining populations exist in small pockets in Grimsby, St. Catharines and Short Hills Provincial Park, where there is no legal hunting and no stocking occurs.” Niagara-on-the-Lake, with its moderate climate, was once considered ideal habitat for pheasants. However, the precise size of this population is not known, although it is considered low. In other words, the historic approach to large scale releases of pen-reared, non-native species did not result in a larger population. It is also possible that the mild winters of the 1960s followed by the more severe winters of the 1970s were contributing factors in the decline as were unsuitable habitats and use of pesticides. All Niagara records after the early 1970s show the same declining trend (first and second Atlases, BOSNR and CBCs), which coincides with a drastic decline in releases. (See the article by Anne Yagi in this book.)

During the 1980s and 1990s, pheasant hunting became a “put and take” harvest of all fall-released birds. A few individuals are observed during Niagara Christmas counts, especially in the northern portion of the region below the escarpment. In recent years, birds have been seen regularly in the fields around the Niagara District Airport and beside McNab Road south of Lakeshore Road, both in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

In 2002, the OMNR began a pilot project to rehabilitate wild pheasant populations, releasing 200 wild captured pheasants from a large self-sustaining population in Saskatchewan into Lambton and Elgin Counties in Ontario. There was no precedent for this type of release. Birds that were accustomed to an open-range grassland habitat, surviving in severely cold winters (-40° C) with shallow snow depth (0.3m), were captured and released into southern Ontario’s fragmented agricultural habitat consisting of meadows, shrubs and trees. For the first three breeding seasons in Ontario, there were signs of reproduction, dispersal and juvenile recruitment. Then in year four, the population declined.

A 2007 assessment of this pilot project conducted by the Long Point Waterfowl and Wetland Research Fund suggested that a higher number of birds, including more females, should be stocked, but it stated that the habitat, which allowed short-term survival, was of insufficient quantity and quality for long-term survival and that there were too many predators. According to Pud Hunter, formerly the OMNR coordinator for the Pheasant Rehabilitation project, the Saskatchewan birds were accustomed to a host of natural predators including birds of prey and mammalian predators such as coyote, cougar and red fox, but they were not accustomed to southern Ontario’s fragmented habitat and high density of predators such as raccoons, feral cats and opossums.

The Ring-necked Pheasant is a native species of Asia. It was first introduced into southern Ontario circa 1895 and naturalized in many rural areas. It prefers old field, meadow and grassland habitat for foraging, with shelter belts and hedgerows for winter cover, the very type of habitat that is lost through intensive farming and urbanization. We must conclude that habitat loss is a contributing factor in the decline of this species in southern Ontario.

Anne R. Yagi



Wild Turkeys
Harold Stiver

Ruffed Grouse
Raymond Barlow

First Atlas: 9 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 2 possible

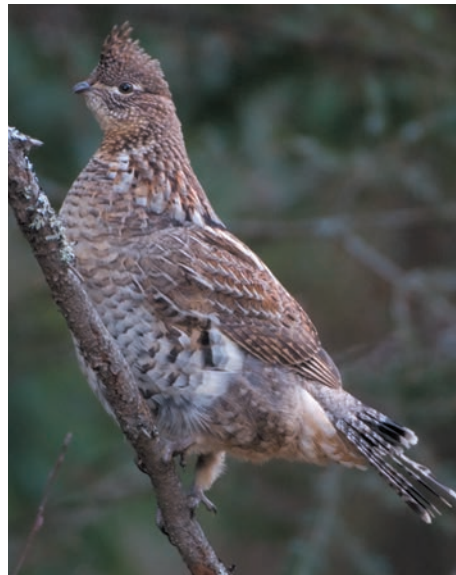
Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 9 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 10 of 41 counts, maximum of 29 birds in 1981

BOS May Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 136 birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported on 9 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1971 and 1973

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds on the 1988 Port Colborne CBC



Ruffed Grouse *Bonasa umbellus*

Rare and local permanent resident

Before 1970 the Ruffed Grouse was considered a “well known game bird [that continued] to hold its own in more extensive woodlands” (Sheppard 1970). However, during the second Atlas, observations declined in most of southwestern Ontario except for Norfolk County. Ontario’s Carolinian region exhibited the greatest declines in numbers of Ruffed Grouse between surveys, from 43% to 20.4% (Szuba 2007a).

During the second Atlas, one case of breeding was confirmed in Niagara. Anne

Yagi recorded adult male drumming in the Wainfleet Bog during consecutive spring seasons from 2004 to 2006. Grouse populations are known to be cyclic in some areas, although the cycle has not been established for Niagara. In recent years, grouse have been observed regularly at the Stevensville Conservation Area.

The Ruffed Grouse inhabits early successional, mixed deciduous forests with small open areas and forested wetlands with a large component of aspen (*Populus sp.*). Although this region boasts extensive oak-maple swamp wetlands and unique slough forests, especially in the southern and western woodlands, aspen stands form a relatively minor component. When snow covers the ground, the grouse diet shifts to buds and catkins of trees and shrubs such as aspen, birch, cherry, ironwood and apple (Post 2005). Declining observations likely reflect the declining quality of habitat. Aspen regeneration, for example, requires a disturbance to open the forest canopy.



Disturbances include timber harvest, fire, wind throw and flooding. Many of these disturbances are suppressed through human intervention. These disturbances set in motion ecological successional processes involving the rapid colonization of light-tolerant plant species into the disturbed area. An example of an ecologically dynamic process that was eliminated in Niagara by the 1950s is the beaver meadow cycle. This cycle changes climax landscapes into open water early successional habitat, which is eventually recolonized by grasses, shrubs and trees. The beaver meadow cycle at one site may take up to 100 years to complete, and during that time waterfowl and herons are gradually replaced by grouse and then turkeys. Adult grouse use the openings created in the woodlands for courtship displays, and as the young poplar stand develops, it provides excellent insect production for young grouse and seed sources for adults. Mature poplar stands are about 40 years old, after which they become overgrown by Oak, Maple and Ash species, and the grouse decline.

By their very nature, Ruffed Grouse may have been more abundant during European settlement, when timber was harvested to build homes, thus creating openings in woodlands that poplar stands could rapidly colonize. In addition, when land that was once cleared for farming was abandoned and people moved into cities, poplar stands would recolonize these areas.

Anne R. Yagi

Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo*

Uncommon permanent resident

Once extirpated from all of Ontario, this native game bird was successfully re-established throughout Niagara during the 1980s and 1990s. In Niagara the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and local conservation clubs began reintroductions of this species in 1986. The first birds were released in Short Hills Provincial Park in January on a snowy hilltop where a former barn and farmhouse had once stood.

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 18 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 22 birds in 2005

BOS May Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 3 of 40 counts, maximum of 28 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds on the 1988 Port Colborne CBC

The following remarks detail the first Niagara releases. On 13 January 1986, 12 females captured from Steuben County, New York State, were released into Short Hills Provincial Park. On 15 January 1986, one female was killed on the road about 3.5 km from the release site. At the same location, on 30 January 1986, three adult males from New York State were released. On 6 February 1986, five females from Vermont were released. One female was killed approximately 11 km from the release site. On 11 February 1986, eight females from New York State were released and one female was radio-collared. On 14 February 1986, one female and one jake from New York State were released. On 16 February 1986, two females and one jake were released. A third female was destroyed at the border because of a suspicious reaction to *Salmonella pullorum* typhoid antigen. On 28 February 1986, an additional jake from Vermont was released. The first breeding stock, therefore, consisted of six males and 26 females (Yagi 1986). In the late 1980s the offspring were relocated throughout the Niagara Peninsula. Priority transfer sites were the Humberstone Marsh in Port Colborne as well as Silverdale and the Caistor-Canborough Slough forest in West Lincoln. In the late 1990s, wild turkeys were transferred to the Dunnville and South Cayuga areas.

This species was first recorded on a Christmas Bird Count during the St. Catharines CBC of 1986, when 25 birds were seen. In 1988 the first turkey was observed on the Port Colborne CBC, and in 1994 two turkeys were reported on the Niagara Falls CBC. Since 1994 Wild Turkey have been recorded, on at least one Niagara count, every year except 1999. These recorded observations demonstrate an increasing population, a trend which is consistent with OMNR population information. (See the article by Anne Yagi in this book for further information.)

In the 1700s, wild turkeys were apparently common in Ontario. There are accounts of large flocks along the north shore of Lake Erie. The bird was an important source of food for aboriginal people and the first settlers (Williams 1986). Unfortunately, the turkey was over-harvested, so much so that by the end of the early 1900s it was extirpated from Ontario. By that time the bird had also vanished from Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Connecticut, Southern Illinois and New York. Historical attempts to re-establish the Ontario population by using the release of pen-reared birds began almost as soon as the population had disappeared. However, these attempts were not successful. During the 1970s the release of birds trapped in the wild was successful in establishing populations throughout their former United States range. Ontario followed, in 1984, with the first release in the Aylmer District. This project was part of an international wildlife exchange between the United States and Ontario. Turkeys were exchanged for Gray Partridge as well as moose and river otter. This wildlife management initiative is considered highly successful because self-sustaining populations now exist throughout southern Ontario, and they sustain a very popular annual spring gobbler season.

Anne R. Yagi

Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus*

Extirpated in Niagara (occasional sightings are escaped birds)

The Northern Bobwhite is designated as an Endangered Species in the Province of Ontario's Endangered Species Act of 2007. Following European settlement in the nineteenth century, the bobwhite increased in abundance and expanded its range across southwestern Ontario. Since 1900, however, land use changes, degraded habitats and pesticides have caused the population and range to decline to their 2007 status, which is

considered low but stable in southwestern Ontario. In Niagara the decline has been reported from many sources. In 1914 William Putman of the Horticultural Experimental Station in Vineland noted the disappearance of bobwhites from Smithville. Sheppard (1970) wrote "Many years ago, in the early part of the century, the bobwhite was apparently not uncommon throughout the Frontier district, and it appears on an old list as present near Stamford centre in the summer of 1913."

Periodic observations of this species have been made by several people. In May 1935, two birds were observed at the Horticultural Research Station in Vineland and were believed to be released birds from Jordan. During the summer of 1961, 250 individuals were released by Adrian Dorst near Rockway, St. Catharines. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) Conservation officer Roy Muma reported seeing three coveys in Willoughby Township near Chippawa in the 1960s. One individual was observed on a Peninsula Field Naturalists count in the St. Catharines area on 22 December 1973. Single birds were observed on 13 November 1966 and 3 September 1977 at Fort Erie and at Port Colborne on 9 July 1978 (BOSNR). Single birds were seen at the Smithville sewage ponds on 22 July 1984 and 10 May 1987 (HNCNR). The most recent sighting occurred on 25 March 2005, when a single bobwhite was found by Brad Clements near Humberstone Marsh in Port Colborne during the second Atlas.

The Northern Bobwhite is an open-meadow grassland species that is in severe decline throughout most of its North American range. In Ontario it is now found only in the extreme southwest in Lambton, Elgin and Middlesex Counties and on the St. Clair River islands (Pud Hunter pers. comm.). This decline in population has been attributed to many factors, including habitat loss, predation, disease and pesticides (Stewart 2003).

Anne R. Yagi

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*

Rare to uncommon spring and fall transient, extremely rare summer visitor, rare winter straggler

Red-throated Loon can be seen in Niagara in all seasons, but most frequently in the fall and winter (especially November). In spring it is rare to uncommon, occurring from late April through May. The earliest date in spring is 6 March 1991, when one bird was seen at Port Weller in St. Catharines (BOSNR), and the latest date in spring migration is 20 May 1967, when one bird was seen at Fort Erie (BOSNR). A summer record of one bird seen by multiple observers at Fort Erie from 12-18 July 1999 (BOSNR) is exceptional for this arctic breeder. The earliest fall date is 7 October 1990 when one bird was observed at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). Although single individuals or small numbers are the rule, high tallies for the region are 70 birds on 30 November 1995 and 58 birds on 15 November 1992, both reported by Rob Dobos and other observers and both occurring at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). Numbers on CBCs were few to none in the first two decades of the reporting period, but since the late 1980s, Red-throated Loon has been almost annual and numbers appear to be increasing. Small numbers of birds are seen from October through February (BOSNR, HNCNR, CBCs).

The Red-throated Loon breeds on freshwater ponds in tundra areas throughout arctic North America and winters on both coasts, migrating on a broad front from northwest to southeast (Palmer 1962, Barr et al. 2000). In Ontario, it nests on the

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1975

Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1975 Port Colborne CBC

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1997

BOS May Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 3 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1992, 1993 and 2004

Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 69 birds on the 2005 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 2 of 23 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1985 and 1990

Hudson Bay coast in the tundra zone west of Cape Henrietta Maria (Peck and Sutherland 2007), migrating along the west James Bay coast (Wilson and McRae 1993) and presumably wintering on the Atlantic coast.

Niagara birds belong to the Atlantic wintering group, but it is unknown whether Ontario breeding birds pass through the region. Regular observations during migration at Thunder Cape Bird Observatory since the early 1990s and elsewhere suggest a migration route that follows Lake Ontario, Lake Huron and Lake Superior, and this may reflect movements of birds from the central and western Arctic. Staging on Lake Ontario in large numbers in fall was reported in Palmer (1962). A few birds winter on Lake Ontario, but most continue to the Atlantic coast.

Kenneth F. Abraham

Pacific Loon

Gavia pacifica

Extremely rare visitor

The Pacific Loon, perhaps the most abundant loon in North America, is a widely distributed bird of the Pacific coast with scattered reports throughout the interior. The species returns to the Arctic tundra each year for only three months in summer for breeding

purposes. The Pacific Loon and the Arctic Loon were once considered to be one species; however, the two are presently classified as distinct and separate species.



right: Pacific Loon
Jean Iron

below: Red-throated Loon
Jean Iron



The Pacific Loon and Arctic Loon are treated as one species in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965), who make no mention of Niagara observations.

There are only five known reports of Pacific Loon in Niagara. On 16 November 1968, Paul Benham and others observed a Pacific Loon in the Niagara River gorge at the base of the Horseshoe Falls, Niagara Falls. It was refound the next morning, 17 November 1968, but disappeared shortly after 0830 hours (Yaki 1969, Sheppard 1970). John Black, Paul Benham and Daniel Salisbury identified a Pacific Loon on 21 November 1981 at Niagara-on-the-Lake.

On 11 November 1995, Steve Kelling, Thomas Nix and Jeff Wells discovered a winter adult bird in the Niagara River gorge at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). On 16 November 1998, Daniel Salisbury studied an immature Pacific Loon also in the Niagara River gorge in Niagara Falls. On 31 October 2004, Brandon Holden discovered a bird in definitive prebasic molt along the shoreline of Lake Ontario off the Niagara portion of Fifty Point Conservation Area. To the delight of many birders, this individual remained in the area until at least 5 November 2004 (Crins 2005, Curry 2006). Although it was undocumented beyond 5 November, there is a possibility that this bird may have been observed as late as 16-17 November 2004.

The Pacific Loon breeds in Canada, Alaska and Siberia. It winters along the coasts of Japan and western North America as far south as California (Harrison 1987).

Kayo J. Roy

Common Loon *Gavia immer*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, occasional summer straggler, rare winter straggler

Common Loon, Ontario's official bird and an icon of Canadian wilderness, has been recorded in Niagara in all months and is usually seen as a single bird or in small groups. It is most abundant during migration in May, October and November on the larger lakes and rivers. The months of greatest activity are May (43 BOS Noteworthy Records), November (45) and December (46). Largest groups occur in October (e.g., 150 on 31 October 1993, 120 on 20 October 1985, and more than 40 on 19 October 1967 and on 26 October 1968). Paul Summerskill conducted a migration watch at Charles Daley Park in Beamsville in November 1994, recording 332 Common Loons, the majority of them flying west (252) or south (59). See his article in this book. No trend of change in status is apparent over the reporting period. Curry (2006) cautiously suggests that numbers in the Hamilton region are lower than they historically have been, having peaked in the late 1960s, but he cites recreational disturbance as a possible cause of lower numbers on staging areas and notes that systematic counts would undoubtedly yield higher numbers. In Niagara the number of recreational fishing boats on the Lake Ontario shore in April and May has increased substantially in recent years since the introduction of the Salmon Derby in the early 1980s.

The Common Loon was formerly a very rare breeder in Niagara (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). It was seen in nine years in June and eight years in July between the first and second Atlases (BOSNR) but only twice in summer during the second Atlas, a single bird observed on a point count on 13 June 2003 at Point Abino and a single bird observed on 28 July 2005 at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). The plumage of these birds was not recorded, and they may have been predominantly of non-breeding age (Ron Pittaway pers. comm.). The Common Loon's Ontario breeding range had

BOS April Count: Reported on 29 of 41 counts, maximum of 21 birds in 1997

BOS May Count: Reported on 29 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 1990

BOS October Count: Reported on 20 of 40 counts, maximum of 205 birds in 1989

Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 29 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds on the 1994 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 4 of 23 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 2000



Common Loon
Brandon Holden

receded from the Carolinian region to closely match the boundaries of the Canadian Shield by the time of the first Atlas (Dunn 1987a). During the second Atlas, it showed a small expansion south of the shield and a significant increase in probability of observation in the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region since the first Atlas. Overall, the Common Loon population is stable or increasing (Jones and Timmermans 2007).

Kenneth F. Abraham

Yellow-billed Loon *Gavia adamsii*

Extremely rare visitor

The Yellow-billed Loon, an Arctic species found mostly north of the tree line in Eurasia and North America, is the largest of the world's five loon species. They are increasingly being observed wintering inland, but it is not clear if this is a sign of range expansion or improved field identification (North 1994).

This species is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara with only four known observations. The first is that of a bird found on 11 May 1957 at Erie Beach in Fort Erie by Donald R. Gunn. A few days later the bird was observed by James L. Baillie, who added some controversy to the record by implying that it might be a hybrid Yellow-billed x Common Loon (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, there have been three verified Niagara records of Yellow-billed Loon. On 7 May 1966, George North and Robert Westmore identified a loon in Lake Ontario off Winona, now part of the city of Grimsby (Curry 2006). Almost one year later, on 4 May 1967, and at nearly the same location, Robert Curry studied a Yellow-billed Loon in Lake Ontario at the foot of Oakes Road, Grimsby (James 1983, Curry 2006).

Thirty years later on 2 January 1997, John Lamey discovered an immature Yellow-billed Loon in the open waters of Lake Erie near the Point Abino pier. A great many birders raced to the area to see this exceptional visitor. The bird was not observed after 7 January 1997 (Dobos 1998, BOSNR).

The Yellow-billed Loon breeds in the High Arctic from Alaska east to northwest Canada and in Eurasia from Murmansk east to Siberia. It winters south to about 50°N (Harrison 1987).

Kayo J. Roy

Pied-billed Grebe

Podilymbus podiceps

Spring and fall transient, rare summer resident, rare winter straggler

There are four March records in BOSNR. Because the Pied-billed Grebe is a rare winter straggler, it is not clear if these records are of arriving migrants or of birds that have overwintered in Niagara. Harold Lancaster reported one in Welland on 24 March 1968. The earliest spring arrival date in April is 3 April 1977, when a single bird was found on the BOS April Count. It is not clear how to assign spring transient abundance to this species because the small number of possibly transient Pied-billed Grebes cannot be readily distinguished from the small number of birds arriving to breed in the area.

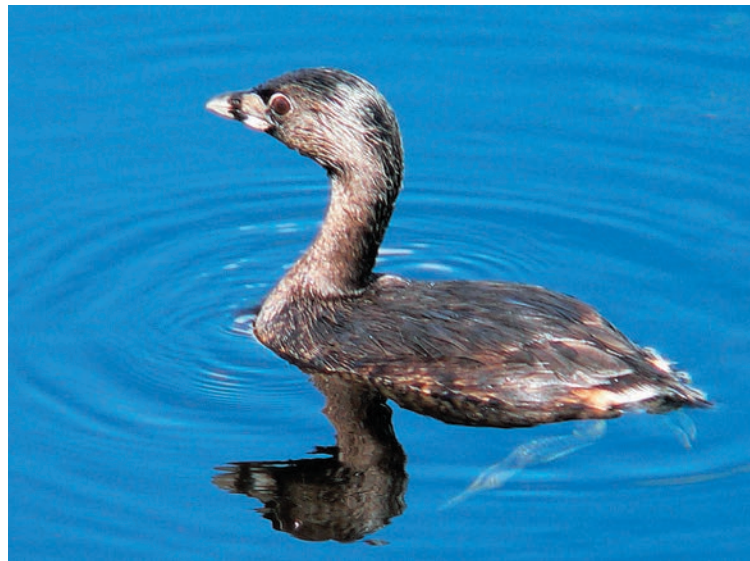
Pied-billed Grebe, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a rare summer resident in Niagara. There was a significant increase (25%) in the probability of observing this species between atlases in the Carolinian region (Sandilands 2007a).

On 17 September 2006, 37 birds, presumably migrants, were observed in Port Colborne (BOSNR). The latest October date is 16 October 1983, when seven birds were seen on the BOS October Count. There is one BOSNR record in November.

Pied-billed Grebe is a rare winter straggler in Niagara. There are eight December records, sixteen January records and two February records in the BOSNR. It is a permanent resident in the southern United States. Northern breeding birds winter as far south as Panama (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Pied-billed Grebe
Kayo Roy



First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 1997

BOS May Count: Reported on 24 of 41 counts, maximum of 10 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 28 of 40 counts, maximum of 72 birds in 1999

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on many counts

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 2003

Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

Uncommon spring transient, less common in fall, rare summer and winter visitor

BOS April Count: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 90 birds in 1966

BOS May Count: Reported on 9 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 26 of 40 counts, maximum of 127 birds 1987

Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 28 of 41 counts, maximum of 82 birds on the 1994 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 3 of 23 counts, maximum of 9 birds in 1991

The earliest spring migration date of Horned Grebe is difficult to determine as arriving transients in March are hard to separate from winter stragglers. The latest spring date is 30 May 1975, when seven birds were seen at Fort Erie (BOSNR). Although there are no June records, there are four observations in July and three for August. These may be early fall migrants, and a similar number (three) occur in September (BOSNR, HNCNR). The earliest fall record is of one bird on 12-28 September 1975 at Fort Erie (BOSNR). Birds (mostly singles) are observed throughout the fall and winter months of October, November, December, January, February and March.

The status of the Horned Grebe in Niagara has not changed from that described by Beardslee and Mitchell (1965). Although the bird is observed in almost every month, its primary designation is that of a migrant. It is an early spring migrant with more consistent presence in April than in May, as it needs to move on to its prairie and northwestern boreal nesting grounds from its wintering grounds on the southeast Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Summer records in Niagara are few, and there is no recent evidence of breeding, although historically it was a rare nester on the shore of Lake Ontario (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

“There is no proof that it [the Horned Grebe] ever nested in Niagara. Eaton’s mention of it in Beardslee and Mitchell is second hand (hearsay) and very much open to question. This species fools people into thinking that it is breeding when they see it in late spring or summer. Years ago Jim Baillie reported it breeding in Algonquin Park (even cited in Godfrey 1986, who missed his retraction) but Baillie later retracted this record.” (Ron Pittaway pers. comm.)

It is less common in autumn than in spring. Winter birds are confined to the larger water bodies, and there appear to be more January and February records in recent decades than in the past. Overall, numbers appear to have declined during the migration seasons compared with historical levels. In adjacent Hamilton, Curry (2006) indicates that Horned Grebe is present at almost all times of the year and that it is more common in spring than in autumn, patterns which mirror those in Niagara. In Hamilton, numbers lingering into January or February were higher in the late 1950s and the early 1960s than in recent decades.

Horned Grebe
Jean Iron



Provincially, the Horned Grebe is a very rare breeder, but a locally common migrant, especially on the Great Lakes. Across North America, there is concern about the contraction of its breeding range to the northwest (Stedman 2000), and it is believed that the population is gradually declining. It is a nocturnal migrant and subject to high mortality in groundings associated with inclement weather (Stedman 2000). In Niagara these birds are confronted with additional danger. Both Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Bull (1974) mention incidents of a few dozen birds being swept over Niagara Falls and killed.

Kenneth F. Abraham



Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

Rare to uncommon spring and fall transient, rare winter straggler

As with other grebes, the earliest spring date is difficult to determine for the Red-necked Grebe because arriving migrants are difficult to separate from overwintering birds. However, groups of 34 and 44 at Fort Erie on 1 March 2003 are very likely indicative of spring influx. Most migrants have left Niagara by late April to early May, and a record on 20 May 1977, when one bird seen at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR), was exceptionally late. There are no summer records (June through September). The earliest fall date is 9 October 1994, when one bird was observed on the BOS October Count, and fall migration appears to be at its peak in late October. The largest fall group was 30 birds on 27 October 1975 at the Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). Birds (mostly singles) are seen from October through February (BOSNR, HNCNR, CBCs).

The Red-necked Grebe has increased significantly in the province over the past 20 years, primarily on its northwestern boreal breeding areas (Harris 2007). Breeding birds have re-established a foothold in western Lake Ontario during this period as well (Curry 2006), although it has not yet been recorded breeding in Niagara. Its migration from core breeding areas in western Canada southeasterly through the Great Lakes to Atlantic

Red-necked Grebe
Brandon Holden

BOS April Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 843 birds in 2003

BOS May Count: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 2001 and 2002

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1985

Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 6 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds on the 1994 St. Catharines CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 1 of 23 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1998

wintering areas has also become better understood through a chain of migration monitoring stations. To find them in Niagara, it is best to search the Niagara River and the bays along the Lake Ontario and Lake Erie shorelines, from October to March.

Although almost all Red-necked Grebes observed in Niagara are found as single birds, they have been observed more frequently during autumn migration in the decades since Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) described them as uncommon to very rare. November is the month with the largest number of records, but individuals linger into January. The largest numbers observed together occur in February and March. This is consistent with the pattern in Hamilton described by Curry (2006), who expresses the view that this is an established spring migration phenomenon. Others suggest that late winter incursions may involve birds frozen out of the upper Great Lakes. See detailed discussion of both points of view in Tozer (2003).

The bones of two Red-necked Grebe were found among muskrat bones on an eroding river bank on the Welland River in Chippawa. They date from about 2000 B.C.E. (William Parkins pers. comm., Sadler and Savage 2003).

Eared Grebe
Kayo Roy

Kenneth F. Abraham



Eared Grebe

Podiceps nigricollis

Occasional visitor

The Eared Grebe is known for several superlatives. It is the most abundant grebe in the world. It is flightless for perhaps nine to ten months each year, having the longest flightless period of any bird capable of flight (Cullen et al. 1999).

The Eared Grebe is an occasional visitor to Niagara with the first accepted record being that of a female bird found dead in the Niagara River gorge on 6 February 1950 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). This bird, found by A. Roy Muma, was carried over the falls where it met its death with many other waterfowl. The specimen (skin) is at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 77014). With two exceptions, Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) detail all of the known sightings of Eared Grebe that have occurred in Niagara prior to 1966. The two exceptions are as follows: on 28 April 1959, a breeding plumaged Eared Grebe that was reported from Jordan Harbour by Harold Lancaster, and one found on 24 May 1964 in Port Colborne by Robert Curry and David Bissell and seen there the next day by Daniel Salisbury.

The following birds were observed in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book.

1974

3 November, one, Fort Erie (Mary Louise Emerson and others, BOSNR).

23-24 November and 5 December, one, Chippawa (Harold Axtell and others, BOSNR).

1976

7 November, one, Chippawa (Robert Andrie and others, BOSNR).

1977

31 October, one, Niagara Falls (David Freeland, BOSNR)

1980

24 July, one, Erie Beach, Fort Erie (Robert Andrie, Richard Byron, BOSNR).

1991

17 November, one, Fort Erie (John Black).

1994

26 March, one, Port Weller, St. Catharines (Kayo Roy, Alan J. Smith).

1995

2 December, one, Fort Erie (Robert Andrie and others, BOSNR).

1996

11-12 May, one, definitive alternate, Port Robinson sewage pond (Marcie Jacklin, Richard Knapton).

1998

10 May, one, Port Weller, St. Catharines (Kayo Roy).

1999

31 December, one, Niagara Falls (Dean DiTommaso, Jeanne Skelly, BOSNR).

2002

26 April, one, Morgan's Point near Burnaby (Jean and Blayne Farnan).

In North America the breeding range for Eared Grebe extends from central British Columbia and Alberta east to south-central Manitoba, and through the northern plains states and the Great Basin to northern Arizona. The species is known to winter along the Pacific coast from Puget Sound to the Gulf of California, and across the southwestern United States into Mexico (Cullen et al. 1999).

Kayo J. Roy

Post-2006 Observation

On 26 December 2008, Paula Clark discovered a winter adult Eared Grebe in the Hydro One impoundment cell just south of the old Gate House building on the Niagara Parkway in Niagara Falls. The temperature dropped over the next few days, and by 31 December 2009 this impoundment cell was frozen over. The Eared Grebe (as illustrated) was forced to move and it was relocated on 1 January 2009 across the Parkway in an open water stream in Dufferin Island. Many observers and photographers enjoyed close-up views of this occasional visitor to Niagara; it was not reported after 5 January 2009 (BOSNR).

Western Grebe

Aechmophorus occidentalis

Extremely rare visitor

This large, energetic waterbird, the largest of all the seven North American grebes, is known for its very dramatic courtship ritual. Both the male and female partake in a unique mating display that finds both birds running rapidly side-by-side along the surface of the water in a very erect stance. They do so for an elective distance and then both immediately dive below the water surface. James A. Creighton recorded the first sighting of Niagara Western Grebe on 18 April 1936 in the Niagara River a few miles below Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

Three observations are known of this extremely rare visitor to Niagara during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. On 23 April 1972, Robert Curry and John Olmsted identified a Western Grebe off Morgan's Point near Burnaby as it swam with hundreds of other waterbirds along the edge of the ice mass held back by the ice boom at Fort Erie. On 27 November 1999, Eric Braaten, Donald Ford and John Sparling observed a Western Grebe in the Niagara River off McFarland Point, Niagara-on-the-Lake (Roy 2000). On 5 November 2004, a first-basic plumaged bird was found by Lois Evans in the Niagara waters of Lake Ontario off Fifty Point Conservation Area. This well-photographed bird was last observed on 12 November 2004 (Crins 2006, Curry 2006).

The lakes and ponds across the American west are common breeding grounds for the Western Grebe. They also breed in Mexico. This species winters primarily off the Pacific coast and on large bodies of water in the southwest, as well as in Mexico (Storer and Nuechterlein 1992).

Kayo J. Roy



Western Grebe
Jean Iron



Black-capped Petrel
Steven N.G. Howell

Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata*

Extremely rare straggler

This ocean wanderer of the southern Atlantic Ocean adjacent to the Lesser Antilles would seem a most unlikely candidate to occur in Niagara. The fact is, however, that Niagara has witnessed visitations of this gadfly petrel on three separate occasions, all associated with the passage of remnant hurricanes.

Following the passage of Hurricane Connie through southern Ontario on 13 August 1955, Alice Ulrich on 21 August 1955 picked up an emaciated specimen of this species at Morgan's Point near Burnaby. The remains are now at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 76892), (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Dobos 1998).

One of the strongest hurricanes on record, Fran, cut a swath through the Niagara Peninsula on 7-8 September 1996. On the afternoon of 8 September, Robert Curry, John Olmsted and (independently) John Lamey found two Black-capped Petrels in Lake Erie, off Fort Erie (Curry and Olmsted 1996, Lamey 1996). At about the same time, Alan Wormington saw another off Port Colborne. The excitement spread rapidly, and before the afternoon was over perhaps 40 observers at Waverly Beach in Fort Erie watched up to three Black-capped Petrels (Dobos 1998).

Over the next 15 days, Black-capped Petrels were observed on both Lakes Erie and Ontario. The last living petrels on Lake Erie were seen on 15 September, and the bird observed by Theo Hoffman on 18 September flying off Fifty Point, Hamilton, undoubtedly strayed into adjacent Niagara waters. Approximately 12 Black-capped Petrels were observed in Niagara during this period (Dobos 1998). In addition, 18 dead specimens were picked up along the northwest shore of Lake Erie in Niagara and subsequently donated to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Dobos 1998). See Curry (1996) and the article on Hurricane Fran in this book for more complete accounts of this event.

Yet another hurricane, Isabel, struck southern Ontario on 19 September 2003. This storm brought two more Black-capped Petrels to Niagara. David Beadle and Alan Wormington found the first on 23 September 2003 off Waverly Beach in Fort Erie. Numerous observers saw this bird later the same day. On 27 September 2003, Brandon Holden found another petrel dead on Waverly Beach in Fort Erie; the skin is now at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 91639) (Crins 2004).

The Black-capped Petrel nests in Hispaniola and perhaps other West Indian Islands. Considerable numbers forage in the Gulf Stream off North Carolina, where they are regularly encountered by birding party boats. It is from these waters that they are roughly snatched by hurricanes and deposited, very rarely, in the waters and on the shores of Niagara.

Robert Curry

Wilson's Storm-Petrel

Oceanites oceanicus

Extremely rare straggler

Hurricane Connie passed through the Niagara Peninsula on 13 August 1955. The next morning Eric Bastin and George and Glenn Meyers of Hamilton were birding the Lake Erie shore. At Long Beach they found a dead Wilson's Storm-Petrel, which they donated to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 73077) (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Roy 2001). It is interesting that a resident of Long Beach reported to birders that, later the same day, he saw another storm-petrel in his yard. He placed it in a birdbath, but it flew away (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

Forty-one years later, in September 1996, Hurricane Fran brought at least four Wilson's Storm-Petrels to Niagara, all at the extreme eastern end of the lake at Fort Erie (Curry 1996). Drew Campbell saw the first bird off Jaeger Rocks on 9 September 1996, the day after Fran passed through. The next day, Glenn Coady, William Lindley and Alan McTavish observed three birds off Waverly Beach in Fort Erie (Dobos 1998), and John Lamey observed one off Jaeger Rocks on 13 September. Other unidentified storm-petrels observed on 9 and 14 September may have been some of these same individuals. In September 2003, Hurricane Isabel brought at least three more individuals of this species to Ontario to bring the total to six records (eight individuals) for the province (Crins 2004).

Wilson's Storm-Petrel occurs abundantly over much of the world's oceans. However, it is strictly pelagic and occurs inland only in the most adverse conditions, such as those encountered by these Niagara birds.

Robert Curry



Wilson's Storm-Petrel
Kayo Roy

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Occasional fall visitor

The Northern Gannet, the most handsome of pelagic birds, is a large, long-winged seabird of the family Sulidae. This graceful, sleek, agile and powerful flyer that spends most of its life at sea can travel far in almost any weather, and it is capable of gliding for hours just above the wave-tips, seldom moving its wings. The Northern Gannet is well equipped by nature for its spectacular plunges for fish from great heights. Unlike most birds, it has binocular vision; that is, its eyes are positioned such that both can see forward (Nelson 1978a).

The first record of Northern Gannet for Niagara is that of a young bird, reported by James H. Fleming, that was picked up dead about the last week of November in 1907 (exact date unknown). Joseph Gilmore found the bird on his farm in Wainfleet located several kilometres from Lake Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). This publication and Sheppard (1970) identify all known observations of Northern Gannet in Niagara prior to 1966.

While Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) refer to this species as “very rare,” and Sheppard (1970) calls it a “rare migrant,” today the Northern Gannet is an occasional fall visitor to Niagara. Near annual observations of juvenile birds are possible along the Lake Ontario shoreline from Fifty Point to Niagara-on-the-Lake and up the Niagara River to Queenston. The birds have on occasion been observed in the Welland Canal at Port Weller and along the Lake Erie shoreline at Fort Erie and at Point Abino. This species has become a rare but regular visitor over recent years to neighbouring Hamilton at the west end of Lake Ontario, where most records come from the Van Wagners Beach area. Depending on the weather, these birds begin to arrive from the Maritimes in small numbers from early November to mid-December (BOSNR).

In North America, the Northern Gannet’s breeding range is the North Atlantic of Maritime Canada. It winters along the eastern seaboard to Florida and the Gulf of Mexico (Nelson 1978b).

Kayo J. Roy

American White Pelican

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos

Extremely rare visitor

One historic record and only three other observations of American White Pelican are known to exist in Niagara for this extremely rare visitor from the American south and west. While not at risk in Canada, this species is listed as Endangered under the Species at Risk Act (SARA 2008). The historic record, and Niagara’s first American White Pelican, is of a bird reported by James Savage in the Niagara River near Fort Erie on 5 October 1894 (Sheppard 1970). Later that same day, “Jake” Koch shot this bird near the International Bridge in Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

Sixty-three years later, on 28 September 1957, Roy Muma observed the second American White Pelican for Niagara at Gravelly Bay near Port Colborne (Sheppard 1970). A front-page article in the 1 October 1957 Welland and Port Colborne newspaper, *The Evening Tribune*, includes a photograph taken on 29 September 1957 that confirms the two-day presence of the bird in the area.



American White Pelican
Kayo Roy

Lake Ontario Mid-winter
Waterfowl Survey: Reported on
1 of 23 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 1992

A further 34 years elapsed before Niagara's third American White Pelican was located. On 17 November 1991, two white pelicans were discovered at Jordan Harbour, Vineland (Bain 1992). Unwisely these two birds stayed for a period of time that proved fatal. Succumbing to a very cold spell early in January, one bird was found frozen on the ice (exact date unknown) while the second bird was observed in the ice-covered harbour until 13 January 1992. This second bird may then have suffered the same misfortune. These birds were well photographed by Robert Tymczyszyn and Alan Wormington and were probably the same two individuals that spent the previous six weeks at Mountsberg Conservation Area, near Campbellville, only 70 km north of Vineland. Finally, on 14 May 2002, Willie D'Anna photographed three American White Pelicans on the Niagara River above the Canadian Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

The main breeding areas for American White Pelican are the Canadian Prairie provinces east to Lake Nipigon in northwestern Ontario (G.K. Peck 2007a), with scattered colonies in the western United States. The species winters chiefly in the Gulf of Mexico, Florida and on the coasts of Central America south to the West Indies and Guatemala. In the west it winters along the coast of central California south through the Gulf of California (Harrison 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Extremely rare visitor

The Brown Pelican is unmistakably a bird of coastal waters and is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. In the early 1970s, the Brown Pelican was seriously endangered. The halting of the use of DDT and other pesticides has resulted in a dramatic recovery for this now very abundant coastal species.

Over the years, there have been several sightings of Brown Pelican across the Niagara River in neighbouring Buffalo, New York; however, only one known record exists for

Niagara. On 25 September 1971, Paul Benham, Mary and William Kraetz, Richard Brownstein and others identified a Brown Pelican, first in flight over Lake Erie being pursued by Herring Gulls, and then perched on a rock some three hundred metres off Waverley Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR, James 1991). Interestingly, there is no earlier sighting of Brown Pelican for the province, so this observation becomes the first record for Ontario.

An adult Brown Pelican spent two days in the Buffalo harbour off La Salle Park in July 1992. The presence of this close-by bird enticed many Ontario birders to camp along the Niagara River in Fort Erie in hopes of catching a glimpse of this coastal rarity. Regrettably, the second Niagara sighting did not happen as the bird was a no-show in Ontario waters.

The Brown Pelican is found on both coasts of North and South America from Washington to Peru and from North Carolina to the West Indies and Brazil. Breeding dates vary according to location (Harrison 1987).

Kayo J. Roy



Double-crested Cormorant
Kayo Roy

Double-crested Cormorant

Phalacrocorax auritus

Very common summer resident,
uncommon winter resident

The status of the Double-crested Cormorant in Niagara has changed dramatically in the last 50 years. Neither Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) nor Sheppard (1970) refers to this bird as anything other than an uncommon migrant or very rare winter visitor. McIlwraith (1894) mentions only that it is seen in southern Ontario. The first record listed by Beardslee and Mitchell was of a single bird seen off the south end of Grand Island in February 1932. There are only three records in the 1940s and three in the 1950s. Sheppard

(1970) refers to it as “An uncommon migrant through the Frontier area, appearing only at rather wide intervals.”

At present the Double-crested Cormorant is a very common summer resident in Niagara. The birds begin to arrive in late March, and most have left the region by early November (Curry 2006). A few birds, however, overwinter here.

Cormorants first nested on the Great Lakes in Lake Superior in the early 1910s. They spread eastward, from Lake Superior, increasing in numbers to about 900 pairs by the 1950s. From the 1950s to the early 1970s, they suffered widespread reproductive failure and a dramatic population decline from the effects of environmental contaminants (Weseloh et al. 1995). Contaminants began to decline and cormorant populations on the Great Lakes began to increase in the early to mid-1970s. The first nesting in Niagara

(16 nests) occurred in 1983 on Mohawk Island, just west of the Niagara Region boundary in Lake Erie (Clarke et al. 1983). By 1994, there were 132 nests there, and since 2004, there have been >1,000 nests annually, with 1,586 in 2008 (CWS unpubl. data). Between 1992 and 2004, cormorants started nesting at five locations on the U.S. side of the Niagara River: 1992 — Buckhorn Weir (7 pairs); 1997 — Motor and Strawberry Islands (18 and 31 pairs, respectively); 2000 — Goat Island (9 pairs); and 2004 — Nimo Crib (7 pairs). In 2003, a few birds attempted to nest at the mouth of the Welland Canal in St. Catharines, and on 19 June 2008, 111 nests were counted there (John Black pers. comm.). At the Port Colborne breakwall, the first cormorant sighting was of 20 individuals on 24 May 2001. The number of birds roosting there increased until the first nests (n=35) were recorded on 2 June 2004 (Ralph Morris pers. comm.). On 22 April 2009, 444 nests were counted there (David Moore unpubl. data). Significant increases in cormorant numbers have occurred on all BOS Counts (see the article by Hamilton and DeLeon elsewhere in this book).

Since 2006, there has been an active program of lethal control over most United States Great Lakes cormorant colonies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2003). On the five U.S. colonies mentioned above, the population in 2006 was 705 nests; by 2008 it had been reduced to 528 nests (Connie Adams pers. comm.).

The Double-crested Cormorant is native to North America. It breeds coastally from Alaska to Baja, California, across the Canadian Prairies, in the Great Lakes Basin, along Atlantic coast and in the Caribbean (Hatch and Weseloh 1999). In Ontario, it breeds mostly on islands and along the shores of the Great Lakes. In the last decade, considerable numbers have started nesting inland from the Great Lakes (Weseloh 2007a).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Extremely rare visitor

The Old World Great Cormorant is the most widely distributed of all cormorants. This conspicuous waterbird, the largest of all the world's cormorants, breeds in all continents except South America. A coastal rather than an oceanic bird, the Great Cormorant, while known to occasionally wander, can regularly be found in North America along the Atlantic coast (Hatch et al. 2000). There are no recorded observations of Great Cormorant in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or Sheppard (1970).

The Great Cormorant has been observed in Ontario on quite a few occasions, with 12 Ontario Bird Records Committee accepted records (Richards 2008). During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, three Niagara records exist for this extremely rare visitor. On 1 January 1974, John Black, Paul Benham and Daniel Salisbury identified a Great Cormorant at Niagara-on-the-Lake. On 23 November 2002, Alan Wormington and others discovered a Great Cormorant at the mouth of the Niagara River in Niagara-on-the-Lake (Crins 2003). Brian Ahara observed what was probably this same individual later in the day at Port Weller as it flew west past the entrance to the Welland Canal. The third Niagara record, also from Niagara-on-the-Lake, is of a bird found by Thomas Bartlett on 8 December 2005 (BOSNR).

In North America the Great Cormorant breeds along the Atlantic coast from Maine northward to Newfoundland. It winters along the Atlantic coast from the Maritime provinces south to the Carolinas (Hatch et al. 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 18 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,216 birds in 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 2,070 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 25 of 40 counts, maximum of 1,188 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 60 birds on the 2006 Niagara Falls CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey: Reported on 17 of 23 counts, maximum of 45 birds in 2003

American Bittern
Barry Cheriére

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed,
2 probable, 3 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares con-
firmed, 2 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
1 of 41 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 2005

BOS May Count: Reported on
12 of 41 counts, maximum of
7 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported
on 2 of 40 counts, maximum
of 2 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 1 of 41 counts,
maximum of 1 bird on the
1971 Niagara Falls CBC



American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*

Rare and local summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

The American Bittern is one of the top 20 common birds in decline as determined by the National Audubon Society (Audubon 2007). There is little evidence to suggest that these birds migrate through Niagara in the spring. Given their secretive nature, however, we may simply fail to see them as they move through. The earliest spring arrival date is 10 April 2005, when a single bird was found on the BOS April Count.

The American Bittern, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a rare and local summer resident in Niagara. The numbers of these birds breeding in the region have declined substantially over the years from 1966 to 2006. In Ontario, however, only in the Carolinian region has the probability of observation declined significantly (Timmermans 2007a). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 19 May. The most reliable location for finding this species is Mud Lake in Port Colborne.

The latest recorded date in October is 14 October 1990, when a single bird was observed on the BOS October Count. There are two November records of single birds: 6 November 1966 at Rose Hill Road (probably on the Lake Erie shoreline) in Fort Erie and 13 November 1972 at Thunder Bay in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

An extremely rare winter straggler, a single bird was seen on the Niagara Falls CBC of 1971. The American Bittern winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis*

Rare and local summer resident

The Least Bittern is designated as Threatened in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). There is little evidence to suggest that these birds migrate through Niagara in the spring. Given their secretive nature, however, we may simply fail to see them as they move through. The earliest spring date is 3 May 1970, when Harold Lancaster and Dan Salisbury saw two birds at Mud Lake in Port Colborne.

The Least Bittern, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a rare and local summer resident in Niagara. Only in the Carolinian region was there a significant decline in the probability of observation of this species between the two atlases (Woodliffe 2007a). According to Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 21 May. One of the most likely places to see the bird and hear its call (a soft “coo-coo-coo”) in Niagara is on the east side of Mud Lake in Port Colborne.

There is only one fall record. A single bird was found by Harold Lancaster on 9 and 12 September 1994 at Mud Lake (BOSNR).

There are no winter records for this species in Niagara. The Least Bittern winters in southern Florida and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Least Bittern
Jean Iron



First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 1 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1974 and 1989

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*

Uncommon summer resident, rare winter straggler

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 12 possible

Second Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 12 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 44 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 36 birds in 1997

BOS October Count: Reported on 36 of 40 counts, maximum of 32 birds in 2005

Christmas Bird Count: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 60 birds on the 2006 Niagara Falls CBC

Great Blue Heron
Sam Barone



McIlwraith (1894) makes very little mention of the distribution of the Great Blue Heron in Ontario except to say that it breeds in North America from the Arctic regions southward to the West Indies and northern South America. He also notes that “In southern Ontario, Herons are seen occasionally wherever their favourite fish is to be found.” He describes one such colony near Ottawa in 1883.

According to Beardslee and Mitchell (1965), during spring and fall migration, this heron can be seen on all rivers and streams in the Niagara Frontier. They also discuss the location of several early colonies in the Niagara Frontier: Oak Orchard Swamp, Grand Island and sites near Wainfleet and Chippawa, Ontario. Between 1937 and 1956, they report 117-244 individuals for April Counts, 201-433 individuals for May Counts, 49-52 individuals for Fall Counts and 20 for Christmas Counts. These numbers, when compared to those in the sidebar, suggest a dramatic decline in the number of herons observed during the April-May period. Sheppard (1970) alludes to this decline: “Although not so prevalent in these days, this large heron was, in former years, a familiar sight during the summer months in the shallows of practically all the larger waterways within this Frontier area.” He also mentions a small (<45 nests) but long-standing colony on Navy Island.

In the New York waters of the river, the Great Blue Heron breeds on Motor Island, where there were 38, 65, 61 and 91 nests in 2005-2008, respectively. It also bred on Strawberry Island in 2005 (three nests) but not in 2006/2007, probably owing to the aggressive cormorant control begun in 2005 (Connie Adams pers. comm.).

Since 1966 the earliest spring record for this species in Niagara is 15 March 1967, when a single bird was reported at Thorold. In terms of late records, individuals are known to linger into January and February (BOSNR).

The numbers of Great Blue Heron reported on the three BOS Counts are amazingly consistent, as compared to, for instance, the numbers of Bonaparte’s Gull. The

consistency of these numbers suggests that any post-breeding dispersal of these herons (Butler 1992) into Niagara, which may occur in August-September, is over by October. The 60 herons reported above on the 2006 Niagara Falls CBC are at least 50% greater numbers than any of the other counts listed. This suggests a build-up in numbers, with the open water sections of the River acting as a distinct wintering area for this species. Great Blue Herons often winter as far north as there is open water (Butler 1992).

Hamilton and DeLeon (see their article elsewhere in this book) show a significant increase in the number of Great Blue Herons reported on the May and October BOS Counts from 1966 to 2006.



The Great Blue Heron breeds throughout much of North America, from Cape Breton Island to central Alberta, south to Florida and Texas. On the Pacific coast, it breeds from southern Alaska south to Baja California (Butler 1992). In Ontario, it breeds commonly throughout southern Ontario and intermittently into the Boreal Forest (Naylor 2007a).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Great Egret
Brandon Holden

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Rare summer resident

McIlwraith (1894) states that this bird occurs primarily in the southern United States but straggles northward to “Canada West.” He considers it only an accidental visitor to Canada.

Until recently, the Great Egret was an extremely rare bird in the Niagara Frontier. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) note that early writers considered it a “rare straggler” and listed only four occurrences of it between 1881 and 1927. From 1928 to 1932, it occurred on six occasions, and it has occurred annually since then. Sheppard (1970) calls it a “sporadic visitor to the [Niagara] Frontier waters.” From 1966 to 1996, in the Canadian sections of the BOS Counts in April and/or May, only one or two birds were seen in eight years. There was no known nesting of Great Egrets in the Niagara Region during either period of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (G.K. Peck 2007b); nor were there any during the first New York Breeding Bird Atlas (Peterson 1988).

Since 1966 the earliest spring arrival date for this species in Niagara is 30 March 1988, when a single bird was seen at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). The latest date of observation is 27 October 2004, when three birds were seen at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

BOS April Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 12 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The first breeding record for the Great Egret on the Niagara Frontier occurred in 1995, when a small colony of two nests was established on Motor Island on the U.S. side of the Niagara River, just downstream from the Peace Bridge (Watson 2001). Reported sightings of Great Egrets on BOS Counts, however, remained scarce. From 1996 to 2006, they were reported during May in eight of ten years but never in numbers greater than six individuals. In spite of the few egret reports on specific count days, the colony on Motor Island has grown steadily since 1995. Nest numbers there were recorded as follows: at least five nests in 2001, nine nests in 2002, 15 nests in 2003, 29 nests in 2005, 31 nests in 2006, 20 nests in 2007 and 36 nests in 2008. (William Watson, Connie Adams pers. comm.).

In the summers of 2002 to 2009, Canadian Wildlife Service, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and BOS colour-banded, with red leg-bands, more than 75 flightless young egrets on Motor Island. The goal of this work was to determine post-breeding movements, natal site fidelity and the origin of pioneering individuals at new egret colonies. During late summers of these years, these birds were seen again, primarily in areas to the east of the Niagara River in the Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area, where there is an overnight roost of more than 200 egrets, and at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, where there is also a large autumn roost. Few birds have dispersed to the west, and no Motor Island banded birds have been reported from any other breeding colony. The Canadian nesting colony nearest to Niagara is in the Toronto Harbour. Since 1995, individuals have been seen regularly on the Niagara River, the Lake Erie shoreline, Mud Lake, Feeder Canal Road (Stromness) and Cement Plant Road pond in Wainfleet.

The Great Egret breeds throughout South and Central America. In North America, it breeds on the Atlantic Coast from southern Maine to Florida and into Mexico. It also breeds at scattered locations throughout the Midwest to the far west (McCrimmon et al. 2001). In Ontario, it breeds with other tree-nesting colonial waterbirds (herons and cormorants) in the St. Lawrence River and Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron (G.K. Peck 2007b).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*

Occasional visitor

The beautiful and graceful aquatic Snowy Egret is the North American counterpart to the very similar Little Egret of the Old World. It inhabits swamps, ponds, lakes and shallow coastal wetlands and tidal flats, but prefers the coastal marshes of the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf Coasts. In the late 19th century and the early 20th century, the delicate breeding plumes of the Snowy Egret were highly prized by the millinery industry as decorations for women's hats, a style that reduced the Snowy Egret population to dangerously low levels. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 protected the birds from this devastation, and the population has substantially rebounded. This treaty still stands today to protect the many species of North America's migratory birds.

There are no sightings of Snowy Egret for Niagara in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965).

The following birds were observed in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book.**1967**

31 May-3 June, one, Port Colborne (Arthur Clark, Daniel Salisbury, Joseph Grzybowski and others, Sheppard 1970, BOSNR).

1968

16 July, one juvenile, Port Colborne (Daniel Salisbury, Richard Brownstein).

8 September, Waverley Beach, Fort Erie (Harold Mitchell and others, Sheppard 1970, BOSNR).

1969

16 June, one (collected), Port Weller, St. Catharines (Daniel Salisbury).

1975

17 May, one, west of Fort Erie on BOS May Count (James

Braunberns, Mary Louise Emerson, Marjorie Emerson).

1978

29-30 April and 2 May, one, Fort Erie (Robert Sommerville, Ralph Gardiner, BOSNR).

1983

14 May, one, Mud Lake, Port Colborne (Paul Hess, BOSNR).

1994

15-21 May, one adult, Kemp Road W, Grimsby (Robert Curry and others).

1997

4 May, one adult, Avondale sewage ponds (now known as the Parmalat sewage ponds), Niagara-on-the-Lake (John Black, Kayo Roy and others).

1999

8-11 November, one juvenile, Niagara-on-the-Lake (Gordon Bellerby and others, BOSNR).

2000

29 May, two adults, Fort Erie (Kayo Roy, Alan J. Smith, BOSNR).

2001

21-23 May, one adult, Fort Erie (Kayo Roy, Alan J. Smith, BOSNR).

2004

16 May, one adult, Richardson's Creek, St. Catharines (Brian Ahara, Kayo Roy).

In North America, the Snowy Egret breeds along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts and inland wetlands from New Jersey to Florida and Texas, also along the Pacific Coast from Oregon to California and inland from Montana to Arizona. It winters on the east coast from Virginia to Florida, Texas, along the west coast from Oregon to California and east to Arizona and New Mexico (Parsons and Master 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

Snowy Egret
Brandon Holden



Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*

Extremely rare visitor

Post-2006 Observation

On 13 May 2007, Suzanne Taylor discovered a definitive alternate Little Blue Heron in the Barnsdale Marsh area of Richardson's Creek (the western extension of Martindale Pond) adjacent to the Green Ribbon Trail bridge in St. Catharines (Richards 2008). This sighting is only the sixth known observation for Niagara of this species from the American south. It was not observed after the morning of 16 May 2007.

The Little Blue Heron of the southeastern United States is a small member of the heron family and is the only heron species in North America in which a dramatic colour difference exists between first-year and adult birds. In its first year, juveniles are all white, turning into an overall slate-blue colour in subsequent years. This species is declining in much of its range owing to loss of wetland habitat and other anthropogenic disturbances (Rogers and Smith 1995).

There are no reports of Little Blue Heron for Niagara in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965). The Ontario Bird Records Committee has accepted 57 records of this species up to 2006 (Crins 2007a). In that this bird wanders north to Canada from the United States, it is surprising that only five of these Ontario records exist for Niagara. Harold Lancaster found the first, a white juvenile bird he discovered on 21 June 1957 along Four Mile Creek in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This individual was not seen after 23 June 1957 (Sheppard 1970).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, only four records are known for Little Blue Heron in Niagara. On 16 July 1968, Daniel Salisbury observed a white juvenile bird at the Cement Plant Road pond in Wainfleet (Sheppard 1970, BOSNR, Crins 2005). Daniel Salisbury also located Niagara's third Little Blue Heron on 1 May 1970 at Mud Lake, Port Colborne. On 13 June 1979, David Freeland and others identified an adult Little Blue Heron at Fort Erie (BOSNR). Robert Curry, James Heslip and John Olmsted discovered a white juvenile bird on 24 July 1994 at the Smithville sewage ponds that was later photographed by Kayo Roy. This Little Blue Heron was last reported on 2 August 1994 (not 1 August 1994 as in Pittaway 1995; Curry 2006).

In North America, the Little Blue Heron breeds in the southeast United States from southern Ohio and the Missouri River valleys to the Gulf Coast of Texas and Florida, and up the Atlantic coast to New England. It winters along the coasts of the southeastern United States from New Jersey to Florida and south Texas (Rogers and Smith 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor*

Extremely rare visitor

Formerly known as Louisiana Heron, the Tricolored Heron is a graceful, slender, medium-sized heron of the coastal shores and marshes of the southeastern United States. Built for marsh life with its long legs, this abundant bird is the only North American heron with an all white belly.

There are no Niagara records for Tricolored Heron in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or in Sheppard (1970).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, six records exist of Tricolored Heron in Niagara. The first is that of a first alternate bird found on 23 May 1971 by Harold Lancaster, Alan J. Smith and Randy Waters at the Cement Plant Road pond in Wainfleet. The bird was not observed after 24 May 1971 (BOSNR, Roy 2002). Six years later on 11 May 1977, Blayne Farnan identified a definitive alternate Tricolored Heron at the same Cement Plant Road pond in Wainfleet. This individual was last seen on 18 May (BOSNR, Roy 2002). Roy E.C. Baker, Simon Baker and David Milsom

discovered a definitive alternate Tricolored Heron on 29 April 1984 at the Smithville sewage ponds (Wormington 1985)

On 27 May 2001, Kayo Roy and Alan J. Smith identified a first alternate Tricolored Heron along the Welland Canal near the Canadian Coast Guard Station in Port Weller, St. Catharines. Many birders were easily able to observe this bird, which was not seen after 2 June 2001 (Roy 2002, BOSNR). On 6 August 2006, Barbara Charlton and Rob Dobos were astonished to find a definitive alternate Tricolored Heron along the shoreline of the Niagara River above the Canadian Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls. One week later on 13 August, and to everyone's total surprise, George Naylor reported that a second definitive alternate Tricolored Heron had joined the first bird. Jerry Lazarczyk observed only one bird on 28 August, and this lone individual was not seen after 3 September 2006 (Crins 2007a, BOSNR).

On 5 October 2006, Michael Oldham reported a definitive alternate Tricolored Heron along the Lake Erie shoreline at Point Abino. This individual was last seen on 11 October 2006 (BOSNR). While it is difficult to know with any certainty, it is believed that the Point Abino bird was likely one of the two Tricolored Herons that had been observed earlier in the year in Niagara Falls.

The Tricolored Heron breeds along the Atlantic Coast from New Jersey south to Mexico, the Caribbean and South America. It winters in most of its breeding range (Frederick 1997). Non-breeding distribution is not very much different from that of the breeding distribution (Hancock and Kushlan 1984).

Kayo J. Roy

Tricolored Heron
Barry Cherie

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Occasional visitor

The Cattle Egret has experienced a remarkable range expansion. First sighted in South America in 1877, it is generally believed that this common Old World species crossed the Atlantic Ocean from Africa by natural means, most probably by transatlantic flight (Hancock and Kushlan 1984). Initially discovered in North America in 1941, it reached Canada in 1952, and Ontario's first record was that of a single individual reported from Port Rowan on 4 May 1956 (Godfrey 1986).



The first Niagara record for this occasional visitor was on 26 May 1964 when Robert Andrle, Arthur Clark, and Joseph Thill discovered a Cattle Egret in Wellandport (BOSNR). Five months later, on 30 October 1964, George Letchworth found a Cattle Egret at Thunder Bay, near Fort Erie (Sheppard 1970, BOSNR).

The following birds were observed in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book.

1968

19-20 May, one, Chippawa (Mavis Folemsbee, Sheppard 1970).

1969

25 October, one, St. Davids (Paul Benham, BOSNR).

1976

29 May, one, Sherkston (Robert Andrle, Alice and Willard McKale, BOSNR).

29 May, four, Welland (Robert Andrle and others, BOSNR).

17-31 July, two, Chippawa

(Robert L. Sommerville, BOSNR).

31 July, five, Chippawa

(Robert L. Sommerville, BOSNR).

4, 11 and 15 August, one, Fort Erie (Robert L. Sommerville, BOSNR).

1977

13 May, one, Rainham Centre (Robert Andrle and others, BOSNR).

23 May, two, Fort Erie

(Robert L. Sommerville, BOSNR).

7 May, one, Fort Erie

(Robert L. Sommerville, BOSNR).

1979

11 November, one, Humberstone (David Freeland and others, BOSNR).

1984

19 May, four, Fort Erie

(Robert L. Sommerville, BOSNR).

1992

4 and 7 April, one, Fort Erie (Robert L. Sommerville, BOSNR).

4 and 7 May, one, Fort Erie (Robert L. Sommerville, BOSNR).

2000

29 May - 1 June, two, alternate plumaged, Avondale sewage ponds (now known as the Parmalat sewage ponds), Niagara-on-the-Lake (Peter Yoerg, BOSNR).

2003

6-7 November, one, Thorold (Kayo Roy).

Post-2006 Observation

On 27 May 2007, returning to Fort Erie after looking for a nesting pair of Sandhill Cranes, Peter Yoerg discovered an adult Cattle Egret in a grassy cattle field along Highway 3 in Gasline (BOSNR). The bird was observed feasting on insects in the long grass along a wire fence line. This Cattle Egret was last observed on 3 June 2007.

The Cattle Egret, a bird of Africa and Eurasia, has expanded its range in the New World from Chile, Argentina and Brazil north to the United States and Canada (Hilty and Brown 1986). It breeds all along the Atlantic coast from Maine south throughout coastal Mexico, and the entire length of the Pacific coast from British Columbia to Baja California, and inland in areas bordering the Gulf of Mexico (Hancock and Kushlan 1984).

Kayo J. Roy

Green Heron *Butorides virescens*

Uncommon summer resident

First Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 6 possible

Second Atlas: 9 squares confirmed, 9 probable, 6 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 11 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 6 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1974

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The earliest recorded spring arrival date of this species is 21 April, when single birds were seen at Mud Lake in Port Colborne in 1968 by Harold Lancaster and at Port Weller in 1970 by Dan Salisbury. There is little evidence to suggest that there is a migration through Niagara of this uncommon species.

The Green Heron, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 18 May. Green Heron prefer conifers for their nesting.

The latest fall date is 20 October 1985, when a single bird was noted on the BOS October Count. There are no winter records of this species in Niagara. The Green Heron winters in southern Florida and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black



Green Heron
Sam Barone



Black-crowned Night-Heron
Sam Barone

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Uncommon summer resident, occasional winter straggler

The earliest spring arrival date for the Black-crowned Night-Heron in our area is 29 March 1998 (but see below), when 21 birds were reported at Niagara Falls. In terms of late dates, single birds are known to linger into January (BOSNR).



Black-crowned Night-Heron
juvenile
Kenneth Newcombe

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 4 possible

Second Atlas: 2 squares con-
firmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
26 of 41 counts, maximum of
188 birds in 1989

BOS May Count: Reported on
27 of 41 counts, maximum of
111 birds in 1989

BOS October Count: Reported
on 10 of 41 counts, maximum
of 5 birds in 1980

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 5 of 41 counts,
maximum of 5 birds on the
1992 Niagara Falls CBC

Beardslee and Mitchell writing in 1965 comment that this species had “increased considerably in numbers in the last half century.” They mention a colony of 574 nests that existed until 1939 on Grand Island and another at Port Weller, St. Catharines that had grown to 630 nests by 1948. Since 1965, this night-heron has been reported in the Canadian sections of the annual April and May BOS Counts in all but four years. Numbers reported in May are much lower (average for the last 10 years is 18) than those in April (average for the last 10 years is 126), probably as a result of greater amounts of foliage on the trees, which hides both birds and nests.

Black-crowned Night-Herons breed on several of the small islands just above Niagara Falls on both the Canadian and U.S. sides of the river. Sheppard (1970) noted 46 nests there on 5 April 1967. The second island east of the stranded barge just above the falls has been visited annually in late April since 1979 by biologists from

Canadian Wildlife Service, whose purpose is to collect Herring Gull eggs for studies of contaminants (Pekarik and Weseloh 1998). Night-Heron nests have also been counted on most visits, and the number of nests has fluctuated from a low of 51 in 1983 to a high of 213 in 1991. Most Night-Heron nests have contained eggs. Occasionally some eggs have already hatched, with some young as old as two weeks. These dates suggest that eggs would have been laid as early as mid- to late March, making this the earliest known seasonal nesting site in Ontario; the earliest egg date in the Ontario Nest Record Scheme is 15 April. Night-Herons also currently nest in the Niagara River on Motor Island near Tonawanda (Watson 2002) and formerly (2000-2006) nested on the breakwater at Port Colborne (Ralph Morris pers. comm.).

In the summer months Black-crowned Night-Herons may be seen anywhere on the Niagara River, on the Lake Erie shoreline, at Mud Lake, Port Colborne and at Cement Plant Road pond, Wainfleet, as well as at Allanburg, Port Weller, and the Glendale sewage ponds. Banded birds from Ontario have been reported at a range of locations from the southern United States through Cuba and the Caribbean islands (Dunn et al. 2009).

The Black-crowned Night-Heron occurs worldwide (Davis 1993). In North America, it breeds from Washington through southern Alberta to the Great Lakes, down the St. Lawrence River and south to the Gulf coasts; it is absent from the Appalachian Mountains. It winters in the southern United States and Central America. In Ontario, it breeds mainly on the Great Lakes from Lakes Erie and Ontario north to the North Channel of Lake Huron as well as on the Detroit, Niagara, St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers (Weseloh 2007b).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

Nyctanassa violacea

Extremely rare visitor

The Yellow-crowned Night-Heron is a short, stocky, medium-sized bird of the coasts and swamps of the southeastern United States. This handsome wading bird, with a diverse vocal repertoire of as many as 20 calls (Nice 1929), is primarily a solitary forager (French 1973) and usually but not entirely feeds at night (Burleigh 1958).

Sightings in Niagara prior to 1966 are well described in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970).

The Yellow-crowned Night-Heron is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara and has been observed on only two occasions during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. On 26 August 1966, Daniel Salisbury identified and studied a juvenile bird along a stream in western St. Catharines. Willie D'Anna and Betsy Potter discovered another juvenile on 10 August 2002 at the Cement Plant Road pond in Wainfleet. This bird remained until 13 August 2002 to the enjoyment of many birders (Crins 2003, BOSNR).

The Yellow-crowned Night-Heron breeds along the Atlantic Coast from New York southward and up the large river systems in Central United States to Kansas and Indiana. It winters along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts and southward (Watts 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

Post-2006 Observation

On 24 August 2008, Raymond Barlow photographed a juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron perched on a fallen tree limb some 100 metres from the rocky mouth of 40 Mile Creek in Grimsby (Richards 2009). Repeated efforts later in the day to relocate this bird and subsequent attempts to find it over the next few days proved to be unsuccessful.



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
Raymond Barlow

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Extremely rare visitor

The red and iridescent green plumage of the Glossy Ibis can be observed on every continent except Antarctica (Davis and Kricher 2000). During the bird's range expansion, its population also grew significantly. From a few breeding pairs in Florida in the late 1920s, by 1975, an estimated 13,500 Glossy Ibis were breeding along the Atlantic coast (Davis and Kricher 2000).

There are no Niagara records of Glossy Ibis in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965).

A dark wading bird with a long down-curved bill, the Glossy Ibis is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. The first reported sighting was in August 1939 (exact date unknown) when James Platt observed a Glossy Ibis on his farm between Beamsville and Vineland Station (Curry 2006). Four individuals were observed on 4 May 1962 in St. Catharines (Sheppard 1970). On 6 May 1965, Howard Martin and Gustave Yaki discovered a Glossy Ibis on the upper Niagara River between Dufferin Island and Chippawa in Niagara Falls (Sheppard 1970). Keith Culliford, Harold Lancaster and George Sparrow observed a Glossy Ibis at Mud Lake, Port Colborne on 9 May 1965 (Sheppard 1970).

In these early years, no one was expecting White-faced Ibis to appear in Ontario (John Black pers. comm.). This account will treat the above reports and all pre-1984 observations as Glossy Ibis.

In the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, four observations of Glossy Ibis have been reported from Niagara. On 27 May 1971, John Black reported finding two Glossy Ibis in Thorold, and Jim Dowall identified an adult bird on 7 May 1992 at the Smithville sewage ponds (Bain 1993). On 30 August 2002, Tom Crooks, David Don, Cheryl Edgecombe and Gerard McNaughton discovered two birds at the Grimsby sewage ponds, one in definitive basic plumage, the other a juvenal. These birds were last observed on 7 September 2002 (Crins 2003).

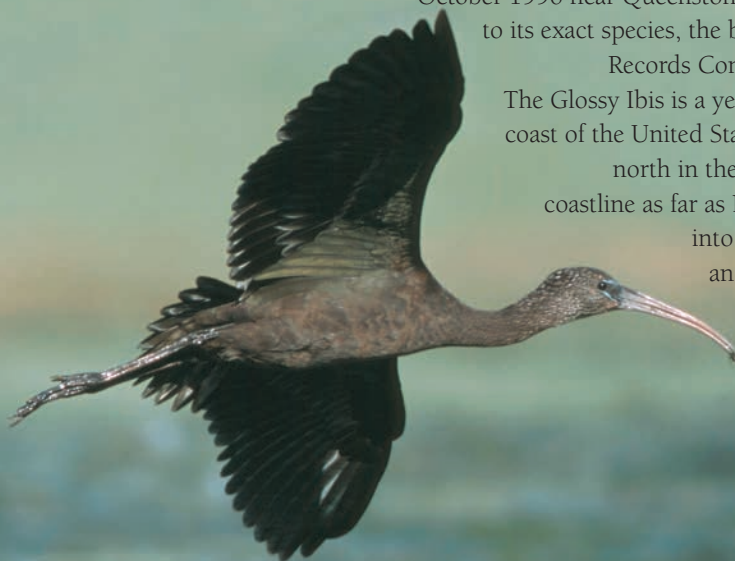
On 3 May 2005, Dayna Lee observed seven definitive alternate individuals. These Glossy Ibis were observed feeding in a cornfield in Fonthill and were last seen there on 4 May 2005 (Crins 2007a). David Milsom observed an *ibis* species in flight on 17

October 1996 near Queenston. Since this bird was unidentifiable as to its exact species, the bird was accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee as *Plegadis*, *sp.* (Dobos 1997).

The Glossy Ibis is a year-round resident along the southeast coast of the United States and throughout Florida. It moves north in the summer, breeding along the Atlantic coastline as far as Maine. Some individuals may wander into Nova Scotia and even west to Illinois and Missouri (Davis and Kricher 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

Glossy Ibis
Kenneth Newcombe



Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*

Extremely rare visitor

The name “vulture” is derived from the Latin word *vulturus* that means tearer, a reference to its feeding habits (Holloway 2003). The Black Vulture is a scavenger with no sense of smell: consequently, the bird hunts by sight for carrion and live young domestic or wild animals. The first occurrence of this extremely rare visitor to Niagara is that of an adult male bird found in worn breeding plumage when collected by Marion Miles on 21 July 1947 near St. Davids (Hope 1949, Baillie 1957, Sheppard 1960, Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Richards 2009). The specimen (skin) of this first Ontario record is at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 74864).

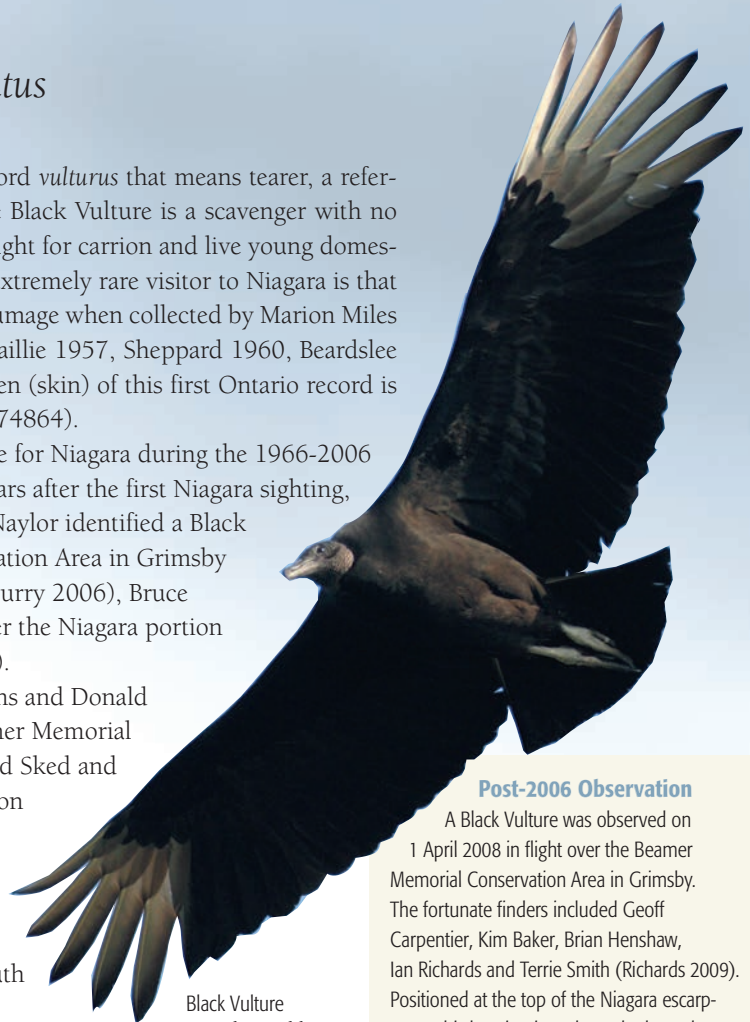
There have been four records of Black Vulture for Niagara during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. On 4 April 1992, 45 years after the first Niagara sighting, Kevin McLaughlin, George Meyers and George Naylor identified a Black Vulture in flight over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (Bain 1993). On 31 May 1994 (not 1993 as in Curry 2006), Bruce Mackenzie observed a Black Vulture in flight over the Niagara portion of Fifty Point Conservation Area (Pittaway 1995).

On 31 March 2000, Robert Curry, Verne Evans and Donald Perks studied a Black Vulture in flight over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Roy 2001). Keith Sealy, David Sked and Tom Thomas noted the flight of a Black Vulture on 5 April 2004, also over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Crins 2005).

The Black Vulture is very widespread and common throughout the southern United States, Mexico, Central America and most of South America. In North America it breeds throughout much of the southern and mid eastern United States.

It winters in a good portion of its breeding range and, while scarce, has been observed on numerous Christmas Bird Counts at the northern edge of these wintering grounds (Buckley 1999).

Kayo J. Roy



Black Vulture
Brandon Holden

Post-2006 Observation

A Black Vulture was observed on 1 April 2008 in flight over the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby. The fortunate finders included Geoff Carpentier, Kim Baker, Brian Henshaw, Ian Richards and Terrie Smith (Richards 2009). Positioned at the top of the Niagara escarpment, this location is perhaps the best place in the region to look for this rare for Niagara vulture as well as for all of the many other raptors that pass through this area during migration.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

Common spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient, occasional winter straggler

The Turkey Vulture is currently the most commonly seen raptor at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) during the spring migration. On occasion, birds have been observed in the last week of February, but their migration does not begin in earnest until after 15 March with the peak occurring during the last week of March and the first week of April. Transients are still seen passing in limited numbers when the watch ends in the middle of May. From the early 1980s to the present, there has been more than a sevenfold increase in the count numbers for this species. It has gone from being less than 5% of the total count to more than 35%. As recently as 1977, no Turkey Vultures were reported on the BOS April Count, which has averaged 100 birds per year in the 2003-2006 period.

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 12 probable, 4 possible

Second Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 12 probable, 6 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer): Average count 2,455, maximum 5,934 (2006), minimum 521 (1982)

BOS April Counts: Reported on 35 of 41 counts, maximum of 185 birds in 1993

BOS May Counts: Reported on 32 of 41 counts, maximum of 63 birds in 1995

BOS October Counts: Reported on 24 of 40 counts, maximum of 67 birds in 2002

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 2003 BOS CBC

Winter observations of single birds exist for eight dates in the BOS Noteworthy Records: 30 November 2003, 21 December 2003, 1 January 1997, 4 February 1996, 8 February 2004, 19 February 1995, 22 February 2002 and 26 February 1995. From Beamer there are two late February records. There are reports of Turkey Vulture overwintering in small numbers to the west of Niagara at a chicken farm near Caledonia, Ontario (Curry 2006). The February sightings may be early transients, and the isolated earlier sightings are likely wanderers.

Some Turkey Vultures migrate long distances with millions passing through Mexico on their way to Central and South America (Goodrich and Smith 2008). Others are sedentary or migrate short distances. It is believed that the farther north the birds migrate in the spring, the farther south they migrate in the fall, a process termed “leap-frog migration” (Boland 1990). Eastern birds, such as those in Niagara, are somewhat less migratory than their western counterparts (Goodrich and Smith 2008).

John R. Stevens

Post-2006 Observation

On 26 January 2008, about 60 Turkey Vultures were observed sitting in trees near a chicken farm not far from Wellandport. On 27 January 2008, there were 15 Turkey Vultures flying over the fields in the same area. According to the owner of the chicken farm, small numbers of vultures had been there for several winters (John Black pers. comm.). On 1 November 2009, during the Hamilton Fall Count, 43 Turkey Vultures were observed behind the West Lincoln chicken farm at 2322 Shurie Road, Smithville (Kayo Roy pers. comm.).

Barns and old buildings are favourite nest sites. On 26 June 2006, Elaine and Don Dimond took John Black, Brad Clements and Kayo Roy to a small run-down abandoned barn adjacent to 8582 Yokum Road in Niagara Falls where a Turkey Vulture pair was raising two young birds. The barn and the downy young were photographed (Kayo Roy) in a dark loft inside the barn. From the top of a nearby large tree the two adult birds kept a close watch.



Turkey Vulture
Brandon Holden



Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Uncommon spring transient, occasional summer visitor, fall transient, extremely rare winter straggler

This eagerly awaited mid- to late season transient at Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) usually makes its first appearance around the beginning of April. It is then seen migrating in limited numbers until mid-May. On a handful of days between 1980 and 2006, more than ten individuals were counted. The earliest record at Beamer (20 March 2000) is almost a week earlier than the next (26 March 1977). In recent years the annual counts have averaged 54 birds, compared to an average of 23 in the early 1980s. The increase in population can be attributed to anthropogenic factors including provision of nest platforms, protection of nest sites and curtailment of the use of chlorinated pesticides (Naylor 2007b).

Ospreys have been seen in eight years of the April Counts and eight different years of the May Counts conducted by the BOS. Eleven of these 16 years with sightings fell within the last 18 years of the period of study (1966-2006). These observations are consistent with what one would expect of a migratory species with an increasing population.

The BOS significant records include summer sightings of individual birds on 23 June 1984, 8 July 1990, 26 June 1991, 23 July 1995, 22 July 1999 and 6 August 2002. In 2004 during the second Atlas, a pair of Osprey nested just west of the Niagara Region, part of a range expansion that was noted throughout southern Ontario between the two atlas periods (Naylor 2007b). On 25 May 2005 an Osprey was observed flying along the Lake Ontario shore in Niagara-on-the-Lake during a point count taken in the second Atlas. It may be only a matter of time before the species becomes a summer resident in Niagara.

Osprey
Brandon Holden

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 43, maximum
71 (2001), minimum 19 (1981)

BOS April Counts: Reported
on 8 of 41 counts, maximum
of 3 birds in 1986

BOS May Counts: Reported
on 8 of 41 counts, maximum
of 5 birds in 2004

BOS October Counts:
Reported on 7 of 40 counts,
maximum of 1 bird in all years

Niagara Christmas Bird
Counts: Reported on 1 of 41
counts, maximum of 1 bird on
the 1986 St. Catharines CBC

Hawk watches on the northern shores of the Great Lakes report Osprey migrating from the time monitoring starts in mid-August (HawkCount). While no monitoring is conducted in Niagara during the fall flight south, there are 30 sightings listed for the mid-August to mid-October period (BOSNR). Interestingly, the average date of the 17 records between 1966 and 1971 is 26 September, with none in August, while for the 13 records between 1978 and 2005, it is 1 September, almost a month earlier. This difference in average dates suggests a significant shift in the migration period over the last 40 years. The Osprey migration is over 95% complete by mid-October at the watches on the north shores of the Great Lakes (Naylor 2007b). This is reflected in the BOS October Counts held, with one exception, between 8 and 16 October, which have found only seven birds in 40 years of effort. These sightings are spread over the four decades of this review.

A single winter record exists for Niagara. On the 21 December 1986, during the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count, Mary Ellen Hebb observed an Osprey flying over Lake Moodie in Thorold. Ospreys are long distance migrants that spend the winters in the extreme southern regions of the United States and south to Central and South America (Goodrich and Smith 2008).

John R. Stevens

Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus*

Extremely rare visitor

The scientific name for Swallow-tailed Kite is a Latin-Greek hybridization of the words *elanus*, meaning “kite” and *eidōs*, meaning “to resemble or be similar to”, and *forfex*, for “scissors” in reference to the forked tail (Gotch 1981). Of all the raptors, the Swallow-tailed Kite is the epitome of aerial grace. The tail, often spread, but frequently opened and closed like scissors, helps the bird maneuver in flight with ease.

This striking and unmistakable bird of prey is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. Only one record exists, that of a bird found by Paul Rose on 15 April 1994 at Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, Grimsby (Pittaway 1995, Curry 2006). The bird flew over the hawkwatch in company with numerous Broad-winged Hawks while Gordon Bellerby, George Meyers and many other observers excitedly looked on.

The Swallow-tailed Kite breeds in the very southeastern United States, primarily in Florida, as well as in Central America and South America. The species winters in South America (Meyer 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis*

Extremely rare visitor

The scientific name for Mississippi Kite comes from *iktinos*, the Greek word for “kite”, and the Latinized name for Mississippi, where Alexander Wilson collected the first specimen. This agile, graceful, long-winged, falcon-like raptor is chiefly insectivorous. More often than not it catches and consumes its prey in mid-air.

The Mississippi Kite is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara, where only four records are known to exist. On 18 May 1975, George Meyers recorded Niagara’s first, an adult bird in flight over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, Grimsby (Wormington 1986, Curry 2006). On 28 May 1977, Thomas Weir also identified an adult bird that he located at Long Beach (Wormington 1985).

Thomas Reavley, John Ryan and Paul Summerskill observed a definitive basic bird on 11 May 1997, gliding over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Dobos 1998, Curry 2006). The fourth Niagara record was of a first-basic Mississippi Kite that George Meyers observed on 14 May 2003 also in flight over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Crins 2004, Curry 2006).

The breeding range of Mississippi Kite extends across the southern United States from Arizona to northern Florida, and north to some localized areas from Nebraska to Virginia. The species winters in South America (Parker 1999).

Kayo J. Roy

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocapthalus*

Uncommon spring transient, rare summer resident, fall transient, rare winter resident

Although the Bald Eagle has become more common in Niagara in recent years, the sight of an adult bird remains a stirring event, one that captures the attention of even those people with no interest in birds. The species is an uncommon transient at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) spring migration watch site, although since 1980 there has been more than a tenfold increase in the number seen annually. The migration period extends from late February until mid-May, with the prime time being the last two weeks in March and the first two weeks in April. The April and BOS May Counts are conducted after this prime period, and the species is seldom recorded on these counts.

One hundred years ago there were about 200 active nesting pairs in southern Ontario, but there were no successful nesting pairs at all in the late 1970s (Neilson and Pollock 2001). During the first Atlas (1981-1985) only a single possible breeding record was made in Niagara. Twenty years later, confirmed breeding was recorded in one area during the second Atlas. This was at an historical nesting site on Navy Island just above Niagara Falls that records suggest may also have been used during the late 1960s (BOSNR). Since individuals of this species tend to use the same nest from year to year, the species has re-established summer residency in Niagara. Bald Eagles are beginning to appear on the October BOS Counts and in the last 20 years have made almost regular appearances on Christmas counts throughout the peninsula. Beginning in 1985, there have been regular reports of Bald Eagles during the winter along the lower Niagara River and around Navy Island. A recent peak was recorded on 20 January 2002 when nine individuals (four adults and five immatures) were seen at Navy Island (BOSNR).

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer): Average count 27, maximum 85 (2006), minimum 1 (1981)

BOS April Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1994

BOS May Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 2003

BOS October Counts: Reported on 3 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 16 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on seven CBCs (all post-1985)



Bald Eagle
Barry Cherriere

A major component of the species' diet is large, often dead, fish. During the mid-twentieth century, the widespread use and release of persistent pollutants, such as polychlorinated biphenyls and chlorinated pesticides, which are prone to bioaccumulate, severely reduced the population of Bald Eagles in eastern North America as a result of the adverse reproductive effects they caused (Neilson and Pollock 2001). Following the enactment of legislation in Ontario in 1973, the Bald Eagle was categorized as Endangered, a designation for species at risk of imminent extirpation or extinction (OMNR 2007). Thanks to huge reductions in the release of pollutants and to recovery plans that help protect habitat and nest sites, the species has made a remarkable recovery in Ontario. It can now be enjoyed year-round in Niagara near bodies of water such as Lakes Ontario and Erie, the Niagara River and the Welland Canal. It remains, however, on the provincial Endangered List in southern Ontario.

John R. Stevens

Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Common spring transient, rare summer resident, fall transient, rare winter resident

First Atlas: 8 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 4 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 6 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer): Average count 142, maximum 223 (2004), minimum 72 (1980)

BOS April Counts: Reported on 31 of 41 counts, maximum of 21 birds in 1969 and 1992

BOS May Counts: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 1969

BOS October Counts: Reported on 35 of 40 counts, maximum of 22 birds in 1995

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 31 of 41 counts, maximum of 44 birds on the 2003 Niagara Falls CBC

Seldom seen in any large numbers, the Northern Harrier is still a regular, albeit the most eccentric, transient at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) hawk watch. Rather than following the usual east to west route of most raptors, it is almost as likely to be seen moving west to east, often south to north and, on occasion, north to south. Coupled with the contrasting adult plumage of the two sexes, the species thus provides considerable variety and interest to the spectacle of spring migration. The migration period extends from mid-March to mid-May, during which time one to ten or more birds of this species can be seen on any day. The April BOS Counts average about five birds a year, but two counts have had 21. The May BOS Counts, conducted after the middle of month, have averaged only two birds a year. However, on 18 May 1969, thirteen birds were sighted. No dominant trend in the number of spring transients has developed in the Beamer counts between 1980 and 2006.

The breeding range of this species includes Niagara. During the second Atlas, it was confirmed to have bred in four squares above the escarpment and probably bred in six others around the region. This was fewer than the eight squares with confirmed breeding and four with probable breeding of the first Atlas. The decline may be the result merely of fluctuations in primary prey populations (voles), a condition that can dictate where harriers reside.

No monitoring of autumn migration is conducted in Niagara, but the BOS October Count results clearly indicate such activity in the middle of that month. The total of 22 birds counted on 15 October 1995 rivals an excellent spring count at Beamer. There are also three records in the BOS Noteworthy Records from 1967-1984 of five to seven harriers in a day at single sites near Fort Erie.

The Niagara Christmas Bird Count data clearly indicate that Niagara lies well within the current winter range of the harrier. With the advent of the Port Colborne CBC in 1986, the apparent population increased markedly in the southern portion of the peninsula. This continued until 1990, after which a rising population in the northern portion, particularly in the Niagara Falls CBC area, equalized counts for the two portions. Beginning in 1995, the population in the northern portion has exceeded that in the south. These trends almost certainly reflect the local population of voles, although the recent combined population of harriers on these counts is about an order of magnitude greater than it was 40 years ago.



Recent studies of migration data have shown conflicting trends at various watch sites (Farmer et al. 2008). Similarly, the second Atlas showed both increased and decreased breeding areas in Ontario (Sandilands 2007b). In Niagara, the winter population has grown and the summer declined, but the spring transient numbers have been fairly steady, suggesting a northward shift in winter and summer ranges that could result from climatic change associated with global warming.

John R. Stevens

Northern Harrier
Barry Cherie

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus*

Common spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient, uncommon winter resident

The Sharp-shinned Hawk, informally known as the “Sharpie,” is a common spring transient at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) hawk watch. Next to the Broad-winged Hawk, it was the most abundant species between 1980 and 1994, but owing to a decline in numbers of Sharp-shinned Hawks observed and a rise in the number of Turkey Vulture sightings, this is no longer the case. It is best seen at Beamer on windy days skimming over the trees and crossing the parking lot just above the watchers’ heads. It typically migrates in small loose groups of two, three or occasionally more. Its small size means that it is easily missed and therefore undercounted especially when skies are blue and the flight is high. The migration begins slowly in early March and increases gradually to a peak in late April. Sharp-shinned Hawk becomes the most common transient in May, when numbers of all other species taper off.

Sharp-shinned Hawk has been recorded on most April BOS Counts, but the number seen is very erratic and probably reflects migration conditions on the day of the count. By contrast, less than half of the BOS May Counts have reported this species and usually as only single birds since the counts are conducted after the bulk of the migration is over.



Sharp-shinned Hawk
Kayo Roy

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 7 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 9 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 3,405, maximum 7,004 (1990), minimum 1,753 (2006)

BOS April Counts: Reported on 27 of 41 counts, maximum of 32 birds in 1985

BOS May Counts: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1999

BOS October Counts: Reported on 33 of 40 counts, maximum of 61 birds in 1991

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 26 of 41 counts, maximum of 19 birds on the 2004 Niagara Falls CBC

The atlas results exhibit a tremendous growth in the breeding population in Niagara between the first and second Atlases. The species may now be found throughout the southern portion of Niagara and in rural areas of the northern portion of the region. Twenty years earlier, confirmed breeding evidence was not obtained anywhere in the peninsula during the first Atlas. There is only one summer sighting in the BOSNR of a single bird at Crystal Beach on 2 August 1977.

By contrast, Sharp-shinned Hawk has been recorded on most October BOS Counts with a significant peak in 1991, when the total of 61 birds recorded was more than three times the total of any other year. There are numerous records for the fall, mainly along the Lake Erie shoreline (BOSNR). Of particular note are sightings of 28 birds on 30 September 1983 and 67 on 12 October 1984, both south of Ridgeway. It is not known if these birds were migrating east or west to avoid crossing the lake.

Except for five individual counts, since 1988 this species has been seen every year on all four of the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. The total number of birds seen in any year was usually between 20 and 30 during this period. Prior to 1988, it was recorded only infrequently (22 of 60 counts) with a maximum of eight birds in 1986 and none at all prior to 1977. The species has thus evolved as an uncommon winter resident throughout Niagara within the last 30 years. It has always been a common spring transient through Niagara (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). This new tendency to overwinter has been termed “short-stopping” (Viverette et al. 1996) and helps to explain the decline in numbers of Sharp-shinned Hawks observed in migration. The change in behaviour likely results from the species discovering that bird feeders attract a reliable supply of prey food. It could also be related to climate change.

John R. Stevens

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*

Common spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient, uncommon winter resident

The Cooper's Hawk has been the most consistent spring transient at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) hawk watch. For the 27 years between 1980 and 2006, the annual count seldom varied more than 25 birds from the average of 207. The flight peaks in late March and early April before the push of Sharp-shinned Hawks begins. Nevertheless, there is much overlap of these two species; Cooper's Hawk is easily mistaken for its smaller relative, generating the most identification discussions at all hawk watches. An average of one Cooper's Hawk is seen per year on the April BOS Counts, which are held just at the end of their prime migration period. The May BOS Counts have a lower average of two birds every three years, probably because there are fewer transients at the time they are held.

The second Atlas documented an astounding expansion of the breeding range of the Cooper's Hawk between atlases in southern Ontario, particularly in Niagara (Gahbauer 2007a). The species was not recorded during the first Atlas in Niagara, and only a single breeding season record of one bird near Point Abino on 24 June 1977 exists in the BOSNR. Yet during the 2001-2005 period, it was confirmed to be breeding in two-thirds of the squares and suspected in all but two of the others, essentially blanketing the region.

There are 17 autumn reports of the species in the BOSNR prior to 1986, and it has been seen on 24 of the October BOS Counts. Based on observations at hawk watches on the northern shores of the Great Lakes (HawkCount), the peak southward migration period extends from mid-September until mid-November, so most of these records are likely of migrants. No watch site is monitored in the fall in Niagara.

In recent years the Cooper's Hawk has been a regular sighting on all four Niagara Christmas Bird Counts with the numbers generally increasing. It has been found on all 21 Port Colborne counts and on the last 21 Niagara Falls counts. By contrast, between 1966 and 1985, one or two birds were found on only ten counts in total. Clearly, the population increase in the summer is being duplicated in the winter. People with bird feeders are frequently seeing these birds in their yards.

Southern Ontario represents the northern limit of the breeding range of the Cooper's Hawk, an area that extends across the United States and into Mexico (Goodrich and Smith 2008). Historically, the population has never been large but was depressed in Ontario during the mid-twentieth century, possibly as a result of chlorinated pesticide use (Gahbauer 2007a). Recent studies have documented a rebound in population in eastern North America since the 1970s, but a levelling off since about 2000 (Farmer et al. 2008). Although the increase in summer and winter resident populations in Niagara echoes these trends, an increase in the spring transient counts at Beamer has not been noted.

John R. Stevens

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 16 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 3 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer): Average count 207, maximum 311 (1990), minimum 121 (1982)

BOS April Counts: Reported on 20 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1993

BOS May Counts: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1974

BOS October Counts: Reported on 24 of 40 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1991 and 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 27 of 41 counts, maximum of 22 birds on the 2005 St. Catharines CBC

Cooper's Hawk
Barry Cheriére



Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Rare spring transient, fall transient, rare winter straggler

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 24, maximum
73 (1983), minimum 3 (1980,
2000)

BOS April Counts: Reported
on 1 of 41 counts, maximum
of 1 bird in 1984

BOS May Counts: Reported on
1 of 41 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 1967

BOS October Counts:
Reported on 2 of 40 counts,
maximum of 1 bird in 1985
and 1986

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 14 of 41 counts,
maximum of 2 birds on the
1986 St. Catharines CBC

The Northern Goshawk is an erratically occurring member of the Niagara bird community. It is seen in small numbers at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) hawk watch every year, but occasionally there are years when irruptions occur that result in about a tenfold increase in the numbers seen. The spring migration period is not very well defined at Beamer because of the small number of birds observed. In non-irruption years Northern Goshawks can appear at any time from the beginning of March to early May. During irruption years, the bulk of the flight passes through during the last ten days of March and the first two weeks of April.

A pair of Northern Goshawks, migrating or possibly breeding, was recorded by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in April 2000 at Ball's Falls. Only two sightings have occurred on the spring BOS Counts: one on 8 April 1984, an irruption year, and one on 21 May 1967. The former date falls within the peak migration time period but the latter date falls after the usual migration period has ended at Beamer. Although regular counts at Beamer are no longer conducted after 15 May, for a time they were carried out until the end of May. The latest observed date at Beamer of a Northern Goshawk was on 18 May 1984. Thus, 21 May 1967 is the latest date of a Northern Goshawk during the spring.

The species was not identified as breeding in Niagara in either of the breeding bird atlas periods and there are no records of it during the summer in the BOSNR. A single bird was observed on 1 August 2002 east of Welland during the second Atlas (John Black pers. comm.).

There are two autumn records of single birds from the October BOS Counts on 20 October 1985 and 12 October 1986. Both sightings were made in the southern part of the peninsula and were likely of migrants. Watch sites on the northern shores of the Great Lakes see peak Northern Goshawk flights in October and early November (Hawk-Count). An immature bird at Niagara Falls on 22 November 1988 (BOSNR) may have been a late migrant.

The species has turned up on 18 of the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts, primarily in the northern portion of the peninsula. With two exceptions, these have occurred between 1982 and 2006 but in both irruption and non-irruption years. There was also a sighting on 31 December 1986 at Snyder (BOSNR). It appears then that Northern Goshawks are or have recently become infrequent winter residents of the region.

The breeding range extends throughout Ontario, but the species is sparsely distributed (Bush 2007). The irregular migration behaviour of Northern Goshawks is associated with populations of prey species that periodically crash and generate the irruptions (Squires and Reynolds 1997). Even in non-irruptive years a proportion of the birds migrate. Migration patterns are highly unusual, varying in distance and direction as well as frequency (Goodrich and Smith 2008). The birds seen in winter in Niagara may have come from the boreal forest, from neighbouring areas of southern Ontario where limited breeding has been documented (Bush 2007), or they may even be year-round residents that escape detection in the summer because of their secretive nature.

John R. Stevens



Northern Goshawk
Barry Cherriere

Red-shouldered Hawk

Buteo lineatus

Common spring transient, rare summer resident,
fall transient, rare winter resident

For many hawk watchers, the best sighting of the entire spring migration at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) is of an adult Red-shouldered Hawk in late March after a recent snowfall, when light reflected from the ground illuminates its gorgeous plumage. It is the one migrating raptor that prefers to travel around the western end of Lake Ontario past Beamer rather than fly east. As a result, in most years more birds of this species are counted at Beamer than at any other watch site in North America (HawkCount). Migration begins about 10 March, peaks about two weeks later, declines during the first two weeks of April and tapers off for the next month. The highest daily count of 655 was made on 23 March 1994. Rather surprisingly, it has been seen in more years on the BOS Counts in mid-May than on those in early April; however, only two birds have been recorded on the May Counts in the last 21 years.

Few summer records exist for Niagara. Birds were sighted once in two areas during the first Atlas, and a pair nested in Fonthill in the 1990s (John Black pers. comm.). During the second Atlas a pair was found nesting near Niagara-on-the-Lake every year from 2001 to 2005. The species was also seen in three other areas during the second Atlas, including a probable breeding site near Port Colborne. Without an autumn migration watch site in Niagara, there is little evidence of the species' presence at that time of year. The species is infrequently seen on October BOS Counts, which are held before the prime fall migration period at watches along the northern shores of the Great Lakes (HawkCount). There are ten records from the Fort Erie area from October and November between 1967 and 1989. These include flights of 15 birds on 4 November 1967, 12 birds on 1 November 1971 and 10 birds on 10 October 1967 (BOSNR). These last three are indicative of a migratory flight path near the shore of Lake Erie.

Almost half of the Niagara Christmas Bird Count records are of a bird or birds that nested in Fonthill and overwintered during the 1990s. There are also seven records between 1972 and 2003 of individual birds being sighted (BOSNR) above the escarpment (Niagara Falls to Lake Erie) between 19 December and 17 February. These infrequent winter sightings are likely of wanderers that appear because Niagara lies just north of the normal winter range of the species, which, except for areas of higher elevations, extends northward to the southern shore of Lake Erie (Dykstra et al. 2008).

Population trends from migration data for the Red-shouldered Hawk indicate a stable situation (Farmer et al. 2008). However, results from the second Atlas indicate a wider distribution, but similar abundance of the species, in the southern portion of the Canadian Shield and adjacent areas compared to the results from the first Atlas (D.S. Badzinski 2007a). The Niagara populations between 1966 and 2006 are consistent with those findings.

John R. Stevens



Red-shouldered Hawk
Barry Cherriere

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed,
1 probable, 2 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 771, maximum
1,419 (1994), minimum 455
(2003)

BOS April Counts: Reported on
12 of 41 counts, maximum of
17 birds in 1993

BOS May Counts: Reported on
14 of 41 counts, maximum of
4 birds in 1967 and 1969

BOS October Counts: Reported
on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 1969

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 12 of 41 counts,
maximum of 2 birds on the
1995 St. Catharines CBC

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus*

Common spring transient, fall transient

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer): Average count 3,487, maximum 8,236 (1985), minimum 1,549 (1996)

BOS April Counts: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1973

BOS May Counts: Reported on 6 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1981 and 1998

BOS October Counts: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1991 and 2000

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1996 St. Catharines CBC

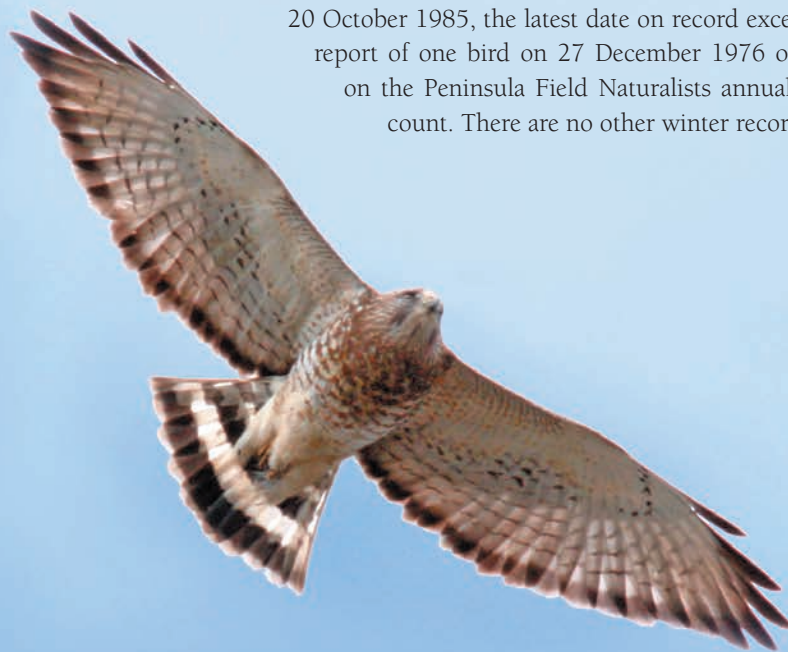
The smallest of the *buteo* family seen in Niagara, the Broad-winged Hawk is also the greatest traveller, as it breeds primarily in the forests of the Canadian Shield and winters in South America (Szuba 2007b). At the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) spring hawk watch, it is the last species to appear and very rarely does so before the middle of April. The birds then flood through in a rush. Unlike most of the other raptors seen in Niagara, they tend to migrate in large flocks. On a warm day in late April with cumulus clouds overhead, it is possible to see thousands go by in swirling flocks (kettles) of hundreds of birds. Immature birds generally pass through in May but are seldom seen in large numbers at Beamer because of the great altitude they can attain in the warmer, hazy May air.

The species has been seen on only three of the April BOS Counts, which are held early in the month. However, the two birds seen on 8 April 1973 are a day earlier than the earliest record for the Beamer watch site, for which records begin only in 1975. The May BOS Counts are held during the time that the immature birds are migrating, yet the species has been seen in only six years and then only as one or two birds.

Niagara lies within the breeding range of the Broad-winged Hawk, but it is at best a rare resident in the summer. Single birds, which may have been late transients, were seen on 30 May and 4 June 1966 just west of Fort Erie (BOSNR). Two birds were seen in the same area near Fort Erie on numerous occasions during June and July of 1969 (BOSNR). There were no records of sightings during the first Atlas, but a single bird was seen near Fort Erie on 14 July 1990 (BOSNR). During the second Atlas, a single bird was seen on 1 June 2002 and again on 30 June 2002 just west of Niagara in Norfolk County.

The species leaves the province en masse around mid-September with a few laggards staying into early October (HawkCount). BOS Noteworthy Records from late August and September include 390 birds seen on 28 September 1970 at Fort Erie. Broad-winged Hawks have been seen on four of the October BOS Counts, including 20 October 1985, the latest date on record except for a report of one bird on 27 December 1976 observed on the Peninsula Field Naturalists annual winter count. There are no other winter records.

Broad-winged Hawk
Brandon Holden



There seems to be potential for a significant fall migration through Niagara, one that is not currently being monitored. An open area not far from the Lake Erie shoreline would make a suitable location for a monitoring station.

John R. Stevens

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsonii*

Occasional visitor

The Swainson's Hawk is a bird of the dry grasslands of western North America. It is colloquially known as the locust or grasshopper hawk because of its intense craving for its favourite food. The scientific name comes from the Latin word *buteo* and the Latinized name for British naturalist William Swainson. The Swainson's Hawk is declining throughout much of its range due to pesticide poisoning, especially on its wintering grounds (England et al. 1997).

There is no mention in either Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or Sheppard (1970) of any records for Niagara prior to 1965 for this long distance western migrant.

In 13 of the 41 years from 1966 to 2006, there are 18 known observations of Swainson's Hawk for Niagara. Seventeen of these records are of birds in spring migration over the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby, and the eighteenth occurred in nearby Grassie. All of these sightings occurred between 10 April and 5 May, a very short three-week window. Although they were reported by competent observers and published in the Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch, the Ontario Bird Records Committee has not adjudicated many of the records shown here. The location "Beamer" below is the Beamer Memorial Conservation area in Grimsby.

1977

10 April, adult light morph, Beamer (George Meyers, Wormington 1986).

1985

21 April, juvenile, Beamer. (Eric Single, Coady 1988).

1988

21 April, juvenile dark morph, Beamer (Denys Gardiner and others, Curry 2006).

22 April, Beamer (George Meyers).

1989

5 May, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch).

1990

12 May, two, one juvenile light morph and one juvenile dark morph, Beamer (George Meyers).

1993

20 April, juvenile light morph, Beamer (George Meyers and others, Bain 1994).

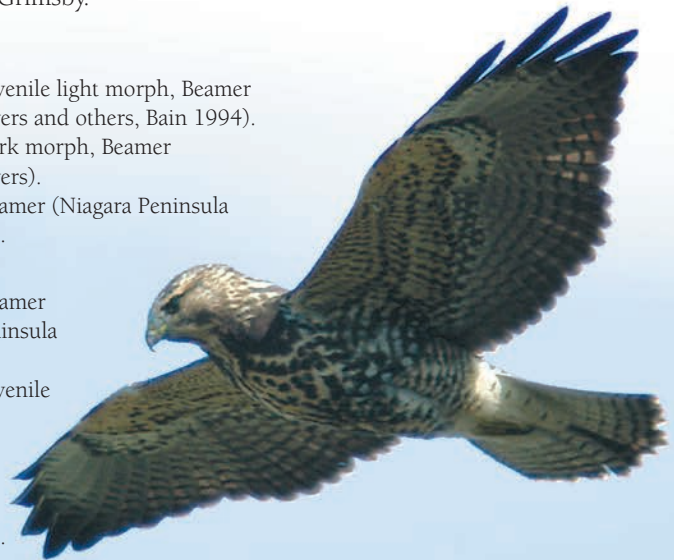
24 April, dark morph, Beamer (George Meyers).

27 April, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch).

1994

15 April, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch)

25 April, juvenile light morph, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch).



Swainson's Hawk
Barry Cherie

1996

18 April, adult light morph, Beamer (Michael King, Michael Street, Dobos 1997).

1997

2 May, two, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch).

1998

28 April, one, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch).

29 April, two, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch).

2000

27 April, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch).

2002

18 April, Beamer (Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch).

2005

10 April, juvenile light morph, Grimsby Air Park, Grassie (Linda and Barry Cherriere, Crins 2006).

The Swainson's Hawk breeds from British Columbia to southern Manitoba and Minnesota, southward through parts of California and eastward to central Texas and northern Mexico. It winters in the South American Pampas (England et al. 1997).

Kayo J. Roy

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*

Common spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient, common winter resident

The Red-tailed Hawk is the raptor most likely to be observed on any day at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) hawk watch, having a migration period that extends from mid-February to late May. The adults migrate first and constitute most of the flight until early April, when the immature birds begin to appear. The migrating Red-tailed Hawks seen in May are almost all immature birds. In five of the years between 1987 and 1996, the Red-tailed Hawk was the most commonly seen transient. It has been recorded on every April and May Count conducted by the BOS.

Both the first and second atlases found the species to be a confirmed breeder throughout Niagara except for a few squares on the periphery of Atlas Region 11 with little land area. The species builds large stick nests high in trees.

Red-tailed Hawk
Brandon Holden





These can be reused from year to year and are often visible from roads. The second Atlas estimated an abundance of between 0.6 and 2.6 birds within an area of 50-100 square kilometres. This represents a population in the order of 30-60 birds in Niagara.

Good numbers of Red-tailed Hawks have been found on the October BOS Counts, with a maximum of 68 birds in 1993. As with the highest totals for the April and May Counts, this date falls within the 1987-1996 period, when the species was most commonly seen during the spring migration. The population appears to have been somewhat larger in that decade than in earlier or later decades.

The population of Red-tailed Hawk in Niagara in the winter is considerably larger than in the summer and fall. The species has been seen, often in large numbers, on every Niagara Christmas Bird Count that has been conducted. In 1997 a total of 421 birds were tallied in the four counts, and in 1995, when data from the BOS count were not available, 402 birds were counted. Considering the primarily rural portions of Niagara not covered by the count circles, which roughly amount to one third of the region, these numbers suggest a winter population in the order of 600 birds — or at least ten times the number during the breeding season.

Occasionally birds with a plumage variation appear in Niagara. These include a near albino on 8 April 1989 at Beamer and a dark morph on 13 February 1994 near the Niagara District Airport (KJR). On several occasions, partially albino Red-tailed Hawk transients have been noted at the Beamer hawk watch.

John R. Stevens

Red-tailed Hawk
Brandon Holden

First Atlas: 21 squares confirmed,
3 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 20 squares confirmed,
3 probable, 1 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 2,849, maximum
3,861 (1992), minimum 2,031
(2002)

BOS April Counts: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
84 birds in 1993

BOS May Counts: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
42 birds in 1995

BOS October Counts: Reported
on 40 of 40 counts, maximum
of 68 birds in 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 41 of 41 counts,
maximum of 205 birds on the
1991 St. Catharines CBC

Ferruginous Hawk *Buteo regalis*

Extremely rare visitor

The Ferruginous Hawk, the largest of American hawks and a raptor of the open country of the west, is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. DNA studies have been conducted and it is the opinion in some quarters that Ferruginous Hawk should be reclassified as an eagle (Lerner and Mindell 2005). The common name Ferruginous Hawk comes from the Latin word *ferrugo*, meaning “rust,” and refers to the colour of the bird’s wings and legging feathers (Lerner and Mindell 2005).

Two accepted records exist for Ferruginous Hawk in Niagara. On 13 April 1992, Dave Copeland and Barry Cheriére identified a light morph juvenile bird in flight over the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, Grimsby (Bain 1993). Bowie Bergsma, Verne Evans, Walter Klabunde, Kayo Roy and Paul Summerskill were among the lucky observers of this rare occurrence. Ten years later, on 24 April 2002, Cheryl Edgcombe, Verne Evans, John Niewiadomski, John Olmsted and Robert Stamp observed a dark morph Ferruginous Hawk, also in flight over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Crins 2003).

The Ferruginous Hawk breeds from eastern Washington and southern Alberta to southwestern Montana and eastern South Dakota, and south to Arizona and the Texas panhandle. It winters from northern California and southern Nebraska south to central Mexico (Bechard and Schmutz 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

Rough-legged Hawk *Buteo lagopus*

Common spring transient, rare winter resident

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 78, maximum
204 (2004), minimum 22 (2002)

BOS April Counts: Reported on
14 of 41 counts, maximum of
6 birds in 1992

BOS May Counts: Reported on
1 of 41 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 2003

BOS October Counts: Reported
on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of
4 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 31 of 41 counts,
maximum of 31 birds on the
1989 Niagara Falls CBC

The Rough-legged Hawk breeds in the far north, generally beyond the treeline (Sutherland 2007b). Every year some birds migrate to southern Canada and the northern United States, but periodically, when there is a drop in northern prey populations, more birds come farther south for the winter. At the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area spring hawk watch, the migration period can extend from late February to mid-May, but the bulk of the passage occurs between 10 March and the end of April. From 1980 to 2006 the average number of birds seen was 78; if the major irruption years of 1982, 1991 and 2004 are omitted, the average is 60. The species has been recorded approximately every three years on the BOS April Counts but only once on a BOS May Count, no doubt because the latter count is held after the migration is largely complete in Niagara. The only spring record later than this (18 May 2003) is of a single bird seen on 3 June 1976 near Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There are no summer records of this species in Niagara and no monitoring of the fall migration. It has been recorded on four years, all prior to 1987, in the first half of October during the BOS October Counts. The earliest date was 12 October 1986. There are also nine records in the BOS Noteworthy Records from October, none before 16 October, and ten from November with a maximum of three birds on 30 November 1974 in Niagara Falls. These autumn birds could be transients because hawk watches on the northern shores of the Great Lakes see transients of the species during the second half of October and throughout November (HawkCount).

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts demonstrate that the species can be a common resident during the winter. On the four counts in 1989, a total of 74 individuals were recorded, and, as recently as 2003, there were 29. By contrast, in 2001 none were seen on any count, in 2005 only one and in 1998 and 2002 only two were seen.

Rough-legged Hawks are accustomed to terrain without trees or with only short trees and shrubs. When wintering in Niagara, they prefer open field habitats where they can perch atop bushes, small trees, poles or fence posts, in contrast to Red-tailed Hawks, which prefer to perch about three to five metres below the tops of larger trees. In contrast to Red-tailed Hawks, and like American Kestrels, the Rough-legged Hawks often hover when stalking prey, a necessary hunting tactic in mainly treeless territory.

Two distinct colourations (morphs) are commonly seen: a light form that is predominant and a striking dark form that occurs in about one bird in four in Niagara. Occasionally there are some birds that are intermediate between the two extremes.

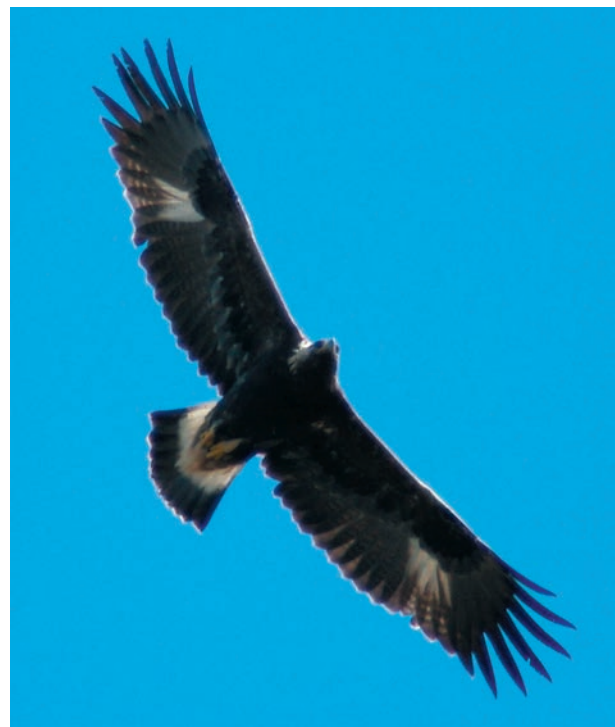
John R. Stevens

Golden Eagle

Aquila chrysaetos

Rare spring transient

Although the Golden Eagle has been recorded every year since 1976, it still causes a great deal of excitement at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) during the spring migration and remains a rare pleasure. Between 1980 and 1984, the average annual count for the species was five birds but in the latest five year period, 2002-2006, the average has been nine birds, so the number of transients has been slowly rising since full-season counting began in 1980. The earliest date on record is 24 February 1984 and the latest is 23 May 1987. There is no focused migration period: a Golden Eagle can pass through on almost any date between mid-March and mid-May. The species generally migrates as individual birds, but over the years observers at Beamer have often noted two or even three Golden Eagles within minutes of each other, often visible at the same time, as though moving together.



top: Rough-legged Hawk
Barry Cheriére

bottom: Golden Eagle
Barry Cheriére

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 8, maximum 13
(2000, 2006), minimum 3
(1980, 1988)
BOS April Counts: Not reported
BOS May Counts: Not reported
BOS October Counts:
Not reported
Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

The Golden Eagle has not been recorded on either the April or May BOS Counts. Nor are there any records of sightings during either of the Atlases. Although no records for Golden Eagle have been made on the October BOS Counts, there is a record of a single bird near Fort Erie on 19 October 1968 (BOSNR). The first autumn transients begin appearing at the watch sites on the northern shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario around 10 October (HawkCount), so the 19 October sighting was likely of an early migrant. None of the four Niagara Christmas Bird Counts has ever recorded the species.

The Golden Eagles that migrate through Niagara are part of an eastern North American population that breeds in the extreme northern portion of Ontario and somewhat more extensively in northern Quebec (Sutherland 2007c). These birds winter in the eastern United States along the Appalachian Mountains from Alabama to Pennsylvania (Goodrich and Smith 2008). Recent migration studies indicate that the eastern North American population has been increasing steadily since the 1970s (Farmer et al. 2008). The species may be starting to repopulate more of its historical range, which is believed to have included all portions of the Canadian Shield within Ontario (Godfrey 1986). Although Golden Eagles have been known to winter in southern Ontario (northeast of Peterborough), Niagara does not have sufficiently extensive uninhabited lands to hope to have a bird stay in the area.

John R. Stevens



American Kestrel
Raymond Barlow

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*

Common spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient,
uncommon winter resident

The American Kestrel is a regular spring transient and a fairly common resident, at least in the early part of the season when many overwintering birds are still present. The first transients begin appearing at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) around 10 March (HawkCount). Birds of this species tend to migrate individually, although some are also seen in mixed kettles with buteos and accipiters. Migration typically peaks during the third week of April and, except for an occasional later sighting, is complete by mid-May. The record high daily count at Beamer (44) occurred on 14 March 1990 as part of the record annual count. The five-year moving average of kestrels rose during the 1980s, peaked in 1992, declined to 1999 and has stabilized at the early 1980s level since then. The 41-year data from the BOS spring counts have shown three times as many kestrels in April (15) as in May (5) on average. This is consistent with the Beamer migration data and implies that this species has mostly left the area by mid-May for breeding grounds farther north.

During the first Atlas, evidence of breeding was found throughout Niagara, but during the second Atlas, abundance was reduced to a pair or two per 100 square kilometres, and in two of the smaller territories, the species was not found at all. Consistent with this data, a mid-June 40-km Breeding Bird Survey route through the centre of Niagara found the species in only two of seven years between 1994 and 2006 (Breeding Bird Survey).



The average number of kestrel sightings on the October BOS Counts is about equal to that in April, reflecting the influx of fall transients, possibly to overwinter. While the most recent October Counts are similar to those of the 1960s, they are lower than the counts of the early 1990s. A good number of kestrels spend the winter in the area, when they are commonly seen on roadside wires or hovering over ditches and fields as they hunt for small rodents. The four Niagara Christmas Bird Counts recorded 232 individuals in 1988, while 1991 and 1993 had 209 and 201, respectively. The average count is 118 with a post-1985 low total of 49 in 2004.

The American Kestrel has recently been identified as undergoing a significant population decline in eastern North America (Farmer et al. 2008). While this decline has not been noted in Niagara, the following trends are evident.

Population	Trends	Period	Sources
Spring Transients	Stable, peak in early 1990s	1980-2006	BOS April, BOS May, Beamer
Summer Residents	Declining	1980-2005	second Atlas
Autumn Transients	Stable, peak in early 1990s	1966-2006	BOS October
Winter Residents	Increasing, peak in early 1990s	1966-2006	CBCs

This pattern of relatively stable transient populations in the spring and fall, together with increasing winter and decreasing summer populations, suggests a possible shift to the north of the kestrel's range, perhaps as a result of global warming.

John R. Stevens

American Kestrel
Raymond Barlow

First Atlas: 20 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 14 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 3 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 100, maximum 204 (1990), minimum 45 (2005)

BOS April Counts: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 38 birds in 1984

BOS May Counts: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 1966

BOS October Counts: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 44 birds in 1985

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 100 birds on the 1988 St. Catharines CBC



Merlin
Jean Iron

Spring Migration (Beamer):
Average count 11, maximum
23 (1994), minimum 1 (1980)

BOS April Counts: Reported on
7 of 41 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 2002

BOS May Counts:
Not reported

BOS October Counts:
Reported on 7 of 40 counts,
maximum of 2 birds in 2001
and 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 8 of 41 counts,
maximum of 2 birds on the
1994 St. Catharines CBC

There are 23 sightings in the BOSNR, mainly between September and January, but none between 5 April and 29 August. These sightings have been primarily in proximity to the Niagara River or the Lake Erie shoreline.

The species has made sporadic appearances on the October BOS Counts over the years, including five birds since 2001 compared to four birds in the preceding 35 years. Winter records were non-existent prior to 1993, but since then Merlins have occasionally shown up on various Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. These birds may be attempting to overwinter in Niagara. The eastern subspecies *F. c. columbarius* is normally a long distance migrant, spending the winter in the southern United States, Central America and northern South America (Goodrich and Smith 2008). *F. c. richardsonii*, which breeds in urban areas on the prairies, is more sedentary (Goodrich and Smith 2008). Nonetheless, Curry (2006) reports that George Meyers documented a Merlin of this subspecies on 6 January 1989 in Grimsby.

John R. Stevens

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

Uncommon spring transient, fall transient, rare winter resident

Occasionally seen on the BOS April Counts, the Merlin is a regular transient at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) hawk watch, albeit in low numbers, with a 27-year annual average of 11 birds per year. Unlike other raptors seen at the watch, it invariably migrates alone, and it almost never soars but flaps hard, just above the treeline, passing the watch in a few seconds. It is, therefore, likely undercounted except at times when multiple observers are present. The long-term trend for Merlins shows a definite increase in abundance during spring migration between the early 1980s, when there were two to three birds per year, and the late 1990s, when there were 16 to 17 birds per year. In the most recent 5-year period, 2002-2006, the annual average of 16 is within the latter range, suggesting the population may have levelled.

Merlins are more commonly seen at shoreline watches than at ridge watches like the one at Beamer. Consequently, it is likely that the number of spring transients passing through Niagara is much higher than the counts at Beamer would suggest. The second Atlas results demonstrate that this species had greatly extended its breeding range southward since the time of the first Atlas (Gahbauer 2007b). While no records exist to suggest that it has bred in Niagara or is even present as a vagrant in the summer, it may do so in the coming years if the range expansion continues.

Post-2006 Observation

On 7 August 2008, Anne Yagi encountered a pair of aggressive and territorial Merlins in the Wainfleet Bog.

Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus*

Extremely rare visitor

The sleek circumpolar Gyrfalcon is the largest of all the falcon species in North America. The bird's scientific name comes from the Latin word *falco* which means "hook-shaped", and *rusticolus* meaning "someone who lives in the countryside." The plumage of this powerful highly polymorphic bird of the tundra and mountains is extremely variable ranging from white to gray to dark. After the breeding season, the Gyrfalcon disperses widely, usually above or near the 49th parallel; however, in years of severe winters it is known to venture farther south.

There is no mention in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) of any Gyrfalcon records for Niagara. The first is that of a bird in white plumage observed in flight eastward over the City of Niagara Falls towards the Niagara River on 17 December 1943 (Sheppard 1970).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, nine records exist of Gyrfalcon for Niagara. On 13 November 1971, a Conservation Officer picked up a juvenile, female, dark morph bird with an injured eye in Wainfleet. The bird was taken to Kay McKeever at the Owl Foundation where Robert Andrle photographed it on 5 January 1972 (BOSNR, Richards 2008). On 25 November 1971, Kay McKeever discovered a Gyrfalcon in Vineland (Curry 2006). On 29 November 1972, Robert Andrle and Richard Byron observed one in Fort Erie (BOSNR). Walter Klabunde reported a Gyrfalcon on 20 April 1977 in flight over the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (Curry 2006). In the same year on 7 November, Jack McNally located one along the Lake Ontario shoreline at Grimsby (Curry 2006).

Nearly twenty years later on 4 January 1997, while many were enjoying great views of a Yellow-billed Loon, a dark morph Gyrfalcon was identified in flight over the Point Abino Harbour (BOSNR). Kevin McLaughlin discovered a Gyrfalcon at Waverley Beach, Fort Erie on 18 February 2001 (BOSNR). George Meyers excitedly identified a white morph Gyrfalcon on 17 January 2003 in flight over the Queen Elizabeth Way near Casablanca Road in Grimsby (Curry 2006). On 16 March 2006, a dark morph Gyrfalcon was observed in flight over the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (Curry 2006).

The Gyrfalcon breeds at high northern latitudes of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Scandinavia and Siberia. While not completely understood, it is believed the bird winters year-round in its breeding range with incursions southward in years of poor food supply (Clum and Cade 1994).

Kayo J. Roy



Gyrfalcon
Harold Stiver



Peregrine Falcon
Barry Cherriere



Peregrine Falcon
Barry Cherriere

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Rare spring and fall transient, rare summer and winter resident

The Peregrine Falcon is a rare raptor sighting at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area (Beamer) spring hawk watch. While the chance of seeing one has increased more than fourfold between the 1980-1984 period (seven birds) and the 2002-2006 period (32 birds), the change is not statistically significant because the number of sightings in a season is so small at Beamer, never having exceeded nine birds. The rarity of peregrines in Niagara is also reflected in the BOS Counts in April and May, which have reported only three sightings in 41 years, all in May between 1993 and 2003. There are also only four BOS Noteworthy Record sightings in March, April and May between 1965 and 2006.

That the peregrine's presence in Niagara is increasing is well-demonstrated in the Atlas results, which show no reported sightings in the first Atlas and three squares with confirmed breeding evidence in the second Atlas. These are described in the following account by Anne Yagi:

Recent breeding records of Peregrine Falcon in Niagara began in 1998 with a pair that nested in the Niagara gorge in Niagara Falls, on a ledge just three metres below the sidewalk opposite the Riverview International Buffet (formerly the Victoria Restaurant) and within a few hundred metres of the busiest tourist area in Niagara. The Niagara Parks Commission immediately put up page wire fencing and modified pedestrian fencing along the sidewalk adjacent to the nest ledge in order to keep people from direct contact with the birds. The Victoria Day fireworks display was modified to help protect the nest site, and several people volunteered to keep an eye on the birds. Bill Kuhun and Bob Chambers provided detailed written accounts of the nest site activities. The bands on the adult female were identified and traced back to her origin in an urban nest in London, Ontario, where she was named "Amelia Earhart." The adult male was not banded and became known as "Father Hennepin" after the first European to set eyes on the Niagara Falls. The parents continued their nesting activity and successfully hatched three young on 26 and 27 May. The chicks were successfully banded on 22 June in the company of several photographers and guests. On this day they were named "Misty," "Cascade" and "Thunder." They successfully fledged and spent the summer of 1998 delighting tourists, birders and honeymooners alike, with their aerial acrobatics.

In 1999, the same peregrine adult pair settled in to rear their young on the New York side of the Niagara River near Goat Island. They successfully raised two or three young each year until 2005. In 2006 there were rumours about a peregrine being attacked by a Red-tailed Hawk, but no one could confirm the nest site location. Then in the spring of 2007, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation biologist, Connie Adams, reported that the nest site was once again on the Canadian side of the river in a cavity on the old Hydro Generation building at the base of the falls (just below the 1998 nest ledge). Two chicks were successfully banded on 18 June 2007. Several observations of the adults were made in December.

This area around Niagara Falls has attracted Peregrine falcons since records were first kept, although no nests were reported in the early years of record keeping. Sheppard (1970) reported the species as "seriously endangered". However, several

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Spring Migration (Beamer): Average count 3, maximum 9 (2006), minimum none (1983 and 1984)

BOS April Counts: Not reported

BOS May Counts: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1993, 1994 and 2003

BOS October Counts: Reported on 5 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 2002

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 10 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds on the 2000 Niagara Falls CBC

notable fall observations were made on the Canadian side of the border from 1936 to 1958. On 5 June 1967, during the breeding season, Frank Folemsbee reported two adults performing acrobatic flights across from Navy Island. Several fall sightings in 1970, 1972, 2002, 2003 and 2004 (BOS October Count) and spring sightings in 1993, 1994 and 2003 (BOS May Count) were also documented. Many noteworthy records originated on the shorelines of Niagara during migration seasons from 1961 to 2005 (BOSNR). No nesting sites were confirmed until that notable discovery in April 1998 in Niagara Falls.

In 1999 Peregrine Falcons attempted to nest in downtown St. Catharines on the Corbloc building on King Street. At this site, eggs were laid but did not hatch. A number of noteworthy observations of Peregrine Falcons were made in Port Colborne: Nadine Litwin in October 2001, Jean and Blayne Farnan in September 2002 and Willie D'Anna and others in November 2003. In 2004 a nesting attempt in an "I-beam" 14 storeys above ground at a mill site on the Lake Erie shoreline in Port Colborne failed. Several subsequent nesting attempts also failed. In 2006 a nest box constructed by the Canadian Peregrine Foundation resulted in successful nestings at this site in 2006 and 2007.

The 1998 Niagara Falls nest was the first record of a peregrine nest in a natural cliff site in Southern Ontario since the population decline. This particular nesting territory helped provincial biologists confirm that the species was well on its way to recovery. In 2006 the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources changed the status of the falcon from Endangered to Threatened.

Perhaps the best evidence from Niagara of the comeback of the Peregrine Falcon since the banning of chlorinated pesticides and the efforts at reintroduction is their presence during the winter season. The first BOSNR sighting during the winter period was in 1985, and in 1986 the first peregrine appeared on a Niagara Christmas Bird Count. Since then, at least one peregrine has been recorded on nine other CBCs including all five years from 2002 to 2006. Most of the recent winter records of the BOS Count originate in the vicinity of the summer nesting sites at Niagara Falls and Port Colborne.

The early results of the Raptor Population Index program, based on analysis of migration monitoring data, show an impressive rebound of the Peregrine Falcon population in northeastern North America since 1980 (Farmer et al. 2008). The shoreline watch site at Holiday Beach near Windsor, Ontario, for example, experienced an annual increase of 9.8% between 1980 and 1990. While this growth rate has decreased in more recent years, the trend still appears to be upward (HawkCount). The current presence of resident peregrines in Niagara, where none existed forty years ago, is thus consistent with a general population increase of this magnificent hunter.

John R. Stevens and Anne R. Yagi

Prairie Falcon *Falco mexicanus*

Extremely rare visitor

The scientific name comes from the Latin word *falco* meaning "hook-shaped" (which may refer to the beak and claws) and the Latinized name for Mexico, where the bird was first collected for scientific study. This skillful, crow-sized hunter, with great speed and acute eyesight, is found chiefly on the plains, the short grass prairie and the desert areas of the American west. Although thought to be hard to train and known to be an unpredictable bird, this species is often used in falconry.

The Prairie Falcon is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. Proof of this fact is that only one record exists of its presence. On 19 April 1995, nine very fortunate birders (Roy Baker, James Fairchild, Jacques Giraud, Jerry Guild, Michael King, George Meyers, Terry Osborne, Jack Ryan and David Worthington) observed a Prairie Falcon in flight over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, Grimsby (Dobos 1996, Curry 2006).

The breeding range of this spectacular bird extends from southwestern Canada south to northern Mexico, east to Saskatchewan and western Nebraska, and south to western Texas. It winters from the very southern portion of western Canada to central Mexico, and more eastward than their breeding range, going as far as Minnesota and eastern Texas (Steenhof 1998).

Kayo J. Roy

Yellow Rail *Coturnicops noveboracensis*

Extremely rare visitor

The Yellow Rail is a small, elusive waterbird that lives in the reeds and marshes of shallow wetlands. The bird prefers to walk or run through thick vegetation, grasses and sedge marshes. It is more often heard than seen and can easily elude observers even though it may be only inches away.

There is considerable discussion in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) on sightings of Yellow Rail prior to 1966. No observations were identified in those publications for Niagara.

The Yellow Rail, while an extremely rare visitor to Niagara, must surely at times migrate somewhere through the region on its way to nesting grounds in northern Ontario. It seems inconceivable that the Yellow Rail has only been observed in Niagara on one occasion. On 3 May 1995, while participating in a study of migrating birds along the Port Weller east pier, Kayo Roy, walking along the north edge of the marshy small pond in an area referred to as “the island,” observed a small, chunky sparrow-sized bird that was all feet and no tail — Niagara’s first and only documented Yellow Rail (Ridout 1995).

The Yellow Rail breeds locally from Alberta to the west coast of James Bay, Quebec and New Brunswick, and southward to the northern United States. It winters along the coastal states from North Carolina to Texas (Bookhout 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

King Rail *Rallus elegans*

Extremely rare visitor

The slender figure and bold plumage of the King Rail inspired John James Audubon to name this species the “elegant rail.” This largest North American rail of freshwater marshes, whose secretive behaviour makes it difficult to detect, has declined alarmingly in much of its range over the past 40 years. This is largely due to loss of wetland habitat. After nesting, it goes through a complete molt and becomes flightless for nearly a month (Poole et al. 2005). The King Rail is currently listed federally as Endangered under the Migratory Bird Convention Act (1994) and provincially under Ontario’s Endangered Species Act (2007).

Numerous records prior to 1966 for King Rail in Niagara are fully detailed in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970). Not included there is Daniel Salisbury’s discovery of a King Rail on 31 May 1965 in Wainfleet Bog, Wainfleet.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, only one record is known to exist for this extremely rare visitor to Niagara. On 2 June 1968, Harold Lancaster identified a King Rail, along the west dyke of Mud Lake in Port Colborne. Given the secretive nature of King Rail, it is possible that it bred at Wainfleet Bog in 1965 and Mud Lake in 1968.

The breeding range for King Rail extends from the Gulf Coast north to southern Ontario and from the Atlantic Coast west to the eastern Great Plains and southward. It winters generally where the species' breeding range is most abundant, from Delaware Valley to southeast Georgia, through the interior of Florida to the Everglades and westward along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Texas, and north to Arkansas (Poole et al. 2005).

Kayo J. Roy

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 3 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, single birds

BOS May Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1986

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1996 and 1998

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1993 St. Catharines CBC

Virginia Rail *Rallus limicola*

Rare and local summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

The Virginia Rail is a small, attractive marsh bird that feeds mainly on insects and aquatic creatures. This secretive bird is more often heard than seen. It prefers to escape danger by running through the marsh vegetation rather than flying. In spite of its apparently weak flight, the Virginia Rail migrates long distances each spring and fall between breeding and wintering grounds (Conway 1995).

There is little evidence for the migration of this species through Niagara in the spring. The earliest known date is 25 March 1972, when a single bird was found at Rose Hill Road (probably on the Lake Erie shoreline) in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Virginia Rail breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a rare and local summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 19 May. One of the best places to see and hear this bird is on the east side of Mud Lake in Port Colborne.





The latest fall date is 13 October 1996, when a single bird was noted on the BOS October count. There is one winter record of this species. A single bird was seen on 19 December 1993 on the St. Catharines CBC. Virginia Rail winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Sora *Porzana carolina*

Uncommon summer resident

The Sora, a plump gray-brown rail that lives and breeds in the freshwater marshes of North America, is more often heard than seen. It is the most abundant and widely distributed North American rail, and its descending whinny call can be easily heard from the depths of weedy swamps, bogs and marshes. The Sora feeds on seeds, insects and snails (Melvin and Gibbs 1996).

There is one BOS April Count record of this species— a single bird found on 13 April 1997—which is also the earliest spring arrival date for this species. There is little evidence for the migration through Niagara of this uncommon species in the spring.

The Sora, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. One of the most likely places to see and hear this bird is on the east side of Mud Lake in Port Colborne. While there are no recent records of eggs on nests, according to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 27 May 1862.

This species was observed on only one of the BOS October counts — 8 October 1967, the latest recorded fall date for this species.

There are no winter records. The Sora winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Sora
Barry Cheriére

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1997

BOS May Count: Reported on 13 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1985 and 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica*

Extremely rare visitor

The Purple Gallinule is a bird of southern freshwater marshes and tropical wetlands. With its purple, blue and green plumage combined with the colours of the pale blue forehead plate and its red and yellow bill, this strikingly beautiful waterbird resembles a feathered rainbow.

The first Niagara record is that of a single adult bird (not two birds as in Beardslee and Mitchell 1965 and Sheppard 1970) that was located by G.J. Clout on 11 September 1937 at Jordan Harbour, Vineland. James L. Baillie writes about this “carefully identified” discovery in his 8 January 1938 *Toronto Evening Telegram* bird column “In Birdland” “Mr. Clout noted the diagnostic sky-blue frontal plate of the bird to satisfy the most critical naturalist of the correctness of his observation.”

Two further early observations of this extremely rare visitor are known for Niagara. On 20 May 1961, an adult Purple Gallinule was picked up off a road in Jordan Station by George H. Townsend (Sheppard 1970). He gave the bird while still alive to a game warden in Fonthill. William E. Hurlburt confirmed the identification of this bird when it was exhibited at the Welland County Fair. No further details are known as to what happened to this bird.

On 10 October 1962 (not 11 October 1962 as in Sheppard 1970), a Purple Gallinule in its pale brown immature plumage was captured on Cherry Avenue in Vineland by Charles Ankersmit and delivered to William E. Hurlburt. He managed to keep the bird alive for a while at his residence, and when it died, the remains were forwarded to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 93157).

It is interesting to note that up to 2006, there are only 13 documented reports of Purple Gallinule for all of Ontario that have been accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (Crins 2007a).

The Purple Gallinule breeds along the Lower Coast Plain of the Gulf States and north along the Atlantic seaboard to South Carolina. This highly migratory species winters from south Florida to Argentina (West and Hess 2002).

Kayo J. Roy

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Spring and fall transient, rare and local summer resident

The Common Moorhen, historically known in the Americas as the Common Gallinule, is a member of the rail family. This handsome bird with almost worldwide distribution is rarely found far from water and prefers freshwater habitats with still or slow-moving water. Unlike other rails, they fly well, which probably accounts for their wide distribution. They also prefer to swim more often than do other rails. This omnivorous bird feeds on a wide variety of freshwater plants, seeds and small aquatic creatures. The earliest spring arrival date is 4 April 1993, when a single bird was seen on the BOS April Count.

The Common Moorhen breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon and local summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 17 May. It should be noted that numbers are declining in Niagara as a result of habitat loss.



First Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1991

BOS May Count: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1986

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Common Moorhen
Brandon Holden

The probability of observation in the Carolinian region has also declined significantly (38%) between atlases (Timmermans 2007b).

This species was observed on eight of the BOS October counts. The latest date is 14 October 1990, when two birds were noted on the BOS October Count. There are no winter records for this species in Niagara. Common Moorhen winters in the southern United States and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

American Coot *Fulica americana*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, rare and local summer resident, rare winter straggler

The American Coot is one of the most familiar of North American waterbirds and the most abundant and widely distributed rail species in North America (Brisbin and Mowbray, 2002). An awkward and clumsy flier, it requires long running takeoffs along the surface of the water to become airborne and, like most rails, has considerable stamina once in the air. Surprisingly, the American Coot has crossed the Atlantic to reach Great Britain and western Europe at least 27 times. The oldest reported bird, based on banding, lived 22 years, 4 months (Klimkiewicz and Fitcher 1989).

There are three March records in the BOS Noteworthy Records for this species. Because the American Coot is a rare winter straggler, it is not clear if these records represent arriving migrants or birds that have overwintered in Niagara.

First Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 34 of 41 counts, maximum of 80 birds in 1987

BOS May Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 34 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 32 of 40 counts, maximum of 127 birds in 1999

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 26 of 41 counts,
maximum of 75 birds on the
1999 Port Colborne CBC

Lake Ontario Mid-winter
Waterfowl Survey: Reported on
11 of 23 counts, maximum of
13 birds in 1995



American Coot
Brandon Holden

The earliest spring arrival date is 29 March 1975, when Harold Lancaster saw eight birds at Mud Lake in Port Colborne. The American Coot, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a rare summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 5 May.

There is one October record of American Coot, a single bird found on 21 October 1983 at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). There are no November records.

American Coot is a rare winter straggler. It was seen on less than 50% of the Christmas Bird counts. The largest number recorded was 75 in 1999 on the Port Colborne CBC. This number is somewhat anomalous as the next largest number was 12 on the 2001 Niagara Falls CBC. There are fifteen December records, twenty-one January records and only four February records in the BOS Noteworthy Records. American Coot winters south of the Great Lakes and farther south (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis*

Rare spring transient, rare and local summer resident

The Sandhill Crane, the most abundant of the world's cranes, is primarily found in freshwater wetlands utilizing habitats that range from bogs, sedge meadows and fens to open grasslands and cultivated fields. The Sandhill Crane has one of the longest fossil histories of any existing bird (Quantic and Hafen 2003). The oldest unequivocal Sandhill Crane fossil is "just" 2.5 million years old (Volz 2003). The earliest remains of most living bird species found after the Pliocene boundary is some 1.8 million years old (Miller 1944).

When heard, the trumpet-like call of this large wading bird is stirring, and the low-pitched rattle can be heard from a long distance. Sandhill Cranes engage in dancing

rituals that include bowing, jumping, running and wing flapping. This courtship dancing strengthens their pair bonds, an important role for these birds that mate for life.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) reported no Sandhill Cranes in Western New York after 1886. On 23 May 1969, Paul Benham observed one flying west at Rock Point in adjacent Norfolk County (Mitchell and Andrlle 1970, Sheppard 1970).

From 1966 to the mid-1980s, southern Ontario Sandhill Crane sightings were few and far between. However, over the past 15 to 20 years, this species has become much more evident, becoming virtually annual in Niagara. A good number of these sightings are from the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby. The first record of Sandhill Crane for Niagara is of a bird that Jack van Norstrand found in Vineland on 22 May 1967 (Curry 2006). Most of the following 10 records were observed near the small hamlet of Snyder.



The following birds were observed in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book.

1975

23 April, Grimsby
(Barry Jones, Curry 2006).

1995

22 March, Lapp Road, Snyder
(Cathy Sanderson, Kayo Roy,
Alan J. Smith, BOSNR).

24 March, Lapp Road, Snyder
(John Black, Gordon Bellerby,
Marcie Jacklin, Richard
Knapton, Kayo Roy, Alan J.
Smith, BOSNR).

1996

18 April, six, in flight over
Beamer Memorial Conservation
Area, Grimsby (Curry 2006).

1997

18 March, two, feeding on
corn stubble along Lapp Road,
Snyder (Kayo Roy, Alan J.
Smith, Gustave Yaki).

30 March, one, Lapp Road,
Snyder (Brian Ahara, Maxine
Myslowka).

1999

11 April, adult, Baker Road
and King Road, Snyder
(Brian Ahara, Kayo Roy,
Alan J. Smith).

2000

26 April, adult, Ort Road
and Baker Road, Snyder
(Brian Ahara, Kayo Roy,
Alan J. Smith).

2001

3 March, in flight over Beamer
Memorial Conservation Area,
Grimsby (Curry 2006).

2002

22 July, three, two adults and
one juvenile, King Road north
of Baker Road, Snyder (Jean
and Blayne Farnan).

2005

9 August, adult, Vanderliek
farm pond, Bismark
(Kayo Roy). This bird was last
observed on 25 August 2005
(John Black, Marcie Jacklin).

Sandhill Crane
Kayo Roy

First Atlas: Not reported

Second Atlas: 1 square con-
firmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
1 of 41 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 1995

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported
on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 1986

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

In North America, the Sandhill Crane breeds from Alaska to Baffin Island, south to British Columbia, northeast California and the Dakotas to Michigan, also southeast United States from south Georgia to Florida and south Mississippi. It winters in central California, southeast Arizona, central New Mexico and south central Texas, also along the Gulf Coast, south Georgia and Florida (Tacha et al. 1992).

Kayo J. Roy

Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Uncommon spring, summer and fall transient

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 29 birds in 2000

BOS October Count: Reported on 31 of 40 counts, maximum of 56 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 100 and 94 birds

Black-bellied Plovers do not breed in Ontario but are uncommon and irregular spring migrants and common fall migrants in Niagara. Leaving wintering grounds in coastal areas of Central and South America, they move through Niagara quickly in late spring heading to tundra breeding sites well above the treeline. Spring sightings of Black-bellied Plover are irregular, usually with fewer than five birds seen annually. The highest BOS May Count was 29 birds seen on 20 May 2000. Most spring records occur during the last two weeks of May; however, this species was reported by Alan J. Smith as early as 10 April 1994 at the Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake (Ontario Shorebird Survey). July records are rare and are likely non-breeders or immature birds that have stopped in the area while migrating northwards, having flown only part of the complete migration route.

Autumn observations of Black-bellied Plovers are more frequent than spring sightings, with only small numbers of birds reported in both seasons in most years. Individuals or small flocks of adults, often mixed in with other shorebird species, begin to arrive back in early August with observations continuing well into October. Frequently found along the Lake Erie shoreline between Fort Erie and Rock Point Provincial Park, which lies outside of Niagara, they may also turn up in cultivated

Black-bellied Plover
Brandon Holden



fields, marshy areas and sewage ponds. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) report historical sightings into late November and early December. Juveniles, which arrive in the area in early September and use the same habitat as adults, can be identified early in the fall by their streaky breasts and neatly checkered back and wing coverts. The number of plovers varies considerably throughout the fall of each year from a few individuals to counts as high as 56 on 11 October 1970, 58 on 18 August 2002, and an unusually large group of 117 on 22 October 1966. The latest date of observation is 4 December 1970, when one bird was seen at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The sporadic numbers observed throughout the years suggest birds may be stopping over in Niagara for short periods during adverse weather patterns and when food resources allow them to linger later into the autumn.

Mark K. Peck

American Golden-Plover

Pluvialis dominica

Rare spring and summer transient, uncommon fall transient

The first documented Ontario nest of an American Golden-Plover was discovered in 1970 on a dry ridge of heath lichen tundra at the junction of the James and Hudson Bay coasts. This area represents the southernmost breeding location for this species throughout its range and, as the crow flies, is only 1,350 km from Niagara Falls. Despite the obvious proximity of this area to the southern part of the province, golden-plovers remain a rare spring and uncommon fall migrant in Niagara and the rest of southern Ontario. The reason is simple: the vast majority of American Golden-Plovers, like several other arctic shorebird species, follow the mid-continental flyway during spring, largely bypassing to the west of Niagara. In the fall, golden-plovers detour around to the east of the area heading toward the Atlantic coast and then south to their wintering grounds in the pampas of Argentina.

Spring records are rare in Niagara. The earliest spring arrival date for American Golden-Plover in Niagara is 9 April 2001, when a single bird was observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). Two of the most interesting sightings have involved flocks of birds, undoubtedly off course, moving around the general area for several days. In 1954, between 18 April and 6 May, there were regular reports of golden-plovers in flock sizes ranging from 11 to 210 birds in western New York and Niagara (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). In spring of 1981, 40 birds were reported migrating west along the Niagara Escarpment in Grimsby. The next day, 125 were reported at the nearby Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, followed by a sighting of 23 the following day in the same area (Curry 2006).

Adult American Golden-Plover leave their breeding grounds as early as late June, having already commenced their body molt into winter plumage. Peak migration of adults through the Atlantic provinces takes place in late July and throughout August



American Golden Plover
Sam Barone

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 10 of 40 counts, maximum of 42 birds in 1979

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 1 and 0

(Morrison et al. 1994). This is also the time one can expect to see adults first move into Niagara, when some individuals are forced inland upon encountering inclement weather. Reports are uncommon in August but expected in September and October, with rare sightings recorded into late November. Sightings are more common in the fall and are regularly, but not always, reported away from expected shorebird locations. Sod farms, pastures and recently harvested fields are favoured haunts for this species, where they are often found foraging with Killdeers and occasionally with Buff-breasted Sandpipers. They are also often reported in the lagoons and shallow ponds in western portions of Niagara and along the shoreline between Fort Erie and Port Maitland, which lies just outside Niagara, where 118 birds were reported in 10 of 37 recent BOS October counts. Juveniles begin showing up in early to mid-September and are often observed foraging in mixed shorebird flocks, occasionally with Black-bellied Plovers. Identification and aging at this time can be challenging. The latest date of observation is 26 November 1966, when a single bird was seen at Port Colborne (BOSNR).

Mark K. Peck

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*

Common spring, summer and fall transient

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 31 of 41 counts, maximum of 37 birds in 1981

BOS October Count: Reported on 21 of 40 counts, maximum of 9 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 506 and 520 birds

In the spring, Semipalmated Plovers leave coastal wintering sites from northern South America through to the southern United States and begin to make their way north. By early May small numbers are generally found scattered around the Niagara Frontier in sewage lagoons, shallow ponds and along the Lake Erie shoreline. They are often found in mixed flocks of shorebirds but have a tendency to congregate near the outer edges of the flock where they often loosely group themselves. The Semipalmated Plover is an Ontario breeding shorebird species, initiating nesting in early June along the coasts of Hudson and James Bays as far south as the Moose River. They are more common in Niagara during spring migration than are the larger arctic breeding plovers and are one of the more familiar northern shorebirds in the fall.

Most spring observations occur throughout May, but there are a few observations of birds returning to the area as early as the second week of April. The earliest spring arrival date for Semipalmated Plover in Niagara is 6 May 1977, when a single bird was observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (BOSNR). Males often arrive first in Niagara and can be distinguished from females by their richer, chocolate brown markings in the face and breast band. Small numbers have been consistently reported annually since the 1950s. This species is usually observed on the BOS May counts conducted on the third Sunday in May. Stopover time during the spring, as with most other low arctic breeding shorebirds passing through the area, is of longer duration than it is for more northern nesting species, peaking in the third week of May. Most birds have left by the end of the month or during the first week of June. Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Smithville sewage ponds and the Lake Erie shoreline are all good spring localities at which to search for this species.

Southbound migrants begin returning to Niagara in early July with most sightings centred in August and September. Birds are usually found individually or in small groups of up to 20 birds. During the BOS shorebird counts on the third Sunday in August, Semipalmated Plovers are one of the more common shorebirds encountered in the area, often along the Lake Erie shoreline. Likewise, a few stragglers are found in



most years during the BOS October counts, but they are certainly not as common as they are earlier in the fall. Females and failed breeding males move south first, followed by juveniles and successful breeding males in early September. Juveniles are easily distinguished from adults during this period by the light fringing and subterminal banding on the back and coverts. The latest date of observation is 31 October 1970, when one bird was seen at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

Mark K. Peck

Semipalmated Plover
Brandon Holden

Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*

Extremely rare visitor

From the early 1930s to the mid 1940s, this attractive, small, sand-coloured plover was a summer resident and a moderately common breeder in Niagara. Austen et al. (1994) identified the Lake Erie shoreline from the Niagara River to Point Pelee as likely harbouring the stronghold of the Ontario Piping Plover populations, with as many as 125 pairs (mostly at Long Point) breeding in the area at one time. Niagara certainly enjoyed having its share. The first recorded observation of Piping Plover was an individual found by Clark Beardslee and Harold Mitchell on 26 May 1929 at Cedar Bay, Gasline, and the first successful nesting evidence was of four young birds found by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas



Piping Plover
Jukka Jantunen

M. Kelly on 25 June 1933 at Sherkston Beach. By the mid 1950s, the increased human use of Niagara beaches along the Lake Erie shoreline, together with the introduction of motorized beach vehicles, resulted in a disastrous loss of habitat for this species. For a complete listing of nesting data and other observations of Piping Plover in Niagara prior to 1966, see Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970).

This crisis of habitat loss for Piping Plover was not just a Niagara problem, but also clearly a national one, resulting in the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designating in 1985 the entire Canadian population of Piping Plover as Endangered. In Ontario the Piping Plover has experienced major declines and in 1989 only 16 pairs were estimated to be breeding (Austen et al. 1994).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book there have been only three observations, all of single individuals, for this extremely rare visitor to Niagara. On 23 July 1988, Alec Humann found a Piping Plover at Crescent Beach, Fort Erie (Curry 1991), and he was also fortunate enough to record a winter adult at the same location on 23 August 1990 (Curry 1991). Jean and Blayne Farnan were excited about their discovery of a first-basic bird on 9 October 2002 at Gravelly Bay, Port Colborne. This Piping Plover was last seen on 18 October 2002 (Crins 2003).

The Piping Plover breeds on the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to Virginia and on the Great Plains from the southern Prairie Provinces to Nebraska. The species winters on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from North Carolina south to eastern Mexico, Bahamas, and Greater Antilles (Paulson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy

Post-2006 Observation

While outside Niagara and beyond the time period of this book, it is encouraging to report that on 13 May 2007, a Piping Plover nest was located at Sauble Beach on Lake Huron in south Bruce Peninsula (Richards 2008). More than 35 years have passed since Piping Plover has been reported from this beach. The nest contained four eggs that all successfully hatched; however, only three chicks survived to face the migration south. For a complete summary see Toews et al. (2008). In the summer of 2008, four Piping Plover nests were located at Wasaga and Sauble Beaches in the Bruce Peninsula (Richards 2009).

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*

Common summer resident, occasional winter straggler

The Killdeer winters throughout the southern United States and Central America and as far south as northern South America. They are one of Niagara's earliest spring migrants and one of the last shorebirds to leave in the fall. They migrate in small groups during the day and at night. In spring, birds initially move into wet areas free of snow, where they are able to find seeds, insect larva and other invertebrate prey (Jackson and Jackson 2000). The earliest spring arrival date for Killdeer in Niagara is 1 March 1998, when two birds were observed at the St. Davids sewage ponds by Alan J. Smith (Ontario Shorebird Survey). Farmland, marshes, shorelines, short grass, bare ground, gravel areas and human-disturbed sites in urban and rural landscapes are all preferred habitat for this medium-sized plover. As the season progresses, Killdeer may often be observed in stiff-winged courtship flights calling loudly and flying in wide circles in open areas. Next to Dunlin, they are the most commonly reported shorebird on all BOS May Counts.

Killdeer begin breeding in early April and will use a variety of unusual sites including railway lines, roadsides, parking lots, rooftops and other sites near human activity. A recent nest found along the Niagara Parkway was built on top of wood chips protecting a young sapling that was surrounded by regularly mowed grass. The Killdeer will renest after nest failures, and double brooding has been reported in Ontario (Peck and James 1983). Both adults incubate and look after the young. They will vigorously defend eggs and offspring by means of a variety of behavioural distractions including alarm calls and the well-known false brooding and injury-feigning displays.

In late summer, Killdeer begin to assemble on shorelines and wetlands but maintain individual spacing in these areas. They are commonly reported on BOS August shorebird counts and are the most common shorebird reported during the October counts. The majority of birds leave by the end of October, but a few stragglers are regularly reported in November and even, rarely, in December.

Mark K. Peck

Killdeer and eggs
Kayo Roy



First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 23 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 173 birds in 1966

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 138 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 278 birds in 1990

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 9 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on the 1991 Niagara Falls CBC

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 1234 and 756 birds

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*

Extremely rare visitor

The American Oystercatcher is an attractive, large shorebird from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean that is clearly an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. Surprisingly, three Niagara records exist for this striking bird that is not known to travel great distances from the ocean. Mildred and Harold Mitchell together with Alice and Edward Ulrich observed a bird that resembled an oystercatcher in flight over Lake Erie on 2 July 1960. They were at Pinecrest Point near Gasline and watched the bird as it flew to the east and eventually out of sight. An immediate search for the bird commenced, but it was not until later in the day that the bird was refound by George Letchworth at Thunder Bay near Fort Erie. Many observers studied this first-for-Niagara bird as it remained for some three weeks in the Thunder Bay-Windmill Point areas just west of Fort Erie. On 21 July 1960, the bird was collected at Rose Hill Beach, Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). The specimen (skin) of this noteworthy bird is at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 90937) (Wormington 1987).

The second observation of American Oystercatcher for Niagara was also a bird that was first seen in flight. On 2 November 1985, Roy Baker was shrewd enough to drive to the Grimsby sewage ponds to look for the American Oystercatcher that had been reported earlier in the day from Windermere Basin in Hamilton. On his arrival at the ponds, he immediately observed the bird in flight heading west towards the Fifty Point Conservation Area. Racing there, he quickly relocated it on the beach and managed to take a few photographs to document the presence of this extremely rare visitor to Niagara (Wormington 1987, Curry 2006).

In September 1996, the remnants of Hurricane Fran displaced a number of seabirds from the Carolinas to Niagara, including the third recorded American Oystercatcher. On 9 September 1996, Mary and Douglas Hart discovered two American Oystercatchers along the Lake Erie shoreline directly behind their residence at Gravelly Bay in Port Colborne. One of these birds disappeared fairly quickly. The second oystercatcher was photographed and observed by many birders at several locations along the Lake Erie shoreline from Gravelly Bay to Rathfon Point, Port Colborne, before it too vanished later the same day (Curry 1996, Dobos 1997).

The American Oystercatcher is a resident of the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, northward to Nova Scotia. Southward, they can be found throughout the Caribbean and along both coasts of Central and South America to Chile and Argentina. It also inhabits the entire west coast of Mexico, rarely venturing north into southern California (Paulson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Black-necked Stilt is a striking black and white, long pink-legged bird of marshy lakes and coastal salt ponds. There is only one record for this extremely rare visitor to Niagara. On 14 October 1979, while participating in the BOS Fall Count, Jerry Chapple and Aline and Gary Novosel flushed a Black-necked Stilt from the west cell of the Smithville sewage ponds. A review of the observers' documentation to the Ontario Bird Records Committee revealed that when the bird was flushed, it circled the pond twice, then flew to the east and disappeared (Wormington 1986, James 1991, Curry 2006).



On 18 May 2004, Barry Jones discovered two Black-necked Stilt at the Jarvis sewage ponds. These ponds are located only 45.2 km (28 miles) from the southern border of Niagara in neighboring Norfolk Region. The pair nested in a cornfield adjacent to the ponds, producing Ontario's first nest with three eggs. A fourth dropped egg was found nearby. Regrettably this nesting failed. For full details, see Peck et al. 2004, 2005.

Black-necked Stilt
Brandon Holden

The Black-necked Stilt is a tropical marsh bird that breeds from Washington, Alberta, Oklahoma and Virginia south throughout the lowlands of Middle America to northern South America and the West Indies. It winters from central and southern California, the Gulf coast, and southern Florida, and south through tropical America. Black-necked Stilt is a vagrant north across all of southern Canada and out to Bermuda (Paulson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*

Extremely rare visitor

The elegant American Avocet with its large, striking profile and colourful, eye-catching appearance is a bird of the marshes, beaches, prairie ponds and shallow lakes of the mid-west and Pacific coast of North America.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) identify the first record of this extremely rare visitor to Niagara. On 8 August 1964, Richard Brownstein, Carl Mrozek, and Arthur Schaffner observed an American Avocet in flight and at rest at Jaeger Rocks near Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

Forty-one years later, on 19 July 2005, Kayo Roy and Brian Ahara identified the second American Avocet for Niagara when they discovered an adult female feeding in the shallow north cell of the St. Davids sewage ponds (BOSNR).

Curry (2006) notes seven individuals of this species being observed at Fifty Point Conservation Area on 2 May 1983; however, they were not in the Niagara portion of the conservation area (Bruce Mackenzie pers. comm.).

It is inexplicable why only two recorded observations exist for Niagara given American Avocet is regularly found only a short distance to the west in neighbouring Hamilton. They are also now reported with some regularity in adjacent New York State in the Buffalo Ornithological Society study area. The American Avocet would be very difficult for observers to miss so it is likely that this species merely passes through Niagara undetected, en route to other regions.

The American Avocet is known to breed throughout western North America, from the southern parts of the Prairie Provinces, east to the western Great Plains and south through the Mexican Plateau. The bird winters in coastal and interior California, along the Gulf coast, as well as in southern Florida and southern Mexico (Paulson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy



Post-2006 Observation

On 16 December 2008, Ronald Goodridge located and photographed an extremely rare American Avocet as it fed along the Niagara River shoreline at the foot of Bowen Road in Fort Erie. It was not seen on any succeeding days. This bird is very likely the same individual that was initially found on 6 December 2008 on the east branch of the Niagara River off Beaver Island State Park in Grand Island, New York, where it was last reported on 15 December 2008, the day before the Fort Erie sighting (BOSNR). Comparing photographs, this illustrated bird appears to be the same individual that spent most of November and early December 2008 at Ajax, Ontario (James Pawlicki pers. comm.).

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident

The Spotted Sandpiper leaves the river banks and mangroves of northern South America to head north in March and April and, with a few annual exceptions, begins arriving in southern Ontario during the third week of April. The earliest spring arrival date for Spotted Sandpiper in Niagara is 20 April 1980, when a single bird was observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). Numbers peak in mid-May as resident birds and northbound migrants continue to mix in the area. The more heavily spotted, richly coloured females arrive first, followed by males a few days later.

Like the phalaropes, female Spotted Sandpipers are polyandrous, pairing with up to four males in their territory (Oring 1997). After the eggs have been laid, males will take over parental responsibilities, although the female will often assist her final partner with the care of young.

The Spotted Sandpiper breeds around the province and, according to the second Atlas, has a relatively high abundance in Niagara. The preferred breeding habitats are the semi-vegetated shorelines of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario and the shorelines and islands of the Niagara River. Numerous other sites, however, including small ponds, lagoons, wetland edges, rivers and streams, rural ditches, wet agricultural locations and human-disturbed areas provide additional nesting places. Breeding begins in mid-May; nests containing eggs have been found in Niagara well into July (Ontario Nest Records



Spotted Sandpiper
Barry Cheriére

Scheme). Territories are usually established near water but nests may be in drier locations a considerable distance away.

In August, Spotted Sandpipers begin moving to more open wetland habitat individually or in small groups. The light fringing on the feathers of the back and wing coverts distinguishes juveniles from adults. Fortunately the molt out of juvenile plumage does not take place until the young birds arrive on the wintering grounds, allowing for accurate aging of birds in the Niagara area. They remain into late September and early October, with only a few remaining for the BOS October counts later in the month. The latest date of observation is 27 November 2005, when one bird was seen at Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

The Spotted Sandpiper is presently a common breeding species and a migrant throughout Niagara, but the number of birds found during the BOS August shorebird counts since 2001 suggest a sizeable decrease from counts taken in the 1950s. It has now been listed as a Species of Concern in Canada based on similar decreases in numbers found in other parts of Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime provinces (Ross et al. 2003). The cause of these shrinking numbers has not been determined.

Mark K. Peck

First Atlas: 17 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 13 squares confirmed, 11 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1982 and 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 90 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 13 of 40 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 1,493 and 541 birds

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*

Uncommon spring, summer and fall transient

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1998

BOS May Count: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1969 and 2002

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 46 and 11 birds

Well named, the Solitary Sandpiper is most often found foraging quietly by itself in wooded and other small ponds, in sewage lagoons, in roadside ditches and occasionally on mudflats along the shores of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

Solitary Sandpipers winter in freshwater marshes and ponds throughout Central America, South America and the Caribbean. They move northward across North America, rarely in coastal areas, to breeding grounds in muskeg and boggy areas of boreal forest. They are much quieter during migration and on the breeding grounds than are yellowlegs. Like the closely related Green Sandpiper of Eurasia, Solitary Sandpipers nest in trees, using an old nest of a thrush, blackbird or other songbird.

Two subspecies are presently recognized: *T. s. solitaria* and *T. s. cinnamomea*. The nominate race *solitaria* passes through Niagara and the rest of eastern North America while *cinnamomea* is found further to the west. Recent DNA barcoding indicates discrete genetic differences between the two subspecies that may warrant a future taxonomic split.

In Niagara, they begin to arrive at the end of April. The earliest documented record is of a single bird on 5 April 1998 at the Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOS April Count). Most leave by mid-May, but there are occasional sightings as late as mid-June. The southern limit of their breeding grounds is less than 500 km to the north, allowing failed or non-breeders to return by the end of June, scant weeks after the last individuals have left on the final leg of their northbound migration. Juveniles begin to show up in early August and are easily recognized by their fresh plumage and evenly spaced white spotting on the upperparts. Most Solitary Sandpipers have left the area by



Solitary Sandpiper
Kayo Roy

mid-September, but occasional sightings occur through mid-October. The latest record is of a single bird at Dufferin Islands in Niagara Falls on 30 October 1969 (BOSNR).

The BOS Shorebird Count points to a significant decrease in the numbers of this species in recent years. This trend has also been noted in other parts of Ontario and Quebec to the extent that the Solitary Sandpiper is now considered a Species of Moderate Concern throughout the province (Ross et al. 2003).

Mark K. Peck

Wandering Tattler *Heteroscelus incanus*

Extremely rare visitor

The name “wandering” refers to this sandpiper’s widespread occurrence over vast portions of ocean shoreline, and “tattler” refers to its voice (Gill et al. 2002). The Wandering Tattler is a characteristic bird of the western seacoast of North America where it spends some nine months of the year along the rugged rocks and spray of the Pacific Ocean. Surprisingly, there are three Niagara records of this extremely rare visitor



Wandering Tattler
Barry Cherriere

from the west, and they comprise the only records for all of Ontario. The first observation was that of a bird in definitive prebasic molt found on 1 August 1948 by Harold Axtell, Harold Mitchell and others along the Lake Erie shoreline at Sugarloaf Beach, Port Colborne (Crins 2005).

On 12 July 1960, Robert Curry found the second Niagara Wandering Tattler, a bird in definitive alternate plumage along the Lake Erie shoreline at Windmill Point, Fort Erie. This bird remained for four days, last seen on 15 July 1960 (Crins 2005). Robert Andrie, David Freeland and others found another definitive alternate plumaged bird on 8 June 1977. Coincidentally, this bird also frequented the Lake Erie shoreline at Windmill Point, Fort Erie, where it lingered until 13 June 1977 (BOSNR, Crins 2005). The flat rocks along the northeast shore of Lake Erie provide the best habitat in the province for this rock-loving shorebird.

The Wandering Tattler breeding grounds are in the mountains of Alaska and northwestern Canada. It winters along the Pacific Coast and offshore islands from British Columbia south to Peru (Gill et al. 2002).

Kayo J. Roy

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Spotted Redshank has the most dramatic plumage changes in the genus *Tringa*, from largely black when breeding to largely white and grey in basic plumage (Marchant et al. 1986). This large Old World shorebird, found occasionally in North America, is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara.

John Black discovered a Spotted Redshank in the west pond of the St. Davids sewage ponds on 25 July 1976, while birding there with Harold Axtell and Paul Benham (Axtell et al. 1977, James 1991, Roy 2001).

John Black relates the following:

The gate to the sewage ponds was open so we moved inside the fenced-in area to look into the west pond where we observed about 300 Semipalmated Sandpipers, 25 dowitchers, 100 Lesser Yellowlegs and a few Greater Yellowlegs. I was attempting to untangle the yellowlegs by size but the light was not very

good however, I noted one bird that was intermediate in size between the two yellowleg species. I asked Harold if he could look at this individual from his location. He observed the bird through his telescope and replied “Oh my, oh my goodness, it's a Spotted Redshank.”

The bird was in alternate prebasic molt, and this remarkable first for Niagara sighting was also the first-ever recorded observation of Spotted Redshank for Ontario (Roy 2001). The small likelihood of observing this species in Ontario becomes evident when one considers that the Ontario Bird Records Committee have accepted only four records for the entire province (Roy 2001).

The Spotted Redshank breeds in the Arctic from Scandinavia east through Siberia, and winters in the Middle East, Africa north of the equator, India and Southeast Asia. The species is a vagrant to both coasts of North America and less often in the interior (Paulson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy



Greater Yellowlegs
Jean Iron

BOS April Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 1981

BOS October Count: Reported on 32 of 40 counts, maximum of 70 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 20 and 79 birds

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Uncommon spring, summer and fall transient

Greater Yellowlegs winter in the southern United States and Central America, a little farther north than do the smaller, closely related Lesser Yellowlegs. They breed throughout much of the southern Canadian boreal forest. Within Ontario their summer distribution extends a little farther south than does that of Lesser Yellowlegs, with breeding evidence as far south as Lake Nipigon and Lake Abitibi (Harris 2007). Their life history, however, remains poorly understood outside migration areas. Today, both yellowlegs are considered uncommon to common migrants in Niagara in both spring and fall. Despite the continued loss to urban growth and development of wetlands and other suitable staging areas, the number of birds passing through the area remains consistent with historical records and may even be increasing slightly.

Greater Yellowlegs arrive in Niagara earlier than most shorebird species, showing up as early as late March or early April. The earliest spring arrival date for Greater Yellowlegs in Niagara is 28 March 1987, when a single bird was observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). They often arrive a week earlier than Lesser Yellowlegs and are usually observed singly or in small groups. Flock sizes of more than 40 birds are uncommon in spring and very rare in fall.

Sewage lagoons, small ponds in rural areas and golf courses, marshes, flooded agricultural fields and other ephemeral wetlands all provide suitable stopover sites in the spring. Species sightings are more frequent in late April and May. A search of the Smithville sewage ponds, the Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake or the Lake Erie shoreline at this time is usually successful. By late May or early June, birds have continued northward and only immature or non-breeding adults are likely to be found in the area.

Adult Greater Yellowlegs begin returning to the Niagara area in early July, females returning earlier than males and adults peaking earlier than juveniles (Elphick and Tibbitts 1998). Juveniles begin to arrive in the area in late July and can be distinguished

from adults by the browner back and the more clearly defined white spots on the upperparts. Unlike Lesser Yellowlegs, adult Greater Yellowlegs molt primary and secondary feathers during migration, a process that aids birders in aging and identifying species. Greater Yellowlegs, especially juveniles, remain in the region well into October; sightings as late as November. The latest date of observation is 24 November 1969, when two birds were seen at Cement Plant Road pond in Wainfleet (BOSNR). Autumn numbers vary widely during the BOS August and October counts, but birds are usually seen annually. It is interesting to note that as the fall progresses, Lesser Yellowlegs move out of the area earlier, while Greater Yellowlegs remain longer and are often more numerous during the October surveys.

Mark K. Peck

Willet *Tringa semipalmata*

Occasional visitor

The Willet is a large, grayish, chunky sandpiper that can appear inconspicuous until it spreads its wings. When the bird takes flight, the striking black and white marked wing patterns are revealed on this bird that is well adapted to both coastal and interior grassland habitats. Two breeding populations exist for this species. The prairie population breeding in central North American is known as the western Willet *C. s. semipalmata*, and the Atlantic to the Gulf Coast subspecies *C. s. inornata* is known as the

inset: Willet showing strongly barred breast. See text for details.

Kayo Roy

below: Barry Cherriere



eastern Willet. The western race is slightly larger and paler gray than the eastern form and shows a stouter bill and a more heavily barred chest and back in alternate plumage (Lowther et al. 2001). Considerable sexual dimorphism exists in Willets so size comparisons should be used carefully.

Over the years there has been considerable discussion and debate about the Willet subspecies that occurs in Ontario. One would expect that observations here would be of the eastern form *C. s. inornata*; however, that is not the case. Other than one undocumented sight record from Long Point in 1985, no confirmed record of the eastern form is known for the province. The first documented Willet observed in Niagara is the bird found by Robert Andrlle and John Doyle on 1 June 1947 at Point Abino (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). This publication and Sheppard (1970) describe the Willet observations for Niagara prior to 1966.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, the Willet has been observed in Niagara on relatively few occasions. Niagara area birders have reported nine observations, and a further 23 are known from the Niagara portion of the BOS study area (BOSNR). The earliest date this species was observed in Niagara is 14 May 1967 in Fort Erie, and the latest date is 24 November 1969, also from Fort Erie (BOSNR).

One interesting observation occurred on 27 June 2004. Kayo Roy, Alan J. Smith and Brian Ahara discovered an adult Willet feeding along the Lake Ontario shoreline at Jones Beach in the Port Weller section of St. Catharines. This individual exhibited numerous strongly marked upperpart feathers, strongly barred breast and flanks, and a clearly barred uppertail, suggesting the bird could be an eastern Willet. In e-mail communications with several prominent Ontario birders, and after a review of three photographs of the bird taken by Kayo Roy, it was recommended that further expert opinions be sought on ID Frontiers. There was considerable discussion in that forum about this bird, and the consensus of opinion was that this Jones Beach bird was a western Willet. This individual is a good example of a bird in which structure is more distinctive than plumage. While the plumage of this bird may be somewhat equivocal, the structure clearly indicates western Willet. The smoothly rounded contours of the breast and back, the thick chest, and the slim, very straight bill are all indicative of western (Michael O'Brien pers. comm.).

The Willet is the only North American sandpiper with a breeding range that extends south from the Canadian Maritime provinces to the Venezuelan tropics (Lowther et al. 2001). The Willet also breeds in the Great Basin and northern Great Plains. It winters on the Pacific coast from northern California south, the Atlantic coast from Virginia south through Middle America, and the West Indies to Ecuador and northern Brazil (Paulson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

Common spring, summer and fall transient

Today, even in the spring, Lesser Yellowlegs are regarded as the more numerous of the two yellowlegs species. Historically, this was not always the case in southern Ontario and western New York. During the late 1800s, both species of yellowlegs faced heavy market hunting pressures, and the numbers passing through the area were impacted

negatively, especially in the fall. Lesser Yellowlegs winter in Central and South America, although some birds will stay as far north as southern New Jersey during mild winters. The northward spring migration occurs primarily throughout the interior portion of the continent, so numbers in Niagara tend to be lower in the spring and higher in the fall, when southbound migrants range farther to the east. The breeding distribution of this northern boreal forest nesting species is also more limited than that of Greater Yellowlegs; the eastern limits of the breeding range of Lesser Yellowlegs do not extend much beyond James Bay in Quebec.

Lesser Yellowlegs generally arrive a little later in Niagara than do their larger relatives. Spring sightings are focused throughout April and the first two weeks of May. The earliest spring arrival date for Lesser Yellowlegs in Niagara is 31 March 1986, when two birds were observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). Individual birds arrive early, but flock sizes of 100 to 200 birds are not uncommon in the last week of April and the first week of May. They begin leaving the area shortly thereafter. During the BOS May Count, which takes place on the third Sunday in the month, only small numbers of Lesser Yellowlegs are found throughout the region in most years. Potential breeding habitat lies within 1,000 km of Niagara Falls, so it is not surprising that that Lesser Yellowlegs would move north earlier than many arctic breeding shorebirds.

The best staging localities in Niagara, in either spring or fall, seem to be at the Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Smithville sewage ponds, but birders should also be on the lookout in flooded agricultural fields, roadside ditches, ponds and other suitable wetland sites, where this species can be found in mud or shallow water, moving methodically and picking at the surface.

Lesser Yellowlegs are one of the earliest fall migrant shorebirds to arrive back in Niagara. The short distance to and from the breeding grounds, mild springs and poor breeding seasons allow some birds to return by the end of June or early July. Juveniles begin to appear in early August, often swelling Lesser Yellowlegs numbers to several hundred birds scattered throughout the region in August and September. In the fall, juveniles can be separated from adults by their more uniform colouration and the heavier concentration of white spotting on the back and wings. Lesser Yellowlegs pass through Niagara slowly, and they regularly turn up on BOS October Counts conducted during the second Sunday of the month. Most are gone by early November, but stragglers have been reported in southern Ontario well into December during mild autumns (Curry 2006). The latest date of observation is 5 November 2000, when three birds were seen at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR).

Mark K. Peck

BOS April Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1991

BOS May Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 80 birds in 1997

BOS October Count: Reported on 31 of 40 counts, maximum of 26 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 130 and 419



Lesser Yellowlegs
Kayo Roy



Upland Sandpiper
Brandon Holden

First Atlas: 10 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1969

BOS May Count: Reported on 16 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1994

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*

Rare summer resident

The iconic image of an Upland Sandpiper is that of an aberrant-looking bird fluttering stiff-winged to a landing atop a fencepost. Upon landing, the wings are momentarily raised for several seconds before the bird finally settles. It is one of a few shorebird species that rarely visits the shore, preferring prairies, pampas, grassland and pastureland. The species is thought to be monogamous and non-territorial, often nesting in loose colonies.

Historically, the Upland Sandpiper was uncommon to rare in Ontario but its numbers increased during land clearing in the 1800s. In Niagara, this species was considered an uncommon summer resident scattered throughout the region (Sheppard 1970).

Upland Sandpipers are primarily nocturnal migrants usually bypassing well-known shorebird staging areas and moving directly to suitable breeding habitat. Those seen in Niagara are returning to the area from their wintering grounds at inland grassland sites in eastern South America in late April or early May. The earliest spring arrival date for

Upland Sandpiper in Niagara is 13 April 1976, when one bird was observed at Rose Hill Road (probably on the Lake Erie shoreline) in Fort Erie (BOSNR). Birds often return to traditional sites, providing the habitat has remained suitable. Nesting habitat includes pastureland, hayfields and old fields. Nests are well hidden in areas of high vegetation. After hatching, broods are moved to adjacent foraging areas with low vegetation, a move that makes observation easier. Nest initiation and egg laying takes place in late May and early June (Ontario Nest Records Scheme). Incubation, which takes 21 days, is carried out by both sexes. The young are also tended by both parents and are able to fly in 30 days (Baicich and Harrison 1997).

Upland Sandpipers are rarely reported in Niagara away from their breeding habitat. Fall migration begins early for this species, with most adults and juveniles departing before the beginning of September. Sexes are similar in appearance, and juveniles are not easily distinguished from adults. Birds have not been reported on any recent BOS August shorebird counts or October counts, as a consequence of both timing and survey locations. The latest date of observation is 6 September 1999, when eight birds were seen at the Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR).

One of the best locations to look for Upland Sandpipers is the Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Throughout the 1990s, Alan J. Smith found a few birds there annually in May and in late July and August, suggesting that birds may have been breeding in the vicinity of the ponds (Ontario Shorebird Survey).

During the first Atlas in the early 1980s, Upland Sandpipers were probable or confirmed breeders in the majority of the 10 km squares throughout Niagara. The second Atlas, however, showed a sharp decline in numbers of Upland Sandpiper in the region. Birds were no longer found in approximately 30% of the squares previously documented. This figure is in line with the significant decline of 37% within the province as a whole (McIlwrick 2007). Habitat loss and changes in land use activities, such as natural succession, urbanization and altered farming practices have undoubtedly contributed to the recent decline. It is unclear what impact changes in wintering and migratory staging areas are having on this species.

Mark K. Peck

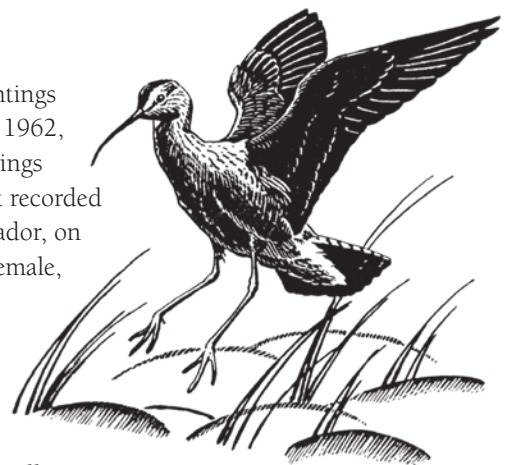
Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis*

One presumed record bordering Niagara

The Eskimo Curlew is now presumed extinct. The last confirmed sightings were of one photographed near Galveston, Texas, in March and April 1962, and one shot in Barbados in September 1963. Some subsequent sightings are compelling but lack documentation (O'Brien et al. 2006). The last recorded specimen of this species taken in Canada was at Battle Harbour, Labrador, on 29 August 1932 (Godfrey 1986). Ernest Doane collected the bird, a female, as it was feeding on berries (Van Tyne 1948). This specimen is at the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, Ann Arbor, Michigan (UMMZ # 69908) (Michel Gosselin pers. comm.).

There are no documented records of Eskimo Curlew in Ontario (Austen et al. 1994); however, Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) makes mention of two presumed Eskimo Curlews collected by George A. Macallum in the Dunnville, Ontario area (no exact date indicated). Curry (2006) identifies

Eskimo Curlew
Terence M. Short
from *Last of the Curlews*
Printed with permission



a specimen collected before 1883 in Hamilton by Thomas McIlwraith. It is housed at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 29156). The Eskimo Curlew is designated as Endangered in Ontario by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to ensure that it would be fully protected should it ever occur here (Austen et al. 1994).

The snow-water ponds and the cobblestone bar and the dwarfed willows that stood beside the S-twist of the tundra river were unchanged. The curlew was tired from the long flight. But when a golden plover flew close to the territory's boundary he darted madly to the attack. The Arctic summer would be short. The territory must be held in readiness for the female his instinct told him soon would come.

Reprinted with the kind permission of Fred Bodsworth.

The above is the closing paragraph from *Last of the Curlews* written by Fred Bodsworth (1954), a good friend of the authors of this book. Bodsworth's book on the Eskimo Curlew is highly recommended reading for anyone with an interest in natural history, particularly those who have a special fondness for shorebirds.

Kayo J. Roy

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Rare spring, summer and fall transient

Whimbrels winter in small flocks and are locally common along coastal areas of Central and South America and the Caribbean. During much of the non-breeding season they usually keep to themselves and are often found in small groups within grassy areas away from most other shorebird species. Of all the shorebirds passing through Niagara and the rest of southern Ontario in spring, the Whimbrel, or Hudsonian Curlew as it was once known, is the most predictable in its timing. Whimbrels leave their spring staging areas along Atlantic coastal areas of the southeastern United States and arrive in Niagara with unfailing regularity within a day or two of 24 May. Small flocks are annually observed heading northwest along the shorelines of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, often in V-formation and calling to each other with a loud, clear, rapid series of single pitch notes, "piupiupiupiupiupi". The majority pass

Whimbrels
Jean Iron



by a little east of Niagara, but annual sightings in the region do occur. An exceptionally early record is of twenty birds on 17 May 1966 at Fort Erie (BOSNR). Whimbrels may rest briefly, but most move through the region heading rapidly to subarctic breeding grounds in the Hudson Bay Lowlands of Ontario, Manitoba and Nunavut. Several thousand individuals move through southern Ontario within a few days in flocks varying in size from a few birds to several hundred individuals. Spring sightings outside of this period are unusual, smaller in number and worthy of note.

One of the wariest of shorebird species, Whimbrels appear to act as sentinels, warning other shorebirds of approaching danger. Unfortunately this tendency means that they are often the first shorebirds to leave a site when birders arrive.

Unlike the spring flocks, Whimbrel sightings in late summer and fall are irregular and usually consist of individuals or small groups along shorelines or in nearby marshes or mudflats. Autumn birds rarely remain in Niagara for more than a day or two. Because males stay with the young on the breeding grounds, early arrivals returning to Niagara in July and early August are likely to be females and failed breeders. Males and juveniles begin appearing later in August and September. Distinguishing adults from juveniles is challenging: juveniles will have more uniform, fresher body plumage with wing and tail feathers showing less wear and fading. Juveniles may also have much shorter bills than adults. By early October this species has moved through the area. The latest record is of a single bird on 11 October 1970 (BOS October Count).

Mark K. Peck

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 58 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 0 and 4 birds

Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*

One historic record (1925)

The extremely rare and highly endangered Slender-billed Curlew is a medium-sized shorebird of Europe, Siberia and Africa that is presently known to be in significant decline. Remarkably, Slender-billed Curlew has been recorded on one occasion in Niagara, comprising the only record for Ontario and North America (James 1983, AOU 1998).

Some of the following basic details are extracted from Beardslee and Mitchell (1965). In the fall of 1925, in October or early November (exact date unknown), Dr. Irvin L. Terry, a Buffalo area dentist, is alleged to have shot and collected an individual of this species at Crescent Beach in Fort Erie. The specimen was given to Joseph A. Santens to be prepared and mounted and was included in Dr. Terry's collection when all of his specimens were donated to the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York (BSNS # 2092). When the specimen was given to the taxidermist, no data tag was found and it is believed that Dr. Terry removed the tags from his entire collection for fear of violating a new law about the collecting of migratory birds without an official permit.



Slender billed Curlew
Mounted specimen photographed on
20 September 2007 by Kayo Roy at the
Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York.



Slender billed Curlew
Mounted specimen
photographed on 20 September
2007 by Kayo Roy at the Buffalo
Museum of Science, Buffalo,
New York

Clark S. Beardslee and Harold D. Mitchell acknowledged that they had received verbal confirmation of this occurrence from Irvin L. Terry, Jr., the son of Dr. Terry, as well as two letters from W. R. Harris, the son of the hunter companion of Dr. Terry, in which Harris corroborates the details including the location and vague date when the bird was collected. He further states that he was at home when Dr. Terry and his father returned with the curlew. In December 2007, Robert Andrle and Richard Rosche checked the mounted specimen, examining overall plumage, flank, and primary feather patterns, and after reviewing Prater et al. (1977), concluded that this Slender-billed Curlew was an adult.

Considering the year of occurrence (1925), it is very unlikely that human involvement played any role in this Slender-billed Curlew's presence at Crescent Beach in Fort Erie. Interestingly,

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) include the measurements of this mounted specimen, and they draw comparisons to ten other specimens of Slender-billed Curlew found in Witherby et al. (1943).

Clearly Slender-billed Curlew is extremely rare worldwide and perhaps on the verge of extinction. Recent winter records have been very few and no sites are currently known which regularly hold migrant or wintering birds. (Marchant et al. 1986).

Kayo J. Roy



Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*

Occasional visitor

The Hudsonian Godwit is the smallest of the world's four godwit species and lives at the extremes of North and South America. Its English name comes from its primary boreal and Arctic breeding grounds, and its Latin name is derived from the reddish colours of its breeding plumage. This attractive large shorebird with a long, upcurved two-toned, bill migrates north in the spring through central North America to its Arctic breeding grounds and is rarely reported in Niagara. After breeding is completed it undertakes an extraordinary non-stop Atlantic Coast flight to staging areas in northern South America, a flight of some 4,500 kilometres (Elphick and Klima 2002).

James Savage discovered the first Hudsonian Godwit for Niagara on 28 May 1934 at Point Abino (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). These two publications describe in detail all Niagara observations of this species prior to 1966.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, the Hudsonian Godwit, as shown below, has been observed in Niagara on only a handful of occasions.

The Hudsonian Godwit breeds from western and southern Alaska through Arctic and subarctic Canada to the south shore of Hudson Bay. The wintering populations are concentrated in Tierra del Fuego and Chiloe Island in southern South America on both Atlantic and Pacific coasts (Paulson 2005), a distance of 14,000 kilometres from Hudson Bay.

Kayo J. Roy

Juvenile Hudsonian Godwit
Jean Iron



The following birds were observed in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book.

1966

1 October, one, Fort Erie (Paul Benham, Daniel Salisbury, BOSNR).

1967

30 September - 1 October, one, St. Davids sewage ponds (Paul Benham, Daniel Salisbury and others, BOSNR).

16 October, one, Erie Beach, Fort Erie (Robert Andrlé and others, BOSNR).

1969

28 September, one, Cement Plant Road pond, Wainfleet (Harold Lancaster).

1979

8 October, one, St. Davids sewage pond (David Freeland, BOSNR).

28 October, one, Port Colborne (Blayne Farnan).

1990

29 August, one, Waverley Beach, Fort Erie (Willie D'Anna, BOSNR).

1992

30 August - 3 September, one, Avondale sewage ponds, Niagara-on-the-Lake (Kayo Roy, Willie D'Anna, Alan J. Smith and others, BOSNR).

1998

6 and 7 September, one, Jaeger Rocks, Fort Erie (Peter Yoerg, BOSNR).

2002

2 November, Grimsby sewage ponds (Brian Ahara, Alan J. Smith).

2004

3 October, one, Grimsby sewage ponds (Gordon Bellerby, Bruce Falls, Kayo Roy, Alan J. Smith).

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Uncommon spring summer and fall transient

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 34 of 41 counts, maximum of 183 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1966

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 52 and 49 birds

It is difficult to watch a turnstone flip over stones, beg food from a fisherman, or dig a deep hole in search of horseshoe crab eggs and not be impressed with its tenacity. Unlike many shorebird species, turnstones feed on a wide range of prey items and may even be found scavenging in garbage dumps.

Ruddy Turnstones passing through Niagara belong to the subspecies *A. i. morinella*, the majority of which winter in coastal areas of northern South America. In May, the largest concentration of these birds stage along the Atlantic coast, specifically in Delaware Bay, before heading north to breed in the Canadian Arctic. Since the early 1980s turnstone numbers have declined by 50% in Delaware Bay.

In mid-to late May, turnstones begin to stage briefly in Niagara. The earliest spring arrival date for Ruddy Turnstone in Niagara is 8 May 1977, when three birds were observed at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). Though there is considerable variation in numbers during May BOS counts, probably due to weather related causes, recent totals reflect the decline noted previously. Like Sanderlings, Ruddy Turnstones are most likely to be found on the shoreline of Lake Erie between Fort Erie and Rock Point (just outside Niagara). They are less inclined to be in the ponds and on the marshy mudflats frequented by other shorebirds species. Although Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings and Red Knots all stage together on the Atlantic coast, the number of turnstones visiting Niagara is consistently greater than the other two species. Most turnstones have moved through the area by the first week of June.

Ruddy Turnstone
Brandon Holden



By late July small numbers of adults commence moving back into Niagara staging briefly along the shorelines of Lakes Erie and Ontario. Juveniles arrive back in late August and early September and can be distinguished from adults by their fresh plumage with pale fringing on the back and coverts. Their head colour is highly variable but generally shows more brown than late summer adults do. Turnstones do not linger long, and most have departed for southern wintering sites by late September. The latest date of observation is 18 November 1979, when one bird was seen at Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

Mark K. Peck

Red Knot *Calidris canutus rufa*

Rare spring, summer and fall transient

The majority of Red Knots passing through Niagara migrate over 30,000 km annually, moving between wintering grounds in Tierra del Fuego and breeding grounds in the Canadian Arctic. Spring migrants largely bypass southern Ontario unless forced down by unfavourable climatic conditions or other migration-related difficulties. Stopovers in Niagara are generally short, erratic and restricted to the latter half of May and early June. The earliest spring arrival date for Red Knots in Niagara is 17 May 1966, when two birds were observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby by Dan Salisbury. Recent BOS May Count records include 40 birds on 18 May 1969 and 10 birds on 19 May 1991. Records of individuals and small numbers of knots are scattered throughout other years. In the important staging areas of Delaware Bay, the majority of knots leave during the last week of May migrating just east of southern Ontario.

Autumn observations of Red Knots are more common and extend over a longer time period. One or a few birds are seen annually in most years, but flocks as large as 45 on 18 September 1949 and 25 on 5 September 1950 have been reported (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). The numbers seen in southern Ontario have dropped off considerably in recent years. Knots begin returning to the Niagara area in late July and early August, continuing throughout September with a few sightings occurring into the second week of October. Banding results from staging areas in other parts of eastern Canada show that the majority of early arrivals are females, followed by males and juveniles later in the season. Juveniles begin moving south in mid-to late August and may be molting into first-basic plumage by late September, making it more difficult to determine their age as the season progresses. Juvenile birds can be distinguished by dark subterminal bands edged with white on the scapulars and wing coverts and a complete lack of rust colouration on the breast throughout the fall. Adults have usually moved out of the area by late September, while juveniles may remain into early November.

During migration, Red Knots prefer sites along the shores of the Great Lakes and the Niagara River rather than the small ponds and sewage lagoons chosen by many other shorebird species. The shoreline of Lake Erie from Fort Erie west to Windmill Point and Fifty Point Conservation Area are two of the best areas for birders in search of this species in the fall. The latest date of observation is 9 November 1968, when one bird was seen at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

In April 2007, the eastern North America subspecies, *Calidris canutus rufa*, was designated Endangered in Canada as a result of precipitous population declines noted in the late 1990s in Tierra del Fuego, Florida and Delaware Bay (COSEWIC 2007). A colour-marked knot found in the Grimsby sewage ponds in the fall of 2004 was banded in Delaware Bay in spring of 2002 (Mark Peck unpubl. data). This sighting and several others around southern Ontario support the suggestion that Red Knots passing through Niagara belong to the *C. c. rufa* subspecies.

Mark K. Peck

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 40 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1976

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 40 and 6 birds

Red Knot
Mark Peck





Sanderling
Kayo Roy

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Common spring summer and fall transient

BOS April Count: Not reported
BOS May Count: Reported on 11 of 41 counts, maximum of 200 birds in 1981

BOS October Count: Reported on 30 of 40 counts, maximum of 95 birds in 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 320 and 220 birds

Sanderlings are widely distributed on southern beaches and coastal areas throughout much of the world during Niagara's winter months. While migrating in the spring through Niagara, they are most often found along the shoreline of Lake Ontario and the shoreline of Lake Erie from Fort Erie west to Windmill Point. They typically run and feed along the water's edge on beaches and other sandy areas but are unexpected in marshes, lagoons, ponds and mudflats away from lake shorelines. The earliest record is of a single bird seen by Dan Salisbury on 17 May 1966 along the Welland Canal in St. Catharines. Sanderlings are less common in spring than in fall, but occasional weather-induced "fallouts" may result in a few individuals or flocks of 100 or more birds visiting the area for several days in late May or early June before heading for breeding grounds in the High Arctic.

Sanderlings are more frequent in the late summer and early autumn and begin to arrive back in the Niagara area in mid- to late July, their numbers peaking in late August and early September. Adults arrive in the region before juveniles and pass through reasonably quickly. Juveniles begin to arrive later in August and may remain much longer. Early in the fall juveniles are easily distinguished from adults by their distinctive black and white checkered upperparts and their black cap. Aging birds later in the fall can be more challenging as juveniles begin their molt into first basic plumage. It is not uncommon for individuals or small flocks to be found throughout October; the BOS counts during the last 40 years indicate small numbers of birds reported in most years. The latest record is of a single bird at Crystal Beach near Port Colborne on 28 October 1991 (BOSNR).

Recent population declines throughout Ontario and eastern North America have now placed this species in a category of high concern. BOS October counts, though variable, also reflect this population decrease.

Mark K. Peck

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*

Common spring summer and fall transient

Semipalmated Sandpipers winter in the coastal areas of Central America and northern South America. Small flocks move northward through Niagara from mid-May until mid-June. When away from their breeding grounds, they tend to be more territorial and aggressive than most other shorebird species and are often observed scuffling and posturing with other sandpipers, feathers fluffed and tail held upright. They make use of a variety of staging areas, including sewage lagoons, marshes and the muddy shores of small ponds and lakes throughout the area. The earliest record is of a single bird seen at the Smithville sewage ponds on 30 April 1996 (HNCNR).

In early July, southbound adults begin to return from subarctic and arctic tundra breeding grounds of Canada, including the Hudson Bay Lowlands of northern Ontario. Adults passing through Niagara later in the fall are likely to be in molt with a mixture of brown breeding plumage and greyer winter plumage on the back and coverts and more clearly defined streaking on the upper breast. Juveniles begin to arrive in Niagara in early August also sporting a grey brown appearance but with a much crisper look, often described as a scaly appearance with white fringing on much of the upper plumage. Distinguishing adults from juveniles becomes more difficult later in the fall when juveniles begin molting into their first-basic plumage. Commonly seen in flocks of several hundred, Semipalmated Sandpipers are one of the most frequently encountered species on the August shorebird counts. By mid-October, this species has become uncommon in the area. The latest record is of a single bird at Long Beach in Port Colborne on 12 October 1991 (BOSNR).

Note that recent population declines in eastern North America as a whole including Ontario have placed this species in a conservation priority category of high concern (Ross et al. 2003).

Mark K. Peck

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 70 birds in 1987

BOS October Count: Reported on 21 of 40 counts, maximum of 30 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 1,264 and 1,906

Semipalmated Sandpiper
Brandon Holden



Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*

Occasional visitor

The Western Sandpiper is a member of a group of small shorebirds collectively known as “peeps”. First described in 1857 by Jean Louis Cabanis, a German ornithologist, the Western Sandpiper is a close relative of the Semipalmated Sandpiper, which is a common bird in Niagara. Careful observation is required to separate the two species. It is one of the most abundant shorebirds in western North America. Despite this, the Canadian Wildlife Service has classified it as a Species of Moderate Concern as biologists fear that it may become a species in decline (Fernández et al. 2006). Western Sandpipers stage along the Pacific coast in spectacularly large numbers with a population estimated at 3,500,000 (Morrison et al. 2006). Congregating in such great numbers, a disaster such as an oil spill could have a devastating effect on its population.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) identify the first definitive record of Western Sandpiper for Niagara. In the first week of September 1897 (exact date unknown) James Savage collected one bird in Fort Erie (present location unknown). Sheppard (1970) states “The Western Sandpiper can only be considered as a rare to very rare migrant through the area.”

The Western Sandpiper has been an irregular visitor to Niagara during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. In adjacent Norfolk Region, the shale and rocky Lake Erie shoreline at Rock Point Provincial Park has attracted shorebirds in fairly large numbers over the years with more than 55% of the Western Sandpiper records in the BOS

Noteworthy Records coming from this location. Western Sandpiper numbers have clearly diminished in the last decade in Niagara. During this period Niagara area birders have reported six observations, and a further 26 are known from the Niagara portion of the BOS study area (BOSNR). Of the 32 sightings, 28 were found between the 30 years from 1966 to 1995, and only four in the 11 years from 1996 to 2006. The earliest date this species was observed in Niagara is 25 May 1994 at the Smithville sewage ponds (Jukka Jantunen, Kayo Roy), and the latest date is 15 November 1970 from Morgan’s Point (BOSNR).

The Western Sandpiper breeds in Alaska from the mouth of the Kuskokwim River north to the vicinity of Point Barrow and Camden Bay. It winters primarily along the Pacific coast

from California to Peru and locally along the Atlantic coast from southern New Jersey to the Gulf Coast, inland to the Salton Sea in California and south to central Mexico (Wilson 1994).

Kayo J. Roy

Western Sandpiper
Jean Iron



Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*

Common spring, summer and fall transient

The smallest of the North American “peeps,” Least Sandpipers are birds of sewage ponds, mud flats and marshy areas, at least in Niagara. Eastern populations passing through Niagara winter in northeastern South America and breed along coastal tundra in northern Ontario and farther south in peat lands and sedge fens in the northern boreal forest. This is an impressive migration for a bird that weighs only about 20 grams.

Historically, Least Sandpipers have been a fairly common migrant throughout Niagara in spring and fall. Spring migrants travel through the region relatively quickly beginning in the last week of April, with most birds having moved on by the last week of May. The earliest spring arrival date for Least Sandpiper in Niagara is 27 April 1980, when a single bird was observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (BOSNR). Numbers vary annually from lows of only a few birds to highs of nearly 70 at the peak of the migration period.

Extraordinary counts of up to 200 individuals have been recorded in favourable habitat, but numbers are usually much lower. Least Sandpipers are habitually found probing or pecking in damp mud at the margins of ponds, sewage lagoons, marshes, ditches, river banks and flooded agricultural fields and are often mixed in with Semipalmated Plovers, Semipalmated Sandpipers and other shorebirds.

During the southbound migration individuals or small numbers of adults return to Niagara as early as late June or early July. Research at Northbluff Point in James Bay in the 1970s was able to determine that fall migrants banded in James Bay, moved to staging areas in southern Ontario and other eastern provinces (Morrison 1978). The adults have already begun their body molt and appear dull brown and a little dishevelled in appearance. Adults do not usually stay long in Niagara and by the time juveniles begin to arrive at the end of July, most of the adults have already passed through the region. Juveniles have a much crisper appearance than the adults and can be distinguished by their bright rufous colouration. They are often one of the more common shorebirds in the area during late August. Since 2000 most BOS August shorebird counts contain several hundred Least Sandpipers, including a high of 420 in 2005. This species remains common throughout much of September, but by early October most birds have moved out of the area. They are usually absent from the BOS October counts during the second Sunday in the month, but a few individuals have been reported in the area as late as the first week of November. The latest date of observation is 7 November 1999, when a single bird was seen at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR).

Mark K. Peck

Least Sandpiper
Jean Iron



BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 34 of 41 counts, maximum of 69 birds in 1997

BOS October Count: Reported on 12 of 40 counts, maximum of 35 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 249 and 1,497

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

Uncommon spring, summer and fall transient

White-rumped Sandpiper
Jean Iron



BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1986

BOS October Count: Reported on 5 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1966

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 4 and 17 birds

The White-rumped Sandpiper, weighing only 40-60g, accomplishes one of the most remarkable annual migrations between its breeding grounds in the northern Canadian arctic and its wintering areas in southern South America, a one-way flight of well over 13,000 km. In spring, the majority move northward, west of Niagara, traveling through central North America to their arctic breeding grounds. During southward migration, most travel east of Niagara through James Bay, the Gulf of St Lawrence and the northeastern United States before flying to northern South America across the Atlantic Ocean.

White-rumped Sandpipers are one of the more uncommon annual shorebird species to be found in Niagara in both spring and fall (Shepard 1970). Most daily sightings involve fewer than 10 birds, usually one or two individuals mixed in with a flock of Semipalmated Sandpipers. They are one of the last shorebird species to move through the region in the spring. Considered an uncommon transient during the May BOS counts, White-rumped Sandpipers usually do not arrive in Niagara until mid-to late May or early June and may be found until mid-to

late June. The earliest record is of a single bird seen at the Smithville sewage ponds on 20 April 1994 (HNCNR).

Most adults begin to return from their breeding grounds in mid-to late August and remain uncommon and unreliable on both the August and October shorebird counts. As in the spring, they are often encountered in mixed flocks on mudflats and marshy areas on or near the Lake Erie shoreline. Juveniles are similar in shape to adults but have a crisper look with white fringing on back feathers and coverts. Like the adults, juveniles also move through Niagara later than most species, often not arriving until late September or early October, some remaining into November. The latest fall record is of a single bird seen by Dan Salisbury at Morgan's Point near Burnaby on 11 November 1969 (BOSNR).

Mark K. Peck

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*

Uncommon summer and fall transient

Baird's Sandpipers are similar in size, shape and appearance to White-rumped Sandpipers. They also share a comparable and just as remarkable spring migration starting in the pampas of southern South America, continuing through interior North America and finishing in the Arctic tundra regions of northern Alaska and Canada. They tend to favour grassland and drier habitat throughout their winter and staging areas, while White-rumped Sandpipers frequent more coastal environments. In Niagara, both species are often found in mixed flocks with other "peeps" and medium-sized shorebirds.

During spring, migrating Baird's Sandpipers are seldom found east of the Prairies, and observations of individuals in southern Ontario are extremely rare. There have been no sightings reported during BOS May shorebird counts, and only a few records exist from nearby Hamilton, usually in late May or early June (Curry 2006). The earliest Niagara record is of two birds seen at Fort Erie on 9 June 1994 (BOSNR).

There are irregular records of adults returning through southern Ontario in late July and August, but most of the birds passing through Niagara are juveniles, which are known to be more widely distributed during their southward migration. They begin to show up in mid-August and, like the adults, are found individually or in small numbers often in sewage lagoons or mudflats but also occasionally along the Lake Erie shoreline. Juveniles can be distinguished from adults by their fresh, clean plumage and their scaly appearance caused by whitish terminal banding on the upperparts of the bird. During the BOS August counts one or two Baird's Sandpipers are generally reported annually with high counts of 11, 11, and 13 in 2002, 2004, and 2005, respectively. They are often found in mixed shorebird flocks containing Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers. By mid-October most of the Baird's Sandpipers have passed through Niagara and sightings during the October BOS counts are rare. The latest fall record is of a single bird seen at the St. Davids sewage ponds on 11 November 1981 (BOSNR).

Mark K. Peck

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 9 and 39 birds

Baird's Sandpiper
Harold Stiver





Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Common spring, summer and fall transient

Pectoral Sandpiper
Brandon Holden

BOS April Count: Reported on 11 of 41 counts, maximum of 311 birds in 1981

BOS May Count: Reported on 11 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported on 27 of 40 counts, maximum of 52 birds in 1989

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 71 and 146 birds

Pectoral Sandpipers are one of the first arctic breeding shorebirds to arrive into Niagara each year. Wintering in southern South America, they move northward rapidly, arriving as early as late March or the beginning of April. While most pectorals migrate through the central flyway, it is not uncommon to have several hundred stage in Niagara for several weeks. The largest concentrations, up to 1,000 birds, have been reported from local sewage ponds like Smithville or Avondale, but they may also be found in ephemeral wet grassy areas, pond and river shorelines or along the Lake Erie and Lake Ontario shorelines. The earliest spring arrival date for Pectoral Sandpiper in Niagara is 30 March 1986, when nineteen birds were observed at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). Males usually arrive first. Flock sizes vary from year to year but tend to peak in late April. Too early to head to the Arctic, birds are likely leaving Niagara and moving westward prior to their continued migration northward. The number of birds found in May usually decreases but considerable variation still exists annually. Sightings of this species in early June are rare.

Pectoral Sandpipers breed in wet grass tundra throughout North America and eastern Asia and are often found staging in grassy areas throughout their migration routes and on their wintering grounds. In Ontario, they are frequently found with Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, usually foraging close to shore rather than on open mudflats.

Males are promiscuous, leaving females the sole responsibility for incubation and care of the young. Lack of parental care allows males to leave the breeding grounds early and they often arrive back into Niagara by mid-July. Females start to arrive several weeks later followed by juveniles in early September. Females are noticeably smaller, have less streaking on the breast and may have an all dark bill. Juveniles can be distinguished from adults by their crisp appearance and white-tipped coverts.

The number of Pectoral Sandpipers is generally lower in late summer and autumn than spring but birds can usually be found throughout August and September with a few remaining well into October in most years. The latest date of observation is 17 November 1991, when one bird was seen at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). One of the few shorebird bright spots, Pectoral Sandpipers appear to be showing up more frequently in Niagara and staying around longer into the fall. Whether this is due to increased population numbers, improved habitat or climactic changes is unclear at the present time.

Mark K. Peck

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

Extremely rare spring transient, rare fall transient, winter straggler

As a shorebird migrating through Niagara, the Purple Sandpiper seems to break all of the rules. Individuals of this species begin to arrive in mid-October after all sensible shorebirds have left the area! The earliest arrival date is 12 October 1995, when Alan J. Smith observed a single bird at the Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake (Ontario Shorebird Survey). They are more commonly found foraging and roosting on the icy rocks of the Niagara River, Port Weller or the Lake Erie shoreline as far west as Morgan's Point. There have also been rare reports of this species in sewage lagoons. By April, when other shorebirds are starting to return, they have already left the area and are beginning to move northward to breeding grounds in the High Arctic. The latest Niagara record is of three birds on 20 April 1981 in the rapids above Niagara Falls (BOSNR). There is also a Fifty Point Conservation Area sighting of three birds on 26 and 27 May (HNCNR); however, it is not known if these birds were on the Hamilton or Niagara side of the Conservation Area.

Purple Sandpipers are the only shorebird that one might expect to see during the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts, though a sighting is far from certain in most years. One or two birds are regularly reported on some of the rocky outcrops in the upper rapids above Niagara Falls during peak gull watching in late November; however, any rocky shores with bivalves and other aquatic invertebrates and vegetation is worth checking. With the greater potential for open water shorelines during winter and the introduction of zebra mussels into this area, birders might expect to see more of these chunky shorebirds in the future.

The majority of Purple Sandpipers winter along the rocky coastlines of the North Atlantic including Iceland, southwest Greenland, the Atlantic Provinces and the New England states. In Ontario, they are found in small numbers in suitable sites around the Great Lakes and the St Lawrence River. They are often observed quietly roosting on rocks near the water's

edge and are habitually quite approachable. Most sightings in Niagara are of one or two birds, although larger flocks are occasionally reported (Sheppard 1970). A record number of nine birds were observed on 12 November 2006 on the rocky shoreline of the Port Weller east pier (JEB, KJR).

Owing to the late arrival of the Purple Sandpiper in Niagara, the juvenile plumage has already been molted, making the aging of birds in the field challenging. Adults will look clean and crisp in their winter plumage with freshly molted primaries and secondaries. Birds born the previous summer will have slightly faded primaries and white-tipped coverts on the lower wing.

Mark K. Peck

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1989

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 10 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds on the 1990 BOS CBC

Purple Sandpiper
Barry Cheriére



Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Common spring, summer and fall transient

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 315 birds in 2000

BOS October Count: Reported on 29 of 40 counts, maximum of 213 birds in 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on the 1987 and 2001 Port Colborne CBCs

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 4 and 6 birds

Dunlins are a cosmopolitan species with several populations recognized around the world. The subspecies *C. a. hudsonia* winters in coastal areas in eastern Mexico and the eastern United States, commonly occurring as far north as New Jersey. This is the subspecies that migrates through southern Ontario. Common historically, in both spring and fall (Sheppard 1970), Dunlin stage in Niagara throughout April and May before continuing their migration to breeding grounds along the western side of Hudson Bay and the central Canadian Arctic. In Ontario, they nest in wet grassy tundra along the northern shores of James Bay and the southern shores of Hudson Bay from mid-June to late July. They are considered an uncommon breeding species in the province with an estimated population of a few thousand (Ross et al. 2003).

Small numbers of Dunlin begin arriving in Niagara in mid-April, with numbers reaching their peak during the last two weeks of May. The earliest spring arrival date for Dunlin in Niagara is 8 April 1981, when a single bird was observed at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). In good years, there may be several hundred birds scattered on mudflats and marsh shorelines throughout Niagara. The northeast corner of Lake Erie from Fort Erie to Mohawk Point and all sewage ponds provide excellent feeding sites for this species in spring and fall provided mudflats are exposed. As with most other shorebird species in

Niagara, numbers quickly dissipate by early June; any stragglers in the area are likely immature birds or non-breeders.

Dunlin are one of the last shorebird species to return to southern Ontario in the fall. Most birds delay their southbound migration until they have completed their prebasal molt on the breeding grounds (Holmes 1971). Juveniles and adults often arrive together but can be distinguished from each other with careful observation. Adults have a grey-hooded appearance while juveniles appear whiter on the throat and usually retain some rufous-coloured coverts and tertials throughout the winter. It is unusual to have Dunlins reported during the BOS



Dunlin
Brandon Holden

August shorebird counts. Most sightings of this species occur after mid-September with some birds remaining in the area into January. Sitting on rocks above the falls, the winter birds can easily be mistaken for Purple Sandpipers. Dunlin is usually the most common shorebird encountered during the BOS October counts, but since 1994, numbers have declined dramatically with only a few birds now being reported annually. The cause for this decrease is unclear, but it is interesting to note that Dunlin are the only shorebird to show such an obvious autumnal decline. Interestingly, the decline is only in the autumn, since spring numbers remain reasonably high. This would suggest that localized conditions such as loss of suitable habitat, changes in water levels or climatic conditions may have impacted this species in this area. However, declines have also been noted in the Hamilton area (Curry 2006) and recent population trends indicate a significant decline since the 1970s (Morrison and Hicklin 2001).

Mark K. Peck

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Extremely rare visitor

The Curlew Sandpiper is an elegant Eurasian shorebird and is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. This species is known to wander, and a number of individuals appear annually in North America along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts as well as at numerous inland locations.

There are four recorded observations for Niagara. The first was a definitive basic plumaged bird that was discovered by Robert Curry and Angela Thomas at Morgan's Point near Burnaby on 21 August 1965. It remained in the area until collected on 11 September 1965. The specimen (skin) is at the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York (BSNS # 5072) (Roy 2001). The second record is that of a definitive alternate plumaged individual that was located by John Black, Paul Benham and Daniel Salisbury on 18 July 1971 at Waverley Beach, Fort Erie. It was last seen there on 20 July 1971 (Roy 2002).

Kayo Roy, Alan J. Smith and Rob Wilson identified a molting adult bird on 30 August 1992 as it fed in the west cell of the Avondale sewage ponds (now known as the Parmalat sewage ponds), Niagara-on-the-Lake. This very colourful individual, still retaining a considerable amount of its bright chestnut breeding plumage, was last observed on 31 August 1992 (Bain 1993). On 16 May 2002, Thomas Crooks, David Don, and Cheryl Edgecombe found a definitive alternate plumaged male at the Smithville sewage ponds (Crins 2003, 2006).

The Curlew Sandpiper breeds on the Arctic tundra of northern Siberia and winters widely in Africa, southern Asia, and Australia (Paulson 1993).

Kayo J. Roy

Curlew Sandpiper
Brandon Holden



Post-2006 Observation

On 28 September 2008, while scoping shorebirds along the rocky Lake Erie shoreline at the old Erie Beach Ferry Pier in Fort Erie, Peter Yoerg came upon a juvenile shorebird that he initially found difficult to identify. Over several days this careful Buffalo, New York birder was drawn back to Fort Erie to further study the bird that had now moved to the adjacent Jaeger Rocks area. He finally concluded that this bird was indeed a Curlew Sandpiper and many birders flocked to see this rare for Niagara visitor. The bird, shown above, was not observed after 14 October 2008 (BOSNR, Richards 2009).

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*

Extremely rare spring transient, rare summer and fall transient

Stilt Sandpipers winter in freshwater inland sites of Central America and central South America prior to leaving for breeding grounds in low arctic coastal sites in central and western North America, including northern Ontario. In spring, birds move northward through the central states and provinces. Sightings in Niagara or elsewhere in southern Ontario during this time are rare. The recent spring records are of individuals or very small numbers of birds arriving between mid-May and mid-June. Most stay for only a day or two before moving on. The earliest record is of one bird seen at the Smithville sewage ponds on 12 May 1980 (BOSNR).

The southbound migration occurs on a slightly broader swath, especially for juveniles, and sightings of Stilt Sandpipers are more common at this time. Sexes cannot be

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1980 and 1986

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 6 and 7 birds



determined in the field, but, like most other shorebird species, juveniles can be identified by their fresher plumage and the pale fringing on wing coverts and upperparts.

Stilt Sandpipers are most often found in sewage lagoons or shallow ponds. Typically two to three birds are found in an area, and flocks are rarely larger than 15. They often forage in water up to their bellies with their heads fully submerged. In southern Ontario, they are regularly seen in the company of yellowlegs and dowitchers. Birds have been reported from early July through mid-October, with most sightings occurring from late July to mid-August. The latest fall record is of seven birds seen at the Smithville sewage ponds on 14 October 1996 (HNCNR).

Mark K. Peck



Buff-breasted Sandpiper

Tryngites subruficollis

Rare summer and fall transient

There is something serene about Buff-breasted Sandpipers whether on the breeding grounds or during migration. The birds are quiet and trustful, often allowing close approach. Their short bill and dovelike appearance while foraging are unique among shorebirds.

The forested areas of eastern North America were never particularly conducive to most shorebird species, and Buff-breasted Sandpipers are not reported in Niagara during spring migration. Birds leave the grasslands of southern South America in February and March and head to breeding sites in the western and central Arctic of North America.

Stilt Sandpiper
Harold Stiver

Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Eric Holden

During southbound migrations, adults return along a similar course, while juveniles disperse over a broader range (Lanctot and Laredo 1994), infrequently passing through Niagara in late August through mid-September. The earliest date is 12 August 1997, when two birds were reported from the Grimsby sewage ponds by Alan J. Smith (Ontario Shorebird Survey).

In Niagara Buff-breasted Sandpipers have been found in a variety of habitats including shorelines, beaches, small ponds, sewage lagoons, pasturelands and sod farms. They are usually found individually or in small numbers and are generally apart from other shorebird species. They often remain in the area for several days before moving on. Juveniles can be differentiated from adults, with careful observation, by their clean, fresh plumage and scaly appearance on their back and scapulars. The latest date is 27 September 1980, when one bird was seen at the St. Davids sewage ponds (BOSNR).

Mark K. Peck

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: Not reported

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Extremely rare visitor

A breeding male Ruff has the most varied individual plumage within a species as no two males are ever identical (Bird 2004). This remarkable Old World shorebird (the female is called a Reeve) is regularly found in North America. Nonetheless, the species is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. Over the years, there have been numerous reports of Ruff observations from neighbouring Norfolk Region and Hamilton, but the first record of this species for Niagara is that of a Reeve found by Richard Brownstein, Robert Andrlé and Arthur Schaffner on 26 July 1957 near Crystal Beach. This individual was collected and is at the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York (BSNS # 4061) (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). On 21 July 1962, Kenneth Able and Richard Rosche observed a Ruff at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, there have been only eight reported occurrences of Ruff for Niagara. A Ruff was reported from Morgan's Point near Burnaby from 30 July-4 August 1966 (Daniel Salisbury and others, BOSNR). On 26 July 1967, exactly ten years to the very date he collected his first Niagara Reeve, Robert Andrlé collected his second, this time at Rathfon Point near Port Colborne (Sheppard 1970). On 22 August 1971, Edward Seeber located a Ruff at Port Colborne (BOSNR). On 16 July 1981, Harold Axtell and others identified a Ruff at the St. Davids sewage ponds. It was last observed there on 19 July 1981 (BOSNR). On 18 July 1984, Harold Axtell and others observed a Ruff at Erie Beach in Fort Erie that was last seen there on 19 July 1984 (BOSNR).

The Smithville sewage ponds have provided three of the four most recent Niagara records of Ruff. On 3 July 1989, Kevin McLaughlin studied two early males in the southwest pond. One bird, an alternate plumaged individual in rich chestnut-orange-black colours remained for only one day; the second bird, in prebasic molt, mostly black with some white and chestnut colours, was last seen on 15 July 1989 (Curry 2006). On 23 April 1994, at the same Smithville sewage ponds, Michael King located an extremely early black plumaged Ruff that was last observed on 29 April 1994 (Curry 2006). On 16 May 1992, William Crins discovered a Ruff at the Grimsby sewage ponds. This bird was not seen after 17 May 1992 (Curry 2006).

The Ruff is a common breeder from Britain and Scandinavia east to eastern Siberia and once in Alaska. Wintering grounds are primarily in sub-Saharan Africa, with smaller numbers through Western Europe, the Middle East, India, Indochina and southern Australia. It is a rare but a regular migrant in Alaska, along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and casual through the interior (O'Brien et al. 2006).

Kayo J. Roy

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*

Uncommon spring, summer and fall transient

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 18 of 41 counts, maximum of 56 birds in 1987

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1992

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 30 and 101 birds

Short-billed Dowitchers migrating northward from their coastal wintering sites in the southern United States, Central America and northern South America move into Niagara from mid-May to early June. They arrive individually or in small flocks and then move on a day or two later. Rare sightings have also occurred in early May and usually involve one or two birds only. An exceptionally early sighting is of a single bird at the Smithville sewage ponds on 28 April 1978 (HNCNR). Short-billed Dowitchers are poorly named. Their bill is almost twice the length of the head and easily distinguishes both dowitcher species from most other shorebird species except snipe and woodcock. Sewage ponds and shallow muddy ponds are the preferred habitat, but this species has also been recorded in similar, suitable habitat along the Lake Erie shoreline.

Sightings in late summer and fall are more common and extend over a wider time period as birds move at a more leisurely pace southward to coastal wintering sites of the southern United States, Central America and northern South America. Arrivals may begin in late June though most observations take place from mid-July to early September. Numbers are variable. Most sightings involve fewer than five individuals, but rare flocks of up to 50 birds have been recorded. Juveniles begin to arrive as early as mid-August. Their fresh, newly grown feathers distinguish them from most adults which already show signs of heavy body molt. Subspecies identification of adults and juveniles during autumn can be extremely difficult. Most dowitchers have left the area by early October. The latest date is 28 September 1998, when Alan J. Smith observed a single bird at the Avondale sewage ponds (Ontario Shorebird Survey).

Short-billed Dowitchers
Harold Stiver

Mark K. Peck



Long-billed Dowitcher

Limnodromus scolopaceus

Extremely rare spring and rare fall transient

Long-billed Dowitchers winter in the southern United States and Mexico. Their ranges overlap with Short-billed Dowitchers and distinguishing between the two species in basic plumage is difficult. Fortunately, with careful study, birds passing through Niagara en route to wet, grassy breeding sites in eastern Russia and the northwest corner of North America can be reliably identified. Spring sightings in Niagara are rare, but most occur in late April to mid-May, earlier than most migrating Short-billed Dowitchers. The earliest



recorded date is of a single bird at the Smithville sewage ponds on 2 May 1987 (HNCNR). Like all dowitchers, they favour lagoons and other mudflats and are easily identified by their “sewing machine” probing. When actively foraging, their heads are often submerged below the surface. Spring visits are of short duration.

Autumnal visits by Long-billed Dowitchers generally occur later than the visits of Short-billed Dowitchers, although it is not unheard of to have a mixed dowitcher flock with one or two long-bills included. Birds will often stay in the area for a week or more. Once again sewage lagoons and marshy mudflats provide favoured habitat. Juveniles are much less colourful than adults and are more likely to be confused with Short-billed Dowitchers. Due to their late arrival, juveniles may have already started their molt into their winter plumage. There have been a few sightings in early August, but most observations occur in September and October and involve one or two birds. The latest record is of a single bird observed on 1 November 1966 at Port Colborne (BOSNR).

Mark K. Peck

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*

Uncommon summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

Wilson's Snipe is one of the most abundant and widespread shorebirds in North America, with an estimated population size of 2 million birds (Morrison et al. 2006). In 2002 they were recognized and separated from several other snipe species on the basis of winnowing sounds associated with differences in their outer tail feathers (Banks et al. 2002).

Wilson's Snipe return from their wintering grounds in central America and the southern United States in late March through to May. The earliest spring arrival date for Wilson's Snipe in Niagara is 24 March 1989, when a single bird was reported from Lincoln Township (BOSNR). Although they breed in Niagara, snipe are more apt to be

Long-billed Dowitcher
Harold Stiver

BOS April Count: Not reported
BOS May Count: Reported on
2 of 41 counts, maximum of
6 birds in 1980

BOS October Count: Reported
on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 1980

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

BOS Shorebird Count Totals:
(1952-1956) and (2002-2006),
1 and 0 birds



Wilson's Snipe
Raymond Barlow

First Atlas: 4 squares confirmed,
12 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 2 squares con-
firmed, 12 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
34 of 41 counts, maximum of
26 birds in 1994

BOS May Count: Reported on
14 of 41 counts, maximum of
4 birds in 1973 and 2004

BOS October Count: Reported
on 21 of 40 counts, maximum
of 16 birds in 1986

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 4 of 41 counts,
maximum of 2 birds on the 1991
Niagara Falls CBC

seen and heard on spring evenings during migration as they perform their winnowing display flights. The display flight begins with the bird rising into the air in a wide circle, steadily increasing in height. This is followed by a rapid zigzag pattern upward and then a straight 45 degree winnowing dive. The winnowing sound is produced by air directed from the wings being pushed through the outer rectrices or tail feathers (Tuck 1972). Unlike the similar American Woodcock display, the flight is louder and often repeated several times in succession without the bird landing. This display is performed by both sexes, although less commonly by females. In the south, the display is usually observed in the evening; however, in more northerly Ontario regions, it can be observed both day and night.

Wilson's Snipe breed in shrub wetlands, fens, bogs and wet grassy meadows throughout much of Ontario and are found in similar habitat during migration. During their Niagara breeding season, snipe are usually found individually or in small numbers in the habitats described above. In May and June, males may be seen sitting atop fence posts or similar perches along rural roads. Males do not assist with incubation but do assist with the care of the young after they leave the nest. Nests have rarely been documented in Niagara, although adults with recently fledged young are occasionally reported. Determination of the age and sex of birds is difficult or impossible in the field. In the late summer and autumn, some Wilson's Snipe leave their wetland habitat to congregate at sewage ponds, in open areas, agricultural fields and sod farms throughout the region. Snipe have not been reported in the August shorebird counts but are found occasionally during BOS October counts.

Wilson's Snipe and American Woodcock are still hunted in southern Ontario beginning in late September through early January, and both species are considered challenging and exciting quarry. The loss of suitable habitat through changes in agriculture and the buildup of urban areas in Niagara may pose an even greater risk to this species in the future.

Mark K. Peck

American Woodcock *Scolopax minor*

Common summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

The American Woodcock is one of the first shorebirds to return to Niagara in the spring and one of the last to leave in the fall. They breed in the region, are one of only two shorebirds still legally hunted, and, unfortunately, are a common window or tower kill casualty. Yet they are easily missed by many birders each year. The reason is simple. Woodcocks are a little different from other shorebirds. They are largely nocturnal, solitary and secretive, and they do not often associate with other species of shorebirds. Although they feed during the day and are found in a variety of habitats including shrubby fields, willow and alder thickets, secondary growth wooded areas, swamps and bogs, they are repeatedly overlooked because they are magnificently camouflaged.

American Woodcock begin to arrive in Ontario from wintering sites in southeastern United States as early as late February, though most birds are discovered in mid- to late March (Curry 2006). The earliest spring arrival date for American Woodcock in Niagara is 15 March 1971, when a single bird was reported from Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). This is also the time when woodcock regularly show up in cities and other urban environments, seemingly disoriented from their nocturnal migrations.

First Atlas: 11 squares confirmed, 9 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 18 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 26 of 41 counts, maximum of 18 birds in 1972

BOS May Count: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 16 birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported on 10 of 40 counts, maximum of 23 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1983 BOS CBC and the 1987 Niagara Falls and Port Colborne CBCs

BOS Shorebird Count Totals: (1952-1956) and (2002-2006), 2 and 0 birds



American Woodcock
Sam Barone

During cold spells, birds will occasionally congregate in areas of open water; roadside ditches, creeks and ponds near wooded areas and fields where they are able to probe for earthworms and other invertebrates.

American Woodcock are polygamous and the larger females are responsible for incubation and brood rearing. They are one of Niagara's earliest ground nesting species. Six nests, with egg dates ranging from 6 April through 29 May, have been documented throughout Niagara (Ontario Nest Records Scheme). Young leave the nest within hours of the eggs hatching.

The fall migration begins in late September with the bulk of the birds leaving Niagara throughout October (Keppie and Whiting 1994). In mild years birds may remain in the region into late December. American Woodcock are undoubtedly under-represented on BOS spring counts and fall shorebird surveys because of their unique habitat requirements and cryptic colouration. However, recent studies indicate declining populations, and they are now considered a Species of High Concern in Canada and are rated a medium conservation concern in southern parts of the province according to the Ontario Shorebird Conservation Plan (Ross et al. 2003). Recent records from Niagara surveys appear to support this finding.

Mark K. Peck

BOS April Count: Not reported
 BOS May Count: Reported on
 9 of 41 counts, maximum of
 3 birds in 2004 and 2006
 BOS October Count:
 Not reported
 Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
 Not reported

Wilson's Phalarope
 Barry Chieriere

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*

Occasional spring transient, rare summer visitor (two nest records), rare fall transient

Although shorebirds spend much of their time near water, very few species are observed swimming on a regular basis. Phalaropes are the exception to the rule. The Wilson's Phalarope is the most terrestrial of the three phalarope species and is often found foraging along pond shorelines or in the wet grasses nearby. It can be easily distinguished in flight by the white rump and lack of wing bars. Red-necked and Red Phalaropes are circumpolar in their distribution and spend much of their winter on the ocean. Wilson's Phalarope, on the other hand, spends little time at sea and has a distribution restricted to North and South America.

While on migration and during the breeding season, all three species can be found on shallow ponds and lakes with grassy edges.

Wilson's Phalaropes commonly breed inland in the shallow prairie marshes of central North America. In Ontario, small numbers are thought to breed annually in western parts of the province, along the James Bay coast and in a few selected breeding locations in southern Ontario. In Niagara, they are best described as an occasional migrant and a rare sporadic breeder with only two documented breeding records.



Phalaropes have a polyandrous mating system that involves the more colourful female laying sequential clutches with as many as four different males. Nesting may be solitary or loosely colonial. Males alone incubate the eggs and care for the young, usually in close proximity to the nest site.

The Wilson's Phalarope usually arrives in Niagara in late April or May and may quickly pass through or, if conditions are suitable, stay to breed. The earliest spring arrival date for Wilson's Phalarope in Niagara is 3 April 1998, when one bird was observed at the St. Davids sewage ponds by Alan J. Smith (Ontario Shorebird Survey). In most areas females arrive before males, although it is not unusual for birds to arrive already paired. Females will stay in an area after incubation has begun and will lay another set of eggs if the first nest is destroyed. There are only two records of nesting from Niagara. On 3 June 1959 two birds were observed at a nest at Long Beach (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). The second record is of a nest containing three eggs observed on 8 June 2002 at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). In 2004 several other pairs were thought to have bred in sewage ponds just outside the Niagara area. Females generally leave Niagara by mid-July. Males and juveniles stay longer but have left by the beginning of October. The latest date of observation is 1 October 1977, when a single bird was reported from the St. Davids sewage ponds (BOSNR).

Juveniles and wintering birds have yellowish legs, while adults in breeding plumage boast dark grey or black leg colourings. Females are more brightly coloured and are almost one third larger than males.

Mark K. Peck

Red-necked Phalarope

Phalaropus lobatus

Occasional visitor

The delicate and colourful Red-necked Phalarope, formerly Northern Phalarope, is the smallest of the three North American phalaropes. In all of the phalarope species, the female has a more colourful plumage than the males, and their sex-role mating system is reversed. Females compete for males, defend mates, and have the potential to mate with more than one male sequentially while previous mates incubate the eggs and care for the young (Reynolds and Cooke 1988). A Holarctic breeder, the Red-necked Phalarope is well adapted to spending a lot of time on water foraging for food. Unlike other shorebirds, phalaropes have lobed toes that enable them to swim strongly.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) identify several Niagara records of Northern Phalarope prior to 1966. "The Northern Phalarope in the late forties and fifties became almost regular in its appearance on the Niagara, particularly on the wide expanse of river within the gorge immediately below the Falls" (Sheppard 1970).

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) identify several Niagara records of Northern Phalarope prior to 1966. "The Northern Phalarope in the late forties and fifties became almost regular in its appearance on the Niagara, particularly on the wide expanse of river within the gorge immediately below the Falls" (Sheppard 1970).



Red-necked Phalarope
Brandon Holden

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, the Red-necked Phalarope appears to have reverted back to its rare and irregular status. In this 41-year period, 25 records are shown in the BOSNR for Niagara with a further three observations by Niagara area birders. The earliest date this species was observed in Niagara is 23 May 1969 in West Lincoln (BOSNR), and the latest date is 23 December 1968 from Niagara Falls (Harold Lancaster, Gustave Yaki, Sheppard 1970). The present scarcity of this species in Niagara becomes apparent when one considers that out of this total of 28 records, 21 were observed in the 30 years between 1966 and 1995, and only seven in the 11 years from 1996 to 2006. This was the case before the remnants of Hurricane Fran reached Lake Erie from the Carolinas. At least 16 Red-necked Phalaropes spent the period from 8-15 September 1966 at the eastern end of Lake Erie (Curry 1996).

The Red-necked Phalarope breeds across the Arctic and subarctic latitudes from Alaska to Newfoundland. It winters on the southern oceans (Paulson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Occasional visitor



Red Phalarope
Barry Cherriere

The circumpolar Red Phalarope, first described by Linnaeus in his work *Systema Naturae* published in 1758, is the most pelagic of the three North American phalaropes. Unusual for a shorebird, its migratory route and wintering grounds are entirely pelagic (Tracy et al. 2002). With its striking rich chestnut colour during the breeding season, the female exhibits a more colourful plumage than the male. Like other phalaropes, the Red Phalaropes sex-role mating system is reversed with the male incubating and caring for the young, while the female may mate with more than one male sequentially (Mayfield 1978). Phalaropes forage along shorelines and, in addition, have a unique feeding technique in water. They swim in a small rapid circle forming a small whirlpool. This spinning action raises food to the surface from the edges or bottoms of shallow ponds for easy consumption.

Edward Ulrich discovered the first Red Phalarope for Niagara on 6 October 1935 at Erie Beach, Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). This publication describes in detail all observations of Red Phalarope in Niagara prior to 1966.

The Red Phalarope has in the last decade become extremely rare with only one reported Niagara observation in the 11-year period from 1996 to 2006. Four Red Phalaropes were observed between 8-15 September 2006 at the eastern end of Lake Erie, likely displaced there from the Carolinas by the remnants of Hurricane Fran (Curry 1996). In the prior 30-year period from 1966 to 1995, 15 records were reported by the BOSNR for Niagara, and a further four observations were documented by Niagara area birders. The earliest date this species was observed in Niagara is 16 September 1972 in Chippawa, and the latest date is 21 December 1975 from Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR).

The Red Phalarope breeds across the Arctic from northern Alaska to northern Quebec and across northern Eurasia. It winters on tropical and southern oceans, but mostly on the eastern Pacific and the eastern Atlantic (Paulson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy



Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Occasional fall and winter visitor

This relatively small, slender, circumpolar seabird is closely related to the gull family Laridae. Probably the most abundant of all gull species, this bird is truly a “seagull” because it spends all of its life on the oceans (Gustave Yaki pers. comm.). Grant (1986) suggests it is almost exclusively a marine and coastal gull. The name kittiwake is derived from the bird's peculiar cry, and the scientific name meaning “three-toed” comes from the fact that the hind toe on the foot is just a slight bump rather than a full fourth toe (Baird 1994).

The Black-legged Kittiwake is an occasional fall and winter visitor to Niagara, likely travelling down the St. Lawrence River from the large nesting colonies along the Atlantic coast. The first known recorded observation of this species in Niagara was on 9 November 1939, and Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) describe the occurrences of this species up to 1965.

The Black-legged Kittiwake, when present, can be found in Niagara as early as mid-September (1972 and 1996) but usually begins to appear from early November to late December (BOSNR). It has also been observed into the New Year with six known reports for January (1968, 1970, 1994 and 1995), one in February 1999, two in March 1970, and one in May 1968 (BOSNR). There also is one very unusual record for August 1990 (BOSNR). The bulk of these sightings are from the Niagara River between Queenston and Niagara Falls; however, the species has on occasion been discovered along the Lake Ontario shoreline between Niagara-on-the-Lake westward to the Niagara portion of the Fifty Point Conservation Area, the Welland Canal, and Lake Erie in both Fort Erie and Port Colborne.

Black-legged Kittiwake
Jean Iron

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 9 of 41 counts,
maximum of 2 birds on the
1991 BOS CBC

Earliest Date: 19 August 1990,
1 bird, Fifty Point Conservation
Area (HNCNR)

Latest Date: 4 May 1968,
1 bird, Point Abino (BOSNR)

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, only a very few of the more than 100 sightings of Black-legged Kittiwake on the Niagara River have been verified as birds in adult plumage (BOSNR). Multiple numbers of this species observed on a single day is uncommon; however, Daniel Salisbury discovered five birds on 29 November 1969 (Sheppard 1970). There are seven records of two birds, and only one record of three birds (BOSNR).

The Black-legged Kittiwake is known to breed on the Arctic coasts of Alaska and Canada, south in the west to the Alaska Panhandle, and in the east to the Gaspé Peninsula. It winters at sea in the Pacific Ocean from southern Alaska to Baja, California, and in the Atlantic Ocean from Labrador to Florida (Baird 1994).

Kayo J. Roy

Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*

Extremely rare visitor

The Ivory Gull is a delicate seabird as rare as it is beautiful. It is Holarctic, nesting at very high latitudes in both the Old and New Worlds. Ivory Gull numbers have declined sharply in Canada, Norway and Russia. In fact, it has experienced one of the greatest population declines ever detected for any bird species in North America, and there is no clear explanation as to the cause (Mallory et al. 2003). Breeding colony surveys suggest that Ivory Gulls have declined by up to 85% in Canada since the 1980s (Stenhouse 2004). As a consequence Ivory Gull is now listed as Endangered under Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA 2008).

The Ivory Gull is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. On 12 March 1910, a gull initially believed to be an Ivory Gull was found and collected in the Niagara River (Reinecke 1912). This bird was later re-examined and measured by James Savage and was determined to be an Iceland Gull (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). An Ivory Gull in pure white adult plumage, the first record of this species for Niagara, was found in December 1924 (exact date unknown, not 1942 as in Sheppard 1970), in flight over

Ivory Gull
Brandon Holden



the Niagara River gorge below the Canadian Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls (Sheppard 1960). Nearly ten years later, on 10 February 1934, (not 19 February 1934 as in Sheppard 1970), William Vaughan observed the second Niagara Ivory Gull, a first-winter, immature bird flying over the rapids above the Canadian Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

The scarcity of this species in Niagara becomes very evident when one considers that it was another 39 years before the third Ivory Gull was found. On 29 December 1973, Alice Ulrich and William Vaughan discovered a first-winter bird in the Niagara River off Dufferin Island in Niagara Falls (BOSNR, Wormington and Curry 1990). This bird was observed at rest on rocks and in flight over the upper rapids of the river. The next day, Harold Lancaster observed the bird off Dufferin Island, and it was last seen on 31 December 1973 at Buckhorn Island State Park in Grand Island, New York (Harold Lancaster pers. comm.). On 22 December 1980, while birding with Robert Andrlé and Harold Axtell, Mary Gustafson found Niagara's fourth Ivory Gull, an immature bird that was easily observed as it foraged for food along the Canadian shoreline of the Niagara River gorge below the Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls. This bird was last observed on 1 January 1981 (BOSNR, Wormington and Curry 1990).

Largely a scavenger, the Ivory Gull shares the territory of the polar bear and Canada's Inuit hunters, feeding on the remains of their kills. This species breeds in the Canadian High Arctic on Ellesmere, Seymour, Devon, Baffin, and Perley Islands and in northern and southeast Greenland. Most of the Ivory Gull population generally winters in and around the ice pack in the Bering Sea, Labrador Sea and Davis Strait, and probably off eastern Greenland, ranging south irregularly to Newfoundland (Howell and Dunn 2007).

Kayo J. Roy



Sabine's Gull
Brandon Holden

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*

Occasional visitor

The fork-tailed Sabine's Gull is a small, graceful and delicate gull with circumpolar distribution throughout northernmost North America and Eurasia. Named after Irish scientist Sir Edward Sabine, this long distance migrant is almost exclusively oceanic. While juveniles and some adults can be seen inland, sufficient regularity exists to suggest that a small percentage of the population must use an overland north-south migration route across North America to wintering areas (Day et al. 2002).

The first Sabine's Gull record for Niagara is that of an individual observed by Mrs. Thomas M. Kelly on 3 October 1937 as it flew along the Ontario shoreline at Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). These two publications identify the many other records for Sabine's Gull prior to 1966.

The Sabine's Gull is an occasional visitor to Niagara. During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, the bird has been generally observed between mid-September and mid-December. A total of 33 documented sightings are known from the Niagara River with seven reports for September, 10 for October, 14 for November and only two for December. Most of the birds found are in immature plumage. The Queenston to Niagara

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 1 of 41 counts,
maximum of 1 bird on the
1995 Niagara Falls CBC

Earliest Date: 3 September
1981, 1 bird, Erie Beach
(BOSNR)

Latest Date: 15 December
1995, 1 bird, Niagara Falls
(BOSNR)

Niagara Falls corridor has produced 20 records and 13 are known from the Fort Erie area (BOSNR).

One further observation exists from Port Weller. On 24 September 1997 Kayo Roy and Alan J. Smith observed one bird associating with Common Terns (BOSNR). Multiple sightings on a single day are somewhat uncommon. The four birds on 26-27 October 1988 at Fort Erie (Willie D'Anna, Peter Yoerg and others) is the record high. On four occasions (1988, 1990, 1995, 1996) three birds were noted, and on two other occasions (1966, 1993) two birds were observed (BOSNR).

In North America, the Sabine's Gull breeds in the coastal wet tundra of the High Arctic from Alaska east to Hudson Bay. It winters in the Southern Hemisphere off the coast of western South America and South Africa (Day et al. 2002).

Kayo J. Roy

Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*

Spring and fall transient, rare summer straggler, very common winter resident

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 28,010 birds in 1997

BOS May Count: Reported on 32 of 41 counts, maximum of 354 birds in 1975

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 12,530 birds in 1988

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 26,187 birds on the 1991 Niagara Falls CBC

The Bonaparte's Gull has been the object of much study on the Niagara River. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) note that prior to 1900 it was classed as a rare migrant by Bergtold (1889) and Short (1893). By 1963, however, it was at times the most common water-bird in the region. On one occasion as many as 10,000 birds gathered in one flock above Niagara Falls. Harold Axtell (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965) notes that years when Bonaparte's Gulls are in great abundance may correlate with years of abundant Emerald Shiner. Hamilton and DeLeon (see their article elsewhere in this book) describe significant increases in numbers of these gulls on April BOS Counts since 1966. Beardslee (1944) provides a month-by-month discussion of numbers, age classes and moults of Bonaparte's Gulls on the Niagara River for an average year. He finds that it became abundant in early April and that by 7 April only about 10% of the birds had developed their full breeding plumage or "hood". But within 10 days, 90% of them had done so. He also describes two waves of autumn migration: one in August-September and one in November-December.

Early spring arrival dates for this species in western Lake Ontario are 7-9 March with scattered individuals lingering through the summer. Autumn arrival dates are 11-12 July with a few individuals lingering until 14-15 January (Curry 2006).

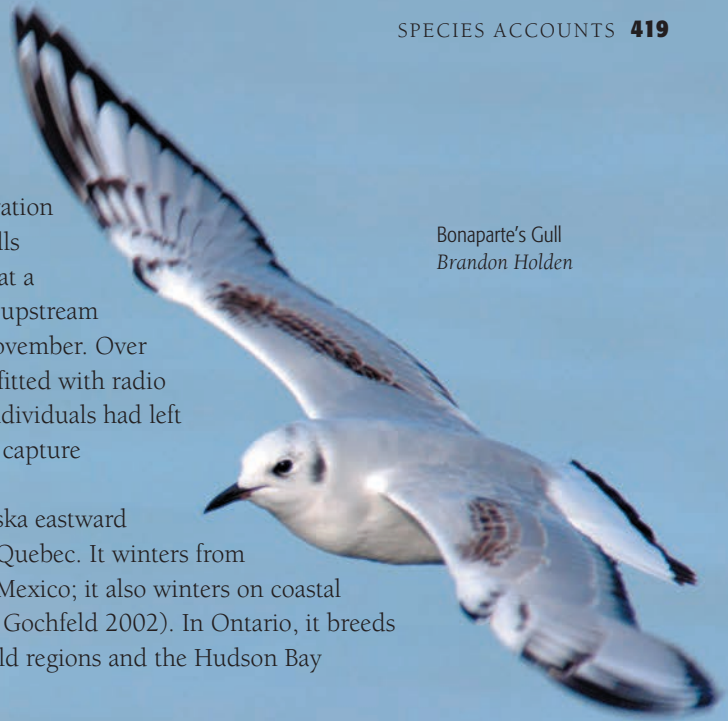
Bellerby (1994) brought to the attention of all birders the spectacular late afternoon-early evening flight of Bonaparte's Gulls down the Niagara River (the "fly-past") to their nocturnal roost at the river's mouth. Kirk et al. (2008) statistically analyzed Bellerby's 1986-1996 data and noted that the roosting flights consisted of 6,300 to 40,000 Bonaparte's Gulls and occurred during October to January or February. The roosting area, which is difficult to see from shore, was visited by boat on 13, 17 and 25 November 1998. It was estimated to extend approximately one kilometre west and three kilometres north of the Rumsey Shoal, which is approximately two nautical miles north of Fort Niagara (Terry Yonker unpubl. data). On those dates, there were an estimated 1,300-1,900 gulls present, but some birds may have been missed and others may have flushed before they were illuminated by the boat's lights. Shore-based radar studies of the roosting activity were undertaken in April 2005; masses of roosting birds in the above area were detected, and the technique will be more extensively applied in the future (Terry Yonker unpubl. data).

In November 2000, a study was undertaken by the Canadian Wildlife Service and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to determine how long individual Bonaparte's Gulls remained on the river. Gulls were cannon-netted at a loafing site on the New York side of the river just upstream from the Adam Beck Generating Station on 28 November. Over 50 birds were captured, and 25 individuals were fitted with radio transmitters (the rest were released). All tagged individuals had left the river by Christmas or within a month of their capture (Chip Weseloh unpubl. data).

The Bonaparte's Gull breeds from western Alaska eastward across northern Alberta to northern Ontario and Quebec. It winters from the mid-Atlantic coast south through the Gulf of Mexico; it also winters on coastal Baja California and the Sea of Cortez (Burger and Gochfeld 2002). In Ontario, it breeds north of Lake Superior in both the Northern Shield regions and the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Sutherland and Pittaway 2007).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Bonaparte's Gull
Brandon Holden



Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Rare winter visitor

The Black-headed Gull is a small migratory Old World gull species which, despite its name, shows a chocolate brown hood rather than a black head for adults in breeding plumage. This noisy, sociable, opportunistic gull of Europe and Asia has successfully spread into the coastal regions of eastern Canada. The Black-headed Gull is not a pelagic species and is rarely seen at sea far from the coastline. It has a long life expectancy, living in the wild to a maximum age of 63 years (Animal Ageing and Longevity Database).

Black-headed Gull
Brandon Holden



BOS April Count: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1982 and 2002

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1966

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on the 1986 Niagara Falls CBC

Earliest Date: 19 August 1994, 2 birds, Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR)

Latest Date: 20 April 2000, 1 bird, Niagara Falls (BOSNR)

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) identified the first two records of Black-headed Gull for Niagara, both in 1959. George North found a breeding plumaged adult on 12 April 1959 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Rachel and Harold Axtell discovered a winter adult bird on 22 November 1959 on the Niagara River in Fort Erie.

The Black-headed Gull is a rare winter visitor to Niagara, having been recorded in 30 of the 41 years of 1966-2006 (BOSNR). Forty-four records of this species are known along the Niagara River from Niagara-on-the-Lake to Niagara Falls. In the years the bird was present, it typically arrived sporadically from early November remaining to late March. Each bird was frequently observed for only a short period of time, with the peak month being November with 15 sightings. There were eight records in December, seven in January, six in February and four into March. Two late records are known for April, and one unusual sighting in August, a straggler Willie D'Anna found on 19 August 1983 in Niagara Falls (BOSNR). On 28 February 1968, Howard Martin and Gustave Yaki discovered a Black-headed Gull on the Niagara River at Niagara-on-the-Lake that was exhibiting some early seasonal plumage change (Sheppard 1970). Additionally there are four records from Fort Erie (Harold Axtell, Paul Benham, Willie D'Anna) and two from Port Weller in St. Catharines (Kayo Roy, Gordon Bellerby, BOSNR). The species was most often viewed at water level from the boat launch area in Queenston where 22 observations were documented.

The Black-headed Gull breeds in Eurasia, and in North America likely only in Newfoundland. It winters in Newfoundland and is uncommon to rare along the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Atlantic Coast south to New Jersey, and casual in the Great Lakes region (Howell and Dunn 2007).

Kayo J. Roy

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Uncommon winter visitor

BOS April Count: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 2001

BOS May Count: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1968 and 1979

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1989

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 29 of 41 counts, maximum of 12 birds on the 1991 Niagara Falls CBC

Earliest Date: 6 July 2003, Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR; Kevin McLaughlin)

Latest Date: 11 May 1975, Erie Beach, Fort Erie (BOSNR)

The Little Gull is a common gull of northern Europe and Asia and is the smallest gull worldwide (Grant 1986). It typically frequents marshes, inland lakes and sheltered coasts and has become regular in small but increasing numbers along the eastern Atlantic seaboard, the Great Lakes basin and Canadian wetlands further north (Ewins and Weseloh 1999).

Prior to 1938, the Little Gull was unknown in Niagara (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). This was perhaps the feeling at the time but more than likely the species may have been overlooked as they flew among the huge flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls in the Niagara River (Bellerby et al. 2000). Sheppard (1970) on the other hand suggests "the Little Gull has been occurring on the Niagara River with surprising regularity for the past three decades." Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) describe in detail observations of this species in Niagara up to 1965.

A comparison of Little Gull staging areas in Ontario indicates that the Niagara River and Long Point might be the most important spring staging areas on the continent for this species (Bellerby et al. 2000). This may perhaps account for the large numbers observed in Niagara, especially in 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1999 (BOSNR). On 2 April 1996, while the "fly-past" of gulls at Niagara-on-the-Lake was being recorded, 78 Little Gulls were observed heading for their nocturnal roost sites on Lake Ontario by Gordon Bellerby, Kayo Roy and Alan J. Smith.



The Little Gull is an uncommon winter visitor to Niagara and has been present in each of the 41 years (1966-2006) of this book. The Little Gull begins to appear on the Niagara River in late July and remains well into May. Over those 41 years, 24 reported sightings were in August, September produced 60 records, and 87 are known for October. In November, sightings increased to 171 while December numbers diminished somewhat to 90 records. January observations increased to 140 and slipped to 130 in February. The number of sightings escalated substantially in March to peak at 289, and while still impressive, April numbers diminished to 251 observations. There were 49 reported for May (BOSNR).

The North American breeding range is poorly known. Confirmed repeated breeding is restricted to the Great Lakes, Hudson Bay and James Bay; isolated single breeding has occurred in the St. Lawrence River and southern Minnesota. In North America, it winters primarily in the Great Lakes area and Hudson-Delaware Region, and the Atlantic provinces south to the Middle Atlantic states (Ewins and Weseloh 1999).

Kayo J. Roy

Little Gulls
Harold Stiver

Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*

Extremely rare visitor

This small, elegant Arctic gull of circumpolar distribution is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. Named after the North Pole explorer James C. Ross, this species is presently listed as Threatened under Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA 2008). Incredibly, over an eleven-month period, three different individuals, all adults in winter plumage, were observed in Niagara at Port Weller, St. Catharines. On 18 December 1994, Barbara Charlton, Rob Dobos and Kevin McLaughlin, while participating in the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count, found the first Ross's Gull for Niagara. They observed the bird going to roost on the east pier of the Welland Canal, and early the next morning birders found only pink feathers at the roost site where the bird was likely killed by the resident Great Horned Owl. Feather specimens were collected and deposited with the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 159517) (Dobos 1996).



Ross's Gull
David Beadle

On 26 February 1995, only two months after the first sighting, Roy Baker and David Milsom found the second Port Weller Ross's Gull. Only traces of its unique black collar and merely a hint of the pink hue of the breast were observed on this winter plumaged adult bird that was last observed on 1 March 1995 (Dobos 1996, m. obs.). Remarkably, on 12 November 1995, Glenn Coady recorded the third Niagara sighting at Fort Erie. This bird, also a winter plumaged adult, moved around Niagara considerably, and it is believed that all of the following sightings are of the same individual. This High Arctic rarity was observed along the Niagara River at Queenston on 19-20 November, over the Whirlpool Rapids on 24-25 November, and at Port Weller, the third observation here in eleven months (where Mary Ellen Hebb found it on 27-28 November). On 1 January 1996, Drew Campbell and Marcy Foster rediscovered this bird at Fort Erie back where it was originally observed seven weeks earlier (Dobos 1997, m. obs.). As rare as this species is and found so

far south of its normal winter range, the 1994-1995 winter months were a banner year for observing Ross's Gulls in the northeast. Accepted records were noted from Montreal, Quebec, 1-11 December, Cape Vincent, New York on 4 January, and Cayuga Lake, New York on 13 January (Dobos 1996).

The fourth record for Niagara is that of a definitive basic Ross's Gull found on 1 December 2002 by Ronald Scovell and others at Niagara Falls, Ontario (Crins 2003). This stunning inhabitant of the Arctic was observed in flight in the Niagara River gorge, weaving in and out of the mist near the base of the Canadian Horseshoe Falls, clearly revealing its diagnostic white, wedge-shaped tail.

The Ross's Gull breeds very locally in northern Canada on southwest Hudson Bay and in Cheyne Island, Nunavut. The main nesting range is along and near the Arctic coast of Russia from the Kolyma Delta west to Taimyr Peninsula. It also breeds in west-central and northern Greenland. It is believed that the Ross's Gull winters in the open waters of the Arctic at the edge of the ice pack and along the northern coast of Alaska. A few birds reach more temperate areas, and on very rare occasions southern Canada and the northern United States (Howell and Dunn 2007). The species much celebrated breeding in the late 1970s on the Hudson Bay lowlands near Churchill, Manitoba was minimal and not considered, by some, to be permanent (Olsen and Larsson 2005).

Kayo J. Roy

Ross's Gull
Michael Harvey



Post-2006 Observation

On 28 January 2008 Brandon Holden observed a definitive basic Ross's Gull in flight over the Ontario side of the Niagara River between the crest of the Canadian Horseshoe Falls and the rusting old barge in the rapids above the falls (Richards 2009, Winnie Poon). Willie D'Anna originally discovered this fifth record of Ross's Gull, as shown, for Niagara the day before on 27 January 2008, while scoping the Niagara River for gulls. He first observed this Ross's Gull at rest on the ice off Goat Island in Niagara Falls, New York. On 29 January 2008, it was identified flying over the Niagara River gorge off the Maid of the Mist boat dock area (Bryan Wylie), and above the Horseshoe Falls at rest on the long, now ice covered, rock island in Canadian waters

near mid-river (Peter Gilchrist, Donald Perks, Wayne Renaud and others). A significant winter storm arrived on 30 January 2008 reducing visibility to near zero; however the bird remained in Ontario waters to 31 January 2008 (Richards 2009). This six-day visit ended at mid-morning on 1 February 2008 when the gull was last observed on Goat Island, New York (Terry Yonker, Lynne Landon).

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

Occasional to rare visitor

Named for its laughter-like call, the attractive Laughing Gull is known to wander from time to time and is an occasional to rare visitor to Niagara. All sightings, with one exception, have been of single individuals that have strayed into the area likely from the east coast of North America. The first known record of Laughing Gull for Niagara occurred on 21 October 1935 when Robert Allen, Warren Eaton, Roger Tory Peterson and L. Walsh observed a bird of this species in Niagara Falls, Ontario (not Niagara Falls, New York, as in Beardslee and Mitchell 1965) when they stopped briefly in the falls area on their way to attend the American Ornithological Union meeting in Toronto (Sheppard 1938).

Six known spring and fall records for Niagara that occurred prior to 1966 are well described in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970).

Seven Laughing Gull sightings exist in Niagara between 1966 and 1996, and surprisingly only one record was reported over the next 10-year period, 1997 to 2006. On 28 October 1967, Daniel Salisbury identified a first-winter plumaged bird at Niagara Falls. On 19 May 1968, an adult bird was discovered at Point Abino on a Niagara Falls Nature Club outing (Sheppard 1970). Seventeen years later on 1 August 1985, Margaret Bain located a summer adult at Niagara-on-the-Lake (Wormington 1986). In the same year on 11 October, Gordon Bellerby found a second-winter plumaged bird also at Niagara-on-the-Lake that remained to at least 18 October 1985 (Wormington 1987). A summer adult bird was studied by Kevin McLaughlin and photographed by Alan Wormington on 3 May 1989 on the grassy grounds of Place Polonaise in Grimsby (Curry 1991, 2006). On 24 January 1993, John and Victoria Carley and Doug McRae identified a first-winter plumaged Laughing Gull at Queenston (Bain 1994). In 1996 the remnants of Hurricane Fran displaced numerous pelagic birds into Lake Erie and Lake Ontario among them numerous Laughing Gulls. From 8-15 November 1996, at least four first-winter plumaged birds were discovered in Fort Erie (Curry 1996). These four birds are the only known multiple number of Laughing Gulls ever observed in Niagara.

On 17 September 2006, Peter Yoerg, William Watson and others identified a second-winter Laughing Gull in Lake Erie at the foot of Kraft Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

This very common North American gull breeds from coastal Maine south along the Atlantic coast, in the Caribbean to southern Texas, and at isolated locations in western Mexico. The species winters from North Carolina south through to southern South America (Burger 1996).

Kayo J. Roy

Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan*

Rare fall and winter visitor

The Franklin's Gull, formerly known as Franklin's Rosy Gull, was at one time no stranger to Regional Niagara. The first known recorded observation of this species is that of an individual found in Fort Erie on 17 October 1937 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). Observations to 1965 are well discussed in these two publications.

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 22 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on both the 1979 BOS and Niagara Falls CBCs

Earliest Date: 14 August 1966, 1 bird, Queenston (BOSNR)

Latest Date: 24 January 1972, 1 bird, Fort Erie (BOSNR)



Franklin's Gull
Barry Cheriére

Franklin's Gull was at one time found annually in Niagara. From 1966 to 1989, more than 160 individuals were well observed and duly documented (BOSNR). The bulk of these observations are of individuals that were located on the Niagara River from the Sir Adam Beck overlook to the Whirlpool Rapids in Niagara Falls. Other locations include Queenston and below and above the Canadian Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls. Significant numbers were also recorded from the Fort Erie area where Franklin's Gull was often observed feeding over the Niagara River or at rest on the grassy areas below or near the Peace Bridge.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Franklin's Gulls began to appear in Niagara around mid-August; however, in more recent times, and in smaller numbers, they seem to arrive by mid-September. More often than not, the birds are in immature plumage and have generally left the area by mid-December. One extremely early record exists for Niagara, an adult bird resting on a rock in Lake Erie off Harbourview Road near Burnaby that was discovered by John Black, Drew Campbell, Brad Clements and Kayo Roy on 19 May 2001. Two records are known for January, both in 1972, a single bird found on 2 January

at Niagara Falls and another individual observed from 15-24 January at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

While most observations are of single birds, numerous multiple observations have occurred with some regularity. The 11 birds recorded by Harold Axtell on 12 September 1975 in Fort Erie and the 10 individuals reported by David Freeland on 14 November 1976 at Niagara Falls are certainly noteworthy numbers (BOSNR).

The Franklin's Gull has today become an irregular visitor with only a few sporadic observations of its presence noted. The diminished presence of this species in Niagara becomes immediately apparent

with only 15 sightings recorded during the 16-year period 1990 to 2006 (BOSNR). Willie D'Anna and Betsy Potter identified the last known sighting, a bird they discovered on 29 October 2006 in Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

The Franklin's Gull breeds in the interior of western North America and winters along the coasts of Peru and Chile (Howell and Dunn 2007).

Kayo J. Roy

Mew Gull *Larus canus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Mew Gull, formerly known as Short-billed Gull, is a delicate and gentle-looking bird that has an extensive range spanning all of the Northern Hemisphere. It is found in Europe, Asia, and North Africa (Felix 1998), where it is known as Common Gull, and considered a separate species.

The complexity of the name of this species is best described by the following. Taxonomically and collectively, the "Mew Gull" is comprised of three subspecies, some

of which are sometimes treated as full species. Those are the European and central Asian breeders (*L. c. canus* group, often referred to as the Mew Gull or the Common Gull), the northeastern Asian breeders (*L. c. kamtschatschensis* group), formerly the Kamchatka Gull and the North American breeders (*L. c. brachyrhynchus*) referred to as the Short-billed Gull, but now known as the Mew Gull), (AOU 1998, Moskoff and Bevier 2002).

In North America, this smallest of all the white-headed gulls is a bird of the Pacific Coast and boreal forest that does not stray far from land (Moskoff and Bevier 2002). It is known to be among the first to seek the shoreline in the occurrence of stormy weather (Bent 1963).

There are no records of Mew Gull prior to 1966 in Beardslee and Mitchell 1965 or Sheppard 1970.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, seven records exist in Niagara for this extremely rare visitor. On 24 October 1967, Daniel Salisbury and Robert Andrlé discovered an adult Mew Gull, the first record for Ontario and Niagara, in the Welland Canal, Port Weller, in St. Catharines. This bird was collected and the specimen is at the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York (BSNS # 5102), (BOSNR, Andrlé and Axtell 1969, Sheppard 1970, Wormington 1987, James 1991). Later the same year, on 28 November 1967, Daniel Salisbury discovered another Mew Gull, this one an immature bird he found at Lock 4 of the Welland Canal in St. Catharines. This bird was observed again on 29 November 1967 (Daniel Salisbury) and on 30 November 1967 (Daniel Salisbury, Robert Andrlé). It was collected and the specimen is also at the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York (BSNS # 5103), (BOSNR, Andrlé and Axtell 1969, Sheppard 1970, Wormington 1987). On 27 January 1968 (not 27 January 1969 as in Sheppard 1970), Daniel Salisbury found his third Mew Gull in Niagara, an immature bird he studied in the Niagara River below Queenston. On 3 February 1968 and on 26 February 1968, Salisbury and others saw this bird again in the same general area of the river near Queenston (Sheppard 1970).

Thirty-four years later, on 25 November 1992, Marlene and Rod Plank with Alan Wormington, Richard Knaption and others identified a winter adult Mew Gull at Niagara Falls (Bain 1993, BOSNR). On 10 November 1996, Sharon Skelly and others located an adult bird in flight over the Niagara River gorge in Niagara Falls (BOSNR). Fifteen days later on 17 November 1996, Robert Curry, Richard Knaption, Kayo Roy and others, standing at the Adam Beck overlook in Niagara Falls, studied a second-basic individual at rest and in flight over the Niagara River (Dobos 1997). On 6 December 2003, Colin Jones, Peter Burke, Willie D'Anna, Burke Koral and others discovered a definitive basic Mew Gull in Niagara Falls. This bird moved to the Queenston area where it was seen on 13, 16 and 18 December 2003 (BOSNR, Crins 2005).

In North America, the Mew Gull breeds through most of Alaska eastward through Yukon, southwestern Northwest Territories, and into northern Saskatchewan, and south along coastal British Columbia to Baja, California. It winters mainly along the Pacific Coast from southeast Alaska south to Baja, California (Moskoff and Bevier 2002).

Kayo J. Roy

Post-2006 Observation

On 6 December 2008 while scoping the Niagara River in Niagara Falls for gulls, Jean Iron drew attention to a different-looking gull that was eventually identified to be a definitive basic Mew Gull, the eighth record of this species for Niagara. Others that contributed to the identification included Willie D'Anna, David Gordon, Kevin McLaughlin, James Pawlicki, Betsy Potter and Ron Pittaway. After a period of study the observers noted some differences in the bird's overall plumage; however, the record was accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee as *Larus Canus* (BOSNR, Richards 2009).



Ring-billed Gull
Kayo Roy

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 5 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
73,493 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
29,622 birds in 2005

BOS October Count: Reported
on 40 of 40 counts, maximum
of 14,527 birds in 1984

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 40 of 41 counts,
maximum of 14,062 birds on
the 1990 Niagara Falls CBC

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

Very common permanent resident

The Ring-billed Gull can be found year round in southern Ontario, at least in small numbers, wherever there is open water. There is, however, a dramatic increase in numbers in western Lake Ontario in early February, which represents the arrival of many migrants (Curry 2006). In the autumn, numbers decline during November-December (Weir 2008).

Although this species is now a very abundant breeding bird in Niagara and the Great Lakes, this has not always been the case. McIlwraith (1894), Eaton (1910), Ludwig (1943), Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) all speak of a time when it was much less common. McIlwraith claims it was common on Lake Ontario but only in winter. Eaton calls it a rare winter visitant in western New York and a sometimes abundant spring migrant on Lake Ontario.

The Ring-billed Gull was not known to nest in the Niagara Region until 1945, when about 50 nests were found on Mohawk (Gull) Island, just west of the boundary of Niagara. By 1960, this colony had grown to 2,000 pairs (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). In 1956, Ring-billed Gulls started nesting in the Niagara River on the old cable-tower island (Tower Island) at the end of the then new 15-arch hydroelectric control-gate weir, part of the International Niagara Control Works structure in Chippawa (Sheppard 1970). Within three years, the Common Terns that had been nesting there

were driven away (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Sheppard (1970) reported that in 1959 about a dozen pairs of Ring-bills first nested “on the Tern colony island near the brink of the Falls” (presumably Table Rock), and by 1970 they had become so numerous that the Common Terns there were nearly eliminated. Also, by 1970, Ring-billed Gulls had started nesting at the Port Colborne lighthouse breakwall.

In the 2007 Great Lakes Colonial Waterbird Decadal census, Ring-billed Gulls were found nesting in the Niagara Area as follows: Mohawk Island (2,201 nests), Port Colborne lighthouse breakwall (2,740 nests), Canada Furnace (Algoma lands) in Port Colborne (31,194 nests), Tower Island (0 nests, but 2,035 nests in 2003) and Table Rock (508 nests), for a total of 36,643 nests in Canada. Five other colonies, totalling over 37,000 nests, were counted in the United States portion of the river and Buffalo Harbour (Connie Adams pers. comm.). Hamilton and DeLeon (see their article elsewhere in this book) show significant increases of this gull species during spring and autumn BOS Counts since 1966. The large numbers of Ring-billed Gulls reported on the BOS Counts can be accounted for by the presence of locally breeding birds from the American and Canadian waters. However, in all likelihood, they also include many passage migrants.

The Ring-billed Gull breeds across central temperate North America from the Atlantic coast to central British Columbia. It winters as far north as the Great Lakes and along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts south of its breeding range but is more common along the shorelines of the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of California (Ryder 1993). In Ontario, it breeds abundantly on the shores and islands of Lake Ontario and eastern Lake Erie, commonly on Lake Huron and much less so on Lake Superior. It also breeds at scattered inland sites (Weseloh 2007c).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

California Gull *Larus californicus*

Rare winter visitor

This mid- to large-sized, white-headed gull is commonly found along the Pacific coast and in the western interior of the United States and Canada. A scavenger, this opportunistic bird will eat anything it can catch. It can be found feeding almost anywhere, in lakes, beaches, landfill sites, farm fields following plows, and like many other gull species, even in public fast food outlet parking lots. In 1848, the California Gull devoured a plague of grasshoppers that threatened the newly settled Mormon first food crop in Utah. To commemorate the averting of this disaster, a gilded statue was erected known as the “Miracle of the Gulls” that still stands today in Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah (Winkler 1966).

There is no mention in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or Sheppard (1970) of the presence of California Gull in Niagara, and there are no records for Ontario prior to 1981. Today however, the species is a rare winter visitor and over the last decade has become more of an annual visitor along the Niagara River. All California Gull records for Niagara are during the months of November, December, January and February. The majority of these records are from mid-November to the end of December, with three records documented for January and two for February (BOSNR).

During the period 1981-2006, 50 Ontario records of California Gull have been accepted by the OBRC (Richards 2008). Of this number, 22 were reported from the Niagara River. The exact number of California Gulls observed over the years along the

river is difficult to ascertain as it is believed that one or more individuals are making return visits to the area, perhaps even annually. Some reports almost certainly represent multiple sightings of the same individual.

On 29 November 1992, Marlene and Rod Plank with Tony Leukering and others discovered Niagara's first California Gull on the Niagara River. They observed an adult bird both in flight and at rest from the Adam Beck overlook in Niagara Falls. The bird remained until 14 February 1993 to the delight of the many birders that flocked to Niagara to add this rare species to their life list or winter list (BOSNR, Bain 1993). Since this first 1992 sighting, the California Gull has been observed on the Niagara River in every year up to 2006 (BOSNR, Bain 1993). Most of these birds have been winter adults, and on occasion more than one California Gull has been present (BOSNR). Away from the Niagara River, on 19 December 1999 during the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count, Kevin McLaughlin, Rob Dobos, George Naylor and Robert Waldhuber discovered a definitive basic California Gull on the Lake Ontario shoreline of Municipal Beach, Port Weller, St. Catharines (Roy 2000).

Jehl (1987) identifies two subspecies of California Gull: *L. c. californicus* (smaller and darker mantled), and *L. c. albertaensis* (larger and lighter mantled). In November 1996, careful observers studied two adult California Gulls on the Niagara River that appeared to have distinctly different mantle shades. While organized records of subspecies are not generally maintained, it is certainly conceivable that both subspecies may occasionally be present on the Niagara River during early winter periods.

The California Gull breeds from southern Northwest Territories south to Oregon and San Francisco Bay, and from Central Alberta and Manitoba south to Colorado and eastern North Dakota.

It winters along the Pacific Coast from southern British Columbia to southern Mexico and inland at scattered western localities (Winkler 1966).

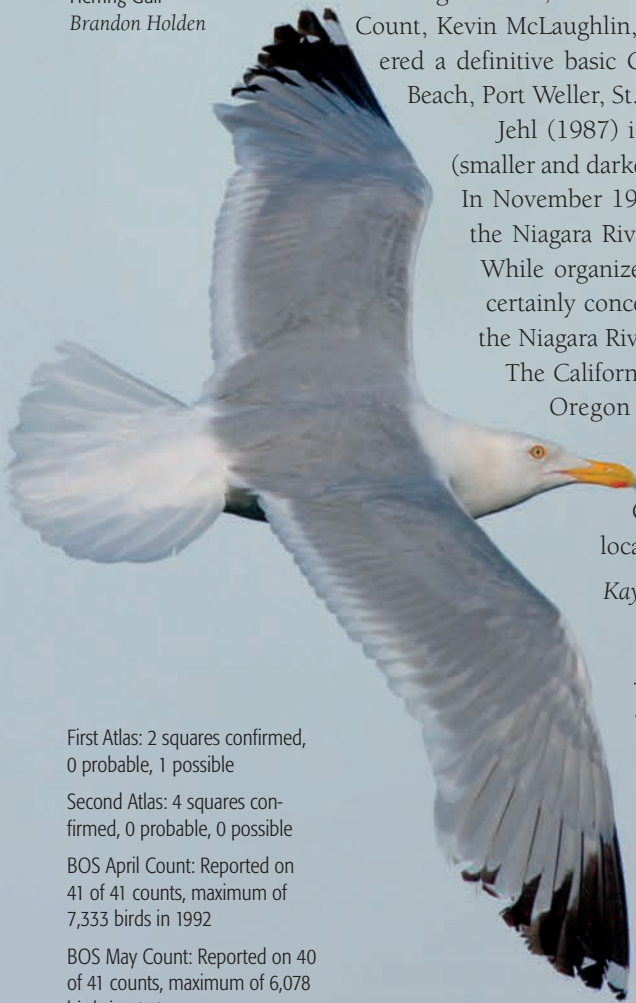
Kayo J. Roy

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Very common winter resident, uncommon summer resident

The Herring Gull is one of the few birds that is both a well-known breeder in Niagara and a very common winter resident; however, this has not always been true. McIlwraith (1894) remarks that "In southern Ontario it is seen only during the winter." It was not reported breeding in (or near) the Niagara until 1943, when a single nest was found at Mohawk Island; there were six nests in 1948 and 35 by 1960 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). More recently, there were 253 nests counted on Mohawk Island in 2007. (See the article by Morris elsewhere in this book). Sheppard (1970) noted the first Herring Gulls nesting in the Niagara River in 1956 on the large island almost at the brink of the Horseshoe Falls. Herring Gulls also nest on one of the islands in the middle of the river near the stranded barge just above the falls. This location has been used as an annual

Herring Gull
Brandon Holden



First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 7,333 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 6,078 birds in 1978

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 7,636 birds in 1981

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 27,464 birds on the 1990 Niagara Falls CBC

monitoring site for contaminants in Herring Gull eggs by the Canadian Wildlife Service since 1979, when 44 nests were counted. Since then the number of Herring Gull nests has fluctuated from a high of 66 in 1993 to a low of only 20 in 2009. Additional documentation on the increase in Herring Gulls on BOS April Counts, since 1965, is available in the article by Hamilton and DeLeon elsewhere in this book.

Another well-known colony in Niagara is at the Port Colborne breakwall. The earliest count for this site indicates 28 nests there in 1972. This number increased steadily to 226 nests in 1999. However, by 2007, the number had declined to 158. At the nearby Canada Furnace (Algoma lands) colony, there were 21 nests in 1973 and 75 in 1987. Since then, the nest numbers there have steadily declined to 32 in 1990, 4 in 1999 and 0 in 2007. (See the article by Morris elsewhere in this book for further details.)

The numbers of Herring Gulls reported above during the BOS Counts, especially in April and May, seem unusually high, given only the few hundred which nest in the region. Perhaps many of them are immature birds congregating there at those times. The much larger numbers recorded on the Christmas Bird Counts indicate the scale of the winter influx (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965) and probably reflect numbers of migrant Herring Gulls from the upper Great Lakes coming into the region.

The Herring Gull has been an accurate indicator of concentrations of environmental contaminants in wildlife on the Great Lakes. Concentrations of two widespread legacy contaminants, PCBs and DDE, in gull eggs from the Niagara River, have declined by 92.3% and 87.5% respectively, from 1974 to 2007 (Pekarik and Weseloh 1998, CWS unpubl.data). A similar pattern is observed at the Port Colborne breakwall colony, where PCBs and DDE in Herring Gull eggs have declined by 93.5% and 96.0%, respectively, over the same time.

The Herring Gull breeds in Alaska and across the mainland of northern Canada, in the lake district of Manitoba, on the Great Lakes and in New England (Pierotti and Good 1994). In Ontario, it breeds on all the Great Lakes and many of the inland lakes from the Canadian Shield northward (Weseloh 2007d).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Thayer's Gull *Larus thayeri*

Rare fall and winter visitor

The Thayer's Gull, named after ornithologist John E. Thayer, is a large gull similar to a Herring Gull. The taxonomic status of Thayer's Gull has been the subject of considerable dispute and its status as a separate species has been contested in many quarters. While the taxonomy of the Thayer's, Iceland, Kumlien's complex remains unsettled, this account follows the current AOU (1998) treatment of Thayer's Gull as a full species. There will continue to be controversy on this confusing gull and no doubt one day there will be a resolution to all the skepticism currently surrounding this entire complex. Birders interested in the dilemma and complexity of this taxon should consult Ron Pittaway's "Taxonomic History of Thayer's Gull" (1999) and the extensive research summarized in Pittaway's references.



Thayer's Gull
Jean Iron

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 24 of 41 counts,
maximum of 5 birds on the 1997
Niagara Falls CBC

Earliest date: 17 November 1990,
1 bird, Adam Beck overlook,
Niagara Falls (BOSNR)

Latest Date: 3 March 1970, 1 bird,
Niagara River gorge, Niagara Falls
(Daniel Salisbury)

Thayer's Gull is a rare fall and winter visitor to the Great Lakes (Snell 2002), and the Niagara River is one of the best places in interior eastern North America to see this interesting gull. It is generally present in small numbers from mid-December to mid-January, most often observed in the gorge between the two power plants from the Adam Beck overlook in Niagara Falls. Because of distance, viewing gulls from this overlook can challenge birders even with the finest high quality optical equipment.

Thayer's Gull is not on the OBRC Review List because it occurs regularly in the province. The BOS statisticians have for many years been reluctant to review documentation for Thayer's Gull given the confusion that exists and consequently there are only three adjudicated BOSNR records for Niagara.

The Thayer's Gull breeds in the Canadian High Arctic as far east as Baffin Island and Greenland. It winters primarily along the North Pacific Coast from British Columbia to Baja, California, with small, scattered populations through the Midwest to the Great Lakes (Snell 2002).

Kayo J. Roy

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*

Uncommon winter visitor

BOS April Count: Reported on
11 counts of 41 counts, maxi-
mum of 2 birds in four years

BOS May Count: Reported on
2 of 41 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 2004 and 2005

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 37 of 41 counts,
maximum of 21 birds on the
2004 Niagara Falls CBC

Earliest Date: 30 October 1977,
1 bird, Queenston and 1993,
1 bird, Adam Beck Overlook
(BOSNR)

Latest Date: 24 May 1997,
1 bird, Niagara Falls (BOSNR)

The Iceland Gull is a migratory species that breeds in the Arctic regions of Canada and Greenland but not in Iceland where it is only observed in winter. Somewhat smaller than the Herring Gull, it is closely related to the Thayer's Gull and disputes over their separation or combination have long interested gull geneticists and others. A further complication exists when Kumlien's Gull, a subspecies of Iceland Gull is drawn into the discussion. The taxonomy of this Iceland, Kumlien's, Thayer's complex remains for now unsettled. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) treat the Iceland Gull as two forms separating the nominate *glaucoides* from *kumlien's*. They report in considerable detail all observations prior to 1966.

The complexity of separating *kumlien's* from *glaucoides* with any certainty continues to be an identification concern. This account will treat all sightings of Iceland Gull as *L. g. kumlieni*. Supporting this decision to do so are the comments in Pittaway (1992b) that *kumlien's* is by far the most likely race found in Ontario, and that there are only a handful of authenticated records of the nominate "Greenland" race *glaucoides* for the province."

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, the Iceland Gull, an uncommon winter visitor, has been observed along the Niagara River in every year. In the Niagara River alone from Niagara-on-the-Lake to Fort Erie, 539 observations of both adults and immature birds have been reported during this time period (BOSNR). The Iceland Gull begins to appear by late October with two known sightings, growing in November to 92, increasing to 124 in December, and peaking in January substantially with 208 individuals being located. The bird's presence begins to diminish in February as only 70 sightings were reported, 37 were found in March and only five in April. One late May record is known, a bird found by Michael Morgante on 24 May 1997 in Niagara Falls (BOSNR). Modest numbers of this species have also been reported from Port Weller, the Welland Canal and Port Colborne; however, dates and numbers over the years were not retained. The Niagara portion of the Fifty Point Conservation Area is another locale where the Iceland Gull can be observed; however, the documentation available in the



Iceland Gull
Brandon Holden

HNCNR did not identify with certainty whether the gulls were observed in the Niagara or the Hamilton portion of this conservation area.

The Iceland Gull breeds in coastal colonies in the Canadian Arctic and in Greenland. Its winter range is not fully understood. Most nominate *glaucoides* and, in all likelihood, many *kumlieni* are intraregional Arctic migrants, overwintering in Greenland and in the Canadian Arctic. It is a regular but uncommon or rare winter visitor throughout the Great Lakes including Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Ontario, New York and the Niagara region (Snell 2002).

Kayo J. Roy

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Uncommon winter visitor

This Western Palearctic gull is a common migratory species that is a regular winter visitor to the east coast of North America. With a very complicated taxonomy which comprises several different subspecies, most birds observed in North America are of the northern European race *graellsii*, which is the lightest black-backed gull of its genus.

Sheppard (1970) identifies a Lesser Black-backed Gull that was collected near Lock 1 of the Welland Canal in St. Catharines on 20 December 1968. Daniel Salisbury, who was present when the bird was collected, advises that the specimen, initially thought to be a first-winter bird, was sent to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City where it was identified as a second-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull. Harold Axtell was not convinced and forwarded the specimen to the National Museum of Canada in Ottawa for their assessment. Earl Godfrey was unwilling to make a decision, and he sent the specimen to the Natural History Museum in London, England for their expert opinion. After careful evaluation, they identified the bird to be an immature Herring Gull. Here is proof positive on how difficult it can be to identify immature gulls. This Sheppard (1970) record in print of Lesser Black-backed Gull needs to be disregarded.

The first confirmed record of this uncommon winter visitor to Niagara is that of an adult bird found on 27 December 1972 by Robert Andrie and Arthur Clark at St. Davids

BOS April Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 2000

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1999

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 22 of 41 counts, maximum of 9 birds on the 2003 and 2005 BOS CBCs

Earliest Date: 5 August 1997, 1 bird, Queenston Reservoir (BOSNR)

Latest Date: 16 May 2000, 1 bird, Niagara Falls (BOSNR)

(BOSNR). In November and December of 1976, three birds were observed in Niagara Falls (BOSNR, Harold Lancaster). Every year since 1976, Lesser Black-backed Gulls have been observed somewhere along the Niagara River and at a few other Niagara locations (BOSNR).

The presence of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in North America has increased dramatically in recent years as the distribution of this species has clearly changed. In Niagara, this species usually makes its first appearance in late September with nine sightings in 1996, 1997 and 1998. October has recorded 34 sightings, increasing dramatically in November to peak with 145 sightings, and diminishing somewhat in December with 93 recorded sightings. Three unexpected records are known for August in 1996 and 1997 (BOSNR). Some believe that the Lesser Black-backed Gull leaves Niagara by year-end and moves to the Atlantic seaboard when the colder weather sets in. This may not be altogether true given that 71 records are known to exist in Niagara for January and seven for February. Other birds have lingered even longer as there are four records for March in 1996, 1999, 2002 and 2003, one for April 2000, and two in the month of May 1999 and 2000 (BOSNR).

In the 31 years from 1976 to 2006, the OBRC, BOSNR and other reports identify at least 369 observations of Lesser Black-backed Gull for Niagara. This number is an approximate estimate after eliminating known duplicate reports from observers over the same time period. Of this total, some 252 records are along the Niagara River from below and above the falls in Niagara Falls, 98 from the Queenston boat launch and Adam Beck overlook area in Niagara Falls, and the balance of 18 from other Niagara locations. Record daily highs were of nine individuals found on each of 21 November 1998 and 21 November 2001, and two in December 2001, all from Niagara Falls. In 1997, 36 individuals were discovered in Niagara peaking at 43 in 1998. In the years 2003 to 2005, more modest numbers were observed; however, in 2006, 20 individuals were studied. This substantiates the ever-changing distribution of this migratory species.

The Lesser Black-backed Gull breeds in northwest Europe, Greenland and Iceland, and there is no current evidence to indicate that breeding has occurred in North America. Non-breeding birds of this species winter mainly from Newfoundland and the southern Great Lakes south along the Atlantic Coast to southern Florida, and west along the Gulf of Mexico to Tamaulipas and to the northern Yucatan Peninsula (Howell and Dunn 2007).

Kayo J. Roy

Lesser Black-backed Gull
Brandon Holden



Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*

Extremely rare visitor

This common large gull of coastal northeastern Asia frequently wanders to the Aleutian Islands, the Pribilof Islands and the western shoreline of Alaska (Harrison 1987). In more recent years, this species is being somewhat regularly observed along coastal California. “Here at Half Moon Bay, California we have had more than twenty birds of all age classes, maxing out at thirteen in one winter for this species whose distribution is changing” (Alvaro Jaramillo pers. comm.).

The Slaty-backed Gull is an extremely rare visitor with only two known observations of its presence in Niagara. On 24 November 1992, Marlene and Rod Plank discovered a winter adult bird, the first record for Ontario and Niagara, at the Niagara Falls Mountain Road landfill site. It moved to the Niagara River where it was relocated on 28 November resting on the concrete breakwall just north of the International Niagara Control Works structure near Chippawa. To the delight of an incredible number of birders, it remained until 29 December 1992 (Bain 1992, BOSNR).

The second record for Niagara is that of a third-winter bird studied by Kevin McGowan and others in Niagara Falls on 2 December 2006. This bird was originally observed resting on exactly the same concrete breakwall where the 1992 bird was seen, and it remained along the Niagara River in Niagara Falls to at least 13 December 2006 (BOSNR, Richards 2008).

The origin of these two birds to Niagara is unknown. Numerous inquiries were sent to several experts who provided the following responses: “Given there are no records of this species in the Western Palearctic, my guess is they come from the northwest — Alaska etc” (Alvaro Jaramillo pers. comm.). “The likely source would be Alaska. To my knowledge, there are no authentic records yet of Slaty-backed in Europe” (Klaus Malling Olsen pers. comm.).

This species breeds along the North Pacific coastline of Asia and winters south as far as Japan (Harrison 1987).

Kayo J. Roy

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

Rare winter visitor

The Glaucous Gull is a large, gregarious and powerful all white gull with circumpolar Arctic distribution. The name glaucous describes the bird's colouration. This migratory scavenger is the only large gull that is common in the High Arctic, and it is known to be one of the most predatory of all gulls.

The first record for Niagara of this omnivorous gull is an old historical record of a bird collected from the Niagara River on 29 January 1895 by John Savage. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) identify the numerous observations prior to 1966.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, the Glaucous Gull, a rare winter visitor, has been observed along the Niagara River in each of the 41 years. In the Niagara



Post-2006 Observation

On 13 December 2008, while scanning the rocks in the Niagara River above the Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls, Jean Iron located a resting definitive basic Slaty-backed Gull. The crouched bird made it difficult to observe leg colour and wing pattern; however, after some preening, the bird stood up to the delight of all observers. The bright purple-pink legs were exposed and Scott Whittle managed to digiscope the stretched-out wing revealing the wingtips string of pearls. Others present to help with identification of this third record for Niagara included Willie D'Anna, Kevin McLaughlin, Ron Pittaway and Betsy Potter. The bird was last reported on 24 January 2009 (BOSNR, Richards 2009).

Slaty-backed Gull / Scott Whittle

BOS April Count: Reported on 9 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on four counts

BOS May Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1981

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1970 and 1988

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 16 birds on the 1974 BOS CBC

Earliest Date: 23 August 1984, 1 bird, Waverley Beach (BOSNR)

Latest Date: 20 May 1978, 1 bird, Fort Erie (BOSNR)

The earliest recorded date of fall arrival from the Adam Beck overlook is 9 October 1970 (BOSNR)

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 1 confirmed square, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 123 birds in 2002

BOS May Count: Reported on 35 of 41 counts, maximum of 66 birds in 2001

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 138 birds in 1998

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 2,089 birds on the 1998 Niagara Falls CBC

River alone from Queenston to Fort Erie, 569 known observations have been documented during this time period (BOSNR).

The Glaucous Gull begins to appear by late October with 3 known sightings, growing in November to 55, increasing substantially in December to 134 sightings, and peaking in January dramatically with 231 individuals being located. The bird's presence begins to diminish in February as 109 sightings were reported, 23 were found in March and only 11 in April (BOSNR). One late August record is known, a bird found by Arthur Schaffner and Fran Rew on 22 August 1984 at Waverley Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). This species has also been reported from several Niagara landfill sites as well as from Niagara-on-the-Lake, Port Weller, the Welland Canal and Port Colborne; however, dates and numbers over the years were not retained. The Niagara portion of the Fifty Point Conservation Area in Grimsby is another locale where Glaucous Gull can be observed; however, the documentation available in the HNCNR did not identify with certainty the gull's presence in the Niagara portion of this conservation area.

In North America the Glaucous Gull breeds along the north coasts of Alaska and the Canadian Arctic east to Labrador. It winters south along the Pacific Coast as far as the temperate maritime regions of California, and along the Atlantic Coast from Newfoundland to Virginia, with small numbers wintering regularly on the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River (Gilchrist 2001).

Kayo J. Roy

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Uncommon winter resident, rare summer resident

A few Great Black-backed Gulls may linger in the Niagara area year round. Generally, however, they arrive in western Lake Ontario in July or August and remain through April (Curry 2006).

McIlwraith (1894) reported the presence of the Great Black-backed Gull in western Lake Ontario until March, when it disappeared for the season. On the Niagara Frontier, Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) reported a specimen taken in 1894 and four to six individuals observed in February 1895, when the species was classed as an uncommon winter visitor. By the 1930s, numbers had started increasing, and 27 were reported on 27 January 1935; the first summering birds were reported later that year. On 1 January 1960, over 100 birds were reported on the BOS Christmas Bird Count (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Sheppard (1970) states that the bird was then "quite common and very regular in its appearance on the River during the winter months." He describes their location: "The little rocky islets scattered throughout the upper rapids, immediately above the falls, are much favoured by the Great Black-backed Gull as resting places, and in that location it may be spotted at almost any time throughout the year." Significant increases in black-backed gull numbers during April, May and October BOS Counts have been documented (see the article by Hamilton and DeLeon elsewhere in this book).

In 2002, the Canadian Wildlife Service (unpubl. data) put satellite transmitters on two breeding black-backed gulls on Pigeon Island in eastern Lake Ontario near Kingston. During 2002 and 2003, both birds spent one to two weeks on the Niagara River in December during their migration to their wintering area in western Lake Erie. The numbers of this species observed on the BOS Counts are also suggestive of its migratory nature on the Niagara River. Maximum numbers in April are twice as great as those



Glaucous Gull
Brandon Holden



Great Black-backed Gull
Brandon Holden

in May. Their numbers build up in the autumn and by Christmas the species is relatively common on the river. Band returns of birds found in the Great Lakes suggest that most birds come from the St. Lawrence Estuary and the Atlantic coast (Angehrn et al. 1979). However, each of the satellite-tagged birds from Pigeon Island moved from western Lake Erie through the Niagara area and returned to Pigeon Island during a five-day period from 21-26 March 2003.

Great Black-backed Gulls breed regularly in eastern Lake Ontario and are usually laying/incubating eggs by late April or early May. This suggests that birds observed on BOS Counts in April and May are not local birds but probably migrants from the St. Lawrence Estuary or the Atlantic coast. During the second Atlas, a single pair bred on the Port Colborne breakwall. The species has also bred on Mohawk Island (Moore et al. 2007, 2008), just outside the western boundary of Niagara.

The Great Black-backed Gull breeds primarily on islands on both the western and eastern shores of the North Atlantic Ocean. In winter it retreats to the southern portions of these areas, including the Great Lakes and the Mediterranean Sea, and farther south (Good 1998). In Ontario, small numbers breed in the St. Lawrence River, eastern Lake Ontario and Lake Huron (Weseloh 2007e).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*

Extremely rare straggler

In early September 1996, Hurricane Fran brought the only Sooty Terns ever to have occurred in Niagara. It is impossible to determine precisely how many individuals were involved, but the following were reported (Curry 1996).

8 September: One juvenile off Jaeger Rocks, Fort Erie (John Lamey)

8 September: One adult off Waverly Beach, Fort Erie (many observers)

9 September: One adult off Waverly Beach, Fort Erie (Hugh Currie, Daniel Salisbury)

10 September: One adult off Waverly Beach, Fort Erie (William G. Lindley)

Sooty Tern
Kayo Roy



In the late afternoon of 8 September as about 40 observers gathered at Waverly Beach in Fort Erie to observe Black-capped Petrels, they were treated to a marvellous view of an elegant adult Sooty Tern that circled the extreme eastern end of Lake Erie and flew west out to the open lake past the ecstatic crowd (Curry and Olmsted 1996).

On 28 September 1996, Robert Curry and John Olmsted found the badly decomposed body of an adult Sooty Tern at Long Beach. This represents the only specimen for the province. The skeleton is at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 159642).

The Sooty Tern is an abundant inhabitant of tropical oceans worldwide. It nests in the Dry Tortugas, Florida, and forages regularly over the warm Gulf Stream current off the Carolinas. It is probably in these waters that the Niagara Sooty Terns originated.

Robert Curry

Least Tern *Sterna antillarum*

Extremely rare visitor

The delicate Least Tern is the smallest member of the North American gull and tern family. This migratory bird, similar in appearance to the Old World Little Tern, is a United States Fish and Wildlife Service bird of Conservation Concern (Audubon 2007). The species is continentally vulnerable and classified as Threatened and Endangered throughout its North American range (Thompson et al. 1997). Sparsely vegetated sandy beach areas are the bird's favourite nesting habitat. This same terrain is prized for human recreation and residential development and subject to alteration by water diversion (Thompson et al. 1997).

There is only one record of Least Tern for Niagara. On 25-26 June 1958, Robert Andrie, Richard Brownstein and Arthur Schaffner discovered an adult bird at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970, James 1991, Pittaway 1995).

The Ontario Bird Records Committee has accepted only three records of Least Tern for Ontario, all coincidentally found along the Lake Erie shoreline. The first Ontario record is of a bird located outside of Niagara on 9 June 1953 at Wheatley Harbour (Bain 1994). To the delight of many birders, a first-winter bird was observed on 4-7 November 1995 near Sweet's Corner, Cayuga (Dobos 1996).

Least Terns breed widely along coastal beaches of the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts and the major interior rivers of North America. While wintering areas remain uncertain and poorly known, it is believed they winter broadly across marine coastlines of Central and South America (Thompson et al. 1997).

Kayo J. Roy

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Uncommon summer resident

There are several records of single Caspian Terns during the 1880s and 1890s in the Buffalo area (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). McIlwraith (1894) considered it rare in southern Ontario and made no mention of local nesting. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) note that "During June and July... a number of Caspian Terns had been seen along the Canadian shore of Lake Erie... especially in the vicinity of... Rockhouse Point." They suggest that Mohawk Island should continue to be checked to see if Caspian Terns nest there in the future. Sheppard (1970) refers to this large tern as "uncommon, but by no means rare in the Frontier area." He listed April and May, and August and September as the months of most frequent occurrence but indicated that there were enough June and July records to suggest that the species may have been breeding somewhere in the western part of the region. The earliest spring arrival date for this species is 3 April 1999, when a single bird was reported at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR).

All the speculation about possible nesting of Caspian Terns on Mohawk Island came to fruition on 5 May 1996, when Laird Shutt, Craig Hebert and Kim Williams, all of Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa, found 40 nests on the southeast shore of the island.

The terns nested on the ridges of dead Zebra Mussel shells that had accumulated there. The researchers had visited the island a year earlier, on 6-7 May 1995, but they did not see any Caspian Terns. On 14 June 1995, they observed 20 terns on the island but no sign of nesting. Obviously, the terns immediately took to the island and have

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 1 confirmed square, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 11 of 41 counts, maximum of 23 birds in 2000 and 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 49 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported



Caspian Tern
Harold Stiver

have nested there ever since, always on the Zebra Mussel shells on the southeast corner of the island. Nest numbers in more recent years have been as follows (Canadian Wildlife Service unpubl. data): 2000: 112, 2002: 165, 2003: 226, 2004: 109, 2005: 233, 2006: 319, 2007: 300, 2008: 289.

Numbers of these terns reported on BOS April and May Counts, 1966-2006, have increased significantly (see the article by Hamilton and DeLeon elsewhere in this book).

Caspian Terns are seen regularly at Mud Lake and Cement Plant Road pond in Wainfleet and at Lake Gibson in Thorold. These are probably birds from the breeding colony on Mohawk Island. The latest date is 10 October 1971, when a single bird was observed at Port Dalhousie by Harold Lancaster on the BOS October Count.

The Caspian Tern breeds on all continents except Antarctica. In North America, there are six distinct populations: the Pacific Northwest including Alaska, central Canada, west-central interior U.S., the Gulf Coast, northeastern Atlantic coast and the Great Lakes (Cuthbert and Wires 1999). In Ontario, it breeds at several sites on Lake Ontario and Lake Huron, a single site on Lake Erie, and one to two pairs have been reported breeding on Lake Superior (Brian Ratcliff pers. comm., Weseloh 2007f).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Black Tern *Chionidias niger*

Rare spring and fall transient (last bred here in 1982)

On the Niagara Frontier, the numbers and status of the Black Tern have fluctuated greatly over extended periods of time during the last 100 years. McIlwraith (1894) claims that this tern bred on Mohawk Island, just outside Niagara. However, the solid limestone of the island would make very unsuitable habitat; perhaps he was referring to the nearby marshy area at the mouth of the Grand River. The Black Tern was considered a rare to uncommon migrant from before the turn of the last century until at least 1910 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). However, by the late 1940s, and until at least the early 1960s, daily autumn numbers of 5,000 – 6,000 individuals on the upper Niagara River, both above and below the Peace Bridge, were not unusual, and the species bred at several local sites, e.g., in Round Pond, Buck Pond at the mouth of Sandy Creek, Oak Orchard Swamp in New York and the Dunnville Marshes in Ontario (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Since the 1960s, unfortunately, their numbers have plummeted and now, once again, the Black Tern is an uncommon species. Currently, the nearest Canadian nesting location is at Long Point.

Of the Black Tern, Sheppard (1970) comments that “it becomes abundant on the upper reaches of the Niagara every year from the latter part of July until mid-September or beyond.” He also finds it to be much less common in the spring, occurring “from the latter part of April until sometime past the middle of May.” The earliest spring arrival date for the Black Tern is 24 April 1997, when a single bird was seen at Mud Lake (H. Lancaster).

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 211 birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported on 5 of 40 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Black Tern
Brandon Holden



A recent tabulation of observational records of Black Terns listed in *The Prothonotary* shows the extent of the latest decline. From 1940 to 1968, the average number of Black Terns reported on the BOS May Count was 198; however, for the period 1969 to 2001 the number was 26. The average number of individuals observed and reported per year for the period 1940 to 1970 was 3,265, and for the period 1971-2000 it was 317 (Chip Weseloh unpubl. data). Something quite dramatic happened during the period 1968-1970 and for whatever reason Black Terns no longer congregated along the Niagara River near Fort Erie...or anywhere else on the River.

As for recent nesting, the Black Tern was a rare nester in Niagara and on the New York side of the Niagara River during the first Ontario and New York Breeding Bird Atlases (Dunn 1987b, Spahn 1988). The last known nesting of Black Tern in the Niagara Region occurred at Mud Lake in Port Colborne in 1982. It was not found nesting, however, anywhere in our area during the second Ontario and New York Breeding Bird Atlases (Weseloh 2007g, Mazzocchi and Muller 2008). The latest date of observation in Niagara is 1 December 1991, when a single bird was reported from Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Black Tern breeds mostly in central northern North America, from central Oregon, Washington and British Columbia to Quebec and from northern Alberta to Colorado. There are scattered “pockets” of breeders outside that area (Dunn and Agro 1995). In Ontario, it breeds at scattered locations across most of the Great Lakes and in the Trent-Severn/Rideau Canal systems. It also breeds at a few sites in the Boreal Forest north of Lake Superior (Weseloh 2007g).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident

First Atlas: 1 confirmed square, 0 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 13 of 41 counts, maximum of 241 birds in 1982

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,146 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 32 of 40 counts, maximum of 3,513 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1991 BOS CBC

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) refer to the Common Tern as an abundant transient visitant and a very common summer resident; they include an 1889 breeding record (Bergtold), apparently of a bird “on the Canadian shore of Lake Erie, not far from Buffalo.” McIlwraith (1894) included Gull (Mohawk) Island among its known nesting sites more than 100 years ago but gave no details. Based on comments by Eaton (1910) that “this tern formerly bred on the Canadian shore of Lake Erie, not far from Buffalo...but now is not known to nest on the Great Lakes nearer than...western Lake Erie,” there may have been a hiatus of its nesting in Niagara for nearly 30-40 years. The tern was next mentioned as nesting locally (at least 500 pairs), in 1933 on Mohawk Island, just west of the boundary of the Niagara Region (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Sheppard (1970) described this tern as “very common ...from April to September” and stated that it apparently “has always nested, here and there, along the north shore of Lake Erie, but only in...recent times has it formed breeding colonies on the River.” The earliest spring arrival date for the Common Tern in Niagara is 5 April 1997, when eight birds were reported from Fifty Point Conservation Area and a single bird from Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

The numbers of Common Tern nests on Mohawk Island peaked at about 1,800 in 1946 but declined to about 1,100 by 1948, to 800 in 1949 and to only about 130 nests by 1960 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Common Terns began nesting as well on



Common Tern
Kayo Roy

the Port Colborne breakwall in about 1945 and by 1950 there were an estimated 50 pairs (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). These authors, as well as Sheppard (1970), discuss nesting Common Terns on Tower Island (also known as Cable-tower Island) and on Table Rock, at the lip of Niagara Falls. Terns apparently deserted these sites in 1956 and about 1970, respectively, probably as a result of competition from gulls (Sheppard 1970). Sometime prior to 1969, a second Common Tern colony developed in the Port Colborne harbour area on property owned by Canada Furnace (Algoma lands); it contained 1,250 nests in 1973 (Morris and Hunter 1976, Courtney and Blokpoel 1983), fewer than 300 nests in 1980, 43 nests in 1987 and no nests in 1990 (Canadian Wildlife Service unpubl. data). By 1990, the Port Colborne breakwall colony had reached 935 nests but declined to only 14 nests in 2007 (see the article by Morris elsewhere in this book). Extensive histories of the Common Tern in the Niagara Region are available from Courtney and Blokpoel (1983), Morris et al. (1992) and Morris (2009).

In 2007 and 2008, extensive work was done to improve nesting habitat for Common Terns in Buffalo Harbor (Lee Harper pers. comm.). Subsequently, nest numbers there increased to 1,425 and 1,721, respectively (Connie Adams pers. comm.). The latest date of observation in the region is 5 January 1966, when a single bird appeared at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Common Tern breeds throughout the temperate northern hemisphere in both the Old and New Worlds; it winters throughout the southern part of its breeding range and into the southern hemisphere (Nisbet 2002). In Ontario, its main nesting area is Lake Huron and the St. Lawrence River, but it also breeds in Lakes Ontario and Erie and at scattered inland sites, especially in the Trent-Severn area and north of Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods (Moore and Weseloh 2007).

D.V. Chip Weseloh

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

Extremely rare visitor

The Arctic Tern is a relatively small, slender, avian wonder of circumpolar distribution that performs the longest regular migration of any known bird. The Arctic Tern's long journey back and forth from breeding grounds in the Arctic to wintering grounds off Antarctica requires a flight of some 38,600 km annually (Bird 2004).

The Arctic Tern is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara and has been reported on only two occasions. On 11 November 1989, Eric Blom and Wayne Klockner identified the first record of this species for Niagara as it fed over the Niagara River in Fort Erie. This exceptionally late first-basic plumaged bird was not observed after 19 November 1989 (Crins 2007a).

The second Niagara record was a definitive alternate plumaged Arctic Tern discovered on 17 August 1990 by Alec Humann at Waverley Beach in Fort Erie (Crins 2005).

The Arctic Tern breeds in the Arctic and subarctic regions of North America from Alaska and Canada south to British Columbia in the west and Massachusetts in the east. It winters along the Antarctic pack ice travelling there via the western coasts of Europe and Africa (Harrison 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*

Rare spring and fall transient

The Forster's Tern is named after German naturalist-pastor Johann Reinhold Forster, who accompanied his friend Captain James Cook around the world in 1772. It is the only tern that is restricted almost entirely to North America throughout the year (McNicholl et al. 2001). The Forster's Tern enjoys a variety of aquatic habitat such as estuaries, inlets and bays; however, it highly favours fresh and saltwater marshes. Known by many as the marsh tern, this species is rarely out of sight of land. The Forster's Tern is widely distributed and globally secure. Data from breeding bird surveys showed a significant increase in the North American population since 1966, mostly in the 1960s and 1970s (Sauer et al. 1997).

The first record of Forster's Tern for Niagara is of three birds found on 19 October 1936 at Frenchman's Creek, Fort Erie, by Roy W. Sheppard (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). These two publications discuss observations of Forster's Tern in Niagara prior to 1966.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, the Forster's Tern has been seen on a fairly regular basis in Niagara, albeit in small numbers. While there are very few spring reports, the species does pass through the area presumably on its way to breeding grounds. In early to mid-August the Forster's Tern begins to make its fall appearance with a few birds beginning to pass through the region. This migration south continues into early November; however, still in only small numbers. Only two reports are known for December.

Jaeger Rocks in Fort Erie appears to be a magnet of sorts for Forster's Terns, as this location seems to attract them with some regularity. Along the Lake Erie shoreline south from Fort Erie, Erie Beach, Windmill Point, Point Abino, Pinecrest Beach, Port Colborne and Morgan's Point have all been locations where the Forster's Tern has been reported.

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Earliest Spring Date: 14 April 1985, 4 birds, Vineland (Lake Ontario near Martin Farms) (JEB)

Earliest Fall Date: 4 August 2001, 1 bird, Windmill Point (BOSNR)

Latest Winter Date: 8 December 1984, 1 bird, Whirlpool rapids, Niagara River

Summer Records: 18 June 1967, 1 bird, Allanburg (Dan Salisbury) and 10 July 1999, 1 bird, Jaeger Rocks (BOSNR)



Arctic Tern
Harold Stiver



Forster's Tern
Harold Stiver

The Lake Ontario side of Niagara, the Welland Canal at Port Weller and west along the lake to Fifty Point Conservation Area are excellent locations to look for this species.

The Forster's Tern breeds along the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific Coasts as well as in the prairies and Great Lakes regions of the US and Canada. It winters on the Atlantic Coast from southern New Jersey south to the Gulf Coast states and on the Pacific Coast from central California to Mexico (McNicholl et al. 2001).

Kayo J. Roy

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Rare visitor

In 1815, Dutch aristocrat and zoologist Coenraad J. Temminck first described the Pomarine Jaeger, the largest of the three North America jaegers. This powerful seabird of the skua family Stercorariidae derives its name from the Greek word *Pomarine* meaning "lid-nosed" referring to the sheath that covers the base of the bill, and from the German word *jager*, meaning hunter. For successful reproduction, the Pomarine Jaeger relies almost exclusively on a high concentration of Brown Lemming on their breeding grounds. In years when the lemming population is low, the species is known to leave the Arctic almost immediately. The Pomarine Jaeger, like all jaegers, terrorizes gulls, terns and other seabirds forcing them to regurgitate recently found food. They show their great agility in flight as they harass their victims.

Pomarine Jaeger
Brandon Holden



Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) report in detail the few sightings of this species prior to 1966.

The Pomarine Jaeger, while seen annually in neighbouring Hamilton area, is a rare visitor in Niagara. No doubt it has flown unnoticed along the Niagara portion of Lakes Ontario and Erie on numerous occasions; however, only seven records have been documented during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. There are no records for Niagara in the BOSNR.

On 5 November 1967, Paul Benham, John Black and Daniel Salisbury identified a Pomarine Jaeger at the mouth of the Niagara River, Niagara-on-the-Lake. On three boat trips into Lake Ontario off Niagara-on-the-Lake on 15, 21 and 28 September 1968, Paul Benham, John Black, Daniel Salisbury and others observed two Pomarine Jaegers (Axtell 1968). On 23 September 1984, John Black observed one bird at Port Weller. On 1-2 January 1986, Robert Andrlé studied an immature bird at Fort Erie (Wormington 1987). During the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count on 20 December 1992, Rob Dobos and others found a Pomarine Jaeger at Port Weller in St. Catharines (Bain 1994).

In September 1996 the remnants of Hurricane Fran possibly displaced numerous Pomarine Jaegers to the western end of Lake Ontario and the eastern end of Lake Erie from the Carolinas. These strong winds brought jaegers closer to shore than usual with some 14 Pomarine Jaeger observations noted between 6-18 September 1996 (Curry 1996). While observed by many, regrettably most of these records remained undocumented. On 14 September 1996, Jukka Jantunen and Kayo Roy discovered a juvenal bird at Fort Erie. The body of a juvenal dark morph Pomarine Jaeger was located on 27 November 1996 along the Lake Ontario shoreline at Beamsville by E. Anderson (Curry 2006).

John Black and Daniel Salisbury studied this species in flight on 14 November 2005 at Port Weller.

In North America the Pomarine Jaeger breeds in the Arctic tundra of Alaska and Canada north of the Arctic Circle. It winters widely across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans (Harrison 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 1 of 41 counts,
maximum of 1 bird on the
1992 St. Catharines CBC

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Occasional visitor

The Parasitic Jaeger, a fierce mid-size member of the jaeger family, is a seabird in the skua group *Stercorariidae*. Like all jaegers, when away from nesting areas where the Brown Lemming is the primary source of food, the Parasitic Jaeger moves into a piratical behaviour of relentlessly pursuing gulls, terns and other seabirds in mid-air forcing them to surrender newly caught food. This method of stealing food is known as “kleptoparasitism” from which the first half of this bird's name is derived. The second name comes from the German word *jager* which means hunter.

Niagara's first documented record of Parasitic Jaeger was on 25 July 1959 when Harold Axtell and Robert Andrlé found this species at Morgan's Point near Burnaby. Other early area records of Parasitic Jaeger are well discussed in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970).

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 birds in four years

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1988 Niagara Falls CBC

Earliest fall date: 15 September 1996, 1 bird, Fort Erie (BOSNR)

Latest winter date: 4 December 1997, 2 birds, Niagara Falls (BOSNR)

Parasitic Jaeger

Brandon Holden

The following birds were observed in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book.

1967

18 October, one adult, Port Weller, St. Catharines (Daniel Salisbury, Sheppard 1970, BOSNR)

1968

15, 21 and 28 September, eighteen, observed on three boat trips off Port Dalhousie to Niagara-on-the-Lake (Harold Axtell, Paul Benham and others, BOSNR, Sheppard 1970)

1970

14 October, one, Erie Beach, Fort Erie (Robert Andrle, Richard Byron, BOSNR)

1972

19 September, one, Niagara Falls (Harold Axtell, BOSNR)

1974

22 September, five, Vineland (Arthur Schaffner, Arthur Clark, BOSNR)

1977

4 December, two, Niagara Falls (Harold Axtell, David Freeland and others, BOSNR)

1978

1 October, two, St. Catharines (Robert Andrle, David Freeland and others, BOSNR)

1984

20 September, one, Fort Erie (Robert Andrle, Richard Byron, BOSNR)

1991

28-29 November, one each day, Niagara Falls (Richard Collins, William Watson and others, BOSNR)



1993

28 September, one, Fort Erie (Willie D'Anna, BOSNR)

1996

8 September, two, Fort Erie (Jukka Jantunen, Kayo Roy)

14 September, three, Fort Erie (Jukka Jantunen, Kayo Roy)

15 September, one, Fort Erie (Willie D'Anna and others, BOSNR).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, the Parasitic Jaeger has been present but undetected or unreported on an untold number of occasions along the Niagara shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie and even in the Niagara River.

The fall of 1996 was a banner year for jaegers in Niagara, nearby Hamilton and other locations as unprecedented numbers were observed well into the fall. Hurricane Fran almost certainly added to these numbers during hurricane week (Curry 1996). Hurricane week Parasitic Jaegers were observed by many in Niagara, but other than those shown in 1996 above, most remained unreported..

The Parasitic Jaeger breeds in the Arctic tundra of western Alaska and the Aleutian Chain, in northern Canada to Hudson Bay and northern Labrador, and also in Europe and Asia. Its exact winter range is not clearly known but likely includes the southern Atlantic and Pacific oceans and off South America and Africa (Harrison 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus*

Extremely rare visitor

The graceful Long-tailed Jaeger with circumpolar range is the most abundant and widely distributed jaeger in the High Arctic, and one that breeds the furthest north. This pigeon-sized seabird of the skua family Stercorariidae is the smallest of the three North American jaegers and relies heavily on the Brown Lemming as a source of food on their breeding grounds. The Long-tailed Jaeger, like all jaegers and skuas, persistently chase after gulls, terns and other seabirds in mid-air until they regurgitate any food they have just found.

There is no mention of Long-tailed Jaeger observations in either Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or Sheppard (1970).

This species has become a rare but regular visitor over recent years to neighbouring Hamilton at the west end of Lake Ontario where most records come from the Van Wagners Beach area (Curry 2006). The species is, however, an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. The Long-tailed Jaeger has almost certainly flown east on occasion from Hamilton and passed Port Weller and Niagara-on-the-Lake unobserved, or if observed, it has regrettably remained unreported.

A strong migration of Long-tailed Jaegers occurred through the Great Lakes in mid September of 1996 (Sherony and Brock 1997), and perhaps this journey may have played a role in this species being observed at Fort Erie. It is however believed by many that the remnants of Hurricane Fran that passed over the eastern end of Lake Erie on 8 September, either knocked these jaegers down as they migrated over the area, or transplanted them to Lake Erie from off the Carolinas. While some duplication may be involved, a totally unprecedented showing of Long-tailed Jaegers made the headlines: up to 12, including several adults, were reported from the west end of Lake Ontario and the east end of Lake Erie during hurricane week (Curry 1996).

There are only three documented records of Long-tailed Jaeger for Niagara during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. On 8 September 1996, Robert Curry, Alan Wormington and others located three Long-tailed Jaegers (one definitive alternate and two juvenals) at the mouth of the Niagara River in Fort Erie (Dobos 1998). On 14 September 1996, Richard Knapton and others observed five Long-tailed Jaegers (two definitive alternates and three light morph juvenals) at Waverley Beach, Fort Erie (Dobos 1998, BOSNR). On 27 August 2000, Kevin McLaughlin discovered two juvenal birds in Grimsby (Roy 2001).

Long-tailed Jaeger breeds in Alaska and Canada north of the Arctic Circle. It winters widely in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans (Harrison 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Dovekie *Alle alle*

Extremely rare visitor

The Dovekie, formerly known as Little Auk, is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. This auk is decidedly more pelagic than any other Atlantic alcid and is alone among them in being permanently satisfied with a planktonic diet, thus able to wander at large on the high seas (Wynne-Edwards 1935). Although these black-and-white, robin-sized seabirds with no visible neck spend much of their lives in the High Arctic, they are

notoriously liable to be driven in large numbers far outside of their normal winter range by storms or high gales at sea (Murphy and Vogt 1933).

On 23 October 1988, J. Butler found a Dovekie along the shoreline of Municipal Beach on Lake Ontario at Port Weller, St. Catharines (Curry 1991). This very emaciated adult female bird survived for only a few hours and is the only Dovekie ever recorded in Niagara. The specimen (skin) is at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 154509) (Curry 1991).

Incredibly, there are nine records of Dovekie for Ontario between 1924 and 1993; however, not all have been reviewed by the Ontario Bird Records Committee. For further reference and a complete summary of these Ontario records, see Di Labio (1995).

The bulk of the world population of Dovekie breeds on the coasts of Greenland (Murphy and Vogt 1933). Primarily found in the North Atlantic but more recently found in small numbers in the Beaufort, Bering and Chukchi Seas where it may also breed. It winters off Newfoundland and Nova Scotia south to Long Island (Harrison 1987). This area is the likely source of this Niagara bird.

Kayo J. Roy

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia*

Historic record (1950-1951)

Formerly known as Brünnich's Guillemot, the Thick-billed Murre was named after Danish zoologist Morten Thrane Brünnich. This abundant circumpolar seabird inhabits the northernmost reaches of the Arctic coasts and islands (Gaston and Hipfner 2000).

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) identify numerous Niagara River historical records from the late 1800s and early 1900s where specimens (present location unknown) were collected.

In late November 1950, a very severe northeast gale caused great damage along the shores of Lake Ontario. On 25 November 1950, this storm brought a flight of some 150 Thick-billed Murres along the north and west shores of the lake and deposited 11-13 birds into the Niagara River gorge (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). Weakened by the storm, none of these birds survived, and most of the emaciated specimens (skins) were sent to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. One specimen was given to the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York (BSNS # 3439), (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). William E. Hurlburt found a dead Thick-billed Murre at Jordan Station on 11 January 1951 (Sheppard 1970), this was clearly part of the November 1950 wreck and it was also forwarded to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 78886).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, there have been no observations of this extremely rare visitor to Niagara.

The Thick-billed Murre breeds in Atlantic and Arctic Canada, Alaska and south to British Columbia and Newfoundland. The species winters at sea from the edge of open ice south to Nova Scotia and northern British Columbia. Wintering birds can also be observed off Greenland, northern Europe and in the Pacific, south to northern Japan (Gaston and Hipfner 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

Razorbill *Alca torda*

Extremely rare visitor



The English name for this large, elegant member of the auk family is derived from the bird's bill and its resemblance to a sharp-edged razor (CWS, Environment Canada). Exclusively an Atlantic Ocean species, this stocky, heavy-billed bird is the closest living relative of the extinct Great Auk (Hipfner and Chapdelaine 2002).

The Razorbill is an extremely rare visitor to the Lake Ontario waters of Niagara with only three known records. The first was on 27 November 1982, when Bruce Duncan and Kevin McLaughlin observed a Razorbill at the mouth of the Niagara River off Queen's Royal Park, Niagara-on-the-Lake (James 1983). On 2 January 1985, Harold Axtell, Paul Benham and John Black discovered a winter adult bird at the mouth of the Niagara River in Niagara-on-the-Lake as it moved out to feed in Lake Ontario (Wormington 1987).

The third sighting, on 19 November 2006, was a juvenile or first-basic Razorbill found by Norma Platt, Robert Spahn, Michael Hamilton and others in the Niagara River just off Fort Niagara in Youngstown, New York. Fortunately, unlike the first two Razorbills, this alcid remained at the mouth of the Niagara River for 50 consecutive days, affording the opportunity for hundreds of Ontario and New York State birders to observe this rare visitor. Each morning this bird, illustrated here in two photographs, began to feed on the United States side of the river near Fort Niagara, and by mid-morning it had moved well into Lake Ontario waters off Fort Mississauga in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where it remained to feed for the rest of the day. The last known date of its occurrence was 7 January 2007 (Richards 2008).

The Razorbill breeds along the coasts from western Greenland, Iceland, Norway, and northern Russia, south to Maine, northern France and southern Finland. In winter the species ranges south to South Carolina (rarely) and the Canary Islands (Godfrey 1986).

Kayo J. Roy

Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Ancient Murrelet is a small seabird in the auk family from the North Pacific that is protected federally under the Species at Risk Act (SARA 2008). The species is also protected under the Migratory Birds Convention Act (1994), although native peoples are allowed to hunt the birds for subsistence purposes. Ancient Murrelets are more likely than any other alcid to be displaced inland, often by heavy storms. Records exist for most Canadian provinces and many American states.

There are two records of this open ocean species for Niagara, one historical and the second a more recent observation. On 15 November 1908, Everett P. Wheeler found a deceased adult male at Crystal Beach near Ridgeway. The specimen (wing, foot and head) is in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 39908), (Pittaway 1995).

Razorbill

left: Jerry Lazarczyk

below: Dominic Sherony





Ancient Murrelet
Barry Cherriere

This sighting was originally believed to be that of a Dovekie; however, in September 1910, the remains were re-examined and measured, and the identification was conclusively confirmed to be that of an Ancient Murrelet (Fleming 1912b, Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970, James 1991).

Eighty-six years later, on 13 November 1994, Willie D'Anna discovered Niagara's second Ancient Murrelet in Lake Ontario, feeding near the tip of the east pier entrance to the Welland Canal in Port Weller, St. Catharines (Pittaway 1994). This bird moved to the tip of the west pier of the canal just off the Canadian Coast Guard facility where it remained for the rest of the day. As one would expect, this mega-rarity attracted hundreds of birders. When David McGinnis, the Canadian Coast Guard duty officer, was made aware of the rarity of the bird, he generously allowed more than 300 birders access to the tip of this private government property to observe and study this extraordinary visitor to Niagara. It was gone the next day. For a detailed account of the bird's presence at Port Weller, St. Catharines, see D'Anna (1994).

Arguably this extremely rare visitor to Niagara must surely be the same individual that was observed for five days only 138 km away at the mouth of the Genesee River in Rochester, New York. The bird was last seen there nine days earlier on 4 November 1994 (Marcotte 1995, Andrlé 1996).

Breeding for this species is known from the Aleutian Islands of Alaska eastward to the Alaskan Peninsula and then south to the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia. While some of these birds winter at sea near their breeding areas, a good number disperse south to California (Harrison 1988).

Kayo J. Roy

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Very common permanent resident (introduced)

Rock Pigeons were introduced into North America about 400 years ago by European settlers. They are now permanent residents throughout southern Ontario and are very common in Niagara. In 2003 the species name was changed from Rock Dove to Rock Pigeon by the American Ornithologists' Union. These birds nest throughout the year, with the peak number of nests between December and April (Sandilands 2007c). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 10 May.

John E. Black

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica*

Extremely rare visitor

The White-winged Dove is a large, chunky, semi-tropical, gregarious pigeon that occurred historically only in the southern regions of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California (Schwertner et al. 2002). It has expanded well outside of this historical range and is now found in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Kansas. The White-winged Dove was introduced into Florida in the 1970s when several hundred birds were released, and breeding occurs there only within this introduced population (Conti and Forrester 1981). There are no reports of White-winged Dove in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or Sheppard (1970). Nor was this species reported during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book.

The White-winged Dove breeds throughout much of the southern United States as far north as Oklahoma. It winters throughout its breeding range except in California and western Arizona (Schwertner et al. 2002).

Kayo J. Roy



First Atlas: 22 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 17 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 302 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 225 birds in 1995

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 713 birds in 1987

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,893 birds on the 1979 Niagara Falls CBC

Post-2006 Observation

A White-winged Dove, the first recorded for Niagara, was discovered on 21 July 2008 in the north St. Catharines residence backyard of Sue and Paul Chapman. The Chapmans initially heard this bird calling but did not recognize the call. They knew, however, that it was different from the Mourning Dove's call. They left for vacation and three weeks later, on their return home, the vocalizing bird continued to be heard. Kayo Roy was contacted and on 12 August 2008, he and Brian Ahara observed the bird in the Chapman's backyard crabapple tree, and the identification was confirmed. While many birders saw this rare visitor to Niagara, this individual, as shown, for the most part, remained quite secretive and was most easily observed during periods of feeding on the backyard wooden patio floor. In the fall the bird became considerably more difficult to locate and was last reported on 18 October 2008 (Richards 2009, BOSNR).

White-winged Dove
Scott Watson



Mourning Dove
Peter Ferguson

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 22 squares con-
firmed, 3 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
446 birds in 2002

BOS May Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
295 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Reported
on 40 of 40 counts, maximum
of 653 birds in 1996

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 41 of 41 counts,
maximum of 2,001 birds on the
1988 St. Catharines CBC

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*

Very common summer resident, common winter resident

A permanent resident only in the southernmost parts of Ontario, the Mourning Dove is very common in the summer in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 6 April.

The Mourning Dove is a common bird on the Christmas Bird Counts. While many are found throughout the winter months, additional birds arrive from farther south in the spring to swell the number of residents. This was certainly not the case in the late 1960s when Mourning Dove was a rare winter straggler and most birds arrived in the spring. It is only since 1980 that numbers in excess of 100 have begun overwintering in Niagara. This trend is not limited to Niagara. According to the atlas, in recent years Mourning Dove has been overwintering in increasing numbers in Ontario (Armstrong 2007). On the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count of 17 December 1989, 540 Mourning Doves were counted as they came in at dusk to roost in the courtyards of Brock University in St. Catharines (JEB).

John E. Black

Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*

Extinct

Named in 1766 by Linnaeus, the Passenger Pigeon was also called Wild Pigeon, Turtle Dove, Wood-Pigeon or simply Pigeon. Described by Aldo Leopold (1949) as “no mere bird” but a “biological storm,” it was once the most abundant land bird in North America (Blockstein 2002). William King, a soldier at Fort Mississauga in Niagara-on-the-Lake, reported having seen in May 1866 a “grand migration of the Passenger Pigeon.” He estimated there to be millions of pigeons in a flock that was a mile wide and 300 miles long and that took 14 hours to pass overhead (King 1866). Nonetheless, during the 19th century, the species was driven to extinction, predominantly by uncontrolled commercial hunting for food.

In 1926 staff at the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology conducted a survey of Ontario residents who remembered having seen or having hunted Passenger Pigeons. The results of this questionnaire and other materials from early Canadian and American literature are documented in the book *The Passenger Pigeon in Ontario*, written by Margaret H. Mitchell (1935), who gained a reputation as Canada’s first internationally known woman ornithologist (Ainley 1990).

In Niagara, Mitchell documented nesting colonies in Humberstone, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Stamford (now Niagara Falls) and Wainfleet, without giving any specific dates. She also reported on small nesting colonies between 1850 and 1870 along the Lake Erie shoreline, a nesting colony of 25 birds between 1864 and 1868 in South Lincoln, a nesting colony between 1870 and 1872 in South Pelham, and a large colony with thousands of nests in South Pelham in 1874. The birds preferred beech, oak and tamarack trees and huckleberry marsh for nesting. Mitchell identifies the year of the last Passenger Pigeon record for Niagara as 1883.

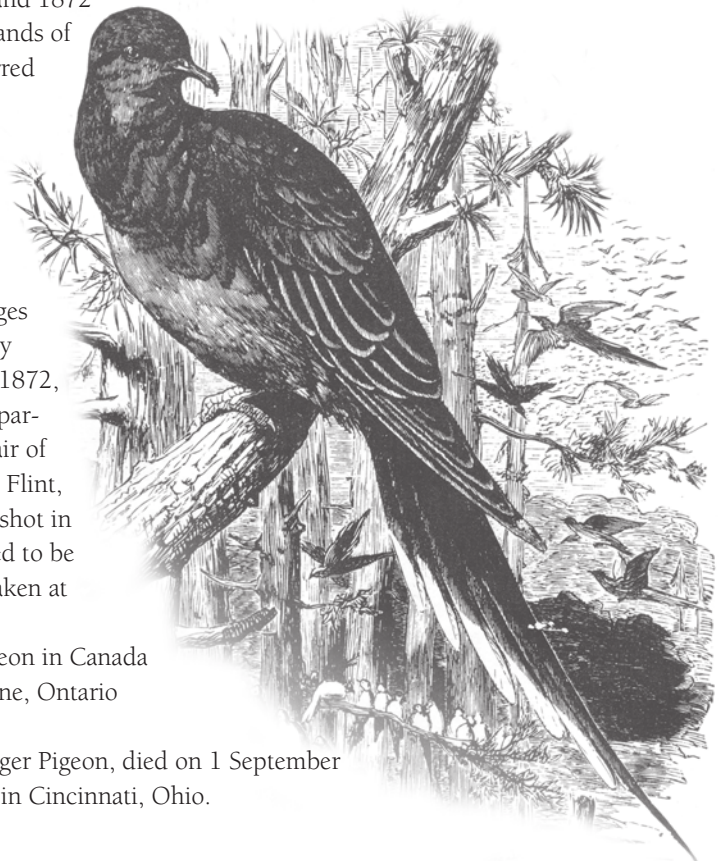
Sheppard (1970) questioned this last record and cited Beardslee and Mitchell (1965). Clark Beardslee and Harold Mitchell devoted three pages to the local history of the Passenger Pigeon. They described Regional Niagara records obtained in 1872, 1883, 1890 and 1891. The last two records are particularly interesting. On 5 September 1890, a pair of Passenger Pigeons was shot in Fort Erie by H.D. Flint, and in mid-September 1891, a young male was shot in Niagara by Ottomar Reinecke. This bird, believed to be the last Passenger Pigeon shot in Ontario, was taken at Sherkston (Snyder 1951).

The last known observation of Passenger Pigeon in Canada was recorded on 18 May 1902 at Penetanguishene, Ontario (Godfrey 1986).

Martha, thought to be the world’s last Passenger Pigeon, died on 1 September 1914 at the age of 29 in the Zoological Gardens in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Marcie L. Jacklin and Kayo J. Roy

Passenger Pigeon
Animate Creation: *Our Living World, A Natural History*, Selmar Hess Publisher, 1898, N.Y.





Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed,
5 probable, 4 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares confirmed,
8 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
6 of 41 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 1989

BOS October Count: Reported
on 1 of 40 counts, maximum
of 1 bird in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Coccyzus americanus

Uncommon summer resident

Yellow-billed Cuckoos are observed infrequently in the spring. It is not clear whether the few birds seen are transients or whether they are arriving in the area to nest. There are no April reports. The earliest arrival date is 15 May 1989, when two birds were found on the BOS May Count.

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon to rare summer resident in Niagara. Seen infrequently in the summer months, this somewhat shy bird may be more common than one expects. It has been known to lay its eggs in the nests of other species, particularly the nests of the Black-billed Cuckoo (Sandilands 2007d).

The latest recorded date is 28 October 1989, when a single bird was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR).

There are no winter records for Niagara. Yellow-billed Cuckoos winter east of the Andes from northern Venezuela to northern Argentina (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Black-billed Cuckoo

Coccyzus erythrophthalmus

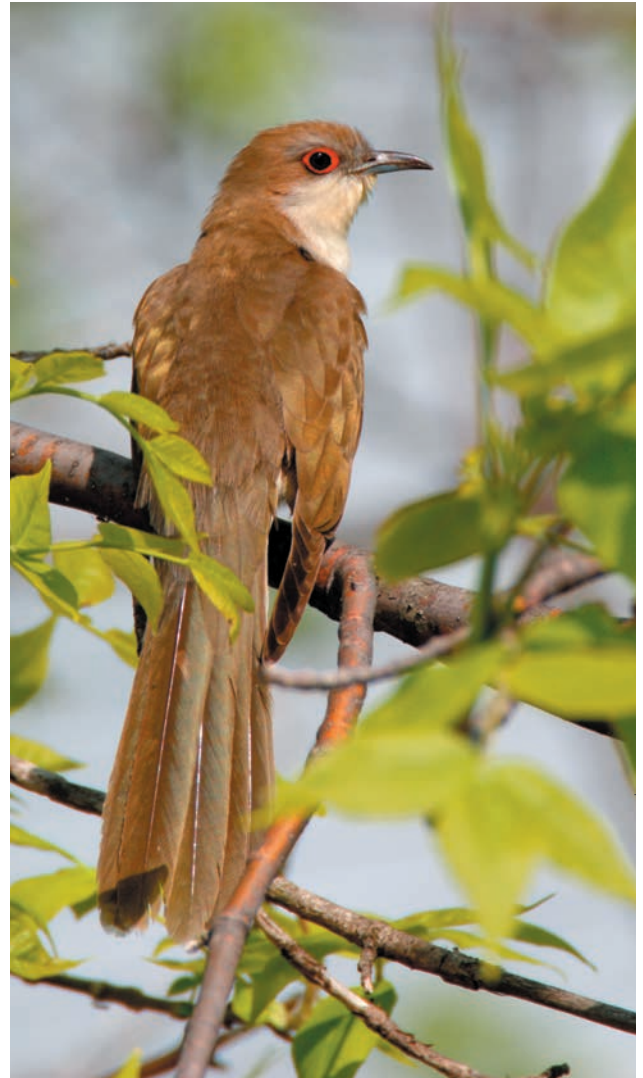
Uncommon summer resident

Black-billed Cuckoos are observed infrequently in the spring. It is not clear whether the few birds found are transients or whether they are arriving in the area to nest. There are no April reports. The earliest arrival date is 6 May 1977, when a single bird was seen at the Smithville sewage ponds (BOSNR).

The Black-billed Cuckoo, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 28 June. Found infrequently in the summer months, this somewhat shy bird may be more common than one expects. Both the Black-billed and Yellow-billed cuckoos prefer to eat hairy and spiny caterpillars such as Fall Webworm, Gypsy Moth and Tent Caterpillars (Sandilands 2007e).

The latest recorded date is 4 October 1970 when a single bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are no winter records for Niagara. Black-billed Cuckoos winter in northwestern South America from Columbia and Venezuela (including Trinidad) to Ecuador and northern Peru (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black



Black-billed Cuckoo
Brandon Holden

First Atlas: 6 squares confirmed,
8 probable, 6 possible

Second Atlas: 7 squares confirmed,
6 probable, 9 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
12 of 40 counts, maximum of 2
birds in 1968, 1973 and 1989

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1980

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1995 St. Catharines CBC

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Formerly a rare resident, currently an extremely rare visitor

Although the Barn Owl is one of the most widespread species of any bird, occurring worldwide on all continents except Antarctica, it is designated as Endangered in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). This owl's unusual facial pattern accounts for its common name, "monkey-faced owl." It is more nocturnal than any other North American owl species.

The first reported Barn Owl for Niagara is a bird that was shot by George Ackerman in September 1903 north of Gasport (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Recorded observations of this species prior to 1966 are well-documented in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) as well as in Sheppard (1970). A number of these recent Barn Owl sightings may be attributed to the more than 200 Barn Owls that have been bred and released by the Owl Foundation in Vineland Station (Vineland) since 1974 (Kay McKeever pers. comm.).

Known observations of Barn Owl in Niagara from 1966 to 2006.

1966

1 January, 2 birds in silo, Niagara-on-the-Lake (Harold Lancaster).

23 January, 3 birds in silo, Niagara-on-the-Lake (Harold Lancaster).

3 July, nest with young in a stone barn, Queenston (Daniel Salisbury).

29 July, one at Harold Axtell residence, Fort Erie (BOSNR).

19 August, one at Harold Axtell residence, Fort Erie (BOSNR).

1967

26 March, one at Harold Axtell residence, Fort Erie (BOSNR).

6 June, nest with young in a stone barn, Queenston (Daniel Salisbury).

1968

17 June, nest with 3 young on a gate lifter, Lock 1, Welland Canal, Port Weller, St. Catharines (John Black, Daniel Salisbury).

1969

13 March, one flying along Beechwood Road, Thorold (Harold Lancaster).

22 April, 26 May and 5 June, one each day at Lock 1, Welland Canal, Port Weller, St. Catharines (John Black, Daniel Salisbury).

17 August, nest with 2 eggs, Queenston (ONRS, P.M. Catling).

1970

3 and 22 January, one bird each day at Allanburg (David Rybczynski and others, BOSNR).

27 March, one at Harold Axtell residence, Fort Erie (BOSNR).

1971

4 January, one in a barn, Allanburg (John Black) and again on 16 January (Roger Taylor).

29 July, one female, Niagara-on-the-Lake (ROM, H. Wilson).

2 November, one at Harold Axtell residence, Fort Erie (BOSNR).

1974 – 1975

31 December-2 January, one at the Genstar Plant, Welland (Harold Lancaster, Harold Axtell, Paul Benham).

1976

20 June, nest in a silo with 6 young, Queenston (Doug McRae).

1977

July, nest with young, Abitibi Price, St. Catharines (NHIC, Kay McKeever).

20 August, nest in a flour mill with 3 young, Thorold (Harold Lancaster, Alan J. Smith).

1980

June, nest with 4 young in a box outside the Owl Foundation, Vineland Station (NHIC, Kay McKeever).

1981

June, nest with 5 young in a box outside the Owl Foundation, Vineland Station (NHIC, Kay McKeever).

1982

13 March, one, West Camboro Road, Pelham (Kay McKeever).

27 March, one, adult, agitated behaviour and anxiety calls outside the Owl Foundation, Vineland Station (NHIC, Kay McKeever).

June, nest with young on Skyway Bridge, St. Catharines (NHIC, Mary Ellen Hebb).

1983

18 August, nest with young on Skyway Bridge, St. Catharines (NHIC, Jean and Blayne Farnan, Drew Campbell).

1987

10 March, flying just above the streetlights along King Street, St. Catharines (Brian Ratcliff).

1988

17 and 26 March, one each day just outside the Owl Foundation, Vineland Station (NHIC, Kay McKeever).

1989

16 July, nest with 5 eggs, Smithville (Jean and Blayne Farnan, Brad Clements). This nest was found abandoned on 19 September 1989.

2001

16 June, in flight over Port Colborne (Jean and Blayne Farnan).





Kay McKeever of the Owl Foundation submits the following interesting commentary:

The bare bones of the Barn Owl propagation, outside of captivity, on the premises of The Owl Foundation began on 19 April 1980, when two unbanded owls were seen in an oak tree from the east window of the house that faces over the forested slope and marsh of the 20 Mile Creek. These two owls were seen coming to shelter on a fiberglass roof under the wooden deck of our second floor veranda. A nesting box suitable to Barn Owls had been fastened to the east wall of a garage some 50 feet up hill from the house. This box was removed from the garage wall and simply placed on the wooden deck above the owls' shelter. This box was almost immediately occupied and egg-laying began; copulation was seen in the oak tree above the deck on 20 May. Four eggs were seen in the box on 23 May and the first hatched on 25 June. I caught the female in the box and banded her left leg.

Barn Owl
 Frank & Sandra Horvath

The three young were caught on 23 July and banded on their right legs. On 19 August the three young birds were observed flying around. In 1981, two birds returned to the Owl Foundation and on 14 April were observed in the oak tree. By 19 April both were seen in the box and by 20 May, the unbanded female was observed incubating. On 23 August five young were banded and placed back into the box. The Barn Owl family used this box for all of the summer of 1981 and through the winter of 1981-1982. During the fall of 1981 and spring of 1982, litter on the ground below the box was almost 100% feathers of blackbirds that massed in the adjacent marsh. Between December 1981 and March 1982, all of the pellets below the box were of dark mice (we did not feed these wild owls). Blackbird feathers in the pellets began again in April of 1982. There was no evidence of breeding in this box in late spring of 1983 although wild barn owls were heard and seen through the spring and summer of 1983.

Currently, in Niagara, the species is an extremely rare visitor. Wild Barn Owls are still seen and heard in Niagara in the spring and summer (Kay McKeever pers. comm.). The likelihood of seeing these highly nocturnal birds is extremely small.

The Ontario Nest Record Scheme lists 29 Barn Owl nests across southern Ontario prior to 1980 (Peck and James 1983). In the past decade, the Ontario Barn Owl Recovery Team has received only a few sightings from southwestern Ontario despite the placement of nest boxes and a public awareness program.

Brian D. Ratcliff

Eastern Screech-Owl *Megascops asio*

Uncommon to common permanent resident

First Atlas: 13 squares confirmed, 9 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 8 squares confirmed, 12 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 9 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1997

BOS October Count: Reported on 17 of 40 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds on the 1988 BOS CBC

The Eastern Screech-Owl is an uncommon to common resident in Niagara. This species is probably under-reported in Niagara because it is nocturnal and roosts in tree cavities during the day. For many winters, Blayne Farnan has alerted the birding community to the presence of one or two screech-owls in Port Colborne sitting at the entrance to holes in trees. Results of the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count indicate that, since 1989, screech-owls have been recorded each year (except 1992), with a maximum of 11 birds in 1994 and in 1998. There have been 133 screech-owls located on the Niagara Falls CBC since 1966 and at least one bird every year since 1986, with a maximum of 14 in 2004. The Port Colborne CBC has reported at least one owl every year since 1986 (except 2001), with a maximum of 12 birds in each of 1989, 1994 and 2003. These owls have been seen on 15 of the February-March owl prowls (1978-2006), with a maximum of 11 birds in 2004. The Owl Foundation has received more than 200 screech-owls from Niagara, among which all three colour morphs have been represented. Of these, approximately 95% were the grey morph, 5% were the red, and three individuals (less than one percent) were the brown.

The Eastern Screech-owl breeds in Mexico, the eastern United States, southern Manitoba and southern Ontario (*National Geographic* 2006).

Brian D. Ratcliff





Eastern Screech Owls
Kayo Roy



Great Horned Owl
Raymond Barlow

Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus*

Uncommon permanent resident

First Atlas: 20 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 18 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1966

BOS May Count: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1972

BOS October Count: Reported on 13 of 40 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 23 birds on the 1993 St. Catharines CBC

Great Horned Owls are probably the most commonly detected owl in Niagara. They have been seen on 18 of the February-March owl prowls (1978-2006), with a maximum of three birds in 2004. They are most easily seen during late January and February when the females are already on nests. Most of the larger mature woodlots in Niagara should support a territorial pair. A Yukon study showed that there can be a significant population of under-detected silent “floaters” for this species. These individuals eke out an existence travelling between territories or along their boundaries waiting for a vacancy (James Duncan pers. comm.).

Great Horned Owls were known to nest in three woodlots in the late 1980s: at Ball’s Falls Provincial Park, off Maple Street in north Fenwick and east of Hwy 24 south of Vineland. These nests were visible from the adjacent roads and were occupied by mid-February. The arctic form of the Great Horned Owl, *B. v. wapaccuthu*, was observed by Edward Seeber near Welland on 12 January 1947 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). There are four subspecies of the Great Horned Owl in Ontario (Pittaway 1993), and the Seeber bird may be what is considered the very pale gray *B. v. scalariventris* or “Snyder’s” Great Horned Owl, which breeds in northern Ontario (Snyder 1961, James 1991).

Great Horned Owls are widely distributed in North and South America (Backhouse 2008) and are found across all of Ontario up to and including the Hudson Bay shoreline (Cadman et al. 1987). This large, powerful owl is very territorial, and many nests are already established in late winter in southern Ontario. Note that Great Horned Owls do not build their own nests but expropriate those built by other species such as the Red-tailed Hawk.

Brian D. Ratcliff

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*

Rare winter visitor

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds on the 1986 Port Colborne CBC and the 1991 Niagara Falls and Port Colborne CBCs

This large northern owl is a rare and somewhat irregular late fall or early winter visitor in Niagara. Most of the sightings have been along the Lake Ontario and Lake Erie shorelines or along the Niagara River (BOSNR). Good locations at which to see this bird include the Niagara District Airport, the International Niagara Control Works structure in Chippawa and the open fields and Algoma Steel lands around Port Colborne. The earliest fall date is for a single bird at Fort Erie on 27 October 1971 (BOSNR). Single Snowy Owls were seen on only three of the February-March owl prowls (1978-2006). The latest spring record is of a single bird on 13 May 1992 at Niagara Falls (Ridout 1992:418).

This large, daytime-hunting owl breeds in the arctic tundra area of North America, Greenland and Eurasia (Backhouse 2008). In most winters there are some reports of Snowy Owl in southern Ontario, and during years of low prey populations on the breeding grounds, there can be numerous observations. When they show up in southern urban areas they are quite conspicuous and prey on rabbits and rodents often common in urban environments. One pellet (regurgitated prey remains) contained no less than 27 meadow vole skulls! They have even been observed catching Rock Pigeons in flight. Satellite-telemetry studies of urban winter Snowy Owls document that most survive to return to the Arctic in spring (James Duncan pers. comm.).

Brian D. Ratcliff



Snowy Owl
Sam Barone

Northern Hawk-Owl
Brandon Holden

Post-2006 Observation

On 1 December 2007, Manley Baarda discovered a third Northern Hawk-Owl for Niagara. Baarda, Brian Ahara and Scott Watson were approaching the north end of Seaway Haulage Road leading to the Welland Canal east pier at Port Weller, St. Catharines, when Baarda observed the bird in a tree along the edge of the road. Many birders (John Black, Cindy Cartwright, Janice Haines, Jean Iron, Marcie Jacklin, Jeremy Knapton, Kayo Roy, Katherine Stoltz, Maggie Smiley, Ron Tozer) reached the location in time to observe this rare visitor to Niagara. The bird was seen for only the one day (Richards 2008).

Northern Hawk-Owl

Surnia ulula

Extremely rare visitor

The Northern Hawk-Owl is a bird of the boreal forests of North America and Eurasia. It is an attractive, bold, diurnal owl that feeds on voles and birds. While not migratory, the Northern Hawk-Owl does irrupt south of its breeding range into southern Ontario, as do other boreal owl species during years when a scarcity of food exists in its permanent residence (James 1991).

A notable incursion of Hawk-Owls (as it was once known) to southern Ontario occurred in the fall of 1962 with ten reports noted from within the boundaries of Metropolitan Toronto (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Late in November 1962 (exact date unknown), E.F. Palmer discovered a Northern Hawk-Owl in his residence garden at Vineland Station (Sheppard 1970).

Only one record exists for Northern Hawk-Owl in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book. On 29 January 2001, George Meyers identified one in Grassie (Curry 2006).

Kayo J. Roy



Barred Owl

Strix varia

Extremely rare visitor

The Barred Owl was fairly common locally in the entire BOS study area (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965), but it would appear, based on other sources, that this species is extremely rare in Niagara. There are only five reliable records for Barred Owl, two from the 1950s and three from the 1970s. The first record is of a bird seen on 5 April 1954 in a row of tall cottonwoods in Roy W. Sheppard's residential garden near the Hydro Electric Canal in Niagara Falls (Sheppard 1970). The second bird, also from the R.W. Sheppard residence, was observed on 24 September 1956 (Sheppard 1970). A single bird was reported on the BOS April Count of 8 April 1973. On the BOS May Count of 21 May 1978 a single owl was located, and on the BOS May Count of 21 May 1979 a single bird was observed.

The Barred Owl was the most commonly detected owl species during the 2006 Ontario Nocturnal Owl Survey in central and northern Ontario; most of the birds were located in central Ontario (Badzinski 2006). Widely distributed across southern Canada and the United States east of the Great Plains, the Barred Owls breeding range also extends west along the southern edge of the boreal forest and widens to include much of the west from southern Yukon to central California. Isolated populations are also found in Mexico (Backhouse 2008).

Brian D. Ratcliff



Barred Owl
Sam Barone

BOS April Count: Reported on
1 of 41 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 1973

BOS May Count: Reported on
2 of 41 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 1978 and 1979

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Great Gray Owl *Strix nebulosa*

Extremely rare visitor

There have been two reports of the Great Gray Owl in Niagara, one clearly of a wild bird and the second likely of an escaped bird. On 14 May 1979, a male owl with a broken wing was taken to the Skyway Veterinary Clinic in St. Catharines. The owl had been hit by a car in downtown St. Catharines (Kay McKeever pers. comm.). This bird was part of a large influx of Great Gray Owls that showed up in southern Ontario during the winter of 1978-1979 (Cadman et al. 1987). There is no mention in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or Sheppard (1970) of Great Gray Owl in Niagara.

On 14 September 2006, a severe wind storm that blew across the Niagara Region toppled a huge hickory tree at the Owl Foundation. An enclosure that housed Great Gray Owls was hit by the falling tree, causing extreme damage and allowing two owls to escape. There were two sightings of Great Gray Owl in mid-December 2006 at Short Hills Provincial Park. On 29 December 2006, one was hit and killed by a car about halfway between the Owl Foundation and Short Hills Provincial Park (Kay McKeever pers. comm.). The fate of the other owl is unknown.

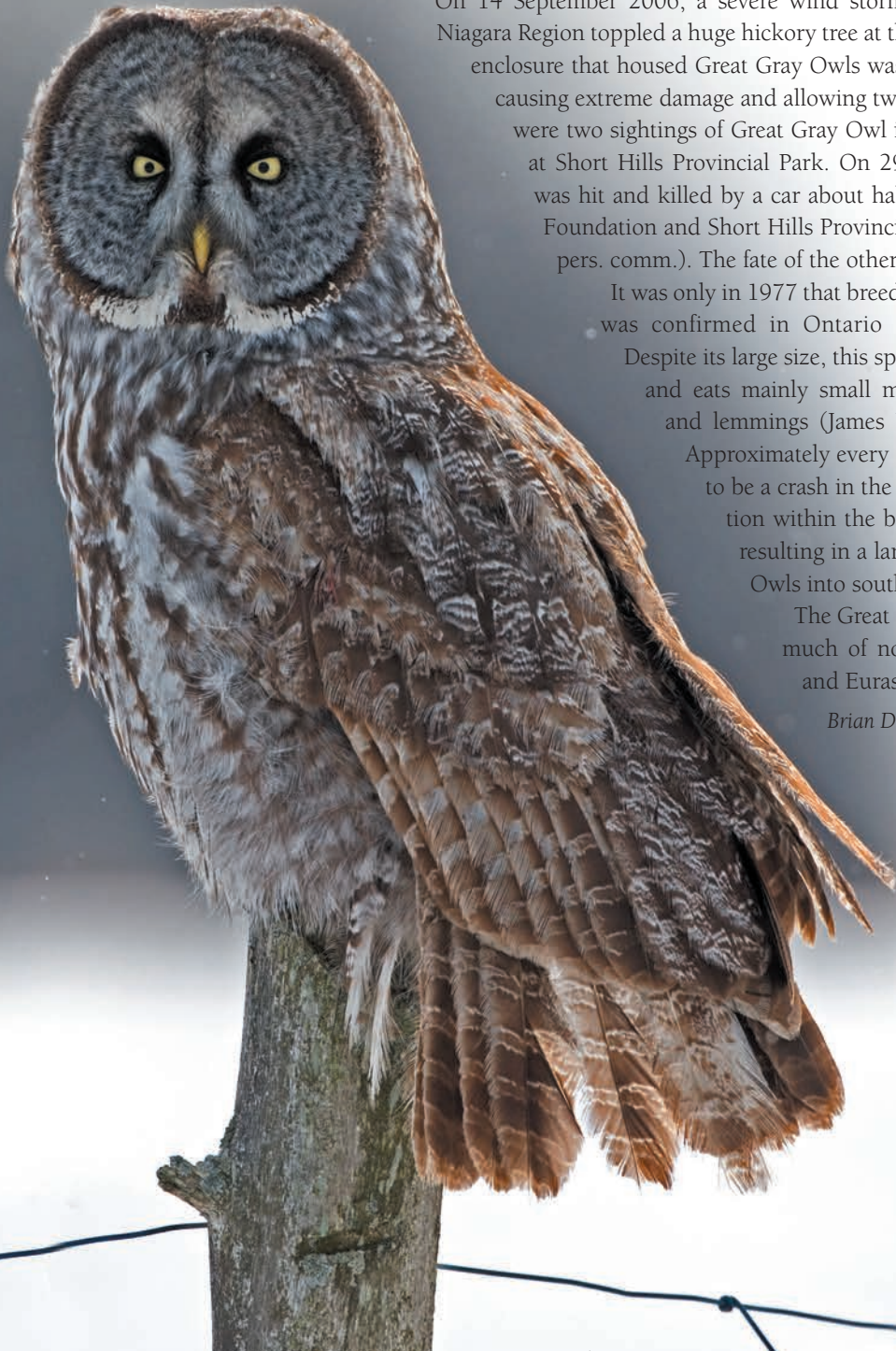
It was only in 1977 that breeding of Great Gray Owls was confirmed in Ontario (Austen et al. 1994).

Despite its large size, this species is a prey specialist and eats mainly small mammals such as voles and lemmings (James Duncan pers. comm.).

Approximately every 3-5 years there appears to be a crash in the small mammal population within the boreal forest, sometimes resulting in a large influx of Great Gray Owls into southern Ontario.

The Great Gray Owl breeds across much of northern North America and Eurasia (Backhouse 2008).

Brian D. Ratcliff



Great Gray Owl
Harold Stiver



Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Rare permanent resident

In Niagara the rare Long-eared Owl is known in only a few locations. For some years these owls were present in the Harold Mitchell Nature Reserve near Long Beach. More recently, they have been present in the Stevensville Conservation Area. In most winters, Blayne Farnan was able to find a bird or two for the owl prowl, and they were seen on 14 of the February-March owl prowls (1978-2006), with a maximum of seven birds in 1972. Early records include two birds from Welland County in 1947 and three birds observed on 7 January 1957 at the Horticultural Experimental Station, Vineland (Sheppard 1970). The first Atlas reports confirmed nesting in three squares. Two nests with eggs were discovered in 1983 and 1985 south of St. Catharines; one nest with fledged young was discovered in 1984 near Port Colborne, and one nest with young in 1985 in the Fenwick area. Information collected for the second Atlas had breeding confirmed in the Chippawa Creek Conservation Area in 2001. A pair of birds probably bred in a coniferous woodlot on the Niagara Parkway in 2003 (JEB).

In southern Ontario, Long-eared Owls are often located in communal winter roosts of up to 75 birds in mature conifer stands (plantations) (Cadman et al. 1987). Maintaining mature conifer stands will help to ensure that this owl species will continue to breed in Niagara. Note that Long-eared Owls do not build their own nests but expropriate those built by other species such as the American Crow (James Duncan pers. comm.).

Long-eared Owls breed in woodlands across Eurasia, northwest Africa and North America (Backhouse 2008).

Brian D. Ratcliff

Long-eared Owl
Raymond Barlow

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1977

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1983

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 16 birds on the 1997 BOS CBC



Short-eared Owl
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1987

BOS May Count: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1997

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1987

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 26 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds on the 2003 Niagara Falls (New York section) CBC

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Rare summer resident, rare winter resident

The Short-eared Owl is a rare breeding species in Niagara. It is designated a species of Special Concern in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). Historically they were reported as rare in the northern part of Niagara, while in the south they were regarded as almost numerous in the open sections of Welland County from Niagara Falls to the Lake Erie shoreline (Sheppard 1970). Sheppard also notes some interesting behaviour that these owls were engaged in during December 1960 and in March 1967. There were deep snow conditions in both of these years, and these two reports noted eight and ten birds respectively roosting in willow trees along Niagara Boulevard near Chippawa. These birds were described as “fishing” as they were observed taking short flights out over the water to obtain food. Jim Duncan offers an alternative explanation:

While it is possible that the owls were indeed fishing or hunting over the water for fish (barred, great horned and eastern screech are all known to hunt for fish), my money is on the likelihood that the owls were going after “short-tailed field mice” or meadow voles. These rodents are remarkable swimmers, and I have observed them diving under icy water and swimming considerable distances. They are like miniature muskrats (Jim Duncan pers. comm.).

During the first Atlas, Short-eared Owls were confirmed breeding in two squares in the Wainfleet area, and possibly in one square near Port Colborne. Results from the second Atlas indicate that a displaying bird was observed on 11 April 2001 off Garringer Road in Wainfleet. The fields where it was seen were cultivated in 2002. Short-eared Owls had been present in the winter at this site for many years before the second Atlas began, but they were not seen following the cultivation. In the summer of 2004, they were observed south of Grimsby on Spring Creek Road, and a single bird was observed at the same location in April 2005. This species has been seen on 19 of the February-March owl prowls (1978-2006), with a maximum of 20 birds in each of 1987 and 1999. Currently, wintering birds are present on Ott Road near Stevensville.

Short-eared Owls are found throughout North America, Eurasia, parts of South America and on numerous major islands (Backhouse 2008). In Ontario they are known to breed across the southern regions and also along the James Bay/Hudson Bay lowlands (Cadman et al. 2007).

Brian D. Ratcliff

Boreal Owl *Aegolius fenereus*

Occasional late fall, winter and early spring visitor

The Boreal Owl is an occasional visitor to Niagara. There have been only eight individuals sighted, and all but two are from the 1960s (BOSNR). Sheppard (1970) identifies four records. The first in Niagara was of a bird photographed on 25 November 1961 at Effingham by Norm Haultain and Grant Hawes. Hawes also reported the second sighting of this species, a bird found in St. Catharines on 16 February 1963. The third record was of a bird at the Horace Troup farm near Jordan — a single bird observed from 23-25 March 1963, which may have been the same bird first observed by Hawes. The fourth record is of a specimen (BSNS # 6148) collected at the Horace Troup farm on 19 February 1967 and given to the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York. A Boreal Owl was first discovered by Dan Salisbury on 22 February 1969 at the Troup farm. On 24 February, the owl was captured and it sang while sitting passively on the hands of Dan Salisbury and George Bryant. This bird was also observed on 23-25 February and 16 March 1969 by Robert Andrie, Richard Byron and Harold Axtell (BOSNR). There are two more recent reports of Boreal Owls. The Owl Foundation picked up an injured female from Lakeshore Road, St. Catharines on 13 December 2004 (Kay McKeever pers. comm.). Eric Denee and Irene Lucas observed a single bird on 16 April 2005 on Lakeshore Road near McNab Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR).

Sightings of Boreal Owls in southern Ontario coincide with the irruptions of Great Gray and Northern Hawk-Owls. These irruptions are thought to be associated with changes in small mammal populations on the breeding territory (D.S. Badzinski 2007b).

The Boreal Owl is a permanent resident in the northern latitudes of North America and Eurasia (Backhouse 2008). Its biology is not very well understood in Ontario. The first provincial record was not until 27 June 1919 at Kapuskasing (Austen et al. 1994).

Brian D. Ratcliff



Boreal Owl
Virginia Lucas

Northern Saw-whet Owl *Aegolius acadicus*

Occasional summer resident, rare winter resident

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count:

Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:

Reported on 14 of 41 counts,
maximum of 2 birds on the
1993 BOS CBC

The Northern Saw-whet Owl, the smallest owl found in Niagara, is a rare winter resident that has also been known to breed in the area. It has been found on a number of occasions in suburban gardens, usually in the fall but sometimes in late summer (Sheppard 1970). A number of birds likely migrate through Niagara in both fall and spring, but its small size, nocturnal habits and secretive daytime roosts probably explain why it may be under-reported. Single birds have been observed on 13 of the February-March owl prowls (1978-2006), and over the years, Blayne Farnan has usually found these owls between 19 October and 22 March. An unusual record is that of a bird that responded to a taped call along the upper Niagara River on 28 February 2004 (JEB). Most observations are from late fall and winter, and there are only three breeding records. On 20 June 1955 a juvenile was found by William Putman at the Horticultural Experimental Station at Vineland (Sheppard 1970). In July 1979, a juvenile was hit by a car on the QEW Highway and taken to the Owl Foundation (Kay McKeever pers. comm.). On 3 July 1985 a recently fledged juvenile female flew into a window near Beamsville. It was one of three chicks that had fledged from a nest cavity in a nearby maple tree (Kay McKeever pers. comm., Cadman et al. 1987). There are two other summer records. A specimen, presumably killed by an automobile, was picked up in Fort Erie on 24 June 1969 (Goodwin 1969:656). There is also a record for 18 August 1970 from Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR).

In Ontario the Northern Saw-whet Owl is a spring and fall migrant. Large numbers have been banded at stations along the north shore of Lake Ontario (Prince Edward Point and Toronto Islands) and at Long Point on the north shore of Lake Erie.

The Northern Saw-whet Owl breeds from southern Canada to northern Mexico (*National Geographic* 2006).

Brian D. Ratcliff



Post-2006 Observation

The Northern Saw-whet Owl is a shrewd and cunning breeder with no confirmed or documented records of nesting in Niagara. No nest card has been submitted for Northern Saw-whet Owl to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme in the last 25 years during which Brad Clements has been the area compiler. On 18 April 2009, when Joseph Pierrynowski opened a nest box in his Niagara Falls backyard to clean it out, he was stunned when a Northern Saw-whet Owl exploded

out of the box. Four very young owlets were observed at the bottom of the box. The date of this first known documented Niagara breeding record is incredibly early. In the BOS study area the earliest date is 2 May (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). The four owlets all survived.

above: Northern Saw-whet Owl female / Dawn Pierrynowski

top right: Northern Saw-whet Owl male / Kayo Roy

right: Saw-whet female in Joseph Pierrynowski's nest box / Kayo Roy

four newborn chicks and four young owlets near fledging / Dawn Pierrynowski

Note the food (mice) in each corner of the box.



First Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 4 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 6 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1979

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1983

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor*

Spring transient, currently a rare summer resident, rare fall transient

The Common Nighthawk is designated by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada as Threatened in Canada (SARA 2008). It is observed infrequently in the spring in Niagara. It is not clear whether the few birds seen in the spring are transients or whether they are arriving in the area to nest. The earliest arrival date is 18 April 1968, when a single bird was found at Grimsby (HNCNR).

The Common Nighthawk, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is now a rare summer resident in Niagara. Its decline in numbers has been dramatic. Sheppard (1970) says of this species: "A common summer resident of the Frontier district, arriving late in May and favouring the urban and suburban areas." In 1970 at least one nighthawk could

be heard every early summer evening hawking over south St. Catharines (JEB). During the five summers of the second Atlas, Common Nighthawks were scarce and seen by only a few individuals. The probability of observation of this species in the Carolinian region has declined by 60% between atlases (Sandilands 2007f). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 4 July.

Fall is the most likely time to see this species because then the birds tend to fly in slightly larger flocks as they migrate through Niagara. The following examples of these larger numbers are identified in BOS Noteworthy Records: 34 and

27 birds at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie on 29 and 30 August 1974 respectively; 60 birds at Niagara Falls on 30 August 1978; 60 birds at Niagara Falls on 29 August 1987; 13 birds at Wainfleet Township on 1 September 2001; and 47 birds at Fort Erie on 5 September 2001.

Sheppard (1970) refers to the Niagara River as a migration corridor for this species. The latest recorded fall date is 17 October 1979, when a single bird was observed at Port Colborne (BOSNR). There are no winter records of Common Nighthawk from Niagara. It winters mainly in northern and central South America (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black



Common Nighthawk
Kayo Roy

Common Nighthawk
Harold Stiver



Whip-poor-will *Caprimulgus vociferus*

Rare and local summer resident

The Whip-poor-will is one of the top 20 common birds in decline as determined by the National Audubon Society (Audubon 2007). It is observed infrequently in the spring in Niagara. The earliest record is 14 April 1991, when a single bird was seen on the BOS April Count. There is little evidence to suggest that these birds migrate through Niagara in the spring. Given its nocturnal habits, however, one may simply not see them moving through. The Whip-poor-will, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a rare and local summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 14 June. Whip-poor-wills are residents



First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1991

BOS May Count: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 1989

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, a single bird in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Whip-poor-will
Harold Stiver

of the Wainfleet Bog, where birders have been hearing and seeing them for many years. On 2 July 2001, a surprising 15 birds were heard in Wainfleet (Hoffman 2001:431). On any evening in June, if a birder were to stand on Wilson Road near the intersection with Garringer Road in Wainfleet, Whip-poor-wills would be heard calling at dusk. With luck, one will fly in and land on the road. There are 46 sightings in BOS Noteworthy Records from May to October. All but one of these sightings are from the Port Colborne and Wainfleet area. The other record is from the Humberstone Marsh in Fort Erie.

The latest fall record is for 13 October 1966, when a single bird was found at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). There are no winter records for Niagara. Whip-poor-wills winter from southeastern United States and northern Mexico to Honduras (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*

Uncommon spring transient, uncommon summer resident, uncommon fall transient

The Chimney Swift is designated by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada as Threatened in Canada (SARA 2008). It is observed infrequently in the spring in Niagara. The earliest date, 11 April 1998, is of two birds at Grimsby (Ridout 1998:327). The next earliest date is 17 April of the same year, when a single bird was reported at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). It is difficult to estimate a late date for spring migration, because transient Chimney Swifts cannot be readily distinguished from birds that have arrived to breed in Niagara.

Chimney Swifts, which breed throughout southern Ontario, are an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. On 28 September 1996, 600 birds were observed by Robert Curry and John Olmsted at Fort Erie (Ridout 1997:50). The latest recorded date is 26 October 1972, when a single bird was found at Crescent Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). On 5 October 2005, 192 swifts, presumably migrants, were observed entering an unused brick chimney on a plant across the tracks from the VIA Rail Station platform in St. Catharines (JEB).

There are no winter records for Niagara. The Chimney Swift winters in northern South America (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black



Chimney Swift
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 16 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 9 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 7 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 151 birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported on 13 of 40 counts, maximum of 70 birds in 1966

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported



Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Raymond Barlow

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Archilochus colubris

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident

First Atlas: 13 squares confirmed,
10 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 12 squares confirmed,
12 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 35
of 41 counts, maximum of 12
birds in 1975

BOS October Count: Reported
on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 1976

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

The earliest date for the spring arrival of this species is 2 May 2003, when one bird was observed at Port Weller east pier (KJR). Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were observed on the Port Weller piers from 10 May to 30 May during the Port Weller Study. They were never common on the piers during the formal count hours, the highest number being three birds on 10 May 1996. On 9 May 1996, during observations outside the count hours, 14 birds were reported. On the evening of the following day, 30 birds were found on the east pier at the north end of the island, and an additional eight birds were seen at the south end of the pond during the Port Weller Study. Spring transient abundance is unclear because it is not evident which of the small numbers of birds found outside known breeding areas in the spring are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird breeds throughout southern Ontario as far north as the southern boreal forest. Ontario's only regularly occurring hummingbird, it is an uncommon resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 22 June.

This species was observed on only one of the BOS October Counts, 10 October 1976, the latest fall date for this species.

There are no Niagara winter records of this species. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds winter from southern Florida to Central America (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black



Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Rufous Hummingbird is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. All sightings in Ontario have been of single individuals at residential feeders. There are 16 accepted OBRC records between 1966 and 2004 (Crins 2005, Chartier 2006). The first Niagara sighting is that of a bird found on 2 September 2005 by Janice and Art Haines at their residential feeder in Niagara Falls. The bird, an immature female, was identified and banded by Allen Chartier on 4 December and was found dead on 18 December (Bain 2005, Crins 2005, Haines 2005, Chartier 2006).

The second Niagara record of Rufous Hummingbird occurred on 13 July 2006. Mary McNeil observed a different looking hummingbird at her Port Colborne residence feeders and called Jean and Blayne Farnan to come and identify the bird. It turned out to be a definitive basic male Rufous Hummingbird that was photographed on the

top: Rufous Hummingbird

Janice Haines

head and tail feathers

Allen Chartier

Editors' Note

For more than 120 days the Rufous Hummingbird frequented a feeder at the Haines residence in Niagara Falls. During that period over 500 birders came to observe this rare visitor. The bird died on 18 December 2004. Janice Haines (2005) comments on this bird, which she named Hannah:

As winter neared, my husband and I set up a Scotch pine tree with Christmas lights on it hoping that Hannah would go in it for the night and get some warmth. Being the curious one that she had always been, within five minutes, she made the tree her new home for the night. I also noticed a Song Sparrow fly into the same tree and from that day on, the two of them slept in it together. Hannah had made her first friend. We also purchased a heating lamp to put near her feeder so the solution would not freeze up.

On the 16th of December Hannah flew off into the distance. I had never seen her do this, maybe the instinct to fly south had registered. I was hoping this was the case as the last two nights had been below freezing. The next day she was at the feeder at 7 a.m., which had been her habit since she arrived. The feedings that day were limited, as she preferred to sit on the Trumpet Vine branches closer to the ground the entire day. I saw her go into the Christmas tree just after 5 p.m. The 18th of December proved to be a bit milder than the previous few days. I proceeded to put up Hannah's feeder early in the morning. A few people arrived to see her, but I could not find her anywhere. I was told there had been a south wind the night before and maybe she had decided to leave. That was not the case.

I found Hannah shortly before 10 a.m. perched at the top of her tree. She had died through the night even though she had tried so hard to survive.

morning of 14 July 2006 by Kayo Roy and was not seen after the late afternoon of that date (Crins 2007a).

During fall migration, the Rufous Hummingbird has been recorded in every US state and nearly every Canadian province and is the most frequently reported vagrant hummingbird throughout eastern North America. Adult males depart the breeding grounds as early as late July, and eastern vagrants frequently overwinter in southern states. Due to their metabolism, they can survive well into early winter in northern states and southern Canada. As more homeowners leave their feeders up later into the fall season, there will undoubtedly be more records from the Niagara Region.

The Rufous Hummingbird breeds in the Pacific Northwest, north to southern Alaska and south to extreme northern California; it winters primarily in central and southern Mexico, with a small number (perhaps a few thousand) wintering on the US Gulf Coast (Calder 1993).

Allen T. Chartier

Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird

Selasphorus sp.

Extremely rare visitor

The Rufous Hummingbird (see species account) and the closely related Allen's Hummingbird are extremely similar in appearance. Both are in the genus *Selasphorus*, along with the Broad-tailed Hummingbird of the Rocky Mountains and three species in Central America. Distinguishing Rufous from Allen's Hummingbird is one of the greatest bird identification challenges in North America. The Allen's Hummingbird breeds in a narrow, mostly coastal strip from southern California to extreme southwestern Oregon and winters in western and southern Mexico (Mitchell 2000). Interestingly, there are numerous records of Allen's from the southeastern United States, and even a few records from southern New England (Howell 2002, Williamson 2001). Many individuals cannot be accurately identified in the field as Rufous or Allen's, and measurements are required of several characteristics, including widths of tail feathers, to confirm identification.

Although there have been no confirmed records of Allen's Hummingbird from Canada, it is clearly possible for one to occur. Many female and immature Rufous/Allen's Hummingbirds are never identified if they are not photographed extremely well, or examined and measured in-hand by a licensed hummingbird bander. As a result, these records remain as "Rufous/Allen's" to reflect that the bird was one of these two species but not confirmed.

The OBRC and other record committees label these observations as *Selasphorus* sp. (Chartier 2006). Since the only other North American possibility, the Broad-tailed Hummingbird, can be easily eliminated from consideration, it makes more sense to label them as "Rufous/Allen's".

There are seven OBRC accepted records of Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird from Ontario (Dobos 1999). Two are from Niagara, both from the Grimsby area. One female or immature male was observed by George Meyers at Grimsby from 1 October to 4 October 1984 (Weir 1985:48), and one immature male was observed by George Meyers at Grimsby Beach from 1 October to 10 December 1990 (Weir 1991:100; Curry 1991, 2006).

Allen T. Chartier

Belted Kingfisher *Megasceryle alcyon*

Uncommon summer resident, uncommon to rare winter resident

Niagara lies at the northern limit of the Belted Kingfisher's range, where it is regarded as a permanent resident. There are two March BOS Noteworthy Records of this species. While one or two birds are often reported throughout the winter months, it is clear that additional birds arrive in the spring to swell the number of residents here.

The Belted Kingfisher breeds from southern Ontario north to the limit of dense boreal forest (Brewer et al. 2000). It is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara, with no more than one pair in most, if not all, squares.

The kingfisher is regularly seen on the CBC counts, usually in small numbers. There are BOS Noteworthy Records of 21 sightings in December, 25 in January and 8 in February. Birds that survive into early January are often found in an area (for example, Dufferin Island in Niagara Falls) that is frozen over by the end of the month. Belted Kingfishers winter from Ontario south through much of Central America and the West Indies. Occasionally they reach northern South America (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 18 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 12 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 6 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 28 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 19 birds in 1989

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 2003

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds on the 1991 Niagara Falls CBC



Belted Kingfisher
Raymond Barlow



Red-headed Woodpecker
Mark Peck

First Atlas: 20 squares confirmed,
4 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 10 squares con-
firmed, 1 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
3 of 41 counts, maximum of 2
birds in 1984 and 1985

BOS May Count: Reported on
36 of 41 counts, maximum of
30 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported
on 14 of 40 counts, maximum
of 7 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 24 of 41 counts,
maximum of 8 birds on the 1977
Niagara Falls CBC

Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*

Spring and fall transient, rare and local summer resident, very rare winter straggler

The Red-headed Woodpecker is designated a species of Special Concern in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). It is a permanent resident over much of North America from Niagara south and breeds as far north as the northern Great Lakes (*National Geographic* 2006). This bird overwinters in small numbers, making it difficult to identify an early migrant arrival date. The earliest arrival date recorded on a count is 8 April 1984, when two birds were found on the BOS April Count. During the Port Weller Study, two birds were seen on 8 May, and single birds on 11, 14, 15 and 22 May on the Port Weller piers.

The Red-headed Woodpecker, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is now a rare summer resident in Niagara. In the first Atlas, confirmed breeding was reported from 20 squares, but during the second Atlas from only 10 squares. The decline in numbers of this species was already in progress prior to the first Atlas. Sheppard (1970) notes: "Formerly a common and conspicuous summer resident throughout the general area, but for the past three or more decades this woodpecker has become increasingly scarce during the nesting season." There are no recent

records of eggs on nests. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the only early egg date for this species in Niagara is from Welland County on 31 May 1895.

The latest October Count date is 16 October 1983, when two birds were noted on the BOS October Count. Six records for November appear in BOS Noteworthy Records.

The Red-headed Woodpecker is a very rare winter straggler in Niagara. It has been seen on only a small fraction of the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts and has been found less frequently in the last decade than previously. In 1966 a Red-headed Woodpecker could be found regularly in January in Paradise Grove, a forest of oak trees in Niagara-on-the-Lake. They can no longer be found there at any time of the year (JEB). There are three December records, four January records and one February record from the BOS Noteworthy Records. In recent years, one or two overwintering Red-headed Woodpeckers may be found at the feeders located at the gated entrance to Point Abino in January.

John E. Black

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*

Uncommon permanent resident

The Red-bellied Woodpecker, a permanent resident throughout southern Ontario, is uncommon in Niagara, which lies along the northern edge of its breeding range. The growth in the numbers of this species in the last 20 years has been remarkable. (See the article by Hamilton and DeLeon in this book for further details.)

In the first Atlas, breeding was confirmed in only one square. In the second Atlas, breeding was confirmed in 19 squares, an enormous increase. The probability of observation of this species between atlases increased by 200% in the Carolinian region (Bavrlc 2007a). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 27 June. Sheppard (1970) noted that, aside from one record in 1891, there were no further records for the Niagara Frontier area until Harold Lancaster found a bird in Niagara-on-the-Lake on December 1962. Harold Axtell commented that on 4 June 1973 a rare Red-bellied Woodpecker appeared at Fort Erie (Goodwin 1973:865). In June 1999, three bird territories were found in Marcy's Woods near Point Abino, and one was found on Point Abino (McCracken et al. 1999).

Still an uncommon bird on the Christmas Bird Counts, Red-bellied Woodpecker has increased noticeably in numbers over the years. From 1966 to 1982 there were only two records of single birds on the BOS CBC; subsequently the birds were seen every year except 1984, and their numbers slowly grew. A total of 125 birds were found in 2005 on the four Niagara Christmas Bird Counts.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 3 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 19 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 14 of 41 counts, maximum of 8 birds in 2003

BOS May Count: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 16 birds in 2004

BOS October Count: Reported on 15 of 40 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 26 of 41 counts, maximum of 58 birds on the 2005 Niagara Falls CBC

Red-bellied Woodpecker
Peter Ferguson





Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Barry Cherriere

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
28 of 41 counts, maximum of 10
birds in 2001, 2002 and 2005

BOS May Count: Reported on
11 of 41 counts, maximum of
5 birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported
on 22 of 40 counts, maximum
of 14 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 12 of 41 counts,
maximum of 4 birds on the
1971 Niagara Falls CBC

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*

Uncommon spring transient, occasional summer straggler, fall transient, occasional winter straggler

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is a permanent resident over much of North America to the south of Niagara and breeds as far north as Hudson Bay (*National Geographic* 2006). In Niagara it is an uncommon spring transient. There are two March records from BOS Noteworthy Records, and on 30 March 1970, Harold Lancaster observed a single bird in Welland. Because the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is a rare winter straggler, it is not clear if these records indicate arriving migrants or birds that have overwintered in Niagara. The earliest BOS April Count arrival date is 4 April 1971, when two birds were found. During the Port Weller Study, single birds were found on 1, 2, 4, 10, 15, 16 and 17 May.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers breed throughout much of southern Ontario. They are found north of Hamilton and in the Long Point area, but they are all but absent from Niagara. In the second Atlas, possible breeding was reported on 11 July 2002 in the Fort Erie area and 8 June 2005 in West Lincoln.

There is one record of an early fall migrant: a single bird was seen at Grimsby Beach on 25 August 1971 by George Meyers (Curry 2006). There is one BOS Noteworthy Record for November. A single bird was observed on 14 November 1976 at Niagara Falls.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is an occasional winter straggler in Niagara, seen only 11 years on the Niagara Falls CBC and one year on the St. Catharines CBC. The BOS Noteworthy Records contains one December record, one January record and five February records. One January sighting was of a single bird found in St. Catharines on 8 January 1969 by Art Briggs Jude. The bird visited his feeder in St. Catharines for several days (JEB). Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers winter from Florida and the Gulf Coast south to western Panama and in small numbers in the West Indies (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black



First Atlas: 23 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 24 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of 39
birds in 1994, 2002 and 2005

BOS May Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
52 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on
39 of 40 counts, maximum of
37 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 41 of 41 counts,
maximum of 143 birds on the
1995 St. Catharines CBC

Downy Woodpecker
Peter Ferguson

Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens*

Common permanent resident

The Downy Woodpecker is a permanent resident throughout Southern Ontario. It is a common species in Niagara and a sighting of a few individuals of this species can be expected on almost any outing by a birder. The Downy Woodpecker is North America's smallest woodpecker. Females forage on tree trunks and large branches, while the males forage on smaller branches and weed stems (Bavrlie 2007b).

John E. Black

Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus*

Uncommon permanent resident

First Atlas: 21 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 20 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 30 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 32 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1971, 1973 and 1976

BOS October Count: Reported on 34 of 40 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 2004

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 36 birds on the 1988 St. Catharines CBC

The Hairy Woodpecker is a permanent resident throughout southern Ontario. It is uncommon in Niagara and is not always observed on bird outings or counts. Abundance maps in the second Atlas show that its population is densest on the Southern Shield, well to the north of Carolinian Niagara (Bavrlic 2007c). While Hairy Woodpecker was found breeding in most squares in the second Atlas, there were very few pairs in each square.

John E. Black

Hairy Woodpecker
Peter Ferguson



American Three-toed Woodpecker

Picoides dorsalis

Extremely rare visitor

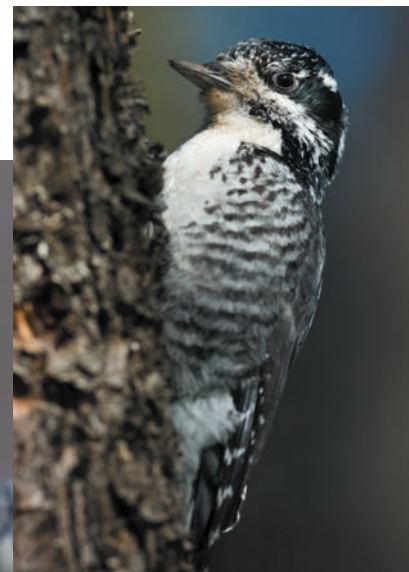
The American Three-toed Woodpecker, formerly known as Northern Three-toed Woodpecker, is a medium-sized bird with a large range across boreal North America. This species breeds farther north than any other woodpecker and forages in its ideal habitat of mature conifer forests containing stands of dead trees as well as burns and clear-cuts. While not wary of humans, the American Three-toed Woodpecker is difficult to see because of its quiet and inconspicuous nature.

There is only one record of this extremely rare visitor for Niagara. On 28 November 1963, Harold Axtell and Robert Andrie discovered a female American Three-toed Woodpecker at Thunder Bay near Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970). The bird remained in the area for more than two weeks providing many Ontario and western New York birders an opportunity to view this rare northern visitor. The bird was collected on 12 December 1963; the specimen is at the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York (BSNS # 5068).

The American Three-toed Woodpecker breeds throughout most of Alaska, the northern Rocky Mountains, and across Canada's boreal regions eastward to Newfoundland and the Maritime provinces. It winters primarily throughout its breeding range with the most northerly birds moving somewhat southward, and the birds of higher elevations moving to lower levels (Leonard 2001). There is sometimes a small southward irruption in the fall to the southern Prairie provinces, northern Great Lakes, New England states and southern Ontario (Leonard 2001).

Kayo J. Roy

American Three-toed
Woodpecker
inset: female, below: male
Jukka Jantunen





Black-backed Woodpecker
Peter Ferguson

Black-backed Woodpecker *Picoides arcticus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Black-backed Woodpecker is a bird of the boreal forest that is superbly adapted to life after a forest fire. This species is strongly attracted to forests where there has been a recent burn, and they are known to travel long distances in search of this preferred habitat. The Black-backed Woodpecker also seeks areas recently logged or swampy forests, where they feed on the outbreaks of bark and wood-boring beetles.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) include a lengthy account of the early presence of Black-backed Woodpecker in the BOS study area. They also bring to the reader's attention some detail of two small invasions or irruptions of this species to the area in 1953 and during the winter of 1956-1957.

In the early 1960s, there are three Niagara observations for Black-backed Woodpecker, all from the Harold Axtell residence in Fort Erie. The first was on 28 October 1962 (BOSNR), followed by another on 14 November 1963 when two birds were seen (Sheppard 1970), and the third on 21 November 1965 (BOSNR). There were no reports of Black-backed Woodpecker from Niagara during the 1964-1965 irruption, and this 1965 individual is the only bird of the 1965-1966 irruption that reached Niagara.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, only one report of Black-backed Woodpecker exists for Niagara. On 22 December 1985 during the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count, Richard Knapton discovered one at the Beaverdam Road woods in Thorold (Weir 1986:276). It appears that a minor irruption may have occurred in 1985, certainly the most since the 1982-1983 irruption, as 24 Black-backed Woodpeckers were reported south of their normal breeding range. In addition to this Thorold observation during the winter of 1985-1986, single birds were reported as far south as Stouffville, Stratford, and Ivy Lee (Weir 1986:276).

The Black-backed Woodpecker breeds throughout the boreal regions of Central Alaska, Canada, the northern United States Rocky Mountains and south to New England. It winters at lower levels in much of its breeding range (Dixon and Saab 2000). Southward irruptions into southern Ontario and Niagara can occur in those years when food shortages and habitat conditions warrant such action.

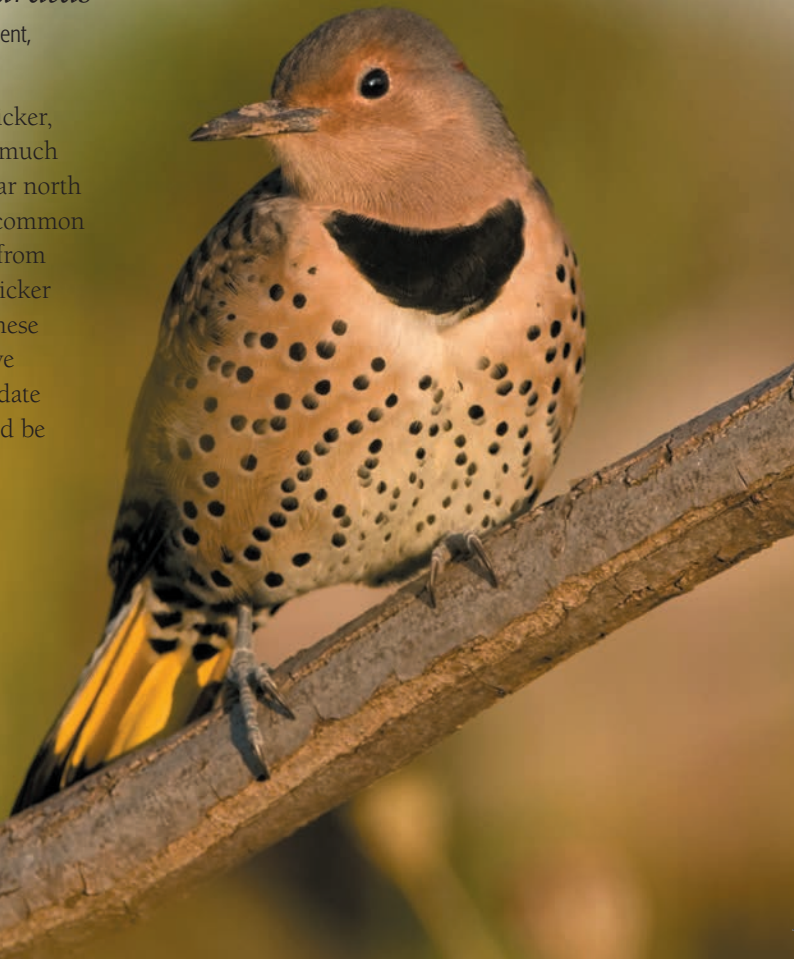
Kayo J. Roy

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*

Common spring transient, common summer resident, fall transient, rare winter straggler

Formerly known as Common or Yellow-shafted Flicker, the Northern Flicker is a permanent resident over much of North America south of Niagara and breeds as far north as Hudson Bay (*National Geographic* 2006). It is a common transient in Niagara. There are five March records from BOSNoteworthy Records. Because the Northern Flicker is an uncommon winter straggler, it is not clear if these records indicate arriving migrants or birds that have overwintered in Niagara. The earliest April arrival date is 3 April 1977, when 15 birds, far more than could be expected to have overwintered here, were seen on the BOS April Count.

Northern Flicker
Raymond Barlow



First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 20 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 163 birds in 1969

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 198 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 89 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 73 birds on the 2003 Niagara Falls CBC

Northern Flicker
male and female
Harold Stiver



The Northern Flicker, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 26 June.

There are seven BOS Noteworthy Records for November.

In Niagara, the Northern Flicker is a rare winter straggler. There are fifteen December records, seventeen January records and seven February records from the BOS Noteworthy Records.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 2 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1975

BOS May Count: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of single birds in 1982 and 2006

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on the 1994 Niagara Falls (New York section) CBC

Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus*

Rare and local permanent resident

The Pileated Woodpecker, a permanent resident throughout southern Ontario, is rare and local in Niagara. In the second Atlas, confirmed breeding was reported from the vicinity of Marcy's Woods near Point Abino. See also McCracken et al. (1999), which finds a possible breeding bird in Marcy's Woods, and Wood (2004), which notes a possible breeding bird at Twelve Mile Creek in Pelham.

An extremely rare bird on the Christmas Bird Counts, Pileated Woodpecker appears in only four records: St. Catharines CBC in 1991 and Niagara Falls (New York section) CBC in 1994, 2000 and 2006. On the morning of 1 January 1970, at the south end of Holloway Bay Road near Point Abino, a number of birders were amazed to see a Pileated Woodpecker fly through Marcy's Woods. This was the first sighting in the Marcy's Woods area, and there have been many others there since that date, culminating in evidence of breeding in the second Atlas (JEB).

John E. Black



Pileated Woodpecker female
inset: male
Jukka Jantunen

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1968, 1987 and 1996

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Olive-sided Flycatcher
Jukka Jantunen



First Atlas: 20 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 14 squares confirmed, 9 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 35 of 41 counts, maximum of 45 birds in 1978

BOS October Count: Reported on 11 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1990

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Olive-sided Flycatcher *Contopus cooperi*

Occasional spring transient, fall transient

There has been a long-term decline in the number of Olive-sided Flycatchers in North America (Cheskey 2007a). As a consequence, this species is now designated by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada as Threatened in Canada (SARA 2008). The cause of this decline is unclear. The earliest Niagara date for this occasional spring transient is 29 April 2000, when a single bird was seen at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (HNCNR). The latest spring date is 3 June 1970, when one bird was observed on Nigh Road, Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Olive-sided Flycatcher breeds north of Lake Ontario. There are no summer records of this species in Niagara.

There are three BOS Noteworthy Records for August, all on 19 August: single birds at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie in 1970 and 1979, and a single bird at nearby Thunder Bay in Fort Erie in 1985. The latest recorded observation is of a single bird on 12 September 1981 in Wainfleet (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of this species in Niagara. The Olive-sided Flycatcher winters from northern South America south to Bolivia (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident

The earliest spring report for this species is of a single bird seen on 3 May 1970 at Mud Lake in Port Colborne by Dan Salisbury and Harold Lancaster. The latest spring sightings occurred on 31 May of 1993, 1995 and 1996 on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study. Spring transient abundance is uncertain. It is not evident which of the small numbers of birds seen outside known breeding areas in the spring are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

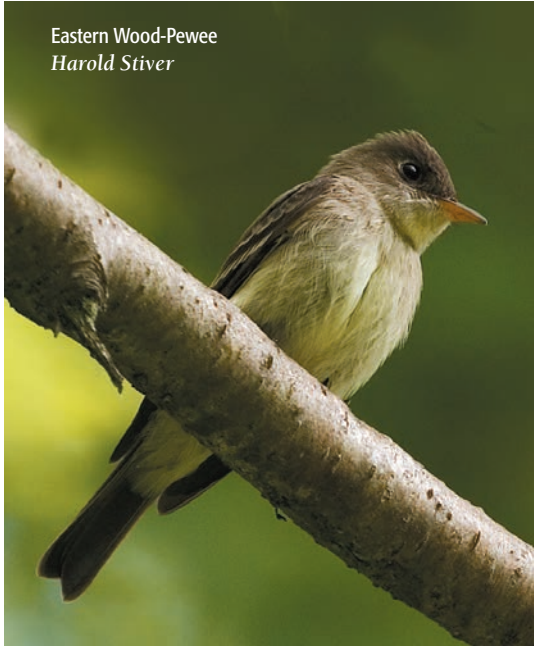
The Eastern Wood-Pewee breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a common summer resident in Niagara. The distinctive “pee-a-wee” of this species will almost certainly be heard in any reasonably-sized deciduous woodlot in Niagara.

The latest record from a fall count is 14 October on the 1980 and 1984 BOS October Counts. A single bird was observed at Erie Beach in Fort Erie on 2 November 1997 (Ridout 1998:54).

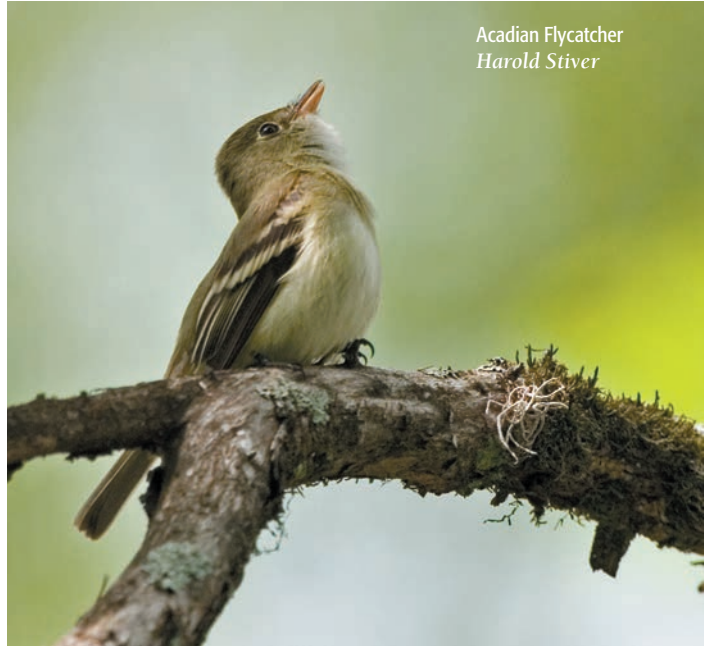
There are no winter records of Eastern Wood-Pewee in Niagara. This species winters mainly in northwest South America (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995). It is territorial both during migration and on its wintering areas, with both sexes using one of the breeding male’s several songs, the pewee phrase. Because of this, several indigenous peoples in Amazonia call “their” bird “pweee” (Eugene Morton pers. comm.).

John E. Black

Eastern Wood-Pewee
Harold Stiver



Acadian Flycatcher
Harold Stiver



Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
Jukka Jantunen



Yellow-bellied Flycatcher *Empidonax flaviventris*

Rare spring transient, fall transient

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is an occasional spring transient in Niagara. The earliest arrival date is 5 May 1967, when one bird was reported at Long Beach in Wainfleet (BOSNR). The latest spring dates are 3 June 1984, when one bird was reported at Fort Erie (BOSNR), and 4 June 2002, when one bird was reported at Niagara-on-the-Lake (KJR).

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher breeds north of Lake Ontario. There are no summer records of this species.

The BOS Noteworthy Records contain five sightings of this species in the fall. The earliest of these is of one bird seen on 12 August 1985 at Port Colborne. The latest is of one bird seen on 26 September 1968 at Morgan's Point near Burnaby.

There are no winter records of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in Niagara. This species winters from northeast Mexico south to Panama (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1975

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Acadian Flycatcher *Empidonax virescens*

Occasional spring transient, extremely rare summer resident and straggler, extremely rare fall transient

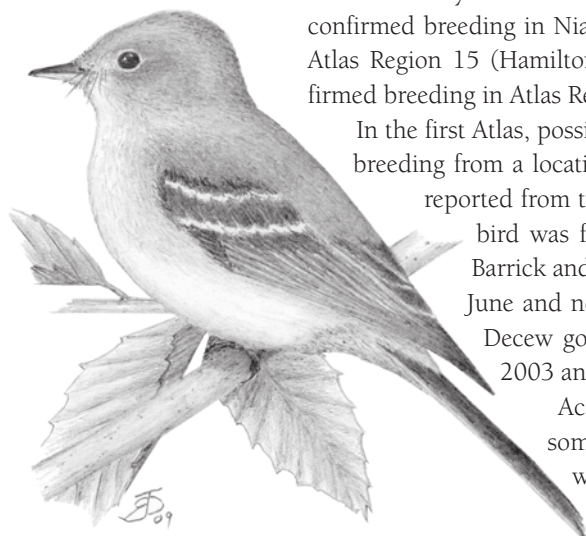
The Acadian Flycatcher is designated as Endangered in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). In Niagara it is an occasional spring transient. There is only one May observation from local birders at locations other than Marcy's Woods, where this species was once known to breed. A single bird was seen on 22 May 2002 at Port Colborne (KJR). There are only five records from BOS May Counts: two birds on 17 May 1975 and single birds on 15 May 1977, 21 May 1979, 15 May 1983 and 21 May 2000. These numbers are perhaps low because migrant males do not always call in May, and identification without the call is difficult. A single bird was found in a woodlot on Kalar Road not far south of Mountain Road, Niagara Falls, on 1 June 2005 but not found a week later, when the site was revisited (JEB).

Niagara lies at the northern edge of the breeding range of the Acadian Flycatcher. It is an extremely rare summer straggler here. There are no records in the second Atlas of confirmed breeding in Niagara. Nor are there any confirmed records in the squares of Atlas Region 15 (Hamilton), immediately to the west, but six squares reported confirmed breeding in Atlas Region 5 (Long Point).

In the first Atlas, possible breeding was reported from Marcy's Woods and probable breeding from a location near Winger. In the second Atlas, possible breeding was reported from two squares and probable breeding from one square. A single bird was found on 18 June 2001 in a woodlot at the intersection of Barrick and Minor Roads in Port Colborne. This bird was last seen on 28 June and not found after that date (JEB). A single bird was seen in the Decew gorge in Thorold (Cheskey 2003) on 11 June and 14 June of 2003 and not found subsequently.

Acadian Flycatchers were known to breed in Marcy's Woods for some years. A calling bird was present from 1968 to 1971 but was not observed in 1976 (JEB). A bird was present in 1998 but not in 1999 (McCracken et al. 1999).

Acadian Flycatcher
Ross James



According to the Natural Heritage Information Centre database, birds were encountered in Marcy's Woods in the following years: in 1970 (observed), in 1972 (one nest), in 1974 (two nests), in 1975 (observed) and in 1984 (calls heard). A pair was also observed near Winger in 1983.

There is only one fall record for this species — a single bird observed on 16 August 1971 at Abino Hills in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

During winter, as do all the *Empidonax* flycatchers, both sexes defend territories in the understory of tropical forest using a species-distinctive call note, a sibilant “wheetz” (Eugene Morton pers. comm.). There are no winter records of this species in Niagara. The Acadian Flycatcher winters from Costa Rica south to western Colombia and north-west Venezuela (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Alder Flycatcher

Empidonax alnorum

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident

Formerly known as Traill's Flycatcher, this species was seen on four of 41 BOS May Counts: two birds were reported on 21 May 1995, and single birds were reported on 17 May 1987 (the earliest recorded spring date for this species), 21 May 1989 and 20 May 2000. The abundance of the Alder Flycatcher as a spring transient is difficult to determine. In the early spring, when the males are not calling, many birders cannot distinguish this species from the very similar Willow Flycatcher. A number of Alder or Willow Flycatchers were seen, but not distinguished, between 14 May and 31 May on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study. See the discussion in Curry (2006) for more on the distinction between Willow and Alder Flycatchers.

The Alder Flycatcher breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon and somewhat local summer resident in Niagara. An easy location for viewing these birds is the Wainfleet Bog. A trail begins at the north end of Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet. About 0.5 km along this trail, a well-marked path branches to the west. It is in this area that the birds are frequently located. They can also be found in the vicinity of the intersection of Wilson Road and Garringer Road in Wainfleet. In both locations, Willow as well as Alder Flycatchers can be heard, a juxtaposition that offers an excellent opportunity to learn the difference between the two calls of these two very similar species.

A single bird, identified as Traill's Flycatcher, was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby on 24 August 1971 by Dan Salisbury. There are no other fall records.

There are no winter records of Alder Flycatcher for Niagara. This species winters from northwest Columbia south to Argentina (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black



Alder Flycatcher
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed,
7 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares con-
firmed, 13 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 4 of
41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in
1989 and 1995

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported



Willow Flycatcher
Harold Stiver



Least Flycatcher
Harold Stiver

Willow Flycatcher *Empidonax traillii*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident

The earliest record of the Willow Flycatcher, formerly known as Traill's Flycatcher, is of one calling bird on 10 May 2005 at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (KJR). On 16 May 1993, a calling Willow Flycatcher was identified on the Port Weller east pier and it remained there until 31 May. A second bird was heard calling from 17 May until 31 May. These were, presumably, territorial birds. The abundance of the Willow Flycatcher as a spring transient is difficult to determine. In the early spring, when the males are often not calling, it is very difficult to distinguish this species from the very similar Alder Flycatcher. A number of Alder or Willow Flycatchers were seen, but not distinguished, between 14 May and 31 May on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study. See the discussion in Curry (2006) for more on the distinction between Willow and Alder Flycatchers.

The Willow Flycatcher, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 22 June.

There is only one fall record, 7 September 1986, when a single bird was seen at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR).

There are no winter records of the Willow Flycatcher in Niagara. This species winters from southern Mexico to northern Columbia (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 13 squares confirmed, 9 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 7 squares confirmed, 16 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1986

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Least Flycatcher *Empidonax minimus*

Uncommon spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient

The Least Flycatcher is an uncommon spring transient. The earliest spring date is 30 April 1989, when a single bird was seen at Fort Erie (BOSNR). The earliest observation of this species during the Port Weller Study was on 8 May 1993, when three birds were seen. The last obvious migrants were three birds on 28 May 1993 and two birds on 28 May 1995. Single birds seen until 31 May on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study could have remained during the summer.

The Least Flycatcher, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara.

From local birders there are four September records of single birds: three at Mud Lake in Port Colborne and one in Wainfleet Bog. There are two October records: a single bird was reported from Crescent Beach in Fort Erie on 9 October 1997 (BOSNR), and one bird was observed by Harold Lancaster at Morgan's Point near Burnaby on 10 October 1966.

There are no winter records of this flycatcher in Niagara. This species winters from eastern and southern Mexico to Panama (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995). If one visits the Mayan ruin Coba in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula during winter, both Least and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers are common, defending territories along the walkway into the site in open, brushy habitat with scattered small trees (Eugene Morton pers. comm.).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Least Flycatcher, banded at Long Point on 17 August 1982, was encountered on 18 September 1982 in Mexico.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 14 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 7 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 32 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

First Atlas: 11 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 18 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 41 birds in 2001

BOS May Count: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 2002

BOS October Count: Reported on 31 of 40 counts, maximum of 10 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1992 St. Catharines CBC and the 2001 Niagara Falls CBC

The earliest date for Eastern Phoebe is 14 March 1982, when a single bird was seen at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (HNCNR). The numbers of Eastern Phoebes observed on the BOS April Count have risen noticeably since 1966. Spring transient abundance is uncertain. It is not evident which of the small numbers of birds seen outside known breeding areas in the spring are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Eastern Phoebe, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 21 May. The second Atlas figures would appear to indicate a substantial increase in the confirmed breeding population of the Eastern Phoebe in Niagara during the last 20 years. This is consistent with the overall figures for Ontario. M.A. McLaren (2007a) indicates a significant increase (44%) in the probability of observation of this species in the Carolinian region between atlases.

The latest October record is of a single bird seen on 26-28 October 1979 at Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are three November records of single birds: one on 2 November 1969 at Welland (Harold Lancaster), one on 13 November 1967 at Queenston (BOSNR) and one on 28 November 1967 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There are two winter records of single birds in Niagara: one on 20 December 1992 from the St Catharines Christmas Bird Count and the other on 29 December 2001 from the Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count (New York State). This species winters from the southeast United States to southern Mexico (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Eastern Phoebe
Harold Stiver





Great-crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus crinitus*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident

The earliest spring sighting of this species occurred on 27 April 1999, when a single bird was observed in Marcy's Woods near Point Abino (JEB). The latest date during the Port Weller Study was 21 May 1993, when one bird was seen on the Port Weller piers. Spring transient abundance is unclear. It is not evident which of the small numbers of birds seen outside known breeding areas in the spring are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Great-crested Flycatcher, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. A Great-crested Flycatcher can be heard in almost any reasonably-sized deciduous woodlot in Niagara. They are the only cavity-nesting flycatchers found in eastern North America (Peck and James 1987). According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 16 June.

There is only one September record by local birders, that of a single bird seen by Harold Lancaster in Welland on 2 September 1977. This species was observed on only one of the 40 BOS October Counts, a single bird on 13 October 1968, which is also the latest recorded date for the species in Niagara.

There are no winter records of the Great-crested Flycatcher in Niagara. These flycatchers winter in central and southern Florida and from southeastern Mexico to northern Columbia and Venezuela (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Great-crested Flycatcher
Brandon Holden

First Atlas: 18 squares confirmed,
6 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 11 squares confirmed,
13 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
40 of 41 counts, maximum of
33 birds in 1995

BOS October Count: Reported
on 1 of 40 counts, maximum
of 1 bird in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis*

Extremely rare visitor

The Western Kingbird is widespread and common in western North America. It is easily found in the open country around farms, ranches, and other areas where a steady diet of insects is available. Over the last decade, its breeding range has been expanding eastward, contributing no doubt to the fact that this rarity is becoming a regular visitor to many areas of eastern North America. The first Niagara record of Western Kingbird is of a bird observed by Richard Brownstein on 16 September 1964 in Canborough (BOSNR).

This species is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara, with only two reported observations over the 41-year period 1966-2006. Rachel and Harold Axtell discovered a Western Kingbird in Wainfleet on 28 August 1972 (BOSNR), and David Freeland identified one in Beamsville on 24 August 1985 (BOSNR, Wormington 1987, Curry 2006).

The Western Kingbird breeds from southeastern British Columbia eastward to central Minnesota and southward to southern Texas and Mexico. It winters in southern Mexico and western Central America. Small numbers also winter in southern Florida (Gamble and Bergin 1996).

Kayo J. Roy



Western Kingbird
James Pawlicki

Post-2006 Observation

On 10 September 2007, Brian Ahara discovered a Western Kingbird at the tip of the Port Weller east pier in St. Catharines (BOSNR, Richards 2008). John Black, James Pawlicki, Kayo Roy and David Sked were among the few lucky birders who arrived in time to see this one-day visitor to Niagara from the American west. The excellent photographs taken by James Pawlicki enhanced the documentation of this bird.

Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident

The earliest spring date for this species is 29 April 1991, when a single bird was seen at the Glendale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake (JEB). On 31 May Eastern Kingbirds were still present on the Port Weller piers during all years of the Port Weller Study. Spring transient abundance is uncertain. It is not evident which of the small numbers of birds seen outside known breeding areas in the spring are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Eastern Kingbird breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 10 June. Local birders provide only three September records: two birds on 8 September 1968 at St. Davids (Dan Salisbury), one bird on 14 September 1968 on Morgan's Point near Burnaby (Dan Salisbury) and two birds on 4 September 1978 in Wainfleet (Harold Lancaster). The Eastern Kingbird was observed on only one of the 40 BOS October Counts, a single bird on 12 October 1997, the latest recorded fall date. While on a birding trip in Peru on 23 October 2005, the author travelled by motorized canoe along the Rio Madre de Dios. A highlight of the trip was the observation of flocks of hundreds of Eastern Kingbirds, which spend their winter months on this Amazonian river.

There are no winter records of Eastern Kingbird for Niagara. This species winters from Central America south to Bolivia (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 21 squares confirmed,
3 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
50 birds in 1987

BOS October Count: Reported
on 1 of 40 counts, maximum
of 1 bird in 1997

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported



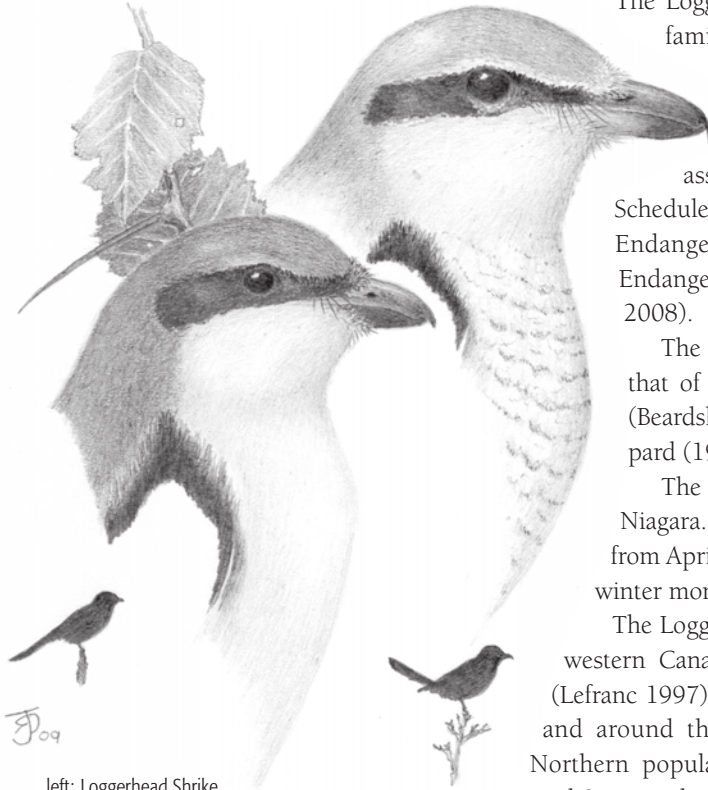
Western Kingbird
Harold Stiver



Eastern Kingbird
Raymond Barlow

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*

Occasional transient (before the last sighting in 1990; bred prior to 1966)



left: Loggerhead Shrike,
right: Northern Shrike / Ross James

The Loggerhead Shrike is the only member of the shrike family endemic to North America. The related Northern Shrike occurs north of the Loggerhead's range but also in the Palearctic. The species is facing extirpation in Canada (Pruitt 2000) and is assessed as Endangered in Canada (Sara 2008, Schedule 1). The Loggerhead Shrike is also designated as an Endangered Species in the Province of Ontario's Endangered Species Act of 2008 (Williams and Steiner 2008).

The first record of Loggerhead Shrike for Niagara was that of a nest with six eggs found in 1906 in Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). That publication and Sheppard (1970) detail the known observations prior to 1966.

The Loggerhead Shrike is an occasional transient in Niagara. The species was typically seen in open countryside from April to September, with some birds remaining into the winter months.

The Loggerhead Shrike breeds entirely in the United States, western Canada, southeastern Ontario and southern Quebec (Lefranc 1997). In Ontario, breeding occurs consistently only on and around the Napanee and Carden Plains (Chabot 2007).

Northern populations are migratory, wintering in the southern United States and Mexico (Lefranc 1997).

The following birds were observed in Niagara during the 1966 – 2006 time frame of this book.

1966

17 April, one, Port Weller, St. Catharines (Daniel Salisbury).

7 July, one, Port Colborne (Harold Axtell, BOSNR).

14 - 26 August, one, Harold Axtell residence, Fort Erie (BOSNR).

1967

26 March, one, Morgan's Point near Burnaby (Harold Lancaster).

1968

18 February, one, Harold Axtell residence, Fort Erie (BOSNR).

28 March, one, Port Weller, St. Catharines (Daniel Salisbury).

26 May, one, Niagara Falls (Harold Lancaster).

1969

24 March, one, Lock 6, Welland Canal, St. Catharines (Daniel Salisbury).

18 May, one, Fort Erie (Harold Mitchell and others).

19 June, one, St. Ann's (Harold Lancaster).

1970

4 August, one, Long Beach, Wainfleet (Rachel and Harold Axtell, BOSNR).

12 August, one, Ridgeway (Rachel and Harold Axtell, BOSNR).

1975

5 May, one, Welland (Harold Lancaster).

1978

2 April, one, Port Robinson (Harold Lancaster).

1981

26 December, one, on the Peninsula Field Naturalists informal Christmas Bird Count.

1985

31 August, one, Beamsville (Willie D'Anna and others, BOSNR).

1988

11 September, one, Wainfleet (Michael Galas, William Watson and others, BOSNR).

1990

2 July, one, Point Abino (Alec Humann, BOSNR).

The breeding range has undergone considerable change; shrike distribution and numbers have steadily decreased in the northeast during the last 100 years. This decline has been attributed to changing agricultural practices leading to loss of suitable pasture habitat for breeding (Graber et al. 1973). Shrike nests were observed in Niagara in Lincoln County in 1937 and 1954 and in Welland County in 1906 and 1925 (Peck and James 1987, Ontario Nest Records Scheme). However, breeding shrikes have been virtually absent from the northeastern United States since the 1970s (Yosef 1996). A 2008 estimate suggests that there are currently fewer than 40 known breeding pairs across Canada (Ken De Smet, Wildlife Preservation Canada unpubl. data). No Loggerhead Shrikes have been seen in Niagara since 1990 (BOSNR). In Ontario, spring records in Niagara were most likely passage migrants. Winter records may represent the occasional wintering individual or unusually late migrant.

Daniel R. Kozlovic

Northern Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Rare spring, fall and winter resident

The Northern Shrike is a rare but regular winter resident in Niagara; it is usually observed singly or in very small numbers from late October to late March, with the occasional bird lingering into April. Spring records include 10 sightings in March (BOSNR). The latest BOS April Count record for Niagara was on 14 April 1996. A late bird was seen at Grimsby on 14 April 1982 (Weir 1982:849). The species was first noted in late fall at Fort Erie on 20 October 1981; there are seven additional records for October (BOSNR). Individuals were noted throughout November (14 records, BOSNR) and December (22 records, BOSNR). Shrike invasions in Niagara occurred during the winters of 1995-1996 and 1999-2000, when 36 and 20 birds respectively were recorded on Niagara CBCs. The 1995-1996 data indicate a substantial peak in numbers, even when the data are corrected for observer effort. A similar peak in numbers occurred on Niagara CBCs in 1970-1971, when 11 birds were seen that winter. Observations of single birds were made regularly through January and February. Three birds were observed on 2 January 1970 at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

Nine Northern Shrike invasions were observed during the winters of 1934-1935 through to 1961-1962 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). The more recent invasions into Niagara were part of larger, widespread irruptions of the population (Petersen and Davis 1997, Hess 2000). Such irruptions may involve a large proportion of immature individuals that tend to disperse farther than adults (Cade and Atkinson 2002). North American populations of this shrike appear to be either stable or in slight decline (Cade and Atkinson 2002). Population trends are difficult to ascertain given the sparse and irregular distribution of the species and the large population fluctuations.

This Holarctic species breeds along the taiga belt of the northern boreal forests; in North America, its range extends from Alaska to the Labrador Peninsula (Lefranc 1997). In Ontario, the species breeds along the Hudson and James Bay lowlands, south to the Moose River (Sutherland 2007d). Most Northern Shrikes in North America are migratory, spending the winter months in southern Canada and the northern United States (Lefranc 1997). In Ontario, the species winters south from Lake of the Woods east to North Bay. The southern limit of the winter range in the United States may experience both cyclic and irregular invasions of the species (Cade and Atkinson 2002).

Daniel R. Kozlovic

BOS April Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1971, 1995, 1996 and 2003

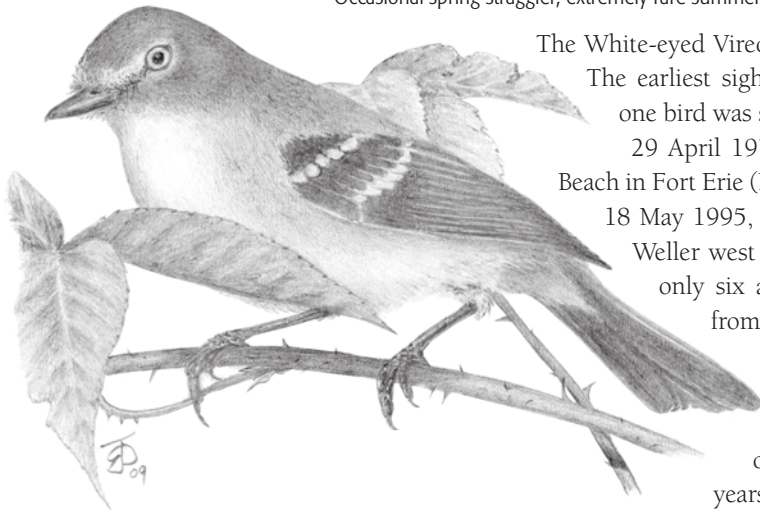
BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 34 of 41 years, maximum of 17 birds on the 1995 Niagara Falls CBC

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*

Occasional spring straggler, extremely rare summer resident, extremely rare fall transient



White-eyed Vireo
Ross James

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
2 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares con-
firmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
4 of 41 counts, maximum of
3 birds in 1979

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

The White-eyed Vireo is an occasional spring straggler in Niagara. The earliest sightings occurred on 29-30 April 1979, when one bird was seen at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (JEB), and 29 April 1979, when a single bird was recorded at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest date of a spring sighting is 18 May 1995, when a single bird was reported on the Port Weller west pier during the Port Weller Study. There are only six additional spring records from Niagara, one from 2004 and the others prior to 1995.

Niagara lies just beyond the currently known northern edge of the breeding range for White-eyed Vireo. There are no reports of confirmed breeding in Niagara in recent years. Nor are there cases of confirmed breeding

in Atlas Region 15 (Hamilton), immediately to the west of Niagara, but there was a confirmed case of breeding in one square in Atlas Region 5 (Long Point) in 2001. The Natural Heritage Information Centre database contains four records: the first on 17 June 1982 (location unknown), the second on 17 and 28 June 1982 on the abandoned Welland Canal, the third on 16 June 1984 in Wainfleet Bog of a calling bird and the fourth on 1 July 1984 of a pair of birds at the same location. (These would seem to be the birds reported in the first Atlas.) The bog site was revisited in 1985 but no birds were seen, and again on 2 July 1990, when bird calls were heard, and on 4 July 1990, when no vireos were seen or heard. In the Wainfleet Bog, on a trail that begins about 1 km north of the north end of Biedermann Road, a bird was heard calling on 14, 21 and 28 June 1992 and again on 14 and 27 June 1993, but no calls were heard on 20 June 1994 (JEB). Sheppard (1970) noted that "a nest with one egg was found by Ottomar Reinecke at Sherkston, Fort Erie in 1890, the only confirmed nesting he [Sheppard] was aware of." There is also a historical record from Niagara Falls described in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965), which may be in error (James 2007a).

There is a single fall record of this species: On 21 September 1985 a single bird was observed at the Grimsby sewage ponds (Natural Heritage Information Centre).

There are no winter records of White-eyed Vireo for Niagara. This species winters from the southern United States south to Honduras (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Bell's Vireo *Vireo bellii*

Extremely rare visitor

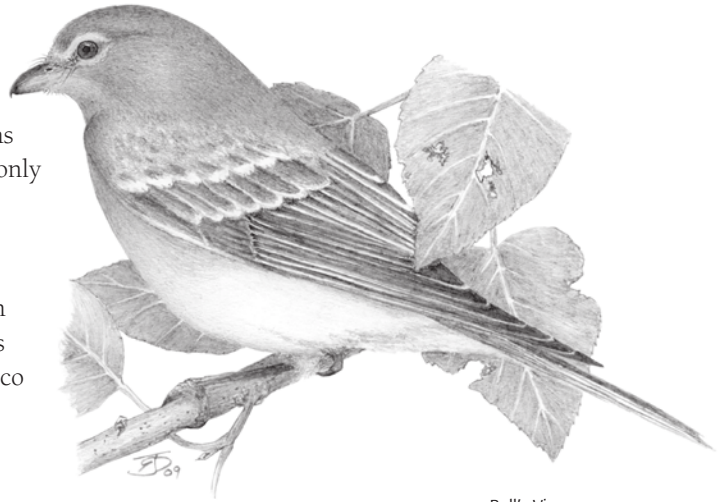
Named by John James Audubon after his travelling companion John Graham Bell, the Bell's Vireo, a bird of the central and southwestern United States, is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. There has been a significant decline for many years in the Bell's Vireo population, likely owing to habitat destruction and cowbird parasitism (Brown 1993).

There is only one known observation of this species for Niagara. On 18 October 1994, Rob Dobos identified a Bell's Vireo on Kelson Road in the Niagara portion of

Fifty Point Conservation Area (Dobos 1996, Curry 2006). The Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) has accepted only nine records of Bell's Vireo for all of Ontario (Crins 2007a), and this observation represents the only OBRC-accepted fall record for the province (Curry 2006).

The species is known to breed in North Dakota, Iowa, Indiana and south to southern California and Nevada, and west to Arkansas and Mexico. The Bell's Vireo winters in Mexico (Brown 1993).

Kayo J. Roy



Bell's Vireo
Ross James

Yellow-throated Vireo

Vireo flavifrons

Rare spring and fall transient, rare and local summer resident

The earliest sighting for this species occurred on 5 May 1985 when a single bird was observed at Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (JEB). Yellow-throated Vireos were found on 23 BOS May Counts, the latest count dates being 19 May in 1972, 1978, 1979 and 1989. Observations by local birders extend into early June, but it is not clear if these are breeding or transient birds.

The Yellow-throated Vireo, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a rare and local summer resident in Niagara. There are five mid-to late-June records of this species in non-atlas years. At least one of these, a single bird found on 16 June 1999 at Point Abino (McCracken et al. 1999), may have been nesting. Sheppard (1970) stated that this bird was not breeding in Niagara.

The earliest fall date is 24 August 1971 when a single bird was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby by Dan Salisbury. There are six additional records from local birders in August and September. Only one October record exists for this species, that of a single bird reported on 13 October 1974 on the BOS October Count.

There are no winter records of Yellow-throated Vireo for Niagara. It winters from Mexico south to French Guiana (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black



Yellow-throated Vireo
Ross James

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1975 and 1996

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1974

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitarius*

Uncommon spring transient, extremely rare summer resident, fall transient

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 30 of 41 counts, maximum of 8 birds in 1972

BOS October Count: Reported on 12 of 40 counts, maximum of 8 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Formerly known as Solitary Vireo, the Blue-headed Vireo is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. The earliest recorded date is that of a single bird on 19 April 2005 at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (KJR). The latest spring record for this species is an observation by Dan Salisbury on 24 May 1969 at Morgan's Point.

The Blue-headed Vireo breeds to the north of Lake Ontario and to the south of Lake Erie. Presently, Niagara seems to be unsuitable for these birds. Sheppard (1970) suggested that this species could possibly have been breeding in Niagara. There is one record, from the second Atlas, of confirmed breeding in a pine woodlot north of Morgan's Point. There is only one additional summer record, that of a single bird found on 11 June 1966 at Long Beach woods (BOSNR).

The earliest fall date is 8 August 1978 when a single bird was observed at Cedar Bay in Gasline (BOSNR). The latest October date of a sighting is 31 October 1982 when one bird was found at Queenston (BOSNR). There is a record for 16 November 1980 of one bird found at Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Blue-headed Vireo for Niagara. This species winters from the Gulf States south to Central America (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus*

Common spring transient, common summer resident, fall transient

First Atlas: 12 squares confirmed, 11 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 13 squares confirmed, 12 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1995

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The Warbling Vireo is a common spring transient in Niagara. The earliest spring sightings are of single birds on 28 April 1974 at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (Harold Lancaster) and 28 April 1986 on the Brock University escarpment trails in St. Catharines (JEB). Warbling Vireo was present on the Port Weller piers on almost all days during the Port Weller Study. It is difficult to determine a late date of migration since transients cannot easily be distinguished from summering birds.

The Warbling Vireo breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 23 May.

There are two late September records of single birds from local birders, both on 28 September: one in 1969 on Kraft Road, Fort Erie (Dan Salisbury) and the other in 1974 at Mud Lake (Harold Lancaster). The only October record is of a single bird observed on 10 October 1971 on the BOS October Count.

There are no November or winter records of Warbling Vireo for Niagara. This species winters from Mexico south into South America (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black



Blue-headed Vireo
Brandon Holden



Warbling Vireo
Raymond Barlow

Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*

Rare to uncommon spring transient, fall transient

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 11 birds in 2002

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1989

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Philadelphia Vireo
Raymond Barlow

The earliest recorded sighting of this species is of a single bird in Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines on 5 May 1985 (JEB). There are 38 records from local birders and from the BOS between May and early June. The latest date of a sighting was 3 June 1984 when a single bird was found at Fort Erie (BOSNR) and 3 June 1968 when two birds were seen at Port Weller by Dan Salisbury.

The Philadelphia Vireo breeds north of Lake Ontario. There are no Niagara summer records. Roger Tory Peterson (1963), commenting on the song, which resembles that of the Red-eyed Vireo, quoted the nature writer Bradford Torrey who wrote "It looks like one vireo and sings like another."

The earliest fall date is 7 August 1994 when a single bird was observed by Robert Curry at Fort Erie (KJR). There are 25 records from local birders and the BOS between August and October. Most of these are in September. The latest fall record is of a single bird seen on 13 October 2002 during the BOS October Count.

There are no winter records of Philadelphia Vireo for Niagara. This species winters from Central America to extreme northwestern Columbia (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black





Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*

Spring transient, common summer resident, fall transient

The earliest recorded spring date of a sighting for this species is 29 April 1990, when a single bird was seen in Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (JEB). Small numbers (fewer than six) of Red-eyed Vireos were found on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study from 17 May to 31 May. They probably breed on the piers. It is not clear how to assign a spring transient abundance to this species, as it is difficult to separate transient Red-eyed Vireos from the birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Red-eyed Vireo, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 2 July. A Red-eyed Vireo will almost certainly be heard in any reasonably-sized deciduous woodlot in Niagara. Estimates based on point count data from the second Atlas indicate that about nine million Red-eyed Vireos reside in Ontario in the summer months (James 2007b). This makes them one of the most abundant summer birds in the province.

The latest fall dates are 18 October 1970, when a single bird was found at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR), and 11 November 1984, when a single bird was reported from Niagara-on-the-Lake (Weir 1985:49).

There are no winter records of Red-eyed Vireo for Niagara. This species winters in the northern three-quarters of South America (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Red-eyed Vireo
Brandon Holden

First Atlas: 17 squares confirmed,
7 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 14 squares confirmed,
10 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
38 of 41 counts, maximum of
59 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Reported
on 9 of 40 counts, maximum of
4 birds in 1968, 1969 and 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported



Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Spring and fall transient,
very common permanent resident

Blue Jay
Sam Barone

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 24 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
184 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
166 birds in 2002

BOS October Count: Reported
on 40 of 40 counts, maximum
of 193 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 41 of 41 counts,
maximum of 744 birds on the
1994 St. Catharines CBC

The Blue Jay is a common permanent resident throughout southern Ontario. Nevertheless, small numbers of transient Blue Jays can be seen moving along the Lake Ontario shoreline in the spring (see the article in this book on the Port Weller Study). They are presumably migrating through Niagara. It is difficult to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from birds arriving to breed in the area. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 22 May.

A dead Blue Jay turned over to Niagara Public Health Department on 11 September 2001 was the first Niagara bird to test positive for the West Nile Virus (West Nile Virus Summary Report 2001-2004, 2005, 2006). Of the 78 Blue Jays collected for testing by the Niagara Region Public Health Department between 2002 and 2006, two were found to be positive (André Laflamme pers. comm.). By the end of 2005, there were 27 confirmed human cases of West Nile Virus in Niagara, but no deaths were attributed to the virus.

Fall migration of Blue Jays, while conspicuously stronger than spring migration in Hamilton (Curry 2006) is not at all noticeable here in Niagara. It is possible, as is the case with other fall migrants, that most of the birds, having passed to the west end of Lake Ontario, move south across the Niagara Peninsula rather than turning eastward. Blue Jays are very common on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts.

Banding and Recovery Data: A Blue Jay banded at Long Point on 17 May 1973 was encountered on 27 April 1974 in Mississippi. One banded at Long Point on 13 May 1985 was encountered on 13 September 1985 in Tennessee. Another banded at Long Point on 13 May 2004 was encountered on 1 February 2005 in Ohio.

John E. Black

Black-billed Magpie *Pica hudsonia*

Escapees

The Black-billed Magpie is a large, noisy, aggressive conspicuous bird found in urban and rural areas of the western half of North America. This striking bird of the crow and jay family is a year-round resident across its range.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) identify early records in the BOS study area, and they suggest the possibility that some of these birds might be escapees from cages. A Black-billed Magpie found by Jack McNally was reported from Beamsville on 10 May 1953 (Curry 2006). Sheppard (1970) identifies two Niagara records for 1959 and 1960.

The wild status of Black-billed Magpie in southern Ontario is at best questionable. Since these colourful birds are often kept in captivity, observations of Black-billed Magpie in Niagara will, in this account, be treated as escapees.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, two records of Black-billed Magpie were reported. On 6 July 1989, Kayo Roy and Alan J. Smith responded to a telephone call from the Reidiger residence at 5 Farrington Crescent, St. Catharines, where two Black-billed Magpies had been present for several weeks. On entering the backyard, Mrs. Reidiger called the birds by names she had given them, and both immediately flew to the side of the porch where they were fed. Clearly these two individuals were not wild birds. On 17 September 1989, Kevin McLaughlin discovered one at the Smithville sewage ponds (Curry 2006).

The Black-billed Magpie breeds from Alaska and western Canada south to California and the Great Plains. It winters in its breeding range (Trost 1999).

Kayo J. Roy

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Spring and fall transient, common summer and winter resident

The American Crow, a permanent resident throughout Southern Ontario, is a common bird in Niagara. There is some movement in Niagara of possible spring transient crows, but it is difficult to ascertain their abundance given the rather large number of permanent residents. On 18 March 1978, 70 birds were observed migrating along the Lake Ontario Shore (BOSNR).

According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date in Niagara for this species is 17 April. During the years 2002 to 2006 a total of 130 American Crows were found dead and turned over to the Niagara Region Public Health Department. They were tested for the presence of the West Nile Virus, and 29 tested positive (André Laflamme pers. comm.).

There is some evidence that the numbers of American Crows seen on the April, May and October BOS counts have declined since the appearance of West Nile in Niagara. (See the Hamilton and DeLeon article on October Counts in this book.) There is also anecdotal evidence, such as the comments of various atlasers and naturalists that crow numbers are down in Niagara during the summer months.

Very common on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts, crows have been seen on all counts since 1966. The largest number observed was 11,050 on the St. Catharines CBC in 1994. Large count numbers were obtained by counting the birds in a roost area in St. Catharines. The count numbers plunged from 3,568 birds in 2001 to 697 birds in 2002 and then to 105 in 2003 and had not recovered by 2006. This large drop from 2001 to 2002 in crow numbers presumably reflects the toll of the West Nile Virus. However, it does not necessarily reflect the deaths of resident Niagara crows. The 3,568 crows, if distributed over the 25 squares studied in the second Atlas, would yield 143 birds per square. Atlasers might, at most, see a few tens of crows in an atlas square, which suggests that many of the overwintering crows in 2001 were from outside Niagara.

John E. Black

American Crow
Jukka Jantunen



First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 22 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 743 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 364 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 799 birds in 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 11,050 birds on the 1994 St. Catharines CBC



Common Raven
Jukka Jantunen

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

Extremely rare visitor

The Common Raven was one of the bird species originally described by Linnaeus in his 1758 work *Systema Naturae*. Boarman and Heinrich (1999) state that

The Raven is the largest of the songbird species, as well as the largest all-black bird in the world. The Common Raven is one of the most widespread naturally occurring species in the world, as it is found across North America and Eurasia, southward into Central America and northern Africa. It is perhaps the smartest of all birds, and can survive in arctic, temperate, and desert environments.

The presence of Common Raven in Niagara today is totally the reverse of what it was in the days of Wilson and McIlwraith at the turn of the 19th century. Alexander Wilson, speaking of this species while visiting Niagara in the autumn of 1804 commented: “On the lakes, and particularly in the neighbourhood of Niagara Falls, the Raven was numerous, and it is a remarkable fact that where they so abound, the Common Crow seldom appears” (McIlwraith 1894). McIlwraith agrees with Wilson: “I had an opportunity of observing this myself in a journey along the shores of lakes Erie and Ontario. The Ravens were seen every day, but I did not see or hear a single Crow within several miles of the lakes” (McIlwraith 1894).

This large, all-black bird found throughout most of the northern hemisphere is today an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. On 15 January 1969, John Black observed an adult bird in flight over Queenston. On 28 March 1975, William Smith, Alfred Epp and Kevin McLaughlin identified a Common Raven in flight over Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, Grimsby. In 1975, three different individuals were reported from Beamer Memorial Conservation Area: 11 March (George Meyers), 14 April (Dave Copeland,

John Ryan), and 24-25 April (Dave Copeland, George Meyers). On 15 May 1994, John Black located a Common Raven in flight over the Niagara escarpment in St. Catharines.

The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005 identifies the range increase of the Common Raven during this second five-year census as being one of the most dramatic in the province (Cadman et al. 2007). Perhaps greater numbers of this species may well be recorded in Niagara in the coming years.

The Common Raven is resident throughout Alaska and Canada, including the High Arctic, south through the western United States into Central America. It can also be found in the northern United States and south to the Appalachians and the extreme northern portions of Georgia (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

Kayo J. Roy

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident, uncommon winter resident

The Horned Lark is one of the top 20 common North American species in decline, as determined by the National Audubon Society (Audubon 2007). It is a permanent resident over much of the United States and breeds as far north as Hudson Bay (*National Geographic* 2006). Because birds are here in small numbers throughout the winter months it is difficult to ascertain the abundance of spring transients for this species.

The Horned Lark, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 7 April. According to Hussell (2007), there was a significant decrease between atlases (16%) in the probability of observing this species in the Carolinian region. Hussell comments, however, that confirmation of breeding for this species is difficult, so breeding likely occurred in many more squares than those in which it was confirmed in southern Ontario.

On 10 August 1991, 30 Horned Larks were observed in Wainfleet Township (BOSNR). These could have been returning migrants or Niagara birds gathering prior to migrating south.

First Atlas: 16 squares confirmed, 7 probable, 1 possible

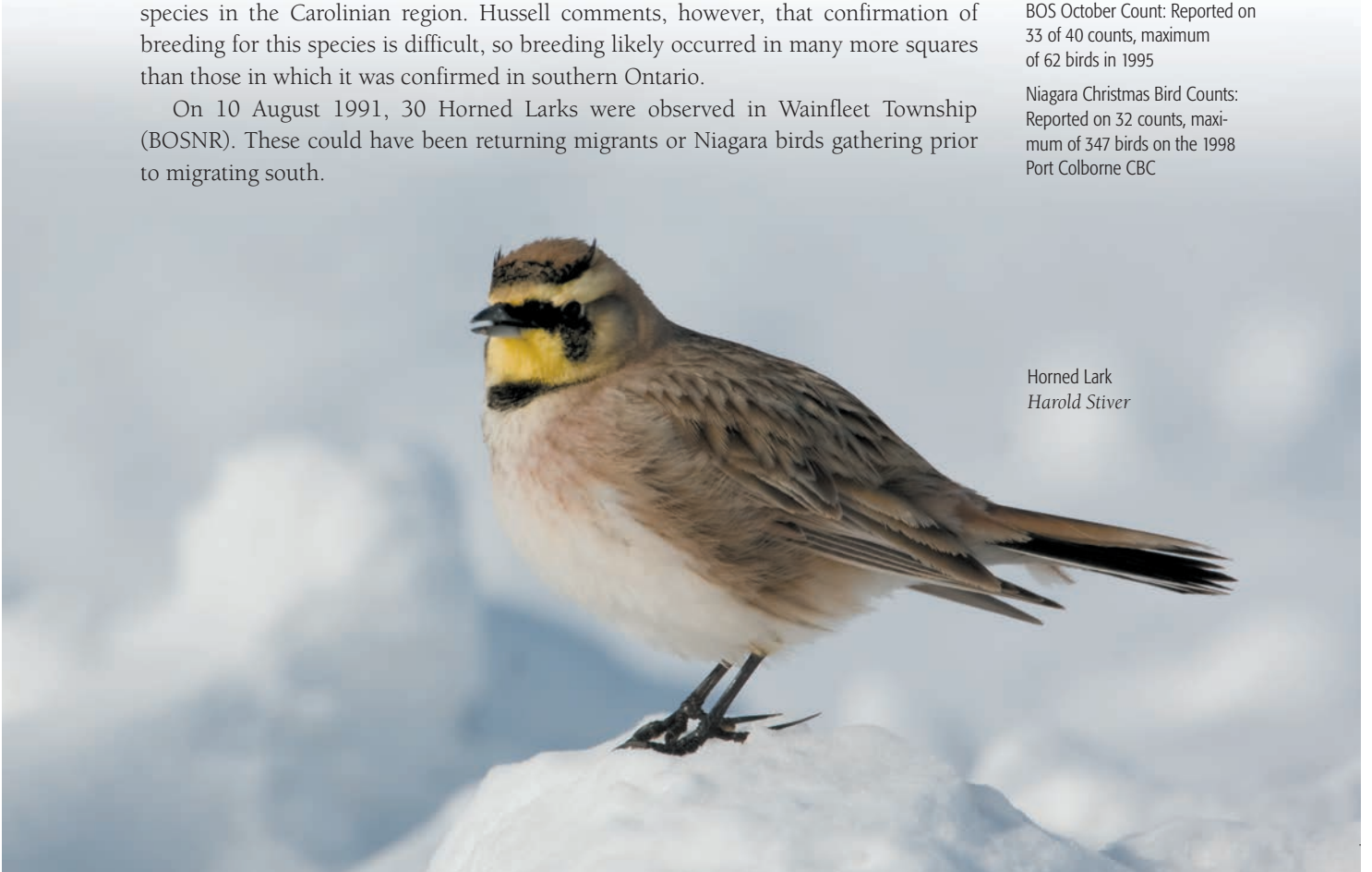
Second Atlas: 9 squares confirmed, 12 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 64 birds in 1966

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 364 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 33 of 40 counts, maximum of 62 birds in 1995

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 32 counts, maximum of 347 birds on the 1998 Port Colborne CBC



Horned Lark
Harold Stiver

The Horned Lark is an uncommon winter resident in Niagara, with numbers dropping in January and rising again in February. An interesting February record is that of Harold Lancaster, who observed a small mixed flock of Northern (*E. a. praticola*) and Prairie (*E. a. alpestris*) Horned Larks on 10 February 1978 on Church Road near Pelham. They were with a flock of Snow Buntings and a single Lapland Longspur.

Horned Larks winter in Niagara and south through much of the United States to Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000). It is not clear which of the overwintering birds are permanent residents and which are migrants that have come from further north, or west, to spend their winter in Niagara. However, most of the birds wintering in the Eastern United States are the "Northern Horned Lark", *alpestris* (*National Geographic* 2006). Pittaway (1994) discusses in detail the subspecies of Horned Larks found in Ontario.

John E. Black

Purple Martins
Kayo Roy



Purple Martin *Progne subis*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident

The earliest arrival dates for the Purple Martin are for single birds seen at Jaeger Rocks in Fort Erie on 26 March 1991 (BOSNR) and at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby on 30 March 1977 (HNCNR). In the spring these birds are often seen in small numbers over bodies of water such as Mud Lake in Port Colborne, the Smithville sewage ponds and the Welland Canal at Port Weller. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Purple Martin, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a very common summer resident in Niagara. In fact, Niagara and southwestern Ontario have the greatest abundance of Purple Martins in

Ontario (Cadman 2007a). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 12 June.

On 23 September 1990, 16,000 Purple Martins, many presumably migrants, were counted along the Niagara River and later verified by Robert Andrie (Weir 1991:100). Purple Martins are known to roost in huge numbers in the summer and fall months. There is one such roost on the south side of Lake Erie in Erie, Pennsylvania, but no evidence of a roost in Niagara. The latest fall date is 22 October 1966, when a single bird was seen at Waverley Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of this species for Niagara. The Purple Martin winters throughout most of South America east of the Andes and as far south as central Argentina (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 80 birds in 2002

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,710 birds in 2002

BOS October Count: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 23 birds in 1966

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported



Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident

The earliest arrival date for the Tree Swallow is 8 March 1995, when four birds were seen at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (Ridout 1995:245). In the spring these birds are often seen in small numbers over bodies of water such as Mud Lake in Port Colborne, the Smithville sewage ponds and the Welland Canal at Port Weller. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area. Tree Swallows have, in recent years, been arriving earlier in the spring at their breeding grounds. This trend is evident in the number of birds counted on the BOS April Counts. It may be the result of increasing global temperatures. (See Hussell (2003) for his discussion of this point.)

The Tree Swallow breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a very common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 8 May.

The latest October date is 25 October 1972, when four birds were seen at Mohawk Point in Wainfleet (BOSNR). The latest November date is 14 November 1976, when three birds were noted at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). There are no winter records for Niagara. Tree Swallows winter from the southern United States south to Panama and the Greater Antilles (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Tree Swallow banded at Long Point on 27 June 1978 was encountered in November 1983 in Louisiana. One banded at Long Point on 24 July 1980 was encountered on 23 May 1983 in South Carolina. Another banded at Long Point on 20 June 1994 was encountered in March 1996 in West Virginia.

John E. Black

Tree Swallows
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 22 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 3 possible

Second Atlas: 23 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,065 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,205 birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported on 23 of 40 counts, maximum of 390 birds in 1987

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

First Atlas: 21 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 6 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 23 birds in 2000 and 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,659 birds in 2006

BOS October Count: Reported on 17 of 40 counts, maximum of 136 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The Northern Rough-winged Swallow is often seen in small numbers along the Lake Ontario shoreline in the spring. The earliest recorded arrivals are single birds seen on the 9 April on BOS April Counts in 2000 and 2006. In the spring these birds are also seen in small numbers over bodies of water such as Mud Lake in Port Colborne, the Smithville sewage ponds and the Welland Canal at Port Weller. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Northern Rough-winged Swallow, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. This species does not dig its own burrow but instead uses a burrow previously excavated by a Belted Kingfisher or a Bank Swallow (Sandilands 2007g).

There are 11 BOS Noteworthy Records for November, all from Niagara Falls, dating from 6 November to 29 November. In recent years the last of the fall swallows in Niagara can often be seen flying over the water below the International Niagara Control Works structure in Chippawa. On 29 October 2006, 200 birds were seen above Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

This species is an extremely rare winter straggler in Niagara. There is only one winter record, that of a single bird seen on 8 December 2001 at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). Northern Rough-winged Swallows winter from the Gulf Coast and Mexico south to northern South America and the Greater Antilles (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Raymond Barlow





Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident

The Bank Swallow is seen in numbers along the Lake Ontario shoreline in the spring. The earliest arrival date is 13 April 1971, when a single bird was reported at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). In the spring these birds are also seen in small numbers over bodies of water such as Mud Lake in Port Colborne, the Smithville sewage ponds and the Welland Canal at Port Weller. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot readily be distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

This species breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a very common summer resident in Niagara.

The latest fall dates for the Bank Swallow are 4 September 1966, when three birds were observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie, 5 September 1966, when one bird was seen at Rose Hill Road (BOSNR), and 14 September 2002, when one bird was seen at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR).

There are no winter records for Niagara. Bank Swallows winter in north and central South America east of the Andes (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Bank Swallow
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 17 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,432 birds in 2006

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported



Cliff Swallow
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 8 squares confirmed,
2 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on
2 of 41 counts, maximum of
2 birds in 1980

BOS May Count: Reported on
26 of 41 counts, maximum of
48 birds in 2004

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Cliff Swallow

Petrochelidon pyrrhonota

Spring and fall transient, uncommon
summer resident

In early spring Cliff Swallows are seen in small numbers along the Lake Ontario shoreline and over open water at Mud Lake in Port Colborne, the Smithville sewage ponds and the Welland Canal at Port Weller. The earliest arrival date is 13 April 1980, when two birds were seen on the BOS April Count. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Cliff Swallow, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an

uncommon summer resident in Niagara. In the first Atlas there was no reported breeding. A few Cliff Swallows nested on the east side of the old Toronto Hydro building above the falls in the years immediately after the first Atlas. It is possible that they were there during the first Atlas but not noted (JEB). It is clear from the second Atlas results, however, that there has been a large increase in the number of breeding Cliff Swallows in Niagara since the first Atlas. In the Carolinian region, there has also been a significant increase (60%) in the likelihood of observing this species between atlases (Cadman 2007b).

On 14 September 1996, 30 birds were observed at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). The latest fall date is 2 October 1966, when a single bird was seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There are no winter records for Niagara. The Cliff Swallow winters in South America from Paraguay to southern Argentina (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva*

Extremely rare visitor

The graceful and swift Cave Swallow is a small songbird that since the mid-1980s has undergone a dramatic range expansion in Texas and has colonized southern Florida. Originally found in the vicinity of limestone caves and sinkholes in Texas, it built its nest inside cave entrances that it often shared with bats. In more recent years, the Cave Swallow has adapted to some new habitats, building their nests in man-made structures like culverts and the undersides of bridges (West 1995).

There are no records for Cave Swallow in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or Sheppard (1970). For reasons unknown, in early winter, a small but increasing number of Cave Swallows have been moving northward from their southern nesting grounds. Cave

Swallows appeared in Ontario in unprecedented numbers in November of 1999. Between 90 and 125 individuals were reported from the north shore of Lake Erie (Roy 2000, Curry and McLaughlin 2000). A second but smaller invasion occurred in November 2002 (Crins 2003), and the species has been recorded with considerable regularity since 2002.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, one undocumented record exists for Niagara. On 5 November 2005, John Lamey identified 17 Cave Swallows in two groups (11 and 6) flying into Ontario across the mouth of the Niagara River at Niagara-on-the-Lake. These birds were likely a part of the large flock of Cave Swallows that were observed flying west along the south shore of Lake Ontario at Hamlin Beach, New York, earlier in the day.

In North America, breeding is spottily distributed. Breeding occurs in southeast New Mexico and in west Texas through the Edwards Plateau to coastal Texas. Breeding is also known from southern Florida. Its winter range is poorly known. It is believed that the birds in Texas winter in Mexico, and the Florida birds in the Caribbean (West 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident

Barn Swallows are observed in large numbers along the Lake Ontario shoreline in the spring. The earliest arrival date is 7 April 1974, when a single bird was spotted on the BOS April Count. In the spring these birds are also seen in small numbers over bodies of water such as Mud Lake in Port Colborne, the Smithville sewage ponds and the Welland Canal at Port Weller. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

Post-2006 Observations

Two additional Cave Swallow records exist for Niagara.

On 10 November 2008,

Daniel Salisbury and John Black identified a Cave Swallow flying with several Tree Swallows over the Niagara River in Niagara Falls, and later the same day three birds were observed by Brett Fried (Richards 2009).

On 14 November 2008,

John Lamey reported a single bird in flight over Lake Erie at Jaeger Rocks in Fort Erie.

Barn Swallow
Harold Stiver



First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 55 birds in 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 4,440 birds in 2006

BOS October Count: Reported on 6 of 40 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1976

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The Barn Swallow, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a very common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 6 June. The probability of observation of this species has declined by 35% in Ontario since the first Atlas, probably owing to a reduction in aerial insect abundance (Lepage 2007). As yet this decline has not occurred in the Carolinian region.

The latest October date is 26 October 1983, when a single bird was observed at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). The only November record is 1 November 1998, when one bird was reported from the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR).

There are no winter records of this species in Niagara. The New World race of Barn Swallow (*H. r. erythrogaster*) winters from Panama and the West Indies throughout South America to Tierra del Fuego (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*

Common permanent resident

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 21 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 126 birds in 1983

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 69 birds in 2002

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 286 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,298 birds on the 1980 Niagara Falls CBC

The Black-capped Chickadee is a permanent resident over its range in the middle latitudes of North America (*National Geographic* 2006) and is a common permanent resident in Niagara. There are no BOS Noteworthy Records on this species.

According to Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 13 May.

Black-capped Chickadees were seen on all Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. They are a common feeder bird in the winter months in Niagara. While the chickadee does not migrate, it does move south in some winters during periods of food shortages. Birds from these irruptions pass through central and southern Ontario about every three to five years and are primarily the young of the year (Cheskey 2007b). One of these irruption years may have been 1980, since the 1,298 chickadees seen on the Niagara Falls CBC was a substantially larger number than the next maximum number of 871 seen on the St. Catharines CBC of 1995.

John E. Black

Black-capped Chickadee
Brandon Holden



Boreal Chickadee *Poecile hudsonica*

Extremely rare visitor

The Boreal Chickadee is a bird worthy of its name given it is found almost entirely in the boreal spruce-fir forests of Canada's far north, and in small parts of the northern United States (Ficken et al. 1996). It inhabits a wide range across much of the north but irruptions south occur in some years likely due to shortages of food (Ficken et al. 1996). In the fall of 1951, a substantial irruption of Boreal Chickadees occurred into southern Ontario (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Curry 2006), and there was an unprecedented influx into the Niagara Peninsula (Sheppard 1970).

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) and Sheppard (1970) describe in substantial detail observations of Boreal Chickadee in Niagara prior to 1966.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, very few Boreal Chickadee records are known to exist for Niagara. In the winter of 1969-1970, three birds were reported from three different locations. On 1 November 1969, Robert Curry discovered one at Queenston (Sheppard 1970). It was last seen on 1 January 1970 by John Black. On 18 November 1969, Gustave Yaki and George Meyers identified a Boreal Chickadee in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This individual was not observed after 27 January 1970 (Sheppard 1970). On 30 November 1969, Daniel Salisbury discovered a Boreal Chickadee in the valley of 15 Mile Creek in St. Catharines. He returned and observed the bird there on 2 December 1969, 1 January 1970, and 7 February 1970 (with John Black and Dave Fidler). The last time Salisbury saw it was on 15 February 1970. On 13 November 1972, Joseph Kikta found a Boreal Chickadee at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Boreal Chickadee breeds from northern Alaska eastward to Labrador and Newfoundland and south to the northern edges of the United States. In winter it usually remains throughout its breeding range (Ficken et al. 1996).

Kayo J. Roy



Boreal Chickadee
Brandon Holden

Tufted Titmouse *Baeolophus bicolor*

Rare permanent resident

Niagara lies at the northern edge of the North American breeding range for the Tufted Titmouse. It is a rare permanent resident in Niagara. There is evidence to suggest that it is a more common resident in the southerly portions of Niagara (John Stevens pers. comm.).

Following the first Atlas, the Tufted Titmouse was identified as a Species at Risk in Austen et al. (1994). Clearly, however, the number of breeding titmice in Niagara has increased considerably since the first Atlas and this increase is not limited to the region. There has been a fourfold increase between atlases in the probability of observing this species in Ontario. The Niagara Peninsula is the core range for this species (Cheskey 2007c). There is also some evidence of increasing numbers in the October Counts. Tufted Titmice were seen on only eight of the first 20 years of the October Counts and on 15 of

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed,
3 probable, 4 possible

Second Atlas: 12 squares confirmed,
5 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 2006

BOS May Count: Reported on 28 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1974

BOS October Count: Reported on 23 of 40 counts, maximum of 11 birds in 2001

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 34 of 41 counts,
maximum of 29 birds on the 2006
Niagara Falls CBC



Tufted Titmouse
Jukka Jantunen

Red-breasted Nuthatch
Barry Cherie

White-breasted Nuthatch
Barry Cherie



of the second 20 years This is still not an easy bird to see in Niagara, but the most likely time to find it is at feeders in the winter. Numbers of this species on the Christmas Bird Counts show a steady increase over the years. For many years, beginning in about 1970, the place to see the Tufted Titmouse was at feeders on Shakespeare Avenue in Niagara-on-the-Lake. In the late 1990s the number of available feeders dropped, and the titmouse was more difficult to see there. Fortunately, since that time, some feeders on Thomas Street in Chippawa have provided birders with a reliable opportunity to see these birds in Niagara.

John E. Black

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, rare summer resident, uncommon winter resident

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is a permanent resident over all but a small part of its most northerly range in North America (*National Geographic* 2006). It does, however, undergo periodic irruptive migrations from its more northerly breeding grounds roughly every two years (Cheskey 2007d). It is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara with only a small number of birds remaining to breed here. Because birds are present throughout the year, no attempt at identifying early arrival dates or late spring dates for these transients is made in this account. As many as eight Red-breasted Nuthatches, presumably transients, were present on the Port Weller piers on most days from 1 May to 22 May during the Port Weller Study. The Red-breasted Nuthatch is a rare summer resident. There is evidence of an increase in resident nuthatches in Niagara in recent years as can be seen in the atlas figures above. There was a significant increase (81%) in the probability of observing this species between atlases in the Carolinian region (Cheskey 2007d).

The Red-breasted Nuthatch, an uncommon winter resident in Niagara, was seen on all but a few years of the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. This species is roughly one quarter as abundant on the counts as the White-breasted Nuthatch.

John E. Black

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, common winter resident

The White-breasted Nuthatch is a permanent resident over most of its range in North America (*National Geographic* 2006). It is, nevertheless, an uncommon spring transient in Niagara with a fraction of the birds observed remaining to breed in Niagara in the summer months. Because birds are here throughout the year, no attempt at identifying early spring arrival dates or late dates of transients is made in this account. There were sightings from the Port Weller piers from 2 May to 20 May during the Port Weller Study.

The White-breasted Nuthatch is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. A common winter resident in Niagara, the White-breasted Nuthatch was seen on all but one year of the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. It is roughly four times as abundant on the Christmas Bird Counts as the Red-breasted Nuthatch.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 20 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds 2000

BOS May Count: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 29 birds 1978

BOS October Count: Reported on 34 of 40 counts, maximum of 27 birds 1969

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 31 of 41 counts, maximum of 73 birds on the 2003 Niagara Falls CBC

First Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 14 squares confirmed, 10 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 19 birds in 2006

BOS May Count: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 24 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 37 of 40 counts, maximum of 38 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 175 birds on the 1973 St. Catharines CBC



Brown Creeper
Peter Ferguson

Brown Creeper *Certhia americana*

Uncommon spring transient, rare summer resident, fall transient, rare winter resident

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 3 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 3 probable, 5 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 151 birds in 1994

BOS May Count: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 56 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 26 birds on the 1994 Niagara Falls CBC

The Brown Creeper is a permanent resident over all but the most northerly and southerly portions of its range in North America (*National Geographic* 2006). It is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara with only a small number of birds remaining to breed in Niagara. Because birds are here throughout the year, an early arrival date for these transients is difficult to determine. A single bird, possibly an arriving migrant, was observed at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby on 14 March 1987 (HNCNR). There are no March BOS Noteworthy Records. Brown Creepers, presumably transients, were observed on the Port Weller piers on most days from 1 May to 22 May during the Port Weller Study.

The Brown Creeper is a rare summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 29 June.

This species was observed on all but one of the BOS October Counts. On 8 October 1990 Robert Curry and Verne Evans counted 40 transient Brown Creepers at the Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR).

The Brown Creeper is a rare early winter resident in Niagara; however, by January it is difficult to find this species. Its unusual feeding pattern consists of a spiral search up the trunk of a tree followed by a short flight to the base of the next tree and then the sequence repeats.

John E. Black

Rock Wren *Salpinctes obsoletus*

One historical record

The Rock Wren is a bird of the American southwest, where it can easily be found in canyons and dry rocky locations. Interestingly, it is not known to drink water, and it has a repertoire of over one hundred songs. The Rock Wren is known to be an occasional visitor to the east.

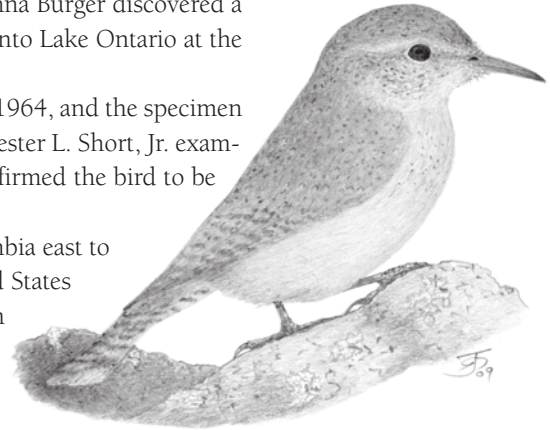
There is one historical record of this extremely rare visitor to Niagara. On 6 December 1964, Carl Mrozek, Daniel Salisbury, Richard Brownstein and Joanna Burger discovered a Rock Wren among the rocks lining the two piers that project out into Lake Ontario at the north end of the Welland Canal (Baillie 1964).

This first Rock Wren for Ontario was collected on 7 December 1964, and the specimen (skin) is at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (ROM # 94722). Lester L. Short, Jr. examined the specimen at the United States National Museum and confirmed the bird to be of the nominate race (Mitchell and Andrlé 1970, Roy 2001).

The Rock Wren breeds in Canada from southern British Columbia east to southern Saskatchewan, and south throughout the western United States from western North Dakota to the Mexican border. It winters from Northern California east to Oklahoma and south throughout the southern portion of its breeding range (Lowther et al. 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

Rock Wren
Ross James



Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

Uncommon permanent resident

The Carolina Wren is an uncommon permanent resident in Niagara. On all but two days in May during the Port Weller Study, one to four birds were present. Male Carolina Wrens have repertoires of about 32 song types all year long, defending territories and mates on a permanent basis as do many tropical birds. Females do not sing, but often overlap their mate's song with a loud chatter. Males also have a loud call note that sounds like "cheer" while females call "dit dit", allowing the sex of individuals to be determined at any time of year (Eugene Morton pers. comm.).

Niagara lies at the northern limit of the breeding range of Carolina Wren. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 28 April. The breeding bird atlas figures for Niagara indicate a substantial increase in the breeding population of Carolina Wrens during the last 20 years. This is consistent with the overall figures for Ontario. There was a significant increase (540%) in the probability of observing this species between atlases (P. Read 2007). A breeding pair of Carolina Wrens was first observed on the Port Weller east pier on 11 April 1993. The young birds left the nest on 16 May 1993 and were last observed with their parents on 28 May 1993 during the Port Weller Study.

Seen on many Niagara Christmas Bird Counts, the number of Carolina Wrens recorded here began to grow in the late 1980s. They have been found on the Niagara Falls CBC every year since 1986. This species is a permanent resident over its range, which extends from Ontario south to northern Mexico, the Yucatan and parts of Guatemala. Its range expands and contracts depending on the mildness or severity of the winter months (National Geographic 2006).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 5 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 13 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds in 2002

BOS May Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 12 birds in 1975

BOS October Count: Reported on 20 of 40 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 39 birds on the 1992 Niagara Falls CBC



Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii*

Extremely rare visitor

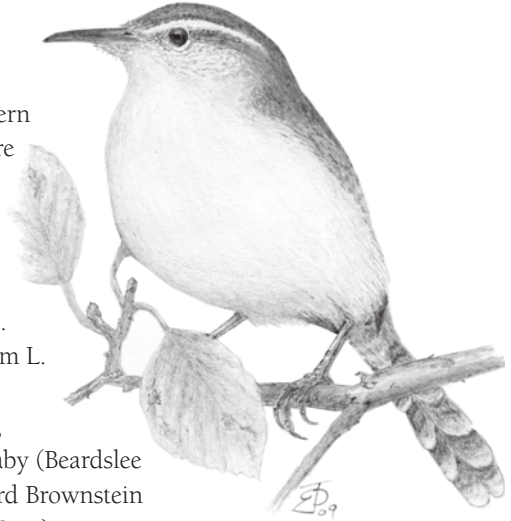
The Bewick's Wren, widespread across much of the southern and western United States and irregularly found in the east, has experienced a severe decline within the eastern population of the species. This dramatic downward spiral has coincided with an increased range expansion of House Wren which, among other factors, is believed to be directly responsible for this downturn (Kennedy and White 1997). The likelihood of this species occurring again in Niagara is at best slim.

Three early observations exist in Niagara. On 21 April 1950, William L. Putman reported observing a Bewick's Wren at the Horticultural Experimental Station in Vineland (Sheppard 1970). On 28 April 1957, Rachel and Harold Axtell discovered one at Morgan's Point, near Burnaby (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970, BOSNR). On 13 May 1957, Richard Brownstein and M. Schultz located a Bewick's Wren at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There is only one known sighting of this extremely rare visitor to Niagara during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. Alan Wormington discovered one at Morgan's Point, Burnaby on 26 April 1972 that was last seen on 8 May 1972.

Bewick's Wren breeds extensively along the Pacific coast from Southern British Columbia to Baja California, in the central southern United States from southern Wyoming to central Missouri and south to Arizona, eastern Texas and to Mexico. It winters in most of its western and central range along the Colorado River and in eastern Texas (Kennedy and White 1997).

Kayo J. Roy



Bewick's Wren
Ross James

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

The earliest sighting for House Wren is 9 April 1971, when Harold Lancaster observed a single bird in Welland. Probably a common spring transient, it is difficult to assign a spring transient abundance to this species because it is not easy to separate possible transient House Wrens from the many birds arriving to breed in the area. During the five years of the Port Weller Study, a maximum of 16 House Wrens were reported on 10 May and 11 May, but by 31 May the numbers reported had declined to 10 individuals. However, by 31 May, House Wrens were nesting on the piers, and if they were incubating, would be uncounted by the observers.

The House Wren breeds throughout southern Ontario. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 7 April. With the exception of the House Sparrow, the House Wren occupies a greater latitudinal range in the Americas than any other passerine (Brewer 2007).

The latest fall sighting is of a single bird on 22 October 1967 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There is one winter record for Niagara: a bird seen by David Gascoine at Niagara Falls on 6 December 1992 (Ridout 1993:254). This species winters from the southern United States south to central Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 23 squares confirmed,
2 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
39 of 41 counts, maximum of
68 birds in 1999

BOS October Count: Reported
on 18 of 40 counts, maximum
of 9 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Uncommon spring transient, rare and local summer resident, fall transient, rare winter resident

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 28 of 41 counts, maximum of 12 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 12 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 31 of 40 counts, maximum of 21 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 29 of 41 counts, maximum of 16 birds on the 1992 and 2005 Niagara Falls CBC

The Winter Wren, an uncommon spring transient, is one of the earliest migrants to arrive in Niagara. The earliest dates in March are 2 March 1968, when Dan Salisbury saw a single bird at Queenston (see also BOSNR) and 12 March 1972, when Harold Lancaster saw a single bird at Mud Lake in Port Colborne. These could have been winter stragglers. There are an additional 35 records of Winter Wrens from local birders extending from 26 March to 7 May. Another five BOS Noteworthy Records originate in areas where these wrens are not breeding. These represent the earliest dates found each year, confirming that the Winter Wren arrives here in late March and early April. Non-resident birds were seen on the Port Weller piers from 1 May to 14 May during the Port Weller Study. Latest dates of what are probably transient birds are 21 May 1967, 1972, 1978 and 1995 on the BOS May Counts.

Niagara lies just at the northern edge of the area in which the Winter Wren is a permanent resident in North America. The species is a rare and local summer resident in Niagara. One of the squares with probable breeding in the second Atlas, and a good place to find these birds in the summer, was the Harold Mitchell Nature Reserve. This reserve lies just north of the Long Beach Conservation Area on Lake Erie on Side Road 30 in Wainfleet. At least two singing males were encountered there in 2005 (JEB).

There are 12 records from 1 August to 31 October (BOSNR). There are five BOS Noteworthy Records and four records from local birders for November.

Winter Wren is an occasional to rare winter straggler in Niagara. There are five records from 1 December to 31 December (BOSNR) and two additional December records from local birders. There are 12 records from 1 January to 28 February (BOSNR) and five additional records from local birders for the same period. The Winter Wren is reported on many Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. Since 1985 it has been found on every Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count, the maximum number being 16 birds in 1992 and 2005. Birders have found single Winter Wrens by the open water of small streams at Dufferin Island in Niagara Falls, St. John's Conservation Area near Fonthill and Ball's Falls Conservation Area near Vineland, all in January (JEB). This species winters mainly in the southern United States (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Winter Wren
Kenneth Newcombe



Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis*

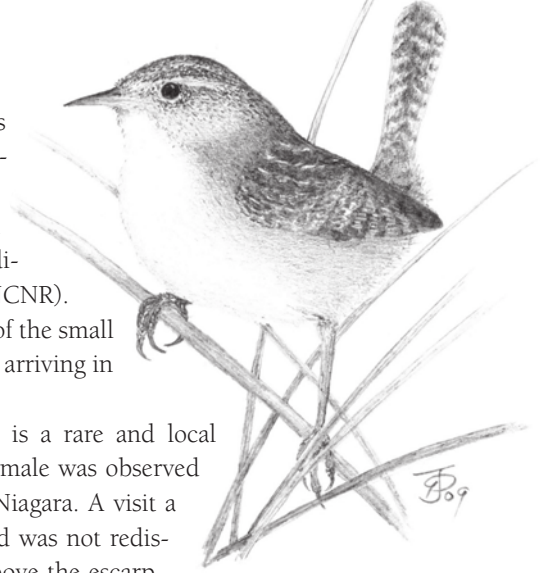
Spring and fall transient, rare and local summer resident

Formerly known as Short-billed Marsh Wren, the Sedge Wren has appeared in only two BOS May Counts. These were single individuals seen on 19 May 1968 and 17 May 1975. No birds were reported on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study. In the Niagara side of the Fifty Point Conservation Area, single individuals were observed on 17 May 1997 and 17 May 1998 (HNCNR). Spring transient abundance is uncertain. It is not evident which of the small numbers of birds found in the spring are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Sedge Wren breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a rare and local summer resident in Niagara. During the second Atlas a singing male was observed 11 July 2004 not far from Lowbanks in Dunville, just west of Niagara. A visit a week later revealed that the field had been plowed, and the bird was not rediscovered (JEB). On 23 June and 7 July 2002, a bird was seen above the escarpment near Beamsville, but not in subsequent years (JEB). In the summer of 2001, a bird was repeatedly sighted in Port Colborne (Jean and Blayne Farnan), and on 17 June and 24 June 2003 a bird was found not far from St. Davids (JEB, KJR). Two earlier summer dates exist: Dan Salisbury saw three birds in the Wainfleet Bog on 4 June 1969, and Harold Lancaster saw two birds in the Humberstone Marsh in Port Colborne on 6 June 1971. Given the locations and dates, these are most probably summer residents on territory.

There are no BOS Noteworthy Records or BOS October Count records for this species. A transient Sedge Wren was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby on 27 September 1969 (JEB, Dan Salisbury). There are no winter records for Niagara. This species breeds from southern Canada to Tierra del Fuego. High latitude populations are migratory and tropical latitude populations are sedentary (Stiles and Skutch 1989). The Sedge Wrens that breed in Niagara winter in the southeastern quarter and along the Atlantic Coast of the United States (*National Geographic* 2006).

John E. Black



Sedge Wren
Ross James

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
3 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
2 of 41 counts, maximum of
1 bird in 1968 and 1975

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported



Sedge Wren
Harold Stiver



Marsh Wren
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 4 squares confirmed,
6 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares con-
firmed, 3 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
18 of 41 counts, maximum of
14 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported
on 6 of 40 counts, maximum
of 10 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon and local summer resident

The earliest spring date for this species, formerly known as Long-billed Marsh Wren, is 15 April 1989, when a single bird was found at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (JEB). Marsh Wrens inhabited the Port Weller piers from 7 May to 31 May during the Port Weller Study, with no more than one individual seen on any one day of May during all five years of the study. Spring transient abundance is uncertain. It is not evident which of the small numbers of birds located in the spring outside known breeding areas are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Marsh Wren breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon and local summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 24 June. This is a species of cattail marshes, and males can make as many as 22 dummy nests in a season (Tozer 2007). Over the years Mud Lake has been a reliable location for seeing these birds in the summer months.

The latest October record is of a single bird seen on 21 October 1967 at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There is one November record, 24 November 1967, of a single individual on the upper Niagara River, seen by Robert Andrlé and others (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Marsh Wren for Niagara. This species winters from the southern United States south to northern Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*

Common spring transient, extremely rare summer resident, fall transient, uncommon winter resident

The Golden-crowned Kinglet is a common and early spring transient. Twelve birds were found at Fort Erie on 26 March 1988. There are 17 April records from local birders. On 3 April 1977, 33 birds were seen on a BOS April Count. The latest spring sighting is 21 May 2006, when a single bird was seen on the BOS May Count. (Note: there were eight May Counts conducted on 21 May over the 41 years of counts, but only the 2006 count reported a sighting of Golden-crowned Kinglet.) During the Port Weller Study, Golden-crowned Kinglets were present from 1 May to 13 May.

Niagara lies within the North American range in which the Golden-crowned Kinglet is a permanent resident. However, it is an extremely rare summer resident in Niagara. There were no records in the first Atlas. In the second Atlas, breeding was confirmed in Port Colborne, in a Norway spruce grove on the firelane beside Lake Erie between Pinecrest Road and Weaver Road. The kinglets were first observed on 12 June, then again on 20 June 2005. In July they were found feeding a cowbird on a branch with a young kinglet still on the nest (JEB, Jean and Blayne Farnan). Only three nests were reported during the entire second Atlas, so the observation of this nest was a very unusual one (M.A. McLaren 2007b). A singing male was present on 21 June 2006 in the same spruce grove. An abandoned gas pump on the roadside marks the spot. The spruce grove runs for 110 metres along the road and extends about 80 metres north of the road at its deepest point.

There are eight records of Golden-crowned Kinglet in September (BOSNR). The latest count date is 20 October, when 83 birds were reported on the BOS October Count. There are no October or November BOS Noteworthy Records. On 8 October 1990, 250 birds were observed on the Niagara side of the Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). Dan Salisbury saw 20 birds on Morgan's Point near Burnaby on 11 November 1969.

The Golden-crowned Kinglet is an uncommon winter resident, but a few individuals can usually be found in some of the small strands of conifers that are scattered throughout Niagara. Since 1986, when Port Colborne joined the other Christmas Bird Counts in Niagara, there have been only three counts on which the Golden-crowned Kinglet was not observed. This species winters from southern Canada to Guatemala (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*

Common spring transient, fall transient, occasional winter straggler

The earliest reported dates for this common spring transient are of single birds seen at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby on 29 March 1997 (HNCNR) and at Morgan's Point near Burnaby by Harold Lancaster on 7 April 1968. While there are 38 additional April records from local birders, there are no other March records. Many birds were observed on the days between 1 May and 19 May over the five years of the Port Weller Study, but no more than one bird a day was observed over the five years after 19 May. The latest date of a spring sighting is 31 May 1996, when one bird was observed on the Port Weller west pier during the Port Weller Study.

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,006 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 2003

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 387 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 59 birds on the 1995 St. Catharines CBC



Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ross James

BOS April Count: Reported on 22 of 41 counts, maximum of 16 birds in 1981 and 2002

BOS May Count: Reported on 32 of 41 counts, maximum of 159 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 222 bird in 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds on the 2004 BOS and St. Catharines CBCs



Golden-crowned Kinglet
Harold Stiver



Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Harold Stiver

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet breeds north of Lake Ontario. Its clutch size, up to 12 eggs, is the largest clutch of a small North American songbird (Crins 2007b). There is only one summer record: a nest observed by Mark Jennings at Windmill Point near Fort Erie on 11 June 1977 (Goodwin 1977:1134) and what were presumably birds associated with the same nest observed by Bob Andrie at Windmill Point on 5 and 10 July 1977 (BOSNR).

The earliest fall date during five years of the BOS October Counts is 8 October. The latest October Count date is 20 October 1985, when 47 birds were seen. There are three November records from local birders: Dan Salisbury reported two birds at R.W. Sheppard's resi-

dence in Niagara Falls on 11 November 1967, one bird at the residence of Horace Troup in Louth on 18 November 1967 and one bird at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie on 16 November 1969.

Observed on 16 Niagara Christmas Bird Counts, the first recorded Ruby-crowned Kinglet was found on the St. Catharines CBC of 1983. On 19 February 1983, a single bird was seen in Niagara-on-the-Lake (KJR, Dan Salisbury). The Ruby-crowned Kinglet winters from the southern third of the United States to Guatemala (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Ruby-crowned Kinglet banded at Ruthven Park in Cayuga, Ontario, on 22 October 2001 was encountered on 26 December 2002 in Arkansas. A second, banded at Long Point on 9 October 1989, was encountered in the fall of 1989 in New Jersey. A third, banded at Long Point on 6 May 1985, was encountered on 4 January 1986 in North Carolina.

John E. Black

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

The earliest arrival date for this species is 15 April 1994, when a single bird was found at Port Weller east pier (KJR). During the years of the Port Weller Study, gnatcatchers were reported in fairly large numbers from 1 May to 20 May, and thereafter only one or two birds were observed from 21 May to 31 May. Some or all of these later birds may have been breeding, as they are known to nest on the piers (JEB). Spring transient abundance is uncertain. It is not evident which of the small numbers of birds seen outside known breeding areas in the spring are transient and which are individuals arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara.

Possible early arrival dates of migrants heading south in the fall are of single birds found on 8 August 1987 on the Niagara side of Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR) and on 20 August 1966 at Morgan's Point near Burnaby by Dan Salisbury. Three birds were seen at Long Beach in Wainfleet on 20 August 2006 (BOSNR). The latest fall date is 15 October 1995, when a single bird was found on the BOS October Count.

There are two winter records for Niagara. Single birds were found by Gus Yaki at Dufferin Island in Niagara Falls on 1 December 1991 (Weir 1992:261) and by Richard Byron in Niagara Falls on 18 December 1994 (Ridout 1995:144). This species winters from the southern third of the United States south to Honduras (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 7 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 5 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 33 of 41 counts, maximum of 8 birds in 2003

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1995

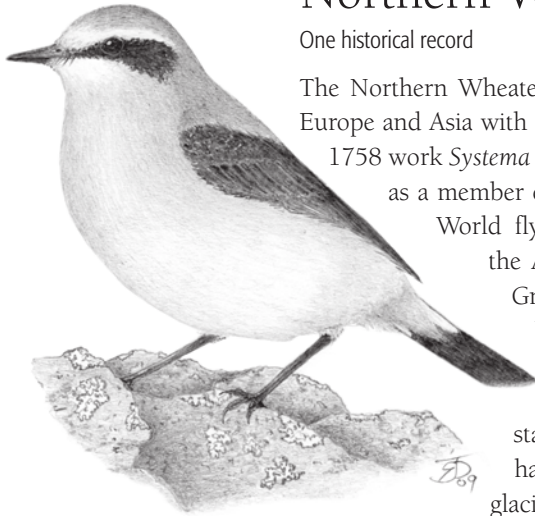
Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Sam Barone



Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

One historical record



Northern Wheatear
Ross James

The Northern Wheatear is a migratory, insectivorous species of open, stony habitat of Europe and Asia with an extremely large global range. First described by Linnaeus in his 1758 work *Systema Naturae* as *Motacilla oenanthe*, this small passerine was once classed as a member of the thrush family Turdidae but is now considered to be an Old World flycatcher Muscipidae. Two races are found in North America: the Alaska and Northwest Canada subspecies *O. o. oenanthe*, and the Greenland and Northeast Canada subspecies *O. o. leucorhoa*. The Northern Wheatear may be the only breeding passerine of North America that migrates to wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa. Stragglers of this species have been found in 33 provinces and states of Canada and the United States. American breeding grounds have probably been occupied by Northern Wheatears since the last glacial period (Voous 1960).

Only one historical record is known for this extremely rare visitor to Niagara. Reprinted here is the detail from Beardslee and Mitchell (1965):

The occurrence of this species in our territory must be considered highly fortuitous. We are fortunate that when two of our most capable observers, Wright and Nathan, were driving about two miles west of Ridgeway, Ontario, on September 24, 1949, their attention was attracted to a small bird with a white rump which flew up with a group of sparrows from the roadside south of the Cherry Hill Golf Club. Careful study revealed all of the identifying field marks of a "Greenland Wheatear." The two observers were Albert J. Wright and Bernard Nathan. Wright took photographs of the bird (present location unknown).

The Northern Wheatear breeds along the Arctic coast of Alaska, northern Yukon Territory, parts of northeast Arctic Canada and Greenland. It winters in tropical Africa (Kren and Zoerb 1997).

Kayo J. Roy

Eastern Bluebird

Sialia sialis

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident,
rare winter resident

The Eastern Bluebird is a permanent resident in Niagara. There are three March records from the BOS Noteworthy Records and seven March records from local birders. The earliest April recorded dates are 13 April 1988, when two birds were seen at Ridgeville (KJR); 15 April 1967, when four birds were found by Dan Salisbury at Virgil; and 15 April 1982, when a single bird was seen at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (JEB).

Eastern Bluebird
Peter Ferguson



The Eastern Bluebird breeds in all areas of the province except the Hudson Bay lowlands and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. On 2 April 1989 a territorial pair was observed on Sawmill Road in Pelham (JEB). According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 16 April. The breeding bird atlas figures show a substantial increase in the breeding population of Eastern Bluebirds in Niagara over the last 20 years, a trend that is consistent with the overall figures for Ontario. There was approximately a fivefold increase in the probability of observation of this species between atlases in the Carolinian region (B. Read 2007). For more information on the dramatic recovery of this species in Niagara the reader is referred to the article by Clements and Read in this book.

The latest October sighting occurred on 28 October 1967, when a single bird was found at Thunder Bay in Fort Erie. There are eight records of the Eastern Bluebird in November (BOSNR).

Currently it is considered a rare winter resident in Niagara, although bluebirds have been reported on all but one of the St. Catharines CBCs since their inception in 1982. Note also that 1982 was the first year a bluebird was seen on any Niagara CBC. Bluebird winter numbers started to rise in the early 1990s. Records of bluebirds in January and February from local birders and the BOS do not begin until 1992. There is only one February record prior to 1992, that of a single bird found 16 February 1975 at Effingham in Pelham by Harold Lancaster. This species winters from the central regions of the United States (regularly north to Southern Ontario and Michigan) south to the Gulf Coast (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Townsend's Solitaire

Myadestes townsendi

Extremely rare visitor

This unique, long-tailed gray thrush of the high western mountains is named after American ornithologist John Kirk Townsend. Of the 13 New World solitaires, the Townsend's is the only one that occurs in North America (Bowen 1997). This species is very territorial even into the winter months, as they strongly defend their winter-feeding territories of berry-rich patches of juniper trees for survival purposes (Bowen 1997).

In Niagara, only one record of this extremely rare visitor is known to exist. On 6 November 1983, Richard Knaption discovered a Townsend's Solitaire in the rolling countryside just north of Fonthill (James 1984, BOSNR). This void for Niagara is not indicative of this species' dispersal east given that in recent years it has become a regular but sporadic annual visitor to Ontario. For example, neighbouring Hamilton has recorded nine observations of Townsend's Solitaire in their study area over the years (Curry 2006).

The species breeds in the mountainous areas of Alaska to the Northwest Territories and from British Columbia south to California and from South Dakota to central Mexico. Wintering grounds are from southern Canada west to Nebraska, usually at lower elevations than their breeding grounds (Bowen 1997).

Kayo J. Roy

First Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 2 possible

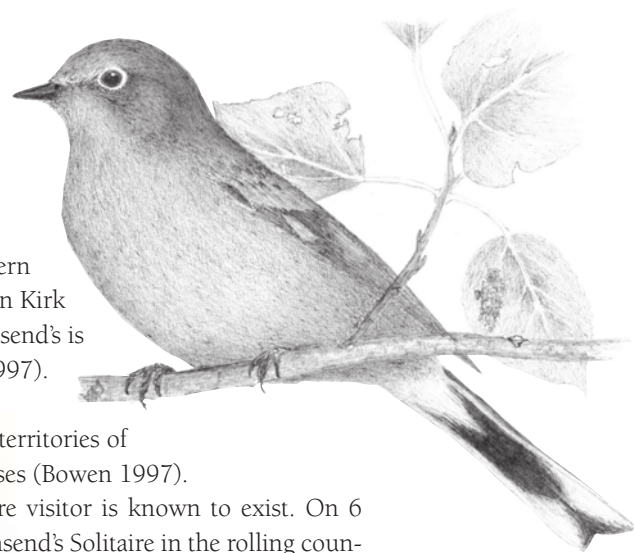
Second Atlas: 22 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 17 birds 2006

BOS May Count: Reported on 24 of 41 counts, maximum of 14 birds 2006

BOS October Count: Reported on 29 of 40 counts, maximum of 50 birds 2002

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 91 birds on the 2000 St. Catharines CBC



Townsend's Solitaire
Ross James

First Atlas: 8 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 5 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 6 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 26 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1971 and 1974

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Veery
Harold Stiver



Veery *Catharus fuscescens*

Uncommon spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient

The Veery is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. The earliest spring record is for 28-29 April 1969 of a single bird seen at Port Weller by Dan Salisbury. Birds were present on the Port Weller piers from 8 May to 29 May, the latest spring date for this species during the Port Weller Study.

The Veery breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 4 June. Figures from the breeding bird atlas indicate a small decrease in the breeding population of Veery in Niagara over the last 20 years, a trend which is consistent with the overall figures for Ontario. There was a significant decrease (27%) in the probability of observation of this species between atlases in the Carolinian region (Friesen 2007). Veery are abundant in the Wainfleet Bog, in particular at the north end of Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet.

The earliest date for a fall transient is 30 August 1966, when a single bird was found at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded date is 13 October 1974 on the BOS October Count.

There are no winter records of Veery for Niagara. This species winters from northern Columbia south to Brazil (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 2003

BOS October Count: Reported on 9 of 40 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Gray-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*

Rare spring transient, fall transient

A rare spring transient, the Gray-cheeked Thrush is one of the last migrants to arrive in Niagara in the spring. The earliest date is 13 May 2000 for one bird in Point Abino Woods (KJR). The latest date is 3 June 1984 for a single bird at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are only four records of single birds from the Port Weller Study: 24 May 1993, 24 May 1996, 27 May 1995 and 31 May 1993.

The Gray-cheeked Thrush breeds on and north of James Bay in Ontario. There are no Niagara summer records.

The earliest fall arrival date is 4 September 1978, when single birds were seen at Cedar Bay in Gasline (BOSNR) and Wainfleet (Harold Lancaster). The latest fall date is 18-19 October 1969, when a single bird was found at Rose Hill Road (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Gray-cheeked Thrush for Niagara. This species winters from northern Columbia south to Brazil and Peru (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black



Gray-cheeked Thrush
Harold Stiver

Swainson's Thrush

Catharus ustulatus

Uncommon spring transient, fall transient

Formerly known as Olive-backed Thrush, the Swainson's Thrush is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. The earliest date is 22 April 1967, when a single bird was found at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (JEB). During the Port Weller Study very small numbers were present from 9 May to 29 May, the latest spring date for this species.

In the spring and fall of 1994 two acoustic microphones were operated near St. Davids, a small town 20 km southeast of Port Weller. Since many migrating birds call as they travel at night, the number of chips heard each night provide a measure of the number of migrating birds passing overhead each evening. Almost all chips in the study could be identified as those of thrushes or smaller passerines. The largest spring numbers passed overhead on the night of 25/26 May 1994, when 2,600 thrushes were heard. Of these, 2,240 or 86% were Swainson's Thrush, 12% Veery, 2% Gray-cheeked Thrush and 3% Wood Thrush. The largest fall movement was heard on the night of 17/18 September 1994, when 7,085 thrushes were heard (Blanchard and Black 1994, 1995).

The Swainson's Thrush, which breeds north of Lake Ontario, is not present in Niagara during the summer months. It is, however, one of the earliest migrants to return to Niagara and can arrive as early as July. There are five July records (BOSNR) of single birds on Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie: 18 July 1974, 25 July-31 August 1980, 29 July-11 August 1981, 29 July-31 August 1982 and 28 July-31 August 1984.



Swainson's Thrush
Harold Stiver

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 36 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 1996

BOS October Count: Reported on 27 of 40 counts, maximum of 45 birds in 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

There are nine August records, excluding those mentioned above, from Rose Hill Road, two August records from Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR) and three August records from local birders. For September there are two records from Rose Hill Road, one record from Niagara Falls (BOSNR) and fourteen records from local birders. For October there are three BOS Noteworthy Records and five records from local birders. The latest October date is 16 October 1983, when a single bird was seen on the BOS October Count. There is one November record of a single bird discovered on 15 November 1970 (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Swainson's Thrush for Niagara. This species winters from northern Mexico south to Argentina and Paraguay (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Swainson's Thrush banded at Long Point on 22 September 2000 was encountered on 24 November 2001 in Peru, and a second Swainson's Thrush banded at Long Point on 27 September 2001 was encountered on 5 December 2001 in Peru. A Swainson's Thrush banded at Long Point on 25 September 1995 was encountered on 28 April 1996 in Oklahoma.

John E. Black

Hermit Thrush
Harold Stiver



Hermit Thrush

Catharus guttatus

Uncommon spring transient, fall transient,
occasional winter straggler

The earliest arrival date for this uncommon spring transient is 30 March 2003, when two birds were seen on the Port Weller east pier (KJR). There are 34 April reports from local birders. The latest arrival dates are of single birds on the BOS May Counts of 21 May 1967, 1972 and 1978 (Note: on the remaining five BOS counts that took place on 21 May there were no Hermit Thrushes reported). Single birds were found during the Port Weller Study from 1 May to 15 May.

The Hermit Thrush breeds north of

Lake Ontario. There are no Niagara summer records. The earliest date for a fall transient is 23 August 1966, when three birds were seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest October date is 27 October 1968, when one bird was seen at Rose Hill Road (BOSNR). There is one November record, 9 November 1991, of a single bird at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR).

An occasional winter straggler, it is not found every year on the Christmas Bird Counts, but when seen, there are usually one or two birds. On the Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count of 2003, 13 individuals were observed in New York State. The previous high was three birds on the Niagara Falls CBC of 1997. There are five January records from local birders, the latest date being 25 January 2004 at Port Colborne (JEB, KJR). This species winters from the southern United States as far south as Guatemala (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

BOS April Count: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 11 birds in 2000 and 2005

BOS May Count: Reported on 18 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1975

BOS October Count: Reported on 34 of 40 counts, maximum of 159 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds on the 2003 Niagara Falls (New York section) CBC



Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

The earliest date for the spring arrival of this species is 12 April 1968, when Dan Salisbury observed one bird at the Harold Mitchell Nature Reserve in Wainfleet. This species was observed on the Port Weller piers from 4 May to 17 May during the Port Weller Study. Spring transient abundance is unclear because it is not evident which of the small numbers of birds seen outside known breeding areas in the spring are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Wood Thrush breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon and local summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 23 May.

The latest fall date for this species is of a single bird on 17 October 1966 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There is one winter record for Niagara, that of a single bird observed at Port Weller by many observers from 27 to 30 December 1967 (Goodwin 1968:435) and 1, 2 and 4 January 1968 (Dan Salisbury). The Wood Thrush winters in southern Texas and south to Panama (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Wood Thrush
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 9 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 13 squares confirmed, 10 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 37 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 9 of 40 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

American Robin *Turdus migratorius*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident, uncommon winter resident

First Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,583 birds 2000

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,137 birds 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 3,193 birds 1969

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 2,065 birds on the 2004 Niagara Falls CBC

This species is a very common summer resident in Niagara. Large flocks of robins are present in the winter months, but it is not clear how to separate these winter residents from arriving migrants so as to determine an early migrant arrival date or spring transient abundance. March records abound (BOSNR). While American Robins were present on the Port Weller piers they were not counted during the Port Weller Study.

The American Robin, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a very common summer resident in Niagara. Only Common Grackle, European Starling and Red-winged Blackbird are found more frequently in the Carolinian region of the atlas (Burke 2007). According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 14 April.

This species was observed on all BOS October Counts. There are numerous records for November (BOSNR). An uncommon winter resident (its numbers perhaps swelled by northern stragglers), there are many BOS Noteworthy Records from December to February. There is evidence (see the article on Christmas Bird Counts in this book) that numbers of wintering American Robins have been increasing over the years. The main wintering range of the American Robin is in the southern two-thirds of the United States south to Guatemala and the Bahamas (Brewer et al. 2000).



Banding and Recovery Data: American Robins banded at Long Point have been encountered in Alabama, Georgia, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

John E. Black

Post-2006 Observation

On 21 February 2007, two robins arrived and remained to breed at a residence in south St. Catharines (JEB). While there were other robins present from time to time, they arrived in large flocks and feasted on fruit-bearing trees in the area.

American Robin / *Harold Stiver*

Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius*

Extremely rare visitor

The Varied Thrush is a striking, robin-sized bird of the Pacific Northwest that is often referred to as the grandest of western songbirds. Its ethereal whistle-like song heard throughout the forests of the west is sometimes referred to as a “kid with a whistle.” The first encounter with this species by John Burroughs, the eminent American writer, naturalist and essayist even resulted in appreciative verse. While on the Harriman Expedition to Alaska in 1899 he wrote:

*O Varied Thrush! O Robin strange!
Behold my mute surprise.
Thy form and flight I have long known,
But not in this new disguise.*

Though it is still common in most of its range, there is some concern about recent declining trends in the population status of this beautiful western songbird.



The Varied Thrush is regularly known to wander widely across North America from its normal western range (George 2000). Only one record exists for Niagara of this extremely rare visitor. On 28 December 1997 while participating in the Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count, Rob Dobos, Kevin McLaughlin and Kevin Hannah discovered a female Varied Thrush near the Sunnybrook Farms Winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake. While not seen every day, the bird was last reported on 6 January 1998 (not 2-3 January 1998 as in Ridout 1998:193, BOSNR).

The Varied Thrush breeds throughout Alaska, south through Yukon and British Columbia to central Idaho, and as far south as northern California. It winters along the Alaska and British Columbia coastline to northern Idaho, and as far south as Baja, California (George 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

Varied Thrush
Frank & Sandra Horvath

Post- 2006 Observation

On 6 January 2009, Carole and William Chapman observed an unusual bird at the base of their residence feeders in Fenwick. This brightly coloured male Varied Thrush was an easy identification. It was seen by many birders and well photographed by Bill Watson and Frank and Sandra Horvath, and was not seen after 10 January 2009 (BOSNR, Mann 2009:253).

Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident, occasional winter straggler

The earliest spring arrival date for this species is 14 April 1991, when a single bird was found at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (JEB). It was present on the Port Weller piers from 7 May to 31 May during the Port Weller Study. Spring transient abundance is uncertain because it is not evident which of the small numbers of birds seen outside known breeding areas in the spring are transient and which are arriving in Niagara to breed.

The Gray Catbird, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 15 May. The latest fall date is of a single bird on 26 October 1968 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

An occasional winter straggler, Gray Catbird has been found on eight St. Catharines CBCs, on one BOS CBC and on 11 Niagara Falls CBCs. There are two December records and five January records from local birders, the latest date being of a bird seen on 25 January 2004 on Wilson Road in the Wainfleet Bog (JEB, KJR). The winter range of this species extends from the southeastern United States to Panama and to the Greater Antilles, Bermuda and the islands in the Caribbean Sea (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 23 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 20 of 41 counts, maximum of 151 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 30 of 40 counts, maximum of 14 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 16 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds 1996, 2001 and 2005

Gray Catbird
Raymond Barlow

Banding and Recovery Data:
A Gray Catbird banded at Long Point on 8 September 1985 was encountered on 12 January 1986 in Guatemala. Another banded at Long Point on 24 September 1993 was encountered on 15 October 1993 in Alabama.





Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*

Uncommon permanent resident

Niagara lies just inside the northern edge of the breeding range of Northern Mockingbird. However, this range is expanding north (Smith and Poon 2007). The Northern Mockingbird is an uncommon permanent resident in Niagara. The first record is of a bird seen at McNab in old Lincoln County on 12 May 1932 by James H. Fleming (Sheppard 1970). In the 1980s, numbers of Northern Mockingbird began to increase. (See the article in this book by Hamilton and DeLeon.)

According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 31 May. There is evidence to suggest that it is a more common resident in the northerly portions of Niagara (John Stevens pers. comm.).

The Northern Mockingbird is seen frequently on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts; in fact, it was seen on all counts but those of 1966. Since 1990 there has been a steady increase in the number of Northern Mockingbirds seen on the CBC. There are 259 BOS Noteworthy Records ranging from January to December.

John E. Black

Sage Thrasher *Oreoscoptes montanus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Sage Thrasher is one of the rarest birds in Canada and over the past 70 years has experienced an estimated 50% loss of habitat (Cannings 1995). This loss of habitat is primarily caused by agricultural and urban development, burning and clearing of sage, heavy grazing and use of pesticides (Blood 1995). Designated as Endangered in Canada (SARA 2008), the Sage Thrasher is the only species in the genus *Oreoscoptes*, which means “mimic of the mountains.” The species is known to the residents of the

Northern Mockingbird
Jukka Jantunen

First Atlas: 14 squares confirmed,
5 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 17 squares con-
firmed, 4 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 35
of 41 counts, maximum of 14 birds
in 2002 and 2003

BOS May Count: Reported on 31
of 41 counts, maximum of 18
birds in 1989

BOS October Count: Reported
on 38 of 40 counts, maximum
of 22 birds in 1989

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maxi-
mum of 159 birds on the 1989
Niagara Falls (148 in Ontario and
11 in New York) CBC

Okanagan and Similkameen valleys as the “poet of the lonesome sagebrush plain.” There are no recognized subspecies (Cannings 1998).

Remarkably, two of the 13 records accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee for Sage Thrasher have been recorded in Niagara. On 20 October 1966, Daniel Salisbury discovered the first at Port Robinson. The specimen (skin) is at the Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo, New York (BSNS # 5095) (Wormington 1986, BOSNR, James 1991).

Some 40 years later, on 24 February 2006, Brian Ahara identified a Sage Thrasher at the tip of the east pier of the Welland Canal in Port Weller, St. Catharines. This extremely rare visitor, and the first-ever winter record for Ontario, was seen by many birders and was last observed on 27 February 2006 (Crins 2007a, BOSNR).

The Sage Thrasher breeds from south-central British Columbia through central Idaho to south-central Montana and south through the Great Basin to the northern portions of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and western Oklahoma (Reynolds et al. 1999). It winters from central California, southern Nevada, northern Arizona, central New Mexico and central Texas south to Baja California and central Mexico (Howell and Webb 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, occasional winter straggler

First Atlas: 18 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 14 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in four years

BOS May Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 62 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1966

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 6 of 41 counts, all single birds

There are three March records of Brown Thrasher (BOSNR). Since it may be found in Niagara during all months of the year, it is not clear if these March sightings are of early migrants or winter stragglers. The earliest April arrival dates are 4 April 1999, when a single bird was seen at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (HNCNR), and 5 April 1998, when a single bird was seen on the BOS April Count. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Brown Thrasher, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date in Niagara for this species is 6 May. In the Carolinian region there has been a significant decrease (32%) of this species between atlases (Curry 2006).

There are seven records of Brown Thrasher in the BOS Noteworthy Records for November. They range from 7 November to 25 November. It is an occasional winter straggler in Niagara. In the BOS Noteworthy Records, there are two records in December, nine records in January, and five records in February. A single bird was present at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie from 9 November 1968 to 26 April 1969 (BOSNR). The Brown Thrasher is rare on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. There are three instances of single birds on the BOS CBC, two instances of single birds on the Niagara Falls CBC and one instance of a single bird on the St. Catharines CBC.

Brown Thrashers winter in the southern portion of their breeding range in the United States (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Brown Thrasher banded at Long Point on 25 April 1966 was encountered on 8 March 1974 in Kentucky.

John E. Black



Sage Thrasher
Brandon Holden



Brown Thrasher
Brandon Holden



European Starling
Peter Ferguson

First Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 9,959 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,850 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 16,582 birds in 1989

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 68,925 birds on the 1998 Niagara Falls CBC

European Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Very common permanent resident (introduced)

The European Starling currently breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a very common permanent resident in Niagara. Sheppard (1970) refers to the first recorded observation:

It was first reported in this part of Ontario from St. Catharines in the winter of 1919-1920 and from Fort Erie shortly afterward, but the author subsequently recorded a recollected observation of a group of four or five starlings which were seen to light in a tall tulip tree, close to the railway tracks near the centre of the city of Niagara Falls, sometime in the month of October 1914.

Breeding was confirmed in all squares in both atlases. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 27 April.

In recent years, during the months from August to December, perhaps as many as 50,000 starlings have roosted on the Cytek Property in Niagara Falls. This property (formerly known as Cyanamid) extends 2.0 km north of the Welland River to Brown Road and west of Garner Road for 2.0 km to Townline Road. It consists of areas of open water and Phragmites

(*Phragmites australis*). Two good places to watch the birds as they enter this roost are on Brown Road just west of the intersection of Brown and Garner Roads and about 0.5 km south of Brown Road on Garner Road.

On many evenings, from 1997 to 1999, the birds were observed to come into roost from the two locations mentioned above. The bulk of the activity was in the hour before sunset. Starlings staged north of the property on power lines, in trees and in the fields. The actual entry to the marsh could take as little as 30 minutes. While most of the birds observed were starlings, there were also good numbers of swallows, Common Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds and smaller numbers of Rusty Blackbirds (JEB). On 27 December 1998, between 1545 hours and 1700 hours EST, the author and his son, in the company of John Miles and his son who were observing for the Niagara Falls CBC that year, counted approximately 30,000 to 60,000 starlings as they entered the roost.

For several years efforts were made to determine where the starlings were roosting in January and February. It was not until 2008 that a roost was discovered with tens of thousands of starlings in St. Catharines in an apartment complex located northeast of the intersection of Carlton St. and Bunting Road. This roost has been occupied in the winter, according to the caretaker of the apartment complex, since at least 2003. The spectacular aerial displays of the starlings as they collected before roosting were amazing (JEB).

The European Starling is the most abundant bird on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts and has been seen in huge numbers since 1966. One of the attractions in Niagara for the starlings is the icewine grapes that usually stay on the vines until some time in January. (See the articles by Somers and Ziraldo in this book.) Some birds leave Niagara in the winter and migrate south. The percentage of birds that do this is unknown.

Banding and Recovery Data: A Starling banded at Long Point on 11 August 1974 was encountered in December 1974 in Alabama.

John E. Black

American Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, occasional winter straggler

Formerly known as Water Pipit, the American Pipit is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. The earliest arrival date is 5 April 1992, when a single bird was seen at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). The American Pipit was not seen on the Port Weller piers during the five years of the Port Weller Study. The latest spring date is 8 May 1997, when a single bird was seen on the BOS May Count.

The American Pipit breeds from James Bay northwards. There are no summer records in Niagara. There are 12 BOS Noteworthy Records of this species for September. The earliest fall date is 7 September 1968, when one bird was seen at Yacht Harbor in Crystal Beach (BOSNR). There are six BOS Noteworthy Records for November. One of the better locations for finding this bird in the spring and fall is on the Port Weller east pier, where one or two individuals are often heard and then observed flying overhead.

Recently, American Pipits have become occasional winter stragglers as demonstrated by the following observations. There is only one December BOS Noteworthy Record,

BOS April Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 45 birds in 1989

BOS May Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 45 birds in 1982

BOS October Count: Reported on 32 of 40 counts, maximum of 286 birds in 1998

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds on the 1991 Port Colborne CBC

American Pipit
Harold Stiver



that of a bird at the Adam Beck overlook in Niagara Falls on 22 December 2005. On 18 January 2004, a bird was present on the old canal in Port Colborne, and on 28 January 2006 a calling bird flew over the Niagara Side of the Fifty Point Conservation Area in Grimsby (JEB). In 2000 two birds were seen on the Port Colborne CBC. In 2001 one bird was reported on the Niagara Falls CBC and five birds on the Port Colborne CBC. American Pipits that breed in Canada winter mainly in the United States and south to El Salvador (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*

Occasional winter visitor

The Bohemian Waxwing with Holarctic distribution is a bird of the North American west. Some presume the bird originated in Bohemia, hence its name; however, others suggest it was so named because it wanders widely in large nomadic groups in winter. This gregarious, silky, smoothly-plumaged bird is monogamous and nonterritorial with no true song. In winter its irruptive, unpredictable travel patterns in large groups are based on following their food supply of wild fruit and berries. It is believed that the availability of food is more important to them than temperature or latitude, often resulting in their wandering in search of fruit as far east as Newfoundland and the Maritime provinces or as far south as California and Texas.

The first record for Niagara of this occasional winter visitor is that of a large flock (exact number unknown) of birds observed by William L. Putman in

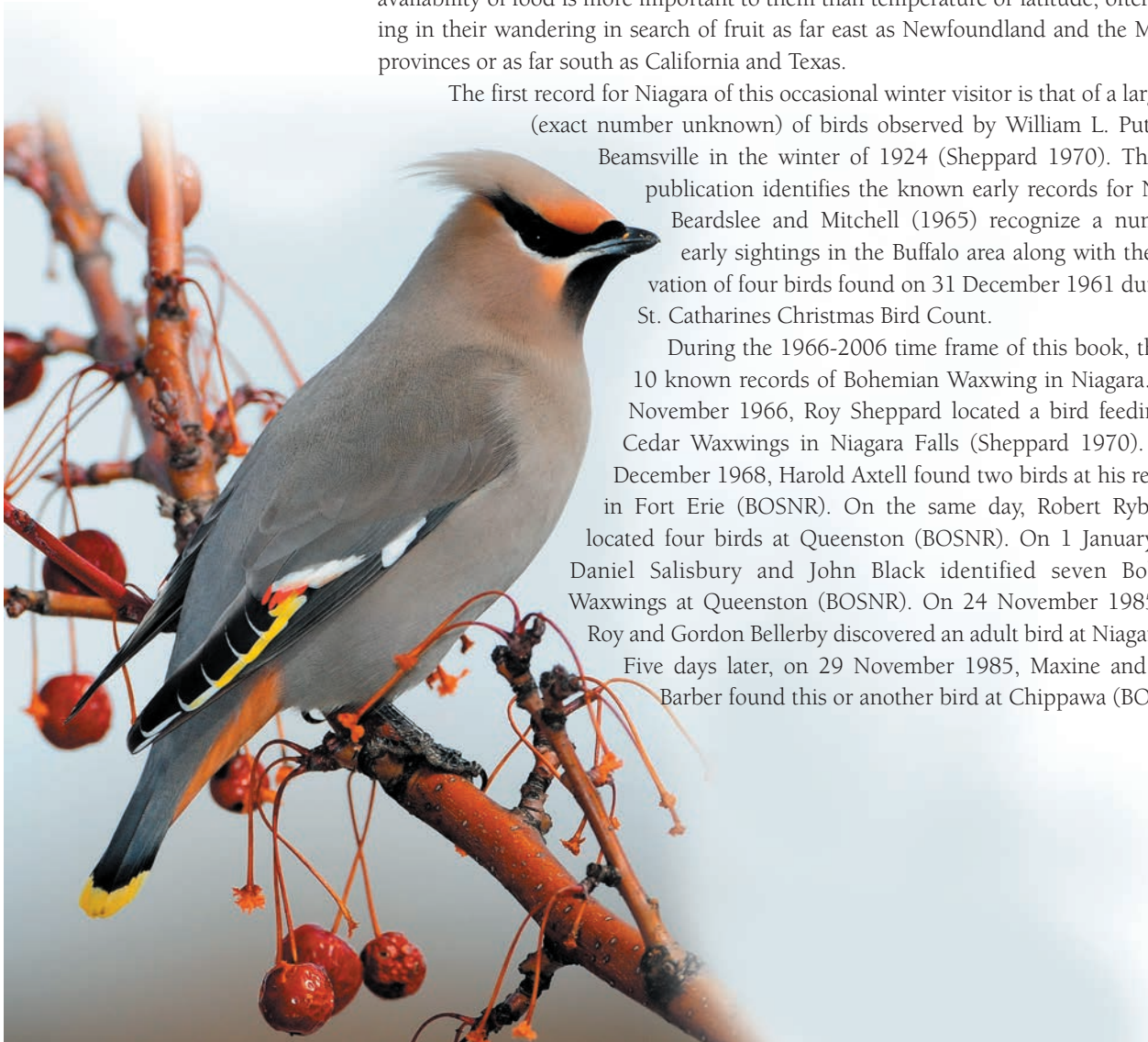
Beamsville in the winter of 1924 (Sheppard 1970). This same publication identifies the known early records for Niagara.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) recognize a number of early sightings in the Buffalo area along with the observation of four birds found on 31 December 1961 during the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, there are 10 known records of Bohemian Waxwing in Niagara. On 19 November 1966, Roy Sheppard located a bird feeding with Cedar Waxwings in Niagara Falls (Sheppard 1970). On 26 December 1968, Harold Axtell found two birds at his residence in Fort Erie (BOSNR). On the same day, Robert Rybczynski located four birds at Queenston (BOSNR). On 1 January 1969, Daniel Salisbury and John Black identified seven Bohemian Waxwings at Queenston (BOSNR). On 24 November 1985, Kayo Roy and Gordon Bellerby discovered an adult bird at Niagara Falls.

Five days later, on 29 November 1985, Maxine and Wavell Barber found this or another bird at Chippawa (BOSNR).

Bohemian Waxwing
Sam Barone



On 14 January 1989, Kayo Roy discovered an adult Bohemian Waxwing at Happy Rolph's Bird Sanctuary in Port Weller. The bird was rediscovered later in the day, to be enjoyed by many birders including Alan J. Smith and Gordon Bellerby (BOSNR). On 2 December 1989, Willie D'Anna reported one at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). The next day Gordon Bellerby and Kayo Roy saw the same or another bird at Niagara Falls. On 22 December 1991, Nel Dekker identified a Bohemian Waxwing in her garden, adjacent to Happy Rolph's, at Port Weller. It would be nearly 15 years before the next Bohemian Waxwing was reported in Niagara. On 21 May 2006, Willie D'Anna discovered a late lingering bird in Port Colborne (BOSNR).

The Bohemian Waxwing breeds in coniferous or mixed forests from Alaska and British Columbia eastward to Manitoba and Ontario. It winters widely throughout its breeding range or wherever its search for food takes it (Witmer 2002).

Kayo J. Roy

Post-2006 Observation

A modest irruption of Bohemian Waxwings occurred in Niagara in the late winter of 2007-2008. On 31 December-1 January, Marcie Jacklin, Tim Seburn and Richard Stockton reported one in Fort Erie. On 11 March 2008, Jean and Blayne Farnan discovered 40 birds feeding in their Fielden Avenue backyard crabapple tree in Port Colborne. Four days later, Brian Ahara, Manley Baarda, Kayo Roy and Scott Watson identified six Bohemian Waxwings with numerous Cedar Waxwings in two crabapple trees along Elgin Street in Port Colborne.

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident, uncommon winter resident

Because the Cedar Waxwing is an uncommon winter straggler, there is no way of knowing if birds seen in March and April are arriving migrants or winter stragglers. A flock of 35 to 40 birds was seen at Port Weller on 5 March 1992, and a flock of 40 birds was seen at the Niagara-on-the-Lake sewage ponds on 27 March 1988 (KJR). The earliest count date is 3 April 1977, when a single bird was reported on the BOS April Count. The earliest date recorded during the Port Weller Study was 13 May. Waxwings were then present there until the end of May.

The Cedar Waxwing, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 18 June. With luck one can observe the elegant courtship feeding rituals of these birds in the summer months.

The latest October date is 27 October 1983, when a single bird was seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are no BOS Noteworthy Records for November. Cedar Waxwings are uncommon winter residents in Niagara. They were seen in all but a few years on the CBCs, but numbers are quite variable from year to year. The largest number recorded was 381 in 1994 on the Niagara Falls CBC; however, the previous year yielded only 22 birds on this count. There are no December records, six January records and one February record from the BOS Noteworthy Records. Cedar Waxwings winter from Ontario south through the United States to Panama and the Antilles (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Cedar Waxwing banded at Long Point on 27 May 1976 was encountered on or about 28 February 1977 in Guatemala.

John E. Black



Cedar Waxwing
Barry Cherriere

First Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 10 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 16 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 22 of 41 counts, maximum of 150 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 86 birds in 1978

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 542 birds in 1985

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 34 of 41 counts, maximum of 397 birds on the 2002 St. Catharines CBC

Blue-winged Warbler *Vermivora pinus*

Uncommon spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 9 birds in 1995

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The earliest arrival date for the Blue-winged Warbler is 29 April 1990 at Waverley Beach, when a single bird was found (JEB). The May Count numbers of this species increased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.) The latest recorded date of migration is 31 May 1996, when a single bird was observed on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study). This warbler, the related Golden-winged Warbler, and the Blue-winged x Golden-winged hybrid warblers (Brewster's and Lawrence's) are an interesting group of very attractive birds. Note that there is only one Niagara record of Brewster's Warbler — a single bird located in Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines on 13 May 1983 (JEB). There are no Niagara records of Lawrence's Warbler. For a description of these hybrid warblers in Ontario see Vallender and Leckie (2007).

While the Blue-winged Warbler can be found breeding in southern Ontario, it is more common south of Lake Erie (Dunn and Garrett 1997). In Niagara it is an uncommon summer resident. The figures for Niagara in the two atlases would seem to indicate substantial increase in the breeding population of the Blue-winged Warbler here over the last 20 years. This increase is consistent with the overall figures for Ontario. From Vallender (2007) we learn that there was a significant increase (74%) in the probability of observation of this species between atlases. One of the best locations to see this warbler during the second Atlas was on Sherk Road in Niagara Falls; another good location was just north of Sherk Road on Willoughby Drive.

On 4 September 1968 a single bird was reported from Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie, a location where the Blue-winged Warbler does not normally breed (BOSNR). This observation is the latest fall record for this species.

There are no winter records of Blue-winged Warbler for Niagara. This species winters primarily in Mexico and northern Central America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Blue-winged Warbler
Brandon Holden





Golden-winged Warbler

Vermivora chrysoptera

Rare spring transient, extremely rare summer resident, fall transient

The Golden-winged Warbler is designated as a species of special concern in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and as threatened in Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). It is a rare spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest recorded arrival date is 4 May 2006, when a single bird was located in Malcolmson Eco-Park (KJR). The latest recorded date is 20 May 1967, when a single bird was found at Erie Beach in Fort Erie by Dan Salisbury. The May Count numbers of this species decreased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.) This warbler, the related Blue-winged Warbler, and the Blue-winged x Golden-winged hybrid warblers (Brewster's and Lawrence's) are an interesting group of very attractive birds.

The Golden-winged Warbler, while it is found breeding in the southernmost parts of Ontario, is more common north of Lake Ontario. A possible breeding male was observed on 30 June 1968 by Dan Salisbury in St. John's Conservation Area near Fonthill. In the second Atlas a single case of probable breeding was reported from Short Hills Provincial Park in Fonthill. A singing male was found on 10 June 2002 and again on 27 June 2002. The bird was not found in the park in subsequent years. Sheppard (1970) notes that the Golden-winged Warbler was reported nesting in the Fonthill area.

The earliest date of possible fall migration is 22 August 1970, when a single bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded date is 27 September 1975, when a single bird was observed at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Golden-winged Warbler for Niagara. This species winters from southern Mexico into South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Golden-winged Warbler
Kenneth Newcombe

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
2 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 0 possible

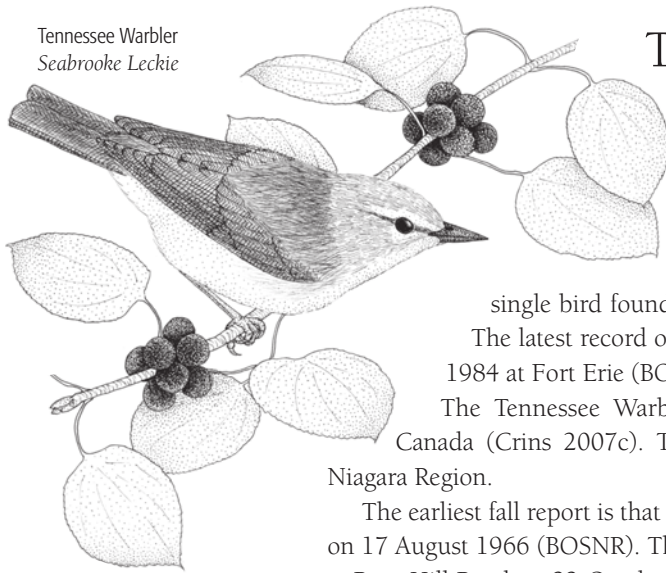
BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 8
counts of 41, maximum of 2 birds
in 1995 and 1996

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Tennessee Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie



BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 34 of 41 counts, maximum of 21 birds in 1978

BOS October Count: Reported on 6 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Tennessee Warbler

Vermivora peregrina

Common spring transient, fall transient

This warbler's striking song, beginning with a "tizip-tizip-tizip", is often heard before the bird is located.

The earliest record of a spring arrival is that of a single bird found on 4 May 1968 at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest record of a spring sighting is for a single bird found on 3 June 1984 at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Tennessee Warbler breeds almost entirely in the boreal forests of Canada (Crins 2007c). There are no summer records of this species in the Niagara Region.

The earliest fall report is that of a single bird observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie on 17 August 1966 (BOSNR). The latest October record is that of three birds observed at Rose Hill Road on 22 October 1968 (BOSNR). The October Count numbers of this species decreased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.) There are two November (BOSNR) reports: one of a bird observed on 5 November 1967 at Rose Hill Road and the second of a bird seen on 11 November 1973 near the town of Fort Erie. A single bird was found on 17 November 1979 at Niagara Falls (Goodwin 1980:157).

There are no winter records of Tennessee Warbler for Niagara. This species winters from southern Mexico into South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Orange-crowned Warbler

Vermivora celata

Rare spring transient, fall transient, extremely rare summer and winter straggler

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1984

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1967 and 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 1968 BOS CBC and 1 bird on the 1995 Port Colborne CBC

Peterson (1980) says of this species that it is a "dingy warbler; without wing bars or other distinctive marks... Song a colorless trill becoming weaker toward the end." This lack of striking field marks and the non-descript song may be two reasons that not many birds of this species are found here in the spring. Our earliest recorded spring date for this species is 2 May 2003, when a single bird was located in Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (KJR). The latest recorded date is of a spring transient seen on the Port Weller west pier on 26 May 1995 (KJR).

The Orange-crowned Warbler breeds in Ontario north of Lake Superior. One summer record exists — that of a single bird observed on 26 June 1985 in St. Catharines (BOSNR).

The earliest recorded date of a fall transient is 5 September 1981, when a single bird was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). There are nine BOS Noteworthy Records of Orange-crowned Warbler in October. The latest recorded October date is 27 October 1981, when a single bird was observed in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are two November records of single birds: 5 November 1966 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR) and 18 November 1969 at Rose Hill Road (BOSNR).

The Orange-crowned Warbler is an extremely rare winter straggler in Niagara with only three winter reports. A single bird was observed during the 1995 Port Colborne CBC on Steele Street in Port Colborne on 7 January 1996 (KJR) and again on 13-14 January 1996 (BOSNR). From a different source, we learn that this bird was in Port Colborne from 1 December 1995 to 31 March 1996 (Ridout 1996:167). A single bird was observed on the 1968 BOS CBC. A single bird, thought to be injured, was found in Niagara-on-the-Lake on 3 December 1983 (Weir 1984:313). The Orange-crowned Warbler winters from the southern United States through Mexico to Guatemala (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Nashville Warbler *Vermivora ruficapilla*

Common spring transient, rare summer resident, fall transient

Our earliest arrival date is that of a single bird located on 26 April 1994 at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). From Dunn and Garrett (1997) we learn that spring migrant Nashville Warblers often feed high in the trees, while fall migrants feed closer to the ground. The latest recorded dates of transients are 27 May 1978, a single bird observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby by Harold Lancaster, and 27 May 1994, two birds on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study).

In southern Ontario we are at the extreme southern limit of the Nashville Warbler breeding range in Ontario, with large numbers of these warblers found breeding north of Hamilton. They are a rare and local summer resident in Niagara. In the second Atlas, probable breeding was reported from two squares (up to three singing birds were found every year in late June in the Wainfleet Bog), and a single bird was observed carrying what looked like nesting material in Niagara-on-the-Lake on 30 May 2005 but was not found subsequently. Birds in the Wainfleet Bog were found on the trail that begins at the north end of Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet. They were located a few hundred metres past a well-marked trail going to the west at 0.5 km. They were also found on both sides of the trail heading to the west. Finally they were found south of this location, where a poorly maintained trail and road exist just south of a large drainage ditch.

The earliest date of fall migration is 22 August 1974, when a single bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR), and 22 August 1990, when a single bird was observed at Morgan's Point (BOSNR), both areas where these birds are not known to breed. The latest recorded date in October is 15 October 1995, when two birds were observed on the BOS October Count. There is only one November record, that of a single bird found on 4 November 1984 at Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There is only one winter record of this species. From Curry (2006) we learn of a Nashville Warbler observed at Grimsby by Anita Meyers on 3 January 1980. This species winters from northeastern Mexico south into Central America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

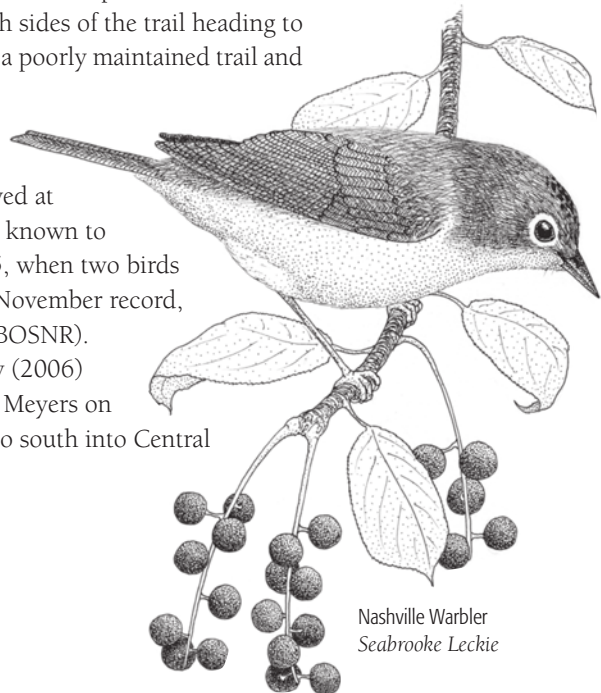
Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 35 of 41 counts, maximum of 36 birds in 1984

BOS October Count: Reported on 17 of 40 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1970 and 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported



Nashville Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie

Northern Parula *Parula americana*

Uncommon spring transient, extremely rare summer straggler, fall transient

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 8 birds in 1978

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of single birds in 1975 and 2003

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Our earliest arrival date is of a single bird at Grimsby on 27 March 1998 (Ridout 1998:326). The latest date of migration is 25 May 1993, when a bird was found on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study).

The Northern Parula breeds in Ontario north of Lake Ontario. There is one report of possible breeding in the second Atlas; a single bird was heard calling and was observed on Navy Island near Chippawa on 4 July 2002. It was not seen or heard on visits to the Island on 25 June and 31 July 2002. There is a record of one bird on 16 June 1999 at Marcy's Woods near Point Abino (McCracken et al. 1999). From Alsop (2002) we learn that "Northern Parula is declining on the Great Lakes and Atlantic Coast primarily due to loss of *Usnea*, a moss-like lichen, as a result of pollutants." From P.L. McLaren (2007a) we find there is some uncertainty as to whether or not the population is declining in Ontario.

The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 9 September 1971, when a single bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie and another bird was observed at Pinecrest Point in Port Colborne (BOSNR). Latest fall dates are 12 October 1975 and 12 October 2003 on the BOS October Counts and 18 November 2006 at Queenston (BOSNR).

There are no winter records for the Northern Parula in Niagara. The species winters primarily in the West Indies. It is regular but uncommon in winter in southeastern Florida (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

Yellow Warblers are a common sight in Niagara in the spring.

Just which of these many birds are transients is not at all clear as there is no simple method for distinguishing transients from the large number of birds arriving to breed in the area. Moreover, no late date of migration is available owing to the difficulty of recognizing

these transients. Our earliest arrival date is that of a single bird seen at Cook's Mills on

Lyons Creek near Welland by

Harold Lancaster on 23 April 1966.

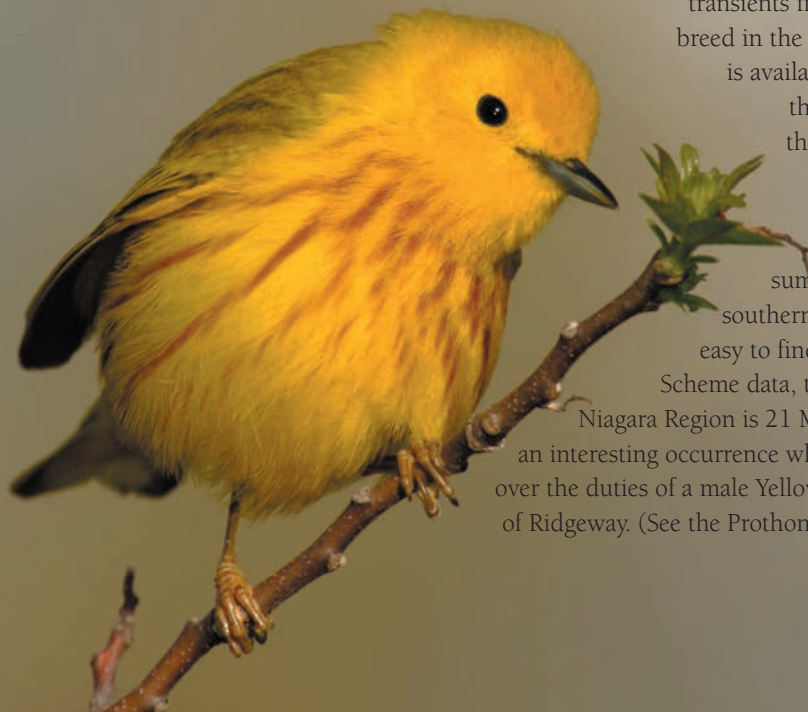
The Yellow Warbler, our most common summer resident warbler, breeds throughout southern Ontario. The nest of this warbler is very easy to find. According to the Ontario Nest Records

Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in the

Niagara Region is 21 May. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) report

an interesting occurrence whereby a male Prothonotary Warbler took over the duties of a male Yellow Warbler on Nye Road about 4 km west of Ridgeway. (See the Prothonotary species account for further details.)

Yellow Warbler
Brandon Holden



The presence of many resident Yellow Warblers makes it difficult to estimate a fall date for the arrival of transients. These birds are among the first warblers to leave Niagara in the fall. There are no BOSNR records of this warbler in October. A single Yellow Warbler was present at Queenston on 19 November 1989 (Ridout 1996:48). A single Yellow Warbler was reported 19-24 November 1995 in the Niagara Falls area (BOSNR). It was still present on 3 December 1995 (Ridout 1996:167).

The Yellow Warbler is an extremely rare winter straggler in Niagara. A single individual was discovered on the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count on 14 December 2003. It was found on the Port Weller west pier by Rob Dobos and Kevin McLaughlin. The Yellow Warbler winters from Mexico south to northern South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Yellow Warbler banded at Long Point on 4 August 1985 was encountered on 20 August 1985 in Georgia. Another banded at Long Point on 12 May 1994 was encountered on 27 August 1999 in Louisiana.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 355 birds in 1979

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 count, maximum of 1 bird on the 2003 St. Catharines CBC



Chestnut-sided Warbler
Brandon Holden

Chestnut-sided Warbler *Dendroica pensylvanica*

Common spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient

The earliest record of a spring arrival is of a single bird seen on 1 May 1970 at Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (JEB). Between 0800 and 0900 hours on 24 May 1993, counters walking the 800 metres from the Coast Guard station to the end of the west pier were amazed to see 27 Chestnut-sided Warblers (Port Weller Study). The latest date of a spring transient sighting is 29 May 1995, when a single individual was found on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study).

More abundant to our north, the Chestnut-sided Warbler is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. The atlas figures indicate a substantial increase in the breeding

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 60 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1986

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

population of the Chestnut-sided Warbler in Niagara in the last 20 years. One of the best places to hear, and perhaps see, this species during the second Atlas was at the beginning of the trail that leads into the Wainfleet Bog from the north end of Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet.

The earliest fall report of a possible transient is that of a single bird observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie between 16 August and 23 August 1968 (BOSNR). The latest recorded count date in the fall is 13 October 1968, when a single bird was observed on the BOS October Count. On 16 October 1994, a single bird was observed at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (Ridout 1995:43).

There are no winter records for Niagara. The species winters from southern Mexico to eastern Panama (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Chestnut-sided Warbler banded at Long Point on 27 August 1989 was encountered on 10 September 1990 in Cuba.

John E. Black

Magnolia Warbler *Dendroica magnolia*

Common spring transient, fall transient

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 52 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

This warbler is a common spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest recorded arrival date is of a single bird seen on 29 April 2004 at Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (KJR). On a memorable 24 May 1993, counters walking the 800 metres from the Coast Guard station to the end of the west pier were amazed to see 45 Magnolia Warblers (Port Weller Study). The latest recorded date of migration is 31 May 1996, when two birds were found on the Port Weller east pier (Port Weller Study). May Count numbers of this species decreased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.)

In Ontario the Magnolia Warbler breeds in Hamilton and to the north. There are no confirmed cases of breeding in Niagara, and there was no breeding evidence in the first Atlas. One instance of possible breeding was reported in the second Atlas — a single bird found on 18 June 2002. Two additional summer records exist: Single birds were observed on 15 June 1968 in Niagara Falls (BOSNR) and on 29 July 2001 at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR).

The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 15-21 August 1968, when a single bird was located on Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded date in October is 15 October 1995, when a single bird was observed on the BOS October Count. There are no November records of Magnolia Warblers.

There are no Niagara winter records after 1947. Sheppard (1970) cites one winter record “a male Magnolia Warbler in bright plumage, found at Niagara Falls moving through low hedge growth in bitterly cold weather and light drifting snow, on December 10, 1947.” The species winters from eastern and southern Mexico south to Panama (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Magnolia Warbler banded at Long Point on 25 May 1984 was encountered on 19 April 1986 in Honduras. A Magnolia Warbler banded at Long Point on 27 August 1989 was encountered on 9 September 1990 in Cuba, and another banded at Long Point on 16 May 1970 was encountered on 17 April 1972 in Guatemala.

John E. Black



Magnolia Warbler
Brandon Holden

Cape May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina*

Rare spring transient, fall transient

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 26 of 41 counts, maximum of 76 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 5 of 40 counts, maximum of single birds

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

These warblers are normally a rare spring transient in Niagara. The earliest recorded arrival is of a single bird found on 30 April 2004 on the Port Weller east pier (JEB). They have been observed on only four of the 10 most recent BOS May Counts. On a memorable 24 May 1993, counters walking the 800 metres from the Coast Guard station to the end of the west pier were amazed to see 21 Cape May Warblers (Port Weller Study). The latest date of migration is 28 May 1994, when a single bird was seen on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study). This is one warbler which clearly has declined in numbers in the Niagara Region since Sheppard (1970) wrote his description of Niagara frontier birds. He described the Cape May as a common migrant.

The Cape May Warbler breeds in Ontario north of Lake Ontario. There is no evidence from either atlas of this species breeding in Niagara. The only summer record is of a single bird found on 26 June 1985 in St. Catharines (BOSNR).

The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 21 August 1966, when one bird was observed at Windmill Point in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded fall date in October is 13 October 1968, when a single bird was observed on the BOS October Count. The October Count numbers of this species decreased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.) In fact, no Cape May Warblers have been reported from an October Count since 1976. There are no November records for this species.

There are no winter records of Cape May Warbler for Niagara. This species winters primarily in the Bahamas and Greater Antilles (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Cape May Warbler banded at Long Point on 26 August 1976 was encountered on 23 November 1976 in Jamaica. Another banded at Long Point on 24 August 1977 was encountered on 4 September 1977 in West Virginia.

John E. Black

Black-throated Blue Warbler

Dendroica caerulescens

Common spring transient, extremely rare summer straggler, fall transient

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 60 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 10 of 40 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The Black-throated Blue Warbler is a common spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest recorded arrival dates are those of single birds found on 30 April 1972 in Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (JEB), 30 April 1989 at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR) and 30 April 2000 in Marcy's Woods near Point Abino (KJR). The latest recorded date of migration is 5 June 1997, when single birds were observed at both Windmill Point and Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Black-throated Blue Warbler breeds north of Lake Ontario. There are no confirmed cases of breeding in Niagara. In the second Atlas, possible breeding was reported from Marcy's Woods on 15 June 2001 and probable breeding from the Beamsville area, where a single bird was observed on 16 June and again on 24 June but not after that date. There are two other summer records of single birds: 14 June 1977 in Marcy's Woods (BOSNR) and 29 June 1986 in Welland (BOSNR).

The earliest fall report is that of a single bird on 18 August 1971 located on Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). The latest October date is of a single individual observed by Dan Salisbury on 16 October 1966 at Morgan's Point. There is one November record of a single bird seen on 25 November 1990 in Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Black-throated Blue Warblers for Niagara. The species winters primarily in the Bahamas and Greater Antilles (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Dendroica coronata

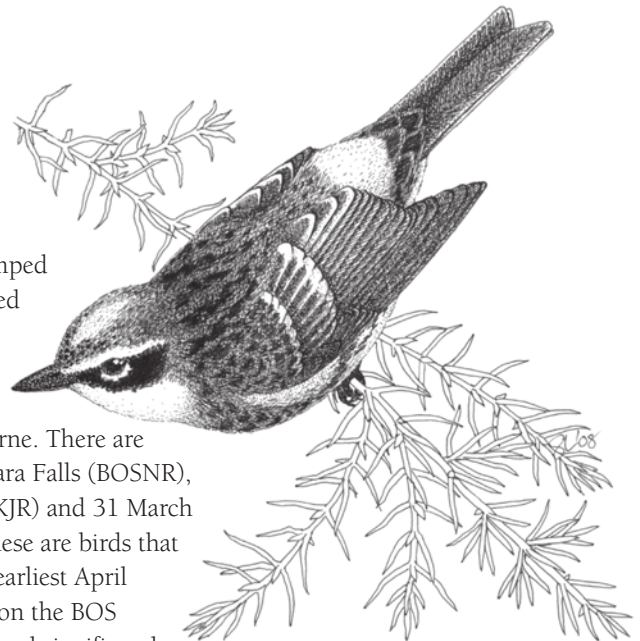
Very common spring and fall transient, rare winter straggler

Formerly known as the Myrtle Warbler, this species was lumped with the Audubon's Warbler in 1973, and both were renamed Yellow-rumped Warbler. It is our most abundant spring transient warbler. One of the best locations from which to view this warbler in large numbers in the spring is in the willows along the western shore of Mud Lake in Port Colborne. There are three March records of single birds: 10 March 2000 at Niagara Falls (BOSNR), 11 March 1998 at the Thomas Street Feeder in Chippawa (KJR) and 31 March 1998 at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). It is not clear if these are birds that spent the winter in Niagara or are very early migrants. The earliest April record is 5 April 1998, when a single individual was found on the BOS April Count. The April count numbers of this species increased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.) On 31 May 1996, one bird was located on the Port Weller east pier, and two were located on the west pier (Port Weller Study), the latest recorded date of observation of this species in the spring. Note that there are no Niagara records of "Audubon's Warbler."

The Yellow-rumped Warbler breeds throughout Ontario with the exception of most of the Carolinian region. In the second Atlas there are a number of records of possible and probable breeding of the Yellow-rumped Warbler in Hamilton, but instances of confirmed breeding are found only further north. There are no summer records of this species in the Niagara Region.

The Yellow-rumped Warbler is a very common fall transient. The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 15 August 1982, when a single bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded date in October is 23 October 1993, when a single bird was observed in Wainfleet Township (BOSNR). There are 13 BOSNR records for November.

Our most frequently found warbler in early winter, it is, nevertheless, a rare winter straggler in Niagara. There are 11 BOS Noteworthy Records of these warblers from 1 December to 31 December. There are also many records of Yellow-rumped Warblers on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. In fact, beginning in 1989, these warblers have been found on one or more of the four Niagara Region Christmas Bird Counts on all



Yellow-rumped Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie

BOS April Count: Reported on 16 of 41 counts, maximum of 12 birds in 1992

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 147 birds in 1971

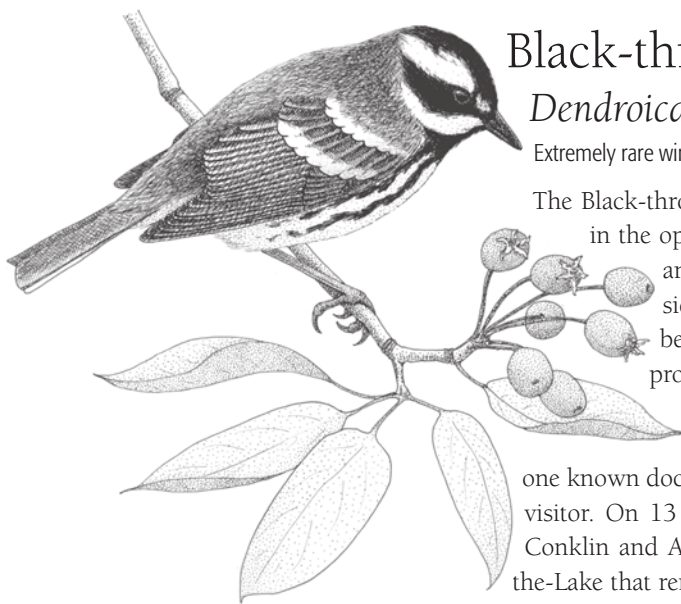
BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 900 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 20 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds on the 2002 Niagara Falls CBC

but three years. There are a number of local birder observations of Yellow-rumped Warbler on 1 January. Interestingly, there are no records from 2 January until 10 March for this species. This dearth of records may result from a lack of effort on the part of birders in mid-winter, but it may also indicate that the species is very rarely present through the winter. This species winters from the Great Lakes through Mexico to Central America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Yellow-rumped Warbler banded at Long Point on 15 October 2000 was encountered on 19 October 2000 in New Jersey. A second banded at Long Point on 7 October 2000 was encountered on 6 February 2002 in Florida. A third banded at Long Point on 6 October 2003 was encountered on 6 February 2004 in North Carolina and a fourth banded at Long Point on 27 October 2004 was encountered in January 2005 in Maine.

John E. Black



Black-throated Gray Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie

Black-throated Gray Warbler

Dendroica nigrescens

Extremely rare winter visitor

The Black-throated Gray Warbler is a small western songbird found in the open coniferous and mixed forests of the American west and southern British Columbia. While generally not considered long-distance migrants, birds of this species have been irregularly reported from many eastern states and provinces (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

While there are three accepted OBRC records from neighbouring Hamilton (Curry 2006), there is only one known documented observation in Niagara for this extremely rare visitor. On 13 November 1980, Harold Axtell, Robert Andrie, Paul Conklin and Arthur Schaffner studied an adult male in Niagara-on-the-Lake that remained until at least 23 November 1980 (Wormington and Curry 1990).

The Black-throated Gray Warbler breeding grounds extend from Southern British Columbia, southern Idaho and Wyoming, south to northern Mexico. It winters in western Mexico (Guzy and Lowther 1997).

Kayo J. Roy

Black-throated Green Warbler

Dendroica virens

Common spring transient, extremely rare summer straggler, fall transient

The Black-throated Green Warbler is a common spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest recorded arrival date is of a single bird seen on 21 April 2000 at Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (KJR). The latest recorded date of migration is 29 May 1993, when a single bird was observed at Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

The Black-throated Green Warbler breeds in Ontario to our west in the Long Point area and to our north, beginning in Hamilton. There are, however, no confirmed records of breeding in Niagara. In the second Atlas, possible breeding was reported on 4 June

2001 and 4 June 2004 from Marcy's Woods near Point Abino and on 26 June 2003 from the Welland area. One non-atlas sighting was noted, that of a single singing male on 15-16 June 1999 in Marcy's Woods (McCracken et al. 1999).

The earliest date of fall migration is 19 August 1999, when a single bird was observed at Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded date in October is 16 October 1966, when a single bird was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby by Dan Salisbury. There is only one November record, that of a single bird on 2 November 1966 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Black-throated Green Warbler for Niagara. This species, which winters from northeastern Mexico to central Panama, is also found regularly in winter in southern Florida (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca*

Uncommon spring transient, extremely rare summer straggler, fall transient

The Blackburnian Warbler is one of the most striking of all our spring warblers. It is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara, and it is always an occasion when the first bird of the year is located. Our earliest recorded arrival is of a single bird seen on 27 April 1969 at Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded date of spring migration is of a single bird on 28 May 1995 on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study). May Count numbers of this species decreased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.)

The Blackburnian Warbler breeds in Ontario to our west in the Long Point area and to our north in Hamilton.



First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 39 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 19 of 40 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 35 of 41 counts, maximum of 43 birds in 1978

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1967 and 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

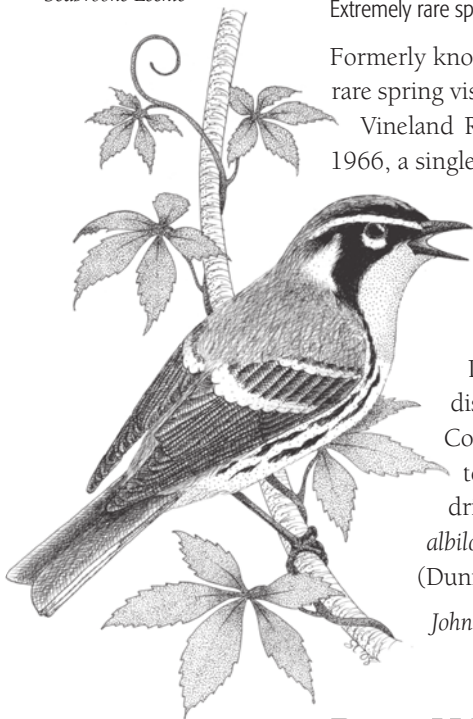
Blackburnian Warbler
Brandon Holden

The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 9 August 1986, when a single bird was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). This species was observed on two of the 40 BOS October counts, the largest number of birds reported being two on each of the 1967 and 1970 counts. The latest recorded fall date is 11 October 1970, when two birds were observed on the BOS October Counts.

There are no winter records for Niagara. The species winters mainly in the Andes of South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Yellow-throated Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie



Yellow-throated Warbler *Dendroica dominica*

Extremely rare spring, fall and winter visitor

Formerly known as the Sycamore Warbler, the Yellow-throated Warbler is an extremely rare spring visitor in Niagara. Andrew Smith found a single male on 15 May 1996 at the Vineland Research Station (KJR). Sheppard (1970) cites one spring record before 1966, a single bird on 20 May 1943 in Niagara Falls.

The northernmost breeding birds of this species, those belonging to the race *albilora*, breed to the south of the Great Lakes (Dunn and Garrett 1997). There are no summer records for Niagara.

There is one fall record, a single bird found at Niagara Falls by Sarah and Chauncy Wood, on 1 November 1988 (Weir 1989:98).

In Niagara the only winter record — 12-19 December 1982 — is of a bird discovered by Hugh Currie, who saw the bird by the International Niagara Control Works structure in Chippawa (BOSNR). Currie flagged down a car to get to a telephone to report the bird and to his surprise found the driver was Harold Axtell, a very prominent local ornithologist. The race *albilora* of this species winters from eastern Mexico south through Nicaragua (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Pine Warbler *Dendroica pinus*

Uncommon spring transient, fall transient, occasional winter straggler

The Pine Warbler is a rare to uncommon spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest recorded spring date is that of a single bird reported from 13-14 March 1985 at Niagara-on-the-Lake (Weir 1985:295). Our next earliest recorded arrival date is that of a single bird observed on 15 April 1982 at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (JEB). The latest date of migration is 21 May 1967, when a single individual was seen on the BOS May Count.

In Ontario the Pine Warbler breeds mainly north of Lake Ontario, although some breeding birds are found to our west in the Long Point area and to our north in Hamilton. One Pine Warbler was observed by Maggie Smiley on 9 June 2005 at Niagara Shores Conservation Area in Niagara-on-the-Lake during the second Atlas but was not found on a subsequent visit on 16 June. Niagara Shores does have some large pines that might be suitable for the breeding of Pine Warblers. From Crins (2007d) we learn that there was a significant increase (over 100%) in the probability of observation of this

BOS April Count: Not reported
BOS May Count: Reported on 6 of 41 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1999

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1999

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 7 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on the 1985 BOS CBC

species in the Carolinian region between atlases. A lack of any substantial pine forest habitat may be the reason for the absence of this species breeding in Region 11.

The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 17 September 1991, when a single bird was observed at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). The latest recorded date in October is 11 October in 1987 and 1998, when single birds were observed on the BOS October Counts. There is one November record: 11 November 1966, when a single bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

In Niagara it is an occasional winter straggler. There are nine December records, all but two of single birds: 12 December 1988 at Niagara Falls (BOSNR); 18-31 December 1991 at Niagara Falls (BOSNR); Christmas Counts of 1983 (three birds); 1985; 1994; 1999; 2000 (two birds); 2002 and 2006. There are five January records of single Pine Warblers: 1 January 1984 at Fort Erie (JEB); 1 January 1986 in a Woodlot on Beaverdams Road in Thorold (Found on the St. Catharines Christmas Count 22 December 1985, this bird was still present on 1 February (JEB).); 5 January 2002 at the International Niagara Control Works structure in Chippawa (KJR); 25 January 2004 at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (JEB and KJR); and 22 January 2006 at Dufferin Island, Niagara Falls (JEB). This last mentioned bird was first observed by Richard Rosher on about 15 January (Willie D'Anna pers. comm.) and stayed around until at least 20 February (BOSNR) at a small feeder beside the parking area where people feed ducks in the winter. It is quite possible that there are many winter occurrences of this species which are not reported, given that this species may stay in one woodlot or at one feeder for many months of the winter. The hardy Pine Warbler winters mainly in the southern half of the United States (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

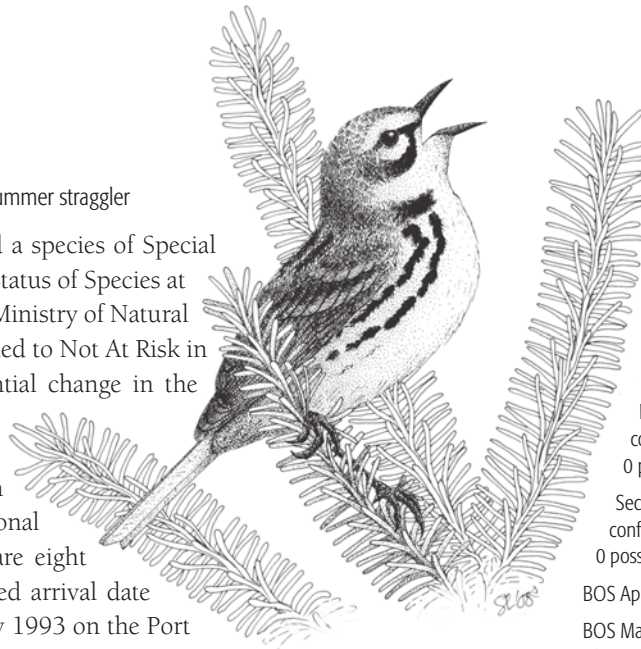
John E. Black

Prairie Warbler

Dendroica discolor

Occasional spring transient, extremely rare summer straggler

The Prairie Warbler was designated a species of Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Canada and by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in 1985 but was downlisted to Not At Risk in 1999. "There has been no substantial change in the distribution of the Prairie Warbler in Ontario since the first atlas" (Sutherland and Harris 2007). In Niagara, this species is an occasional spring transient, for which there are eight spring records. Our earliest recorded arrival date is of a single bird found on 1-2 May 1993 on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study). Single birds were observed on the 1972, 1977 and 1997 May Counts. A single bird was found by Mary Ellen Hebb on or about 7 May 1984 and rediscovered on 14 May 1984 at Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines on a Baillie Birdathon (JEB). Single birds were seen on 15-18 May 1997 on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study) and on 26 May 1967 at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR).



Prairie Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie

First Atlas: 0 squares
confirmed, 0 probable,
0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares
confirmed, 1 probable,
0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 3
of 41 counts, maximum of single
birds in 1972, 1977 and 1997

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Rare and local in Ontario in the summer, most Prairie Warblers breed to the south of Lake Erie (Dunn and Garrett 1997). There is one summer record from Niagara, a bird reported as probable on the second Atlas.

This singing bird was first observed in Wainfleet Bog on 6 June 2001 and was last observed there on 15 June 2001. It was not found on 21 June 2001 (JEB).

There are no fall records, but with a small population nesting to the north in Ontario it is probable that prairie Warblers occur occasionally in the autumn in Niagara.

There are no winter records for Niagara. This species winters mainly in the West Indies, but it is also numerous in the winter months in southern Florida (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum*

Common spring transient, fall transient, extremely rare winter straggler

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 2002

BOS May Count: Reported on 20 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1967 and 1981

BOS October Count: Reported on 20 of 40 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird on the 2005 BOS CBC

Dunn and Garrett (1997) comments that this species pumps its tail more than any other warbler. One of the best locations from which to view large numbers of these birds in the spring is along the western shore of Mud Lake. It is a common spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest recorded arrival date is of a single bird found by Brian Ahara on 9 April 2000 on Garner Road, Niagara Falls (KJR). The latest recorded date of migration is 27 May 1994, when a single bird was seen on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study).

The Palm Warbler breeds in Ontario north of Lake Superior. There are no summer records from Niagara.

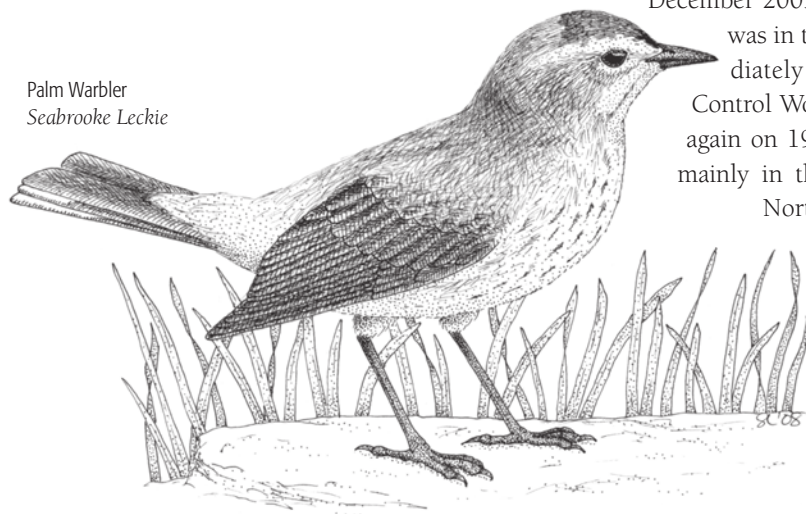
The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 2 September 1989, when a single bird was observed at Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded date is 26 October 1969, when a single bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are no November records.

The Palm Warbler is an extremely rare winter straggler in Niagara, there being only two winter records. On 1 January 1997 a single bird was observed at Fort Erie (BOSNR, Ridout 1997:746). A single bird was found by Betsy Potter and Vicki Rothman on 18

December 2005 on the BOS Christmas Bird Count. It was in the bushes beside the parking lot immediately south of the International Niagara Control Works structure in Chippawa. It was seen again on 19 December 2005. This species winters mainly in the southeastern United States (coastal North Carolina) and the Caribbean region (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Palm Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie



Bay-breasted Warbler *Dendroica castanea*

Uncommon spring transient, fall transient

Between 0800 and 0900 hours on 24 May 1993, counters walking the 800 metres from the Coast Guard station to the end of the west pier were amazed to see 36 Bay-breasted Warblers (Port Weller Study). They are normally an uncommon spring transient. Our earliest recorded arrival date for this warbler is of a single bird found on 1 May 1970 at Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (JEB). The latest recorded date of migration is 5 June 1977, when a single bird was observed at Thunder Bay (BOSNR).

In Ontario the Bay-breasted Warbler breeds to the north of Lake Ontario. There is only one summer record in Niagara — a single bird observed in Welland on 29 June 1986 (BOSNR).

The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 17 August 1984, when an individual was located at Windmill Point in Fort Erie (BOSNR). On 31 August 1997, Stuart MacKenzie observed approximately 300 Bay-breasted Warblers along Fifty Creek and throughout the Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). The latest recorded date for these birds in the fall is 13 October, when single birds were found on both the 1974 and 1996 BOS October Counts.

There are no winter records for Niagara. This species winters from Costa Rica to northern South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata*

Uncommon spring transient, fall transient

An uncommon spring transient in Niagara, the Blackpoll Warbler is often the last spring transient warbler heard in my yard in south St. Catharines in the first week of June (JEB). The earliest recorded arrival date is that of a single bird found on 8 May 2000 at Point Abino woods in Fort Erie (JEB, KJR).

The latest recorded date of migration is 5 June 1997, when single birds were seen at both Windmill Point and Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR)

Blackpoll Warblers breed in Ontario from the latitude of the southern end of James Bay northward. According to Sutherland (2007e) “this species has the most northerly distribution of any warbler in the province.” There were no records of breeding reported in the two atlases. There were, however, a few records of stragglers. In 2003 atlassers reported a single bird in Niagara Falls that was first heard on 9 June and again on 16 June but was not heard on 17 June. On 13 June 2003, atlassers found a single bird in Marcy’s Woods near Point Abino. These stragglers were probably late migrants. Singing birds are still passing through Virginia in late May (John Rappole pers. comm.). On 19 July 1970, a single Blackpoll was found on Windmill Point Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

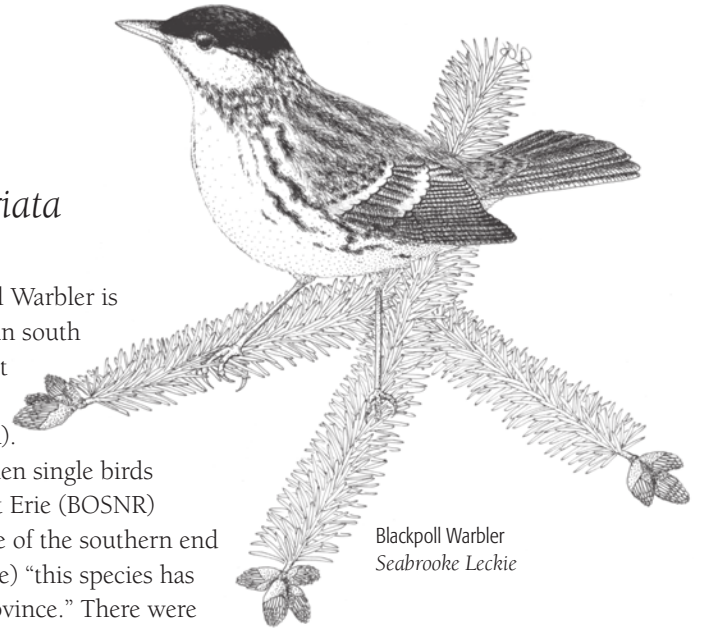
The earliest date of fall migration is 21 August 1978, when a single bird was observed at Cedar Bay near Gasline (BOSNR). The latest recorded date in the fall is 14 October 2001, when one bird was observed on the BOS October Count.

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 33 of 41 counts, maximum of 36 birds in 1972

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 3 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported



Blackpoll Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 25 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 1972

BOS October Count: Reported on 8 of 40 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 1987

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

There are no winter records for Niagara. This species winters almost exclusively in South America. To get there, Blackpoll Warblers fly out over the Atlantic from eastern Canada to their wintering grounds, a journey of as many as 4,200 kilometres over water. Wintering Blackpoll Warblers have been recorded as far as 40 degrees south in Argentina and Chile, a fact which makes them the southernmost wintering migrant North American warbler (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Cerulean Warbler *Dendroica cerulea*

Rare spring transient, rare and local summer resident

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 3 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 17
of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds
in 1971

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

The Cerulean Warbler is designated a species of special concern in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). It is a rare spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest arrival date is that of a single bird discovered on 1 May 1994 at Port Weller (Port Weller Study). An unusual record is of three birds found together on 11 May 1991 by Louis Haviland, also found by Alan J. Smith, in a tree at the north end of the Port Weller east pier (KJR). The latest spring sighting is 15-20 May 1997, when a single bird was observed on Port Weller east pier (Port Weller Study). There is a later record for 31 May 1999 in Marcy's Woods near Point Abino (McCracken et al. 1999). This bird may not have been a spring migrant. The tall canopy dominated by red oak at Marcy's Woods is ideal habitat for this species. This bird may have been a wandering prospecting male (Donald Sutherland pers. comm.).



Cerulean Warbler
Brandon Holden

Strongholds for the Cerulean Warbler in Ontario, in order of decreasing abundance, are the Frontenac Axis, the Midland Peninsula, Skunk's Misery and the Norfolk Sand Plain (Donald Sutherland pers. comm.). It was a rare and local breeding bird here in the mid-1960s. In the last 24 years there has been only one confirmed breeding record. In the first Atlas, possible breeding was reported from three squares and probable breeding from one square (Navy Island). In the second Atlas, two singing birds were found, both reported to the atlas as possibly breeding. One bird on 25 June 2005 just west of the Niagara Region on Lake Erie first called in response to a tape recording but did not respond to the tape a week later. A second bird was heard on 3 July and 7 July 2002 on Abino Hills Road in Point Abino but was not heard subsequently. One or two singing males, presumed breeding, were present in Marcy's Woods from 1967 to 1979 but were not heard in 1985 (JEB). From Natural History Information Centre data we learn of one bird whose breeding calls were heard on Navy Island on 10 June 1990 by Bob Curry. We also learn of breeding birds in the Caistor-Canborough Slough Forest in 1983 (nest with young), 1985 (1 singing male) and 1986 (8 singing males). Bob Curry comments:

On 5 June 1983 I counted eight singing male Cerulean Warblers at the swamp woods south west of Winslow. As you know the Niagara-Haldimand line bisects this slough forest running in a nw-se line. Some of these singing males were on either side of the line. Glenda Slessor and I visited this site on 9 May 2001 when there was but one singing territorial male Cerulean. We did not visit the site again until two days in 2005: 1 June and 23 June. No Ceruleans on either date. The habitat has changed very little, but, sadly, the Ceruleans are gone. These birds were so close to the line that I think you should include them in *Niagara Birds*. When there were eight males I believe at least some of the territories were in fact in Niagara. In 2001 the single singing male was near the road right on the county/region line.

There are no fall or winter records of Cerulean Warbler for Niagara. The species winters almost exclusively in northern South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Black-and-white Warbler

Mniotilta varia

Uncommon spring transient, fall transient

The Black-and-white Warbler is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest arrival date is that of a single bird observed on 26 April 1989 in north St. Catharines (KJR). The latest recorded date of migration is 31 May 1995, when three birds were found on the Port Weller piers (Port Weller Study).

The Black-and-white Warbler breeds in Ontario to our west in the Long Point area and to our north starting in Hamilton. There are no records in the first Atlas of this species in Niagara. In the second Atlas there are two squares in which possible breeding was reported. A single bird was found 14 June 2001 in the Welland area and single birds were observed in Marcy's Woods near Point Abino on 15 June 2001 and 10 June 2002. There are three additional summer records in Niagara. Single birds were observed in Marcy's Woods on 14 June 2001 (BOSNR; note this could be the same bird

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 27 birds in 2005

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1969 and 1976

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

reported there the next day) and 16 June 1999 (McCracken et al. 1999). On 22 June 1999, Rob Eberly observed a bird building a nest at Point Abino. According to Ontario Nest Records Scheme data, this nest was eventually abandoned.

The earliest date of fall migration is 9 August 1986, when an individual was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). The latest recorded date in the fall is 13 October 1974, when a single bird was observed on the BOS October Count.

There are no winter records for Niagara. This species winters mainly in the Bahamas and Greater Antilles and from Mexico to South America and is also fairly common in winter in peninsular Florida (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Black-and-white Warbler banded at Long Point on 5 May 1986 was encountered on 24 October 1989 in Belize.

Black-and-white Warbler
Brandon Holden

John E. Black



American Redstart

Setophaga ruticilla

Common spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient, extremely rare winter straggler

Between 0800 and 0900 hours on 24 May 1993, counters walking the 800 metres from the Coast Guard station to the end of the west pier observed 30 American Redstarts (Port Weller Study). Although they are a common spring transient, these numbers are exceptionally high. Our earliest arrival date is that of single birds found on 4 May 2000 at Point Abino (JEB, KJR) and 4 May 2004 at Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (JEB). The May Count numbers of this species decreased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.) The latest recorded date of migration is 31 May 1996, when three birds were seen on the Port Weller piers (Port Weller Study).

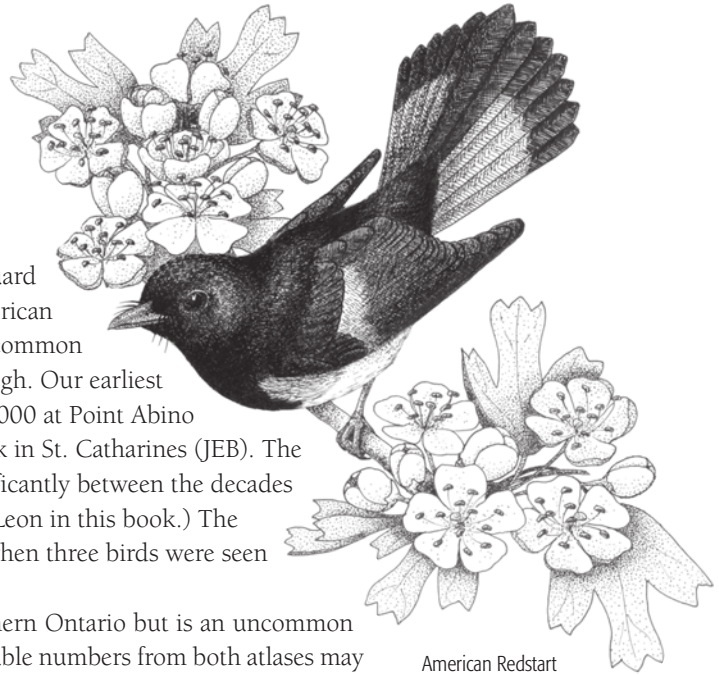
The American Redstart breeds throughout southern Ontario but is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. The possible and probable numbers from both atlases may be misleading as the American Redstart is one of the few passerines of which the males do not reach full breeding plumage until their second breeding season. First year males may sing and defend territories, but not all will attract a mate (P.L. McLaren 2007b).

Owing to the presence of summer resident birds, it is difficult to estimate a date of fall migrant arrival. There is only one November record, a single individual on 23 November 1983 in Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

There is one winter record for Niagara: a single bird at Niagara Falls on 18 December 1994 (Ridout 1995:144). The species winters from northwestern Mexico south to South America and is also found in Trinidad, Bermuda, the West Indies and southern Florida in the winter months (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Banding and Recovery Data: An American Redstart banded at Ruthven Park in Cayuga, Ontario, on 20 May 1997 was encountered on 23 October 1997 in North Carolina.

John E. Black



American Redstart
Seabrooke Leckie

First Atlas: 8 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 11 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 67 birds in 1972

BOS October Count: Reported on 9 of 40 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1969, 1974, 1976 and 1993

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea*

Occasional spring transient, extremely rare summer straggler and fall transient

Prothonotary Warbler is designated an endangered species in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). It is an occasional spring transient in Niagara. There are no spring count records for this species. From Sheppard (1970) we learn that only three Prothonotary Warblers were observed in the spring in the Niagara Region prior to 1966. Since 1966 there have been six spring records of single individuals: May 1982 Port Colborne (Weir 1982: 848), 2 May 2003 at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (KJR), 6 May 1993 at Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study), 15 May 2005 at Mud Lake (Blayne and Jean Farnan), 23 May 1971 at Mud Lake (Harold Lancaster) and 26 May 1967 at Point Abino (BOSNR).

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed,
7 probable, 5 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares con-
firmed, 11 probable, 6 possible

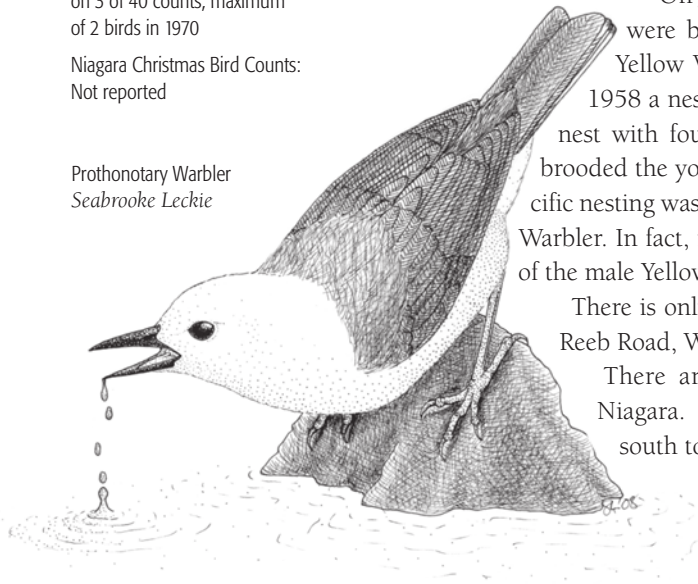
BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 37
of 41 counts, maximum of 24
birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported
on 3 of 40 counts, maximum
of 2 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Prothonotary Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie



There are a few records of breeding Prothonotary Warblers to our west, but the northern edge of their main breeding area lies well south of the Great Lakes (Dunn and Garrett 1997). Summer records include single birds on 11 June 1977 at Windmill Point in Fort Erie (BOSNR) and 13 June 1979 at Abino Hills in Point Abino (BOSNR). On 21 June 1986, a singing male of this species was observed in a willow-Buttonbush slough on Point Abino (Natural Heritage Information Centre data). Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) report an interesting occurrence of a male Prothonotary Warbler taking over the duties of a male Yellow Warbler on Nye Road about 4 km west of Ridgeway:

“On June 24, 1956 a nest was found with two young who were being fed by the male Prothonotary and by a female Yellow Warbler. No nest was found in 1957 but on June 14, 1958 a nest with four young was found and on June 14, 1959 a nest with four eggs was located. In both cases a Yellow Warbler brooded the young [and the Prothonotary was present]. No interspecific nesting was proved, since all the young were believed to be Yellow Warbler. In fact, in our opinion, the Prothonotary took over the duties of the male Yellow Warbler after the eggs were laid.”

There is only one fall record, 27 August 1978, of a single bird on Reeb Road, Wainfleet found by Harold Lancaster.

There are no winter records of Prothonotary Warbler for Niagara. The species winters mainly from southern Mexico south to South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorum*

Occasional spring transient

In Niagara the Worm-eating Warbler is an occasional spring transient “overshoot” (Heagy and Sutherland 2007). This bird is often heard before it is seen since it forages at low levels in fairly dense woodland. Its song is a rapid trill, similar to that of the Chipping Sparrow but perhaps a little faster and heard in locations where a Chipping Sparrow would not be expected. There are seven spring records, all of single birds: 19 May 1989 St. Catharines (Weir 1989:474), 1 May 1994 Port Weller east pier (BOSNR and Port Weller Study), 4 May 2003 Port Weller east pier (JEB), 5 May 2002 Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines found by Katherine Stoltz (BOSNR), 6 May 2000 Marcy’s Woods near Point Abino (JEB), 21 May 2006 BOS May Count and 30-31 May 2004 at Morgan’s Point near Burnaby (Blayne Farnan). Sheppard (1970) cites only two April records and one May record for this species prior to 1966.

There are a few records of Worm-eating Warblers breeding to our west, but the northern edge of their main breeding areas lies well south of the Great Lakes (Dunn and Garrett 1997). There are no summer records for Niagara.

There are no fall or winter records for Niagara. The species winters mainly from Mexico south to Panama and in the West Indies (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black



Worm-eating Warbler
Kenneth Newcombe

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*

Uncommon spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient

The Ovenbird is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest arrival date is that of a single bird located on 1 May 1996 on the Port Weller east pier (KJR). The latest recorded date of migration is 31 May 1996, when a single bird was reported from the Port Weller east pier (Port Weller Study).

The Ovenbird is a fairly common breeding bird in Southern Ontario. In Niagara it is an uncommon summer resident. One of the best places to hear, and perhaps see, Ovenbirds during the second Atlas survey period was on the trail into the Wainfleet



Ovenbird
Sam Barone

Bog that begins at the north end of Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet. Kroodsma (2005) describes a flight song of the Ovenbird heard in the middle of the night. These flight songs can also be heard during the day (Michael Cadman pers. comm.). Although there were a number of woodlots where Ovenbirds were calling, there were no confirmed records of nesting in the second Atlas, perhaps because the nest of this ground-nesting species is very difficult to find even though its approximate location is relatively easy to determine.

The earliest date of a possible fall migrant is 6 September 1968, when Dan Salisbury observed a single bird at Port Weller. The latest date of observation is 11 October, and there are three records of birds on that date. In 1966 a single bird was found at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR); in 1970 two birds were seen on the BOS October Count, and in 1987 a single bird was found on the BOS October Count.

There are no winter records for Niagara. The species winters mainly in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean Region (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Banding and Recovery Data: An Ovenbird banded at Long Point on 30 August 1978 was encountered on 26 September 1984 in Tennessee.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 2005

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis*

Uncommon spring transient, occasional summer resident, fall transient

The Northern Waterthrush is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara, usually associated with small streams or wet areas. Its habit of bobbing helps separate it from most other warblers for identification purposes, but not from the similar, and much rarer, Louisiana Waterthrush, which also bobs. Our earliest recorded arrival date is of a single bird seen on 26 April 1974 in Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (JEB). The latest recorded date of migration is 25 May 1993, when a single bird was found on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study).

The Northern Waterthrush breeds in Ontario to our west in the Long Point area and to our north, beginning in Hamilton. In the second Atlas possible breeding was reported in two squares. A single bird was observed on 9 June 2003 in Willoughby Marsh in Niagara Falls, but was not found on a visit to the site on 16 June 2003. A single bird was located in the Humberstone Marsh which is located in Port Colborne on 9 June 2003. One other summer record is of a single bird located on 16 June 1999 at Marcy's Woods near Point Abino by McCracken and others (1999). According to Sheppard (1970), "... this ground warbler is probably, to some extent, a summer resident."

The earliest date of fall migration is 16 August 1991, when a single bird was observed at Port Colborne (BOSNR). The latest recorded date is 19 September 1987, when a single bird was observed at Ridgeway (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Northern Waterthrush for Niagara. This species winters mainly from Mexico to South America and in the West Indies. It is uncommon but regular in southern Florida in the winter (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Louisiana Waterthrush

Seiurus motacilla

Occasional spring transient, extremely rare summer resident or straggler, extremely rare fall transient

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

Not reported on any counts in
Niagara

This considerably less common of the two waterthrush species, the Louisiana Waterthrush, is designated a species of special concern in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). An occasional spring transient in Niagara, the Louisiana Waterthrush arrives on its breeding grounds in late April (Wood 2004), a fact which may account for the paucity of sightings. From Natural Heritage Information Centre data we find a record for Swayze Falls in Pelham 5 May 1982 and a record from 30 Mile Creek in Beamsville April 1984 and May 1985. We also find reference to a Beamer's Falls site, just below the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby, where nesting birds were found in 1956-1960, and single calling birds were found on 20 April 1974 and 28 April 1990. Another early arrival date is that of a single bird seen on 1 May 1966 at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (Harold Lancaster). Other records of single birds reported by Lancaster are as follows: 4 May 1975 at Mud Lake, 11 May 1975 on Reeb Road, Wainfleet, 23 May 1971 at Mud Lake and 28 May 1972 on Reeb Road in Wainfleet. There are two Port Weller Study sightings: 24 May 1993 on the Port Weller west pier and 15 May 1994 on the Port Weller east pier.

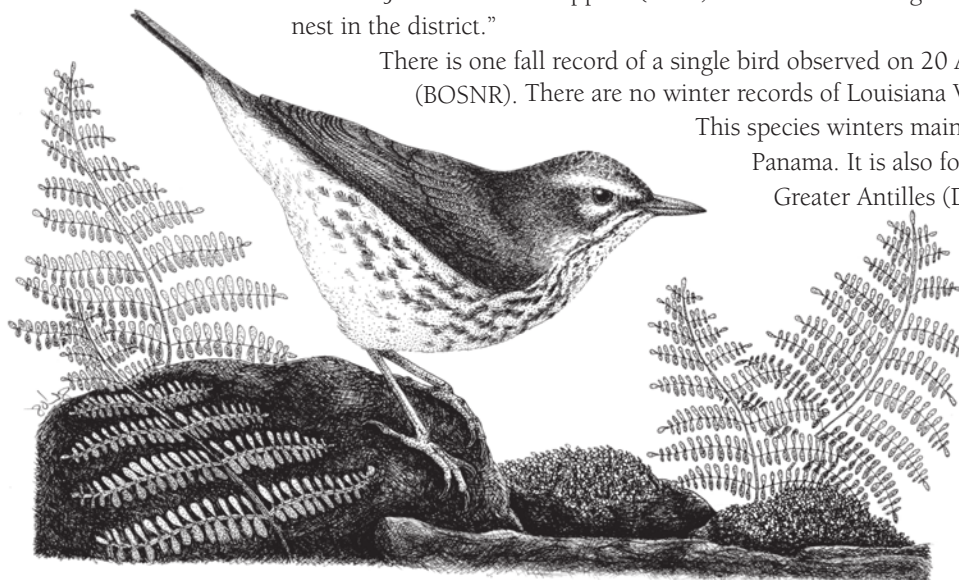
In Ontario the Louisiana Waterthrush breeds to our west on the Norfolk Sand Plain but also at scattered locations along the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Frontenac Axis region in southeastern Ontario (Donald Sutherland pers. comm.). It is also found to our south on the Lake Erie shore of New York State (Dunn and Garrett 1997). It is an extremely rare summer resident in Niagara, and there has been no confirmed breeding of this species since 1960. There were two observations of Louisiana Waterthrush in the first Atlas, a possible breeding record on the headwaters of 12 Mile Creek in Decew Gorge in Thorold (Wood 2004) and a probable record at the 30 Mile Creek site west of Beamsville. There were no records of Louisiana Waterthrush in the second Atlas. Note that atlasers visited the 30 Mile Creek site on 4 May 2004, 6 June 2005 and 25 May 2005 and no Louisiana Waterthrushes were heard or seen (JEB). Cheskey (2003) reported no Louisiana Waterthrushes from the headwaters of 12 Mile Creek in June of 2003. Sheppard (1970) comments "... this ground warbler is believed to nest in the district."

There is one fall record of a single bird observed on 20 August 1985 at Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are no winter records of Louisiana Waterthrush for Niagara.

This species winters mainly from Mexico south to Panama. It is also found in the Bahamas and Greater Antilles (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Louisiana Waterthrush
Seabrooke Leckie



Kentucky Warbler

Oporornis formosus

Extremely rare spring, summer and fall visitor

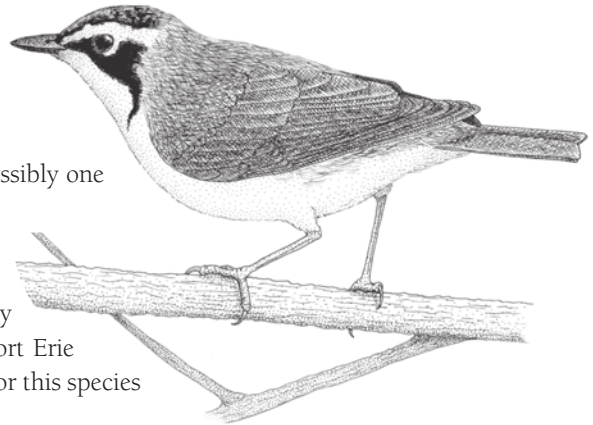
The Kentucky Warbler is a secretive ground-foraging bird, possibly one reason why it is rarely found in Niagara. There are four spring records: 8-10 May 1983 a single bird at Mud Lake in Port Colborne (BOSNR, JEB), 8 May 2000 a single bird on the BOS May Count, 15 May 1976 two birds on the BOS May Count and on 17 May 1977 a single bird at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). Sheppard (1970) cites two Niagara spring records for this species prior to 1966.

The Kentucky Warbler is not known to breed in Ontario, but is found breeding to the south of Lake Erie (Dunn and Garrett 1997). On 2-3 June 1993, Jarmo Jalava and Sean Blaney performed a breeding bird survey in the Fonthill Kame (Fonthill Sandy Valleys – SJF7). A single Kentucky warbler was observed and described as a possible breeding bird. The site was revisited on 12 June 1993 (Ridout 1993:1106) and a singing male was again encountered, but on a 25 June visit by Jalava, Richard Knapton and Marcia Jacklin the bird was not rediscovered (Riley et al. 1996).

There is one fall record of a single bird found by Harold Lancaster on 4 September 1978 at Mud Lake in Port Colborne.

There are no winter records of Kentucky Warbler for Niagara. The species winters mainly from Mexico south to Honduras (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black



Kentucky Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie

Connecticut Warbler *Oporornis agilis*

Occasional spring transient, fall transient

With a total of 11 spring records, the Connecticut Warbler is an occasional spring migrant in Niagara. This bird is frequently heard before it is seen because it often forages on the ground in dense vegetation. Our earliest recorded arrival date is of a single bird observed on 12 May 1999 on Port Weller east pier (KJR). The latest recorded date of migration is 3 June 1966, when a bird was reported from Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

The Connecticut Warbler breeds in Ontario north of Lake Superior. There are no summer records of this species in Niagara.

The earliest date of fall migration is 7 August 1986, when a single bird was observed at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). There are only three other fall records of single birds: 4 September 1978 Reeb Road in Wainfleet by Harold Lancaster; 24 September 1970 Rose Hill Road (BOSNR); 10 October 1971 on the BOS October Count. There are no November records.

There are no winter records of Connecticut Warbler for Niagara. The winter range of this species is the most poorly understood of all warblers. There are no documented records of wintering birds north of South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Mourning Warbler *Oporornis philadelphia*

Uncommon spring transient, uncommon summer resident, fall transient

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 7 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 7 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 19 of 41 counts, maximum of 12 birds in 2000

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of single birds in 1970 and 1974

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The Mourning Warbler is a ground-feeding and somewhat secretive species. It is difficult to see in migration but relatively easy to find in summer, when its distinctive song, a “cheery-cheery-cheery-chory-chory”, can be heard. Our earliest arrival date is that of a single bird found on 14 May 1991 on the Port Weller east pier (KJR). The latest spring date is 31 May 1996, when a single individual was located on Port Weller east pier (Port Weller Study).

The Mourning Warbler, more abundant to our north, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. One of the best places to hear, and perhaps see, Mourning Warbler during the second Atlas survey period was at the head of the trail into the Wainfleet Bog at the north end of Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet. It has also been found on side trails that run to the east and west of this trail about 0.5 km north of the end of Erie Peat Road.

The earliest recorded date of possible migration is 20 August 1990, when a single bird was found in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest fall date is 13 October 1974, when a single bird was seen on the BOS October Count.

There are no winter records of Mourning Warbler for Niagara. The species winters from southern Nicaragua to South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*

Common spring transient, common summer resident, fall transient, extremely rare winter straggler

First Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 9 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 61 birds in 2003

BOS October Count: Reported on 17 of 40 counts, maximum of 4 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 on the 1994 St. Catharines CBC

The Common Yellowthroat is a common spring transient in Niagara. This is borne out by results from the Port Weller Study which show many birds were reported although only a few individuals are known to breed on the piers. Our earliest arrival date is that of a single bird found at Mud Lake in Port Colborne by Harold Lancaster on 18 March 1966. There is only one April record, a single bird seen on 29 April 1990 at Waverley Beach in Fort Erie (JEB). It is difficult to estimate a late date for spring migration as it is not clear how to distinguish transient Common Yellowthroats from birds that have arrived to breed in the Niagara Region.

The Common Yellowthroat, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in the Niagara Region. The nest is difficult to find, and as of 2006 only two records for this species had been submitted to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme. According to their data, the earliest egg date for this species in the Niagara Region is 23 May.

The presence of many resident birds makes it difficult to estimate a date of transient arrival in the fall. The latest recorded date in the fall is 20 October 1974, when a single bird was observed at Clinton (now Lincoln) Township (BOSNR).

For this extremely rare winter straggler, there is only one winter record. A bird was found in Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines by Barb Charlton, Rob Dobos, Kevin McLaughlin and Paul Rose during the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count of 18 December 1994. This species winters south from the Carolinas through Central America and in most of the West Indies (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black



Banding and Recovery Data: A Common Yellowthroat banded at Long Point on 23 September 1968 was encountered on 1 October 1968 in Pennsylvania. A second banded at Long Point on 31 May 1973 was encountered in the fall of 1974 in Florida. A third banded at Long Point on 24 September 1995 was encountered on 1 May 1998 in Tennessee.

Common Yellowthroat
Raymond Barlow

Hooded Warbler *Wilsonia citrina*

Rare and local summer resident, extremely rare fall transient

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 7 squares confirmed,
2 probable, 4 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
16 of 41 counts, maximum of
4 birds in 1996

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

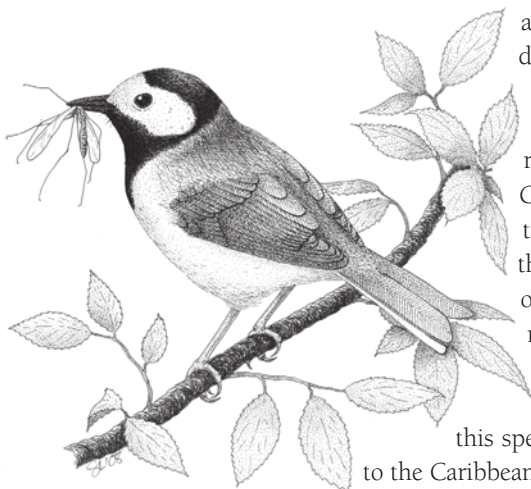
The Hooded Warbler is designated as a threatened species in Ontario (OMNR 2007) and Canada (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). Prior to 1993, the first year that birds were found nesting in Niagara, there were only four spring records from independent birders and eight records from the BOS May Counts for this species. Our earliest arrival date is that of a single bird found on 29 April 1984 on the escarpment near Brock University in St. Catharines (JEB). There were two sightings of Hooded Warbler on the Port Weller Study. Sheppard (1970) cites only two spring records for this species prior to 1970.

Though most common in the Carolinian zone, the Hooded Warbler breeds north of Niagara in Durham, Hamilton, Halton, Northumberland, Peel, Peterborough, Simcoe, Waterloo and York counties. It is a rare and local summer resident here. In the first Atlas, possible breeding was reported from only one square. In the second Atlas, possible breeding was reported from four squares, probable breeding from two squares and confirmed breeding from seven squares. These figures indicate a substantial increase in the breeding population of Hooded Warblers in Niagara. From D.S. Badzinski (2007c) we learn that a 400% increase in the number of Hooded Warbler nests reported in Ontario occurred between the first and second atlases and that Niagara had 33 of the 300 nests found during the second Atlas.

The earliest evidence of confirmed Hooded Warbler breeding in Niagara was obtained on 2-3 June 1993, when Jarmo Jalava and Sean Blaney performed a breeding bird survey in the Fonthill Kame (Fonthill Sandy Valleys – SJF7). As part of the same survey, a visit to the North Pelham Valley (NPV11) by Jalava on 2 June led to the identification of Hooded Warbler as a probable breeding bird (Riley et al. 1996). Six male birds were present on 20 June 1993, three of which were paired (Ridout 1993: 1106). Two pairs later fledged young. Mary Gartshore and Peter Carson entered the Fonthill Kame from McSherry Street in Fonthill and saw three males, two females and two to four fledged young (about 25 days old) on 10 July 1993 (Mary Gartshore pers. comm.). From Natural Heritage Information Centre data, we learn of a pair found on Navy Island near Chippawa on 23 May 1985 but not seen there on 6 June 1985. (This presumably is the possible record reported from Navy Island in the first Atlas.) We also learn of the Richard Knapton and Blayne Farnan observation of two nests in Marcy's Wood in Fort Erie in 1998 and four males (two nests) in the Fonthill Kame in 1998. See also the description of the observation by Rob Eberly and Jon McCracken of three singing male Hooded Warblers in Marcy's Woods near Point Abino on 16 May 1999 (McCracken et al. 1999). Cheskey (2003) reported that 33 pairs of Hooded Warbler were found in the Twelve Mile Creek Headwaters Important Bird Area located in Pelham. The best location for seeing this warbler during the years of the second Atlas was at the south end of Holloway Bay Road near Point Abino. Birds were found on the Marcy's Woods trail, on the Holloway Bay Road itself and on the roads leading off Holloway Bay Road to the west.

There is only one fall record, 29 August 1996, of a single bird at Niagara Falls (BOSNR). There are no winter records from Niagara for this species. The Hooded Warbler winters mainly from eastern Mexico south to the Caribbean region of Honduras and Nicaragua (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Hooded Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie



John E. Black

Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla*

Uncommon spring transient, fall transient

The species is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest recorded arrival date of a Wilson's Warbler is of a single bird seen on 8 May 1979 at Crescent Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest recorded date of a spring migrant is of a single individual on 31 May 1993 on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study).

Wilson's Warbler breeds in Ontario north of Lake Huron. There are no summer records from Niagara. The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 19 August 1979, when a single bird was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). The latest recorded fall date is 13 October 1969, when a single bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are no winter records of Wilson's Warbler for Niagara. The species winters mainly from northern Mexico to Panama (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 27 of 41 counts, maximum of 26 birds in 1989

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1970 and 1986

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Canada Warbler *Wilsonia canadensis*

Uncommon spring transient, occasional summer resident, fall transient

The Canada Warbler is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. Our earliest recorded arrival date is that of a single bird seen on 30 April 1984 on the escarpment near Brock University in St. Catharines (JEB). May Count numbers of this species decreased significantly between the decades 1966-1975 and 1997-2006. (See Hamilton and DeLeon in this book.) The latest recorded spring migration date is 28 May 1994 on the Port Weller west pier (Port Weller Study).

The Canada Warbler breeds in Ontario to our west in the Long Point area. In the second Atlas, probable breeding was reported from the Wainfleet Bog, where a bird was observed on 6 June and 13 June 2001 but not on 21 June, and from the Port Colborne area where a bird was observed on 8 June and 15 June 2004 but not later in June. For five years in the summer months, as many as two pairs of Canada Warblers were present in the Wainfleet Bog, about 1 km north of the end of Biederman Road.

They were first heard 14 June 1992, and one was observed carrying food on 28 June of that year. Two Canada Warblers were heard on 16 June 1996, and none was heard on the last visit to the site on 8 June 1997 (John Black pers. comm.). From Sheppard (1970) we learn that Putnam (1952) found Canada Warbler to be regular in the breeding season in the ravines at Jordan and Grimsby, with singing males present in June.

The earliest recorded date of fall migration is 12 August 1967, when a single bird was observed at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). The latest recorded date in October is 14 October 1984, when a single bird was observed on the BOS October Count. There are two November records of single birds: 11 November 1967 at R.W. Sheppard's home in Niagara Falls (Dan Salisbury) and 25 November 1990 in Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of Canada Warbler for Niagara. This species winters primarily in northern South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black



Canada Warbler
Seabrooke Leckie

First Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 3 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 26 of 41 counts, maximum of 21 birds in 1989

BOS October Count: Reported on 3 of 40 counts, maximum of single birds in 1970, 1984 and 1986

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Yellow-breasted Chat *Icteria virens*

Occasional spring transient, rare and local summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 3 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds in 1970

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The Yellow-breasted Chat is designated as a species of special concern in Ontario (OMNR 2007), and in Canada the eastern population (*I.v.virens*) is similarly designated (SARA 2008, Schedule 1). It is an occasional spring transient or straggler in Niagara. We have a total of nine spring records of single birds found between 1966 and 2006. The earliest record is for 3 May 1970 at Morgan's Point near Burnaby by Harold Lancaster. Other dates and locations are as follows: 28 May 1972, 19 May 1974 and 19 May 1975 — all on Reeb Road, Wainfleet by Harold Lancaster; 11 May 1993 on Port Weller east pier (Port Weller Study); 5 June 1994 in Wainfleet (KJR), 23-24 May 1998 on Port Weller east pier at the edge of the north wood (JEB); 28 May-3 June 2003 in Stevensville by George Melvin (JEB); and 31 May 2006, Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet (JEB). Sightings in late May and early June are in locations where it is possible the bird could breed, but they may simply be of stragglers.

We are at the northern limit of the breeding grounds for the Yellow-breasted Chat (Dunn and Garrett 1997). According to Donald Sutherland: "This species is notoriously ephemeral in its occupancy of sites, particularly those at or near the extreme northern periphery of its range. There are a number of examples of apparently anomalous nesting events at sites for which there was no history of the species. It occupies early successional vegetation and, in Ontario, particularly shrub thickets bordering wetlands, e.g., Wainfleet Bog" (Donald Sutherland pers. comm.).

The earliest egg date for this species in the Niagara Region is 16 June, according to Ontario Nest Records Scheme data. During the first Atlas on 16 June 1984, a nest with eggs was discovered in the Wainfleet Bog. On a visit to the bog one week later, the nest had been depredated (JEB). A chat was observed for a number of days off Wilson Road near Garringer Road in Wainfleet in early June 1985 (JEB). In the second Atlas a single bird was seen on 11 June 2005 in a field off Highway 406 near Fourth Street Louth in St. Catharines. It was not found on subsequent visits to the area (JEB). From the Natural Heritage Information Centre data we find six additional summer sites of possible, probable or confirmed breeding birds: two sites in 1983 (one unlisted and one at Grassy Brook, Welland); one new site in 1988 in the Caistor-Canborough Slough Forest (this site may be just outside the Niagara Region); two new sites in Wainfleet in 1990 and one new site in Wainfleet in 1991.

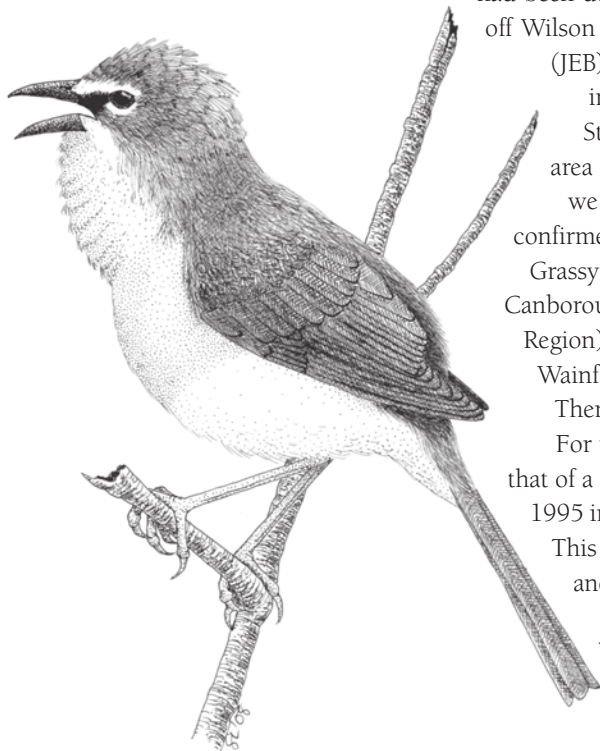
There are no fall records for this species.

For this extremely rare winter straggler, there is only one record, that of a single bird that stayed from 8 December 1994 to 10 January 1995 in the yard of Frank Banfield on Yates Street in St. Catharines.

This species winters mainly from Mexico south to Panama (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

John E. Black

Yellow-breasted Chat
Seabrooke Leckie





Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*

Extremely rare visitor

Summer Tanager
Harold Stiver

The Summer Tanager is an insectivorous bird of the dry oaks and mixed forests of the southern United States. While it feeds on a wide range of insects, it is well known that a major part of the diet is made up of bees and wasps. There is very little information on the survivorship and life span of Summer Tanager; the longest recorded lifespan is five years (Robinson 1996).

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) describe a few Buffalo area sightings of Summer Tanager but not any for Niagara. Roy Sheppard describes seeing one, the first record for Niagara, at the far end of his garden in Niagara Falls on 7 September 1960 (Sheppard 1970).

The Summer Tanager is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara with only four known records between 1966 and 2006. The first is that of two Summer Tanagers observed by Raymond Lowes on 2 May 1970 at Beamsville (Curry 2006).

On 10–11 May 1983, John Black discovered an adult male at Malcolmson Park in St. Catharines. Miriam Klepfer and Robert Andrie and others noted another Summer Tanager on 19–20 May 1984 at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). Gary Novosel, Willie D'Anna, Kayo Roy and William Watson studied an adult male at Mud Lake, Port Colborne on 6 May 1991 (BOSNR). It is interesting that all four of these observations occurred within a span of only 19 days during May of each year.

The breeding range for Summer Tanager is the southern United States and northern Mexico north to southern Iowa and New Jersey. It winters from southern Mexico south to northern South America (Robinson 1996).

Kayo J. Roy

First Atlas: 6 squares confirmed, 12 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 12 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 82 birds in 1970

BOS October Count: Reported on 4 of 40 counts, maximum of 27 birds in 1969

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Scarlet Tanager
Brandon Holden

Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident



The male Scarlet Tanager, with its bright scarlet body and black tail and wings, is the only Ontario bird with this striking color combination. It is most likely to be found in the upper canopy of the forest. The earliest arrival date in Niagara is 3 May 1970, when four birds were seen by Harold Lancaster at Mud Lake in Port Colborne. By early May, Scarlet Tanagers have arrived to breed in Niagara and they have been seen on 38 of 41 BOS May Counts. It is not

clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Scarlet Tanager breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. This “robin with a sore throat” (a robin-like song but hoarse) prefers deciduous forest with large trees. Fireman’s Park in Niagara Falls was a reliable location at which to see this species during the years of the second Atlas.

The latest fall date is 16 October 1983, when a single bird was seen on the BOS October Count. Interestingly, there were no observations of Scarlet Tanager on the October Count after the year 1983.

There are no winter records of this species for Niagara. The Scarlet Tanager winters in South America from Columbia to Bolivia (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana*

Extremely rare visitor

The male Western Tanager is a brightly coloured, very distinctive, widespread bird of the western North American coniferous forests. Interestingly, the red pigmentation on the face of the male is called rhodoxanthin, which is very rare in birds (Hudon 1999). The bird does not manufacture this red colouration; instead, it must be acquired by diet (Hudon 1999).

The first recorded observation of Western Tanager for Niagara is that of a bird found at Herbert O’Reilly’s feeder in Tintern on 18 December 1957. This bird was last seen on 13 February 1958 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Curry 2006) when it likely succumbed to the extremely harsh winter weather that occurred that week.

The Western Tanager is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara with only three further occurrences during the 1966–2006 time frame of this book. Maria and Lorne Featherston discovered a male on 15 May 1989 at Fort Erie (Wormington and Curry 1990). Margaret Cunningham identified a female Western Tanager at her backyard



feeder in Wainfleet on 5–8 December 1992 (not 3–7 December as in Ridout 1993: 255 and not Port Colborne as in Bain (1994) and Henshaw and Kerr (1993)). On 7 May 2000, Edmund Stevens and others observed a male in alternate plumage at Point Abino, Ridgeway (Roy 2001).

The breeding grounds for Western Tanager are widespread in the west. They breed from southern Northwest Territory and southeastern Alaska, south through the western United States and east to western Manitoba, to the Black Hills of South Dakota, and to western Texas. It winters from central Mexico through to Costa Rica. Some individuals have been known to overwinter in California (Hudon 1999).

Kayo J. Roy

*Western Tanager
Harold Stiver*



Green-tailed Towhee
Harold Stiver

Green-tailed Towhee *Pipilo chlorurus*

One historical record

The Green-tailed Towhee is a shy bird of the scrublands of the Rocky Mountains of western North America. While it is the smallest of all North American towhees, it is one of the larger members of the sparrow-bunting family Emberizidae. The Green-tailed is the only entirely migratory member of all North American towhees, arriving on breeding grounds in June and leaving for wintering grounds by August.

One historical record of Green-tailed Towhee exists for Niagara. In late March 1954 (exact date unknown), Gertrude Selby identified a Green-tailed Towhee at John Young's residence feeder in Welland. The bird was last seen on 18 April 1954 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970, Wormington 1987, James 1991). Harold Axtell, Bernard Nathan and Arthur Schaffner were among the many area birders lucky enough to see and confirm the identification of this first record of Green-tailed Towhee for Ontario and Niagara.

The Green-tailed Towhee breeds in western North America from Oregon and central Montana south to southern California, central Arizona, New Mexico and western Texas. It winters in the southern parts of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona and through Baja California into Mexico (Byers et al. 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Spotted Towhee is a distinctive, large New World bird of the sparrow-bunting family Emberizidae, which is often heard before it is seen. While once considered a separate species, then briefly lumped as a subspecies with the eastern Rufous-sided Towhee, an AOU split in 1995 once again returned full species status to this western race of Rufous-sided Towhee. A bird of the open woods, it generally rummages for food among dead leaves in woodlot undergrowth and its brushy edges.

With only three known occurrences during the 1966–2006 time frame of this book, the Spotted Towhee is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. The first is that of a bird observed on 27 November 1968 at Roy Sheppard's residence in Niagara Falls. The bird made numerous visits to the garden over the next four and one-half months, and excellent colour photographs taken by Paul Benham clearly revealed the bird to be an immature female. It was last seen on 12 April 1969 (Sheppard 1970).

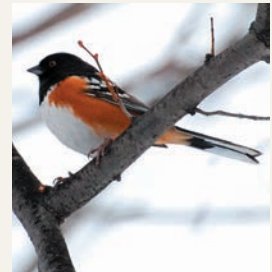
On 4 December 1976, Harold Axtell identified a basic female of the *montanus* subspecies at his Fort Erie residence that remained to 12 December 1976 (Dobos 1999). Daniel Salisbury discovered Niagara's third Spotted Towhee, a male, on 17 December 1978 also at the home of Roy Sheppard in Niagara Falls. This bird was last observed on 21 December 1978.

The Spotted Towhee breeds in southern Canada from British Columbia east to Saskatchewan, then south to western Texas, Mexico and Guatemala. It winters from southern British Columbia, southern Idaho and western Colorado south and east to Kansas and Texas (Greenlaw 1996)

Kayo J. Roy

Post-2006 Observation

John and Mary McNeil invited Blayne Farnan to visit their Port Colborne residence to identify a bird at their feeders that appeared to be different. Observing the bird, Blayne instantly told the homeowners that their avian guest was an adult male Spotted Towhee. The bird first appeared on 17 January 2009 and remained to be enjoyed by many observers until 21 February 2009 (BOSNR). This Spotted Towhee, appearing 31 years after the last visit to Niagara by a Spotted Towhee, was at times difficult to see; however, the photograph by James Pawlicki leaves no doubt as to the identity of this welcome winter visitor from the American west.



Spotted Towhee
Jukka Jantunen



Eastern Towhee
Sam Barone

Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, occasional winter straggler

At one time the Eastern Towhee was lumped with the Spotted Towhee (a western North American species) and the two were known as Rufous-sided Towhee. In 1995 this species was again split, with those breeding east of the Great Plains named the Eastern Towhee. There are nine Niagara March records of Eastern Towhee (BOSNR). Since it is found in all months of the year, it is not clear if these March records are of early migrants or winter stragglers. The earliest April arrival date is 3 April 1977, when a single bird was seen during the BOS April Count. Birds were found from 1 May to 16 May on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Eastern Towhee breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. The number of atlas squares with confirmed breeding has dropped substantially in Niagara, with a decline in the probability of observation between atlases in the Carolinian region of 16% (Timpf 2007). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 9 June. One of the few easy locations to locate these birds in recent years has been in the Wainfleet Bog, 0.5 km from the start of the trail into the bog beginning at the north end of Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet.

There are seven Niagara BOS Noteworthy Records of this species for November. They range from 1 November to 29 November.

Eastern Towhee is an occasional winter straggler in Niagara. There are BOS Noteworthy Records of seven birds in December, nine birds in January and five birds in February. The Eastern Towhee is a rare bird on the Niagara CBCs. There are nine instances of single birds on the BOS CBC, nine records on the Niagara Falls CBC, three records on the Port Colborne CBC and two records on the St. Catharines CBC. The Eastern Towhee winters mainly from the Mid-Atlantic States south to Florida and the Gulf Coast (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

American Tree Sparrow *Spizella arborea*

Spring and fall transient, common winter resident

American Tree Sparrows are often seen in loose and mixed flocks on arable land and pasture, along forest edges, hedgerows and at feeding trays from October to May. Prior to 1966 individuals were noted in the Niagara Frontier area from 20 September to 15 May (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). On the BOS May Count, single birds were sighted on only two occasions: 16 May 1971 and 18 May 1986, the latter date being the latest spring record. Birds were sighted on 11 of 41 BOS October Counts, with early records for 8 October in 1972, 1989 and 2000. One hundred birds were noted in Jordan on 30 October 1966 (BOSNR), the largest number observed that month.

During the winter months, the American Tree Sparrow is a common resident in Niagara. This hardy species was the second most common emberizid encountered on Niagara CBCs, which yielded an average of five birds per party hour. Influxes of American Tree Sparrows in the region have occurred periodically. Particularly large

First Atlas: 9 squares confirmed, 13 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 5 squares confirmed, 10 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 10 birds in 1969

BOS May Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 66 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 29 of 40 counts, maximum of 15 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds on the 1967 BOS CBC

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 165 birds in 1993

BOS May Count: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1971 and 1986

BOS October Count: Reported on 11 of 40 counts, maximum of 50 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,054 birds on the 1995 Niagara Falls CBC



American Tree Sparrow
Sam Barone

increases in numbers occurred during the winters of 1968-1969 and 1969-1970, when 12 birds per party hour were observed. A familiar feeder species, about three to seven birds are seen per feeding station in Niagara (Project FeederWatch).

By mid-September, American Tree Sparrows start to leave their breeding grounds in the far north to winter in southern Canada, including central and southern Ontario, and throughout much of the United States east of the Rockies (Naugler 1993, Rising 1996). Since 1966, CBC data have shown that the numbers of American Tree Sparrows visiting Niagara have been relatively stable. In contrast, the North American population has shown a gradual decline from three to two birds per party hour during the last 30 years. A factor contributing to this decline may involve increased development and clearing of habitat on the wintering grounds (Naugler 1993). Project FeederWatch data indicate that the numbers of birds attending feeding stations in North America have been relatively stable. In some years, the species may be uncommon locally owing to heavy snow cover and a resulting lack of available forage (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

Banding and Recovery Data: An American Tree Sparrow banded at Long Point on 20 March 1970 was encountered in January 1972 in Ohio. One banded at Long Point on 7 November 1974 was encountered on 12 March 1975 in Ohio, and another banded at Long Point on 30 October 1998 was encountered on 17 March 2001 in Michigan.

Daniel R. Kozlovic

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident, occasional winter straggler

There is one March record of Chipping Sparrow for Niagara (BOSNR). Since this species is found in almost all winter months in Niagara, this bird may have been a winter straggler rather than a spring migrant. The earliest unambiguous migrant arrival date is 8 April 1999, when a single bird was seen at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (KJR). By May, Chipping Sparrows have definitely arrived to breed and they have been seen on all BOS May Counts. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Chipping Sparrow breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 22 May. From data obtained in the second Atlas it would seem that the Chipping Sparrow, with an estimated population of 12 million birds, is one of the most abundant birds in Ontario in the summer (Cadman 2007c).

On 8 October 1990, 80 Chipping Sparrows were found among a large grounding of transient sparrows at Fifty Point Conservation Area (HNCNR). There are seven BOS Noteworthy Records for November, ranging from 1 November to 27 November.

The Chipping Sparrow is an occasional winter straggler in Niagara. There are reports from the BOS Noteworthy Records of one bird in December and two birds in February. One bird was seen in Niagara-on-the-Lake on 28 December 1986 (Weir 1987: 278). A single bird was seen in Niagara on 1 January 1975 (JEB and others). A single bird with missing tail feathers was observed at feeders on Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet on 22 January and again on 26 January 1997 (JEB, KJR). The Chipping Sparrow is a rare Niagara CBC bird. There are four records from the Niagara Falls CBC, one from the Port Colborne CBC and six from the St. Catharines CBC. The Chipping Sparrow winters in the southern United States and south to Central America (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Chipping Sparrow banded at Long Point on 2 June 1967 was encountered on 3 January 1969 in Louisiana.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 22 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 18 of 41 counts, maximum of 20 birds in 2002

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 169 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 35 of 40 counts, maximum of 176 birds in 2005

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 2 birds on the 2005 St. Catharines CBC



Chipping Sparrow
Sam Barone

Clay-colored Sparrow *Spizella pallida*

Extremely rare visitor

The Clay-colored Sparrow is a bird of the bushy grasslands and northern prairies of interior United States and Canada. A common and widespread bird, the Clay-colored Sparrow is perhaps the most numerous passerine of low shrub communities, especially in the southern parts of the Canadian Prairie provinces. The plowing of the Prairies considerably reduced the habitat for this species, but the clearing of eastern forests extended its range northeastward to the eastern Great Lakes region (Knapton 1994).



Clay-colored Sparrow
Kayo Roy

There is no mention of Clay-colored Sparrow for Niagara in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965).

During the 41-year period of this book, 1966-2006, there are only five known records of this extremely rare visitor to Niagara. On 10 July 1968, William L. Putman observed the first Clay-colored Sparrow for Niagara at the Horticultural Experiment Station in Vineland (Sheppard 1970). Sheppard comments, "Mr. Putman's Vineland record would appear to be unique for Canada's Niagara Frontier territory."

On 1 May 1970, Daniel Salisbury identified a Clay-colored Sparrow at Mud Lake near Port Colborne. On 29 December 1970, Daniel Salisbury located another

at the Honsberger farm in Jordan. Salisbury took Paul Benham and John Black to the location on 1 January 1971, where they had an opportunity to study this bird at length. On 16 May 1971 during the BOS May Count, Harold Mitchell located a Clay-colored Sparrow at Fort Erie.

Twenty-three years later, on 8 May 1994 during the Port Weller Study, John Black and Mary Ellen Hebb discovered a Clay-colored Sparrow in a grassy area just north of the Canadian Coast Guard Station on the Port Weller west pier, St. Catharines. The BOSNR does not show any records of this species for Niagara.

The Clay-colored Sparrow breeds in the interior of North America from eastern British Columbia through central and southern Manitoba to the eastern Great Lakes. It winters in southern Texas and south through Mexico (Knapton 1994).

Kayo J. Roy



Post-2006 Observation

On 5 June 2007, while looking for Henslow's Sparrows, John Black and Daniel Salisbury discovered a territorial Clay-colored Sparrow singing from the top of several small trees and bushes along a grassy section of land adjacent to the Welland Canal at the west end of Young Road, Welland, Ontario. Kayo Roy photographed the bird on 7 June 2007, and it was seen on numerous subsequent visits to the area. It is not known if this singing male ever found a partner, but the bird was last observed, still on territory, on 2 July 2007. Photo: Kayo Roy



Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, occasional winter straggler

The Field Sparrow is one of the top 20 common North American species in decline, as determined by the National Audubon Society (Audubon 2007). There are two March BOS Noteworthy Records of this species. A single bird was seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie on 18-21 March 1973 and three birds were seen at Port Colborne on 8 March 1980. Harold Lancaster located a single bird at Morgan's Point near Burnaby on 27 March 1966. Since Field Sparrows are found in Niagara in all months, it is not clear if these March sightings are of early migrants or of winter stragglers. The earliest April date is 7 April 1968, when a single bird was seen on the BOS April Count. Small numbers of Field Sparrows were seen on the Port Weller piers on most days from 1 May to 23 May during the Port Weller Study. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Field Sparrow breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date in Niagara for this species is 25 May. The decline in squares with confirmed breeding in Niagara may be a reflection of the 17% decrease in probability of observation of this species between atlases in the Carolinian region (M.A. McLaren 2007c).

The latest October record is of two birds observed on 20 October 1985 during the BOS October Count. There are no BOS Noteworthy Records for September or October.

Field Sparrow
Sam Barone

First Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 9 squares confirmed, 13 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 20 of 41 counts, maximum of 9 birds in 2002

BOS May Count: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 54 birds in 1966 and 1970

BOS October Count: Reported on 30 of 40 counts, maximum of 16 birds in 1988

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds on the 1995 Niagara Falls CBC

There are eight BOS Noteworthy Records for November ranging from 1 November to 30 November. Field Sparrows are occasional winter stragglers in Niagara. There are BOS Noteworthy Records of two birds in December, three birds in January and two birds in February.

Field Sparrows winter from Kansas east to Massachusetts, and south to Florida and northeastern Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Field Sparrow banded at Ruthven Park in Cayuga, Ontario, on 13 October 2000 was encountered on 14 February 2001 in Arkansas.

John E. Black



Vesper Sparrow
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 15 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 22 birds in 1969

BOS May Count: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 40 birds in 1969

BOS October Count: Reported on 19 of 40 counts, maximum of 32 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 2 of 41 counts, maximum of single birds on the 1969 and 1993 BOS CBC

Vesper Sparrow

Pooecetes gramineus

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, extremely rare winter straggler

There is only one March BOS Noteworthy Record for the Vesper Sparrow — a single bird seen on 31 March 1967 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie. This is also the earliest spring arrival date. The Vesper Sparrow is a rare bird on the Port Weller piers in the spring; only two records appear in the Port Weller Study. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Vesper Sparrow breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. It is most easily found by listening for its lyrical

song in suitable open habitat before sunset, and it prefers recently fallow fields with a hedgerow of small trees. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 18 May. The probability of observing this species in the Carolinian region between the two atlases declined by 16% (Rising 2007a). Prior to 1966 this species was abundant in Niagara. Sheppard (1970) describes it as “A common summer resident of the rural roadsides and pastures... most abundant in some parts of the area, particularly along the dirt roads and byways of the Welland County sector.” Much of the decline in numbers in Niagara in recent years can be attributed to a loss of suitable habitat to urbanization and vineyards.

The latest October sighting is of one bird observed on 21 October 1973 at Fort Erie on the BOS October Count (BOSNR). There are two November records — a single bird seen on 7–11 November 1966 at Rose Hill Road (BOSNR) and a single bird observed on 21 November 1969 near Grassie by Harold Lancaster.

It is an extremely rare winter straggler in Niagara, as borne out by a complete lack of BOS Noteworthy Records for the winter months. This sparrow is a rare find on Christmas Bird Counts. There are only two records: one bird in 1969 and another in 1993, both on the BOS CBC. The Vesper Sparrow winters in the southern United States and northern Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus*

Extremely rare visitor

The Lark Sparrow is a large attractive bird of farmlands, grasslands, pastures and roadsides of the Great Plains, central Texas and the American west (Beadle and Rising 2003). A gregarious bird, its bold facial pattern of chestnut, white and black distinguishes it from all other sparrows (Beadle and Rising 2003). The Lark Sparrow nested at one time in the east but since the 1930s has declined steadily as a result of reforestation and urbanization (Martin and Parrish 2000).

Primarily a ground-foraging omnivorous bird, it is extremely pugnacious during the breeding season (Lambeth 1998). This eye-catching species feeds mainly on seeds and insects and is a short to medium distance migrant (Martin and Parrish 2000). The Lark Sparrow is, however, clearly known to occasionally wander eastward. The Ontario Bird Records Committee has accepted 82 records of this species in the province up to the end of 2008 (Richards 2009).

The Lark Sparrow is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. The first record for the region is that of a bird found by Richard Drobits on 11 May 1956 at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, there were no observations of Lark Sparrow reported from Niagara.

The Lark Sparrow breeds from south central Canada southward to northern Mexico, westward to the California coast, and eastward to the Mississippi River and western Indiana. It winters primarily in California and from Texas south through Mexico. Scattered individuals may be found throughout the United States and along the eastern coast (Martin and Parrish 2000).

Kayo J. Roy



Lark Sparrow
Harold Stiver



Lark Bunting
Jukka Jantunen

Lark Bunting

Calamospiza melanocorys

Extremely rare visitor

Lark Buntings are unusual among sparrows in that they have a high degree of sexual dimorphism. The male completely moults from a distinctive bright breeding plumage to a dull drab winter plumage. Only one record exists in Niagara for this common grassland species of the western plains.

On 13 October 1990 while birding around the Grimsby sewage ponds, Alfred Epp, Kevin McLaughlin and George Naylor came upon a large, stocky drab-looking sparrow along a gravel pathway. McLaughlin immediately identified the bird as a female Lark Bunting. To the enjoyment of many birders this bird remained until 14 October 1990 (Curry 1991, 2006).

Lark Buntings breed in the southern portion of Canada's Prairie provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan and in the Great Plains, south to northern Texas and north-western New Mexico. The species winters from the south Great Plains to central Mexico (Shane 2000).

Kayo J. Roy

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident, occasional winter straggler

The earliest arrival date is 23 March 1972, when a single Savannah Sparrow was seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There were Port Weller sightings from 1 May to 16 May during the Port Weller Study. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Savannah Sparrow breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 24 May.

A loose fall flock of 75 transient Savannah Sparrows was observed at the Grimsby sewage ponds on 17 August 1993 (HNCNR). There are two November records of single individuals: one bird on 3 November 1991 at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR) and another on 6 November 1966 at Rose Hill Road (BOSNR).

An occasional winter straggler in Niagara, the Savannah Sparrow was seen on one year on the BOS CBC, two years on the Niagara Falls CBC and two years on the St. Catharines CBC. On 24 January 1985, a single bird was seen at the feeder on Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet (JEB). This species winters in the southern half of the United States and south to Honduras. It is also found in the Bahamas, Cuba and on Grand Cayman and Swann Islands (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 23 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 18 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 28 of 41 counts, maximum of 68 birds in 1966

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 123 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 29 of 40 counts, maximum of 50 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds on the 1981 Niagara Falls CBC



Savannah Sparrow
Kenneth Newcombe



Savannah Sparrow
Raymond Barlow

Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*

Occasional spring transient, common and local summer resident, fall transient

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 3 possible

Second Atlas: 3 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 13 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1986

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

The Grasshopper Sparrow is one of the top 20 common North American species in decline, as determined by the National Audubon Society (Audubon 2007). This species is almost never seen outside its known breeding grounds in Niagara in the spring. The earliest arrival date is 26 April 1999, when a single bird was seen at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). There were no Port Weller sightings during the five years of the Port Weller Study.

The Grasshopper Sparrow breeds throughout southern Ontario and is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara, which is near the northern limit of its breeding range. The 48% decline between atlases in the probability of observation of this species in the Carolinian region (Earley 2007) did not occur in Niagara. According to Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 27 May. They are most abundant in the fallow fields located south of Welland and to the east of the Welland Canal. These fields were created when the canal was diverted past Welland.

There is only one fall record for Niagara: Harold Lancaster observed two birds on Effingham Street, Welland, on 13 September 1970.

There are no winter records of this species for Niagara. Grasshopper Sparrows that breed in North America winter from the southern United States to Costa Rica (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Grasshopper Sparrow
Sam Barone



Henslow's Sparrow *Ammodramus henslowii*

Extremely rare visitor

The Henslow's Sparrow is a bird of open habitats that contain tall, dense grass and herbaceous vegetation with few or no woody shrubs and trees (Austen et al. 1994). It was named by John James Audubon in honour of his botanist friend John S. Henslow (Herkert et al. 2002). The species is Endangered provincially (OMNR 2007) and federally (COSEWIC 2000, Environment Canada 2006). During the past 40 years, the Henslow's Sparrow has undergone a dramatic decline in both numbers and range in Ontario (Austen et al. 1994). During the first Atlas, the provincial population was estimated at a maximum of 50 pairs (Cadman et al. 1987). No known breeding pairs were reported in Ontario during the second Atlas (Cadman et al. 2007).

There were no Henslow's Sparrow records for Niagara in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965).

The Harold Lancaster Colbeck Drive residence in Welland played host to as many as five birds from 4 May to 25 May 1964 (Sheppard 1970). On 30 June 1965, Harold Lancaster located another Henslow's Sparrow also in Welland.

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, six additional records of Henslow's Sparrow are known for Niagara. Welland was once again the location for a bird Harold Lancaster discovered on 22 May 1966. Three days later on 25 May 1966, Daniel Salisbury studied one in the Wainfleet Bog in Wainfleet. On 28 May 1967, Harold Lancaster observed another in Welland. On 7 and 21 July 1968, Harold Lancaster identified a Henslow's Sparrow in the Cement Plant Road pond area in Wainfleet.

Twenty years later, from 29 May to 5 June 1988, William Lamond and others observed a Henslow's Sparrow in Caistorville (Curry 2006). On 7 June 2002, Brendan Klick reported one from Port Colborne (BOSNR) that was not located in subsequent days.

The Henslow's Sparrow breeds in the northeastern and east-central United States. It also winters in the United States bordering the Gulf of Mexico and in the southeastern states along the Atlantic Coast (Herkert et al. 2002).

Kayo J. Roy



Henslow's Sparrow
Jean Iron

Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*

Rare spring and fall transient, occasional winter straggler

BOS April Count: Reported on 24 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 2005

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 11 of 40 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 6 of 41 counts, all single birds

The Fox Sparrow is a rare spring transient in Niagara. Nine March sightings and three April sightings appear in the BOS Noteworthy Records. The earliest arrival dates are for single birds seen on 17 March 1971 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie and 17 March 1988 at Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR).

Fox Sparrows breed well north of the Great Lakes; there are no summer records for Niagara.

The earliest fall date of arrival in Niagara is 1 October 1966, when one bird was seen at Rose Hill Road (BOSNR). The latest October Count date is 20 October 1985, when five individuals were seen during the BOS October Count. There are 10 BOS Noteworthy Records for October and 12 for November. On 6 November 1966, 20 individuals were observed by Harold Axtell at Fort Erie (Goodwin 1967:29).

The Fox Sparrow is an occasional winter straggler in Niagara: one bird overwintered at Rose Hill Road from 9 January 1972 to 13 March 1972 (BOSNR). There are three Niagara Falls CBC records and two St. Catharines CBC records, all of single birds. Numbers are noticeably smaller than those encountered in nearby Hamilton in the winter. Fox Sparrows winter in the southern parts of eastern Canada and the Maritimes (rarely) and south to Georgia and Texas (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Fox Sparrow
Barry Cherie





Song Sparrow
Raymond Barlow

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident, uncommon winter resident/straggler

There are five Niagara March records for Song Sparrow in the BOS Noteworthy Records. Because the Song Sparrow is an uncommon winter straggler, there is no way of knowing if these records are of arriving migrants or stragglers. A definite arrival date of breeding birds is 2 April 1995, when many Song Sparrows were observed on territory on the Port Weller east pier (JEB). It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Song Sparrow breeds throughout Ontario and is a very common summer resident in Niagara. Point count data from the second Atlas indicate that this species, with a population estimated at three million birds, is abundant in Ontario in the summer (Rising 2007b). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 6 May.

The Song Sparrow is an uncommon species in Niagara in the winter, but it is not clear which of these birds are residents that are wintering here and which are migrants from farther north wintering in Niagara. Twelve December records, twenty January records and seventeen February records appear in the BOS Noteworthy Records. Song Sparrows winter from southern Ontario south through most of the United States to central Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 23 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 504 birds in 1972

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 613 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 311 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 81 birds on the 1982 Niagara Falls CBC

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 16 of 41 counts, maximum of 10 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 17 of 40 counts, maximum of 7 birds in 1971

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Lincoln's Sparrow
Jukka Jantunen



Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolni*

Rare spring and fall transient, extremely rare and local summer resident

The Lincoln's Sparrow is a rare spring transient in Niagara. The earliest arrival date is 25 April 1971, when a single bird was seen at Malcolmson Eco-Park in St. Catharines (JEB). Port Weller pier sightings are recorded from 9 May to 16 May during the Port Weller Study. The latest spring date is 24 May 1969, when a single bird was seen at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR).

Lincoln's Sparrow, for the most part, breeds north of Niagara and is an extremely rare and local summer resident in the region. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 14 May. In both atlases, breeding in the Wainfleet Bog was confirmed. Before 1966 this species bred regularly in the interior of the Wainfleet Bog. In recent years however, the invasive European Birch has covered the entire open area of the bog where the sparrows bred. In the second Atlas, a nest was found just outside the bog at the south end of Townline Road in Wainfleet (JEB).

The earliest fall date of arrival in Niagara is 8 September 1968, when two birds were seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). This date is about three weeks later than that for the earliest migrants seen in Hamilton and Toronto (Glenn Coady pers. comm.). The latest fall date is 27 October 1977, when one Lincoln's Sparrow was seen at Niagara Falls (BOSNR).

There are no winter records for Niagara. This lack of records is in striking contrast to the situation in Toronto, Hamilton and London (Glenn Coady pers. comm.). Lincoln's Sparrows winter from the southern United States south to Costa Rica (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, rare winter straggler

Two March entries for Swamp Sparrow appear in the BOS Noteworthy Records. In addition, Harold Lancaster saw a single bird in the Wainfleet area on 18 March 1975. These March sightings could be of arriving migrants but they could also be of birds that survived the rigours of a Niagara winter. The earliest April arrival date is of a single bird seen on 4 April 1993 during the BOS April Count. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Swamp Sparrow breeds throughout southern Ontario. Atlas point count data suggest that the Swamp Sparrow, with an estimated population of two million birds, is an abundant bird in Ontario (Rising 2007c). It is, however, an uncommon summer resident in Niagara owing to a lack of suitable marsh habitat. One of the few remaining places in Niagara at which to observe the Swamp Sparrow is on the western edge of Mud Lake in Port Colborne.

There are two BOS Noteworthy Records of single Swamp Sparrows in November: Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie on 6 November 1966 and the upper Niagara River on 24 November 1967.

The Swamp Sparrow is a rare winter straggler in Niagara. In the BOS Noteworthy Records there are eight December records, four January records and eight February records. Swamp Sparrows were seen in 11 years during the BOS CBC, 20 years during the Niagara Falls CBC, five years during the Port Colborne CBC and 14 years during the St. Catharines CBC. The largest number seen on a count was 10 individuals (nine in Ontario and one in New York State) on the 1999 Niagara Falls CBC. The Swamp Sparrow winters from southern Ontario to the Gulf Coast and northeastern Mexico (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Swamp Sparrow banded at Long Point on 9 October 1989 was encountered on 20 October 1991 in West Virginia.

John E. Black

White-throated Sparrow

Zonotrichia albicollis

Very common spring and fall transient, occasional summer straggler, uncommon winter resident

The White-throated Sparrow is a very common spring transient in Niagara. There are two March records in the BOS Noteworthy Records. Because the White-throated Sparrow is an uncommon winter straggler in Niagara, however, it is not clear if these March sightings are of arriving migrants or of birds that have overwintered in Niagara. The earliest April arrival dates are 4 April 1971 and 1993, when six and two birds respectively were seen on the BOS April Count. The latest date of a spring transient sighting is 30 May 1977, when one bird was observed at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). During the Port Weller Study, birds were seen on all dates from 1 May to 23 May. A single bird was seen on 28 May. In Ontario the White-throated Sparrow breeds from Lake Ontario north. In 1965 a single



Swamp Sparrow
Brandon Holden

First Atlas: 7 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 2 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares confirmed, 12 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 9 birds in 1969 and 1991

BOS May Count: Reported on 34 of 41 counts, maximum of 38 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 23 of 40 counts, maximum of 59 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 24 of 41 counts, maximum of 10 birds on the 1999 Niagara Falls CBC



White-throated Sparrow
Raymond Barlow

BOS April Count: Reported on 34 of 41 counts, maximum of 57 birds in 1972 and 1986

BOS May Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 143 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 2,524 birds in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 39 of 41 counts, maximum of 164 birds on the 2002 Niagara Falls CBC

bird visited Rose Hill Road from 30 June to 7 August (BOSNR). There has been only one summer record for this species since 1966. The species was listed as probably breeding on Navy Island in the Niagara River in the first Atlas.

The earliest fall arrival date is 3 August 1973, when a single bird was seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are 11 BOS Noteworthy Records for November.

White-throated Sparrows are uncommon winter residents in Niagara. The BOS Noteworthy Records contain twenty-five December records, twenty-three January records and twenty-one February records. White-throated Sparrows winter from southern Ontario south to Florida, Texas and northern Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: White-throated Sparrows banded at Long Point have been encountered in Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia.

John E. Black



Harris's Sparrow
Jukka Jantunen

Harris's Sparrow *Zonotrichia querula*

Extremely rare visitor

The Harris's Sparrow, named by John James Audubon after amateur ornithologist Edward Harris (Rising 1996a), is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. This handsome bird, the largest sparrow in North America, is the only bird species that is an endemic breeder in Canada (Norment and Shackleton 1993).

There are no Harris's Sparrow records for Niagara prior to 1966 in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or in Sheppard (1970).

During the 1966–2006 time frame of this book, there are five records for Harris's Sparrow in Niagara. For a species that rarely strays far from their normal mid-western range, they apparently stay a long time when they do wander. The first record for Niagara is that of a single bird found on 9 January 1972 by Harold Axtell at his residence in Fort Erie. This bird was last seen on 9 April 1972 (BOSNR). Robert Sommerville located a Harris's

Sparrow at Fort Erie on 8 November 1973 that remained until an unknown date in April 1974 (BOSNR). On 7 December 1974, Harold Axtell, John Black and Harold Lancaster studied an immature male Harris's Sparrow in Welland that lingered there until 30 April 1975 (BOSNR).

Twenty-one years later, on 8 December 1996, John Lamey identified a Harris's Sparrow along Morgan's Point Road in Burnaby. While it is difficult to be certain, this individual may be the same adult bird he observed five months later on 10 May 1977 at a feeder behind 11310 Lakefield Crescent, Burnaby, a mere 300–400 metres east of his earlier sighting.

On 1 December 2000, Kayo Roy and Alan J. Smith discovered the fifth Harris's Sparrow along Church Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a winter adult male that had last been observed on 18 February 2001 (BOSNR, m. obs.). This bird spent the entire ten weeks in a ditch area with some running water, where dense shrubbery was augmented by considerable vegetation and numerous small trees.

The Harris's Sparrow breeds throughout the very northern portions of the central Canadian provinces and winters in the central United States from South Dakota to southern Texas and from eastern Colorado to western Missouri (Norment and Shackleton 1993).

Kayo J. Roy



White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

Common spring and fall transient, uncommon winter resident

The White-crowned Sparrow is a common spring transient in Niagara. There are five March records in the BOS Noteworthy Records. Because the White-crowned Sparrow is an uncommon winter straggler in Niagara, however, it is not clear if these are arriving migrants or birds that have overwintered in Niagara. The earliest April arrival dates are 4 April 1971 and 1993, when one and eight birds respectively were seen during the BOS April Count. The latest date for a spring transient is 27 May 1979, when one bird was seen at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). During the Port Weller Study, birds were seen on most dates from 1 May to 24 May. On 6 April 1968 and on 21 May 1969, individuals of the northwestern gambelli race of this sparrow were observed in Fort Erie (Goodwin 1968a:523, 1969b:586).

The White-crowned Sparrow breeds from James Bay north. There are no summer records of this species for Niagara.

The earliest fall date for this species is 19 September 1979, when a single bird was seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). Nine sightings are reported in BOS Noteworthy Records for November.

The White-crowned Sparrow is an uncommon winter resident in Niagara. There are observations on almost all years of the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. There are 14 December records, twenty-six January records and ten February records from the BOS Noteworthy Records. White-crowned Sparrows winter from southern Ontario south into the United States and northern Mexico. Conspicuously rare in the Eastern United States, they are more common in the west (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A White-crowned Sparrow banded at Long Point on 12 October 1969 was encountered on 5 March 1970 in Texas, and another banded at Long Point on 7 May 1987 was encountered in March 1989 in Texas.

John E. Black

White-crowned Sparrow
Brandon Holden

BOS April Count: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 14 birds in 1972

BOS May Count: Reported on 37 of 41 counts, maximum of 79 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 287 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 34 counts, maximum of 62 birds on the 2003 Niagara Falls CBC

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*

Common spring and fall transient, common winter resident

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 314 birds in 1969

BOS May Count: Reported on 15 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 2005

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 800 birds in 1968

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,675 birds on the 2005 St. Catharines CBC

The Dark-eyed Junco is a common transient and winter resident in Niagara. It frequents woodland edges, hedgerows, open fields and feeding stations from September to May. Individuals of the western Oregon (oreganus) race occasionally visit the region. There is one photographic record of an Oregon Junco at a feeder at 26 Ziraldo Road in St. Catharines on 18 March 1988 (KJR). There are two late BOS May Count records: one bird on 21 May 1972 and two birds on 21 May 2006. The latest observation is of a single bird in Welland on 27 May 1978 (Harold Lancaster). No birds were noted in Niagara in the summer (BOSNR). The earliest fall record was 3 September 1966, when one bird was seen at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (BOSNR). At Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie, 70 individuals were noted on 12 November 1989 (BOSNR).

Seen annually on Niagara CBCs, the Dark-eyed Junco was the most common winter emberizid. On the 2005 St. Catharines CBC, 1,675 individuals were spotted, the largest number on any count in Niagara. Single birds of the Oregon race appeared on the Niagara Falls CBC in 1969, 1973, 1994 and 1999. Single Oregon Juncos were observed on the Port Colborne CBC in 1993 and 2003. Three Oregon Juncos were observed from 8 to 13 December 1995 at Niagara-on-the-Lake (Ridout 1996:167). On 9 March 1969, a bird of the race *cismontanus* was observed at Harold Axtell's feeder on Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (Harold Lancaster). The Dark-eyed Junco is a familiar sight at feeding stations, which regularly attract between seven and fifteen individuals per household (Project FeederWatch).

Prior to 1966, Dark-eyed Juncos were common in Niagara from 29 March to 4 May and from 26 September to 10 November (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Spring migration starts about 1 March and peaks mid-March to early April (Nolan et al. 2002). Earliest fall migrants can arrive in mid-August, although birds of northern populations typically arrive in September and October (Nolan et al. 2002).

Dark-eyed Junco
Barry Cheriére



Juncos seen during winter in Niagara are either resident or migrating individuals. Continental winter abundance of the Dark-eyed Junco declined about 1.3% per year from 1969 to 1990 (Nolan et al. 2002); however, junco numbers have shown an increase in Niagara. In 2006, CBCs in Niagara reported about seven birds per party hour compared to about two birds per party hour across North America. An average of five birds were seen attending feeding stations in the Great Lakes Region (Project FeederWatch).

This familiar member of the sparrow family breeds throughout the mixed and boreal forests of Canada and the United States (Rising 1996). In Ontario, the species breeds throughout the northern and central regions (Rising 2007d). Most populations are migratory, wintering in southern Canada, the United States and northern Mexico (Rising 1996, Nolan et al. 2002).

Banding and Recovery Data: Dark-eyed Juncos banded at Long Point were encountered in Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Daniel R. Kozlovic

Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*

Rare spring, fall and winter visitor

Usually seen in mixed species flocks in agricultural fields and pastures from October to March, the Lapland Longspur is a rare but regular visitor to Niagara. Spring records include one bird observed on 5 March 1978 and 150-200 individuals on 22 April 1996 (BOSNR). The latest spring date is 2 May 1999, when two birds were seen at the Smithville sewage ponds. The earliest fall record is of one bird on 24 September 1991 at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). The species was noted on four occasions in January. These included an observation of 39 birds at Rockway in Lincoln on 16 January 1970. There were three sightings in February (BOSNR).

Niagara lies in the northern margin of the winter range and, as a result, winter records of this species are typically low. Birds seen in Niagara from December to February are likely overwintering individuals rather than transients, and late April migrants provide the observer an opportunity to see males with their striking pied head pattern, characteristic of the alternate (breeding) plumage.

This circumpolar sparrow breeds above the taiga belt; in North America its range extends from the Aleutians to the Labrador Peninsula (Rising 1996). By mid-August, North American populations of Lapland Longspurs begin to leave their breeding grounds to winter in southern Canada and the United States (Hussell and Montgomerie 2002). Winter densities of the species are greatest in the Midwestern United States (Root 1988).

Daniel R. Kozlovic



Lapland Longspur
Harold Stiver

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1972

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 14 of 41 counts, maximum of 26 birds (all New York State) on the 2001 Niagara Falls CBC



Snow Bunting
Brandon Holden

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 35 of 41 counts,
maximum of 1,075 birds on the
2005 St. Catharines CBC

Snow Bunting

Plectrophenax nivalis

Uncommon spring, fall and winter visitor

Usually found in fairly large flocks in pastures and fields and along shorelines, the Snow Bunting is an uncommon but regular spring, fall and winter visitor in Niagara from late October to March. The latest recorded spring date is 15 March 1992, when 18 birds were seen at Crystal Beach near Fort Erie (BOSNR). The earliest recorded fall dates are 20 October 1974, when two birds were seen at Port Dalhousie in St. Catharines (BOSNR), and 20 October 1989, when four birds were seen at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). Snow Buntings were seen throughout November (18 records); 1,500 birds were noted at Niagara-on-the-Lake on 16 November 1986 (BOSNR). An estimated 3,000 birds were seen in flight along the Lake Ontario shore on 9 November 1994 (see Summer-skill's article in this book).

Snow Buntings, about 500 per hour during daylight, arrived at Niagara-on-the-Lake on 13-20 November 1987 as if they had just crossed Lake Ontario. The migrants then crossed the Niagara River and flew west along the south shore of Lake Ontario (Weir 1988:70).

A thousand birds were observed in Niagara-on-the-Lake on 13 February 1994 (Ridout 1994:205). The Snow Bunting is a rare feeder bird in Niagara. Fewer than five appeared at feeding stations in February of 1990 and 1996 and March of 2000 (Project FeederWatch).

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965), referring to the entire Niagara Frontier Region, noted the species to be most common in February through March. Maximum flock sizes of 2,000-5,000 birds were typical, although one flock exceeded 10,000 birds. Birds ceased to be common by mid-March, but some lingered as late as 16 April. Based on CBC data, numbers of wintering Snow Buntings in North America appear to be relatively stable; between 0.5 and 2 birds are usually observed per party hour. Although peak numbers of Snow Buntings on Niagara CBCs appear to be unique to Niagara, it is difficult to interpret these increases, given the nomadic nature of these birds and the relatively small percentage of CBCs that record the species in North America (Root 1988).

This large bunting breeds throughout the high Arctic. In the Nearctic, Snow Buntings winter in Alaska, across southern Canada and the northern United States; they winter in southern and central Ontario, south of Thunder Bay (Rising 1996).

Daniel R. Kozlovic

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*

Common permanent resident

The Northern Cardinal, first described by Linnaeus in 1758 work *Systema Naturae*, is found in woodlands, shrublands, swamps and, more commonly residential areas throughout its range. Once prized as a pet, its sale as a cage bird has been banned since the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was enacted in 1918. The Common name of the Northern Cardinal, as well as the scientific name, refers to the cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church (Holloway 2003). The term “Northern” in the common name refers to its range, as it is the only cardinal found in the Northern Hemisphere (Holloway 2003).

Since the early 1800s, the Northern Cardinal has taken advantage of moderate temperatures, human habitation and provisioning at bird feeders to expand its range northward (Halkin and Linville 1999).

The Northern Cardinal is a permanent resident throughout southern Ontario and a common permanent resident in Niagara. This was not always the case. Sheppard, writing of this species in 1960, commented: “Twenty years ago the Cardinal was a rare bird in the Niagara Frontier area, now it is a common resident of our parks and gardens, which it seems to favour over the more rural sectors where it is decidedly less prevalent.”

The first nest of the Northern Cardinal in Ontario was found in 1901 at Point Pelee, and the species is still continuing its northward expansion (M.A. McLaren 2007d). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 21 April.

A common bird on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts, the Northern Cardinal has been seen on all counts since 1966. This is a bird commonly found in the winter at feeders in Niagara. At Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie on 31 January 1973, 81 cardinals were present at the feeders (JEB).

The species is found throughout eastern and central North America from southern Canada into parts of Mexico and South America.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 24 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 23 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 107 birds in 2004

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 92 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 54 birds in 2004

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 496 birds on the 1993 Niagara Falls CBC

Northern Cardinal
Raymond Barlow



First Atlas: 21 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 21 squares con-
firmed, 2 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
40 of 41 counts, maximum of
107 birds 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on
6 of 40 counts, maximum
of 1 bird

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 1 of 41 counts,
maximum of 1 bird on the 1985
BOS CBC

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident,
extremely rare winter straggler

The male Rose-breasted Grosbeak is one of the most colourful birds to arrive in Niagara in the spring. It can often be seen at the forest edge. The earliest arrival date is 16 April 1969, when a single bird was seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Harold Stiver



The Rose-breasted Grosbeak, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 17 June. One can expect to encounter this species in any reasonably sized woodlot in the area.

This species was observed on only six of the 40 BOS October Counts. The latest fall sighting is 20 October 1985, when a single bird was found on the October BOS Count.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is an extremely rare winter straggler in Niagara with only three winter records. A single bird was observed on the 1985 BOS CBC, and another single bird was present at Wainfleet Township on 7 December 1997 (BOSNR). An overwintering bird was seen at Rose Hill Road from 24 January 1981 to 27 March 1981 (BOSNR). Rose-breasted Grosbeaks winter from central Mexico south to Ecuador, Columbia and Venezuela (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: A Rose-breasted Grosbeak banded at Long Point on 7 September 1978 was encountered on about 1 February 1980 in El Salvador. One banded at Long Point on 18 May 1966 was encountered on 11 November 1970 in Columbia and another banded at Long Point on 26 September 1970 was encountered on about 10 April 1976 in Guatemala.

John E. Black

Indigo Bunting

Passerina cyanea

Spring and fall transient, common summer resident

In breeding plumage, the male Indigo Bunting, is the only small North American finch to appear blue all over. It is frequently seen sitting on wires or in trees on the roadside. The earliest arrival date is 4 May 1969, when a single bird was seen at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). Single Indigo Buntings were seen from 11 May to 31 May on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study. It is not clear how to

estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Indigo Bunting, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 21 June. A single bird was observed on 11 October 1970, the only BOS October Count record for this species. The latest fall date is 12 October 1966, when a single bird was seen at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of this species for Niagara. Indigo Buntings winter mainly from central Mexico south to Panama and northwestern Columbia (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: An Indigo Bunting banded at Rock Point near Dunville on 4 October 2002 was encountered on 15 May 2003 in Pennsylvania.

John E. Black



Indigo Bunting
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 16 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 15 squares confirmed, 8 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 35 birds in 1975

BOS October Count: Reported on 1 of 40 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1970

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Not reported

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris*

Extremely rare visitor

The brilliantly-coloured and visually striking male Painted Bunting is often called the most beautiful bird in North America. Originally described by Linnaeus in his 1758 work *Systema Naturae*, the species is currently listed as a Species of Concern on the Partners in Flight WatchList.

Painted Bunting
Harold Stiver



According to data gathered for the North American Breeding Bird Survey, the Painted Bunting breeding populations declined significantly across its range during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book. Causes for this population decline are not known, but the cage bird trade, habitat loss and Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism are believed to be factors.

The presence of Painted Bunting in Niagara is confined to a single observation. On 13 May 1996, Ainsley Barley looked out of his St. Catharines residence kitchen window after supper to see a flash of colour feeding below his side yard bird feeder. He called his wife Dorothy asking her to bring the camera, and several photographs were taken of this definitive alternate male bird (Dobos 1997, BOSNR). Despite an extensive search of the area the next day, the bird was not relocated.

Painted Bunting breeds in two different regions. The western population breeds from southern Missouri and Kansas to the Gulf Coast and northern Mexico. It winters in Mexico south to Panama. The eastern population breeds along the Atlantic coast from central North Carolina to north-central Florida. It winters on the Florida peninsula, the Florida Keys and the Bahamas (Lowther et al. 1999).

Kayo J. Roy

Dickcissel *Spiza americana*

Occasional visitor

Primarily a bird of the prairie grasslands and farmlands of the Great Plains, the Dickcissel, named for its song, is a wanderer that is frequently found far from its normal range. This species is characterized by periods of absence or extreme scarcity, often appearing in one area only to be totally absent the following year (Austen et al. 1994).

In contrast to its usual irregular southern Ontario occurrence, the Dickcissel was noted five times at the Harold Axtell residence in Fort Erie from 1961 to 1965. Four of these observations were documented by Beardslee and Mitchell (1965), and the fifth was discovered by Harold Axtell and Daniel Salisbury on 17 October 1965 (BOSNR).

The Dickcissel is an occasional visitor to Niagara, and during the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, it was found on only nine occasions. Like a huge magnet, the secluded Axtell property in Fort Erie continued to attract Dickcissel. Four of these nine observations were reported from the Axtell property. Single birds were noted there on 11-12 October 1966 and October to December 1967, an immature on 11-24 November 1969, and a male on 3-7 January 1970 (BOSNR, Harold Lancaster).



On spring evenings in 1994 and 1995, John Black recorded the calls of migrating birds as they flew over St. Davids. When Bill Evans, an expert in nocturnal calls, reviewed the tapes for 15 May 1994, he immediately identified one call to be the Dickcissel's "bzrrrrt" call, which it often gives in flight. This is the only spring Dickcissel record for Niagara (Blanchard and Black 1994). For further clarification and information on the calls heard in this research project, see the article on monitoring migrants on the Port Weller piers in this book.

Dickcissel
Sam Barone

On 27 May 1972, Robert Sundell and Douglas Carlson discovered a Dickcissel in Port Colborne (BOSNR). Paul Benham, John Black and Daniel Salisbury identified one at a Queenston feeder on 28 December 1976.

In 1988, when habitat suitability in the Midwest was affected by severe drought, an irruption of Dickcissel into Ontario and Michigan occurred with over 30 nests reported in southern Ontario alone (Austen et al. 1994). Port Colborne was one of those reported sites. On 23-30 June 1988, a male and female, along with three additional males, were observed on Minor Road with nesting confirmed at this site (Peck 1990). On 6 April 1988, Margaret and Robert Millman found an immature Dickcissel at their residence feeder in St. Catharines. On 21 December 1997, during the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count, Richard Knapton discovered a Dickcissel south of the Queen Elizabeth Way in west St. Catharines. Amazingly, of these fourteen known sightings of Dickcissel in Niagara, all but five have been observed at the somewhat secluded Axtell residential property in Fort Erie.

Dickcissel breeds in the southern Great Plains from eastern North Dakota to Michigan and Indiana, and south to Texas and Louisiana. Irregular breeding has occurred east as far as New Jersey and west to New Mexico and Saskatchewan. It winters in Central America and Northern South America (Temple 2002).

Kayo J. Roy



Bobolink male
Raymond Barlow

First Atlas: 18 squares confirmed,
4 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 11 squares confirmed,
12 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
41 of 41 counts, maximum of
187 birds in 1983

BOS October Count: Reported
on 3 of 40 counts, maximum
of 15 birds in 1985

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident

The earliest arrival date for Bobolink is 28 April 1969, when a single bird was reported from Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). One or two Bobolinks were seen on the Port Weller piers from 13 May to 19 May during the Port Weller Study. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Bobolink, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon, but somewhat local, summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 31 May. During the five years of the second Atlas, Bobolinks were most abundant in the fallow fields west of Fort Erie. The second Atlas indicates that there has been a sharp decline in the annual index of abundance for this species during the years of the second Atlas, with the index only one quarter of what it was during the period of the first Atlas (Gahbauer 2007c).

According to the second Atlas, Bobolinks begin to assemble for their migration south in July. The earliest date for such an assembly is 24 August 1990, when 40 birds were observed at Crescent Beach, Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest dates in October are 20 October 1985, when 15 birds were seen on the BOS October Count, and 20 October 1986, when one bird was seen at the Smithville sewage ponds (HNCNR). There is one November record, that of a single bird seen on 7 November 1967 at Rose Hill Road (BOSNR).

There are no winter records of this species for Niagara. The Bobolink winters in southern South America, mostly east of the Andes (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black



Bobolink female
Raymond Barlow

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident, uncommon winter resident

The Red-winged Blackbird is a permanent resident over much of North America south of Niagara, breeding as far north as James Bay (*National Geographic* 2006). There are three March records of fewer than 10 birds from the BOS Noteworthy Records. Because the Red-winged Blackbird is an uncommon winter straggler, it is difficult to distinguish the first arriving migrants from birds that have overwintered in Niagara. On 3 March 1968, Harold Lancaster observed 100 birds near Pelham. Lancaster also observed over 10,000 birds at Mud Lake in Port Colborne just after sundown on 18 March 1968, and 5,000 birds there just after sundown on 18 March 1969. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Red-winged Blackbird is a very common summer resident in Niagara, and breeding was confirmed in all 25 squares in both atlases. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 3 May. The total number of Red-winged Blackbirds in North America is estimated to be 193 million (Zimmerling 2007a).

Red-winged Blackbirds roost in the Cytek property in Niagara Falls during the autumn. See the species account on the European Starling in this book for more details about this large roost. This species is uncommon in Niagara in the winter. It is unclear which Niagara wintering birds are residents and which are migrants that have come from farther north. Wintering blackbirds have been seen on all years since 1978 on the Niagara CBCs. The largest number recorded was 130 in 1999 on the Port Colborne CBC. That year also yielded a record high for the Niagara Falls CBC, when 123 birds were seen. There are 10 December records, twenty January records and seventeen February records from the BOS Noteworthy Records.

Northern populations of the Red-winged Blackbird winter in southern Ontario and as far south as Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and recovery data: Red-winged Blackbirds banded at Long Point have been encountered in Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 14,786 birds in 1975

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,965 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 11,961 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 32 of 41 counts, maximum of 130 birds on the 1999 Port Colborne CBC



Red-winged Blackbird
Peter Ferguson

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon summer resident, occasional winter straggler

First Atlas: 21 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 16 squares confirmed, 7 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 193 birds in 1966

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 302 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 32 of 40 counts, maximum of 80 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 13 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 on the 1968 BOS CBC

The Eastern Meadowlark is one of the top 20 common North American species in decline, as determined by the National Audubon Society (*Audubon* 2007). It is a permanent resident over much of North America to the south of Niagara and also breeds north of the Great Lakes (*National Geographic* 2006). There are two March records from the BOS Noteworthy Records. Because the Eastern Meadowlark is a rare winter straggler, it is not clear if these birds seen in the spring are arriving migrants or birds that have overwintered in Niagara. The earliest arrival date is 3 April 1977, when 24 birds — far more than could be expected to have overwintered here — were seen on the BOS April Count. During the Port Weller Study, individuals were seen on only four dates: 3 May, 5 May, 18 May and 24 May. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Eastern Meadowlark, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is an uncommon summer resident in Niagara. In the early 1960s this species was a common summer resident here, but by 1970 its numbers had declined substantially. Breeding Bird Survey data show a near significant 1.5% annual decline in Eastern Meadowlark populations in Ontario since 1968 but no change since 1981 (Leckie 2007b). According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 6 May.

The latest October date is 20 October 1985, when two birds were seen on the BOS October Count. There are four BOS Noteworthy Records for November.

The meadowlark is an occasional winter straggler in Niagara. It is not clear if these stragglers are Eastern or Western Meadowlarks because identification is very difficult in the winter. Nor is it clear which of these wintering birds are residents that are overwintering and which are migrants that have come from other locations to spend the winter in Niagara. There are a total of 15 records from the four areas reporting CBCs in Niagara. There are eight December records, seven January records and six February records from the BOS Noteworthy Records. Eastern Meadowlarks winter from southern Ontario south to Mexico (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Eastern Meadowlark
Sam Barone



Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta*

Extremely rare visitor

The Western Meadowlark is not a member of the lark family but of the New World blackbird family Icteridae. When John James Audubon noticed there were significant differences between meadowlarks in the east and west, he gave the western bird its Latin name *neglecta* because it was overlooked for such a long time (Davis and Lanyon 2008). Nonetheless, until the early 20th century, this species was believed to be just another Eastern Meadowlark. The Western Meadowlark is a bird of the open grasslands, prairies, pastures and fields across most of western and central North America. This beautiful, brightly coloured bird is well known for its exceptional flute-like, melodious, warbled song. Abundant and widely distributed in its range, the Western Meadowlark, while known to wander to the eastern provinces and American states, is today being observed there in considerably reduced numbers (Davis and Lanyon 2008).

The first observation of Western Meadowlark for Niagara is that of a bird found between 17 May and 30 May 1953 by Harold Mitchell, Rachel and Harold Axtell, Bernard Nathan and others at Rathfon Point near Port Colborne (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). This same publication identifies numerous records of Western Meadowlark for Niagara prior to 1966. There are as well the following six early additional observations: 30 April 1954 (Queenston), 17 and 27 April 1955 (Thorold), 26 April 1957 (St. Catharines), 24 April, 1 and 8 May 1959 (St. Catharines), 1 and 9 May, 20 June 1961 (St. Catharines), and 25 April and 3 May 1962 (St. Catharines), all reported by Harold Lancaster, a careful and competent Niagara birder.

The decline of Western Meadowlark in Niagara becomes quite apparent given that only five observations are known for the next 11 years (1966-1976), and only two in the 30 years thereafter (1977-2006). The species has clearly become an extremely rare visitor to Niagara.

On 23–24 and 30 April 1966, Daniel Salisbury discovered a Western Meadowlark in Vineland. From 25 May to 20 August 1966, Daniel Salisbury, Arthur Clark and others observed one and sometimes two birds in the Wainfleet Bog. Surprisingly, on 11 June 1966, Robert Andrle and Joseph Thill discovered a nest in the bog with five young (BOSNR, Sheppard 1970). On 4 July 1966, Joseph Grzybowski, Joanna Burger and others located a Western Meadowlark at Fort Erie (BOSNR). On 5 July 1969, to the delight of a great many birders, Robert Farnan found one in a field on Forks Road in Welland. David Freeland discovered a Western Meadowlark in Fort Erie on 17 May 1976 (BOSNR).

On 17 November 1986, George Meyers observed a Western Meadowlark in his backyard in Grimsby (Curry 2006), and on 13 June 1989, Willie D'Anna and others studied a Western Meadowlark in Wainfleet that was last seen on 15 June 1989 when observed by Michael Galas and Richard Collins (BOSNR).

The Western Meadowlark breeds from central British Columbia to northern Michigan and northwest Ohio, south to Missouri, central Texas and northern Mexico. It winters from southern British Columbia and the Central Plains to Mexico and Baja California (Davis and Lanyon 2008).

Kayo J. Roy

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

Extremely rare visitor

The attractive Yellow-headed Blackbird with its brilliant golden-yellow head is a bird of cattail marshes and wetlands chiefly west of the Great Lakes. The male's song has been likened to the sound of the opening of a rusty gate. Under no circumstances could one call its song beautiful, but it is distinctive (Jaramillo and Burke 1999). The Greek word *xanthos* means "yellow" and *cephalus* means "head". Consequently, the genus and species name *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus* means literally "yellow head, yellow head". While widespread and common throughout its range, the Yellow-headed Blackbird is known to wander with some regularity to the east and is found nearly every winter somewhere along the east coast of North America.

The first Niagara record is of a group of 15 birds, including one fully plumaged male, observed every day for a week or more by Norman Mitchinson in the latter part of October 1955 (exact dates unknown) at Stamford Centre near Niagara Falls (Sheppard 1970). On 6 May 1956, Harold Axtell, Bernard Nathan and others discovered an immature Yellow-headed Blackbird at Morgan's Point near Burnaby (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Sheppard 1970).

During the 1966-2006 time frame of this book, there are only three records of Yellow-headed Blackbird for Niagara. On 23 March 1969, George Meyers observed nine birds in flight over Grimsby Beach (Curry 2006). Twenty-four years later, on 23 October 1993, Margaret Cunningham located a Yellow-headed Blackbird at her home in Wainfleet (BOSNR). On 2 May 2003, Tara Allen went out to fill her frontyard bird feeders and noticed a large black bird with an all yellow head busy feeding below one of the feeders. She quickly identified it as an adult male Yellow-headed Blackbird. This well-photographed bird remained to feed at her residence on Highway 20 near Bismark until 4 May 2003.

The Yellow-headed Blackbird breeds from central British Columbia east to the western Ontario border and northern Illinois, south to central California and central New Mexico. A small population is scattered further east along the Great Lakes and into Ohio. It winters from southern Arizona and western Texas south to southern Mexico, with small numbers wintering in California (Twedt and Crawford 1995).

Kayo J. Roy

Yellow-headed Blackbird
Jukka Jantunen





Rusty Blackbird female
below: male
Jukka Jantunen

Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus*

Uncommon spring and fall transient, rare winter resident

The Rusty Blackbird is designated by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada as Threatened in Canada (SARA 2008). It is an uncommon spring transient in Niagara. There are eight March records from the BOS Noteworthy Records. Because the Rusty Blackbird is an uncommon winter straggler, it is not clear if birds seen are arriving migrants or birds that have overwintered in Niagara. The earliest arrival date is 3 April 1995, when many birds were seen at the Cytek property in Niagara Falls, where, at most, only a few birds overwinter (JEB). The Rusty Blackbird was not observed on the Port Weller piers during the five years of the Port Weller Study. The latest date is 21 May in both 1995 and 2006, when five birds and one bird respectively were seen on the BOS May Counts.

The Rusty Blackbird breeds north of the Great Lakes to Hudson Bay. There are no summer records for Niagara.

There are 11 BOS Noteworthy Records for September. The earliest fall date is 11 September 1990, when 20 birds were seen at Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR). There are seven BOS Noteworthy Records for November. Rusty Blackbirds roost on the Cytek property in Niagara Falls in the autumn and early winter months. See the European Starling species account in this section of the book for more details about this large roost site.



BOS April Count: Reported on 32 of 41 counts, maximum of 180 birds in 1991

BOS May Count: Reported on 6 of 41 counts, maximum of 5 birds in 1995

BOS October Count: Reported on 35 of 40 counts, maximum of 640 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 13 of 41 counts, maximum of 19 on the 1998 Port Colborne CBC

A rare winter resident in Niagara, this species is seen infrequently on Niagara Christmas Bird Counts. With only a total of 16 records. Rusty Blackbirds are most numerous in the Port Colborne area in the winter months. For many years, a feeder at the north end of Erie Peat Road in Wainfleet was a reliable location at which to observe these blackbirds in January. There are 10 December, 14 January and 10 February records from BOS Noteworthy Records for this species. Rusty Blackbirds winter in the United States south of New England (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black



Brewer's Blackbird
Harold Stiver

Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*

Rare visitor

Named after American ornithologist and naturalist Thomas M. Brewer, the Brewer's Blackbird is a bird of western North America, where it fills an ecological niche in the west to that filled by the Common Grackle in the east (Jaramillo and Burke 1999). It is commonly found in fields, grasslands, pastures and even in urban areas. Over the last century, the distribution of this western species has seen a significant eastward expansion to the Great Lakes region, taking advantage of suitable habitat created by the felling of forests (Jaramillo and Burke 1999). Competition with the Common Grackle, which also utilizes suburban habitats, may be a factor limiting further expansion of Brewer's Blackbird into the lower regions of southern Ontario.

There are no recorded Brewer's Blackbird observations in Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) or Sheppard (1970).

While there are 20 accepted records of Brewer's Blackbird in neighbouring Hamilton (Curry 2006), only six are known of this rare visitor's presence in Niagara. On 17-18 November 1971, Harold Axtell discovered Niagara's first Brewer's Blackbird at his residence in Fort Erie (BOSNR). On 1 January 1979, while driving along Weaver Road in Fort Erie, Harold Lancaster, Blayne Farnan and Gary Novosel located one in a farmyard along with numerous House Sparrows. Robert Curry identified a female Brewer's Blackbird on 19 September 1993 at the Avondale sewage ponds in Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR). Norm Murr reported two birds at Chippawa on 31 January 1999 (BOSNR). On 23 January 2000, Kayo Roy and William Watson studied an adult male Brewer's Blackbird associating with Brown-headed Cowbirds at an Erie Peat Road residence feeder in Wainfleet (BOSNR). Brandon Holden and others observed this species on 26 April 2006 at the Beamer Memorial Conservation Area in Grimsby (Curry 2006).

The Brewer's Blackbird breeds from southwest Canada east to northwest Ontario, and along the north shores of Lake Superior and Lake Huron, in the west south to Mexico, and south from Illinois through the Midwest to Texas. It winters from southern British Columbia south to Mexico and east along the southern United States to western Florida (Martin 2002).

Kayo J. Roy

Common Grackle

Quiscalus quiscula

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident, uncommon winter resident

Surprisingly, the Common Grackle is one of the top 20 common North American species in decline, as determined by the National Audubon Society (Audubon 2007). Some of this decline may reflect the spread of dew worms (European earthworms) and the resulting changes in the composition of forest floors. It is a permanent resident over much of North America to the south of Niagara and breeds as far north as James Bay (National Geographic 2006).

There are three March records from BOS Noteworthy Records of fewer than 15 birds. Because the Common Grackle is an uncommon winter straggler, it is not clear if these are March sightings of arriving migrants or of birds that have overwintered in Niagara.



Common Grackle
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,293 birds in 1987

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,577 birds in 1966

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 3,523 bird in 2006

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 32 of 41 counts, maximum of 200 on the 1986 St. Catharines CBC

The earliest certain arrival date is 2 April 1974, when Harold Lancaster saw 2,000 birds at Mud Lake in Port Colborne. The abundance of spring transients is unclear because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Common Grackle, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is still a very common summer resident in Niagara. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 20 April. In the Carolinian region, only the European Starling and the Red-winged Blackbird have higher densities than the Common Grackle (Zimmerling 2007b).

Common Grackles roost on the Cytek property in Niagara Falls in the autumn. See the species account for European Starling for more details on this large roost site. In their article in this book, Hamilton and DeLeon note that, on the 11 October 1998 count,

Lynne Landon, David Cooper and Jim Wojewodzki witnessed a “river,” not a “stream” of mixed blackbirds, predominantly grackles, flying south directly overhead near Decew Falls, south of Brock University. It started between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m. and lasted about 30 minutes. When flocks dropped down to feed, the observers took turns with one person checking for the comparative percentage of grackles, redwings and cowbirds on the ground while the other two estimated the numbers going overhead. They did this independently of each other and then compared notes after the “river” had passed. Lynne said that when the last bird had gone they just stood there in awe of what they had seen which, when they got their heads together, turned out to be an estimated 90,000 Common Grackles! This is by far the largest number of a single species recorded in BOS count history, going back to 1935.

This species is uncommon in Niagara in the winter months. It is not clear which of the few wintering birds are summer residents that are staying on and which are migrants that have come from farther north to spend the winter in Niagara. Common Grackles are seen on many, but not all years on the Niagara CBCs. The largest number recorded was 200 in 1986 on the St. Catharines Count. This was an anomalously high number since numbers on all other counts did not exceed 20. There are ten December records, eight January records and five February records in the BOS Noteworthy Records.

The Common Grackle winters from southern Ontario south to the Gulf Coast and southern Florida (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: Common Grackles banded at Long Point have been encountered in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee.

John E. Black

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*

Spring and fall transient, very common summer resident, uncommon winter resident

The Brown-headed Cowbird is a permanent resident over much of North America to the south of Niagara, and it breeds almost as far north as James Bay (*National Geographic* 2006). There are four March records from BOS Noteworthy Records, each of fewer than 20 birds. Because the Brown-headed Cowbird is an uncommon winter straggler here, it is not clear if these early arrivals are migrants or birds that overwintered. The earliest



count arrival date is 3 April 1977, when 67 birds, far more than would normally have overwintered here, were seen on the BOS April Count. It is not clear how to estimate the abundance of spring transients because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Brown-headed Cowbird breeds throughout southern Ontario and is a very common summer resident in Niagara. It lays its eggs in the nests of other species of birds. In fact, it is not unusual for a birder to see a pair of cowbirds watching other birds so as to find the location of their nest where the female cowbird can then deposit her egg.

This species is an uncommon winter resident in Niagara. It is not clear which of the wintering birds are summer residents that are staying on and which are migrants that have come from farther north to spend the winter in Niagara. The species is seen on many, but not all years on Niagara CBCs. There are fifteen December records, twenty-four January records and sixteen February records from the BOS Noteworthy Records.

The Brown-headed Cowbird winters in southern Ontario and the United States (Brewer et al. 2000).

Banding and Recovery Data: Brown-headed Cowbirds banded at Long Point have been encountered in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee.

John E. Black

Brown-headed Cowbird
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 22 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,252 birds 1969

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 702 birds 1977

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 41 counts, maximum of 4,317 birds 1995

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 32 of 41 counts, maximum of 650 on the 1998 Niagara Falls CBC

Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius*

Spring and fall transient, uncommon to rare summer resident

First Atlas: 3 squares confirmed,
1 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 4 squares con-
firmed, 9 probable, 2 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
18 of 41 counts, maximum of 6
birds in 1999

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Not reported

The Orchard Oriole, a Nearctic-Neotropical migrant, is the smallest oriole in North America (Scharf and Kren 1996). It leaves its wintering grounds in March or April and, after spending only a short time on its breeding grounds, returns sometimes to wintering grounds as early as mid-July. The Orchard Oriole is known to nest late, raising only a single brood to accommodate this migratory schedule (Scharf and Kren 1996).

The Latin name *spurius* meaning 'illegitimate' refers to the original misidentification of the male as a female Baltimore Oriole. The Orchard Oriole feeds on insects, fruits, nectar and pollen from flowers (Scharf and Kren). The longest known life span of Orchard Oriole is 9 years, 7 months (Klimkiewicz and Futcher 1989).

The earliest arrival date for the Orchard Oriole in Niagara is 30 April 2004, when a single bird was seen at the Grimsby sewage ponds (HNCNR). There were only two observations of this species on the Port Weller piers during the Port Weller Study. The abundance of spring transients is unclear because they cannot be readily distinguished from those birds arriving to breed in the area.

The Orchard Oriole breeds throughout southern Ontario, although Niagara lies at the northern edge of its breeding range. It was identified as a Species at Risk in Austen et al. (1994) but appears to be making a "come back" and is no longer listed at risk. In Niagara, the number of squares in which the species was listed as probable increased substantially between the atlases. In Ontario, the probability of observation tripled between the atlases (Woodliffe 2007b).

The latest fall date is 25 August 1966, when a single bird was observed at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR).

There are no winter records for Niagara. Orchard Orioles winter from southern Mexico to Columbia and Venezuela (DeGraaf and Rappole 1995).

John E. Black

Orchard Oriole
Raymond Barlow





Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*

Common spring transient and summer resident, fall transient, extremely rare winter straggler

With its bright orange and black plumage, the Baltimore Oriole is one of the more visually stunning birds in Niagara. In the mid-1980s, this species was lumped with its western counterpart the Bullock's Oriole and both were known as Northern Oriole. In the mid-1990s, based on DNA evidence, the American Ornithologists Union Checklist Committee reversed this decision, returning the name of the western population to Bullock's Oriole and the name of the eastern population to Baltimore Oriole. It is a common spring transient in Niagara. The earliest arrival date is 30 April 1990, when a single bird was seen on the Brock University trails (JEB). Baltimore Orioles, including a few breeding pairs, were seen in good numbers on the Port Weller piers from 7 May to 31 May, during the Port Weller Study.

The Baltimore Oriole, which breeds throughout southern Ontario, is a common summer resident in Niagara, and breeding was confirmed in all 25 squares in both atlases. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 10 June.

Baltimore Oriole
Harold Stiver

First Atlas: 25 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 25 squares confirmed,
0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Reported on
36 of 41 counts, maximum of
182 birds in 1971

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 1 of 41 counts,
a single bird on the 1992
Port Colborne CBC

There are four Baltimore Oriole BOS Noteworthy Records for September, ranging from 2 September to 16 September. Harold Lancaster observed single birds on 11 September 1966 at Mud Lake in Port Colborne and on 14 September 1975 at Morgan's Point near Burnaby. There is an October date prior to 1966 that is notable: a single bird was seen from 31 October 1964 to 1 November 1964 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are two winter records: a single bird was seen on 25 December 1992 during the Port Colborne CBC and again in Port Colborne on 3 January 1993 (Ridout 1993:255), and a single bird visited a feeder in Vineland from 2 December 1988 to 12 January 1989 (Weir 1989:311). Baltimore Orioles winter mainly from central Mexico south to Venezuela and Columbia, but also in the West Indies, and uncommonly in Florida and the Atlantic coast north to Virginia (Brewer et al. 2000).

John E. Black

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*

Occasional spring, fall and winter visitor

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 14 of 41 counts,
maximum of 43 birds on the
1972 BOS CBC

The Pine Grosbeak is an occasional spring, fall and winter visitor to Niagara; it is usually seen in small numbers with other finches from November through January. The earliest fall date is 29 October 1978 at Erie Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). There are thirteen January records (BOSNR). There are very few records after 1986. On 4 November 1993, a male was found at Port Weller by Mary Ellen Hebb, and on 16 December 2001, eight birds were found on Foss Road, Pelham, by Marcie Jacklin (KJR). The second largest number of Pine Grosbeaks reported was sixteen birds at Dufferin Island in Niagara Falls on 22 December 1968 (Harold Lancaster). The latest winter dates are 22 January 1966 (BOSNR) and February 2005 (Project FeederWatch). There are no BOS Noteworthy Records for February or March.

Prior to 1966, this species was considered rare and irregular, but influxes with usually three, but sometimes four, five and six-year cycles, were noted when birds were considered common (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Such influxes were noted in 1968, 1972, 1985, 1987, 1993 and 2001, when 20 or more birds were recorded on CBCs in Niagara. Based on CBC data, numbers of Pine Grosbeaks in North America have increased since the early 1990s from about two to four birds per 10 party hours. However, this increase is not evident at feeding trays in the Great Lakes Region, where, typically, between five and ten birds have been seen since 1988 (Project FeederWatch). Trends based on wintering birds are difficult to ascertain, given the erratic migratory nature of the species.

This cardueline finch breeds throughout the subarctic and subalpine conifer, birch, and alder forests of North America and Eurasia (Clement et al. 1993, Adkisson 1999). In Ontario, breeding occurs north of Georgian Bay (Peck and Coady 2007). Largely resident on the breeding range, the species is an erratic migrant to regions south. During periods of food shortage, Pine Grosbeak populations of central and eastern North America may migrate as far south as Nebraska and east to New England (Clement et al. 1993). During such irruptions, individuals are known to invade Niagara.

Daniel R. Kozlovic

Pine Grosbeak female
Kenneth Newcombe



Pine Grosbeak male
Kenneth Newcombe

Purple Finch *Carpodacus purpureus*

Rare spring transient, occasional summer resident, rare winter visitor

First Atlas: 2 squares confirmed, 3 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 2 probable, 3 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 12 of 41 counts, maximum of 19 birds in 1985

BOS May Count: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 6 birds in 1971

BOS October Count: Reported on 21 of 40 counts, maximum of 37 birds in 1981

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 29 of 41 counts, maximum of 27 birds on the 1982 St. Catharines CBC

The Purple Finch occurs regularly in Niagara; it may be seen in small numbers throughout the year. Possible early dates of the passage of spring transients are 4 April in 1971 and 1993 (BOS April Count) and 12 April 1997 in Fonthill (KJR). Harold Lancaster recorded possible transients at Morgan's Point near Burnaby and at Mud Lake in Port Colborne in May during the period 1970 to 1975. Winter records include three in December (1968-1978), eight in January (1966-1986), and none in February; on 28 January 1979, fifteen birds were sighted at Long Beach in Fort Erie (BOSNR). In the winter months an average of three to seven birds may attend feeding trays in Niagara; in some years more than 15 birds have been seen at feeders at one time (Project FeederWatch).

Purple Finches found in Niagara may be permanent residents or migratory individuals. The species was considered a common breeder in the Cattaraugus of western New York State during the 19th century (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). In Niagara, there have been no confirmed breeding records since 1972 (Ontario Nest Records Scheme). Breeding Bird Survey data show a 50% decline in the eastern population (Wootton 1996). Since the mid-1980s, numbers of purple finches on CBCs in the east have decreased from about four to two birds per 10 party hours. This decline appears to be the result of interspecific competition with the House Finch, which has recently colonized the east (Wootton 1987, Shedd 1990). Future trends in numbers of purple finches may be dictated by changes in the population of the eastern House Finch.

Breeding in deciduous, mixed and coniferous forests across Canada, the Purple Finch occurs year-round in southeastern Canada and the northeastern United States (Wootton 1996). This finch breeds throughout Ontario, except in the extreme north and south (Leckie and Cadman 2007a). A partial migrant, birds winter in the southern United States.

Daniel R. Kozlovic

House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus*

Common permanent resident

First Atlas: 18 squares confirmed, 4 probable, 1 possible

Second Atlas: 19 squares confirmed, 6 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 24 of 41 counts, maximum of 365 birds in 1994

BOS May Count: Reported on 23 of 41, maximum of 267 birds in 1995

BOS October Count: Reported on 24 of 40 counts, maximum of 592 birds in 1992

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 29 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,118 birds on the 1994 St. Catharines CBC

The House Finch is a newly established species in Niagara; since 1976, it has become a common permanent resident throughout the region. The House Finch was first noted in Niagara on 8 April 1976 at Rose Hill Road, Fort Erie (BOSNR) and has been recorded annually in Niagara since 1983 (BOS April Count). Harold Lancaster visited one of the first nests in Niagara-on-the-Lake on 23 July 1978. He writes in his notes:

We were given a step ladder in order to view the nest, which was constructed behind a rose trellis protruding above one of the windows of the Dean home. The female finch returned first and within a few minutes was joined by its mate. We observed the latter for several minutes as it came and went from the area while its mate remained on the nest.

First noted on the Niagara Falls CBC in 1978, the species has been recorded every winter since that year. Feeding trays in Niagara may attract 12 to 25 or more individuals at a time from November through March (Project FeederWatch).

An exponential increase in numbers is evident on Niagara CBCs until 1994, after which the population decreased to about half its peak size. Population crashes are not atypical following a period of rapid growth. Individuals at high density encounter factors



that limit population size. These may include pathogens. House finch mortality may be associated with a novel strain of the bacterium *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, which causes severe conjunctivitis and eventual blindness. In Niagara, the prevalence of mycoplasmal conjunctivitis was first recorded in 1995 and peaked in 1998, when infected birds were observed 25-50% of the time during surveys (House Finch Disease Survey 1994-2002, Cornell Lab of Ornithology). Notably, numbers of House Finches have decreased in areas where there is a high incidence of this parasitic bacterium (Dhondt et al. 1998). Given this relationship, the population may be expected to stabilize once pathogen and host attain equilibrium.

Native to western North America, the House Finch was introduced into Hawaii and eastern North America. The species now breeds in Hawaii and throughout Canada, Mexico and the United States, except for portions of the Great Plains, Mexico, southwestern and southeastern Canada (Hill 1993). In Ontario, breeding occurs primarily south of the Canadian Shield and sporadically north to Lake-of-the-Woods (Leckie 2007c). Breeding was first confirmed in the province on 20 June 1978 at Niagara-on-the-Lake (James 1978). Given the close association of the species with human settlement and its superior competitive ability, the subsequent spread of birds was swift (Kozlovic 1987, 1994; Cooper et al. 2007).

Banding and Recovery Data: A House Finch banded at Long Point on 11 May 1980 was encountered on 8 March 1981 in West Virginia. One banded at Long Point on 19 April 1990 was encountered on 4 February 1995 in Ohio.

Daniel R. Kozlovic

top: House Finch
Harold Stiver

bottom: Purple Finch
Jean Iron



Red Crossbill
Harold Stiver

BOS April Count: Not reported

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 3 of 41 counts,
maximum of 6 birds on the
1969 Niagara Falls CBC

Red Crossbill

Loxia curvirostra

Occasional visitor (last seen 1980)

The Red Crossbill, an occasional winter visitor to Niagara, also occurs sporadically in small numbers throughout the year. Spring records include two birds noted at Long Beach in Fort Erie on 16 March 1968, one bird seen at the Adam Beck Generating Station in Niagara Falls on 18 March 1978, 27 individuals observed at Rose Hill Road, Fort Erie, on 28 April 1968 (BOSNR) and two birds observed at Port Weller on 3 May 1969 by Dan Salisbury. Salisbury also observed Red Crossbills in 1970: three birds at Lock 2 of the Welland Canal on

1 June, and 35 birds and 25 birds at Port Weller on 2 and 20 June, respectively. Three summer sightings were made at Rose Hill Road: one bird on 3 June 1973, six birds on 11 July 1969 and one bird on 28 August 1966 (BOSNR). There is no evidence of breeding in Niagara (Simard 2007, Peck and James 1987). In fall, one bird was noted at St. Davids on 31 October 1977 (BOSNR). Ten records for November included high counts of 23 and 40 birds at Long Beach on 11 November 1966 and 19 November 1967, respectively (BOSNR). Additional winter records include four records for February in 1970: two birds at Port Colborne on the 2 February, one bird at Fort Erie on 14 February and three birds at Rose Hill Road on both 15 and 16 February (BOSNR). The last recorded date for this species in Niagara is 16 November 1980, when two birds were seen at Niagara-on-the-Lake (BOSNR). Although seen at feeding trays elsewhere in the Great Lakes Region, Red Crossbills have not been observed attending feeders in Niagara (Project FeederWatch).

Extreme dates noted for the Red Crossbill prior to 1966 were 23 September and 28 July, with birds most commonly observed between 8 November and 25 May (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). The occurrence of the species in Niagara is extremely erratic and appears to be triggered by an increased population and absent or diminished conifer seed resources in the range (Clement et al. 1993). As a result, major flights of birds may occur, most noticeably in late winter or early spring (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965, Adkisson 1996). Such flights appear to have taken place in Niagara in April of 1968 and November of 1966, 1967 and 1969, when 20 or more birds were seen at a time. These influxes were part of larger flights observed in the eastern range. Typically, less than one bird is recorded per 10 party hours on CBCs in the east. Small numbers in Niagara may also be attributed to lack of suitable forage; the region lies in the Carolinian zone, which is characteristically free of conifers.

This unusual finch occurs year-round throughout the coniferous taiga, mixed and montane forests of Eurasia, Canada and the United States. Migrants are known to wander great distances and breed considerably farther south (Adkisson 1996). Breeding occurs throughout Ontario except in the extreme southwest (Simard 2007).

Daniel R. Kozlovic

White-winged Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera*

Occasional spring, fall and winter visitor

Occasional in Niagara, the White-winged Crossbill may be seen in small numbers from October through March. Spring records include sightings of single birds on 19 March 1972 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR), 9 April 1972 (BOS April Count) and 13 April 1966 at Decew Falls in Thorold by Dan Salisbury. There is no evidence of breeding in Niagara (Peck and James 1987, Coady 2007b). Nonetheless, there are two summer observations by Dan Salisbury of birds along the Welland Canal: one bird at Lock 2 on 2 June 1970 and two birds at Lock 3 on 10 July 1969. There are no records for the BOS October Counts; however, 14 birds were noted by Tom Crooks and David Don at Port Weller on 28 October 2001 (BOSNR). Eight BOS Noteworthy Records for November included a high count of 70 birds sighted by Robert Curry and others at Niagara Falls on 21 November 1981. Additional winter records include a single bird seen on 22 January 1964 at Port Weller and a pair seen at Niagara-on-the-Lake on 26 January 1998 (BOSNR). There are four BOS Noteworthy Records throughout February, with a high count of nine birds on 20 February 1978 at Erie Beach in Fort Erie. A single bird was seen at Welland on 25 February 1978 by Harold Lancaster. One to three birds were noted at some feeding stations in Niagara in March 1989 and January 2002.

BOS April Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 1 bird in 1972

BOS May Count: Not reported

BOS October Count: Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 3 of 41 counts, maximum of 13 birds on the 1997 Niagara Falls CBC



White-winged Crossbill
top: female
right: male
Jukka Jantunen

Extreme dates noted for the White-winged Crossbill prior to 1966 were 25 August and 30 May, with birds most commonly observed between 8 November and 27 April (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Occurrence of the species in Niagara is very irregular; during most winters the species is not reported at all. Occasionally, major flights may be witnessed, as during the winters of 1950-1951, 1955-1956, and 1960-1961, when several flocks were encountered (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Apparently, such incursions took place in Niagara during the autumn of 1981 and 2001; however, these influxes were not witnessed throughout the range in the east. Typically, less than one bird is recorded per 10 party hours on CBCs in the east; three to four birds per 10 party hours would suggest an incursion.

The distribution and habits of the White-winged Crossbill are similar to that of its congener, the Red Crossbill (Clement et al. 1993); however, White-winged Crossbills range no farther south than the central United States (Benkman 1992). Breeding occurs throughout Ontario except in the extreme southwest (Coady 2007b).

Daniel R. Kozlovic

BOS April Count: Reported on 5 of 41 counts, maximum of 150 birds in 1978

BOS May Count: Reported on 1 of 41 counts, maximum of 90 birds in 1969

BOS October Count:
Not reported

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 21 of 41 counts, maximum of 520 birds on the 1993 Port Colborne CBC

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

Rare spring, fall and winter visitor

The Common Redpoll is rare but regularly seen in Niagara. It occurs from October through March in small to large pure and mixed flocks, which may include American Goldfinches, Pine Siskins and American Tree Sparrows. Spring sightings were made daily during March 1982 when 20-80 individuals were noted at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest and only spring record included 90 individuals observed on 18 May 1969 (BOS May Count). There are no summer records (BOSNR). Although no birds were noted on the BOS October Count, early fall records at Port Weller included three birds on 27 October 1968 and one bird on 28 October 2001 (BOSNR).

Common Redpoll
Harold Stiver



There are twelve records for November, high counts being 40 and 46 birds at Port Weller in St. Catharines on 23 November 1968 and 4 November 2001, respectively (BOSNR). Very large numbers of birds were observed on Niagara CBCs in 1993: 228 on the BOS CBC, 399 on the Niagara Falls CBC and 520 on the Port Colborne CBC. Common Redpolls were noted daily during January and February, with high counts of 150 birds at Port Weller on 1 January 1969 and 200 birds at Black Creek, Stevensville, on 2 February 1972 (BOSNR). Small numbers of redpolls (five or fewer) may attend some feeding stations in Niagara. In 1994, 1998 and 2004, the mean group size at feeders reached 10-25 individuals (Project Feeder Watch).

Extreme dates noted for the Common Redpoll prior to 1966 were 19 October and 2 May, with the majority of observations made between 12 November and 9 April (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Typical of northern-breeding finches, Common Redpolls are irregular in their occurrence. Irruptive cycles correspond with food availability in the breeding and wintering range (Knox and Lowther 2000). Birds may be numerous in some years, with flock size exceeding 1,000 individuals, and absent in others (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). With few exceptions, southerly winter irruptions in the east have occurred on even-numbered years. This pattern was also evident in Niagara, with greater numbers of birds visiting feeding stations and increased sightings (one to three birds per party hour) on CBCs.

This Holarctic finch breeds throughout open coniferous forests and tundra scrub. In North America it ranges from Alaska to Newfoundland, south to the central United States (Clement et al. 1993, Knox and Lowther 2000). In Ontario, Common Redpolls breed along the Hudson and James Bay Lowlands south to Moosonee (Leckie and Pittaway 2007a), and they winter throughout the remainder of the province (Knox and Lowther 2000).

Daniel R. Kozlovic

Hoary Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*

Occasional winter visitor

The Hoary Redpoll is very rare in Niagara; birds are usually seen singly within flocks of Common Redpolls from November through February. The earliest fall record is of a single bird at Port Weller in St. Catharines on 23 November 1968 (BOSNR). A single bird was also seen at that location on 2-13 December 1968 (BOSNR). One bird was seen on the Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Count on 27 December 1993 on Kalar Road, Niagara Falls, by John Miles. There are two observations for January 1994: one bird on 2 January at Niagara Falls and two birds on 18 January in Wainfleet Township (BOSNR). The latest February records are from Dan Salisbury of two birds and one bird reported at Port Weller on 24 and 25 February 1969, respectively (BOSNR). Kayo Roy photographed a bird at his feeder in St. Catharines on 13 January 1994 and observed it again on 9 February 1994. He also identified a bird at his feeder in Fonthill 5 March 2004 and again 14 March 2004. On 3 March 1969, a Hoary Redpoll was seen in the company of twenty Common Redpolls off Highway 8 at Fifteen Valley by Dan Salisbury. Small numbers of Hoary Redpolls (less than three) were observed at some feeders in December 1995, January-March 1996 and March 2003; this number increased to three to seven birds during March 1998 and February 2007 (Project FeederWatch).

Hoary Redpoll
hornemanni subspecies
Kayo Roy



BOS April Count: Not reported
BOS May Count: Not reported
BOS October Count:
Not reported
Niagara Christmas Bird Counts:
Reported on 1 of 41 counts,
maximum of 1 bird on the 1993
Niagara Falls CBC

Extreme dates noted for the Hoary Redpoll prior to 1966 were 22 December and 2 April, with most records from January to March (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). In most cases, Hoary Redpolls are observed in flocks of Common Redpolls and thus are more likely to be seen during years of population irruption of the latter species in the south. Based on banding and CBCs in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Hoary Redpolls comprise about 1.3% of the redpoll population (Knox and Lowther 2000).

This small, bright finch breeds throughout the High Arctic regions of the world and ranges in North America from Alaska to the Labrador Peninsula (Clement et al. 1993). The Hoary Redpoll is rare in Ontario and documented in only a few isolated places in the breeding range, which lies along the coast of Hudson Bay (Leckie and Pittaway 2007b). Breeding was only confirmed in 2004 in the extreme north of the province, along the Manitoba border (Peck and Peck 2006).

Daniel R. Kozlovic



Post-2006 Observation

The Hoary Redpoll is frequently referred to as the denizen of the High Arctic and is an extremely rare visitor to Niagara. There are two Hoary Redpoll subspecies; the more widespread low Arctic *exilipes* and the Canadian Arctic islands and Greenland *hornemanni*, the largest, palest and rarest redpoll (Ron Pittaway pers. comm.). When observed in Niagara, the Hoary Redpoll *exilipes* is almost always in the company of the often seen Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*. The Greenland race Hoary Redpoll is larger and much paler or frosty-looking, with a small bill, an obvious white rump and a noticeably longer tail. On 2 April 2009, in company with four Common Redpolls, a very large, frosty, long-tailed, pale-looking redpoll was observed at Kayo Roy's balcony feeder at 13 Kinsman Court in Fonthill. Photographs were taken that clearly showed these field marks as well as the all-white rump. The obvious size difference of the Hoary Redpoll compared to the American Goldfinch and several Pine Siskins that fed together on the niger seed feeder was clearly apparent. This great rarity in southern Ontario (Ron Pittaway pers. comm.) represents the first known documented record of Hoary Redpoll *hornemanni* for Niagara. Photo: Kayo Roy

First Atlas: 1 square confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 0 squares confirmed, 1 probable, 1 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 8 of 41 counts, maximum of 10 birds in 1988 and 1990

BOS May Count: Reported on 6 of 41 counts, maximum of 50 birds in 1990

BOS October Count: Reported on 21 of 40 counts, maximum of 198 birds in 1969

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 23 of 41 counts, maximum of 150 birds on the 1986 St. Catharines CBC

Pine Siskin *Carduelis pinus*

Uncommon spring, fall and winter visitor

The Pine Siskin occurs regularly in Niagara. It is usually seen in small numbers, occasionally in large flocks, in the company of other finch species, from September through May. Breeding was confirmed in only one atlas square on 9 May 1984 at Port Weller. The latest spring record is for 20 May 1990, when 50 birds were observed on the BOS May Count. The earliest fall record is from Niagara-on-the-Lake on 14 September 1990, when three birds were seen (BOSNR). Fall observations include six records for September (BOSNR). At Queenston on 12 October 1987, 200 birds were noted (BOSNR). The species was seen throughout November and December, with 150 birds reported at Queenston on 2 November 1969 (BOSNR). Additional winter sightings include 15 records throughout January and February (BOSNR). Small numbers of Pine Siskins (five to ten) were observed visiting some feeding stations in Niagara during January-March 2003, and March 2004 and 2006 (Project FeederWatch).

Pine Siskin
Harold Stiver



Prior to 1966, Pine Siskin was described as irregular but fairly common and most numerous between 17 October and 8 December, with extreme dates of occurrence as late as 17 May. Breeding occurred March-August, but birds appeared erratically, if at all, during the summer months (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Similarly, numbers of siskins may fluctuate greatly from year to year, with no apparent regularity. Generally, CBCs in the east reported two to ten Pine Siskins per 10 party hours. Participants on CBCs in Niagara may expect to see about one Pine Siskin per 10 party hours; however, during peak years this number may increase to about 20 birds per 10 party hours, as witnessed in 1981 and 1986 (CBC data). There appears to be no significant population trend for the species, except for Pacific Coast populations, which have shown a slight annual decline of about 6% (Dawson 1997).

The characteristic wheezy song of the Pine Siskin may be heard throughout the conifer and mixed wood forests of North America (Clement et al. 1993). The species breeds throughout Ontario except in the extreme southwest. The most southerly confirmed record of breeding is along the Lake Erie shore near Long Point (Pittaway 2007).

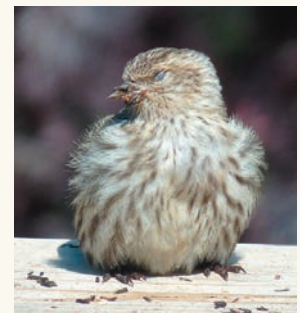
Banding and Recovery Data: A Pine Siskin banded at Rock Point near Dunville on 6 November 2004 was encountered on 26 January 2005 in Illinois.

Daniel R. Kozlovic

Post-2006 Observation

The winter of 2008-2009 was a banner year for Pine Siskin in Niagara. A massive irruption of these northern birds to the region was nothing short of spectacular.

The birds moved south, likely due to a poor food supply of cone crops in the coniferous woods of the boreal forests. Reports of large numbers of Pine Siskin in Niagara began in late November 2008. On the balcony floor and on the niger seed feeder at 13 Kinsman Court in Fonthill on 9 December 2008, more than 100 feeding Pine Siskins were counted. Every day a minimum of 50-60 siskins was observed, with more than 150 individuals counted on 27 January 2009. This influx of Pine Siskins continued well into May 2009, when smaller numbers visited the feeders. Included in this mass of Pine Siskins over the months was a minimum of nine green morph Pine Siskins. These individuals revealed the greenish hue to the upper parts and had more yellow in their wings and tail. While no nests were located, several pairs of Pine Siskins nested in the backyard pine trees. A number of young birds that retained a considerable amount of fluffy white downy feathering were photographed on 12 May 2009 on the wooden balcony railing.



Downy young Pine Siskin
Kayo Roy



American Goldfinch
Barry Cheriére

American Goldfinch *Carduelis tristis*

Common summer resident, uncommon winter resident

The American Goldfinch, the most abundant finch species in both Ontario and Niagara, may be seen here in weedy fields, orchards and gardens throughout the year. The species was observed throughout March at Rose Hill Road, Fort Erie, in 1971 and 1972 (BOSNR). The probability of encountering this common summer resident in the Carolinian region during the second Atlas was greater than 95% (Leckie and Cadman 2007b). A flight of 660 goldfinches took place along the shore of Lake Ontario on 7 November 1994 (see the article by Paul Summerskill in this book). On 8 January 1967, 200 American Goldfinches were reported at Chippawa. The species was seen throughout February 1971 on Rose Hill Road (BOSNR). It is a common visitor to gardens in Niagara. Feeders attract average group sizes of five to twelve birds and occasionally more than 25 individuals (Project FeederWatch).

Prior to 1966, American Goldfinch was described as common during the period 5 May to 10 November and uncommon to sometimes fairly common in winter (Beardlee and Mitchell 1965). CBC participants in Niagara generally encountered 10-25 birds per 10 party hours; in 1978 about 65 birds per 10 party hours were recorded. The presence of feeding trays has been suggested as a possible factor in determining the winter distribution and abundance of this species (Root 1988). Analysis of CBC data indicates no significant change in population size of wintering birds in Ontario; however, the Breeding Bird Surveys suggest a decline in eastern populations (Middleton 1993). This trend may reflect changes in land use and resulting decrease of preferred old field and shrubby habitats in eastern North America. In Ontario, American Goldfinches are most abundant in the Lake Simcoe-Rideau region and less so in areas of intensive agriculture, such as the Carolinian region (Leckie and Cadman 2007b).

This brightly coloured finch may be found throughout the temperate regions of North America; in Ontario, American Goldfinches breed throughout the south as far north as the Moose River and Lake-of-the Woods (Middleton 1993, Leckie and Cadman 2007b).

Banding and Recovery Data: An American Goldfinch banded at Rock Point near Dunville on 30 August 2002 was encountered on 28 January 2003 in Texas. Other banded birds have been encountered in Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Daniel R. Kozlovic

Evening Grosbeak *Coccothraustes verspertinus*

Occasional spring, fall and winter visitor

This large finch is occasionally observed in Niagara; when seen it is in small numbers, sometimes at feeders, from October to May. Spring records include 45 individuals seen throughout March in 1972 at Rose Hill Road in Fort Erie (BOSNR). The latest spring date is of one bird at Morgan's Point near Burnaby on 25 May 1969 (BOSNR). There are no summer records. The earliest fall date is 16 October 1983, when 15 birds were reported from the BOS October Count. The species was noted throughout November (11 records, 1966-1999), with a high count of 45 birds at Fort Erie on 23 November 1977 (BOSNR). Feeding trays in Niagara attracted small numbers of grosbeaks (five or less) during the winters of 1993, 1994, 2005 and 2006 (Project FeederWatch). On the 1985 Niagara Falls CBC, a notable number of birds were counted in Niagara.

First Atlas: 20 squares confirmed, 5 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas: 18 squares confirmed, 7 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 38 of 41 counts, maximum of 118 birds in 1971

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 528 birds in 1968

BOS October Count: Reported on 39 of 40 counts, maximum of 323 birds in 1967

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 454 birds on the 1994 St. Catharines CBC

BOS April Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 45 birds in 1972

BOS May Count: Reported on 4 of 41 counts, maximum of 12 birds in 1976

BOS October Count: Reported on 2 of 40 counts, maximum of 43 birds in 1985

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 17 of 41 counts, maximum of 131 birds on the 1985 Niagara Falls CBC



Evening Grosbeak
Sam Barone

During the winter of 1889-1890, some 20 specimens were collected at Sherkston in Fort Erie (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Apparently, this range expansion resulted from the extensive planting of box elder trees and recurring outbreaks of spruce budworm in the east, both of which provided suitable forage and allowed for the establishment of breeding grosbeak populations (Gillihan and Byers 2001). Indeed, areas of Ontario with significant budworm outbreaks also supported the highest breeding densities of grosbeaks (Hoar 2007). Depending on food abundance, the species may be relatively common in some years and rare or absent in others. Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) noted winter influxes of the species in roughly two-year cycles from 1945-1962. Since 1992, however, CBCs in the east have revealed a gradual decrease in numbers of wintering grosbeaks. In the last ten years a total of only nine birds have been seen on the Niagara CBCs. Continental breeding populations show a significant decline for the period 1980–1999 (Sauer et al. 2000).

The Evening Grosbeak is found year-round in mixed forest regions across Canada, the northeastern and western United States and central Mexico (Gillihan and Byers 2001). In Ontario, the species breeds on the Canadian Shield north to Pickle Lake and Moosonee (Hoar 2007). The range of the Evening Grosbeak has undergone considerable expansion; once restricted to the west, the grosbeak population gradually spread and by the turn of the 20th century had invaded the east (Gillihan and Byers 2001).

Daniel R. Kozlovic

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Very common permanent resident (introduced)

The House Sparrow, formerly known as English Sparrow, was first intentionally introduced into North America in the fall of 1850 in Brooklyn, New York to control insects. It has become one of the most widespread wild birds in the Americas as it follows human beings all over the New World and throughout the planet (Lowther and Cink 2006).

The English and scientific names of the House Sparrow have the same meaning. The Latin word *passer*, like the English word “sparrow” was a term for small active birds coming from a root word referring to speed. The Latin word *domesticus* means “of the house” like the common name, a reference to the long association between the sparrow and human beings (Lewis and Kingery 1918; Partridge 1983; Summers-Smith 1988).

Reaching Ontario in 1870, the House Sparrow is rarely found far from human habitation. The exact date of this small, granivorous and insectivorous songbird's arrival in Niagara is not known. Sheppard (1960) comments on the House Sparrow's presence in the region in the 1950s, 100 years after its Brooklyn release: "An abundant resident, the so-called English Sparrow is one of the commonest and most omnipresent birds in the district."

The House Sparrow is a permanent resident throughout southern Ontario and is a very common permanent resident in Niagara. The establishment of House Sparrows in the Buffalo area probably followed the introduction of this species into Rochester between 1867 and 1869. The first nest record in the BOS study area was at Lockport on 16 May 1878 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). The earliest record in Niagara is of 50 individuals seen on an unofficial Christmas Bird Count in Vineland on 24 December 1926, reported by George Dickson, William Hurlburt and E.F. Palmer (Marcie Jacklin pers. comm.).

In both breeding bird atlases, the House Sparrow was confirmed breeding in all 25 squares. According to the Ontario Nest Record Scheme data, the earliest egg date for this species in Niagara is 6 May.

An abundant bird on the Niagara Christmas Bird Counts, the House Sparrow is commonly found in Niagara throughout the winter.

John E. Black

First Atlas: 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

Second Atlas; 25 squares confirmed, 0 probable, 0 possible

BOS April Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 1,218 birds in 1967

BOS May Count: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 2,109 birds in 1967

BOS October Count: Reported on 40 of 40 counts, maximum of 1,110 birds in 1966

Niagara Christmas Bird Counts: Reported on 41 of 41 counts, maximum of 3,349 birds on the 1996 Niagara Falls CBC

House Sparrow
Raymond Barlow



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