

BIRDFINDING IN CANADA

November 1983

Vol.3 No.6



ISSN-0229-5024

Record Keeping

Notice the new heading? No more "Statisticae Canadensis." At least not in this issue.

We've often noted the negative reactions when words like "statistics" or "lists" are used. But "records" or "field notes" are the semantic good guys. Some birders keep records but would never admit to maintaining lists.

The fact is that one of the enjoyable phases of birding is recording what we see and relating it to some kind of success or accomplishment factor. Observers who adopt some sort of challenge or discipline (not just in birding) are quite likely to find it enhances their knowledge and makes the whole exercise more enjoyable and rewarding.

There is an interesting range of polarization of thought in this regard. Not long ago, we received this message from a subscriber. "I find the statistics completely boring. You can skip them. They're not of one bit of interest." Two days later, another note arrived. "If 25% of your subscribers report statistics and respond to your questionnaires, how come you allot only 10% of your space to the subject. Let's have more." So there we are. Caught in the middle.

We intend to continue with this facet of birding news and keep trying to please as many readers and displease as few as possible. We think it's fun. It's harmless. It provides a unifying thread coast-to-coast. Imagine baseball without batting averages? Same with birding.

One item we had to leave out of our September issue was "ATPAT's." This term means life lists of birders for All Territories and Provinces Added Together. It was first suggested to us by Dave Mark and Eric Tull (two diligent ATPATters) as a bench mark for measuring the extensiveness and thoroughness of an observer's coverage of the total country. Recognizing that one of its factors vulnerable to criticism is that small provinces (e.g. P.E.I.) are treated the same as larger ones, we defend it as having both usefulness and charisma.

Based on latest information (figures submitted within the past 7 months) here are the top two dozen ATPAT scores.

Eric Tull, Westmount, Que.	2667	Dan Brunton, Ottawa, Ont.	1548
Bruce Mactavish, St. John's, Nfld.	1977	Angus MacLean, Alma, N.B.	1517
Roger Burrows, Glovertown, Nfld.	1847	Bruce Di Labio, Ottawa, Ont.	1480
Hue MacKenzie, Burnaby, B.C.	1780	Roger Foxall, Ottawa, Ont.	1450
Dave Mark, Tonawanda, N.Y.	1769	David Stirling, Victoria, B.C.	1432
Mike Bentley, Inuvik, N.W.T.	1749	Roger Taylor, Ottawa, Ont.	1337
Jo Ann MacKenzie, Burnaby, B.C.	1710	Blake Maybank, Rocky Harbour, Nfld.	1234
Gerry Bennett, Woodbridge, Ont.	1674	Stan Shadick, Saskatoon, Sask.	1186
Alex Gray, Mississauga, Ont.	1574	Bill Crins, Mississauga, Ont.	1133
Richard Poulin, Ottawa, Ont.	1566	Richard Cannings, Vancouver, B.C.	1096
Mark Gawn, Ottawa, Ont.	1561	Chris Adam, Regina, Sask.	996
Luke Fazio, Mississauga, Ont.	1553	Sheldon McGregor, Ajax, Ont.	902

There are two other categories we toyed with for a while. These were assigned acronyms of SYATPAT (single year ATPAT) and BYATPAT (hash total of each best year ATPAT). These generated very little interest and we're discontinuing them. However, if anyone does wish to continue reporting them, fine -- we'll pass them directly to the few others that are interested but not by use of space in any of our future issues.

New subject - Location Lists. Here is a term so flexible that it could relate to a small city lot, a county, a city park or, indeed, a whole country.

Let's start with the small area. Here's a letter from Jim Coey in Mississauga, Ont. " I have kept a list of birds seen from my garden. Any bird seen as long as I am on the property is acceptable. My total is 37 species. Is that all, you say? Well, my lot is 60' x 120' in suburban Mississauga with not many shrubs."

Our comments. First, when it comes to location lists, we're strong on the "on-or-from" formula where small areas are concerned. This means you count birds noted from the property even if they're across the street. Conversely, if you're the one who's across the street but the bird is on your lot, you count it too. This may be too flexible for purists or for more official checklists such as those for a county or National Park, or whatever.

Second, the trouble with lot lists is that they're not comparative and so are usually of interest only to one person. For example, from a tiny lot on the shore of Pratt's Pond in Cobourg, Ont. where we lived for just two years, we ran up a lot list of 174 species. The reason for this high total was that the pond not only had a wide variety of waterfowl both spring and fall but also had a large mud flat area visited by hundreds of shorebirds. For the past 18 years, we have lived on a 10-acre rural lot with plenty of woodlot-and-field habitat but it took us 16 of those years to reach the 174 plateau to match Cobourg. Also, in 7 years, on a postage-stamp size lot in Etobicoke (a suburb of Toronto) we never got past 30 species for our lot - no potential at all.

Let's now talk about larger locations - like Canada and Provincial lists. At present, we have total Canada, 10 Provinces, Yukon and the Northwest Territories - 13 entities in all. Perhaps you keep the N.W.T.'s by Mackenzie, Keewatin and Franklin (and, eventually, Deneland et al) so that would make it 15 or more.

Now, who can say, as of any given date, how many species of birds have ever been identified (or, if you wish, accepted by the official decision-maker) in each of these political or geographical entities? This is a problem we face constantly.

We recently visited the National Museum of Canada and discussed this with the Ornithological Dept. We learned that no specific attempt is made to keep an "at-the-ready" figure of the number of species on Canada's checklist. In fact, no one has produced such a list since Eric Tull's was published more than 10 years ago by the Canadian Nature Federation when the Canada list was pegged at 537 species. Of course, when Earl Godfrey's new "Birds of Canada" is published (and it's ready now) one can always add up the species and say that is the total Canada list as of now.

So what about the Provinces? Here, a lack of uniformity exists as to who or what is the official governing body on bird checklists. In one it may be the local Museum; in another the Federation of local naturalists' clubs and yet one more may have a committee of birdwatchers. Because of this, we face a dilemma in determining such totals for our purposes.

This is the major reason why we have not attempted to combine percentage indices (thresholds) with absolute numbers (life lists) when publishing personal statistics. It is also partly why we haven't applied uniform thresholds for each province when publishing list data, a matter that appears to be of some understandable concern to some readers.

On Page 23 we're showing the latest totals we have for the number of species "accepted" as having been recorded in Canada, the Provinces and Territories. We'd greatly appreciate being updated by whomever has accurate updated data. Please let us know what the new total(s) are for any of these, advising at the same time, who verified the number and what that party's official status as the recognized authority is. This would be a giant and helpful step in getting this train of thought back on the track.

(Continued on Page 23.)

So, here they are:

		Canada	- 550		
British Columbia	- 410	Saskatchewan	- 330	New Brunswick	- 340
Yukon Territory	- 210	Manitoba	- 330	Nova Scotia	- 370
Northwest Territories	- 240	Ontario	- 400	Prince Edward Island	- 360
Alberta	- 340	Quebec	- 360	Newfoundland	- 290

We are big on National Parks as interesting and hospitable places for birders to spend their leisure time. Quite a few of our subscribers do turn in life lists for several of these locations. The more popular and frequented ones appear to be Pacific Rim; Waterton Lakes; Banff; Jasper; Prince Albert; Riding Mountain; Point Pelee; Forillon; Kouchibouguac; Fundy; Gros Morne; Terra Nova and Prince Edward Island.

Here are some life lists reported to us within the past year and a half which we publish here mainly to generate further interest in this phase of record keeping.

Banff - Dan Brunton, Ottawa, Ont.	161
Prince Albert - Blake Maybank, R. Harbour, Nfld.	176
Riding Mountain - Angus MacLean, Alma, N.B.	219
Point Pelee - Alan Wormington, Leamington, Ont.	310
Fundy - David Christie, Albert, N.B.	199
Prince Edward Island - Angus MacLean, Alma, N.B.	195
Gros Morne - Blake Maybank, Rocky Harbour, Nfld.	131

With this issue, we enclose a newly-revised questionnaire for reporting any numbers you wish to submit. On its reverse side, space is provided for National Parks life lists so, hopefully, we'll have more to say about this in a future issue. Also, as with the National, Provincial and Territories' checklist levels, any and all information on totals for each of the Parks will be most welcome.

Now -- how far do we intend to go with location figures? Well, you report for any areas you wish and we'll see what interest results from them. It is, of course, desirable, when you're reporting on areas of your own selection, that you define the limits and give us the best estimate of what the total checklist level (if there is a checklist) would be.

In the past few years, Alan Wormington has developed life list data on a selected number of Ontario locations (Point Pelee, Presqu'île Park, Rainy River District, etc.) and many of our subscribers have been reporting directly to him. At Alan's request, BIRDFINDING IN CANADA is taking over this series of records. We had hoped to have more to say about it in this issue but, obviously, we're running out of space. So, we'll get back to it in 1984. Meanwhile, anyone wishing to report numbers for Ontario locations, previously submitted to Alan, may show them on the back of the questionnaire, or on a separate sheet, and we'll take it from there.

And we are, of course, just as interested in these types of figures from all provinces.

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