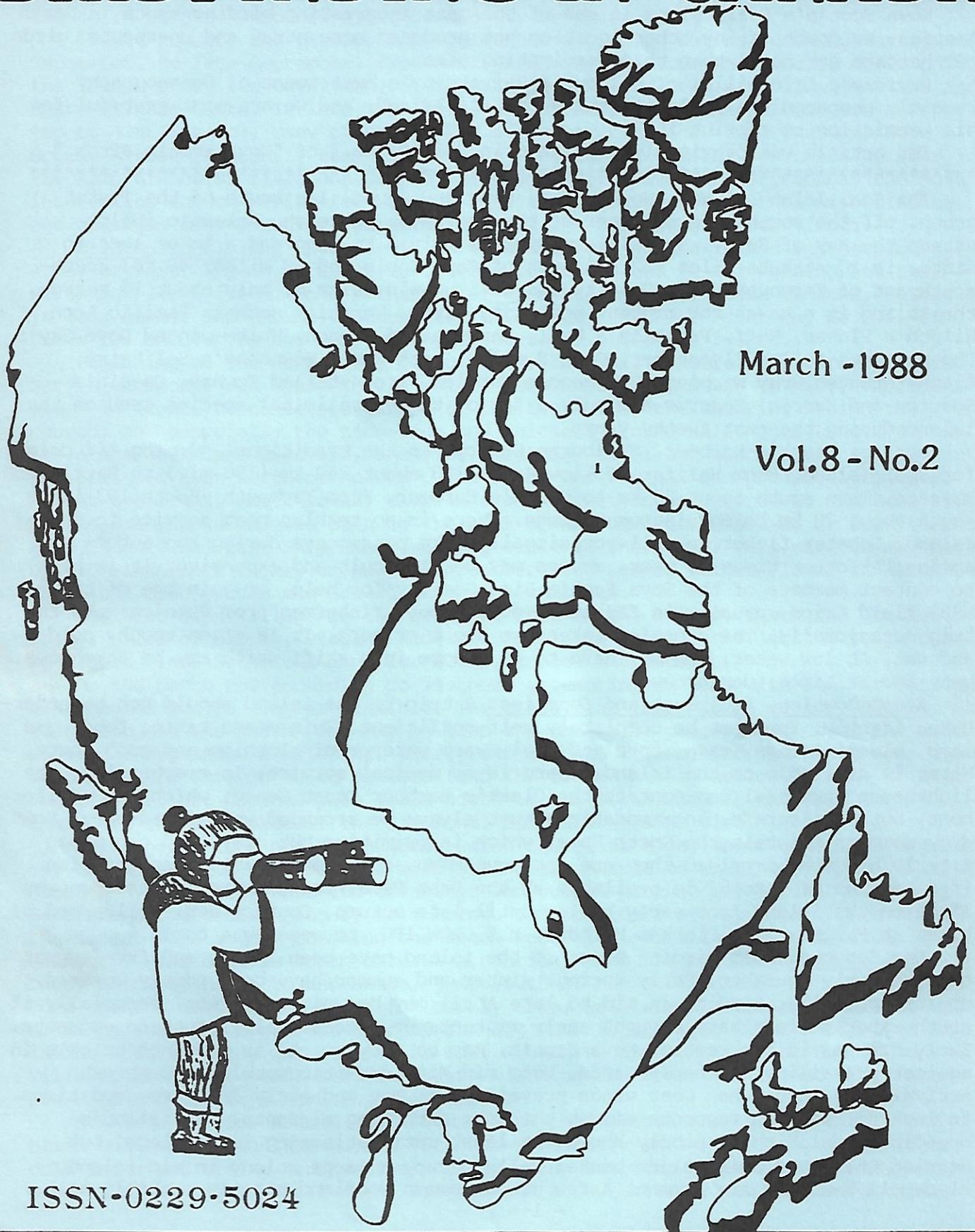


BIRDFINDING IN CANADA

March -1988

Vol.8 - No.2



ISSN-0229-5024

BIG DAY IN QUEBEC

In our January '88 issue, we wrote about "The Big Year" - an enjoyable type of birding project.

Probably even more challenging, at least in some aspects, is the popular and well-publicized "Big Day," an exercise that involves birders observing as many species as possible in an unbroken 24-hour period. The dimensions of the area to be covered are defined by the observers.

Whereas a Big Year entails long range planning with lots of second chances, the preparation of a Big Day relates heavily to knowing one's location so well that pin-point match-up of habitat to species becomes a prime factor.

A Big Day combines the ultimate levels of commitment, stamina, planning and sheer fun. It can be gratifying or disappointing. And, even if it doesn't turn out as hoped, there's always tomorrow, or next year.

On May 29, 1987, a trio consisting of Danielle Ruest, Guy Gendron and Tristan ap Rheinallt, observing in the Rimouski sector of Quebec's St. Lawrence River shoreline, went all out in quest of the one-day record for that province.

Tristan has written up his story of the Big Day. Here is an abridged version.

"Only five minutes of the 28th of May remain. Seated in the car, waiting for the radio to give the signal for midnight, my thoughts drift back to the day, three years ago, when we set a Big Day record for the province of Quebec with 153 species. Now, as then, our selected area centred on the city of Rimouski, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, some 320 km northeast of Quebec City. We are blessed with a great variety of habitats, from boreal forest to marshland. And, although we are at 48° N. Lat., a number of "southern" species breed in our area.

Outside, the night is calm, clear and warm, with the shifting curtains of the aurora borealis being punctured from time to time by a shooting star.

Now, a new day has begun! We waste no time getting started. All three of us have previous Big Day experience and a detailed knowledge of the local birds, even though mine is somewhat rusty, owing to two years spent back home in the U.K.

Almost before he's out of the car, Guy hears an American Woodcock and a Common Snipe. It is a perfect night for birding. We try for a Long-eared Owl but it fails to respond. This is soon offset as our visits to other wooded sites produce items like Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Pied-billed Grebe and American Bittern. Then to keep us encouraged, a Long-eared Owl is heard at a new site. In the stillness, sounds seem to carry for miles.

Our final stop before a 3 A.M. breakfast is a small marsh where both Sora and Virginia Rail are regular. The latter fails to respond, but a Short-billed Dowitcher calling as it flies overhead is some compensation. By breakfast, we have 19 species.

After breakfast, in a restaurant where all but ourselves seem to belong to the night, not morning, we rush to one of the local ponds where, in the half-light, our list takes off for real with a dawn chorus of many passerine species. Included is a Warbling Vireo at its only expected site in our whole itinerary.

A brisk walk along a river bank enables us to add the potentially hard-to-list Ruffed Grouse. We are pleasantly surprised when, along with the Black-capped Chickadees, we hear the distinctive note of a Boreal.

As the light increases, more species manifest themselves. Danielle spots a Ruby-throated Hummingbird in flight. A few minutes later, the hoped-for Fox Sparrow is heard. Also present are Mourning Dove and Golden-crowned Kinglet. All these three are easy to miss in a day's birding in this sector.

Our next move represents a significant departure from tradition. Our usual strategy has been to spend the first few hours of daylight getting the breeding songsters as quickly as possible when they're most vocal, leaving the rest of the day (timed to include a high tide) to concentrate on aquatic birds. The problem

with this approach is that by late May many migrant seabirds, such as scoter, have become scarce. By far the best time of day to see them is early morning as they fly past. So, we decided to take a half-hour to seawatch. We immediately see action in the distance. Along with the inevitable large numbers of Common Eider, there are some scoters. Through the 'scope, we identify both Surf and Black Scoter; then Guy spots a single individual of the more difficult White-winged flying past. Our next good species is a Red-throated Loon. We also add Black Guillemot.

We leave well satisfied. On our way to a large marsh, a short detour brings us our expected Eastern Meadowlark. In the salt marsh, from a vantage point high above, we quickly find Black-crowned Night-Heron, more ducks and shorebirds. A Northern Harrier flies over the marsh. In the distance we spot an Osprey and a Gannet. As we watched, we got our first 'bonus' species of the day - a Water Pipit calling as it flies over. This species has usually disappeared by the end of May.

A glance at our watches shows that time is passing quickly and we rush off to a small quay in the Bay of Rimouski. Lesser Scaup is added. I spot a male Barrow's Goldeneye among a large group of its congeners. It disappeared for a moment making me wonder if I'd started hallucinating. Hoped for Common Mergansers weren't there.

It is now 6:15 A.M. and we already have 89 species with plenty of passerines still to come. Roadwork construction has put us behind schedule but we hope to make up time later. At a small pond, a Green-backed Heron failed to show for us.

We leave Rimouski and make for woodlands to the south. Several stops for some specific nesting species - Northern Oriole, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Wood Thrush - all of which were checked out yesterday, pay off as they are all duly found. Shortly after 9 o'clock our total of 118 species included most of those expected. Some of those still missing should be at our next woodland site.

We add Great Crested Flycatcher and Cliff Swallow on the way. As we leave the car for the woods, we realize the weather has turned very warm. Even so, birds are still singing and we soon add Solitary Vireo and Blackburnian Warbler. A Hairy Woodpecker is heard - another bird that can easily be missed. The heat turns out to have positive consequences. A few raptors appear above the mountain slopes to the south. Most are Rough-legged Hawks, unusually common this spring, but we also see Broad-winged and Sharp-shinned, which we could well have missed on a cold day. Our second 'bonus' species is a Peregrine Falcon. Like the pipit, this is a late date.

As we munch a few sandwiches by the car, we evaluate our chances. We've missed a number of species - Cape May Warbler, Brown Creeper, Scarlet Tanager, Evening Grosbeak, Cedar Waxwing - possibly an irrevocable situation. I estimate the final total at 146 species. Nevertheless, the continuing good weather is a definite plus.

We go back to the coast. An hour later, we have added nothing, and the inevitable mid-day doldrums set in. But, a change of habitat - the Mont Joli airport - brings us the expected Upland Sandpiper and Horned Lark. We are lucky to spot one lone Canada Goose swimming just offshore. Ring-billed Gulls nearby brings our total to 135 with 8 hours of daylight left and 19 species to get. It seems to me that only a good showing of shorebirds can bring us our desired level of success.

The easternmost point of our route is the Bay of Metis. I spot a King Eider in the distance. Guy, who has done all the driving so far, rouses himself from a position that, to me, is suspiciously close to horizontal, to look at the bird.

As the bay yields nothing more, we start to make our way slowly back westward, stopping frequently to check for white-winged gulls and shorebirds. Our progress is slow; our tiredness increases. Eventually, we manage to find both Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, but many sites, including the famous marsh at Pointe-au-Père, yield nothing at all that we need. When we realize that, in a little under 5 hours, we've added only 7 species, our hopes for the record recede, and only Danielle retains any vestige of optimism. In desperation, we try a brief stop at the eastern end of the Bay of Rimouski, even though the tide appears a bit high. Sure enough, all that projects from the water is a single small, rocky outcrop. "Dunlin!" someone calls, and within a few minutes we have it plus Ruddy Turnstone and Semipalmated Sandpiper.

We now have 141 species and it is nearly 4 P.M. A glance at the list shows us that, to have any chance at the record, we have to try for any and every species, no matter how unlikely.

The first stage of this plan is a return to the quay for a second try for a Common Merganser. Even though we hated to afford time to visit a site twice, we do so anyway, and are rewarded - 142 species.

Now, we stopped at randomly chosen sites to try unsuccessfully for Cedar Waxwings. We do catch up with this species, but by accident, as we 'scope a distant island where there are Black-legged Kittiwakes Two more species for 144. Where will we find another ten? As we ponder this, Guy remembers that, in a nearby bay, in the past few years, Oldsquaw have lingered, and there was once a Pileated Woodpecker. The bay seems deserted, and no amount of looking could produce an Oldsquaw. As the others return to the car, I decide to try to rouse a last, lost White-crowned Sparrow. I stop quickly when I see a Snow Goose standing on the shore. My frantic shouts do not disturb it, although they do attract the attention of my companions.

By 5:30 P.M., we are at the river at Trois Pistoles. Only a few peeps are running about among the seaweed. I scan them - Least, with a single Semipal. Then Danielle draws our attention to the 'Semipal.' Sure enough, she's not joking - a White-rumped Sandpiper - not a bad species for a spring with no shorebirds.

At 6:40 we arrive at Cacouna and, as we take the track from the main road, we stop to survey the pools on both sides. A hawk flying past causes a commotion, and we hear the call of a Lesser Yellowlegs. At the same time, Guy calls out, "Wilson's Phalarope!" I train my 'scope on the pool, noting the presence of a Shoveler, and I see that shorebirds have alighted. Along with the yellowlegs and the phalarope, is a darker bird and, only after shouting, "Ruff!" do I pause to check my hasty identification of this, the bird of the day. Then Danielle spots a Short-eared Owl. Five species in as many minutes and we are reeling with shock.

We now need 3 more species. A quick drive to the other side of the marsh adds a Gadwall. But the sky is very dark and we are starting to panic. A rush back to our Virginia Rail spot and we call it out - it even comes out for a look. We have equalled the record - but, what next? We move to the other side of the marsh, get out of the car and scan, almost at random. Some shorebirds fly up and go over our heads - Pectoral Sandpipers calling!

We have 154 species - the record is broken. Danielle is characteristically ebullient. But Guy and I are more subdued. The celebration will come later.

In the little light that remains, we decide to look out over the water. Now, as I sit on a rock, in the gloom, watching three Belugas that swim around in the shallows, I feel good. Soon, we return making a couple of perfunctory stops for Nighthawks - in vain. We sit out on the balcony, back at Rimouski, with needed refreshments and continue to listen. I am weary and begin to experience aural hallucinations. Warblers and vireos are singing everywhere. Then, at 11 P.M., for some unknown reason, shorebirds start to call out over the sound of traffic. This time the birds are real and we recognize the call of a Solitary Sandpiper that appears to circle overhead, calling several times. With this, our 155th species, we call an end to our long day."

Those of us who have taken part in many a Big Day project, can well relate to the story of Danielle, Guy and Tristan.

We have more to print about this subject.

In fact, in our next issue (May, 1988), we'll have a story from Gordon Grief, of Dugald, Manitoba, on the "Biggest Day" ever in Canada. Gordon was a participant. Stay tuned.

More individual records, this time relating to Life location lists, follow on the next few pages.

ALBERTA

Allen Wiseley, Calgary.	320
Dave Elphinstone, Calgary.	314
Richard Klauke, St.Paul.	312
Andrew Slater, Calgary.	311
Robert Storms, Calgary.	304
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	300
George Cheeseman, Edmonton.	287
David Stirling, Victoria, B.C.	271
Joan McDonald, Calgary.	238
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	231
Hue MacKenzie, Surrey, B.C.	230
Jo Ann MacKenzie, Surrey, B.C.	226
William McKitterick, Calgary.	223
Wayne Weber, Burnaby, B.C.	221
Chris Siddle, Fort St.John, B.C.	218
Luke Fazio, Mississauga, Ont.	201
Bill Clark, Ottawa, Ont.	193
Alex Gray, Mississauga, Ont.	192
Bruce Mactavish, St.John's, Nfld.	187
Stan Shadick, Saskatoon, Sask.	187
Richard Cannings, Vancouver, B.C.	182
Audrey Viken, West Vancouver, B.C.	180
Roger Foxall, Halifax, N.S.	176
Peter Hamel, Toronto, Ont.	174
Roger Burrows, St.John's, Nfld.	173
Edge Pegg, Claremont, Ont.	173
Bill Crins, Vancouver, B.C.	171
Gerry Bennett, Woodbridge, Ont.	169
Dale Jensen, Vancouver, B.C.	157
Brooke Clibbon, London, Ont.	155
Rick Howie, Kamloops, B.C.	152
Gordon Grief, Dugald, Man.	150

SASKATCHEWAN

Stan Shadick, Saskatoon.	305
Chris Adam, Kingston, Ont.	302
Chris Escott, Willowdale, Ont.	301
Harv Lane, Los Angeles, Calif.	275
Guy Wapple, Saskatoon.	275
Richard Klauke, St.Paul, Alta.	236
Blake Maybank, White's Lake, N.S.	219
Gordon Grief, Dugald, Man.	215
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	210
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	197
Helen Inch, London, Ont.	189
Spencer Inch, London, Ont.	189
Alex Gray, Mississauga, Ont.	184
Angus MacLean, Alma, N.B.	183
Hue MacKenzie, Surrey, B.C.	179
Jo Ann MacKenzie, Surrey, B.C.	170

MANITOBA

Gordon Grief, Dugald.	328
Dennis Fast, Kleefeld.	320
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg.	316
Harv Lane, Los Angeles, Calif.	309
Robert Parsons, Winnipeg.	301
Angus MacLean, Alma, N.B.	276
Peter Hamel, Toronto, Ont.	264
John Zoch, Cornwall, Ont.	263
Rob Walker, Alma, N.B.	253
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	241
Stan Shadick, Saskatoon, Sask.	231
Linda Feltner, Seattle, Wash.	230
Bill Clark, Ottawa, Ont.	227
Bill Zufelt, Orillia, Ont.	223
Alex Gray, Mississauga, Ont.	221
Richard Klauke, St.Paul, Alta.	220
Bob Odear, Jamestown, N.C.	211
Hue MacKenzie, Surrey, B.C.	209
Mary Collins, Vernon, B.C.	208
David Stirling, Victoria, B.C.	204
Bruce Cruickshank, Toronto, Ont.	202
Roger Foxall, Halifax, N.S.	202
Ben Feltner, Seattle, Wash.	201
Bob Curry, Ancaster, Ont.	200
Mike Austin, Friendswood, Texas.	198
Blake Maybank, White's Lake, N.S.	192
Gerry Bennett, Woodbridge, Ont.	190
Helen Inch, London, Ont.	189
Spencer Inch, London, Ont.	189
Jo Ann MacKenzie, Surrey, B.C.	189
Lorraine Foott, Kingsville, Ont.	177
Larry Neily, Ottawa, Ont.	176
Ian Roseby, Verdun, Que.	173
Edge Pegg, Claremont, Ont.	161
Wayne Weber, Burnaby, B.C.	156

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Phil Ranson, Armstrong, B.C.	176
Rolph Davis, King City, Ont.	166
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	165
Alan Wormington, Leamington, Ont.	155
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	151
John Geale, Port Hope, Ont.	132
Gordon Cameron, Bolton, Ont.	121
David Stirling, Victoria, B.C.	112
Peter Hamel, Toronto, Ont.	101

YUKON

See Page 27.

QUEBEC

Mabel McIntosh, Pointe Claire.	335
Guy Gendron, Rimouski.	334
Jim Houghton, Montreal.	309
Charles Vachon, Quebec City.	308
Daniel St.Hilaire, Hull.	291
Peter Mitchell, Montreal.	282
Ian Roseby, Verdun.	279
Peter Smith, Beaconsfield.	275
Roger Foxall, Halifax,N.S.	270
Ron Pittaway, Minden,Ont.	270
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	266
Hue MacKenzie, Surrey, B.C.	260
Jo Ann MacKenzie, Surrey, B.C.	260
Ken Thorpe, Montreal.	258
Roger Taylor, Ottawa, Ont.	256
Steve Charlton, Pierrefonds.	252
Bruce Mactavish, St.John's, Nfld.	243
Blake Maybank, White's Lake, N.S.	232
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	223
Brooke Clibbon, London, Ont.	220
Ilay Ferrier, London, Ont.	220
Luke Fazio, Mississauga, Ont.	209
Gordon Pringle, Ottawa, Ont.	205

NOVA SCOTIA

Eric Mills,H.of St.Margaret's Bay.	342
Bruce Mactavish, St.John's, Nfld.	319
James Taylor, Dartmouth.	299
Roger Foxall, Halifax.	281
Richard Stern, Kentville.	269
Larry Neily, Ottawa, Ont.	266
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	264
Roger Burrows, St.John's, Nfld.	261
Bob McDonald, Halifax.	259
Lance Laviolette, Pierrefonds,Que.	252
Brian Dalzell, St.Stephen, N.B.	240
Angus MacLean, Alma, N.B.	225
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	222
Rick Howie, Kamloops, B.C.	220
Mike Parmenter, St.John's, Nfld.	193
Dave Mark, Tonawanda, N.Y.	186
Blake Maybank, White's Lake.	186
Luke Fazio, Mississauga, Ont.	172
Doug Whitman, Riverview, N.B.	168

NEW BRUNSWICK

David Christie, Albert.	326
Mary Majka, Albert.	317
Mike Majka, Albert.	317
Brian Dalzell, St.Stephen.	300
Angus MacLean, Alma.	271
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	261
Rob Walker, Alma.	246
Doug Whitman, Riverview.	244
Hilaire Chiasson, Lamèque.	236
Donald Cormier, Moncton.	221
Roger Burrows, St.John's, Nfld.	210
Bruce Mactavish, St.John's, Nfld.	224
Helen Inch, London, Ont.	193
Spencer Inch, London, Ont.	193
Chris Adam, Kingston, Ont.	189
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	187
Gordon Pringle, Ottawa, Ont.	179
Roger Foxall, Halifax, N.S.	174

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Roger Burrows, St.John's, Nfld.	208
Angus Maclean, Alma, N.B.	208
Brian Dalzell, St.Stephen, N.B.	205
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	164
Rick Howie, Kamloops, B.C.	161
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	152
Bruce Mactavish, St.John's, Nfld.	143
Roger Foxall, Halifax, N.S.	136
Blake Maybank, White's Lake, N.S.	133

NEWFOUNDLAND

Roger Burrows, St.John's.	277
Bruce Mactavish, St.John's.	274
Blake Maybank, White's Lake,N.S.	259
Mike Parmenter, St.John's.	232
Rob Walker, Alma, N.B.	162
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	159
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	153

YUKON

Dick Cannings, Vancouver,B.C.	157
Wayne Neily, Winnipeg, Man.	150
Eric Tull, London, Ont.	133
David Stirling, Victoria, B.C.	132

 BIRDFINDING IN CANADA is published six times a year by G.Bennett, R.R.# 2,
 10780 Pine Valley Drive, Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada. L4L 1A6.
 Business address is:"BIRDFINDING IN CANADA, Box 519, Kleinburg, Ontario,
 Canada. L0J 1C0.

All articles are written by G.Bennett unless stated otherwise.

Copyright. All rights reserved. ISSN-0229-5024. Second Class Mail Registration
 # 5563.

Subscription rates as of March 1,1988: \$14.00 per year in Canada; \$14.00 U.S.
 to addresses in U.S.A.; \$16.00 U.S. to all other locations.
