

Manx Shearwaters on the Great Lakes

Robert Curry and Bruce Di Labio

There are now four records of Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) from the lower Great Lakes or adjacent water bodies and land areas. This paper will discuss in detail observations of the bird at Hamilton in 2006. It will also summarize what is known about the other three records and speculate about their origins.

Armada, Michigan, 19 August 2000

The first Manx Shearwater for the Great Lakes was found in emaciated condition on a lawn. Armada is in Macomb County in the southeastern part of Michigan, due north of Windsor, Ontario, and southwest of Sarnia (Brewer 2003, Chartier 2000).

Apart from the fact that this bird most probably passed through Ontario, the most intriguing fact is that it was banded as a nestling on Copeland

Island, County Down, Northern Ireland, on 7 September 1991. When found it was nine years old (Brewer 2003).

Ottawa, Ontario, 26 August 2001

On 26 August 2001, while walking along the Shirley's Bay dyke west of Ottawa along the Ottawa River, Bruce Squirrel noticed a black and white bird floating in the water (Di Labio 2001). Noting it looked unusual for a gull, he retrieved the bird. It was in excellent condition and appeared to have just recently expired. The specimen was put in a freezer and Di Labio was contacted, through Peter Dunn of Ottawa, about this unusual specimen. On 9 September 2001, Di Labio picked up the specimen and later took it to the Canadian Museum of Nature where he and Michel Gosselin confirmed the



Figure 1: Manx Shearwater found dead at Shirley's Bay, Ottawa, 26 August 2001.

Photo: Bruce DiLabio

identification. Photographs were taken (Figure 1) and Di Labio prepared the bird as a study skin (specimen number CMNAV 77920). The shearwater was emaciated, weighing only 248.6 grams, and its stomach was empty. Average weight of healthy female individuals ranges from 375 to 447 grams (Cramp

and Simmons, 1977). Sex was a female; ovaries measured 10 mm X 4 mm. The feathers were in relatively good shape and there was no unusual wear. The record was accepted by the Ontario Bird Record Committee as the first record for Ontario (Roy 2002)

Hamilton, Ontario, (Van Wagners Beach) 31 August – 1 September 2006

Lake watchers at the western end of Lake Ontario have established that among the best periods to watch for Canadian Arctic birds on passage to their wintering grounds on southern oceans are at the end of August and the first 10 days of September. Conditions at the end of August 2006 were particularly ideal when a nine-day period of strong northeast winds caused birds on the lake to drift to the western end. Barry Cheriére and others began a daily vigil on 24 August (Cheriére 2007).

On 31 August, the seventh day of such favourable winds, observers tallied numbers of Parasitic Jaegers (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). At 1400h, Cheriére was stunned to observe the characteristic stiff-winged roller coaster flight of an apparent shearwater as it flew through the field of view of his spotting scope from left to right; five others were present and observed the bird at this time. Using Harrison (1983) they identified the bird as a Manx Shearwater. They observed the bird flying by out in

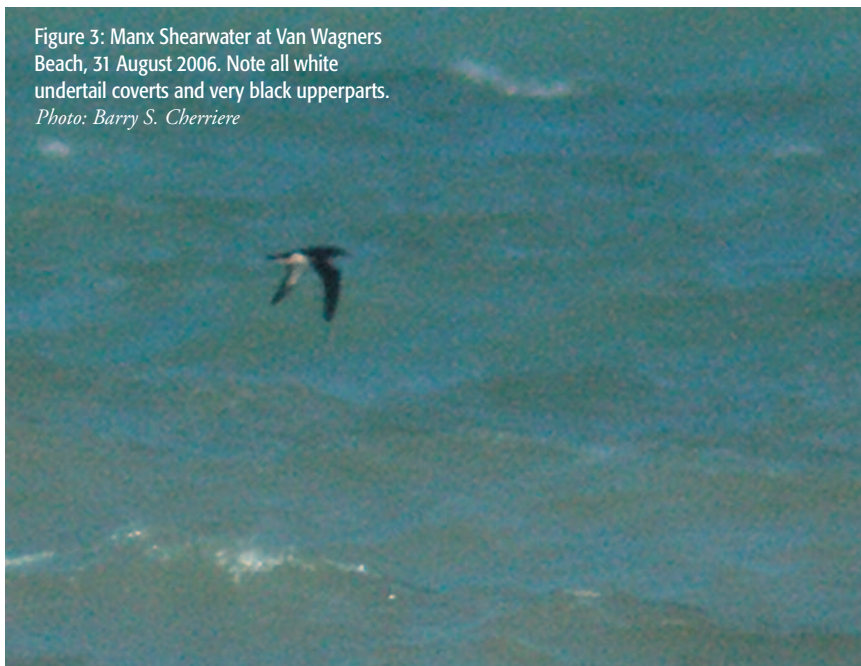




Figure 4: Manx Shearwater at Van Wagners Beach, 31 August 2006, commencing descent from high, arching glide. Photo: Barry S. Cherriere

the lake several more times over the next hour or so. However, as birders began to gather, the bird was not being seen. Fortunately, at 1830h, the gathered group was treated with two “fly-bys”. The shearwater flew past from east to west at an estimated distance of 200 m then, presumably finding itself cut off by the end of the lake, returned from west to east at a distance of approximately 400 m. On this second pass Cherriere obtained photographs (Figures 2 – 4).

The following morning, 1 September, a much larger group of happy birders managed to see the Manx Shearwater. Unfortunately, after about 0900h the bird disappeared, although in the late afternoon a few watchers managed to observe it farther out in the lake. This

was the last observation of the Manx Shearwater at Hamilton.

Only a few similar shearwaters are small, dark above and white below. Three that occur in the northwestern North Atlantic are the Audubon’s (*P. lherminieri*), Little (*P. assimilis*) and Manx Shearwaters (Dunn and Alderfer 2006, Post 1967). The Manx Shearwater is by far the most likely of these three to be seen inland. Audubon’s is a warm-water species and is a postbreeding inhabitant of the Gulf Stream, occurring rarely as far north as Canadian Atlantic waters (Godfrey 1986). There is one Ontario record of Audubon’s Shearwater — of a bird found dead at Almonte, *Lanark*, on 8 September 1975 (Godfrey 1976, 1986). This bird’s

arrival so far inland probably resulted from Hurricane Caroline, a category 3 storm, when it made landfall in western Florida, and which dissipated into a tropical depression on 1 September in eastern Kentucky (Wormington 2008). The Little Shearwater breeds on islands in the eastern Atlantic and is a vagrant to the western Atlantic. The Manx Shearwater, on the other hand, has changed drastically in status on this side of the Atlantic, and is discussed later.

Observations and photographs of the Hamilton bird illustrate the diagnostic features of Manx Shearwater and clearly eliminate Audubon's and Little Shearwaters. Manx is noticeably longer-winged than the other two, and is the only one that habitually soars high above the water, interspersed with long glides in a rolling fashion. The long-winged shape, pointed primaries and soaring behavior, were carefully noted by observers at Van Wagners Beach, and are apparent in the photographs. It was uniformly black on the entire upper-parts. It was gleaming white on the under-parts, including white wing linings, and had white undertail-coverts. The leading and trailing edges of the wings were black, as were the undersides of the outer primaries. It was difficult under the conditions of observation to note the exact pattern of the head, except to note that the crown was dark and this black extended down to the eye and onto the sides of the neck. Little Shearwater is a small, short-winged species that flies close to the water

with a more laboured flight. Audubon's Shearwater is proportionately shorter and rounder winged, has dark brown upperparts and dusky undertail coverts, and does not normally tower in flight.

Derby Hill, New York, 23 October 2006

On this date, Bill Purcell and Dave Wheeler watched a Manx Shearwater flying west into the wind off Derby Hill at the southeast end of Lake Ontario (Iron and Pittaway 2006, Veit and Paxton 2007). They observed the salient features and their description appears to clearly eliminate Audubon's Shearwater. They submitted a report to the New York State Avian Records Committee but it had not been reviewed at the time of writing this paper (Jean Skelly, pers. comm.).

The only other inland record of Manx Shearwater in North America was one observed, on 30 May 2004, by a birding tour group at Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge Reservoir in western Montana (Holt *et al.* 2007). Unlike the Great Lakes birds, this shearwater likely originated in the North Pacific, where since the first report in 1975, The Manx Shearwater has increased dramatically up to the present time; now about 15 are found annually (Mlodinow 2004). Also, unlike the Great Lakes birds, the Manx Shearwater in Montana must have crossed a considerable extent of land, including mountains, to arrive at the observation point.

Status and Origin of Great Lakes Manx Shearwaters

The majority of Manx Shearwaters breed in the eastern Atlantic, mostly in the United Kingdom and Ireland, but also on islands off the coast of Europe and Africa (Lee 1999). The world population is estimated to be 340,000 – 410,000 pairs (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). The bulk of the population undertakes a long and rapid trans-equatorial migration to the South Atlantic and overwinters off the east coast of South America, although a few remain in Northern Atlantic waters (Lee 1999).

In the western Atlantic, there were a few reports and specimens of Manx Shearwater beginning with 1833, when Audubon claimed to have obtained a specimen to the west of Newfoundland (Post 1967). The species is known to have bred three times in Bermuda, but not after 1905 (Lee 1999). Beginning in the 1950s Manx Shearwater was reported regularly from North American waters. The first North American nest was found on Penikese Island, Massachusetts, in 1973 (Bierregaard *et al.* 1975). Manx Shearwaters were first found nesting on Middle Lawn Island, off the Burin Peninsula in southern Newfoundland, in 1977 (Storey and Lien 1985). They continue to nest there. Numbers in waters off the east coast of Canada and the United States have increased dramatically since the 1970s (Mlodinow 2004).

Manx Shearwater has a preference for the shallower waters of the continental shelf and now is the commonest shearwater found in inshore waters of Nova Scotia (Lee and Haney 1996). For example, Di Labio *et al.* (unpubl. data) counted more than 100 Manx Shearwaters, on 31 August 2001, in the Bay of Fundy off Grand Manan Island. It is by far the most common shearwater in the St. Lawrence estuary with at least 25 records west of Matane, Quebec (M. Gosselin pers. comm.). There are at least two records as far upriver as Quebec City (31 July 1984, 20 August 2006), and one was reported near Sherbrooke, on 20 August 1993 (M. Gosselin, pers. comm.).

The large numbers of Manx Shearwaters off Canada's east coast are not all breeding in Canada. Some nonbreeding adults and juveniles from the European colonies spend the summer in North American waters and others may visit northwest Atlantic feeding grounds before migrating to the South Atlantic. The Michigan bird, although originally banded in Northern Ireland, may have already been over the Canadian continental shelf before it moved inland

Note the tight grouping of three of these records; they occurred in a space of 13 days, 19 August – 31 August, and also all three in the span of seven years between 2000 and 2006. Nonbreeding adult Manx Shearwaters and juveniles depart their North Atlantic breeding grounds in July – August, followed by

breeding adults in August – September (Lee and Haney 1996). Almost certainly all these Great Lakes Manx Shearwaters flew up the St. Lawrence River, perhaps as they wandered prior to southward migration (Iron and Pittaway 2006). There is no evidence to suggest that their arrival inland was weather related, i.e. hurricanes.

The increasing numbers of Manx Shearwaters in the St. Lawrence estuary suggest this species may become a more frequent vagrant to the Great Lakes region.

Acknowledgements

We thank Michel Gosselin for the Quebec records and Alan Wormington for information from his files on rare birds of Ontario. We thank Ron Pittaway whose careful review of an earlier draft greatly improved this paper. In addition, Barry Cheriére, Doug McRae and Alan Wormington reviewed earlier versions of the manuscript and we are grateful for their suggestions.

Literature Cited

- Bierregaard, R.O. Jr., A.B. David, II, T.D. Baird and R.E. Woodruff** .1975. First northwestern Atlantic breeding record of the Manx Shearwater. *Auk* 92:145–147.
- Brewer, D.** 2003. Manx Shearwater: The possible first Ontario record? *Ontario Birds* 21:98–99.
- Chartier, A.T.** 2000. Manx Shearwater in Michigan. *Bird Banders Forum*, 25 August 2000. Available online at <http://listserv.arizona.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0008d&L=bird-band&T=0&P=2340>
- Cheriére, B.** 2007. Manx Shearwater found in Hamilton! *The Wood Duck* 60:172–173.
- Cramp, S. and K. E. L. Simmons** (editors). 1977. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic: Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Volume 1: Ostrich to Ducks.* Oxford University Press, London.
- Dunn, J.L. and J. Alderfer** (editors). 2006. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America.* National Geographic Society, Washington D.C.
- Di Labio, B.** 2001. Anything is Possible!: Specimen record of Manx Shearwater for Ontario : *Ontario Birding News* 6:4.
- Godfrey, W.E.** 1976. Audubon's Shearwater, a species new for Canada. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 90:494.
- Godfrey, W.E.** 1986. *The Birds of Canada, Revised Edition.* National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa.
- Harrison, P.** 1983. *Seabirds an Identification Guide.* Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Holt, D.W., B. Mulrooney and J.M. White.** 2007. A Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) from Montana. *Northwest Naturalist* 88:14–16.
- Iron, J. and R. Pittaway.** 2006. Another Manx Shearwater on Lake Ontario. *Ontbirds Listserv* 24 October 2006.
- Lee, D.S.** 1999. A closer look: Manx Shearwater. *Birding* 31:526–531.
- Lee, D.S. and J.C. Haney.** 1996. Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*). *In* the Birds of North America, No. 257 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington D.C.
- Mitchell, P.I., S.F. Newton, N. Ratcliff and T.E. Dunn.** 2004. *Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland.* T & A.D. Poyser, London.
- Mlodinow, S.G.** 2004. Manx Shearwaters in the north Pacific Ocean. *Birding* 36:608–615.

Post, P.W. 1967. Manx, Audubon's and Little Shearwaters in the northwestern North Atlantic. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 38:278–305.

Roy, K.J. 2002. Ontario Bird Records Committee report for 2001. *Ontario Birds* 20:54–74.

Storey, A.E. and J. Lien. 1985. Development of the first North American colony of Manx Shearwaters. *Auk* 102:395–401.

Veit, R.R. and R.O. Paxton. 2007. Hudson-Delaware. *North American Birds* 61:42–46.

Wormington, A. 2008. The Rare Birds of Ontario: A catalogue of distributional records. Unpublished manuscript.

Robert Curry, 3115 New Street, Unit 30, Burlington, Ontario. N1G 2W1

Bruce Di Labio, 400 Donald B. Munro Drive, Carp, Ontario. K0A 1L0

Another Leucistic Bird: Common Goldeneye

Barry Cherriere



Figure 1. A leucistic female Common Goldeneye, 8 December 2001, Stony Creek, Niagara R.M.

Photo: Barry Cherriere

Further to the five leucistic birds mentioned in the December 2007 *Ontario Birds* (25:115-120), a leucistic female Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) was sighted on 8 December 2001, at the end of Grays Road, in Stony Creek, Niagara Region. It was with a mixed flock of hundreds of other wintering ducks, and almost never came close to my position. The distant photo (Figure 1) illustrates a very pale looking bird; the head was almost white, but with a dark bill, the wings were a very light gray and white; the back feathering was dappled medium and light gray. The most noticeable loss of pigment was in the melanins contributing to the black of the wings and the brown of the head.

Barry Cherriere, 506 – 575 Queenston Road, Hamilton, Ontario. L8K 1K1