



## Bird Quiz

Fred Bodsworth

1. What raptor is mainly a northwoods nester, an uncommon winter visitor to southern Ontario, yet outside Ontario it nests as far south as Florida and Central America?
2. What bird is thought by some authorities (but not all) to go without food for about a month during its fall migration from northern Ontario to Central America?
3. What bird has increased in numbers a staggering 300-fold in Ontario since the 1970s?
4. What common Ontario passerine often includes a shed snakeskin in its nest, but in modern times frequently substitutes a strip of clear plastic instead?
5. What birds are lured by their mothers into a precarious aerial "journey" before they can fly?
6. Some female birds appear to have stronger mothering instincts than others and lure away young of other females of their species until they are busily caring for broods of 20 or more. What species are especially known for this trait?
7. There is a bird whose range extends around more than 80 percent of the land of the Northern Hemisphere, from Britain east across Eurasia, from the Pacific coast across western North America, but then stops at the Manitoba-Ontario boundary. What is it? What theory has been suggested for its failure to complete circumpolar range across Ontario and eastern North America?
8. What shorebird is believed to fly nonstop from James Bay to somewhere in southern South America in its fall migration, a flight of around 6,500 kilometres and possible 80 hours duration?

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# OFO NEWS

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## Merganser Mystery

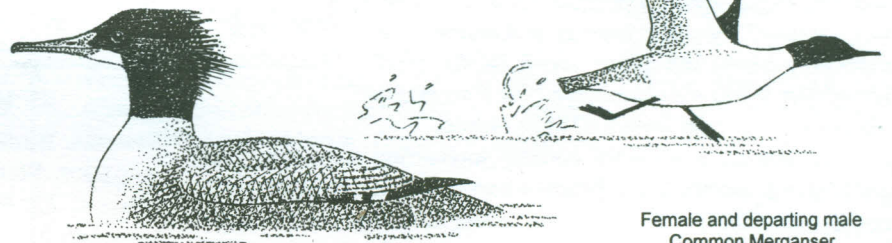
Ron Pittaway

Every spring when the ice goes out in late April, I see many pairs of Common Mergansers on the numerous lakes of Haliburton County. The pairs are in definitive alternate (adult breeding) plumage, but the males mysteriously disappear about a month later! For instance, I saw my last adult male on 5 June 1997. Ron Tozer reports that male mergansers disappear about the same time from Algonquin Park. Once the females are incubating their eggs inside a hollow tree, the males depart to unknown molting areas for the summer. We do not see males molting into basic (eclipse) plumage in the summer in Haliburton and Algonquin Park.

Where do these thousands of male Common Mergansers go to molt in summer? Palmer (1973) in the *Handbook of North American Birds* says "the habitat of drakes in summer, after they leave their mates, is not well known...the whereabouts of many is a mystery." Palmer gives a further clue to why there is a mystery; they disappear and migrate at night!

I asked two Ontario waterfowl experts where male Common Mergansers go to molt in summer: Ken Ross of the Canadian Wildlife Service and Harry Lumsden (retired) of the Ministry of Natural Resources. Ken and Harry thought that most of the males may go to James Bay. Todd (1963) in the *Birds of the Labrador Peninsula* reported Common Mergansers summering along the Quebec coast of James Bay and many (95 percent males) at the Belcher Islands, NWT, in southeastern Hudson Bay.

Where do the females molt? Interestingly, the literature is divided on where the females molt in summer. Some authors say they molt on the breeding grounds and others say they also depart for places unknown when the juveniles are grown.



Female and departing male  
Common Merganser  
by Michael King

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