

Michel Gosselin

Profile of a Canadian Museum of Nature Ornithologist

By Ron Pittaway



Michel Gosselin examines Barred Owl specimens in 2016. Photo by Stephanie Tessier, Canadian Museum of Nature

Michel Gosselin began his ornithological career in Ottawa in 1978 as a Research Assistant with the National Museum of Natural Sciences, now the Canadian Museum of Nature. He retired in December 2016 as Collection Manager where he managed the National Bird Collection of over 125,000 specimens.

In his early years at the museum, Michel worked with some of the finest ornithologists in Canada including taxonomist Earl Godfrey who authored *The Birds of Canada*, taxonomist Henri Ouellet of Bicknell's Thrush fame, Arctic researcher Stewart MacDonald, artist John Crosby who illustrated *The Birds of Canada*, and ornithology technician Richard Poulin. Also working at the museum over the years were Richard Snell who studied Iceland Gulls, and OFO members Bruce Di Labio, Ross Harris, and Doug McRae.

Following budget cutbacks at the museum in 1993, Michel became the only go-to bird person at the museum, hosting researchers and fielding inquiries from across Canada and worldwide. Michel coordinated the move of the bird collection in the mid-1990s from Ottawa to the new National Heritage Campus research facility in Gatineau, Quebec, and in 2005-06 he coordinated the layout and contents of the new public Bird Gallery at the Victoria Memorial Museum in downtown Ottawa. It is the largest and most modern bird gallery in Canada with more than 500 specimens of Canadian birds.

Michel has authored or co-authored over 400 publications: popular, refereed, reports, and books. Gulls are one of Michel's longtime interests. He and co-author Normand David were the first in 1975 to discuss the field identification of Thayer's Gull, which was published in

American Birds 29:1059-1066. Michel and I, in 2002, documented the first record of European Herring Gull in Ontario, which was published in *Ontario Birds* 20:3-6. Michel is also an accomplished artist. In 1992 he illustrated Common and Hoary Redpoll subspecies for my Recognizable Forms article in *Ontario Birds* 10:108-114.

In a letter to the editors of *OFO News* in February 2005 Michel wrote: "I find *OFO News* the most interesting Canadian bird publication currently on the market, with its always relevant topics. The recent paper on the Cackling Goose by Ken Abraham is the most informative item on this topic I have seen so far, a welcome alternative to all the controversial information that circulates on the web. The tribute by Glenn Coady about the *Last of the Curlews* by Fred Bodsworth was very informative. I read the book as a youngster, a French translation by *Reader's Digest* that my aunt ordered as part of a book club promotion. Although I cannot say that it influenced my 'career' in any way, you have to remember that there were extremely few books on the topic of birds in those years."

He is also the French Language Advisor to the American Ornithological Society's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of North and Middle American Birds. This is the Committee that decides on splits and lumps, official names, and checklist order.

In retirement Michel continues at the museum as a volunteer helping with collection management. OFO is proud to have him as a member. He has in the past provided editors of *Ontario Birds* and *OFO News* with ornithological advice and information, and OFO will continue to benefit from his exceptional knowledge of birds.