

**Claremont couple among Canada's best**

**Peggs make birdwatching a science**

By CHRIS SHANAHAN  
Staff Reporter

Lots of feeder stations and an apparently inexhaustible supply of seed combine to make Edge and Betty Pegg's Claremont-area property a virtual birdwatcher's paradise.

Mr. Pegg has even devised a suspension system out of twine to protect birds from flying into the dining room window of the couple's Ponda Nesta homestead.

It'd be appropriate to say the retired dairy farmer is truly a living legend in birding circles, having dedicated countless hours to his passion over the past 30 years.

His name is mentioned in virtually every publication that has anything to do with the practice of observing man's fine feathered friends.

Mr. Pegg ranks 24th on the life-list for Canadian sightings with 414 species (his total has actually increased to 416 since the Nov. 25, 1985 figures were published in the magazine, *Birdfinding In Canada*). Norm Chesterfield of Wheatley, Ont. heads the national poll with 487.

As for North American life-time viewings, Mr. Pegg had recorded 590 species at the time of the American Bird Association's last official count. His Ontario figure alone stands at 330.

A regular contributor to the Audubon Society's field guide, he's one of many Pickering residents who conduct the area's annual Boxing Day bird count. A total of 69 species were spotted there on Dec. 26.

**THICKSON'S WOODS**

Mr. Pegg does much of his birdwatching at Thickson's Woods, the last of a thick forest of white pines that used to blanket southern Ontario.

But its natural balance was in recent jeopardy when the property-owner ordered many of the tallest trees cut for timber. As chainsaws roared, a small group of concerned citizens decided to act



**Watch the birdie**

Betty Pegg strikes a familiar pose as she focuses her camera using husband Edge's shoulder as a support. The R.R. 2, Claremont couple have been avid nature-

lovers (and bird-watchers) for most of their lives.

—Chris Shanahan

rather than sit idly by and complain about the loss of yet another irreplaceable natural treasure.

After lengthy negotiations in 1984, they bought the 16-acre parcel and formed the Thickson's Woods Heritage Foundation to manage the lot's plant and animal life.

It cost \$90,000, with a third of the purchase price down and an open mortgage for the rest. The main concern at present is paying off the remaining \$55,000.

Mr. Pegg and fellow foundation

members hope that through the generosity of conservation-minded citizens, corporations and organizations, the money can be raised.

"I'd sure like to pay this thing off," he says. "I'm thinking about the future. I've enjoyed it (Thickson's Woods) for 30 years and I'm sure others have."

"Once these places are gone, you can't get them back," the naturalist adds, noting that he feels the future is bright "unless someone drops a bomb on us, and

that can happen any day. (Otherwise) it will be there forever."

One of the group's more novel fundraising ventures was a 1985 birdathon in which five counters — Mr. Pegg, Dr. Margaret Bain, Dennis Barry and Margaret Carney, all of Whitby; and Oshawa's Dave Calvert — earned money by gaining pledges for each species they spotted at Thickson's Woods. Although he didn't really get started until March, Mr. Pegg still managed to spot 140 species during the year. Dr. Bain maintained a heavy birding schedule in recording 206.

The upcoming raffle of two Marc Barrie wildlife prints is another source of financial support for the woodlot. The Brougham-based artist and his mother/gallery manager, Karinne Barrie, are strongly behind such environmental causes, according to the Peggs.

The public is welcome at the woods, which contain towering white pines that are 150 years old and 100-feet high. It's located next to the Corbett Creek Water Pollution Control Plant.

Tax-deductible contributions can be forwarded to Thickson's Woods Heritage Foundation Inc., Box 541, Whitby, Ont., L1V 5V3.

**DISCOVERY**

A sparkle comes to Mr. Pegg's eye when asked to relate the circumstances surrounding what is undoubtedly his most noteworthy bird sighting: a Painted Redstart.

It was back in mid-November of 1971 that Lindsay Death contacted him about a mysterious bird that'd suddenly arrived at her Lake Ridge Road (Durham Region Road 23) farm property.

Mr. Pegg knew he was on to something big soon after he'd made hasty tracks to the site in true bird-lover fashion.

"I was just shaking that afternoon," the ruddy-faced outdoorsman recalls with a lingering feeling of excitement. "I said to myself 'I know it (a Painted Redstart) has never been seen in Canada.'"

And sure enough, subsequent identification revealed Mr. Pegg had recorded the country's first-ever viewing of that subtropical, red-breasted bird. (Only one other documented Redstart find has followed Mr. Pegg's, that being in British Columbia. The bird is native to the south-western United States, specifically Arizona, and Central America.)

"You tell someone, 'I just saw a Painted Redstart,'" he relates, "and they say 'ya, have you been drinking?'"

The north Pickering man has his own theory about the events leading up to that highly-publicized discovery.

The bird, being an "insect-lover," may have hitched a ride in a boxcar carrying fruit into Canada, he believes.

Mr. Pegg's Painted Redstart was kept in captivity for about eight years. It finally died and was preserved for permanent display at the Royal Ontario Museum.

"Any bird in North America could turn up in Canada at any time," claims the life-long area resident. "It could get blown here by storm. You never know what might turn up."

The Peggs, both members of the Oshawa's Durham Field Naturalists and Pickering Naturalists groups, have travelled coast to coast and through parts of the U.S. in search of natural treasures. Past field-trip destinations include Canada's northlands, Alaska, Florida, Arizona, Texas, California and even Scotland.

Mr. Pegg's confident he'll boost his bird sighting totals in 1986 as they make a March trek to California and visit Newfoundland and Labrador in July.

**KEEN EYE**

Betty Pegg has earned a place in the family's birder hall-of-fame with her keen eye as a photographer. Her work has often graced the pages of Stouffville's Tribune newspaper and most recently her Painted Redstart color exposure was included in J. Murray Speirs' book, *Birds of Ontario*.

Some of Mrs. Pegg's framed color photos grace the interior of their finely appointed home, as do several Barrie prints and others by friend and sometimes field-trip companion, Robert (or Bob as she prefers to call him) Bateman.

A wide selection of nature buttons, featuring some of her best shots from Thickson's Woods, make a nice addition to any naturalist's jacket.

The Claremont-area couple have obviously passed their love of the outdoors to future generations of Peggs. A son Hal of Port Perry and a daughter Kathy Beckett, Ajax, share their parents' appreciation of all things natural.

**Cedarena holds anniversary skate**

Markham's Cedarena outdoor skating rink will hold its 59th anniversary skate Tuesday, Jan. 28 at 7 p.m.

Admission for the adult-only skate is \$3 and free coffee and donuts will be served.

The rink, located on the 10th Line south of Hwy 7 in Cedar

Grove and is open for adult skating every Tuesday evening from 7 to 10 p.m. Admission is a \$1.75.

The rink is open for public skating Thursday to Saturday, 7 to 10 p.m. and Sunday from 2 to 4 p.m. Admission is \$1.75 for adults and \$1 for children.

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