

## BIRDS OF A FEATHER

My interest was piqued by a telephone message from Mary Taylor which awaited me on my arrival home from Kingston on November 5. Upon returning her call, I learned that she had been watching a white bird with a longish neck. It had visited her yard off and on for two days and was at that very moment sitting on her roof. Mary said that the bird reminded her of ones she had seen pictured on TV nature programmes sitting on the backs of animals. Great! An educated guess would make it a Cattle Egret!

Even though it was nearly dark, I set off for Mary's house, but by the time I arrived the bird had 'flown the coop'. The story of my life! In any case, after talking to Mary and having had her look at 'the book', I was sure the bird had been a Cattle Egret. But more of that later.

Cattle Egrets have a fascinating history. To begin with, in the early 1800's this species inhabited mainly Africa and Southern Eurasia. Then somehow these 'African' birds managed to reach South America and were first sighted there around 1880. By 1930 they had managed to colonize there. Gradually moving northwards, Cattle Egrets reached North America in the early 1940's and were discovered breeding in Florida in 1953.

The first Cattle Egret reported in Canada was seen in Newfoundland in 1952, and the first Ontario sighting was made in 1956. The first Ontario sighting close to Kingston occurred on Ant Island, near the east end of Wolfe Island in 1960. By 1968 two Cattle Egret nests were discovered on Pigeon Island. As the range of this species expanded locally, the most favoured sites appear to be in areas near Lake Ontario. However birds do appear more inland, and I personally was lucky enough to see one near Lyndhurst last year.

Cattle Egrets feed on insects, toads, worms and the like found around cattle. They also, in the manner of gulls, follow the plough for an even greater source of food.

It is believed that the expansion of the Cattle Egret was due to some unknown natural happening, unlike that of the House Sparrow and European Starling, both of which were brought here from the Old World by humans.

Now, to return to my story of Mary's egret: it was decided since the following day was the North Leeds Birdwatchers' (NLB) regular

field trip day, they would first check to see if they could find the Cattle Egret. They followed their plan - but you guessed it - no luck! Disappointed the group continued on their mornings' outing.

At the end of the field trip the members decided to give the Harlem Road, where Mary lives, one last check for the egret. Being in somewhat of a hurry, I left before the others. Then, I could hardly believe my eyes, for there beside Highway 42, not far from Lockwood Lane was the elusive Cattle Egret. I passed it, turned and parked on the roadside to await my friends. As I sat there the egret approached my car and walked right on beside it! I was able to signal the other birders with my lights, and everyone had a marvelous look at the bird.

The NLB had another interesting experience on an earlier field trip. Driving north of Portland, members in the lead car saw a large white bird

fly across the road. First thoughts were that it was either a Snowy Owl or a Gyrfalcon. We hurriedly got out a telescope and attempted to get a better view of the bird. It had landed in a distant tree and was partially obscured by the branches. I announced that it was a Snowy Owl, but then it flew again. In flight it was obvious that it was not a Snowy Owl. Wrong again! This time it landed in a better position for viewing. We were now sure it was a hawk of some sort, but none of us could make it into a Gyrfalcon. It flew again and we lost it. We continued driving in the direction the bird flew and not seeing it again, retraced our 'steps'. Two Red-tailed Hawks and a Rough-legged Hawk were noted - but no white bird. Suddenly, alerted by Marg Alexander we turned and looked on the other side of the road, and there in plain view sat a large white

hawk. Telescopes up! In the middle of the bird's tail were several rufous feathers. Our 'mystery bird' was a Redtailed Hawk in an aberrant albino-like plumage. The bird of the day!

Eastern Bluebirds have been creating a lot of interest since I last wrote Winona Barker, Jansje Keates, Leorene Hayes and Marg Alexander sighted this species October 26, 27, 29 and November 4 respectively. Leorene Hayes also had American Robins on October 29.

Winona Barker has been watching a Pileated Woodpecker take shelter in tree holes where it spends the night. She has also been hearing Screech and Great Horned Owls on her property.

Allan Earl saw a Ring-necked Pheasant recently, and has heard of other sightings of this species. Elsie Goodman has seen Purple Finches at her feeder and a lone male visited ours. We also entertain a Red-breasted Nuthatch regularly.

Cheryl Matson of Delta phoned to say that when she was out with a friend on November 7 they heard and saw 2 Whistling Swans flying overhead. The new name for these species is Tundra Swan. Tundras must be passing through our area, for on November 14 Annette Mess saw 4 near Westport.

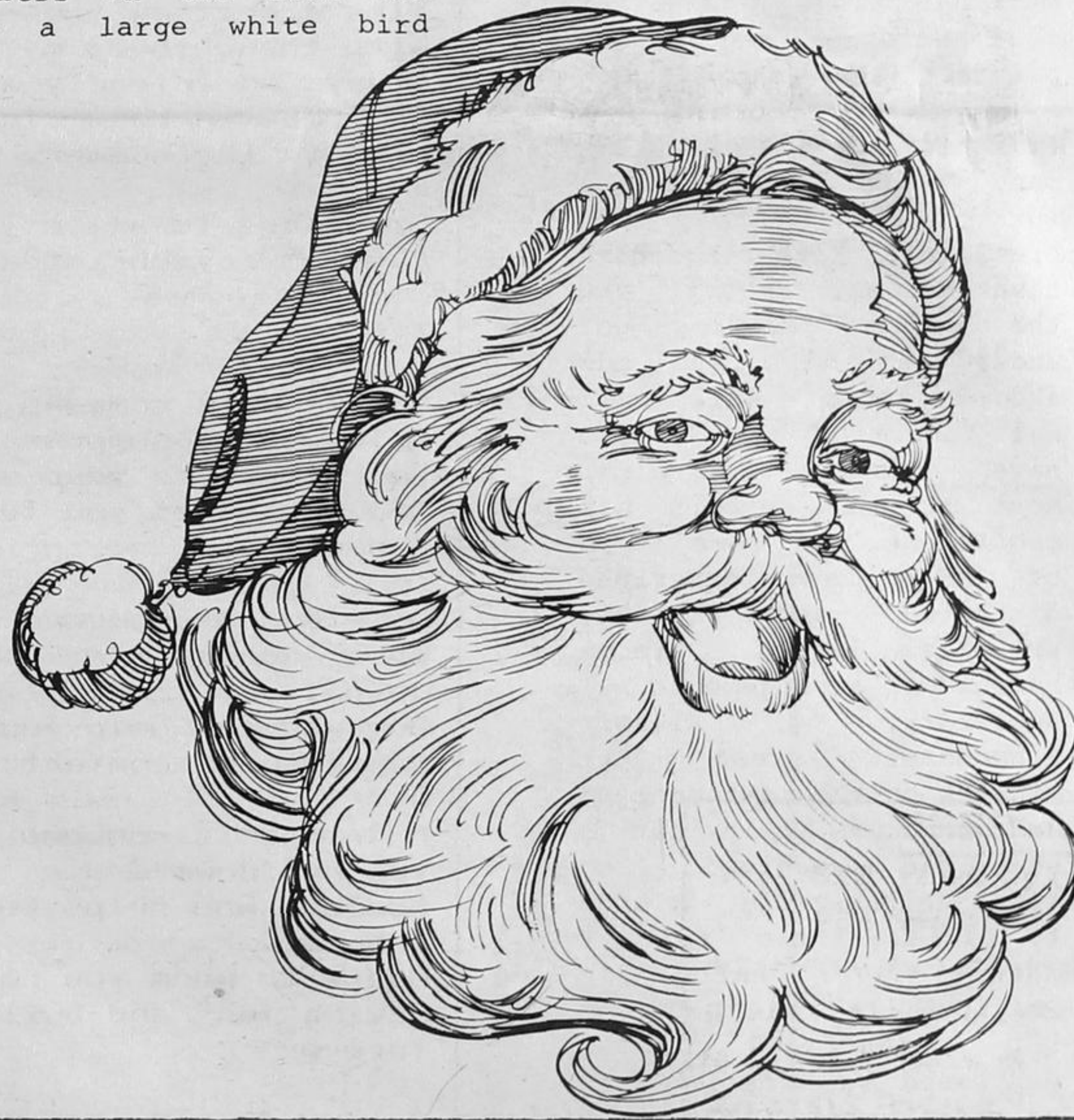
The Christmas Counts are coming up. The NLB unofficial count will be held on December 17, the Westport Count on December 19 and the Rideau Ferry Count on December 27. The coordinators of these counts welcome participants, so if you wish to take part give me a call and I can put you in touch with the appropriate person.

If you have a feeder and live within a 7½ mile radius of Highway 42 and Lyndhurst Road, of Westport, or of Rideau Ferry it would be of great help if you stocked your feeders the nights of December 16, 18 and 26 respectively. This would mean that participants in the counts would have a better chance of getting birds at your feeder if they are checking early in the morning. Many times we pass by feeders that are not yet filled for the day. Also, if you wish to report any unusual birds in your area before the count dates please let me know.

I would like to wish all my readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Please continue to call in your sightings and until February next year

GGOD BIRDING!



**LOCAL FIRM RECOGNIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF THE GOLDEN RULE**

The International Order of the Golden Rule (IOGR) recently announced that Scotland Funeral Home Limited in Elgin is beginning its 4th year as an IOGR member.

IOGR is a not-for-profit funeral association formed in 1928 to help the general public by identifying and honoring outstanding funeral firms. The association is comprised of over 1500 respected funeral homes in the U.S., Canada and abroad.

A firm's selection for membership requires community recommendations, adherence to strict professional standards of service and 100 percent approval by IOGR's Board of Directors. Members base service on the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

"We're proud to recognize Scotland Funeral Home Limited as an exceptional firm," IOGR Executive Director Dale L. Rollings said, "Scotland Funeral Home Limited has continually shown concern for meeting community needs with the highest quality of funeral service."