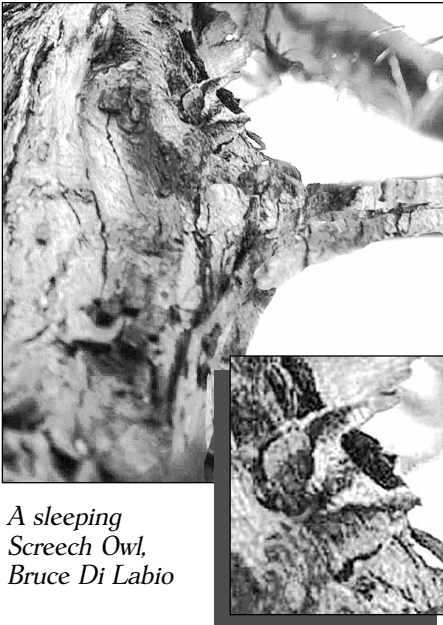


Blending In

by Bruce Di Labio

Take a close look at the picture below. To the unaided eye, it simply looks like a picture of a deciduous tree trunk. Now, take a closer look. Are you able to see the outline of a grey morph Eastern Screech Owl's head in the tree cavity? See the inset.



A sleeping Screech Owl, Bruce Di Labio

Important to survival, camouflage, or the protective colouration of feathers, is found on many birds in our region. Many species have cryptic markings, some matching so well that when immobile, they look like part of the landscape.

With spring migration well on its way, we'll be watching for species such as goldfinches, vireos and warblers that live in forest or dense

thickets. They tend to be yellowish or greenish, with black markings, a perfect colouration for the forest setting. Anyone who birds Pelee in the spring knows the difficulties of locating a brightly coloured Golden-winged or Black-throated Green Warbler sitting motionless on a branch. It almost makes one want to wish the vegetation would wait until June to blossom!

Whip-poor-wills and Nighthawks easily blend in to their surroundings, either when sitting on the ground or on a branch. In both cases, their browns, blacks and greys allow them to blend into the environment and help in their disguise.

The American Woodcock, with its dead leaf colour pattern, is almost undetectable, unless you are lucky enough to step near it! Even the

Killdeer, with its distinctive chest bands, when sitting, appears to be just another "unturned stone" on the beach.

With some species, plumage changes are seasonal, providing birds with camouflage throughout the year. The Willow Ptarmigan, an arctic species, is a good example of seasonal protection. In winter, its plumage is white, blending perfectly with the snowy backdrop. In summer, its plumage turns a mottled white and brown, again providing it with protection.

What is the rule of thumb when trying to spot elusive birds? Well, there really isn't one, except perhaps patience, double check where you have looked and more patience. The bird that you have been trying to find, may actually be a lot closer than you think!



American Woodcock, B. Morin

Wanted!

TAVERNER CUP BIRDERS - May 25, 2002; 6th annual. Want to sharpen your birding skills in a hurry, raise \$\$ for a conservation project, meet some of Canada's best birders, check out Carolinian, Great Lakes Forest and Boreal habitats, practically in your backyard, or just have some fun?

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New Club

York-Simcoe Naturalists is a new club looking for members in the Bradford, Innisfil, Newmarket and New Tecumseth areas. There are monthly meetings with interesting speakers on topics such as loons and bird banding and guided outings on some weekends. Call Cathryn Rees at (905) 775-7021 for more information.