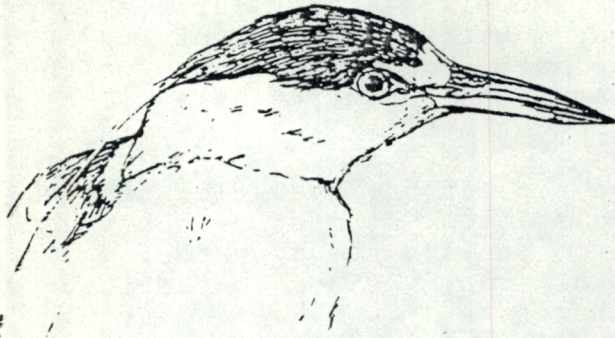


Can you help out?



Although the Long Point Bird Observatory is a long way from Prince Edward Island, Natural History Society members may have heard about some of the problems that high water levels have caused at the Lake Erie reserve. A disastrous storm on December 1 & 2 totally destroyed the field station at the tip of Long Point.

The LPBO has done a lot of important work at their banding stations monitoring migrations since 1960 and continue to introduce many visitors to the nature and joys of Long Point. Plans to upgrade one facility into field headquarters and visitor centre have been postponed as priorities centre around rebuilding the field station on safer ground.

Unusual events in the fall of 1985 led up to the disaster. The lake levels in late spring were high, part of the annual cycle caused by spring melt which is always followed by a fall from late summer onwards. Except for 1985.

Dave Shepherd, an ornithologist at the observatory, gave the following report: "Levels did indeed drop for a while but then, ominously, began to rise again. The wettest November on record did not help. Neither did the high snowfall and wet summer around Lake Superior, the reservoir for the Lower Great Lakes, which rose to unprecedented levels. The consequent effect on Lake Erie was to raise its level by 50cm above the already high average of the previous few years.

"The storm of the 1st/2nd December was unusual in two respects. First its intensity - stronger than any other in the observatory's history. Secondly, the wind direction initially was W/SW which would produce oblique waves of diminished height merely scouring the beach. A tidal surge of up to 1.5m accompanies such an increase in winds from that quarter and an eye-witness report confirmed that the tip was completely under water apart from dune areas. Thus the full height and fury of those mighty waves (reported at 20-25ft. in mid-lake) must have been unleashed directly at the dunes and the building beyond with catastrophic results."

Dunes were completely devoured, trees were downed and buildings moved or destroyed. After a helicopter ride to the site, Mr. Shepherd faced this sight: "In a daze, totally shattered by the utter desolation of the scene, ... I wandered along the 130m to the original location of the cabin, now just a thin strip of beach. All that remained were a few bent pilings, the new shoreline (18m from its position ten days before) running through them ... Behind, the warden's garden, so carefully nurtured over the years to provide a haven for migrants, was now a tangled wreck of snow fence and fallen trees. Further on lay the skeleton of the garage, more recently used as a storage shed, a condensed and twisted mess of steel supports.

"In the distance we could see where the s. dune now started - to the W of the Heligoland trap! The storm had ripped out over 250m of up to 5m high sand dune and washed it to a varying extent into the ponds and across the point. The majority of our former recording area was now beach!

"The Heligoland Trap itself was a sad sight. With no protective dune, flotsam had crashed through large sections of the netting. The catching area, so painstakingly rebuilt during the year and so successful, lay at a sick