

# COTTAGE

Last summer, a male cardinal regularly perched by the side mirror of a car parked behind the cottage and pecked at its reflection. We have been cottaging here for more than 40 years and have never seen this before. Is this unusual behaviour for a cardinal?

—JEAN SHILTON, BRUCE PENINSULA, ONT.

Cardinals aren't Einsteins. "He sees his reflection, believes it is an intruder into his territory, and so he keeps going back to fight the rival – day after day," says Michel Gosselin, collections manager at the Canadian Museum of Nature. What the northern cardinal lacks in grey matter is offset by its visual acuity. "Cardinals have increased sensitivity to the colours yellow and red," explains Mark Peck, an ornithologist at the Royal Ontario Museum. So they zone in quickly on that rich plumage reflected in the side mirror and see, well...red.

Cardinals are particularly prone to this behaviour, although robins have been known to do it as well. That's probably because both species often nest near humans, and are therefore more likely than other birds to encounter windows and mirrors, says Peck. Since cardinals hop about looking for food, they are also prone to perching by a car side mirror by chance while rummaging for seeds or insects, something their feathered brethren who feed in the trees won't do. Cardinals are also year-round residents, explains Gosselin. They may raise more than one family during their breeding season from early April to late September, unlike many migratory birds that leave by early August. Since the cardinal's breeding season is longer, they exhibit territorial behaviour for a longer stretch

than migrating species. Once a cardinal associates the mirror with another male, it will frequently return, sometimes for weeks, until something distracts it or it moves out of the territorial phase. "I've had calls from people who have a cardinal rap at their window every morning – at 5 a.m.," says Audrey Heagy, a land bird conservationist at Bird Studies Canada. "They find it somewhat annoying."

**My wife and I are thinking about transferring our Lake Simcoe cottage to our two sons. The lot measures 100 feet in frontage and is 300 feet deep. There are two cottages on the property. We would like to resurvey the property into two lots and give a title to each son. How should we proceed with the application?**

—NEIL DUNCAN, BURLINGTON, ONT.

Severance regulations vary between municipalities, so first call the local planning department – in your case, the Town of Georgina – to find out if your property is eligible. Waterfront properties typically need a minimum of one to two acres and 200 feet of frontage. The existence of archaeological sites, highway access points, protected habitats, and the

inability to install a septic system could all put the kibosh on your plans. Also consider that the Lake Simcoe area falls under the provincial greenbelt plan, which means you must hire an environmental consultant. Denis Beaulieu, the planner for the Town of Georgina, suggests checking [www.ontarioplanners.on.ca](http://www.ontarioplanners.on.ca) for a list of accredited consultants.

While criteria for severance varies, the process is similar province-wide. Once you have determined that you can sever, submit an application to the township's planning department. Application fees are set by the different municipalities and run from \$500 to \$1,500. Expect to answer specific questions about the dimensions of your property, including frontage, area, and the size of the proposed lot. The planning department will circulate your application to neighbours, who, depending on the municipality, could include conservation authorities, railways, the Ministry of Transportation, and First Nations bands. A public meeting will be held to review your application, followed by an appeals period that

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typically lasts 20 days. One of the common conditions of approval is a survey for the new lot, says Kim Horrigan, assistant director of the development services department for the town of Bracebridge, another built-up cottage area. This step will run you an extra \$1,000 to \$3,000, depending on whether there are existing markers on the property or if the surveyor has to start from scratch. Finally, a lawyer draws up the new deed, and once the planning department stamps it, you will have officially created a brand new property. Congratulations.

### What are the merits of the J-stroke versus switching sides every few strokes? Have any studies been done to evaluate the two methods?

—LARRY AND LORNA SCHMIDT, BASS LAKE, ONT.

Boat designer John Winters, who has studied the efficiency of different paddles and spent decades designing canoes, says the J-stroke beats switching sides when you're using a regular paddle. The J-stroke allows you to steer the canoe from one side by pulling the paddle back to the hip, then turning the blade out, like the bottom of the letter J, to end the stroke. When done well it can look quite graceful. But Winters has serious issues with the J-stroke. Biomechanically, it's just plain awkward. "That pulling back and prying away is really an unnatural motion."

Kevin Callan, author of 10 paddling guidebooks including *A Paddler's Guide to Ontario Cottage Country*, concurs. "Switching sides is a waste of time and energy," he says, but he also thinks the J is hard on your body. "If you did what the books tell you to do, your wrist would be killing you by the end of the day." Instead, Callan employs a modified J, using the gunwale to support the paddle shaft at the end of the stroke, while Winters prefers the slip, or Canadian, stroke – steering by angling the paddle as you draw the blade straight back. Yet another method, the silent stroke, is favoured by canoe instructor Becky Mason: silently knifing and turning the blade forward after each J-stroke so that it never emerges from the water. It's a little more Zen, and an excellent choice for getting closer to wildlife.

But if speed is your thing, never mind the scenery, buy a bent-shaft paddle along with a specialized canoe designed for tandem racing. Then employ the sit-and-switch, or hut stroke, in which you and your partner switch sides every few strokes, yelling out "hut!" to coordinate your efforts. "It is the most asinine thing I have ever seen in my life," grumbles Callan. Different strokes...

### My family and I have been cottaging on Horseshoe Lake for almost 60 years. Recently, there's been some talk about Lyme disease and we want to know if anything has been found in Haliburton County. We have a lot of children who love to hike and we want to protect them.

—PATTI BAUER, MINDEN, ONT.

Lyme disease is an infection caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*, transmitted through the saliva of deer ticks, a.k.a. black-legged ticks, distinguished by dark legs and a grey or brown body. But you won't be able to identify them, says King Wan Wu, a technician with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's biodiversity program, who is working on a book about Canadian ticks; an adult is the size of a sesame seed. Prime deer tick habitat includes the fringe areas between grassland and forest, but Wu notes they can be found almost everywhere. "Deer ticks prefer warm and moist areas," Wu says, habitats like the north shore of Lake Erie, an established Lyme disease hot spot.

There were 30 reported cases of Lyme disease in Ontario in 2004; however, Atul Jain, supervisor of environmental health at Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit, reports only eight cases in their entire district since 1987. There are no statistics for Haliburton County specifically.

A 2005 study by the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control and the Lyme Disease Association of Ontario found that many black-legged ticks removed from migrating birds across Canada tested positive for *B. burgdorferi*, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are spreading the disease. "The survival of ticks carried by birds depends on a lot of environmental factors," Wu says. "I think temperature will prevent them from spreading north. In experiments

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where tick eggs are buried in the snow, they hatch but they don't survive."

To be on the safe side, experts recommend wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants – even socks. If you get bitten, it's best to have a tick removed by a doctor so it can be sent to a lab. Use tweezers if you remove it yourself, and take the tick to the health unit for testing. If it comes back positive, don't panic. "Most ticks aren't that competent in transmitting the disease," Wu says. If you remove an infected tick within one to two days, you probably won't contract Lyme disease. Symptoms usually occur one to two weeks after a bite and include fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, and often a red bull's-eye skin rash. It's treated with antibiotics.

**The aluminum screen from our cottage porch is five years old and has developed a series of small holes. Why?**

—DON BRUNTON, BLACK LAKE, ONT.

Organic debris, such as bug guts or tree sap, if left on mesh over time, can prevent the screen from drying and lead to corrosion, according to a Canadian materials scientist, who, oddly, wished to remain anonymous. However, Alan Gray with Alabama-based Phifer Wire Products (the world's largest producer of aluminum and fibreglass insect screening) doubts that dead bugs were the problem.

"If the integrity of the coating on aluminum screening is breached," he says, "then open air gets to the aluminum and it will eventually just corrode until it basically dissolves." Contaminants that can breach that coating include acid rain, deck stains and washes, roofing treatment, and exterior vinyl cleaners. Pinning down the exact cause is tricky, he says, because no one knows exactly what kinds of pollutants waft by on the wind. But in many cases, the culprit is cleaning solutions, particularly deck wash. "Those types of cleaners contain harsh ingredients, so you must protect other materials from splashes," Gray says.

When you replace the screen, you might consider using a fibreglass mesh. It has better resistance to chemical contamination overall and is widely available at a comparable price. 🐦