

CANADA GOOSE SWEEP OVER THE WEIR IN SASKATOON

JOHN PATTERSON¹ and SCOTT CORLEY²

¹554 Bornstein Terrace, Saskatoon S7N 3Y1

²311-235 Stillwater Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7J 4M7
(306) 220-0456 (cell) email: scottcorley@msn.com

Any veteran watcher at the weir on the South Saskatchewan River in Saskatoon knows that on occasion a goose or duck will float fairly close to the weir before swimming or flying back upstream. They don't appear to be in any danger of being swept over, being clearly alert to the risk of drifting too close to the edge. However, on the morning of May 24, 2014 while participating in the May Bird Count, the unexpected happened and we saw an adult goose swept over the weir.

We were part of a team surveying the University of Saskatchewan campus including the eastside riverbank between University and Circle Drive Bridges. While the two of us were at the riverbank under the train bridge we observed a Canada goose behaving very strangely just above the weir toward the west side of the river. It floated backwards to the very edge of the weir and at the last instant as it started to accelerate over the edge it took flight and flew upstream a few meters and did it again. It was at much greater risk of going over the weir than any goose either of us have

previously observed. That it would put itself in such danger seemed inexplicable until we noticed that a second goose was directly below the first in the churn at the base of the weir. Only the neck and head of the second goose were visible from our vantage point.

How long the goose had been at the base of the weir, why it was there and how often the goose above the weir had floated to the brink were all unknown. While we watched, the goose upstream allowed itself to be swept backwards over the weir, this time making no effort to recover. Both birds immediately popped out downstream, seemingly no worse for their experience and swam to the cement pad on the western shore.

Pelicans can often be seen fishing at the base of the weir and one of us has seen a pelican carelessly drift too close and be driven under the water only to reappear and continue fishing, but only in exceptional circumstances would a goose be seen there. Over the years goslings have on occasion been observed going over the weir, sometimes accompanied by

an adult, and surviving¹. A goose and several goslings were seen going over the weir many years ago when the flow in the river was high as it is now². In that instance the adult was downstream of the goslings trying unsuccessfully to shepherd them back upstream but they were caught in the current. They became entangled in debris trapped below the weir and neither the adult nor the goslings survived. While the first adult had tried to block the downstream drift of the goslings the second adult remained upstream calling to them. Our best guess is that we saw the latter part of a similar drama - an early hatch of goslings

was swept over the weir with one parent. The parent was saved by its buoyancy and remained at the base of the weir. Either there were additional goslings that we didn't notice or the pair bond/parental instinct was sufficient to induce the second goose to follow the first over the weir. We didn't see any goslings that day but it is hard to imagine any other circumstance that accounts for the actions of the adult pair.

1. Personal communication from Michael Williams.
2. Personal communication from Craig Salisbury.



- John Patterson

