

TWO OF SASKATCHEWAN'S OLDEST AND MOST-STUDIED RAPTORS



Osprey with 1K blue band on left leg. Photo credit: Julio Blas

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I report two new Saskatchewan raptor longevity records received in 2013, my 71st year of banding birds.

**Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*), 608-89289.
25 years, 9 months.**

This owl was killed on Highway 20, 12 km south of Nokomis, near the junction where Highway 15 heads east, on the evening of February 15, 2013, 180 km SSE of where it had been banded. It died instantly, doing about \$1,200 damage to the grill of Kevin King's van. This owl had been banded on May 24, 1987, and thereby became Saskatchewan's oldest Great Horned Owl at 25 years, nine-and-a-half months.

It had been one of two young in one of four nests lined up for me by Lorne Volk, then teaching science at Mayfair High School, but who formerly had nests for me to band when he taught earlier at Eyebrow. Landowner Phyllis Jackson was present at the banding with her granddaughters, Glennis in Grade 6 and Marilyn in Grade 10. Martin Gerard and Bob Green were my climbers that day; Bob climbed to the nest 8.9 m in an aspen. I take only minor credit for Lorne Volk's high reputation today as the Senior Biologist in the Louis Riel School Division in St. Boniface, one of the top high schools in Greater Winnipeg.

This owl recovery was one of 597 from the 7,771 Great Horned Owls (7.7 per cent) banded in

Saskatchewan under my master permit, 1946-2015. I had previously held the North American longevity record twice: 508-08090, banded at Bredenburg on May 17, 1959 and caught in a trap at Roblin, MB on Dec. 4, 1972 (Houston 1985) was 13 years, six months old, the North American record for four years. Next was 518-60626, banded 1.5 miles west of Elstow (wrongly cited as "Lanigan") on May 20, 1967, killed by a truck on Highway 5, 11 km south of Aberdeen on January 18, 1988, 20 years seven months old, and found by Hal Fleischhaker. It was in such good condition that he obtained permission from the conservation officer to have it mounted. This recovery held the record for the continent for two years (Klimkiewicz and Futcher 1989; fig. 2 in Houston 1992). Finally, an injured owl 608-08052, was found and was euthanized at the Veterinary College at the University of Saskatchewan at 23 years, four months old; it was within 2 km of where it had been banded by Gerard Beyersbergen on June 1, 1977 (Beyersbergen 2006). The two current North American

longevity records are an owl banded by Jack Holt near Cincinnati, Ohio, which lived until it was seriously injured at 28 years, 0 months; that bird, after rehab, lived a few more years as a demonstration owl in an owl rehab facility, but those years do not count for survival in the wild. An even longer survival of 28 years, seven months is listed in the North American longevity records in second place in error at only 27 years, seven months, because the fact 568-17752 was an adult when banded (clearly stated in Nero 1992 and Sealy *et al.* 2003) did not reach the banding office, which still lists the record on July 7, 2016 as "age unknown."

**Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*),
608-98795.
19 years 3 months.**

The various sightings of Saskatchewan's oldest Osprey are of particular interest. I applied two bands to this Osprey — the standard aluminum band on the right leg, and a blue band with a readily visible alphanumeric 1-K on the other leg, when it was a nestling on the



Stuart Houston holding a healthy Great Horned Owl.
Photo credit: Glen and Rebecca Grambo

platform at the north end of Loon Lake on July 16, 1994. The female parent carried a black band 1-8 on her right leg, placed when trapped on three eggs on June 4, 1989 by Bert Dalziel, and recaptured on three eggs on the same platform on June 4, 1990 by Marc Bechard.

Blue 1-K became our most frequently sighted osprey, with four encounters and one recovery. It was photographed twice by Dr. Julio Blas from Seville, Spain. It proved to be our only osprey to return to breed (surprise!) on the identical platform on which it had been raised, at nine years, July 19, 2003. When 12 years old, it moved to a platform 200 m distant where it was photographed by Blas on July 22, 2006 when 12 years old. Its final encounter, sighted by telescope at the original but restored platform, was by Marten Stoffel on May 23, 2008 when it was nearly 14 years old. M.T. Griffin reported its recovery, with both leg bands intact, on the air force base 1.5 km south of Bellevue, Nebraska on October 9, 2013, at 19 years three



Osprey banding crew in the mid-2000s. Top row: Julio Blas, Martin Gerard, Stuart Houston and Marten Stoffel. Middle: Mary Houston and Dan Zazelenchuk. Front: Silvia Gerard, Penny Davis and Frank Scott.
Photo credit: Julio Blas

months of age. Sightings of blue 1-K thus accounted for five of the 32 recoveries and encounters of Ospreys from 609 banded, 1965-2004.

1-K blue was raised on the second most successful platform we built in our study area, where 25 young were reared to fledging in 12 years of success and four years of failure. Our most successful platform was built on Tullibee Lake; it raised 26 young in 11 years. The third successful platform on a donated and transported windmill in the marsh south of the unbuilt railway line never completed into Loon Lake village, raised 21 young in nine years of success (Houston *et al.* 2010).

The winter recoveries of Saskatchewan-banded Ospreys have been mapped — one in Ecuador, two in Colombia, and one in Panama (Ewins and Houston 1992). An Osprey with a satellite transmitter wintered twice in Costa Rica (Houston, 2002, 2004). The North American Osprey longevity record is 25 years two months in Virginia (Longevity records of North American birds USGS).

The world famous bird bander, the first author of *The Golden Guide to Field Identification of Birds of North America*, and the one who conceived Breeding Bird Surveys, Chandler S. Robbins, began banding in Maryland. He banded birds for 75 years until he ceased at the end of 2013 at age 94. The Houston and Robbins families both lived in Jesus College, Oxford University, during the XIV International Ornithological Congress, July 24-30, 1966 and have been correspondents since. Chan's albatross currently holds the world record for the oldest bird banded — a Laysan Albatross banded on Midway Island in the Pacific Ocean in 1956, when it must have been at least five and perhaps eight years old. This albatross usually breeds

every second year and has done so for over 58 years. Chan himself recaptured it there in 2002, and has received reports of its breeding at age 63, the world's oldest banded bird of any species.

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Introducing Marla Anderson



Born and raised in Regina, Marla's love for nature started during the many cross country camping trips she took with her family and the summers spent at their cabin on Last Mountain Lake. After receiving a diploma in photography at SIAST, Marla travelled the world and made a home in a variety of places, including the UK, Palau, Botswana, and South Africa. She has seen some amazing places and some amazing wildlife, but it was while doing large predator research in South Africa that Marla decided nature conservation was what really inspired her.

Returning back to Canada, Marla completed a diploma in Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation from Lakeland College and continued her education at the University of Regina obtaining a degree in Environmental Biology. Marla began working for Nature Saskatchewan in 2014 as the Important Bird Areas summer assistant. She loved it so much she came back again in the summers of 2015 and 2016. Marla will be fulfilling the role of Conservation and Education Manager while Lacey Weekes is away on maternity leave.