

A Common Redpoll Nest Record for Southern Saskatchewan

by **Fred W. Lahrman** and **Robert W. Nero**, Sask Museum of Natural History

Dr. Stuart Houston has recently indicated (1960. *Lake Athabasca records of interest. Blue Jay*, 18:125), that there is no published nest record of the Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*) for Saskatchewan. Several years ago the senior author (Lahrman) observed and took notes on a nest of this species at Mortlach, on the southern plains of Saskatchewan. This most unusual occurrence should have been reported earlier, but unfortunately his notes were lost and he has delayed reporting this incident until now, hoping to find them.

In early June of 1945, Mr. K. (Casey) Harris Jones of Mortlach called Lahrman's attention to a pair of Redpolls which were nesting in his garden. Mr. Jones knew Redpolls well since many of them were regular visitors to his yard every year. Furthermore, he recognized that it was unusual for them to stay during the spring and summer and to breed in this region. On the day of his visit Lahrman watched a pair of Common Redpolls feeding five well-developed young in a nest which was placed in a low shrubbery about 14 inches above the ground. He distinctly saw the bright red patch on their foreheads and had no doubt whatsoever that they were redpolls. He returned the following day to photograph the nest but was disappointed to learn that a cat had taken the young during the night and that the adults had disappeared.

Mr. Jones, upon recent enquiry, provided some additional information regarding the state of the nest at the time of Lahrman's visit (pers. corres., 1960): ". . . the nest was as you mention approximately 14 inches above the ground in the rustic arch I had over the garden path. There were five young just about ready to leave the nest. The female was quite tame. I could walk right past her without disturbing her. I had a Morning Glory creeper climbing over the arch. This particular day the nest was pulled out and lying on the path. I will not repeat here the frightful curses; some of the oaths I used are possibly still floating around in the

ether, not yet dissolved. I was sure mad, as you can imagine."

In later correspondence (1961) Mr. Jones added that during the early spring of the year they nested, a flock of about 30 were feeding on a profusion of Lamb's Quarters (*Chenopodium album*) which had gone to seed. Every day for quite a while Mr. Jones watched them feeding on the seeds of these plants until they moved on.

The American Ornithologists' Union **Check-list of North American birds**, lists this erratic species as **breeding** in Saskatchewan at the mouth of the McFarlane River on Lake Athabasca (1957:568). However, through recent correspondence (1961) with Dr. Francis Harper, who conducted a biological survey on Lake Athabasca in 1920, we have learned that this statement is apparently based on insufficient evidence. The question will be discussed further in a forthcoming list of the birds of the Uranium City-Lake Athabasca area. Redpolls could be expected to breed in Saskatchewan, especially in the extreme north-eastern corner, since, as Francis Harper points out in his "Birds of the Nuelin Lake Expedition, Keewatin, 1947" (1953, *Amer. Midl. Nat.*, 49:1-116), this species "evidently breeds through the Hudsonian Zone and along the upper border of the Canadian Zone as well as on the Barren Grounds." Records of Redpolls breeding outside of this area, however, are apparently unknown. Dr. Paul H. Baldwin, Colorado State University, who is currently studying the geographic variation of redpolls, has informed us (pers. corres., 1961) that he knows of no extra-limital breeding record for this species. The Mortlach record must be regarded as a very unusual case; presumably these birds lingered until the onset of breeding conditions while in a situation where suitable nesting cover evoked nesting. This is further substantiated by a recent observation of a pair of Common Redpolls at Regina as late as May 16 (1961). The pair was seen by Frank Brazier at noon in the Legislative

Grounds. He noted that they were closely associated, flying about together as if already paired. The two birds, which were seen within ten feet for several minutes, were more conspicuously marked than those usually seen here in the winter, and were apparently in their breeding plumage.

An extreme case of extra-limital breeding of another passerine species, the Parula Warbler (*Parula americana*), is of interest in this connection. In 1952 a male and two females with nests were discovered on the coast of California 1500 miles west of the normal range of this species. James Fisher considered this a "most fantastic example of a songbird nesting where it shouldn't." (Peterson, R. T., and J. Fisher, 1956. *Wild America*,

Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston). The incident is discussed at some length in a recent issue of a western bird journal (Williams, L., K. Legg and F. S. L. Williamson, 1958. Breeding of the Parula Warbler at Point Lobos, California. *Condor*, 60:345-354). Williams, *et al*, point out that this was the first record of the species west of the Rocky Mountains and the southwestern deserts. "It is believed that, other conditions being suitable, the fortuitous occurrence of individuals of both sexes in an area in which an abundance of lichens hanging from trees provided nest sites and material similar to those used in the normal breeding range of the species induced breeding in these birds." No repetition of breeding, or even of occurrence, has been recorded in the area in subsequent years.

First Saskatchewan Nest of Barred Owl

by Stuart Houston, Saskatoon

Exciting news took my mind at once from the 95° sweltering heat on Sunday afternoon, June 4, when I received a phone call from Kelvington. Anton Waycheshen had travelled three miles by boat and twenty-one miles by car to reach a phone and report the first Saskatchewan nest of a Barred Owl. This was an emergency, and Bill Richards and I rapidly cancelled our social engagements for the evening, and twenty minutes later we were on our way to High Hill.



Photo by Bill Richards

Young Barred Owls, Klogei Lake, June 4, 1961.

Anton and Steve Waycheshen found the nest while fighting a forest fire in the southwest corner of the Porcupine Forest Reserve along the northeast corner of Klogei Lake (sec. 6, twp. 39, range 2 west of 2nd meridian). They had seen the parent owls acting in a concerned manner in this area on Sunday, May 28, and again on May 31, when Anton climbed a spruce to inspect the only visible nest nearby, which proved to be an unoccupied crow nest. However, on June 4, Anton climbed another spruce and was able to look down on the young Barred Owls—not in the type of nest he expected, but in the upper part of a nearby black poplar stub.

Bill and I reached the Waycheshen farm at 7 p.m. and Anton and Steve took us the length of nearby Klogei Lake in their boat. On the still, cool lake we obtained relief from the oppressive heat while watching Buffleheads and White-winged Scoters.

At the end of the lake, we walked across the quarter-mile strip of recently burned mixed forest—a desolate sight—and then along the bulldozed fireguard. It was fortunate indeed that the nest was on the right side of the fire guard, for otherwise it would have been destroyed by the fire.

The Barred Owl nest was in the upper part of a black poplar stub, 18.