

# Large Concentration of Common Loons on Wildnest Lake

by Douglas E. Wade and Dorothy R. Wade, Regina

While on a "wilderness" canoe trip August 14-24, 1963, into Wildnest Lake north of the Hanson Lake Road and about 30 miles northwest of Creighton, Saskatchewan, we observed several large concentrations or flocks of Common Loons on Wildnest Lake. Most of the observations were on that part of the lake immediately south of the Department of Natural Resource's Wildnest Lake fire tower. On a visit to the tower we discussed birds and other animal life of the area with Mr. Andrew Custer who was from Pelican Narrows. Mr. Custer volunteered the information that he had been seeing some very large groups of loons on the lake south of the tower. His observations as to dates and numbers corresponded to our own. He gave us the information on the loons without any leading from us, so therefore we could assume that seeing such large numbers in single flocks was somewhat unusual, even for Mr. Custer.

Common Loons in pairs or small groups up to five were seen frequently along our route into Wildnest Lake as well as during the six days that we spent exploring Wildnest Lake from our base camp which was on an island about two miles south of the tower.

On August 18, within 200 yards of our camp, we saw a compact group of at least 35 Common Loons. They were repeatedly diving and going through displays such as preening and wing-stretching, with some calling, although the calls were short-phrased. On the 19th, about three miles north of our camp, we saw three packs of Common Loons. Counting was difficult because the birds were frequently and repeatedly diving, but the largest count on one pack was 57. These birds were relatively quiet.

On the 20th, to the north of the island on which we camped, a very noisy pack of about 100 Common Loons moved into within 50 yards of us while we sat quietly on the shore, partly hidden by some rocks and jack pines. Many of the males were en-

gaged in peering, wing-stretching and even in very short pursuits on water of females. Males would face each other and repeatedly dip their heads into the water. (This large group was probably the one observed by Mr. Custer and mentioned by him during our visit to the fire tower on August 21.)

Outside of large but loose concentrations (which could not be called flocks) seen by us off the coast of North Carolina, we had never seen such large, closely-assembled flocks of Common Loons in salt or fresh water.

In the course of this canoe trip, which started and ended at Leaf Rapids on the Sturgeon-weir River and went up the Wildnest River through Granite Lake and back into the Wildnest River to its source at Wildnest Lake, we saw such other birds as: Red-necked Grebe, Mallard, Canvasback, White-winged Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Goshawk, Pigeon Hawk, Sparrow Hawk, (this small hawk, incidentally, was very often seen along the entire Hanson Lake Road), Spruce Grouse, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Common Tern (one flock of 27 seen), Common Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher, Gray Jay, Common Raven, Common Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Boreal Chickadee, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Palm Warbler, Pine Siskin and Harris' Sparrow (including one immature). Several gulls were seen at a distance, but we could not identify them.

Mr. Custer told us that small birds ("sparrows and other small birds") often were found inside the tower on mornings and he opened the windows to let them out.

We saw Mink on two occasions—at rapids; saw fresh Moose and Black Bear signs; and learned that Woodland Caribou were probably present in the vicinity of an un-named lake about eight miles north of Wildnest.

Crayfish were abundant in Wildnest Lake and River. Fishing was

(Continued on page 140)

## UNUSUAL RED-HEADED WOODPECKER RECORD IN MOOSE JAW AREA

by Rosalind Taylor, Moose Jaw

On July 23, 1963, Mrs. Cy Knight and I went to the farm of Mr. Stan Green, six miles from Moose Jaw, to see a Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) which Mr. Frank Brazier had reported to me. He had seen one at this place on July 7 while driving from Boharm to Moose Jaw and later wrote me about it, because I am collecting records of this bird in Saskatchewan.

After checking with Mr. Green at the farm we soon sighted the bird on top of a telephone pole and watched it as it flew down onto the road and then up into the tree tops of the shelter belt on the opposite side of the road. We watched it for some time, then to our astonishment a second Red-headed Woodpecker appeared and we observed the two birds for about an hour.

Several members of the Moose Jaw Natural History Society went out to see the birds and we thought, because the shelter belt contained many old dead trees, we might find a nest or see immature birds. On one of our visits to the farm in late August, we finally found an old dead stump that had had three nests, but whether any of these belonged to the Red-headed Woodpeckers, we do not know. We saw no immature birds and Mr. Green did not see the two adult birds after the first week of August.

In looking over the records (more than 50) which I have collected to date for Saskatchewan, all back to 1900 are for single adult birds. (I have breeding records for 1894 and 1895). That is the reason for our excitement when we sighted the second bird. We shall watch this location closely next spring to see whether the birds return.

(Continued from page 138)

good with Northern Pike, Walleyes, and a few Yellow Perch caught by our party. This trip, made by the writers, their son, Alan, and his friend, Gregg Keith, was of the kind that the whole party considered very suitable for family groups with fair camping and canoeing skills.

## SUMMER OBSERVATION OF WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS AT REGINA

by Al Binnie, Regina

A most unusual species of bird, considering the time of year, paid us a visit on July 15, 1963. Two White-winged Crossbills were observed in our garden at the Provincial Correctional Institution from 8:00 to 8:15 p.m. on the above-mentioned date. The two birds, one male and one female, were busily opening aphid-filled galls on the cottonwood trees. We were able to observe closely their great adaptability for this type of feeding. If the number of gall-infested leaves lying on the ground beneath many of the large cottonwoods throughout the grounds was any indication, our crossbills must have remained in the area several days, although they were not seen again.

A similar observation of a related species, the Red Crossbill, feeding on aphid-filled galls on poplar trees in Regina was described by Dr. George Ledingham in 1959 (*Blue Jay*, 17:149-150).

### INFORMATION WANTED

Have you seen gulls carrying two black poultry rings on the left leg? In July, 1963, 644 young Glaucous-winged Gulls, part of the Christie Island gull population were banded with US F&W Service bands on the right leg and poultry rings on the left leg. Information on the success of the colony and its dispersal movements is wanted. Please report place and number seen for each date of observation and send to Mr. John G. Sarles, The Canadian Wildlife Service, 6660 N.W. Marine Drive, Vancouver, B.C.

### 1963 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Send in reports, listing the numbers of each species seen on the one BEST DAY between December 19 and January 1. In addition, list other species (number of individuals and date seen) between December 19 and January 1.

Send reports as soon as possible to the Editor, *Blue Jay*, Box 1121, Regina.