

Birds of the Kazan Lake Region, Saskatchewan

by **Thomas E. Randall**, Edmonton

FOREWORD

In April of 1942, Ducks Unlimited (Canada) engaged Thomas E. Randall to carry on a study of waterfowl and related wildlife. Mr. Randall accordingly worked at Kazan Lake for four months, from June to October. His final report, submitted on October 9, 1942, indicates that he made good use of his time: a total of 285 ducks were banded, 557 duck nests were discovered, and notes were made on the occurrence of 153 species of birds.

Mr. Randall's work on the birds of Kazan Lake was first called to my attention by Herb Moulding, Ducks Unlimited, Regina, in response to a query regarding bird work in northern Saskatchewan. Through the kindness of Mr. Moulding and of W. G. Leitch, Chief Biologist, Ducks Unlimited, Winnipeg, I was given access to the D.U. file and was able to examine Randall's list. I later learned that Dr. Stuart Houston and W. Earl Godfrey were aware of the list, but no information from it had been published.

Desiring further information on certain species briefly mentioned in the D.U. list I decided to contact Randall. Thanks to Professor W. Ray Salt, co-author of **Birds of Alberta**, I was able to locate Randall at his present home in Edmonton, Alberta. Through correspondence with Randall it was learned that he was agreeable to publishing his bird list and further, that considerable additional records were available, the list as it appears in the D.U. files being a much abbreviated account, prepared mainly with waterfowl in mind and without all of the field data on hand. The present list is based upon Randall's original field notes and lists and was prepared by him with our encouragement during the winter of 1961-1962. Some information given in the D.U. report has been added where this seemed appropriate.

Earlier investigations were made at Kazan Lake for D.U. by other workers. Fred G. Bard was at Kazan Lake from March 27 to April 8, 1939, and recorded in those 12 days some

16 species. A report in the D.U. files: "An investigation of the Kazan Lake Area, Saskatchewan. March 27th to April 8th, 1939," by W. Lloyd Bunting and Fred G. Bard, D.U. files, dated April 12, 1939, lists eight species, and a letter by Bard to G. R. Fanset, Manitoba Manager, D.U. files, dated April 28, 1939, lists eight other species. These winter records of birds at Kazan Lake have been included in the present list, thus adding two new species—Willow Ptarmigan and Pine Grosbeak.

Randall's list supplies some valuable records for a little known region of the province. While no attempt has been made to correlate his observations with others for the general area the interested reader may wish to consult the following works which bear on the area:

Buchanan, A. 1920. **Wild life in Canada**. McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 264 pp. (Records for Lac Ile-à-la-Crosse, etc.).

Godfrey, W. E. 1950. **Birds of the Cypress Hills and Flotten Lake regions, Saskatchewan**. Natl. Mus. Canada, Bull. 120. 96 pp. (Flotten Lake is 60 miles south of Kazan Lake).

Macoun, J. and J. M. Macoun. 1909 **Catalogue of Canadian birds**. Can. Dept. Mines, Geol. Surv. Branch, Ottawa. 761 pp. (Several records for Lac la Loche, i.e., Methye Lake and Portage region).

One cannot resist mentioning certain records on Randall's list which are outstanding. For example, his records include three species of jaegers and his account of the Long-tailed Jaeger is the first record for the province, establishing this species at least as hypothetical. The Mew Gull record is the farthest south for the province, although it has been recorded in southern Alberta. We usually think of Say's Phoebes and Rock Wrens as birds of southwestern Saskatchewan, but Randall's records show that they may wander far out

of their normal range. The Bohemian Waxwing account is extremely interesting as this species is not otherwise known to nest in Saskatchewan except for a probable record at Fond du Lac on Lake Athabasca made by T. Shortt in 1945. Randall's Blackpoll Warbler nest record represents the earliest record for the province, Shortt having found the only other known nest at Fond du Lac in 1945 (**Blue Jay**, 18:125). Randall's nest-finding ability should also be noted. Of the 191 species listed, nests were found for 104. An additional 28 were reported as probably nesting.

The unusual assemblage of birds may be attributed to the geographic situation. Kazan Lake lies within a special forest region designated the "Upper Churchill Section" of the Boreal Forest. "This Section in west-central Saskatchewan occupies an area of low relief, mostly below the 1,500-foot contour, bounded by the Precambrian Shield on the north and the Saskatchewan Uplands on the south. Extensive stands of jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*) occupy the sand plains and low ridges, while intervening poorly drained areas are forested with black spruce (*Picea mariana*) and tamarack (*Larix laricina*). White spruce (*Picea glauca*) and aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) are of less importance here than on the upland tills of the Mixedwood Section to the south, though both species, and also balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera*), are well represented where drainage conditions are favourable. Balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) and white birch (*Betula*

papyrifera) are present but not abundant. Large areas of swamp, bog and muskeg are common. The area was occupied by Lake Hyper-Churchill at an early stage in the retreat of the last continental glacier, hence the flat or undulating surface. The sandy nature of the lacustrine and till deposits has possibly been inherited, in part at least, from a thin basal sandstone on the Precambrian basement at the north side of the Section, even though the main bedrock is dolomite or limestone of Devonian age. Soil profiles under pine forest on the sandy tills and lacustrine plains are strongly leached, the whiteness of the eluviated horizon showing up strikingly wherever the surface humus is removed as along bush trails. On heavier materials, for example on some of the modified tills or banded lacustrine deposits, grey-wooded profiles have developed in association with white spruce and poplar forests." (Rowe, J. S. 1959. **Forest regions of Canada**. Bull. 123, Forestry Branch, Dept. N. Affairs and Nat. Resources, Ottawa. 71 pp.

Readers may be interested to know that Mr. Randall is now writing a series of essays on several species, including Sora, Greater Yellowlegs and Bonaparte's Gull, for Dr. A. H. Bannerman of Dumfries, Scotland, who is writing the 12-volume work, **Birds of the British Isles**. We look forward to seeing these in print and hope to have further notes and articles from Mr. Randall on his observations of western Canadian birds.—Robert W. Nero, University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus, Regina.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born June 21, 1886, at Rodmersham Green, Kent, England. My first ten years were spent around the orchards, fields and woods. Early in life I got interested in the beauties of nature, especially the birds, and I soon acquired the ability to recognize the many species I met with. While quite young I saw such rarities as four Waxwings in an apple tree and a pair of Golden Orioles in a plantation of larches. Just before my eleventh birthday my parents moved to the district bordering the Thames River estuary and here I soon became acquainted with the bird life of the

extensive marshes along the estuary. I soon came to know the gamekeepers and marsh shepherds and was allowed to ramble through woods, fields and marsh with perfect freedom. I observed many comparatively rare birds, found large numbers of nests and acquired a thorough knowledge of the bird life of the district. I recorded such British rarities as Bittern, Rough-legged Buzzard, Lapland Bunting, Snow Bunting and Shore Lark. I found nests not previously recorded from the district. Nests of Common Snipe, Water-rail, Shoveller and Pochard were all firsts

for the North Kent marshes. But my most notable find was a small colony of the beautiful Bearded Tit in a reed bed. This was in 1907 and was the first nesting of this bird in Kent for nearly one hundred years. These birds were still there in 1912, when I came to Canada. But since that time there has been no report of the bird until last year, 1961, when the sight of a bird was reported from the reed bed where I last saw them fifty years ago. So I am the only living person to have seen Bearded Tits nesting in Kent.

Coming to Canada in July, 1912, I had scarcely got well settled when war broke out, and did not see more of Canada until September, 1919. Then I at once took up my old bird interests and soon became acquainted with the late Dr. William Rowan who greatly aided me in my continued study of western Canadian birds. After a few years spent in the Alberta prairies I got into the northern forests and muskegs and have since spent a great deal of time there.

It would take a long time to relate all my findings. A few of the highlights are as follows: in 1930, in the Athabasca district, I found 43 nests of the Gray (Canada) Jay. In 1940, at Beaverhills Lake, I found 27 Marbled Godwit's nests. I found the first Greater Yellowlegs' nest recorded for Alberta. In 1961 I discovered the sixty-eighth nest of this species. I possess the only record of Virginia Rail nesting in Alberta. While camping out with the late P. A. Taverner, at Herchmer, Manitoba, in 1936, in ten days I found 23 Harris' Sparrow nests. In 1942, before going to Ile-à-la-Crosse, I spent a month in the hills south of Mortlach, Saskatchewan, and among many nests found there I discovered 28 Willet's nests.

Now that I am getting to an age where it is advisable to take things a little easier, it gives me great satisfaction and pleasure to pass all these and other experiences through my mind. But I often wish I could do it all over again.

INTRODUCTION

I reached Ile-à-la-Crosse on May 28, 1942, my destination being Kazan Lake, which lies some 20 miles northwest of Ile-à-la-Crosse. As I had decided to camp at the northwest corner of the lake, the journey consisted of a 25-mile canoe trip to the north end of the Aubichon Arm of Lac Ile-à-la-Crosse, then a portage of seven miles over a bush trail to Kazan Lake. My camp was a forestry cabin situated on the shore of the lake where the Kazan River flows north to Peter Pond Lake.

Kazan Lake is about 10 miles from north to south and six and one-half from east to west. The shore is very irregular, especially on the east and south. A group of well-wooded islands lie near the north shore and another group near the south end. For the greater part the forest grows right to the water's edge, but in a few places small areas of rough grass and rushes occur and reed beds of varying size are quite plentiful. The north side of the lake is very shallow and the water is low, leaving an extensive foreshore of mud, thickly strewn with rocks.

The surrounding country is flat but on the east side a low ridge lies between Lac Ile-à-la-Crosse and Kazan

Lake. Nine miles to the north lies the great Peter Pond Lake, the area between being mostly muskeg which has been devastated by fire in recent years, so that few large trees remain. Eight miles to the west lies the smaller Niska Lake, which is also connected with Peter Pond Lake by a fairly wide channel of deep water. Around Niska Lake I found some fairly extensive stands of white and black poplar and white spruce of large size.

The object of my visit to this area was to make a survey of the wildfowl population and to band ducks, but being a keen student of all bird life, I observed birds of all kinds, and the following list is the result of my observations.

A trip was taken in mid-June to Niska Lake and then up to the Hudson's Bay post of Dillon River on the west side of Peter Pond Lake. Apart from that trip, all of my time from June 3 to October 1 was spent at Kazan Lake. Unless otherwise indicated all records are for Kazan Lake.

The nomenclature used in the species account is that of the American Ornithologists' Union **Check-list of North American Birds** (5th ed., 1957).