

The Bird Life at Cree Lake, Summer 1963

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Sandy shore of Middleton Island, Cree Lake

Photo by F. W. Lahrman

In the summer of 1963 I spent four delightful weeks at Cree Lake, studying the bird life there, and while the time was late—July 16 to August 13—useful data and 48 specimens were collected. I was joined by Fred G. Bard on August 6. We camped in a DNR patrol cabin on a peninsula running into the lake at the north end, and our trips into the area were made on foot or by boat.

Cree Lake is approximately 180 miles northwest of La Ronge, on the border of the physiographic area known as the Athabasca Plain. It is a large lake generously sprinkled with wooded islands and peninsulas that cradle numerous small lakes. The tree growth of this sandy terrain is predominantly jack pine, with scattered white spruce and river birch, and almost no poplar. When Fred Bard returned to Cree Lake briefly in September (September 25-27) the woods were spangled with gold, but this was the yellow autumn foliage of the birches, not poplars. In mid-

August blueberries were at their height, and by late September, the low-bush cranberries were touched by the first frost. During our few weeks at camp we enjoyed to the full the natural, unspoiled beauty of the place.

When I arrived at Cree Lake, Herring Gull and Common Tern colonies occupied several of the many smaller rocky islands. The gull colonies varied in size from two or three nests to 30 or more, and at this late date the young gulls were hatched and almost one-third grown. All were flying by August 9. The Common Terns had young on the wing, but there were also downy young and some birds still incubating eggs. Besides the Herring Gulls, there were a few wandering Bonaparte's and Mew Gulls and one immature California Gull.

On August 6, while checking a colony of Common Terns on a small rocky islet, we found three Red-breasted Mergansers' nests, hidden in

the dense clumps of grass. In two of these nests the eggs were already hatched and the young gone, but one pipped egg and four downy Red-breasted Merganser young were found in the other (see photo).

A Bald Eagle's nest was found on July 21 with three nearly full-grown young. The nest was in a jack pine on an island in the Cree River. Local Indians reported another one approximately 10 miles farther down the river. A third nest was seen by Mr. Bard on September 27 near Cyril Mahoney's Camp on the Foster Lakes about 80 miles southeast of Cree Lake.

Family groups of Myrtle Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Gray Jays, Common Crows, Robins, Slate-colored Juncos, Boreal Chickadees and Spruce Grouse were seen on the larger wooded islands. White-crowned Sparrows were found in the muskegs along the Cree River. Roving bands of Pine Siskins were seen quite frequently.

On August 2 a family of three newly-fledged Olive-sided Fly-

catchers were found. Three Bohemian Waxwings were seen on August 7 and a male was collected which appeared to be a breeding bird.

On Mr. Bard's September trip flocks of Common Loons were seen. Two flocks observed on September 25 consisted of 21 and 48 birds respectively, and on September 26 another group of 14 was seen, all flying westward.

SPECIES RECORDED: Common Loon, Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Mallard, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Pigeon Hawk, Sparrow Hawk, Spruce Grouse, Spotted Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Herring Gull, California Gull, Mew Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Common Tern, Great Horned Owl, Great Gray Owl (feathers only), Common Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Gray Jay, Common Raven, Common Crow, Boreal Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Robin, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Myrtle Warbler, Palm Warbler, Rusty Blackbird, Pine Siskin, White-winged Crossbill, Slate-colored Junco, Chipping Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Song Sparrow (54 species).



Downy Young of Red-breasted Merganser, August 6, 1963.

Photo by F. W. Lahrman