

Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*) Record for Saskatchewan

By A. F. Oeming, Edmonton

On 11 October, 1957, my friend John Matthews of Edmonton while on a goose shoot near Luseland, Saskatchewan, observed an American hunter down a large falcon. The bird had stooped down on some ducks that were feeding near the hunter's goose decoys. Matthews was unable to observe the killing through his binoculars and upon walking to the scene of the killing he discovered the dead bird to be a large immature-plumaged female Gyr Falcon. The

bird was of slate grey coloration and weighed 57 ozs. In weight, color and age it was identical to the Gyr Falcon shot near Whitford Lake, Alberta, the previous fall.

INFORMATION WANTED— The writer would appreciate information on this species from anyone who has seen them during the fall and winter in Saskatchewan. Data as to color, location and activity at time of observation would be most appreciated. Of special interest would be any report of such a bird repeatedly seen in a particular area. Send information to Albert F. Oeming, Edmonton Zoological Society, Rm. 6, 10126-100 Street, Edmonton,

Prairie Falcon Nesting Records in Sask.

By Richard W. Fyfe, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History



Photo by R. W. Fyfe

Walter Knudsen and Chris Willoway examining Prairie Falcon nest site 280 feet above the valley floor at the Big Muddy.

The first and only reported nesting of Prairie Falcons (*Falco mexicanus*) in Saskatchewan is that of a set of four eggs collected at Battle Creek (which flows from the Cypress Hills) by J. E. Bowman on May 3, 1914 (Godfrey, 1950. *Birds of the Cypress Hills and Flotten Lake Regions Saskatchewan*). To the present time no further nest records

have been recorded although these birds are occasionally seen and are listed as occurring in this province (Taverner, 1945, *Birds of Canada*; Bent, 1938, *Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey*).

On July 1, 1958, in Big Muddy Valley, three nest sites of Prairie Falcons were found by Walter Knudsen, Chris Willoway and myself. All three



Photo by R. W. Fyfe
Prairie Falcon.

aeries were located within a distance of one mile which would indicate that these birds nest regularly where suitable locations may be found in this valley. It was relatively easy to locate the aeries because they were marked by "whitewash" and because the enraged parents came as much as one half mile to meet us and screamed overhead until we left. Two nests containing three young each were found on the sides of the 300-foot mud and shale cliffs in the valley, approximately 280 feet above the valley floor. The third was located on a somewhat lower cliff estimated at about 100 feet, the nest cavity being some 14 to 20 feet below the top; two young were observed perched at the entrance. All three aeries faced south or south-east and were in large cavities on the steepest sides of the cliffs. Two of the nests were inspected at close range but the third was considered out of reach. The cavities which were examined were large and apparently naturally formed, the first being approximately 6 feet in diameter and extending 5 to 6 feet into the face of the cliff; the second, although only 2½ to 3 feet in diameter, was about 10 feet in depth. No nesting material was present and only a small amount of debris from past meals was found.

Two additional active aeries have been found and checked: one with at least two young was found south of Beechy in the South Saskatchewan River Valley by Tom Gentles in June of this year and verified by myself on July 5; an additional nest in the Big Muddy Valley was found and identified by three boys and myself on July 12, 1958.

Both of the above nests were also found on southern exposures and in rather large natural cavities. Litter was found in each, although no nesting material was present, and each was well marked by "whitewash" at the entrance of the cavities. The aerie heights varied somewhat from the others: the one found south of Beechy was approximately 50 feet in height on a 75 foot cliff; the one found in the Big Muddy Valley on July 12 was approximately 150 feet up the side of a 200-foot cutbank.

An additional nest site which was probably that of a Prairie Falcon was found vacated in June in the South Saskatchewan River Valley south-west of Glidden. Small feathers were seen near the entrance while below this and the adjacent ledge "whitewash" was present. Further down the cliff a wing feather of a Prairie Falcon was found. While we were attempting to reach the site a Prairie Falcon came to the area and circled above us but did not exhibit the concern shown by the other birds when we were near their young. We suspect a possible early nesting of the birds at this nest. However, a further check will be made in the coming year to determine whether this is a used aerie.

Any additional nesting records of a Prairie Falcon are valuable as each is a verification or extension of the known breeding range in Canada. However, I would warn against the examination of new nests until mid or late June. Prairie Falcons may leave their eggs if disturbed for too long a period early in the nesting season, but if left undisturbed, the birds will use one aerie for many years.

Protection of Birds of Prey To Be Discussed at Annual Meeting, Saskatoon, October 18th

If you are interested in the protection of birds of prey in Saskatchewan, plan to attend the **SNHS ANNUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 18, in SASKATOON**. If unable to attend the meeting, please send us a letter in support of a resolution for protection.