

## THE BARN OWL IN ALBERTA

by Wayne Smith, 8220 Elbow Drive, Calgary

On the weekend of July 22-23, 1967, Cleve Wershler and I were in the Cypress Hills at Elkwater. At 10:20 p.m. on July 22, while listening for night birds, we heard a bird we couldn't identify. Twice we plunged through the thick brush at the southwest corner of the Elkwater Lake campsite, but only had one glimpse of the bird in our flashlights. We decided, from what we had glimpsed, that the bird was an owl; but what kind of owl?

At approximately 10:35 p.m., under a clear, moonlit sky, we tracked down the owl. It was sitting on top of a 15-foot pole. We shone both our flashlights (one, a four-cell) on the owl. It was obviously a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*).

We made a field description, writing down the following points: long legs, snowy-white underparts, long wings, heart-shaped face, and its size (about that of a small Great Horned Owl, roughly 18 inches). As we watched it from the bottom of the pole the Barn Owl kept calling (a magpie-like croak—nasal, wheezy and ascending) and it also kept lowering its head and weaving it from side to side. Each time it flew, its flight was moth-like. This particular pole must have been a favorite perch because it was reluctant to leave the pole and kept returning to it. Four times we observed the Barn Owl for over a full minute.

Twice, the Barn Owl we were watching was answered by another Barn Owl. Also, at about 1:00 a.m., July 23, we heard a long, quavering whistle from the east end of the campground. We read later in A. C. Bent's "Life Histories" volume on owls that the call of a young Barn Owl with unopened eyes is "a high-pitched quavering whine . . ." Egg dates for Barn Owls are reported as very unpredictable.

The Barn Owl is very scarce in the Prairie Provinces. Salt and Wilk

(*Birds of Alberta*) show no previous records for Alberta. Recent reports in the *Blue Jay* (21:104, 25:22) show the following: Saskatchewan, four records—Balcarres, May 1, 1910; Aylesbury, May 5, 1924; Kindersley, May 18, 1930; and Regina, May 3, 1936; Manitoba, four records—St. Anne's, November 6, 1912; Sperling, January 1925; Whitewater Lake, October 1927; and La Rivière, April 8, 1945.

## ALBERTA INDIGO BUNTING RECORD

by Wayne Smith, 8220 Elbow Drive, Calgary

On June 24, 1967, Garry McKay, Stu Alexander, Cleve Wershler, two small children and I were on a field trip along the eastern Rockies. We stopped by a small slough about 15 miles north of Kananaskis Lake, about 50 miles west of Calgary. In a large grove of young aspens we heard a bird song that none of us had ever heard before. After many minutes of stealthy stalking we managed to get a good look at the bird and identified it as a young male Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*). It was a deeper blue and smaller than a Mountain Bluebird, and its body shape and bill were distinctive. Its plumage contained a lot of grey mixed with the blue. We supposed it to be a non-breeding young male as its territory seemed large and ill-defined.

Later on in the day we had an opportunity to compare its song, which we had carefully listened to, with Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*) songs, for we found about eight of the latter species about 15 miles west of Longview. Although Salt and Wilk (in *Birds of Alberta*, 1966) state that it is impossible to separate the species by voice, we found a distinct difference. While observing the Lazuli Buntings we briefly glimpsed a bunting whose song appeared to be that of an Indigo Bunting, and we felt fairly sure that it was this species.