

## A POSSIBLE SIGHT RECORD OF THE BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK IN MANITOBA

by **Martin McNicholl**, Winnipeg

David A. West (1962) considers the Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) and the Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*P. ludovicianus*) to be two races of one species, rather than two species as presently held by most authorities, including the A.O.U. Committee (1957). Evidence presented by West includes extensive hybridization between the two forms, especially where their ranges overlap in the southern Plains. In southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba we can expect both grosbeaks, as well as hybrids of these two forms. On this account, it may be difficult to separate poorly marked or female and immature birds in the field.

On August 22 and 23, 1964, Andy Heidrick saw a bird in Brookside Cemetery, near Winnipeg, which he believed was an immature or female Black-headed Grosbeak. On August 31, when Andy and I were about to return home shortly before 5:00 p.m. from a routine check of the cemetery, Andy spotted his mystery bird again. We felt, and others who have studied our notes have agreed, that this was an immature male Black-headed Grosbeak. We watched it for some time through 7 x 35 binoculars, while I wrote down the following description: "In size, shape, general characteristics, and wing pattern like the Rose-breasted Grosbeak; orangy breast, similar to Robin colour, but lighter and absolutely unstreaked; rump, when flying, a reddish or rusty colour (almost cinnamon)." Dr. Lawrie Smith felt that the breast colour and lack of streaking was the strongest evidence for identifying this bird as a Black-headed Grosbeak, although both Peterson and Pough mention the rump as well. The bird was accompanied by two other immature or female grosbeaks which appeared to have unstreaked breasts, but these were not closely observed, as we wanted to obtain all the details from the showiest bird. Attempts to have the observation verified by others were not successful.

The normal breeding range of the

Black-headed Grosbeak, according to Peterson, is "s. B.C., s. Alberta, s.w. Saskatchewan, south through w. U.S. to s. Mexico." Although it appears on A. G. Lawrence's *Field checking list of Manitoba birds* as a straggler, we located very few Manitoba records. Mr. Harold Hosford located a reference in an unpublished leaflet by A. G. Lawrence entitled "Rare bird visitors to Manitoba" as follows: "Odd few stray into Manitoba. First recorded on May 30, 1919 at Aweme, Treesbank by the Criddle brothers." According to R. W. Sutton's records this latter observation was of a singing male. Mr. Harold Mossop cited a recent record — two females and two males sighted at Treesbank on May 14, 1955 by Stuart Criddle. And Hoyes Lloyd (1961) has reported finding a flock of five Black-headed Grosbeaks along the south shore of Lake Manitoba west of Delta, Manitoba, on August 31, 1959.

Even in most parts of Saskatchewan it is very rare. Although it breeds sparingly in the Cypress Hills (Godfrey, 1950) and has bred once at Last Mountain Lake (see accompanying article in this journal), many other areas have no records of it. Specimens have been taken at Eastend and Lake Johnston (= Old Wives Lake) and the bird is reported as "seen eastward to Estevan" (Mitchell, 1924). There are also two records from Nipawin (Houston and Street, 1959) and at least six from Regina: five cited in Belcher (1961) and one male seen August 11, 1962 by Frank Brazier (pers. corres., M. Belcher, F. Brazier).

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## SUMMER RECORD OF A SNOWY OWL

by **Garry L. Fletcher**, Conquest

The following is an account of my capture of a female adult Snowy Owl on June 14, 1964. The owl was first observed near MacDonald's Creek, two miles west of Bounty, Saskatchewan, flying about 10 to 15 feet above the ground at a distance of a quarter of a mile.

There were four other people with me at the time, and we had been casually walking in a stony pasture looking for tipi rings. At first, not



Photo by Garry L. Fletcher

thinking of a Snowy Owl being around in the summer, we expected it to be some large white water bird, but after approaching to within several hundred yards, we soon recognized it as an owl. When it lit on an open piece of ground near the creek, two of us decided to circle around it to get a better look. The nearer we approached the more bewildered it got until I managed to wrap a coat around it from behind. Of course, after having seen it fly we had never expected to catch it. We didn't realize what was wrong with it until I had got it home and in a pen. Then it was evident that the right wing was not tucked in as close to its body as was the left one. Closer examination showed that the main bend of the wing had been broken and had healed almost perfectly. The bird appeared in otherwise excellent condition. Being near the water had likely helped it to survive, by way of providing easy-to-catch shorebirds and other small game. We noticed that in the place where we caught the bird several Willets were making quite a fuss, apparently disturbed over the presence of the owl.

I kept the owl for a week, feeding it scraps of raw meat and dead House Sparrows. The latter, I might add, were consumed whole, in one gulp. On June 20, I brought the owl to the Wild Animal Park in Saskatoon, where I left it to live with the two other Snowy Owls that were there.