

1966 REVIEW OF SASKATOON BIRD OBSERVATIONS

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This annual review of birds reported within a 40-mile radius of Saskatoon is more complete than in previous years (Gollop, Roy and Folker, 1963; Gollop and Gollop, 1964; Gollop, 1965; Gollop, Slimmon and Folker, 1966). It is based on approximately 4,500 records for 217 species from 101 contributors to the Saskatoon Bird Review, which was initiated in 1966 and modelled after a similar project of Dr. M. T. Myres and the Calgary Bird Club. The objectives of this periodic report are to develop and increase interest in birds among members of the Saskatoon Natural History Society, by encouraging their participation in an investigation of how many birds of which species do what, when and where in this district. Eventually, these records will be compiled and analyzed for a publication on the birds of Saskatoon and vicinity. The present paper is a summary of the more interesting reports from the first five issues of the Review.

Contributors: Ten people submitted more than 3,500 of the 4,500 observations received: J. E. Black, R. V. Folker, M. A. Gollop, Dr. and Mrs. C. S. Houston, Mrs. J. M. Pepper, W. S. Richards, J. F. Roy, J. A. Slimmon and the author. Twelve other observers contributed 25 to 100 records each: E. R. Clark, D. A. Classen, J. M. Gerrard, J. D. Hogg, S. M. Keay, M. R. Lein, C. A. Matthews, R. S. Miller, B. M. Rever, J. W. and M. J. Schmidt and Mrs. W. T. Shepstone. Specific reports by other contributors used in this paper are acknowledged in the text.

Breeding Season: At present it is estimated that 116 species of birds nest in the Saskatoon District. In 1966 data were submitted on 664 occupied nests and 118 broods of 76 species (Table 1). There were no breeding records of such common species as Rock Dove*, Catbird, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Balti-

more Oriole, Chipping and Song Sparrows. There are still six species believed to breed annually in the area for which no nests or flightless young have ever been reported: Cooper's Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Blue Jay, Rufous-sided Towhee and American Goldfinch.

Probably the most notable ornithological event around Saskatoon this year was the influx of Long-eared Owls. C. S. Houston banded 50 young in 18 nests, most of which were found by J. W. and M. J. Schmidt and K. I. Ecklund (see also Houston, 1966). Lark Buntings were more common than in any recent year; an article on a colony near Clavet appeared in the September issue of the *Blue Jay* (Cohen and Rever, 1966).

Four species not known to breed in the area in the last six years at least, were found nesting: **Piping Plover**, a nest on an alkali slough near Strehlow had four eggs on 8 June (J. A. Slimmon). **Franklin's Gull**: a colony that may have had 500 nests was found on Rice Lake in June by R. T. Sterling. **Cliff Swallow**: there was a colony with $70 \pm$ nests under a bridge near Environ on 19 June. By 14 August practically all of these nests had been destroyed but $80 \pm$ nests, a few with young, were found under another bridge six miles away. Presumably, this was the same colony (J. B. Gollop). **Pine Siskin**: R. R. Cohen discovered a nest with three eggs on 15 June on 7th Street and another with young on the University Campus on 15 August, the latter in an American elm (*Ulmus americana*) instead of the usual conifer.

Migration: The spring migration of 1966 produced significantly smaller than normal numbers of geese, Sandhill Cranes, shorebirds, thrushes, warblers and sparrows. A spring that

*Common names used in this article are from the AOU Checklist (1957).

began with indications of a very early migration turned out to be the latest on record. Migrant warblers and flycatchers, in particular, were late, some not arriving until the first week in June. The largest migration was apparently overnight on 5 and 6 May and continued for the next two days and nights. It involved geese, ducks, cranes, shorebirds, swallows, crows, warblers, blackbirds, sparrows, longspurs and probably other species. The most unusual spring reports were of shorebirds migrating west-northwest across the south side of the city and a crow migration in May. These and other records of visible migration are described in more detail in another article in this issue.

Fall migration was not noticeably early or late but it was disappointing—fewer migrants spent less time in the district than usual. This was particularly true of thrushes, most warblers and some sparrows. Based largely on small samples of birds banded by Dr. and Mrs. C. S. Houston, three waves of warblers were indicated: **20-25 August:** Black-and-white, Tennessee, Yellow, Northern Waterthrush and Wilson's; **7 and 8 September:** Tennessee, Cape May, Myrtle, Chestnut-sided, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Palm, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Mourning and Wilson's; **17 and 18 September:** Black-and-white, Orange-crowned and Myrtle. Fewer birds than usual were heard migrating on fewer nights. Only 22 birds were found dead at the CFQC-TV tower in 13 inspections between 7 August and 24 September.

For most species there are too few data to determine whether they were more abundant during the spring or the fall migration in this district. Other things being equal, and they seldom are, summer production added to spring populations should result in more birds on southward than northward migration through an area. In fact, only three species did appear to be more common in fall than in spring: Rough-legged Hawk, Osprey and Rusty Blackbird. Four species recorded in fair numbers in April and May were not recorded again in the

fall of 1966: Common Loon, Double-crested Cormorant, Red-breasted Merganser and Golden Plover. Nine others appeared in noticeably smaller numbers this fall: Ring-necked Duck (one record), Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser (one record), Bufflehead (one record), Red-breasted Nuthatch (one record), Gray-cheeked Thrush, White-crowned and Fox Sparrows.

Several migrants were more common this year than in previous years. Nine Common Loons were reported on seven dates between 23 April and 17 May. There were more records of Double-crested Cormorants than in the previous five years combined (12 birds on six dates from 28 April through 29 May). Common Mergansers with 183+ birds on 21 days between 31 March and 6 May and Red-breasted Mergansers (49 birds on 13 dates from 16 April through 27 May) were more abundant than in any other spring on record. There was only one previous report of an Osprey until this year when one was seen on 27 May and seven birds were reported on six dates between 19 and 30 September. Traill's Flycatchers were much more common than in any other year (45± birds between 31 May and 7 June) and seven birds—in the hand—between 19 and 23 August).

Winter: Bohemian Waxwings have been common in the last two winters and Snowy Owls have been uncommon, which is probably their usual status. Eleven species were recorded in larger numbers on the 1966 Christmas Bird Count than in any of the previous eleven counts, including Mallard, Common Goldeneye, Blue Jay, Black-billed Magpie, Black-capped Chickadee and Starling. Snow Buntings were common until about mid-December but have apparently decreased significantly since then and, for the first time, none were recorded on the Christmas Count. Redpolls, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks have been much less common to 31 December than they were last winter.

Other records: The addition of three new species to the area list this year brings the total to 260 species. The

new birds were: **Piping Plover:** On 14 May a single bird was studied on Buffer Lake by R. R. Cohen, B. M. Rever, A. T. Moran and G. O. Michalenko (See also Breeding Species). **Yellow-breasted Chat:** J. E. Black studied a single bird south of Moon Lake on 20 July. On 21 and 22 July it was seen and heard by J. F. Roy and the author. It could not be found on 23 July or 8 August. **Dickcissel:** On 18 July a single bird was singing in an alfalfa field on Preston Avenue, seven miles south of the city. Two birds were studied in the same field the next morning in the course of an hour's nest hunting by J. E. Black, J. A. Slimmon and the author. No birds could be found on 23 July when the field was partly cut.

On 23 April a hybrid Yellow-shafted X Red-shafted Flicker was studied for 30 minutes by J. F. Roy, A. J. Nijssen, R. V. Folker and J. E. Black. As it was followed for about half a mile south of Pike Lake, the salmon coloring under the wings and tail was clearly visible.

More intensive coverage of the district and better organization of reports produced a few other interesting situations that should be checked more closely in the future to determine whether or not they are normal. Lesser Scaup, which breed fairly commonly in the district, were not reported between 17 August and 4 October. Common Goldeneye, a common spring migrant and probably a rare breeding species here, were not recorded from 20 July to 4 October. There were no adult Cowbirds, a common breeding species, reported after 16 July.

Marsh Hawks provided an example of apparent temporary emigration. Before the young begin to fly, there is about one adult male (gray-backed bird) for every adult female (brown) Marsh Hawk. Shortly after the young (brown in both sexes) begin flying, however, the adult males practically disappear and few gray birds are reported for the next six to eight weeks. This can be demonstrated by recording the colour of every Marsh Hawk seen through July, August, September

and October. This year between 5 August and 1 October, three gray and 133 brown hawks were recorded for a ratio of 1:44. Assuming four flying young per pair and that every pair was successful, the expected ratio would have been one gray for every five brown birds. Between 2 and 16 October, males appeared again and the ratio among 65 Marsh Hawks was one gray: four brown, almost the expected ratio. It may be that the October males are not the same individuals or age group as the birds that leave in July. More observations are needed to confirm temporary or early adult male emigration from this area and data from other areas are required to determine how widespread it is and, possibly, where the males go.

Some species occurred in much larger flocks than ever before reported: 296 Western Grebes on Patience Lake on 4 May, and 5,100± Whistling Swans on Goose Lake on 30 October. Buffer Lake had 15,000± ducks, mostly Pintails, on 14 May, a large number for so late a date. There were, 1,700± male Blue-winged Teal on Rice Lake on 30 July; 6,000 American Coots on 4 September on Proctor Lake; at least 130 Common Snipe on one part of Rice Lake on 10 September and 44 American Avocets north of Grandora on 31 July. On 30 April, 11,000± white-headed gulls (probably Ring-billed) flew into Rice Lake from the east to roost and on 26 August at least 12,000 Franklin's Gulls roosted on Strehlow Pond. A flock of 130 night-hawks flew southeast over the city on 21 August. Eleven Western Kingbirds on 8 August south of Saskatoon on Preston and 11 Baltimore Orioles in the same area on 11 August are the largest flocks of these species ever recorded here. In late August or early September a flock of blackbirds that covered about 10 acres of stubble near Smuts may have numbered 20,000 birds (W. J. D. Stephen).

On the other hand, 29 species were represented by stragglers on only one, two or three dates through the year. Those reported only once were two White-winged Scoters (27 May), two Turkey Vultures (18 September), and

single individuals of Ruddy Turnstone (23 May), Hawk Owl (14 January), Red-headed Woodpecker (4 June), Connecticut (2 June), Canada (4 June), Black-throated Green (25 May) and Chestnut-sided (8 September) Warblers, Western (13 August) and Scarlet (30 August) Tanagers. The following species were reported only on the dates given and were singles except where there is a number in parentheses: Black-crowned Night Heron, 23 July and 13 August; Broad-winged Hawk, 6 (3) and 14 May; Peregrine Falcon, 8 and 14 May; Whooping Crane, 22 April (2, V. J. Harper) and 2-4 May (2, R. A. Whitlock); Knot, 13 (6) and 14 (4) May; Herring Gull, 26 and 30 (3) April and 1 May (2); Bonaparte's Gull, 20 and 26 (2) May; Common Tern, 21 (2) and 23 (3, R. R. Cohen) May and 2 June; White-rumped Sandpiper, 7 and 16 (3) June; Saw-whet Owl, 28 June and 30, 31 December; Common Raven, 28 October (7) and 21 November (A. R. Smith); Townsend's Solitaire, 28 March and 4 July; Olive-sided Flycatcher, 30 May, 1 June, 22 August; Long-billed Marsh Wren, 1 August and 17 September; Mockingbird, 21 May (W. J. Brucks, A. Lambert) and 8 July (Mrs. J. A. Smith); Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 8 and 14 May and 25 September; Philadelphia Vireo, 11 September and 19 October (a month later than any previous date); Bay-breasted Warbler, 30 May, 2 June and 7 September.

It is interesting to note that the paragraph above on large numbers gives details on more than 71,000 individuals of 13 groups (17± species) of birds; the following, longer paragraph deals with only 82 individuals of 29 species. The respective ratios are 4000± birds per species and 3 birds per species. It should be obvious that the occurrence and activities of large numbers of birds of common species are of much greater importance in determining the primary roll of the Saskatoon district in the ecology of the North American birds than are records of species represented by stragglers. The behaviour of common

species best defines the habitat, climate, etc., of an area in terms of its avifauna. It makes little difference to our understanding of the Saskatoon environment whether two Dickcissels and one Yellow-breasted Chat have occurred here or whether no albatrosses, no Mississippi Kites and no Black-chinned Sparrows have ever occurred here. The fact remains, however, that those individuals which are least representative of a species as a whole, e.g., extremely early or late birds of common species, and stray individuals of rare species, command much greater interest. While this is natural and it is commendable to document the occurrence of an abnormal individual (because, for instance, it may be the forerunner of a species that is expanding its range), it is unfortunate that familiarity breeds such contempt that many more significant observations of concentrations and activities of common species go unrecorded.

There were not enough records of any common species in this area in 1966 from which to adequately determine its status at any particular season. Information was particularly lacking as to when a species, whether breeding or migrant, became *common* in spring and *uncommon* in fall. For migrants there was little on when they became *uncommon* in spring and *common* again in late summer or fall. Such determinations are more difficult but, at the same time, are more significant than dates of first, last or stray individuals.

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TABLE 1.

Breeding species in the Saskatoon district with 1966 breeding records

	Active nests	Broods,** coveys		Active nests	Broods,** coveys
*Red-necked Grebe	—	1	Short-eared Owl	1	—
Horned Grebe	10	1	*Saw-whet Owl	—	—
Eared Grebe	1	6	Common Nighthawk ..	1	—
Pied-billed Grebe	—	2	*Belted Kingfisher	—	—
*Great Blue Heron	—	—	Yellow-shafted Flicker	1	—
*American Bittern	—	—	*Yellow-bellied Sap-		
*Canada Goose	1	—	sucker	1	—
Mallard	11	10	Hairy Woodpecker	—	—
Gadwall	1	13	Downy Woodpecker	—	—
Pintail	3	4	Eastern Kingbird	6	—
Green-winged Teal	—	1	Western Kingbird	2	—
Blue-winged Teal	2	1	Eastern Phoebe	1	—
American Widgeon	—	7	Least Flycatcher	2	—
Shoveler	1	2	Horned Lark	9	—
Redhead	7	1	Tree Swallow	5	—
Canvasback	12	16	Bank Swallow	23	—
Lesser Scaup	—	3	Barn Swallow	3	—
*Common Goldeneye	—	—	*Cliff Swallow	80±	—
Ruddy Duck	2	8	*Purple Martin	—	—
*Sharp-shinned Hawk	—	—	*Blue Jay	—	—
*Cooper's Hawk	—	—	Black-billed Magpie	23	—
Red-tailed Hawk	2	—	Common Crow	14	—
Swainson's Hawk	3	—	Black-capped		
*Ferruginous Hawk	1	—	Chickadee	—	—
Marsh Hawk	5	—	*Red-breasted Nut-		
*Pigeon Hawk	—	—	hatch	—	—
Sparrow Hawk	1	—	House Wren	—	1
Ruffed Grouse	—	—	Long-billed Marsh		
Sharp-tailed Grouse	1	2	Wren	—	—
Ring-necked Pheasant	—	1	Catbird	—	—
Gray Partridge	1	20	Brown Trasher	1	—
*Virginia Rail	—	—	Robin	3	—
Sora	3	—	Swainson's Thrush	—	—
American Coot	43	3	Veery	—	—
*Piping Plover	1	0	Mountain Bluebird	—	1
Killdeer	4	1	Sprague's Pipit	—	1
*Long-billed Curlew	—	1	Cedar Waxwing	5	—
Upland Plover	—	—	Loggerhead Shrike	3	—
Spotted Sandpiper	—	—	Starling	8	—
Willet	—	—	Red-eyed Vireo	—	—
Marbled Godwit	1	1	Warbling Vireo	—	1
American Avocet	5	2	Yellow Warbler	—	—
Wilson's Phalarope	1	—	Ovenbird	—	—
*Franklin's Gull	120+	—	Yellowthroat	—	—
Black Tern	1	—	*American Redstart	—	—
Rock Dove	—	—	House Sparrow	15	—
Mourning Dove	2	—	Bobolink	2	—
Black-billed Cuckoo	—	1	Western Meadowlark ..	9	—
Great Horned Owl	14	2	Yellow-headed Black-		
Burrowing Owl	—	—	bird	45	1
Long-eared Owl	16	2	Red-winged Blackbird	54	—

	Active nests	Broods,** coveys		Active nests	Broods,** coveys
Baltimore Oriole	—	—	*Grasshopper Sparrow..	—	—
Brewer's Blackbird	2	—	Baird's Sparrow	3	—
Common Grackle	3	—	*Le Conte's Sparrow	—	—
Brown-headed Cowbird	2+	—	Vesper Sparrow	7	—
*Pine Siskin	2	—	Lark Sparrow	—	—
American Goldfinch	—	—	Chipping Sparrow	—	—
*Red Crossbill	—	—	Clay-colored Sparrow..	15	—
Rufous-sided Towhee ..	—	—	Song Sparrow	—	—
Lark Bunting	10	—	Chestnut-collared		
Savannah Sparrow	7	1	Longspur	—	—

Totals: 664 occupied nests

118 broods and coveys

76 species

* Rare or irregular (Estimated that fewer than 5 pairs per year laid eggs since 1960).

** Flightless young out of nest or flying young being fed by adult.

VISIBLE MIGRATION — SASKATOON, 1966

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Most migration records are of birds pausing between breeding and wintering areas — birds in trees or bushes, on the ground, on water or making local flights. Many of these species migrate at night. Impressive flights of birds by day — visible migration — are not frequently seen near Saskatoon, but 1966 was exceptional in this respect. Because of this, visible migration is discussed here in some detail to encourage the collection of more information on this phenomenon.

Visible migration was noted on 42 days in the spring: nine days in March after the 18th, 17 through April and 16 in May to the 27th. Through the fall, birds were seen migrating on 23 days: five in August after the 6th, eight in September and 10 in October to the 29th. The major species in March were eagles on six days, crows on five, Horned Larks and magpies on one day. In April hawks were migrating on eight days, ducks on seven, crows on six, eagles on five, Evening Grosbeaks on four, geese and cranes on two days. In May shorebirds were evident on nine days, blackbirds on six, Franklin's Gulls, Black Terns and swans on four, crows, swallows and other passerines on three, geese

and loons on two, pelicans, hawks and longspurs on one day. There was much less variety in the fall: nighthawks (4 days) and Sandhill Cranes (1) in August; cranes (5), hawks (4), crows (3), nighthawks (2), geese and swallows (1) in September; and hawks (7), crows (3), eagles (2) and ducks (1) in October. Single Bald Eagles were southward bound on 13 and 26 November. These observations confirm previous years' experience that several species are seen migrating through this area only in the spring. Nighthawks are the only birds recorded on southward but not northward migration.

Probably the most spectacular migrations in 1966 were those of shorebirds on 6 May—1,100± birds in 101 flocks in less than two hours — and on 26 May — 1,880± in 27 flocks in just over one hour. Both early morning flights were moving west-northwest over the Jubilee Park area. Also impressive were 20 strings totaling 645 Golden Plover in a 45-minute period on the evening of 14 May. While shorebird migrations are seldom seen, it is known that they occur during May. However, a migration of crows on 6 and 7 May (230 and 40