

GREAT BLUE HERON COLONIES IN SASKATCHEWAN IN 1970

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A survey of nesting colonies of Great Blue Herons was made in Saskatchewan in the summer of 1970 to obtain information on distribution, size, and habitat of heronries. Heronries were located by asking naturalists and wardens if they knew of colonies in

their areas and by searching apparently suitable habitat along rivers and around lakes. As the survey was not exhaustive, colonies may have been missed, and further information on heronries unknown to the writers will therefore be much appreciated.

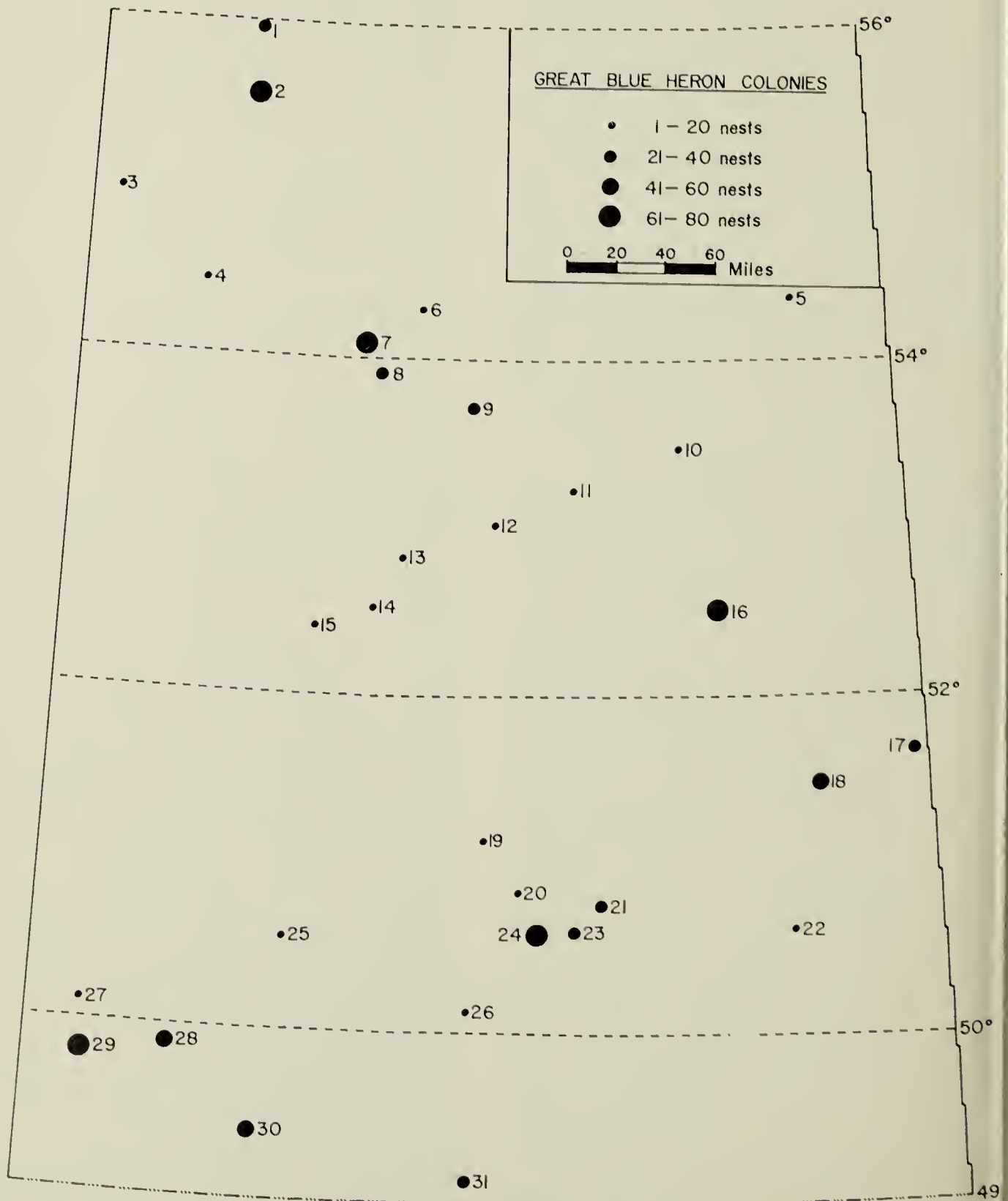


Fig. 1. Great Blue Heron colonies in Saskatchewan, 1970.

Thirty-one active heronries were located in Saskatchewan in 1970 as shown in Figure 1. Numbers in that figure correspond to colonies shown in Table 1. The number of nests ranged from 1 to 75, and the mean colony size was 26.8. This is not significantly different ($P > 0.05$) from the mean colony size of 21.3 nests of 27 colonies ranging from 1 to 55 observed in Alberta in 1967 (K. Vermeer, 1969, Great Blue Heron colonies in Alberta. *Can. Field-Nat.*, 83:237-242). Of the 31 active colonies 17 were located near rivers and creeks, 12 on lake islands and two near lake shores.

Sixty per cent of 15 colonies north of Saskatoon, 50° 07'N, were on lake

islands as compared to only 19 per cent of 16 colonies south of that city. For the same latitude in Alberta it was 81 and 19 per cent respectively. The large percentage of colonies found on lake islands north of the above latitude may be related to the greater availability of lake islands there than in the southern parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

As in Alberta (Vermeer, 1969), Great Blue Herons in Saskatchewan chiefly nested in poplar trees over 20 feet in height (Table 2). Mixed colonies of Black-crowned Night and Great Blue Herons were found in choke-cherry bushes at Old Wives Lake and in low buffalo berry bushes along the

Table 1. Location and size of Saskatchewan Great Blue Heron colonies in 1970.

Water body	No. nests	Section	Township	Range
1. Churchill Lake	21	—	80	16W3
2. Kazan Lake	75	13	76	16W3
3. Primrose Lake*	20	11	69	25W3
4. First Mustus Lake	14	4	63	19W3
5. Suggi Lake	1	15	62	6W2
6. Lavallée Lake	15	—	61	4W3
7. Delaronde Lake	64	5	60	8W3
8. Delaronde Lake	40	2	57	7W3
9. Anglin Lake	40	10	55	27W2
10. Saskatchewan River	8	1	52	14W2
11. Saskatchewan River	16	20	49	21W2
12. South Saskatchewan River	6	—	46	26W2
13. North Saskatchewan River	2	16	44	5W3
14. North Saskatchewan River	5	34	40	7W3
15. North Saskatchewan River	15	26	39	11W3
16. Marean Lake	70	6	41	11W2
17. Madge Lake	30	—	31	30W1
18. Horseshoe Lake	50	2	29	5W2
19. Arm River	2	14	25	28W2
20. Arm River	4	2	22	26W2
21. Qu'Appelle River	25	28	20	20W2
22. Qu'Appelle River	7	12	19	7W2
23. Qu'Appelle River	24	26	19	22W2
24. Buffalo Pound Lake	65	31	18	24W2
25. Swift Current Creek	13	34	18	13W3
26. Old Wives Lake*	5	29	13	29W2
27. Tenaille Lake	9	28	13	26W3
28. Bone Creek	50	4, 9	11	20W3
29. Harris Reservoir	65	8	10	26W3
30. Frenchman River	43	12	5	15W3
31. Southwest of Fife Lake	26	27	2	30W2

*Not visited in 1970. Counts at Primrose and Old Wives Lakes made in 1968 and 1969 respectively.

Table 2. Tree habitat of active Great Blue Heron Colonies.

Dominant tree species in colony	No. colonies	Prevalent condition of nesting trees		Estimated average height in feet*			
		alive	dead	1-10	11-20	21-30	Over 30
<i>Populus</i> spp.**	19	15	4		1	9	9
<i>Picea glauca</i>	4	4					4
<i>Acer negundo</i>	2	2			1	1	
<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>	2	2				2	
<i>Betula papyrifera</i>	1		1				1
<i>Ulmus americana</i>	1	1				1	
<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	1	1		1			
<i>Shepherdia</i> sp.	1		1	1			
Total	31	25	6	2	2	12	14

*Height in one colony unknown

**Mostly *Populus balsamifera* and *P. tremuloides*

Frenchman River. In the latter colony were also four nests of Canada Geese. Great Blue Herons nested together with Double-crested Cormorants in birches and aspen poplars at Kazan Lake. The cormorants occupied the lower branches. Five heronries were observed to contain one Great Horned Owl nest each and one pair of Ospreys bred in a heronry along the Saskatchewan River near Nipawin.

At least 20 heronries are known to have disappeared in Saskatchewan over the years (Table 3). Nine of those

ceased to exist in the 1960's. Five colonies appear to have disappeared because of disturbance by shooting (Crane Lake - Skull Creek), hail (Fairwell Creek), flood (Middagh Lake), tree cutting (Whitewood Lake) and nest robbing (Qu'Appelle River, No. 13). Causes of decline in the other 15 colonies are unknown. Active colonies have also been disturbed by the above causes. A rancher dwelling near the active heronry at Swift Current Creek reported that many young herons were killed during a hailstorm

Table 3. Great Blue Heron colonies no longer active in Saskatchewan.

Water body	Section	Location Township	Range	Last year known to breed
1. Ministikwan Lake	17	58	25W3	1968±1
2. Delaronde Lake	27	57	7W3	1965±2
3. Paddling Lake	10	46	7W3	1930-1940
4. Acton Lake	30	45	13W3	1932
5. Basin Lake	27	42	23W2	1920?
6. North Saskatchewan River		41	15W3	1938±2
7. Lizard Lake	36	38	14W3	1958
8. Whitewood Lake	27	29	17W2	1943±2
9. Last Mountain Lake		28	24W2	1932
10. Middagh Lake	9	24	4W3	1950's
11. Pearl Creek	28	19	7W2	Late 1960's
12. Qu'Appelle River	23	19	12W2	Late 1950's
13. Qu'Appelle River	4	19	11W2	Late 1950's
14. Qu'Appelle River	1	18	33W1	1969
15. Pipestone Creek		15	4-5W2	1968-1969
16. Pipestone Creek	19	12	31W1	1967±1
17. Crane Lake - Skull Creek		12-13	22-23W3	1906
18. Scott-Ray Lake	21	10	3W2	Early 1960's
19. Sandy Lake	16	10	4W2	1965
20. Fairwell Creek	31	6	24W3	1963±1

in 1966 and that the colony has been subsequently reduced in size. He also reported that one person took a few dozen eggs from that colony in 1969. Yost (pers. comm.), dwelling in the vicinity of the active heronry southwest of Fife Lake, reported that the herons probably moved from west of Rock Glen to their present site because of human disturbance. The birds still are shot at occasionally but Mr. Yost does what he can to prevent this. We hope that readers will watch vigilantly for any form of human disturbance to heronries in their locality.

Acknowledgments

Many naturalists and wardens provided information or gave assistance in locating heronries. Special thanks go to Dr. C. S. Houston, Saskatoon, who provided a detailed list of heronries, D. W. A. Whitfield, Saskatoon, who located several new heronries along rivers by plane, R. Isbister, Edmonton, who surveyed the heronries at Churchill, Kazan and Lavallée Lakes and J. E. Polson and T. Donald, who conducted a brief and preliminary survey in 1969.

A THIRD RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER RECORD FOR SASKATCHEWAN

by **Frank H. Brazier**, 2657 Cameron Street, Regina

Reclining at ease in the shade of several tupelos, popularly known as "black gums", I often watched the comings and goings of a family of Red-bellied Woodpeckers at a feeder in a Louisiana garden. I also saw this attractive and distinctive bird often during a recent visit to Florida.

Because I am familiar with the Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Centurus carolinus*) through my travels in the southeastern United States, I was sure when I wandered into Manley Callin's front yard at Fort San, Saskatchewan, on July 19, 1970, that a woodpecker which landed on a power-line pole about 100 yards away belonged to this species. A Yellow-shafted Flicker was nearby on the pole, so I could see that the newcomer was smaller, about Hairy-sized. The size of the bird and the absence of the typical Hairy Woodpecker pattern when viewed sideways at that range sent me racing for my binoculars which I had left in my car. A few seconds later my 10x50's brought it well into viewing range. It had obligingly shifted a quarter-turn to the left around the pole, giving me a field-guide view of the back; the red over part of the nape, the gray crown and the fine-barred back left no doubt that I was seeing a Red-bellied Woodpecker. The size of the nape patch indicated a female.

This was the third Red-bellied Woodpecker I had seen in Saskatchewan, and I was sure that it would be a first record for Fort Qu'Appelle and the vicinity, and a "lifer" for Manley Callin. Unfortunately, however, Manley failed to hear my call and I had to run in to get him. Returning, we scoured the neighbourhood fruitlessly for some time. Then, when poking through the bush bordering a meadow (those who were at the first annual June field meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society and saw the breeding Yellow-breasted Chat would know the spot), a bird flashed by and perched briefly on a dead tree limb before vanishing into the foliage, long enough for me to get a few seconds' view through the glasses. It was enough to convince me, though I had only a low-angle look, that it was the same bird.

Saskatchewan's first Red-bellied Woodpecker, a female, was seen in the Legislative Grounds in Regina on May 23-26, 1959 (*Blue Jay*, 17:95). I had seen that bird and, at practically the same spot, on October 12, 1961, a male of this species flew to a tree within a few feet of me. Lucy Eley later mentioned that she had seen a Red-bellied Woodpecker in that vicinity on about that date.