

NOON TRIPS FOR BIRDS

by **Mark Abley**, 1002 King Street, Saskatoon

Many bird watchers have very little time in which to pursue their favourite hobby. What can, in fact, be accomplished if one has only an hour or so to go "birding"? I hope that this article will show that a great deal of useful knowledge can be gained and a great deal of pleasure derived from regular bird-watching excursions, no matter how brief.

In the past three years, I have accompanied Mr. Frank Roy on noon-time trips to watch birds. These trips were taken in spring, during the mid-day break at City Park Collegiate, where I was a student and Mr. Roy a teacher. We were usually accompanied by Dr. Ron Bremner, and sometimes by one or two other persons as well. City Park Collegiate is located fairly close to downtown Saskatoon, so several minutes were taken up leaving and re-entering the city. As a result, we had only an hour at the most in which we could actually watch birds. It is worth noting that not once in the three years was I late for afternoon classes—despite the fact that five minutes before the bell rang we were quite often outside city limits!

Despite the proximity of City Park Collegiate to the city centre, there are many areas within reach which are excellent for birding. Kinsmen, Kiwanis and Cosmopolitan Parks were occasionally visited (generally at the peak of warbler migration), as was the Woodlawn Cemetery. All these places are inside the city, and reasonably near the school. But much of our time was spent outside the city, at such spots as the sloughs north of the Saskatoon airport, the Hudson Bay chain of sloughs north and east of Saskatoon, and especially at one four-acre tree-rimmed slough on 51st Street North, about one-half mile east of Highway 5.

A typical trip would consist of a quick jaunt round the King Street area (excellent for small migrants); a brief visit to the South Saskatche-

wan River; an extended stop at the tree slough on 51st Street; and a trip either to the Airport sloughs or to the large sloughs northeast of Saskatoon. Clearly, we could go no farther without returning late and incurring the wrath of the school administration.

Such trips are excellent for a novice bird watcher, as I was in 1969. Our noon excursions trained me to spot birds quickly, identify them quickly, and recognize songs and call-notes with a fair degree of accuracy. Furthermore, the trips provided me with a splendid picture of the passage of migrating birds; visits to many of the same sites each day give one a precise sense of timing in regard to the arrival and departure of each species. Our first dowitchers for the season were sighted May 6, 1969; May 6, 1970; and May 3, 1971. While few species were as consistent as the dowitcher, the "first spring" and "last spring" dates for many birds were remarkably similar during each of the three years.

The trips were also useful from the standpoint of gathering interesting records. A full list of birds seen during the three years is found at the end of this article; but some of the more unusual species were: Cooper's Hawk, Pigeon Hawk, Knot, Ruddy Turnstone, Ruff, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Brown Creeper, Magnolia Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Baird's Sparrow, and LeConte's Sparrow. We recorded new early arrival dates in the Saskatoon region for species as diverse as the Red-necked Grebe, and the Chestnut-collared Longspur. We saw all five species of grebes; 15 kinds of ducks; seven species of hawks; 25 species of shorebirds; 12 kinds of warblers; and 22 species of finches.

With regard to number of species observed in a single day, the highest totals are 60 (May 16, 1969) and 61 (May 20, 1970). At the opposite extreme, diligent searching on April 21,



Photo by Frank Roy

Tree slough, Saskatoon, May, 1971

1970, turned up only 12 species. The highlight of the three years would undoubtedly be the trip taken on May 19, 1970, when just one hour of birding produced such rarities as a Pigeon Hawk, a pair of Buff-breasted Sandpipers, and the Ruff sighted for the first time in Saskatoon. This find was reported by Frank Roy in the March, 1971 *Blue Jay*.

If it could be said that our trips had a specific focus, it would be the tree slough on 51st Street. It is remarkable that this slough has managed to remain reasonably well-preserved and unpolluted in spite of the steady encroachment of civilization. A gravel road, once almost unused but now quite busy, runs through the slough, cutting it in two parts. The slough is surrounded by trees, mostly willow and aspen. This accounts in part for the amazing number and variety of birds it still attracts. On its south side is a farmhouse; to the east lies a gypsum-producing plant; on the other two sides, farmland. A total of 120 different species have been recorded here through the years. It attracts both waterfowl (every species of duck commonly found in the Saskatoon district has been recorded here) and small land birds. In May of this year (1971), over 60 Myrtle Warblers—the largest

flock yet seen in Saskatoon—were continually flitting in and out of the willows. Several unusual species were recorded there from 1964-1966 (but not in the last three years), including the Broad-winged Hawk, Long-eared Owl, Black-throated Green Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Swamp Sparrow. Many of the trips of those years, however, were taken in the fall, whereas the trips on which I accompanied Mr. Roy (for scholastic as well as ornithological reasons) all took place in the spring.

Our noon bird-watching trips were both enjoyable and worthwhile. If one is a bird watcher and is willing to forego the pleasure of an unhurried hot lunch, such trips can produce much pleasure and many birds. The total of 144 species recorded in the past three years shows that not even an extremely limited time span during a poor time of day can prevent birders on regular trips from uncovering unexpected and interesting birds.

I would like to thank Ron Bremner for his comments, and Frank Roy for his advice and photographs.

LIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED DURING NOON TRIPS (1969-1971): Red-necked Grebe, Horned Grebe, Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, Whistling Swan, Mallard, Gadwall, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Ameri-

can Widgeon, Shoveler. Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Common Merganser, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Marsh Hawk, Pigeon Hawk, Sparrow Hawk, Gray Partridge. Sandhill Crane, Sora, American Coot, Killdeer, Golden Plover, Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Snipe, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Willet, Lesser Yellowlegs, Knot, Ruff, Pectoral Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Long-billed Dowitcher, Stilt Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Hudsonian Godwit, American Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, Northern Phalarope, California Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Franklin's Gull, Common Tern, Black Tern, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Long-eared Owl, Common Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Western Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Traill's Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Bank Swallow, Barn Swallow, Black-billed Magpie, Common

Crow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, House Wren, Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Robin, Hermit Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Veery, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Water Pipit, Sprague's pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Loggerhead Shrike, Starling, Red-eyed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Black and-white Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Myrtle Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Palm Warbler, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Wilson's Warbler, American Redstart House Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Baltimore Oriole, Rusty Blackbird. Brewer's Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, Rufous-sided Towhee, Savannah Sparrow, Baird's Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Slate-colored Junco, Tree Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Harris' Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lapland Longspur, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Snow Bunting.

THE GARGANEY, A NEW BIRD FOR MANITOBA

by **Rudolf F. Koes**, 348 Oakwood Avenue, Winnipeg 13

On May 23, 1971, my wife and I decided to join Winnipeg birdwatchers for the annual outing to St. Ambroise on the south shore of Lake Manitoba, approximately 60 miles northwest of Winnipeg.

Having arrived at the beach, we stopped to look at some waders and ducks feeding in a shallow, marshy pond on the south side of the wooded ridge along the lake. Several ducks were present, among them Blue-winged Teal, Pintail and Mallard. One other species of duck was present, but it was so familiar I paid little attention to it. This was an adult drake Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), the size of a Blue-winged Teal and a duck common in my native Holland. After a moment, however, I made a quick check in our *Birds of North America* (Robbins, et al., 1966) and was surprised to find that the bird was not even listed for this continent.

Delacour (1956:163) gives the following description of the male Garganey in breeding plumage:

" . . . a black crown and throat, broad, long white supercilia joining on the nape, and the rest of the head and neck brownish chestnut streaked with

white; mantle, back and tail blackish brown with pale borders to the feathers; wings generally as in the other species of the group, the long, lanceolate, ornamental scapulars glossy black with a broad central white line, the wing coverts pale bluish grey, the mirror light green between two wide white bands; breast light brown laced with black; rest of underparts white, finely waved with black on the sides and spotted on the vent and undertail coverts. Iris brown; bill and legs leaden grey."

After observing the Garganey for about half an hour through 10 X 50 binoculars, we decided to alert the rest of the group. Luckily, several prominent ornithologists were present, among them Dr. Bob Nero and Herb Copland. All were able to see the bird several times. It was observed by close to a dozen persons from approximately 12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m., through binoculars (10 X 50, 7 X 50, 8 X 35, etc.) and a 25-power telescope. The minimal viewing distance was about 100 feet. At the time the temperature was between 60° and 65°F. and it was mostly cloudy with little wind.

Dr. Bob Nero made the following