

WASCANA WATERFOWL PARK

by Margaret Belcher, Regina

Two official ceremonies held this summer in the Wascana Waterfowl Park helped to focus attention on this unique area in the heart of the city of Regina. The first of these events took place on June 28 when the new display ponds were opened. The short afternoon ceremony was presided over by P. J. Moran, Chairman of the Waterfowl Park Committee which has advised the Wascana Centre in the development of the waterfowl park. Guest speakers were the Honourable D. V. Heald, Chairman of the Wascana Centre Authority, who officially opened the project, and Miss Carma Halldorson, a Grade 10 student from Campbell Collegiate, whose interest in the park was first inspired by a visit to it with her school class when she was in Grade 7.

The park was described as a unique oasis in a metropolitan area, and indeed visitors who stood within the fenced area of the display ponds look-

ing across the marsh to the city could hear the sounds of a living marsh around them as frogs croaked and calling waterbirds flew over. Suddenly amid the familiar marsh voices of the two species of blackbirds, and the cries of Killdeer, Avocets, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Spotted Sandpiper overhead, strange goose talk was heard. One recognized the call of the White-fronted Geese, which now share one of the ponds with the less common Ross' Goose, while in a second pond a pair of Pelicans provided another unusual sight, since these birds rarely visit the Wascana Marsh.

A month later, on July 30, a second ceremony was held in the park, on the occasion of the dedication of a handsome cairn and bench installed on the east side of the marsh near the native prairie area, to acknowledge the donation of \$8,000 made in 1970 to the Park by Ducks Unlimited (Canada). Mr. Moran again presided over the



White Pelican in Wascana Waterfowl Park display pond.

Leader-Post Photo



Photo by Fred Lahrman

Canada Geese returning to Wascana Waterfowl Park.

ceremony, and greetings were given by Mayor Walker, vice-chairman of the Wascana Centre Authority, the Honourable Walter Smishek, representing the Government of Saskatchewan, Dr. Ken Martin, former president of Ducks Unlimited (Canada), and Ernie Paynter, who has been a member of the Waterfowl Park Committee since its inception. In these brief speeches, the theme was reiterated of the importance of protecting our natural environment, and the generous donation of Ducks Unlimited toward the preservation of the native grassland area in the park was cited as a splendid example of practical support for this concept. Appropriately, a short tour of the native prairie was arranged to follow the dedication ceremony, with Ron Boychuk, park naturalist, pointing out familiar grassland plants and discussing with interested guests the problem created by encroaching cultivated species like brome grass or even native species like snowberry which increases under the pressure of use. The difficulty of maintaining intact such a small area of native grassland became apparent to the visitors, but it was also clear that the effort to preserve it was worthwhile in terms of the respect for natural areas inculcated in those who come to know the Wascana Waterfowl Park.

The inscription on the plaque unveiled at the cairn during the dedica-

tion ceremony tells briefly the history of the park:

“Created originally in the early 1880’s as an artificial lake for a permanent water supply for local residents, Wascana Lake was set aside in 1913 as a game preserve and was created a bird sanctuary in 1956. Banding of ducks in the marsh was carried out by Ducks Unlimited in the early 1940’s and Canada Geese were introduced in 1956. Commencing in 1960 young geese were transplanted to selected areas in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The sanctuary became part of the Wascana Centre in 1962.

Development of this prairie habitat to provide much needed waterfowl nesting cover has been made possible through funds provided by Ducks Unlimited (Canada).

The Wascana Centre, the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources, the University of Saskatchewan and the citizens of Regina and Southern Saskatchewan have given continuing support and financial assistance to develop and maintain the Wascana Waterfowl Park as a home for prairie wildlife and for the public to enjoy.”