

Lake, but found the roads quite impassable after an all-night rain.

Seven days later, on October 31, I descended the steep eastern bank of the Saskatchewan River one mile north of Nipawin to study a raft of Lesser Scaups, and was rewarded by seeing another Common Scoter in the same plumage as the first. With the telescope it was possible to observe the following features in addition to those noted on October 24: "Belly lighter than the dark sides, back and wings; the tail projected parallel on the surface of the water and was reasonably long when seen from the side and not stubby as it appeared when seen from the rear; the tail was wagged horizontally and the neck stretched vertically several times; as the bird emerged from a dive, it seemed quite calm, while the scaups nervously raised their heads, moved them from side to side and paddled aimlessly for a few feet; the bill was quite angular on the lower edge of the lower mandible, rising sharply at its anterior 1/3, the upper surface of the upper mandible was curved" Late in the

afternoon of this day I returned with my son David and was able to locate the bird again and point out its characteristics to him.

The relative tameness of both birds, as noted above, is a characteristic of scoters. Walter H. Rich, for example, is quoted by Bent (*Life histories of North American wild fowl*, part 2, 1925) as saying of the scoters: ". . . Probably the least wary of the duck family, they may be approached quite readily . . ."

I believe these two sightings were of different birds because the movement of water birds and gulls is eastward down the Saskatchewan River in the fall; the "Nipawin" bird was seen seven days later and 32 miles westward and up river from the "Tobin Lake bird. I am convinced that both were Common Scoters. The only bird with which they might have been confused is the Ruddy Duck. The full-bodied, heads-up, round-headed birds which I observed were distinctly different from the smaller, dish-billed "Andy Capp" Ruddies, with which I am thoroughly familiar.

FOX PREDATION ON A BIRD ISLAND

by **Hans Blokpoel**, Canadian Wildlife Service, Saskatoon

This note describes Red Fox predation on colonial birds and eggs at Backes Island, Primrose Lake, Saskatchewan. The colony of White Pelicans on this island is the largest in Canada (Vermeer, 1970b).

Backes Island is a strip of boulders and gravel with a sandy shore, lying three miles off the mainland. This island is about one-half mile long; its greatest width is approximately 150 feet. The northern fifth of the island is covered with poplars and thick underbrush, the central part being mainly a bare guano-flat with some scattered tree trunks and the remainder open and covered with low shrubbery.

In 1970 Great Blue Herons were breeding in live trees at the north end of the island and in rows of dead or

dying trees where the guano-flat slopes down to the lake. The pelican colony covered the guano-flat, which extended slightly into the trees. Double-crested Cormorants were found in small colonies among the pelicans, nesting on fallen trees rather than on the ground. The southern, open part of the island was occupied by gull colonies, mainly California and Ring-billed with a few Herring Gulls. Common Terns were nesting on the southernmost tip.

In late May 1970, P. P. Desfosses and J. R. Drury visited Backes Island. They counted 3,000 pelicans and reported seeing a fox. Accordingly, with the permission of T. Arsenault, Conservation Officer, Loon Lake, Saskatchewan, a five-man party led by C. W. Scott, Conservation Officer, Cold Lake, Alberta, and including myself, visited

the island on June 6 in hopes of eliminating the fox.

We found about 10 dead adult pelicans, usually with only the feet missing, but occasionally the head as well. Some of the missing feet and heads were found near the entrance of a fox den in thick underbrush on the north end of the island. Thirty-four newly built pelican nests close to the den were empty. About one-third of the cormorant nests and more than half of the gull nests had been destroyed. Some empty nests showed yolk stains, and many broken eggs were scattered over the island. The small tern colony seemed to have suffered few, if any, losses.

The clutch sizes of the pelican and cormorant nests were as follows:

	1 egg	2 eggs	3 eggs	4 eggs	Brown eggs or empty	Total nests
Pelican	405	1238	91	11	35	1780
Cormorant	8	5	11	2	23	49

We saw three adult foxes on the island. Two of them (a male and a nursing female) were killed. The stomach of the female contained grass and the toenail and skin of a webbed foot. The male was not examined.

On June 20 a flock of 200 presumably non-breeding pelicans was seen flying in V-formation over the Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, about 40 miles south-southwest of Backes Island. Such a flight had not been seen in the previous seven years at this time of year (P. P. Desfosses, pers. comm.).

On June 27, Scott led another party including F. W. Lahrman, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, and G. Kemp, district biologist for St. Paul, Alberta, to the island in an attempt to kill the remaining fox(es). They found that only about 300 pelican nests still contained eggs, of which 80 to 90 per cent were rotten. All cormorant and many gull nests had been destroyed. The tern colony had

increased to over 300 nests (Lahrman, pers. comm.). Some pelicans were still incubating. No fox was seen, but poison pellets were left in known entrances of the den.

Palmer (1962) does not indicate that pelicans re-nest, but even if they do, it seems unlikely that the disturbed birds would have re-nested on Backes Island in July. Fewer than 100 young pelicans may have been raised on the island in 1970, compared to 800-1000 young in 1967 and about 1800 in 1968.

Although Primrose Lake is located in the middle of an Air Weapons Range of the Department of National Defence, it is not likely that the reproductive failure of the pelicans, cormorants and gulls can be explained by aircraft disturbance. In previous years reproduction was successful.

The Air Weapons Range is a Game Reserve. DND personnel are permitted to fish in Primrose Lake during the weekends. Very few DND people visit Backes Island in the shallow northern part of the lake, since it is dangerous when windy. Those who do go may well cause some disturbance, but that probably does not explain the almost total breeding failure. Military restrictions make it difficult for the public to visit the island.

Virtually no pesticides are used in the Primrose Lake area. Because the affected bird species probably had different wintering areas it seems improbable that pesticides caused the reproductive failure. The herons had nestlings on June 6.

It seems safe, therefore, to conclude that disturbance of the adult birds and destruction of eggs and, possibly, nestlings by the foxes were the main reasons for the almost complete reproductive failure of pelicans, cormorants and gulls on Backes Island in spring 1970. It seems likely that the foxes reached the island over ice. Vermeer (1970a) describes extensive predation by coyotes on island-nesting California Gulls and Canada Geese in Alberta.

I would like to thank Dr. J. B. Gollop, Canadian Wildlife Service, for

his comments on an earlier draft of this note.

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A SIGHT RECORD OF THE SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER FOR SOUTHERN SASKATCHEWAN

by Mrs. Jean E. Bradley, Milestone

The power line which crosses the Moose Jaw Creek beside our house at Milestone, about 30 miles south of Regina, is a favourite perch in summer for a Belted Kingfisher. Every day he sits there and watches for un-wary fish swimming below.

On September 24, 1970 his place was taken by a stranger. In the morning sun this gray and salmon-pink bird could be seen clearly: its most distinctive feature was a long, forked, black-tipped tail—a tail much longer than the bird, and which opened and closed scissor fashion as it perched there on the line. The bird remained in this spot for some time, long enough and close enough to be closely seen by the naked eye and also through binoculars. Eventually it flew off, its very long tail still working scissor fashion as it flew.

With these distinctive features it could not have been anything else but the rarely seen Scissor-tailed Flycatcher.

Editor's Note: The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscivora forficata*) has not previously been reported for Saskatchewan, but it has been recorded twice in Alberta and more than a dozen times in Manitoba. The locality nearest to the present record is Virden, Manitoba, about 160 miles east of Milestone. The present sighting thus is surprising only in that it appears to be the first one for Saskatchewan. This distinctive species, which nests as far north as central Kansas, is listed by Godfrey (*The birds of Canada*, 1966, p. 250) as "casual or accidental" in Canada, with

records as far as Quebec and New Brunswick. The Alberta records, both sightings, are for 1943 and 1952 (Salt and Wilk. *The birds of Alberta*, revised ed., 1966, p. 267). Manitoba records are for: 1880 (specimen), 1884 (sp.), 1899, 1924 (sp.), 1927, 1930, 1934, 1940 (two, including a sp.), 1949 (two), and 1952 (two, including a sp.) (Jehl and Smith, *Birds of the Churchill region, Manitoba*, 1970, p. 58; and other sources). A number of these records are for far northern localities, e.g., Fort Chipewyan, Lake Athabasca, Alberta, and Churchill and York Factory, Manitoba.

COVERED COMMON CROW'S NEST

by Wayne C. Harris, Box 93, Raymore

On May 2, 1970 I found what appeared to be a nest of a Black-billed Magpie, four miles south and one-half mile west of Raymore. The nest, which was still being constructed, was situated in a willow clump and was about six feet from the ground. It had all the appearances of a Magpie nest, including a well constructed dome-like roof. The only difference was that instead of having the mud cup typical of Magpies, it had a cup which was being constructed of strips of dry bark and some rootlets.

When the nest was checked again on May 14, a Common Crow was flushed from the nest which now contained three crow eggs. On May 24, five eggs were being incubated.

By June 15 all five eggs had hatched and by July 3 all the young had left the nest. I then checked the nest construction more carefully for traces of mud or anything else which would have indicated that the nest was originally built by a Magpie. The results were negative and as the nest was in excellent condition it would seem that it was built this year.

In a subsequent survey of literature I was unable to find any other record of a covered Common Crow nest.

Editor's Note: Might one suggest that the crow had probably taken over an abandoned covered portion of a Magpie nest?