

States, both the House and the Senate passed a bill that would protect the females and do away with wanton destruction, but President Grant refused to sign it. Secretary Delano was quoted as saying that he would rejoice when the last bison was exterminated. General Sheridan appeared before the assembly and suggested that every hunter be given a medal with the figure of a dead buffalo on one side and that of a discouraged Indian on the other. He added, regarding the hunters, "These men have done in the last two years, and will in the next year, do more to settle the vexed Indian question than the entire regular army has done in the last 30 years . . . It would seem that the government regarded the bison as vermin. Nevertheless, the author tells us that there were other causes for the callous slaughter of the animal and he carefully considers the part played by man's greed, the coming of the railroad, the improved "buffalo guns", the westward movement of civilization and the bison's unadaptability.

By 1900 the total population of living bison in North America had been reduced to less than 250 in captivity and fewer than 300 in the wild, the latter all in Canada. Against this background one wonders how any could have survived but survive they did. Effective protective legislation was

passed, game wardens posted and in the United States, Congress apportioned money to buy bison from private herds to replace some of those that had been destroyed in Yellowstone Park. Their number in North America has been increased to over 30,000 which includes the largest free-roaming herd in the world, possibly 17,000 animals. They wander at will in or near the world's largest national park, Wood Buffalo, consisting of 11,072,000 acres of unfenced wilderness in northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories of Canada.

Mr. Park has used almost 100 photographs to complement his text; he even lists the photographic equipment that he employed. A bibliography and an index enhance the value of the information in the book; statistics are interestingly presented. The author's sense of conservation is contagious and whether you are a conservationist or not it is likely that you will find yourself reading the book a second time. This account of the near destruction of a species should help educate man to the threat that man himself represents to these other creatures that he considers his enemies or competitors. It also shows that man has the ability, sometimes, to see and correct his mistakes — if he recognizes his error in time. — *V. J. Harper*, Saskatoon.

Letters and Notes

WINTER SIGHTINGS OF THE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH IN MANITOBA

Just after Christmas, 1970 I received a report of a flock of birds that were coming to the feeding station of Mr. and Mrs. R. Lissaman at their home overlooking the Assiniboine and Minnedosa River valleys about 10 miles west of Brandon. I went out to the Lissaman home on New Year's Day hoping to observe and identify the birds. However, it was rather late in the afternoon and, though the birds had been there earlier, they were gone.

The birds were described to me as small birds with clear colours, white

wing bars and white edgings on wing feathers, V-notched tail, yellowish on throat and under wings, clear greyish belly, small bill, chestnut to olive on head and back, with no streaking. Looking through Peterson's *Field guide to the birds*, we concluded they were not any of the usual winter birds such as redpolls or Pine Siskins. When I returned home, I studied other bird books, and concluded that the birds at the feeding station must be American Goldfinches.

On January 10, 1971, accompanied by Mamie McCowan, I paid another visit to the Lissamans, arriving about 12:45 p.m. This time we were fortun-

ate in seeing a flock of up to 13 birds. Seeing them, and hearing them singing and calling in typical Goldfinch manner, we could not be mistaken about their identity. Mr. Lissaman told us that they come every day to the feeding station where they consume quantities of small sunflower seeds, and that he has counted as many as 15. I saw the flock again on two more occasions, on January 18 and on January 24, when 14 were counted.

Mr. H. W. R. Copland of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature later gave me a reference to Goldfinches recorded in Manitoba during the winter, taken from A. G. Lawrence's "Chickadee Notes" in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 21, 1929: "J. R. Morton, our leading Manitoba bird bander, saw a female Goldfinch with a banded Redpoll on February 2 at his trap in East Kildonan. The Redpoll entered the cage but the Goldfinch did not. The Redpoll was one banded on December 17, 1928, by Mr. Morton."—*Barbara Robinson*, 1441 Eighth Street, Brandon, Manitoba.

EUROPEAN VISITORS TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

The appearance of two European bird species in British Columbia last fall—the Wheatear and the Spotted Redshank, provided great interest for local birders.

The Wheatear was noted when two of our local birders were searching the periphery of the Victoria Airport on October 10, 1970 for traces of the Gray Partridge, 500 of which were released around there in 1908 and 1909. They flourished for some decades, then disease reduced their numbers to as low as a dozen or so in 1955. We saw six partridge last spring, but on October 10 none was found. However, a bird on the roof of a small hangar attracted the attention of the two birders. It was the size of a bluebird and had the same characteristics, flying to the ground after insects and up again to the roof. Closing in on the bird, they were astonished to find that it was a Wheatear, the inverted black T on the tail being unmistakable. It was after-

wards seen and photographed by many of the members of our club.

The Spotted Redshank appeared at the Reifel Wildlife Refuge, situated on an island at the mouth of the main channel of the Fraser River about the middle of October, and stayed there about a month. It flew from one mudflat to another along the open sea, and to the refuge during the high tides. We saw the bird on October 31, and at that time it was with about 30 Long-billed Dowitchers and 150 Dunlins. It was tame enough for close-up photography, and was seen by many interested observers who came from many places in B.C. and the United States.—*Albert R. Davidson*, 2144 Brighton Avenue, Victoria, B.C.

SHUSWAP WELCOME

The Shuswap Naturalist's Club extends a warm invitation to members of the SNHS to get in touch whenever they are in Shuswap country. Meetings are held the third Tuesday of every month and field trips are organized.

At Sorrento, contact Deryk Beacham, president. And in Salmon Arm, Deane Munro, vice-president. Phone 832-3143. Anyone holidaying at Shuswap Lake Park should ask for Sandy Rathbone at the Recreation and Conservation Department of the Parks Branch, Scotch Creek. Phone 955-2241.

You may be surprised how many former and present members of the SNHS you will find among the Shuswap Naturalists!

As a member of both SNHS and SNC I hope that Saskatchewan naturalists will call in to say hello to us, too. We have been sorry to hear from different members that have been through our area but who didn't know "where in the Shuswap to find us."

For the records, then, our CEDAR HEIGHTS sign and map is on the Trans-Canada Highway, 17 miles west of Salmon Arm—adjacent to a Lookout Point. If the office hasn't been opened there yet follow the direction on the map to the Cedar Heights Information Centre. The phone number is 675-2525 or 675-2593.—*Ruth M. Chandler*, Sorrento, B.C.

CHURCHILL — A NATURALIST'S MECCA

A lifetime of searching would fail to find a more crusty character than "Smitty" (Irwin H.) Smith, long-time solitary trapper and trader, and his gracious wife Blanche Smith, botanist, historian and conservationist who joined Dr. Joseph R. Jehl in writing *Birds of the Churchill Region, Manitoba*. This grand Churchill couple epitomize the Arctic as intolerant and unforgiving of the ignorant while compassionate and generous to the malleable.

In August 1970 my wife Gladys and I spent four days at Churchill admiring the Eskimo Museum and its intense curator, M. Volant, O.M.I.; reliving the history of Fort Prince of Wales across the estuary; chatting with Eskimos and handling their works of art at the village Akudlik; communing with a cross-section of scientists, natives and residents in the Hudson Hotel pub; climbing over the extensive refuse dumps, where dead automobiles, not worth the cost to ship out by rail to Thompson, join the host of spectral derelicts on the tundra; inspecting the cavernous merchant ships waiting impatiently beside the incongruous grain elevators; standing and listening to some forlorn Indians

at the whale processing factory, "closed down because the whales are full of mercury"; and searching the flower-strewn muskeg and tundra, moss and lichen-covered rocks for birds or mammals or fossils or whalebones or anything of fascination to a prairie resident.

While the following 44 species of birds (of which 11 were lifers for us) were recorded between August 3-7, 1970, such a moment was merely an apéritif to a multi-course meal—and we're still hungry!

Arctic Loon, Red-throated Loon, Mallard, Redhead, Oldsquaw, Common Eider, White-winged Scoter, Surf Scoter, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Pigeon Hawk, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, American Golden Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Stilt Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, Northern Phalarope, Parasitic Jaeger, Herring Gull, Thayer's Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Arctic Tern, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Robin, Water Pipit, Starling, Yellow Warbler, Rusty Blackbird, Common Redpoll, Savannah Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lapland Longspur, Smith's Longspur.—S. D. Riome, Nipawin.



Photo by S. D. Riome

Eroded precambrian shield; Fort Prince of Wales across the Churchill River.

IMPRESSIONS OF A TRIP TO LAST MOUNTAIN LAKE

[Editor's Note: In the late summer of 1970, Annetraut Panse came from Germany to spend three months as an exchange student with a Regina high school student. The daughter of a biologist in a German gymnasium, she was interested in natural history activities in Saskatchewan. On one occasion, she accompanied Margaret Belcher on a trip to see the Sandhill Cranes at the north end of Last Mountain Lake.]

In the middle of September, Miss Belcher invited Jane Wilhelm and me to observe the cranes in the region of Last Mountain Lake. Since Jane and I are very interested in birding, we were happy to receive this invitation. We left Regina and went by car up to the northern part of the lake, equipped with binoculars, bird guides and warm clothes. Miss Belcher told us on our way that it was the time that the cranes leave the northern regions and start flying south. Several times on our way, we stopped the car to watch Red-tailed Hawks, Sparrow Hawks, a Mourning Dove, a Yellow-shafted Flicker, three Mountain Bluebirds and birds of several other species. All these birds were easily observed because they were either sitting on telephone poles or in the fields, or flying right beside the road.

Finally we approached the northern part of the lake, but we could not see any bird which resembled a crane. In the meantime the sun began to set and we arrived at the marsh. We were watching two flights of Brewer's Blackbirds and Lapland Longspurs when suddenly we heard the well-known shouts of the cranes. We searched the sky then and one of us discovered the first flight of about 40 or 45 Sandhill Cranes. They flew down to the lake to spend the night there, coming from the fields where they had been feeding.

Meanwhile the sunset had reached the point where it was the most beautiful. The whole sky over the lake was suffused with colour — from red and orange to yellow. I was fascinated by

this view and again, when I turned around, by what I could see in the other direction where a full moon was rising in the nearly black sky. At that moment I was no longer listening to the shouts of Janie calling out: "There is another flock of about 70 cranes. Oh and look! How many are there over there?" I was so fascinated by this spectacular scenery at the huge and wide horizon that I was quite unaware of anything else that was happening around me. Such a beautiful sunset is so unusual in Germany that I did not even watch the cranes any more. Then the sun disappeared and we discovered more and more cranes in the sky which was becoming darker and darker. Cranes, which have such a majestic way of flying, landed just in front of us on the lake. Soon the air was filled with the sound of their shouting, so it was difficult to understand each other's words.

We were watching the cranes resting on the small islands in the water when suddenly Miss Belcher shouted "There! I see a Whooping Crane!" Knowing that there are so few Whooping Cranes left in the world, we were all very excited. For quite a long time we observed this unusual bird standing in the tall grass on a small island among all the other cranes. But then it was soon so dark that we could hardly see anything more. So we had a picnic at a small open fire while listening to the sustained shouting of the crane. After this rather romantic supper we brought all our things back into the car and returned to Regina, very happy, satisfied, and a bit tired.

The enthusiasm I had shown for this birding trip to Last Mountain Lake prompted Miss Belcher to ask me about our bird activities at home in Bad Pyrmont. In Germany everything is different from Canada. People live much closer together, every few miles there is a village or a town — on 250,000 square kilometers 60 million people live. Compare Canada with an area of 3,852,000 square miles and a population of 16 million people! So you can imagine that one cannot find large plains; original wilderness hardly

xists. We are content when we see a row or hawk circling over our nice Wesenbergland." Cranes cross Bad Pymont every fall on their journey south or in spring on their way back north. That is the European Crane, which flies in a formation. His loud and far-reaching shouts bring us to the balcony or out of the house.

My home town, Bad Pymont, is well known for its mineral springs to which people from all over Europe come to drink the water. Mainly Bad Pymont possesses a famous, very extensive park, gardens with flower-beds, broad avenues with fountains and old trees. Here one finds many native song birds to which the park offers protection—quiet, food and a nesting place. When one walks in the park in the morning or in the afternoon, one always finds tourists with food in their hands, waiting for the birds. Chaffinches, titmice, nuthatches, woodpeckers climb on the hands of the visitors.

In the evening, when it gets dark, one can hear the shouts of the owls which nest in the big trees. Mainly it is the big tawny owl then that shouts its loud "hoo", turning his head in such an amusing way and flying away very silently. Or the Käuzchen, the teinkauz, called Totenvogel or "bird of death", shouts its awesome "huihui" through the night. A few hundred years ago these cries would have frightened people who believed them to be ill omens, but owls are so common and familiar to us that those thoughts do not come to our minds.—*Innetraut Panse*, Bad Pymont, Germany.

PILEATED WOODPECKERS

On March 9, 1970, there was a Pileated Woodpecker in a tree barely 10 feet from our living-room window. We watched it for over an hour as it started taking a black poplar apart river by sliver. It threw a 6 x 12 inch piece of bark over its shoulder with ease. The tree proved to be insect-ridden and a sudden squall blew it over later in the spring.

On November 9, 1970, Mrs. Roy Bett of Carlea reported seeing a Pileated Woodpecker in their yard. We both live within a mile or two of the Carrot River but we are in open farmland. Ordinarily the Pileated Woodpecker is seen only in dense timber. I have a theory that they might be coming into open farmland to feed on insect-ridden black and Russian poplar trees that have been planted in the shelterbelts. These poplars were popular in the 30's because they are quick growing but now they are all in some stage of decay and they make good feeding places for the woodpeckers.—*Mrs. M. Robin*, Box 149, Aylsham.

FISHING ANYONE?

During the 1970 fishing season, Mr. Frank Borcsok, Oxbow, caught a pike in the Souris River south of Oxbow. The fish weighed 13½ pounds and was 35½ inches long. It is a number of years since fish of such size have been caught in the Souris River so naturally the event was recorded in *The Oxbow Herald*.—*Hazel Paton*, Oxbow, Saskatchewan.

WEASELS

The farmer has no better helper than the weasel. Sometimes they are said to be bloodthirsty animals but I think they do more good than bad.

Every fall we have trouble with rats which move into our silo shed where some crop has been spilled. We try to poison them but we are never sure if they have all been destroyed.

One day last November we noticed a dragging mark in the snow. Beside the dragging marks were tracks nearly as large as a cat's tracks, but they were weasel tracks. A weasel had dragged a rat from the bale stack some 200 yards to a small stone pile. I noticed the same tracks around our granaries and pig barn so now we know that our rat problem has been taken care of for this winter.—*Rosemary Nemeth*, Junior Naturalist, Yellow Creek, Saskatchewan.