

except for scattered areas of grasses and sage.

The nest was on a narrow clay ledge 60 feet up on an 80-foot high cliff. It was approximately two feet in diameter, one foot in height, and was composed of aspen twigs lined with coarse grasses. On May 2, 1971 the nest contained three eggs. A further visit was paid to the nest on June 5 at which time four downy young, a heavily incubated egg, two Richardson ground squirrels (*Citellus richardsonii*) and one meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) were in the nest (see Fig. 1). During each of these visits, both adults soared overhead screaming their annoyance. A final visit to the nest was made on June 27 at which time the nest was empty. One of the adult birds still protested as the nest was approached.

Upon examination of the dates involved and the size of the young on June 5, we concluded that none of the young survived. A possible explanation for this could be the exceptionally heavy June rains. Support for this hypothesis is the fact that the nest was well exposed in the direction of the prevailing winds. The food supply

was abundant, as previously mentioned, and as evidenced by our observations at four Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) nests in the same general area. We feel that this eliminates starvation as a factor. Predation seems unlikely due to the inaccessibility of the nesting site.

In summary, this observation is interesting because of the fact that it is a cliff-nesting record, the clutch size is unusually large and there is a scarcity of reports of this occurrence, especially in western Canada. In six years of observation in southern Alberta, this is our only record.

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## A PROBABLE PINNATED GROUSE NEAR MORTLACH

by Frank Brazier, Regina

"This species is not now believed to occur anywhere in the province . . . ." Thus comment Nero and Lein when annotating the Greater Prairie Chicken or Pinnated Grouse (*Tympanuchus cupido*) in S.N.H.S. Special Publication No. 7 "*Birds of Moose Mountain, Saskatchewan*".

On Sunday, December 19, 1971 at 4:00 p.m. I was driving west on Alternate No. 1 Highway between Caron and Mortlach. It was an overcast day but rather bright. The rolling topography thereabouts is due to the sand dunes which, though clothed now in prairie grasses, forbs and shrubs (ah! the scent of Wolf Willow in the spring!) and with dense aspen groves

in the hollows, are invisible but real enough under the vegetation. Because this is grouse country and the Sharp-tailed Grouse is tolerably common, I took no particular notice when I saw a single grouse flying towards me from the southwest. It cut across the road just ahead of me, flying quite low—at eye level or a little higher—and disappeared northeasterly over a bush-crowned low hill.

As the bird crossed the road ahead of me, it was briefly silhouetted against the sky. I saw that it was very dark, short-tailed, peak-headed, and the head area bore two long (three inches, I judged) stiff appendages. As I cut its line of flight moments after it passed,

I looked behind to my right and got a rear view of the bird just before it disappeared—there was no trace of white.

The Pinnated Grouse is so rare that I am not claiming a positive sighting after so brief an acquaintance. This incident reminded me of another possible "rare bird" glimpse described by Michael Sharland in "*A Territory of Birds*" (1964, London and Adelaide). The author was attempting to prove the existence of the near-extinct Night Parrot of Central Australia and had staked out a watering tank where it, along with the only other nocturnal drinking parrot, Bourke Parrot, might appear. He describes his brief experience: "So after closely examining the birds on the tank I swung the beam of the torch to the trough, expecting to see nothing but Bourke Parrots. But before I was able to adjust my vision to the greater distance I saw a different bird suddenly fly from a fence alongside the trough. There was a flick of wings, and it was lost in the darkness. But, weak as the light was, in that fleeting moment it had seemed to me to be larger and greener than the Bourke Parrots that were with it. It was a single bird only, more robust and green than the Bourkes, and obviously a parrot. It could be nothing, I felt sure, but a Night Parrot . . . ."

Of such flimsy stuff is the fun of birding made.

For my bird there are only three possibilities. The dark body colour I saw could have been caused by the poor quality of the daylight—a Sharp-tail would have appeared dark. The short tail may have been the result of a Sharp-tail's losing the long tail feathers, or it could betoken a Ruffed Grouse which would account for the lack of posterior white. The peaked head is a feature common to all three grouse, but I must say that of all the hundreds of Sharp-tails I have seen in similar circumstances their head tops have invariably presented a smooth, rounded contour. In some pictures I have seen of the Pinnated Grouse the anterior end of the comb is shown as a peak; in other pictures head feathers form a peak as they do in both the Sharp-tailed and Ruffed Grouse.

I cannot explain away the three-inch appendages which I saw so plainly when the bird flew across my path. They could only be the pinnae from which the grouse derives its name. I have never seen a Sharp-tailed or a Ruffed Grouse flying which exhibited all the features which led me to believe the bird I saw was a Pinnated Grouse—short tail, peaked head, neck appendages, dark tail region, dark body colour.

The area is accessible. Perhaps other birders will keep an eye peeled for this elusive species.

## TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE AND BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK AT WEYBURN

by **Robert Kreba**, 144 Milne St., Regina

On September 7, 1970, I had the good fortune to see both a Townsend's Solitaire and a Black-headed Grosbeak at the Saskatchewan Hospital grounds, Weyburn. It was fairly warm when Garry Holtz of Weyburn and I set out at about 6:40 a.m. The sky was slightly overcast, resulting in subdued lighting with no harsh shadows, making for ideal viewing conditions.

The Weyburn area had been invaded by a large influx of Rose-breasted

Grosbeaks, which had first appeared about August 25. On August 27, 28, and 31, I had tentatively identified some females as Black-headed Grosbeaks, but I was not certain because of poor viewing conditions and their close resemblance to female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. Alerted to the possibility of their presence in the area, I was especially eager to find a male Black-headed Grosbeak.

At about 7:15 a.m., Garry Holtz and