

FIVE VIREOS AT FORT QU'APPELLE, 1972 AND 1973

by E. MANLEY CALLIN*

The year 1973 might well be called "the year of the Vireo" at Fort Qu'Appelle. The official list of Saskatchewan birds (Field check-list of Saskatchewan birds, 5th edition, June 1, 1969) includes five species of vireos. Two of these species, the Warbling and the Red-eyed, are regular and common summer residents in our area but the other three species are considered rare or uncommon transients here. In 1973 all five species were recorded at Fort Qu'Appelle and four of these were heard or seen on one day (June 12, 1973) in the small wooded area on our two lots in Fort Qu'Appelle. It would seem impossible for me to ever again repeat either of these records. Some details on the occurrence of the three relatively rare species follow:

Solitary Vireo: The Solitary Vireo was probably first seen and heard on May 19, 1973, in a coulee to the southwest of Fort Qu'Appelle but the details of observation were not quite satisfactory. On May 21 three birds were heard singing at once and fairly close together in the same area; one was seen and all birds were followed by sound for a considerable time as they foraged slowly down the coulee. On May 26 I had a beautiful view of one silent bird near the bridge over the Qu'Appelle River at Lebret.

I have records of the Solitary in only 6 of the 47 previous years.

Yellow-throated Vireo: A male of this species awakened me at 6:15 a.m. on June 12, 1973, by singing in the woods

by our house. It was not seen at this time but was observed many times from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on the same day in the trees across our back alley. It was not seen or heard again.

It is of special interest that a male spent all or most of the time in these woods for a full month in 1972 — from May 14 to June 15. It was last seen by David Hatch and myself on June 14, 1972.

I have recorded the Yellow-throated in only 2 of the last 47 years.

Philadelphia Vireo: At about 10:00 a.m. on June 12, 1973, while trying to get a view of the Yellow-throated, I heard a vireo song in our woods which very definitely lacked the distinctive "burry" quality of that species. Neither did it sound quite right for a Red-eyed as it seemed to lack the volume; it seemed higher in pitch and the notes were not as full and rich. It was difficult to get a good view of this bird as it foraged high in the trees and among the leaves but it proved to be the first Philadelphia I had knowingly heard. The bird remained in this small area for 6 days (June 12 to 17) and was frequently heard and seen. Repeated reference to Peterson's song recordings suggested that this particular individual of the Philadelphia had greater differences from the Red-eyed than is indicated in those recordings.

I have observed the Philadelphia in only 1 of the 47 previous years.

In summary, it is interesting to note the late dates of the Yellow-throated and Philadelphia vireos. One is in-

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clined to speculate that these males did not find a mate here and also to

wonder whether they might have nested if they had found a mate.

THE AUTHENTIC SPARROW HOUSE?

by VIRGINIA BARTKOW*

“The woodpecker pecked out
a little round hole
And made him a house
in the telephone pole.”

So went the nursery rhyme by Elizabeth Madox Roberts, but that is not how it happened in our garden.

Several years ago I asked Michael to build me a bird house. He did, but being a perfectionist, had to make it authentic — an authentic sparrow house. For two years it was empty; no authentic sparrows showed up, and all the other birds ignored it. And then we moved to Langford.

Almost immediately it was occupied by sparrows. However, their tenancy was challenged by starlings, so Michael had to put a new front with a smaller hole, over the opening. The second year, swallows tried to drive the sparrows out but were unsuccessful, and nested instead in a small Tupperware birdhouse at which, Michael said scornfully, no self-respecting bird of any kind would even look. He had barely hung it up before the swallows were in.

The next year, so there would be plenty of nests for everyone, and stimulated by the bluebird nesting competition, Michael built several new houses, single ones, double ones, round, square and octagonal. We had

them all up in plenty of time, but the year was late all down the line . . . The sparrows and swallows fought intermittently over the sparrow house, until finally the swallows got down to business and raised one family in it.

The only birds that were completely organized were the nuthatches. They have a nest in a red alder — a tiny slit in the trunk, so narrow that even when the bird vanishes you don't believe it. Every year they raise three families in this nest, but last year there was extra activity. One busy little female filled every bird house in the garden, except the sparrow house, with twigs, stuffing the holes so that nothing but a nuthatch or a chickadee could possibly get into them, and after every twig was laboriously jimmed into position, she would carol out a paean of accomplishment.

Now it is late November, and every house is busy with birds. Somehow they have managed to move the nuthatch twigs, and apparently are evaluating the nesting possibilities — sitting inside, peering out the doors, chirping to their mates. All but the sparrow house, and that has been appropriated by a Hairy Woodpecker! Happy “Hairy” pounded away until the hole was bigger than the original opening, squeezed inside,

“And as I watched, he poked
out his head,
Black and white and topped
with red.”

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