

# A RECONNAISSANCE OF THE BIRDS AND MAMMALS OF THE CARIBOU MOUNTAINS, ALBERTA

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## ABSTRACT

Field work with collecting, in the Caribou Mountains in the summer of 1973 and 1974, established the presence of 84 species of birds. The most interesting of these were Red-throated Loon, Northern Phalarope and Gray-cheeked Thrush. All three were seen in circumstances which strongly suggested local breeding. Breeding records for the Surf Scoter and Red-breasted Merganser were also obtained.

Sixteen species of mammals were recorded. This included heather voles, which were trapped, and observations of river otters and caribou.

The Caribou Mountains of northern Alberta are an isolated high plateau with a number of large and small lakes. The center of the area lies about 100 miles northeast of the settlement of Fort Vermillion. The plateau extends about 50 miles from north to south and for almost 90 miles from east to west. Its altitude exceeds 3,100 feet in some places and a considerable area is over 3,000 feet high. No zoological field work has, to our knowledge, been

carried out in this area apart from some entomological work on the southern slope of the plateau and on Foggy Mountain on its southern rim, carried out in July 1970 by Drs. F. H. Gooding and B. S. Henning of the University of Alberta.

Owing to its altitude at a latitude of 59°, it was felt that the plateau might well harbour some birds of otherwise more northern breeding distribution. This was borne out in 1973 by the finding of Red-throated Loons, Gray-cheeked Thrushes and a Northern Phalarope.

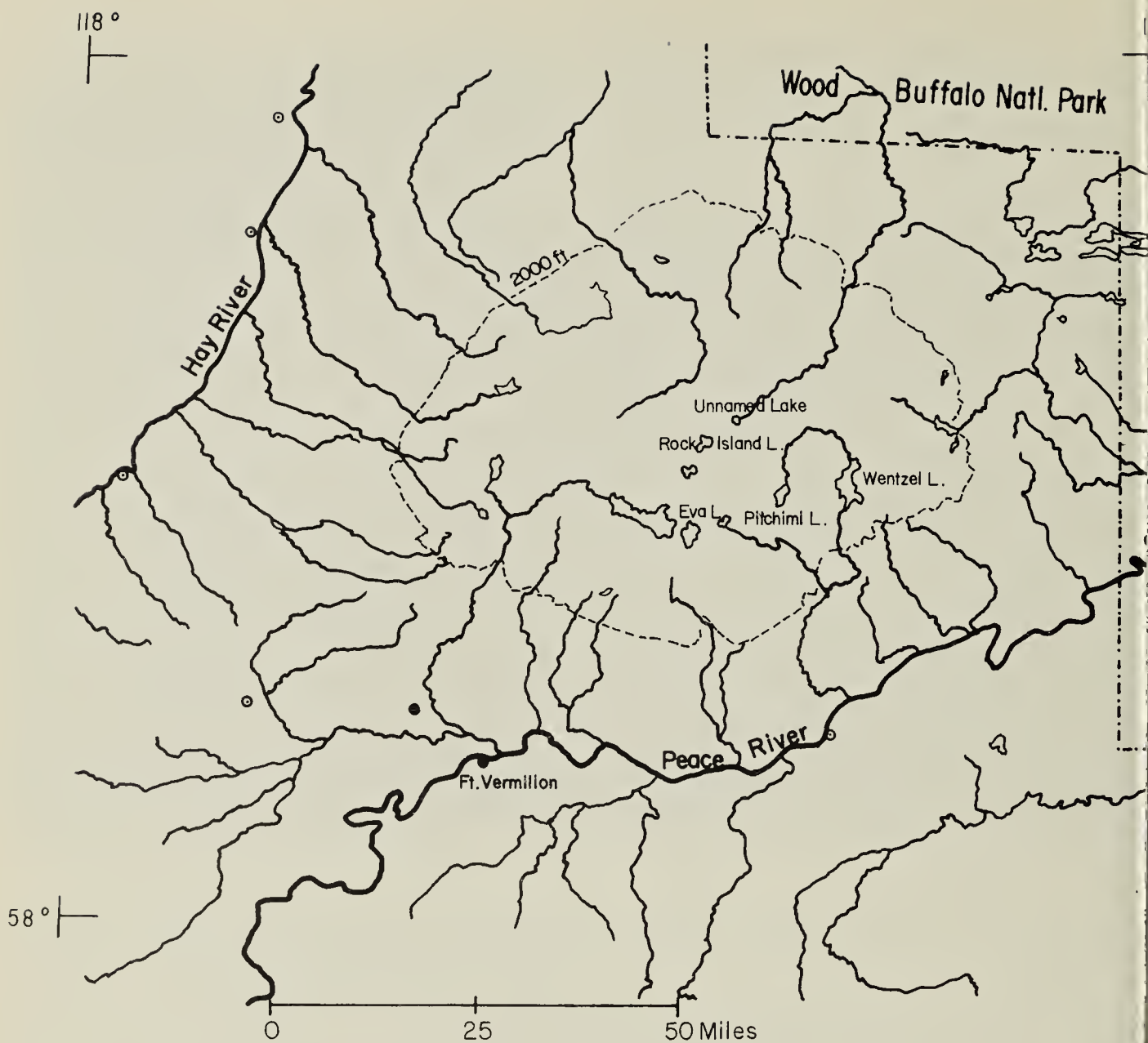
Almost as striking was our failure to observe in this area a number of birds which are common in summer in northern Alberta as a whole, either in 1973 or 1974.

The absence of the House Sparrow and of Starlings is presumably related to the lack of year-round human inhabitants. Other absentees from our bird list are the Red-tailed Hawk, Marsh Hawk, American Coot, Killdeer, owls other than the Great Horned and woodpeckers other than the Common Flicker, Black-capped Chickadee, wrens and the Long-billed Marsh Wren, Red-winged Blackbird and Leicote's and the Clay-colored sparrows. Their absence on the plateau can in most cases be explained as due to the lack of certain habitats, eg. true marshes, grasslands of any extent, and the scarcity of tall timber.

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Sketch map of the Caribou Mountains showing the lakes named in the text.

### Itinerary

Between us we spent 7 weeks in this area in the summers of 1973 and 1974. Our itinerary is given in some detail so that future workers who may wish to concentrate on areas we did not traverse can identify the areas we covered on large scale maps. Two of the larger lakes visited are not named on maps. They are: Rock Island Lake (so named by forestry service personnel), a lake 2 miles long from north to south and about as wide lying 6 miles northeast of the eastern end of Margaret Lake into which it drains by a creek, and Unnamed Lake about 1-1/2 miles long lying 6 miles north-northeast of Rock Island Lake and

draining into the Buffalo River.

As there are no roads in the area, float-equipped aircraft of the Pease Air Company were used to reach all lakes and to return from the lakes selected as camp sites.

In 1973 E. O. Höhn, accompanied by P. Marklevitz, camped on Eva Lake and then stayed at the fish camp on Margaret Lake from June 6 to 10. The two more northern of the four islands in Eva Lake were visited, as well as a small lake northwest of Eva Lake, the northeastern portion only of the shore of Margaret Lake, and a small lake 1 mile north of the fish camp.

From June 26 to 28 the same observations



rs were camped on the western shore of Rock Island Lake and visited a small lake 1 mile west of this lake and an islet off its southwestern shore. They were then flown to Margaret Lake where they stayed until June 30, visiting the small lake mentioned above and two others which lie about a mile north of the eastern shore of Eva Lake.

In 1974 R. D. Burns, accompanied by D. Sept, were at Unnamed Lake from June 18 to 25 and also visited a smaller lake close by to the east. From June 26 to July 7 they were camped on the east shore of Pitchimi Lake and explored two islands in this lake. From July 8 to 15 they were camped on the west shore of Wentzel Lake.

E. O. Höhn and P. Marklevitz camped on the west shore of Rock Island Lake from July 15 to 20; they visited the small lake to the west as well as two others about 1 and 2 miles respectively to the southwest along the creek draining the lake.

### Habitats

Forests of stunted black spruce, their lower branches hung with grey snea lichens without deciduous undergrowth but with a floor of lichens and patches of sphagnum moss, cover the most extensive areas. Reindeer moss (*Cladonia rangifera*) was the most widespread lichen but *Cladonia mitis* and *Cladonia coccifera* as well as *Strararia nivalis* were also collected. Patches of more luxuriant forest with an admixture of birch, white spruce and lodgepole pine were noticed on islands in Eva Lake and on the shores of Pitchimi and Wentzel Lakes. Former burns had produced more open areas with only scattered young spruce on a bed of lichens or in some places an extensive growth of labrador tea. Willow and alder thickets were found along lakes and creeks. Meadows were small and scarce but were seen on

cleared ground about the Margaret Lake fish camp; some of the seismic trails were grass-grown and some islands in lakes had grassy areas. Emergent water plants in shallow portions of some lakes produced an approximation to marsh vegetation. Segments of the shores of some of the larger lakes have narrow sandy beaches and shore-line areas of alders growing out of a mat of bearberries.

### SYSTEMATIC LIST

In the list which follows, an asterisk preceding the species name indicates that one or more specimens were collected locally. All bird specimens obtained are in the Provincial Museum of Alberta at Edmonton, as are those of mammals taken by R.D.B.; E.O.H.'s mammal specimens are in the collection of the Department of Zoology of the University of Alberta. Except in the case of the White-crowned Sparrow, the subspecific identity of the specimens has not been established and trinomials have therefore been used only in that instance. The names of species not observed by either author but included on the basis of local information, mostly obtained from Mr. George Grimm of Manning, Alberta, who has owned the sport fishing camp at Margaret Lake for a number of years, are placed in parentheses. Species names are from the A.O.V. Checklist and supplement.<sup>1 2</sup>

The names of the larger lakes about which most observations were made are indicated by the following abbreviations: Eva — E; Margaret — M; Pitchimi — P; Rock Island — R; Unnamed — U; Wentzel — W. The phrase "all large lakes visited" refers to these lakes as a whole. The altitudes in feet of these lakes, in ascending order, are: Wentzel — 2,150 approx.; Pitchimi and Unnamed — 2,500 approx.; Margaret — 2,725; Eva — 2,887; Rock Island — 2,950 approx.



BIRDS

**COMMON LOON.** Seen on all the large lakes visited, as many as nine being in sight together on one occasion; single birds seen also on some of the smaller lakes. One flushed from a nest with two eggs on the narrow terminal spit of an island in E lake June 8/73.

**RED-THROATED LOON.** Not previously recorded in Alberta during the breeding season (Salt and Wilk, 1966), though there is a breeding record for northern Saskatchewan (Nero, 1963). A few pairs evidently summer in the Caribou Mountains near R lake but proof of nesting has not yet been obtained. Two seen on a small lake near M lake and one encountered on a nearby trail June 9/73 but none here on June 26. One, at times two, R lake June 26-28/73 (Höhn and Marklevitz, 1974). In 1974 some seen daily on R lake July 16-19; on the evening of July 17 five in a display flight accompanied by *ka ka ka kwao* calls while another was swimming. Individuals were seen to leave R lake with a fish in the beak on two occasions; these and others too far to determine whether they carried prey, generally left the lake in the same southwesterly direction but no loons were seen on two smaller lakes in this direction which we visited.

**RED-NECKED GREBE.** One on a small

lake northwest of E lake June 8/73 and at least one, probably two, pairs on another small lake northeast of M lake June 29/73.

**HORNED GREBE.** Two near a nest on a small lake west of R lake June 28/73 and two on another small lake nearby on the same day. On July 16/74 two on the first mentioned lake.

**WHITE PELICAN.** One on W lake July 9/74.

**MALLARD.** A generally distributed breeding bird but not seen on W lake; scarcer than in lower-lying country; excluded; downies maximum seen in one day. Females with downies seen near R and M lakes in late June 1973.

**GADWALL.** A pair seen on M lake June 8/73.

**PINTAIL.** A fully-feathered young bird on a lakelet near R lake on July 16/74.

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL.** There is probably a moderate, scattered breeding population. A few were seen on E lake June 1973 and others near R lake in the June of the same year as well as one on a small lake nearby. In June 1974 two single birds at P lake and a flock of 10 at R lake in mid-July.



An old burn near Rock Island Lake, typical habitat of the Gray-cheeked Thrush.

E. O. H. m



**AMERICAN WIGEON.** A thinly distributed breeding bird. A few on E lake early June 1973. Next year two females seen at U lake and a female flushed from a nest with nine eggs on June 18; on July 2 a male with a single young seen at P lake.

**GREATER SCAUP.** A number of these seen on several waters in June 1973 and July 1974 seemed to E.O.H. and his companion to show the wing pattern of this species when in flight. As no specimens were collected, their identity was not established. The map of the breeding range given in Godfrey<sup>3</sup> shows it as extending well south of Great Slave Lake — breeding of this species in the Caribou Mountains is not improbable.]

**LESSER SCAUP.** Seen at all larger lakes visited except W lake and also seen on some smaller lakes. On a lake about a mile long, lying northeast of the east shore of M lake, there were over a hundred of these ducks, males greatly in excess, on June 1/73.

**COMMON GOLDENEYE.** Scarce, possibly because of the rarity of trees large enough to carry nesting holes. A pair was on M lake on June 7 and a female only on June 29/73. A lone female on R lake on June 29/73 and a male on P lake on July 7/74.

**BUFFLEHEAD.** This tree-nesting duck is evidently also scarce but proof of breeding is obtained. Seen in small numbers on all larger lakes visited except E lake; greatest number observed was a group of about twenty, mainly males, on a small lake northeast of the eastern end of M lake on June 20/73. A female with five downies on pool near P lake on July 5/74.

**BLDSQUAW.** On June 30/73 a male and a female flew past E.O.H. and his companion, about 35 yards away, along the shore of a small lake a mile due east of the lake fish camp. The male was in full breeding plumage and gave the characteristic spring call. These were presumably non-breeders which had not completed their spring migration.<sup>4</sup>

**WHITE-WINGED SCOTER.** Recorded only in the M lake area; a male on a small nearby lake June 9 and a group of seven of both sexes on another small lake on June 10/73.

**SURF SCOTER.** As Salt and Wilk<sup>6</sup> state that there is no Alberta nesting record, though it probably breeds in the Lake Athabasca region on the basis of June and July occurrences, the breeding record below is of interest. Common on all larger lakes visited as well as on some of the

smaller lakes. A female with four young on a muskeg pool near W lake on July 9/74.

**COMMON MERGANSER.** Well distributed in small numbers, may breed. Seen on P, W, and R lakes; as many as seven males and a female in a group on the first-named lake on June 28/74. A male followed by a file of downy young on W lake on July 10/74; as males normally desert the females during incubation these downies were not necessarily those of the male seen with them or even of his species.

\***RED-BREASTED MERGANSER.** Fairly well distributed in small numbers; breeds locally, a point of interest as Salt and Wilk<sup>6</sup> state there are no unequivocal breeding records for Alberta. Seen on E, M, and P lakes. At P lake a female flushed off a nest with eight eggs beneath a fallen log on a small island on July 2/74.

**GOSHAWK.** A nest with three well-feathered young found 25 feet high in a white poplar in a stand of mature trees of this species at W lake on July 8/74; no adults were seen near the nest but single adults referred to it were seen in the area two and three days later.

**BALD EAGLE.** Seen on all larger lakes visited and probably breeds on all of them. A nest which had evidently been used that year, for egg shells were found beneath it, was seen on an island in E lake on June 8/73. An unoccupied nest was found on an island in P lake on July 2/74.

**OSPREY.** There are probably several breeding pairs in the area. Two were seen at M lake on June 10/73 and fishermen told us that a pair had nested a few years earlier at W lake. At R lake one was seen daily and sometimes twice daily from July 16-19/74 fishing in the lake. It repeatedly left with a fish in its talons, disappearing between the shore-line trees and no doubt had young in the nest not too far off. One was seen by a smaller lake about 2 miles from R lake on July 18 of the same year.

**AMERICAN KESTREL.** Single birds seen at M, U, P, and W lakes; on one occasion two were in sight at the latter locality.

**SPRUCE GROUSE.** Breeds but distribution very local in the two years of our observations. G. Grimm told E.O.H. there were always a few about. None were seen about E, M, and R lakes. At P lake a hen with six young on July 6/74 and another female with young at W lake in July of the same year.

[**WILLOW PTARMIGAN.** G. Grimm told E.O.H. that ptarmigan sometimes appeared in numbers about the M lake fish camp at

the time of the first severe cold of the winter, probably in November.]

**COMMON SNIBE.** Apparently local. One heard drumming at R lake in late June 1973; next day one seen near a smaller lake in that area.

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER.** There are evidently several breeding pairs on all of the larger lakes. Nests each with four eggs were found at M and R lakes in June 1973 and at P and W lakes in June and early July 1974.

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER.** Scarce. One near M lake on June 9/73 showed mild anxiety at our presence and another near R lake on July 18/74 showed definite anxiety and probably had young nearby.

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS.** Probably breeds in small numbers. Two attributed to this species between E and M lakes on June 8/73 and two others near R lake on July 18/74.

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS.** Widely distributed, breeds. Seen at all larger lakes visited except W lake, as well as on a number of the smaller lakes. On June 29/73 at a small lake near M lake there were two very anxious adults and two downy young.

**BAIRD'S SANDPIPER.** One present for most of the day on a sandy strip of shore at R lake on July 17/74.

\***LEAST SANDPIPER.** Four at P lake on July 4/74; at W lake on July 14 of the same year a mixed flock of these and Semipalmated Sandpipers. One at R lake on July 18/74. There were no brood patches on two collected at W lake and these were presumably fall migrants from some fairly distant area.

\***SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER.** Two at W lake on July 10/74 and a somewhat greater number together with Least Sandpipers on July 14.

**NORTHERN PHALAROPE.** One seen June 28/73 on a small lake west of the west shore of R lake showed intense anxiety at our presence and probably had young nearby (Höhn and Marklevitz, 1974). No phalaropes were seen at this lake when it was revisited in July 1974. The only geographically comparable record is that of Nero<sup>3</sup> for northern Saskatchewan.

\***HERRING GULL.** Some seen at all the larger lakes visited. There is a breeding colony on an islet in R lake where about ten pairs of adults and at least four young were seen on June 28/73. There may well be other small nesting colonies in the area.

**CALIFORNIA GULL.** One at U lake on

June 21; seven over P lake on July 4, and one at W lake on July 8/74.

**RING-BILLED GULL.** One at M lake on June 10/73. It seems improbable that this or the preceding species nest in the area.

**MEW GULL.** One seen repeatedly at the fish camp on M lake on June 8, 10 and 28/73; several at E lake in early June that year. At R lake two were seen on July 18/74. May well breed in the area since it occurs in the breeding season at other lakes in northern Alberta though the nearest known nesting colony is at Fort Smith.

**BONAPARTE'S GULL.** Widely distributed, evidently breeds. Some seen at all larger lakes visited as well as on a number of smaller ones. At several of the latter birds in couples or in small groups show by their anxiety that they had young nearby.

\***COMMON TERN.** Apparently breeds near or on the two largest lakes of the area seen on E, M, and W lakes. At a small lake northeast of M lake several terns were seen carrying fish to a grassy islet on June 30/74. Up to two dozen terns were seen in the area at times over an apparent colony on an island in W lake in mid-July 1974.

**BLACK TERN.** Our only record is of two seen over a small lake near R lake on July 28/73; none were seen there on a second visit in mid-July 1974.

**GREAT HORNED OWL.** No owls were seen in the area but a wing feather of one of this species was found near M lake on June 1973 and another near R lake in July 1974.

**COMMON NIGHTHAWK.** Widespread, presumably breeds. One to several birds were seen virtually in all areas visited in 1973 and 1974.

**COMMON FLICKER.** This was the only woodpecker observed. Single birds seen at M, P, R, and W lakes. Breeding seems likely on an island in P lake where two were seen on July 2/74 in an area where several possible nesting cavities in trees were available.

**YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER.** A good view of one was obtained on the east shore of M lake on June 8/73.

**ALDER FLYCATCHER.** The call of the flycatcher was heard in a willow-alder habitat on the east shore of M lake on July 8 and in a similar area at R lake on July 27/73.

**LEAST FLYCATCHER.** One was seen and heard at E lake on June 8/73 and another at P lake on July 4/74.





E. O. Höhn

Northern Phalarope on the small lake near Rock Island Lake,

**OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER.** This flycatcher was scarcer than might have been expected. Single birds were seen at U, M, and W lakes in June and July 1974.

**BREE SWALLOW.** A thinly distributed breeding bird. Seen in very small numbers at M, U and P lakes; two tentatively identified at R lake. At P lake one was flushed from a nest hole in a dead birch on an island on July 2/74.

**BANK SWALLOW.** Only observed near P lake where a bank on the shore of a nearby lesser lake held six occupied nests; two out of three nests examined held eggs on June 21/74.

**BARN SWALLOW.** Probably only an occasional visitor from surrounding areas; one near M lake fish camp on June 28/73.

**GRAY JAY.** A well distributed breeding bird. Small groups often including young of the year seen in all areas visited.

**COMMON RAVEN.** Single birds or couples seen in all areas visited; the

sighting of two adults with a young of the year at P lake on July 1/74 indicates local breeding.

**\*BOREAL CHICKADEE.** Scarce but apparently breeds. Seen only at M, P, and R lakes. A family group with young of the season was seen at P lake on July 2/74.

**AMERICAN ROBIN.** Well distributed and breeds but in small numbers; one or two seen in all areas visited and a nest with three eggs found at P lake on July 3/74.

**HERMIT THRUSH.** Apparently restricted to relatively low-lying portions of the area where it breeds. Nests with eggs were found at U and W lakes in late June and early July 1974; it was also seen at P and M lakes.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH.** Only observed at P and W lakes but fairly numerous about the former. Probably restricted to the lower-lying portions of the area.

**\*GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH.** During our stay at R lake, June 26-28/73, there were about twenty along half a mile of the



west shore of the lake; several seen with food in the beak suggesting young were nearby.<sup>4</sup> During July 16-29/74 only one seen in this area; presumably most had already left this apparent breeding area by then. One heard singing at U lake June 22 and 23/74 and one collected there June 25.

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET.** Some observed in all areas visited.

\***BOHEMIAN WAXWING.** May breed in the area. A male was collected at U lake on June 21/74; several sightings made later at P lake, the largest a flock of twenty-three on June 29; a small flock at W lake July 11-14 of the same year. Elsewhere only a waxwing call heard in early June 1973 near M lake.

[**NORTHERN SHRIKE.** On June 6/73 two of us had a very brief view of a gray shrike presumed to be of this species.]

**RED-EYED VIREO.** A singing male seen on an island in E lake on June 8/73.

\***TENNESSEE WARBLER.** Local, presumably breeds; common and evidently established in territories in areas where there were young deciduous trees or in willow-alder thickets about P lake in June 1974 and in a willow-alder area on M lake in June 1973.

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER.** One seen at M lake on June 8/73, and several on an island in E lake on the following day.

**YELLOW WARBLER.** Evidently less common than in more low-lying country; breeds. One to several, including a pair, were seen at U and P lakes in June 1974. At R lake a male was seen on a shore-line tree with a fully-fledged young bird judged to be of the same species on July 19/74.

**MAGNOLIA WARBLER.** Our only observation is of several seen on an island in E lake on June 8/73.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER.** A common and generally distributed breeding bird. Seen in some numbers in all areas visited in a variety of treed and partly-treed habitats. Family parties with young of the year about R lake in July 1974.

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER.** A singing male observed for some time near the shore of E lake on June 8/73 is our only observation of this species.

\***BLACKPOLL WARBLER.** A widely distributed breeding bird; fairly common in all areas visited both in fairly open, formerly burnt areas as well as in habitats with more trees. Several young out of the nest seen with adults at R lake in mid-July 1974.

\***PALM WARBLER.** A widely distributed breeding bird. This warbler was fairly common in all areas visited, generally in fairly open burns but also found in mixed wood habitats. At P lake on July 5/74 two males and a female were seen gathering insects evidently for their young but no nest could be found.

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH.** Our sole observation is of one well seen on an island in E lake on June 8/73.

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT.** Apparently local but may breed. Single birds seen or heard singing in a willow-alder area on the east shore of M lake on June 6 and 8/73.

\***WILSON'S WARBLER.** Apparently breeds generally in willow or willow-alder scrub areas, seen in such habitats as P, M, and R lakes. One seen at M lake with beakful of food on June 30/73, evidently had young nearby.

**AMERICAN REDSTART.** Observed only on an island in E lake where there were several on June 8/73.

\***RUSTY BLACKBIRD.** Fairly common breeds. Some were observed near large and small lakes and along creeks in all areas visited except W lake. At U lake a female seen feeding a young bird out of the nest June 25/74; by July 7 flocks of up to five were seen at P lake and their apparent absence at W lake which was not visited until July 8 might have been due to their pre-departure from that area.

**PINE GROSBEAK.** Only one observation — a female seen between E and M lakes on June 6/73.

**COMMON REDPOLL.** Two seen for a short period at U lake on June 25/74.

**PINE SISKIN.** Three seen at W lake on July 14 and one near R lake on July 17/74.

**WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL.** Only one observation but it suggests local breeding. A juvenile heavily streaked below was seen at R lake on July 27/73 and later on the same day a group of four which included two males in full plumage was encountered there.

\***SAVANNAH SPARROW.** Fairly common in the limited grassy areas and also on some burns about all the larger lakes visited except W lake. A nest of five eggs found at M lake on June 10/73.

\***DARK-EYED JUNCO.** Fairly common in all areas visited, evidently breeds as family parties with young of the year seen in early July.



CHIPPING SPARROW. Fairly common in dry habitats in all areas visited; breeds. Two nests found at P lake on July 4/74; one held four eggs and the other four young; next day one of these sparrows was seen nest building in a spruce in this area.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW. Fairly common in all areas visited, particularly in large burns, breeds; nest with four eggs, E lake June 6/73; female with brood patch collected at U lake June 19/74; pair seen feeding four young at P lake early July 1974; adults and fledged young common at E lake mid-July 1974. Two adults collected here, as expected, of the subspecies *gam-elli*; however, an adult with the head markings of the subspecies *oriantha* was taken in a small mammal trap at R lake on July 17/74; next day a juvenile taken in the same trap also showed head markings of this form. E.O.H. compared the apparent *oriantha* adult with a number of study skins of birds of the two subspecies mentioned.

Adults of the two forms seem to him to differ only in the head pattern; on this basis the adult taken at R lake belongs to the subspecies *oriantha*.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW. Evidently rare; none seen but one heard singing at P lake on July 3/74.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW. Several seen and heard singing about M and R lakes where they were evidently established. A female with brood patch taken in a trap at M lake on June 8/73.

SWAMP SPARROW. Only one seen, in an alder-willow area near a small lake in the R lake area on July 16/74; may well be more frequent than this single observation suggests.

SONG SPARROW. Perhaps confined to the more low-lying portions of the area where it may well breed for one or two seen at U, P, and W lakes but none about E, M, and R lakes.



One caribou at Rock Island Lake, July 1974.

E. O. Höhn

#### MAMMALS

Statements on the local status of the larger mammals given to E. O. Höhn by G. Grimm in June 1973 are cited in the list below. More general and also negative information received from him is summarized here: mink, marten

and fisher relatively common; he had never seen a lynx, wolverine (though he said the latter were sometimes trapped in the area), skunk or porcupine. On the other hand the chief forestry ranger at Fort Vermillion reported



lynx as numerous, and that his staff had seen signs of porcupines and wolverines.

\*MASKED SHREW. An adult male trapped in an old cabin at P lake July 2/74.

\*AMERICAN WATER SHREW. An adult male trapped on the rocky shore of P lake July 1/74.

SNOWSHOE HARE. The skulls of about half a dozen were found on a trail near M lake on June 9/73 and on June 29 of that year a hare seen on the same trail. The species was presumably at a low during the period of our observations.

\*LEAST CHIPMUNK. Local, perhaps confined to relatively low-lying areas where the vegetation is more rich and varied for it was only seen at M and W lakes where an immature male was collected on July 11/74.

\*AMERICAN RED SQUIRREL. Fairly common in all areas visited. An adult female in post-lactating condition collected at P lake June 26/74 as well as an immature at W lake in July of that year.

AMERICAN BEAVER. Fairly common for some seen in small numbers at U, P, W, and M lakes as well as on several smaller lakes and several lodges seen.

\*DEER MOUSE. Possibly restricted to lower-lying portions of the plateau with relatively rich vegetation, for specimens trapped only near the fish camp at M lake and at W lake.

\*GAPPER'S RED-BACKED VOLE. Evidently the most common murid in the area for several were caught wherever traps were set, i.e. at E, M, R (in 1973 and 1974) and W, P, and W lakes (in 1974). Adults in breeding condition, including pregnant females, post-breeding adults as well as immatures were taken.

\*HEATHER VOLE. An adult male trapped in June 1973 at R lake and another in much the same locality in July 1974.

MUSKRAT. Only observed about the mouth of a creek at the east end of M lake in June 1973 where there were several but G. Grimm says this species and beaver were common in all the lakes of the area.

\*MEADOW VOLE. Apparently confined to grassy areas and as these are few and far between, probably very local. We trapped one at M lake and were able to capture a large adult on the grassy shore of a smaller lake northeast of M lake in June 1973.

WOLF. G. Grimm told E.O.H. it was fairly common; this seems to be confirmed by our

findings of tracks in mud on seismic trail near R lake in June 1973 and July 1974; as there are no dogs in the entire area the identity of large canine footprints is beyond doubt. Droppings attributed to this species were also found at W lake in July 1974.

[RED FOX. Evidently scarce; G. Grimm told E.O.H. he had only seen one, in 1970 we saw none nor any indications of the presence.]

AMERICAN BLACK BEAR. Bears are apparently much scarcer on the Caribou Mountain plateau than in the surrounding lower country. G. Grimm had only knowledge of one about M lake in all his years in the area. A yearling was seen several times at lake between June 26 and 30/74; it was feeding on remains left by fishermen. At W lake fresh bear signs were found in July 1974 and about the same time droppings attributed to this species were found at lake.

RIVER OTTER. G. Grimm told E.O.H. he had once seen two otters on M lake. On June 23 two were seen swimming across lake and then ascending a creek which flows into it.

CARIBOU. The very name of the area indicates that it once held a good population of woodland caribou. The many trails evidently made by these animals, which follow the shores of all the lakes visited, as well as certain creeks, suggest that this was the case until comparatively recently. A pilot of Peace Air Service told E.O.H. that during the five years (preceding 1973) he had known the area, caribou had decreased very noticeably. On the other hand G. Grimm in 1973 rated them as fairly common. One of our parties found fresh tracks as well as the antlers of four animals. On June 9/73 fishermen reported seeing a doe with calf on the shore of M lake to the other party which on the 10th saw a doe with calf on the shore of a small lake between M and E lakes from the air. Early the morning of July 18/74 a doe with calf was seen on the south shore of R lake. The animals followed the lake shore westward crossing the creek which flows out of lake and in the course of about an hour reached our camp on the west shore of lake which they by-passed, after being startled by our presence, on the landward side.

[MULE DEER. According to G. Grimm mule deer are occasionally seen in the Caribou Mountains.]

MOOSE. Rated as scarcer than caribou by G. Grimm. Fishermen reported a male at lake on July 6/74; fishermen on this lake reported seeing a cow and calf on the



Following day; moose sign was fairly common around this lake and moose dung was also found west of R lake in July 1974.

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## AN INTERESTING MERLIN

by DAVID L. SURKAN\*

On 8 February, 1975 while walking home from classes at the University of Saskatchewan, I noticed a bird trying to take off from a snowbank in front of the University Hospital. After a short chase, I picked up the bird and identified it as a Merlin. Dr. Stuart Houston and I determined that the tip of its beak was damaged and it was bleeding — in addition, it was wearing a band. It was a Merlin banded as a nestling by Stuart Houston on 25 June, 1974 at a nest described by Lynn Oliphant.<sup>2</sup>

Merlins have wintered in Saskatoon for at least 20 years, perhaps in response to the large number of small birds which now winter in Saskatchewan cities. The A.O.U. Check-list 1957<sup>1</sup> indicates Wyoming, Colorado and occasionally Nebraska and Iowa as the northern most wintering states for this species. We are not sure whether local Merlins or birds perhaps from further north, winter here. We are not sure which subspecies winters here. The light coloured subspecies, *Falco columbarius richardsonii*, had virtually disappeared as a nesting species from the prairies of Saskatchewan by the 1960's. We strongly suspect, but have no conclusive proof, that it is

pale prairie subspecies that is making a "comeback" in the Saskatoon area.

An adult pair of Merlins was seen early in March, 1975, by Tom Donald re-establishing territory at one of the 1973 nesting sites. We conclude that both adults and their young remain in Saskatchewan the year round. Study of the injured Merlin revealed a very pale plumage of an immature male which is typical of the *richardsonii* subspecies.

The Merlin had a fractured left ulna as shown in x-rays taken by David Pitt-Brooke and Lynn Oliphant, Western College of Veterinary Medicine. The wing was bandaged, and Bob Rafuse undertook to care for the bird until the wing healed. The Merlin will probably be released in June.

I wish to thank Dr. Houston for his assistance in preparing this note.

<sup>1</sup>AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGIST'S UNION, 1957. *Check-list of North American birds*. 5th Edition. Port City Press, Baltimore. 691 p.

<sup>2</sup>OLIPHANT, LYNN W. 1974. *Merlins — the Saskatoon Falcons*. *Blue Jay* 32: 140-147.

### REQUEST FOR MERLIN SIGHTINGS

Any information on Saskatchewan merlin (pigeon hawk) nestings or even sightings during the breeding season would be greatly appreciated to supplement a general survey of these birds in the province.

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