

# GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN NEAR RUTHILDA, SASKATCHEWAN

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A fairly recent record of the rare Greater Prairie Chicken has come to my attention. On January 14, 1976, Jim Goring described to me a bird of this species which he recalled seeing a mile north and one and one-half miles west of Ruthilda, Saskatchewan, the second or third week of July, 1972. Ruthilda is 28 miles west-northwest of Biggar. Mr. Goring is a resident of Biggar who runs a farm near the village throughout the year.

He first noticed the bird while summer-fallowing a piece of land adjacent to a stubble field. The single Greater Prairie Chicken was foraging in this field amongst a group of six Sharp-tailed Grouse. Realizing that the bird was quite unusual in its appearance, Mr. Goring was able to move within a few feet of the Prairie Chicken and observe the following field marks (without binoculars): size — about the same as the Sharp-tails; plumage — the bird had distinct barring on the upperparts, not mottled as on the Sharp-tails; tail — in contrast with the mottled, white-fringed tail of the Sharp-tails, this individual had a shorter, squarer and dark tail. This was seen much better when the birds took flight a few minutes later.

However, the most striking feature of the grouse, Mr. Goring recalled, were the two long (2 to 3 inches) tufts of feathers on each side of the neck. These were very prominent on the Greater Prairie Chicken and were, in fact, the reason Mr. Goring investigated the bird more closely. The small flock, including the Greater Prairie Chicken, remained in the same general area for several consecutive days before moving elsewhere. When asked to point out which species the bird most closely resembled in "Birds of Canada" by Godfrey, Mr. Goring pointed out the flying Greater Prairie Chicken without hesitation. He

assured me there was no mistaking the bird for any other upland game bird as he is completely familiar with the Gray Partridge and, of course, he was able to make a direct comparison with the Sharp-tailed Grouse.

This is the only record Mr. Goring remembers for this species in over 15 years of casual observations in the district.

It is perhaps interesting to note that the most recent well documented sightings for Saskatchewan have occurred during the same general period of time. Brazier reported single birds near Mortlach on December 19, 1971, and on April 16, 1972.<sup>1,2</sup> Hatch examined a specimen shot near Leader on November 3, 1972.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>BRAZIER, FRANK. 1972. A probable Pinnated Grouse near Mortlach. Blue Jay 30:31-32.

<sup>2</sup>BRAZIER, FRANK. 1972. Greater Prairie Chicken sighted again. Blue Jay 30:198-199.

<sup>3</sup>HATCH, D. R. M. 1973. Greater Prairie Chicken at Leader, Saskatchewan. Blue Jay 31:55-56.



Fred W. Lahrman  
Greater Prairie Chicken in Wisconsin