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LAND RECORDS OF THE ROCK PTARMIGAN IN MANITOBA

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The Rock Ptarmigan was considered by Taverner and Sutton to be irregularly common, winter visitor at Churchill, Manitoba.¹⁰ More recently, Lumsden summarized the records of its occurrence in Manitoba and Ontario and found that it moves northward occasionally in winter or within a few kilometres of Hudson Bay and James Bay coasts.⁴ Jehl and Smith also noted that Rock Ptarmigans winter in varying numbers in the Churchill area, with major influx occurring in late fall.³ They observed the remains of Rock Ptarmigans killed by predators up to 1 km inland.

Additional records presented here indicate that Rock Ptarmigans occasionally move further inland in Manitoba than Lumsden's records show. During such years, it may be abundant but inconspicuous by association with the more common familiar Willow Ptarmigan.

On December 10, 1975, one of us (J.L.) collected three Rock and two Willow ptarmigans from the same general area, about 3 km west of Gillam and about 280 km from the Hudson Bay coast. One male Rock Ptarmigan (UMZM 450) weighed 513 g. The other male (UMZM 451) was damaged. The female Rock Ptarmigan (UMZM 452) weighed 484 g. One Willow Ptarmigan (UMZM 453), a male weighing 501 g, was preserved; the crop of the damaged second individual of unknown sex, was saved.

A third Rock Ptarmigan, with a black eye stripe, was seen by Larche on the same date, about 300 m from where the birds were collected. All of the preserved ptarmigans were adults, using the criteria of outer primary pigmentation to age them.^{1 12}

Much earlier, on December 15, 1928, J. T. Martin collected a Rock Ptarmigan at Gillam (Nat. Mus. Can. 50752).² Even further inland, Mowat and Lawrie reported the species near Brochet, Manitoba, on December 11 and 14, 1947.⁶ In the Lake Athabasca region of northwestern Saskatchewan, Nero presented evidence for occasional winter movements of Rock Ptarmigans there.⁷ Nero did not record them in northeastern Saskatchewan.⁸

Both Willow Ptarmigan crops contained willow (*Salix spp.*) buds and twigs. Two of the Rock Ptarmigan crops contained swamp birch (*Betula glandulifera*) buds and catkins. The third Rock Ptarmigan crop contained willow buds and twigs, swamp birch catkins, sedge (*Carex spp.*) and three unknown buds. Such differences in the food habits of Willow and Rock ptarmigan, taken from the same locality near Gillam, are comparable to those found in these species in winter in Alaska.^{5 11}

Although the two ptarmigan species can usually be distinguished in the field in winter by the presence of a black eye stripe in both sexes of

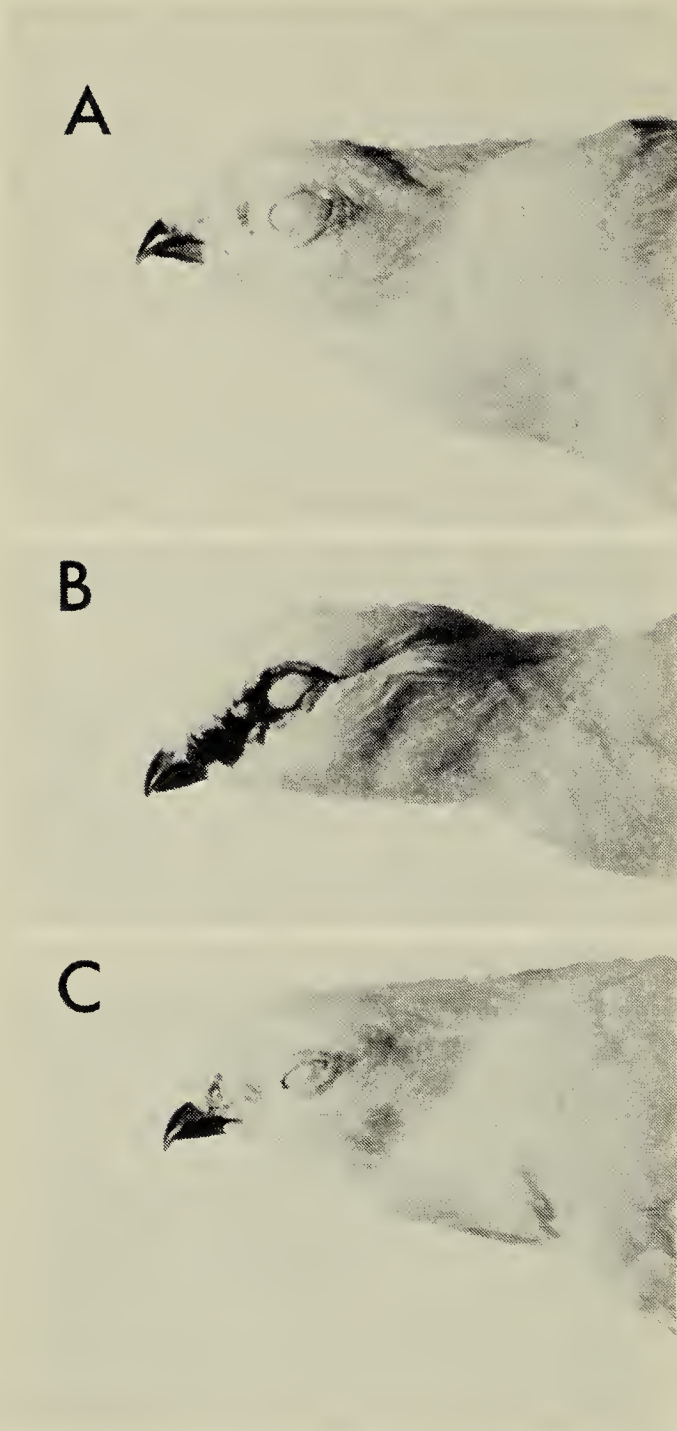


Fig. 1. Side views of male Willow Ptarmigan (A), male Rock Ptarmigan (B), and female Rock Ptarmigan (C) taken near Gillam, Manitoba. Note the absence of the black eye stripe in the female Rock Ptarmigan.

the Rock Ptarmigan, Snyder states that this stripe is lacking in about 40 percent of the females.⁸ This is the case with the female shown in Fig. 1C. It is therefore important for observers in northern Manitoba to scrutinize ptarmigans closely before positively identifying them as Willow Ptarmigan.

H. W. R. Copland kindly checked the collection of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature for Rock

Ptarmigan specimens. H. Oue provided the catalogue number of the specimen in the National Museums of Canada. We thank J. Shay for identifying the plant material contained in the crops. W. H. prepared the photograph.

¹BERGERUD, A. T., S. S. PETERS, and M. MCGRATH. 1963. Determining sex and age of Willow Ptarmigan in the field. *J. Wildl. Mgmt.* 27:700-701.

²HATCH, D. 1976. Chickadee notes. *Winnipeg Free Press, Winnipeg*, 7, 1976.

³JEHL, J. R., JR., and B. A. SMITH. 1963. Birds of the Churchill region, Manitoba. *Man. Mus. Man and Nature*, Publ. No. 1. 87 pp.

⁴LUMSDEN, H. G. 1964. The Rock Ptarmigan, *Lagopus mutus rupestris*, in Ontario and Manitoba. *Can. J. Nat.* 78:161-167.

⁵MOSS, R. 1974. Winter diets, gut lengths and interspecific competition of Alaskan ptarmigan. *Auk* 91:737-741.

⁶MOWAT, F. M., and A. H. LAWRIE. 1963. Bird observations from southern Manitoba and the interior of northern Manitoba. *Can. Field-Nat.* 69:93-100.

⁷NERO, R. W. 1963. Birds of the Athabasca region, Saskatchewan. *Nat. Hist. Soc., Spec. Publ. No. 1*. 143 pp.

⁸NERO, R. W. 1967. The birds of northern Saskatchewan. *Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc., Spec. Publ. No. 6*. 96 pp.

⁹SNYDER, L. L. 1957. Arctic birds of Canada. University of Toronto Press, Toronto. 310 pp.

¹⁰TAVERNER, P. A., and G. M. SUTHERLAND. 1934. The birds of Churchill, Manitoba. *Annals Carnegie Mus.* 23:1-83.

¹¹WEEDEN, R. B. 1969. Foods of Rock Ptarmigan and Willow Ptarmigan in Central Canada with comments on interspecific competition. *Auk* 86:271-281.

¹²WEEDEN, R. B., and A. WATSON. 1971. Determining the age of Rock Ptarmigan in Alaska and Scotland. *J. Wildl. Mgmt.* 31:825-826.