

FIRST SASKATCHEWAN WOOD THRUSH

by PAT O'NEILL*

On May 24, 1973, about 4:30 p.m., I glanced out my "bird-watching" window, which is over the kitchen sink, and was not surprised to see a thrush feeding under the apple tree in the back yard. There had been quite a number throughout the day, mostly Swainson's. Suddenly I realized that this bird was quite different from the others. It was a bit larger and his breast, so snowy white, showing none of the usual obvious yellowish colour, was covered with round spots which were large, dark-coloured and relatively disorganized. While only about 30 feet separated us, I used the binoculars on him and was flabbergasted to realize that this was surely a Wood Thrush. I consulted my bird books and every detail — dark brown back, white eye ring, other markings coincided with "my" bird's appearance. Fortunately I was able to contact Mary Houston who came immediately with son Donald and was followed closely by Dr. Stuart Houston and David. We also got the Shadicks, Stan and John, to come over quickly. All agreed the bird was without any doubt a Wood Thrush. The bird seemed very hungry and lingered for 2 or more hours feeding. In the meantime three other Saskatchewan bird-watchers, Dale Hjertaas, Wayne and Don Renaud, arrived to view the thrush and identified it as a Wood Thrush — a first authenticated record for Saskatchewan.

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Ed. Note: Godfrey in *The Birds of Canada* (1966) and Peterson in *A Field Guide to the Birds* (1947) show the nearest breeding in Canada to be in Ontario east of Lake Superior and in southeastern South Dakota and central Minnesota in the United States. There is also a record for Grand Forks, North Dakota, on Sept. 24, 1971, in *American Birds* 26:79, 1972.

SECOND SASKATCHEWAN WOOD THRUSH

On Oct. 5, 1973, Elmer L. Fox carefully studied a Wood Thrush in Regina.

LITTLE GULL VISITS REGINA by FRANK SWITZER*

On the afternoon of April 20, 1973 Bob Luterback and I were looking around the Wascana Waterfowl Park and the Legislative Building grounds to see if any unusual bird species had been brought in by a storm centre that moved across the northern states. The weather in Regina was a cold 36° with a 20 to 25 mph wind from the northeast which was slowly swinging to the northwest.

I was scanning the surface of Wascana Lake north of the Legislative Buildings to see if any Western Grebes were mixed in with the Lesser Scaup feeding there. Bob asked me what kind of tern was feeding from the lake surface. I looked around without binoculars and casually mentioned that it acted like a Bonaparte's Gull. However, Bob said he thought not and after seeing the bird through binoculars, I agreed with him. At this point it was rather embarrassing to be caught without a field guide. We watched the bird for half an hour and then left the area about 3:30 p.m. Upon returning home, we looked for the bird in *Birds of North America*⁴, *A Field Guide to the Birds*³ and *The Birds of Canada*.¹ We soon realized that we were not seeing a native North American bird. All indications pointed to the bird being a Little Gull, a European species.

Jim Jowsey, Marg Belcher, George Ledingham, Frank Brazier and I gathered at the south shore of Wascana Lake by 5:00 p.m. The Little Gull was

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Little Gull at Wascana.

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observed by all for about 20 minutes. Its feeding habits were similar to those of a tern or a Bonaparte's Gull. However, at times it acted very much like a petrel: hovering near the water just prior to or after having caught its prey and dabbling its feet in the water. At times it would land on the water and, holding its wings aloft, thrust its head, neck and part of the body under the surface to capture food.

The bird was in adult winter plumage and, when in the air, very little black showed on the head. However, when resting on the water, more black showed on the head, though not as much as on a Bonaparte's or a Franklin's gull.

About 5:45 p.m. the Little Gull rose above the tree tops and flew to the east. All those observing the bird agreed with Bob Luterback and myself that this was indeed a Little Gull. George Ledingham's identification is reassuring for he was present at Lake Athabasca when one was positively identified there by R. W. Nero on June 8, 1962.²

The Little Gull was observed on the next day by Fred Lahrman and Fred

Bard, feeding and flying south of the Regina power plant. On the afternoon of April 22, Jim Jowsey, Wayne Gemmell, Bob Kreba, Ferne Lawrence, Frank Brazier, Elmer and Doug Fox and I again observed the gull feeding on Wascana Lake. This time it was in company with several Franklin's and Bonaparte's gulls. There was one occasion when all three species were seen resting on the water in the same field of view with 8x55 binoculars.

When the gulls were feeding one could, at a glance, mistake the Little Gull for a Bonaparte's Gull, as their actions were similar; however, the Little Gull spent more time closer to the surface of the water and appeared more petrel-like in this behaviour. The Bonaparte's Gulls would snatch their prey and rise up a few feet above the water in one motion as do terns. Jim Jowsey and Wayne Gemmell put a boat on the lake and managed to approach the Little Gull and its companion Bonaparte's Gull quite closely on two occasions. When both birds were in flight, it appeared as though the Little Gull had difficulty matching the speed of the larger gull. Twice

when they flew from one end of the lake to the other the Little Gull fell 100 to 200 yards behind the Bonaparte's Gull. This may be only when the birds are flying to escape danger. Probably in migration flight and as we saw in feeding flight, the Little Gull had no difficulty in keeping up with the flock of Bonaparte's that it must have arrived with.

Special thanks go to Bob Luterback, the person who first spotted the bird and my co-identifier. Thanks are also due Jim Jowsey, Margaret Belcher, Frank Brazier and, especially George Ledingham for confirming the identification.

¹GODFREY, W. E. 1966. *The birds of Canada*. Nat. Mus. Canada Bull. 203. 428 pp.

²NERO, R. W. 1963. *Birds of the Lake Athabasca region, Saskatchewan*. Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. Spec. Pub. 5. 143 pp.

³PETERSON, R. T. 1947. *A field guide to the birds*. Houghton-Mifflin, Boston. 290 pp.

⁴ROBBINS, C. S., B. BRUUN and H. S. ZIM. 1966. *Birds of North America. A guide to field identification*. Golden Press, New York. 340 pp.

Editor's Note: A few Little Gulls were found nesting in Ontario in 1962!

HOUSE FINCHES SIGHTED IN REGINA

by FRED G. BARD*

At approximately 1:45 p.m. on April 26, 1973, my wife, Phyllis, called me outside to see three birds which she was sure she hadn't seen in Regina before. To my surprise, they were House Finches — all three rosy-coloured males. They were feeding in our neighbour's adjoining backyard on the ground and later on the buds of seedling plum trees. They afforded us an excellent view as they fed for about 10 minutes. In recent years during several rather lengthy visits to New Mexico and California, we had

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become familiar with House Finches which are common residents there. They could only be confused with the Purple Finch which was a frequent visitor to our neighbourhood this spring but the song and call notes are quite distinctive from those of the Purple Finch. As well, the reddish colouring on the House Finch is a different shade, being more scarlet than the wine red or purplish red of the Purple Finch which also has a light cheek streak. However, to make certain of the identification we were able to compare field marks with the aid of Robbins' field guide, "Birds of North America" with the birds before us. The brown streaking of the breast, side and flanks confirmed the identification. Suddenly, they flew away and, although I placed mixed seeds in the area in hopes of attracting them back, they were not seen again.

L. G. Saunders reported seeing a male House Finch at Saskatoon, October 15, 1959 (*Blue Jay*, December 1959:158), but because not all field marks were noted at the time the record has not generally been accepted. Note that this species has not appeared on the official list of Saskatchewan birds.

W. Earl Godfrey in "Birds of Canada", 1966, describes their range as follows: "Southwestern and central southern British Columbia, Idaho, Wyoming, and western Nebraska south to southern Mexico." Included in the range description for Canada is the notation quote, "casual in southwestern Alberta (Jasper Park May 29, 1944)."

A FURTHER SIGHTING OF WANDERING TATTLERS IN ALBERTA

by E. OTTO HOHN*

The second edition of *Birds of Alberta*¹ states that Wandering Tattlers have been recorded in the province on three occasions, each report involving a single bird. Professor W. Ray Sal