

# WINTER BIRD OBSERVATIONS AT URANIUM CITY, SASKATCHEWAN, 1969-1976

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W. Nero gave a detailed account, including a review of previous work, of the avifauna of the Lake Athabasca region.<sup>1</sup> However, Nero's visits were limited to the summer; for information on winter occurrences he had to rely on other observers.

Uranium City, including nearby Bushell and Eldorado, has a very restricted winter bird life; my observations made in the course of six trips between late November and late March over a seven-year period add to Nero's species and suggest that the lists of a few others should be included. My visits were as follows: Nov. 29-31, 1969; Jan. 27-30, 1970; Nov. 27-29, 1971; Dec. 18-21, 1972; Jan. 28-30, 1975 and Mar. 25-29, 1976. They were made to secure live Willow Ptarmigan on a special permit for a continuing research project.

This short list of birds is essentially limited to winter status with comparisons on Nero's summary of this in the area where my observations suggest a classification.

**HAWK:** One seen successfully flushing a Willow Ptarmigan on Nov. 27, 1971, a glimpse of a hawk, probably this species, perhaps the same bird, was made on Nov. 29, 1971. Nero calls it a common permanent resident.

**WILLOW PTARMIGAN:** One or a few small flocks of 4-8 birds seen on all visits in 1969 when only recent tracks were seen. I was driven on most visits over all roads in the area and, though Willow Ptarmigan were commonly seen, other birds were never numerous.

**ROCK PTARMIGAN:** Nero gives five specimens of Rock Ptarmigan shot in the area (specimens were obtained) in the years 1957-1961. In March, 1976, Mr. "Ray" MacDonald, a Uranium City Inhabitant, showed me a frozen male Rock Ptarmigan

among nine Willow Ptarmigan which he had shot locally during the preceding November. The records in toto suggest that this species is a regular winter visitant in very small numbers.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER:** The only woodpecker observed; single birds were seen in two different areas in late March, 1976.

**COMMON RAVEN:** The only winter bird which is truly common (for so large a bird) both in the settlements and at least for some miles from them. Among other activities they scavenge food from dogs in Uranium City. On my only visit to the town Garbage dump (Dec. 20, 1972) there were about 50 ravens there.

**GRAY JAY:** A few were seen in the course of all visits.

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE:** This is the only chickadee I saw in the area, one on Nov. 27, 1971 and several on Mar. 27, 1976. Nero gives its status as "a fairly common summer resident." No doubt the Boreal Chickadee is a winter bird of the area too but it appears to be even scarcer than the Black-capped.

**BOHEMIAN WAXWING:** One seen Jan. 28, 1970; this suggests that it may be a permanent rather than merely a summer resident.

**NORTHERN SHRIKE:** Not listed by Nero and thus there are presumably no previous records for northern Saskatchewan. One seen at Eldorado, Nov. 27, 1971, flushed some Redpolls but did not pursue them.

**HOUSE SPARROW:** A few, up to 10 on one occasion, were seen on all visits but only in Uranium City, never at Eldorado or Bushell. It may have decreased since the early 1960's; Nero considered it a fairly common permanent resident. However, even then it only had that status at Uranium City.

**PINE GROSBEAK:** Five were seen by my

companion, Mr. D. Dekker, but only heard calling by myself on Nov. 29, 1971, at Eldorado.

**HOARY REDPOLL:** At least three flocks, each of up to 20, were seen during a walk from Eldorado to Uranium City, Nov. 26, 1971. Nero rates this species a rare transient; it appears rather to be a frequent, probably even a regular, winter visitor. Redpolls, not seen at sufficiently close range to distinguish between this and the Common species, were also seen on Dec. 18, 1972, and a small flock and single birds in late March, 1976.

**RED CROSSBILL:** On March 27, 1976, I

caught glimpses of and heard the mistakable call of a few of these birds at the edge of Uranium City. Nero reports a Mar. 7 record. They are probably permanent rather than only summer residents.

**SNOW BUNTING:** A small flock was seen along the Uranium/Eldorado road, Nov. 29, 1971.

<sup>1</sup>NERO, R. W. 1963. The birds of the Athabasca region, Saskatchewan. Spec. Pub. No. 5, Sask. Natl. Soc., Regina.



Black-capped Chickadee

Lorne