

Records of the HARLEQUIN DUCK in Manitoba and Adjacent Regions

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Between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m., C.D.T., on October 5, 1963, two veteran Manitoba birdwatchers, William ("Bill") Adams and Perry Silverman (both now deceased), spotted a small diving duck in the fast flowing waters of the Assiniboine River immediately west of the footbridge crossing the river in Assiniboine Park, Winnipeg. After closely scrutinizing the bird, they concluded it was a female Harlequin Duck, the first Winnipeg record. The observation was verified a few minutes later by Herbert W. R. Copland, Andrew Heidrick, Harold V. Hosford, Peggy Lawson, the writer, and several others. As noted by Harold Hosford: "At rest, the bird appeared as a dull brown bird with three white spots on the head, one in front of the eyes, one in the auricular region and another larger one below the eyes. In flight there was a complete lack of any pattern on the body or wings."¹² These are characteristic features of the female Harlequin, as reported by most field guides.²⁶ In addition, the duck was in "fast water" and occasionally scrambled up on the rocks, habitat and behaviour typical of the species.^{20 16 7} The bird was seen again the following day by Peggy Lawson, but could not be located on October 7 by the writer and Ken Johannesson.

As the Harlequin Duck is a "rare transient" for Manitoba, a review of Manitoba records seemed worth while.¹⁰ The earliest Manitoba record was a bird cited by E. A. Preble and several other authors as having been "examined" prior to 1863 by Blakiston at York Factory.²⁸ Unfortunately, this record must

be regarded as hypothetical, as the precise locality where the bird was obtained is not clear. Preble also notes two early Hudson Bay and James Bay records, to which T. H. Manning offered no additions.¹⁸ The precise locality of neither record is known. However, there are recent sight records of single males at Churchill from July 11 to 14, 1970 and on June 2, 1971.^{27 9} In southern and central Manitoba, the first probable record was of three "brilliantly coloured little ducks" shot by Fred Ward at Shoal Lake in the spring of 1898 and identified several years later as Harlequins. Charles Holden reportedly had a male shot "many years ago" on Lake Manitoba about 1910.^{17 19} Another was observed by Kenneth Holden at Portage Creek in 1928.¹⁹ Twenty-two years later, on September 15, 1950, Lazar Partridge shot two immatures at Pike Lake, Big Eddy, north of The Pas, and took them to Sam Waller for identification.²³ One of these remains at Waller's Little Northern Museum at The Pas and the other is a study skin at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature (R. W. Nero, pers. comm.).³⁴ The next record was of a male near Ponemah Lake Winnipeg on June 4, 1961, with detailed observations made by Perry Silverman.¹⁹ A sight observation without details by Mrs. E. R. Pogue of one bird is available for Bagot in early June, 1969.²¹

Thus there are 10 records of this duck for Manitoba (Fig. 1). Of these, four involve specimens, although one of them may have been taken outside the province, and the identification of Ward's birds was not made while the specimens were available. Of the sight records, four (for Winnipeg, the two Churchill records, and Silverman's

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previous record) are all "acceptable," as the details are well documented, or the observation was confirmed by several people in each case. No details are known for the other two sight records. Thus, the Harlequin Duck is a rare species in Manitoba.

In Canada, the Harlequin Duck breeds in two widely separated areas: a western population in Yukon, British Columbia and the Rocky Mountains of southern Alberta, with additional summer records in Mackenzie; and an eastern population on southeastern Baffin Island, Labrador, parts of Quebec, and possibly Newfoundland.¹⁰ Migration is from these areas to the east. Although the Harlequin breeds in Rocky Mountain portions of Alberta.

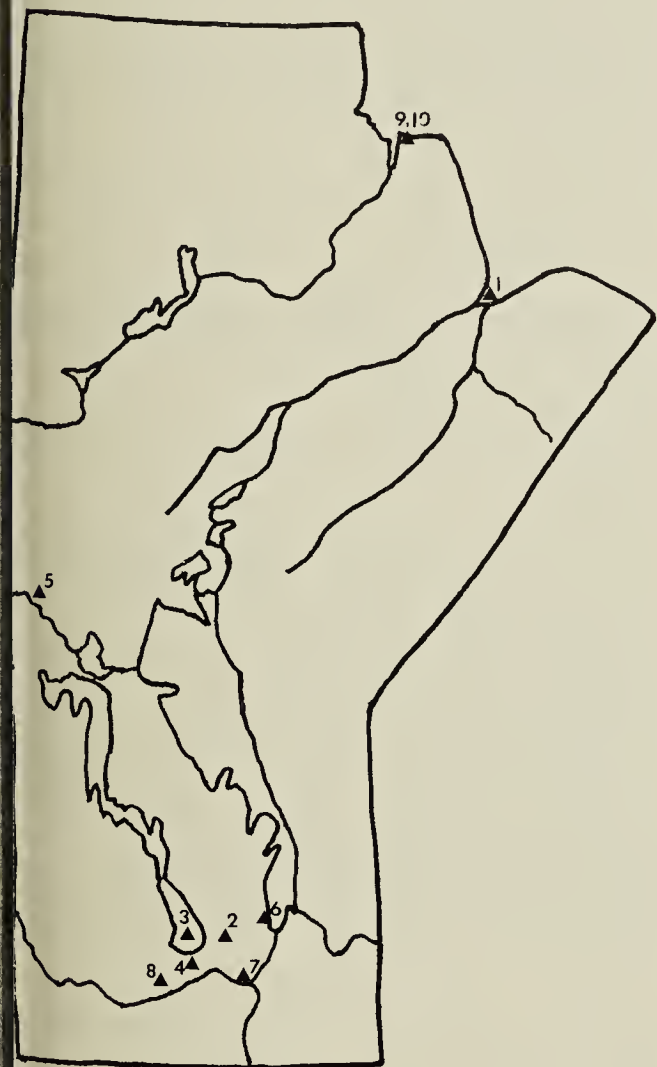


Figure 1. Locations of Manitoba records of the Harlequin Duck (numbered chronologically). 1. York Factory; 2. Shoal Lake (sometimes divided into three lakes); 3. Lake Manitoba; 4. Portage Creek (Delta area); 5. Big Eddy (Pike Lake); 6. Ponemah; 7. Winnipeg; 8. Bagot; 9. and 10. Churchill.

There are few prairie records.⁶⁻¹⁰ It is very rare in Alberta away from the mountains, with records at Cooking Lake, Beaverhill Lake, and Lake Athabasca.¹⁰⁻³⁰ In Saskatchewan, "several pairs" were reported seen at Saskatchewan Landing, north of Swift Current on May 31, 1934.¹⁵ A male was shot by "one of Dick Hamilton's boys" at that time, and mounted by George Warren.¹⁵ Another reported for 1966 by M. M. Tremaine has not been included in subsequent reports, because of lack of details (M. Belcher, pers. comm.).³³ However, Dr. Tremaine, who is familiar with the species, took convincing details which she kindly sent me (pers. comm., 1968). The bird was a female seen on the Puskwakau River (54° 34' N, 103° 34' W) on July 13 and 14, 1966. Details noted included the three white spots (of which the top spot was fairly indistinct), the lack of white in the wing, and the dark colouration (similar to that of a female Surf Scoter). In 1968 three presumed males in eclipse were seen in Wascana Marsh, Regina on September 6, and additional sightings were made by several competent observers north of Regina on October 10, 22 and 23.⁵ Another male was observed and photographed by several observers in the Regina area from June 5 to 13, 1971.³⁻¹³

There are also very few North Dakota records. The first record for the state was a specimen taken at Mandan about September 23, 1912,²⁴ and there have been sight records since, the most recent being a female seen at Valley City on October 5, 1971.¹⁴

To the east, the Harlequin may be increasing as a migrant or wintering bird. It has been considered very rare in Ontario in the past and even more recently.³¹⁻²²⁻⁸⁻¹⁰ However, there have been several recent records, prompting C. E. Goodwin to comment, "this is yet another species which is becoming increasingly regular on the lower Great Lakes."¹¹ Although most Ontario records are from eastern areas, there are records from Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay) as early as the late 1880's, and from the Atikokan area on May 16, 1963.¹⁻²⁵ In Minnesota, T. S. Roberts had relegated it to the hypothetical list,

but added it to the state list as he went to press on the basis of an immature male shot on April 10, 1932.²⁹ ⁴ By 1966 there were 14 records, and several have appeared in *Audubon Field Notes*, *American Birds*, and *The Loon* since.²

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⁵BRUNTON, D. F. 1968. *The Harlequin Duck in Saskatchewan*. Blue Jay 26: 178-179.

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