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# FIRST RECORDS OF THE ORCHARD ORIOLE IN SASKATCHEWAN

by E. MANLEY CALLIN\*

On three dates from June 19 to June 28, 1974, I stopped briefly at the P.F.R.A. dam over the river at the northern edge of the town of Fort Qu'Appelle and in an adjacent, heavily wooded area I heard a lively warble similar to the Purple Finch. The bird could not be seen from the perimeter of the woods and it was singing from a residential area. On June 29 I asked the residents, Constable John Lloyd and his wife, for permission to enter

the area for the purpose of observing and recording. They were most obliging and during the next hour taped about 35 songs but the bird was extremely shy and not once could I get a glimpse of it.

On June 30 Jack Lowe of Fort Qu'Appelle and on July 1 Frank Brazier of Regina assisted in the search for identity of the elusive bird which sang regularly but remained hidden in the upper portion of a very high spruce tree. During these two days more songs and calls were recorded.

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ed but, more importantly, a few screened views were obtained and it was determined that our bird was an Orchard Oriole, a new species for the province. However, it was not in the rich, mature plumage but in the much more modest attire of a first year male (almost all yellowish colour plus a black throat).

The Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History at Regina was notified and on July 3 two employees, Robert Long and Dwayne Harty, visited the area to confirm the find. More songs were recorded, the bird was becoming less shy and great patience enabled Long to take a few satisfactory pictures. On this occasion we had a few, very brief, views of a bird which we considered to be a female Orchard Oriole.

From July 4 to 12, I made daily visits, usually just stopping for a few minutes as I drove by, and the male was still singing regularly. On July 13, I spent about an hour in the area, heard young birds clamoring for food and watched both parents, mostly the male, carrying food to a particular branch. The nest could not be seen, as it was well hidden, and we did not attempt to climb the tree. However, the nest was about 25 feet above ground in blue spruce about 35 feet in height and it was located half-way out on a branch about 6 feet long. Also, the nesting tree was so close to the male's favourite singing tree that the branches overlapped considerably.

Feeding of the young was again observed on July 14, 15 and 16 but the young left the nest after this time. On July 17 there was no activity in the nesting area but the usual sharp, alarm notes of the male were heard in a grove of maples about 25 yards to the east. Here I found the male flying around excitedly and after a brief search discovered one young moving from branch to branch in a fairly competent manner. The female was not seen and

only one young could be found. No birds were heard or seen on July 18 but, upon returning on July 22, I again found the male and one young. Apparently the family left the area on July 22 as no birds were heard or seen on later visits.

**Summary and Queries:** The male sang regularly from June 19 until the young left the nest on July 17. Most of the feeding was done by the female. As time went on, both birds were progressively less shy. Did they become accustomed to our presence or did the rearing of a family create a greater urgency than the fear of humans? Does the Orchard Oriole have a reputation as a shy bird? Orchard Orioles are so rare in Saskatchewan that one is inclined to speculate that this pair must have arrived together. This record involves a first year male and so also does Binnie's record of 1972 (see below). Are young males more aggressive and, therefore, more likely to advance into new territory? Do the Manitoba records of 1974 provide a possible answer? It may be worthy of comment that Saskatchewan is the only province where all three species or well-marked sub-species of Orioles to be found in Canada have now been recorded.

Although the above is the first confirmed record and nesting for the province, I have been advised of a very reliable and interesting record of the Orchard Oriole at Regina in 1972. By telephone and correspondence, Al Binnie informs me that in June of 1972 a first year male spent almost 2 weeks in the mixed woods at the Correctional Institute at Regina. Al and his wife, Betty, had listened to an unfamiliar song for nearly a week, finally observed and identified the singer on June 19 and it was last seen on June 25.

Al stated that almost always the bird remained hidden and was very difficult to observe. He alerted some Regina birders and several had come to see the bird but none of them were able to stay long enough to get a view of it. This is understandable when I recall the extreme difficulty that Jack Lowe and I had for 4-1/2 hours at Fort Qu'Appelle on June 30, 1974.

I would like to thank all those persons mentioned in this article as they have made a valued contribution and, in some instances, expended hours of time and patience. I would also like to thank Mrs. Lily Cochrane of Fort Qu'Appelle who contributed her professional skill in the typing of this report.

