

GLAUCOUS GULLS AT GARDINER DAM, SASKATCHEWAN

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The building of power generating stations in Saskatchewan has made areas of open water available to birds in winter. Christmas Bird Counts have been conducted at the hydroelectric development at Gardiner Dam near Cutbank in 3 of the last 4 years. In 1975 the count was made by Don Renaud and ourselves on December 22.

At 1:50 p.m. we were about 3/4 mile north of the generator when a large gull flew towards us. It passed within 100 yards and continued flying downstream. Its large size and very pale plumage immediately led W. Renaud to conclude that the bird was a Glaucous Gull. He was thoroughly familiar with this species having seen it often during July and August, 1975, in the central Arctic islands.

The bird was obviously an immature in second winter plumage. We could clearly see the light-coloured legs, the very pale mantle which included the primaries and secondaries, and the flesh-coloured bill with a black tip. During the next 20 minutes the gull flew leisurely downstream for approximately 1 mile and returned. On its second pass, it again came within 100 yards and continued up the river. A few minutes later it turned and flew downstream along the center of the river. During this time we were able to compare the field marks with those of the immature Glaucous Gull as illustrated in Robbins *et al.*⁵

We next located the gull about 3 miles downstream from the outlet. It stood on the shore for about 10 minutes, then flew upstream and passed within 30 feet of Godwin who

took three photographs. Again the light was excellent and all field marks noted previously, plus the yellow iris, were viewed through 7 x 50 and 10 x 50 binoculars. What was assumed to be the same gull was last seen at approximately 3:30 p.m. about 1-1/2 miles downstream from the outlet.

Within 5 minutes of leaving the generator outlet, we found two gulls standing on the ice beside a whirlpool created by the generator intake above the dam. Because of the unsafe ice, we were unable to approach closer than 500 yards; but with the aid of binoculars we were able to see the very pale plumage of these birds. For 5 minutes we watched the gulls as they walked along the ice and swam for short distances. Twice one of the gulls raised its wings and revealed the white primaries and mantle. As with the first bird observed, the two gulls appeared to be Glaucous Gulls in second-year plumage.

The dam was visited on several occasions during January and February by Wayne Harris, Bob Godwin, Kim Godwin, Dale Hjertaas, Sheila Lamont, and Kathy Meeres but the gulls were not seen again.

This was the fifth occurrence of Glaucous Gulls in Saskatchewan. Single immatures were seen at Lorado on the north shore of Lake Athabasca on 25 May and 13 June 1960; the latter was collected for the first provincial specimen.³ Another, presumably an immature, was seen near the settlement of Wollaston Lake in northeastern Saskatchewan on 27 May 1964.⁴ Two first-year birds were seen at Prince Albert on 23 October 1969;



Glaucous Gull at Gardiner Dam.

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one was collected the following day and the other remained until 29 October.²

The occurrences of Glaucous Gulls at Gardiner Dam represents the first winter record for Saskatchewan. The regular winter range of this arctic breeding species includes Hudson's Bay and the Great Lakes.¹ The occurrence of Glaucous Gulls in Saskatchewan in mid-winter may, therefore, not be that unusual. The fact that no gulls were seen in the area during later visits does not necessarily indicate that the gulls had left the river. On December 22 the South Saskatchewan River was continuously open for at least 10 miles below Gardiner Dam and intermittently for at least another 100 miles. Mild temperatures continued for most of the winter.

The continued construction of other power generating structures (e.g. Poplar River) will provide additional

opportunities to see species such as the Glaucous Gull which may occur only rarely in the province at any time of the year.

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¹GODFREY, E. W. 1966. *The birds of Canada*. Nat. Mus. Canada Bulletin No. 203. Queen's Printer, Ottawa. 428 pp.

²HOUSTON, M. I. 1974. *Interesting Prince Albert bird records*. Blue Jay 32(2): 110-112.

³NERO, R. W. 1963. *Birds of the Lake Athabasca region, Saskatchewan*. Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. Spec. Pub. 5. 143 pp.

⁴NERO, R. W. 1967. *Birds of Northeastern Saskatchewan*. Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. Spec. Pub. 6. 96 pp.

⁵ROBBINS, C. S., BERTEL BRUUN and H. S. ZIMM. 1966. *Birds of North America*. Western Publishing Co., Racine, Wisconsin. 340 pp.

