

AN HOUR AT JONES' PEAK

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The wedding of Gary Seib and Barbara Shourounis took me to Eastend on a pleasant weekend in June, 1977. Because I had an English visitor as a companion, I was also looking forward to doing a little birding in that interesting country. To our delight, the bride and groom, in the midst of the wedding reception but with complete *sang froid*, advised about locations where we might see species like the Rock Wren. The next morning, June 19, we followed their directions and climbed north out of the valley to take the road to Jones' Peak, a splendid vantage point for the Frenchman River Valley. This high outcraze, now the site of a Sask Tel communications tower, is named after the well known pioneer naturalist and museum curator Corky Jones.

In the hour that we spent there, in mid-morning, we had a generous sample of the bird life of the Frenchman River Valley's eroded slopes. We watched a pair of Mountain Bluebirds, for example, making many trips with food to what was apparently a nest site behind the sandstone outcroppings of the steep outbank. A spot they favoured in their hunt for insects was a slight pebbly depression on the hill top, where the male bluebird, a Rock Wren and Chipping Sparrow were all observed taking food.

From time to time, we spotted a Rock Wren singing from its perch or moving about busily in search of food, while below in the coulees we could hear the distant voice of a Say's Phoebe. A Prairie Falcon also passed over the coulees below us several times with its characteristic call, suggesting that it might be nesting on one of the cliff faces.

At the reservoir near Eastend we had watched swallows closely, without seeing Rough-wings, but from the hilltop at Jones' Peak we had an excellent view of a pair flying just



Mountain Bluebird

John Lane

below us. More exciting was a pair of Violet-green Swallows that we were able to watch closely as they flew in and out behind a sandstone outcropping, obviously feeding young. Although this species was not definitely established as breeding in Saskatchewan until a nest was found at the SNHS Prairie Dog Sanctuary near Val Marie during the SNHS summer meeting in June, 1969, sightings had been reported previously along the Frenchman River where the terrain obviously provides a likely habitat for them.

Turning our faces away from the Valley occasionally to look north over farms in the hills, we saw hawks (par-

ticularly the Ferruginous) and a Golden Eagle. For the birder from England, this short hour of observation from Jones' Peak revealed the characteristic bird life of that dramatic eroded valley terrain.

SAW WHET OWL ATTACKS ROBIN

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On April 20, 1977 I was conducting a lonely vigil at a Saw whet Owl nest on the Wagner property, a spruce-tamarack bog on 118 Avenue on the outskirts of Edmonton, Alberta. A male Ruffed grouse was drumming close by, a coyote walked in the forest within 20 feet of me, and two robins

were singing in the area.

At 2023, while still fairly light, the Saw whet male arrived, calling softly, and sat in a tree 15 feet behind me, directly facing the nest (about 30 feet away). The male transferred prey from foot to beak, flew to the nest, calling softly, and deposited food in the nest hole.

The bird returned to his original perch and called territorially for a few seconds. One of the robins landed in a tree a few feet from the nest, then flew to a tree, 60 feet east of the nest.

Suddenly, the male owl took off from his perch, flew at the singing robin and struck it with his talons. The robin, screeching loudly, flew over me and away from the area. The owl disappeared into the bushes. No robin sang for the rest of the evening. It was a most dramatic incident.



Saw whet Owl

F. W. Lahrmann