

NOTES ON SOME UNCOMMON RAILS, WRENS AND WARBLERS OF ALBERTA

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The Yellow Rail, Short-billed Marsh Wren, Blackburnian Warbler, and Chestnut-sided Warbler have been sporadically sighted in localized areas throughout Alberta. This paper is an attempt to consolidate known information on those observations in the province. Notes on the time of observation, locality, habitat, and observer(s) have been included. Site numbers correspond to each species' map. These have generally been arranged in chronological sequence.

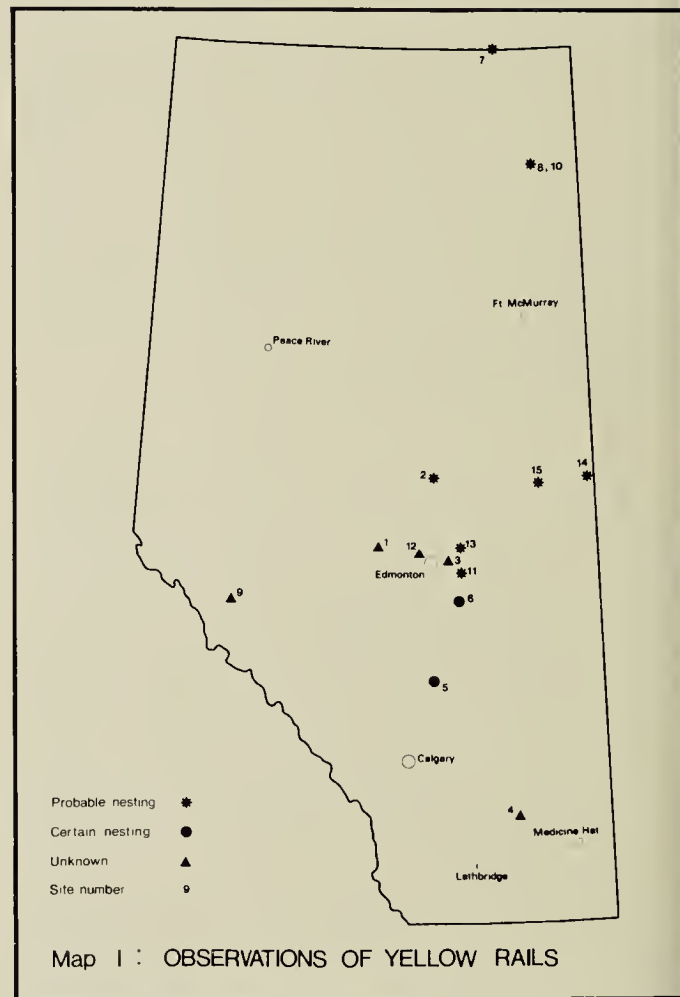
I wish to extend thanks and appreciation to the many observers who have supplied these records. Thanks are also due to the Alberta Provincial Museum, Edmonton, and the University of Alberta Zoology Museum for permitting access to their observation records.

YELLOW RAIL (Map 1). Breeds in the eastern half of Alberta, rarely seen.¹⁴

Site 1. Near Heatherdown, D. Wilby collected a specimen August 21, 1914. It is deposited in the Provincial Museum. No further information concerning it is available.

Sites 2, 3, 4. T. E. Randall flushed a Yellow Rail from a grassy muskeg in the Athabasca area on two occasions in the first half of June during the early 1930's.⁹ He suspected it was nesting. He also reported Yellow Rails from Elk Island National Park and from the Brooks area.^{20 10}

Sites 5, 6. Traverter and Farley reported that Yellow Rails nested in large marshes southeast of Red Deer



and at Dried Meat Lake near Camrose.^{21 5}

Site 7. Soper states that during late July of 1932 "while canoeing along the Little Buffalo River, notes of a rail, thought to be this species, were heard in two separate marshes between Sass and Nyarling Rivers".¹⁹ Preble and Seton also reported Yellow Rails in extreme northeastern Alberta.^{8 17}

Sites 8, 9. A specimen was collected on the delta of the Athabasca River in 1945.^{15 16} Two specimens taken near Jasper in the early part of the century are the only known records from the mountains. Salt and Salt report that the Yellow Rail "breeds in the eastern

half of Alberta from the Lake Athabasca region south at least to Ribstone Creek and west to Cochrane where it nested until the 1950's".¹⁴

Site 10. Hohn reports Yellow Rails from the Peace-Athabasca Delta and Wood Buffalo National Park.⁷ He collected a specimen from the Delta area and states they are rare summer residents, probably breeding.

Site 11. Beaverhill Lake was the location of many observations during June and July, 1973. On June 26 and 27, at least one bird was heard each day by A. Smith and R. Gehlert. Habitat: sedges and scattered shrubs on southeast shore (pers. comm.). Between July 14-21, up to five birds were heard by L. Goulden in tall reeds along the northeast shore (Prov. Mus. records). On July 28, D. Dekker heard four Yellow Rails on the south shore of the lake (Prov. Mus. records). It seems highly probable that the rails were breeding although no nests were located.

Site 12. In a meadow on the edge of a spruce bog five miles northeast of Spruce Grove, J. Wolford heard "a few" Yellow Rails on May 27, 1974 (Prov. Mus. records).

Site 13. Near Lamont between July 15-18 four were heard and one was flushed. Habitat: sedge meadow with scattered willows. The birds probably nested in the area. (A. Smith, pers. comm.).

Site 14. Cold Lake was the site of several observations during the summer of 1976. Many birds were heard "tapping" late on June 5 and 9 in sedge/grass marshes to the west of Cold Lake by C. Wallis, W. Smith, W. Nordstrom and A. Gregg. On July 5, several rails were heard on the south end of Cold Lake in sedge/grass marshes and fens by Nordstrom. These birds probably nested in the area. On June 6, 1977, several Yellow Rails were

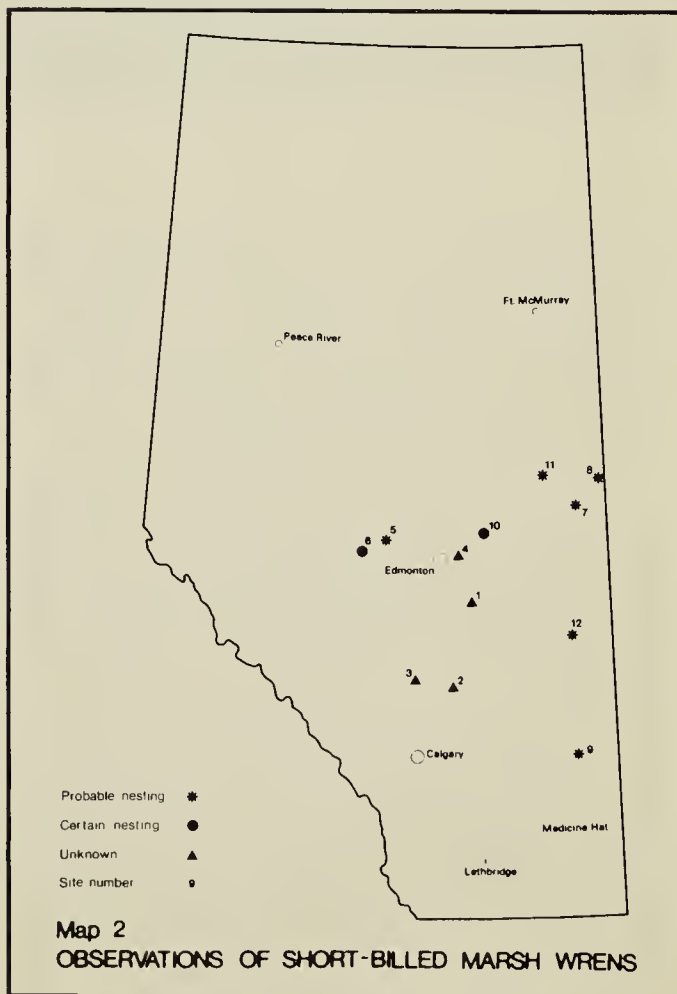
again heard in the same area.

Site 15. The Lakeland area west of Cold Lake provided additional observations for the summer of 1977. Two rails were heard in a *Betula pumila*/sedge fen on May 29, one mile south of Elinor Lake. On June 7, about 10 miles south of Wolf Lake, several birds were heard by Nordstrom in a grass/sedge marsh with scattered willow.

SHORT-BILLED MARSH WREN (Map 2). "A rare vagrant".¹⁴

Site 1. Mr. A. Twomey collected a specimen on September 19, 1927, six miles south of Camrose in the Battle River Valley.⁴ The bird was in the company of migrating warblers. This was the first known record of the species in Alberta.

Sites 2, 3, 4, 5. Salt and Wilk report sight records from Huxley, Innisfail, Elk Island National Park, and Glenevis.¹⁵ It is suspected that they nested near Glenevis.





Typical Short-billed marsh wren habitat south of Wolf Lake

W. Nordstrom

Site 6. J. and E. Wade observed a pair nesting in a marsh west of Gainsford (pers. comm.). The nest contained six young in June, 1970. Photographs and a 16mm movie were taken of them with their young.

Site 7. On July 3, 1972, W. C. Weber observed a Short-billed Marsh Wren singing near Bonnyville in a dry sedge meadow with scattered clumps of willows.²⁴

Site 8. C. Wallis and W. Smith heard three singing males in a sedge marsh to the northwest of Cold Lake town (English Bay area) during the evening of June 5, 1976 (Alta. Ornith, Rec. Comm.). On June 9, 1976, W. Smith, A.

Gregg and W. Nordstrom heard one singing male in the same location. During the evening and night of June 11, 1976, a singing male was heard in a sedge/grass/willow marsh-fen habitat on the south side of Cold Lake by W. Smith and A. Gregg (pers. comm.). During the night of July 8, in a marsh at the south end of Long Bay (Cold Lake) two singing males were heard. These birds were probably breeding.

Site 9. A singing male was heard on June 29, 1976, about 20 miles south of Cereal. Habitat: sedge meadow. On July 4, a bird was heard in the same location (A. Smith and D. Whitfield, pers. comm.).

Site 10. During July, 1976, A. Smith



Short-billed marsh wren tending to her young near Gainsford, Alberta — E. L. Wade

observed several Short-billed Marsh Wrens in the Lamont area: 10 miles southeast — three singing males were observed July 15; 5 miles east — four wrens observed July 16; two singing males seen July 18; and an adult feeding two young were photographed on July 28.

Site 11. Several were heard by Nordstrom in the Lakeland area during the summer of 1977. It seems highly probable that these wrens breed there in suitable habitat. a) May 31, June 7: about 10 miles south of Wolf Lake in a grass/sedge marsh with scattered willow, one bird was heard on May 31, and two on June 7. b) June 6: Many wrens were heard in the large

grass/sedge fen at the south end of Cold Lake. c) July 4: About nine miles southwest of Wolf Lake several wrens were heard in a glacial meltwater channel characterized by a semi-open stand of willows and alders with an understory of grasses and sedges. d) July 7: Several wrens were heard in a grass/sedge meadow with willows about three and one half miles west-northwest of Shaw Lake. e) July 13: One bird was heard in a grass/sedge marsh about four miles southwest of Elinor Lake.

Site 12. C. Wallis saw two wrens about two miles southeast of Dixon Lake north of Czar. Habitat: sedge/willow meadow.

BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER (Map 3).
 "Breeds locally in central Alberta".¹⁴

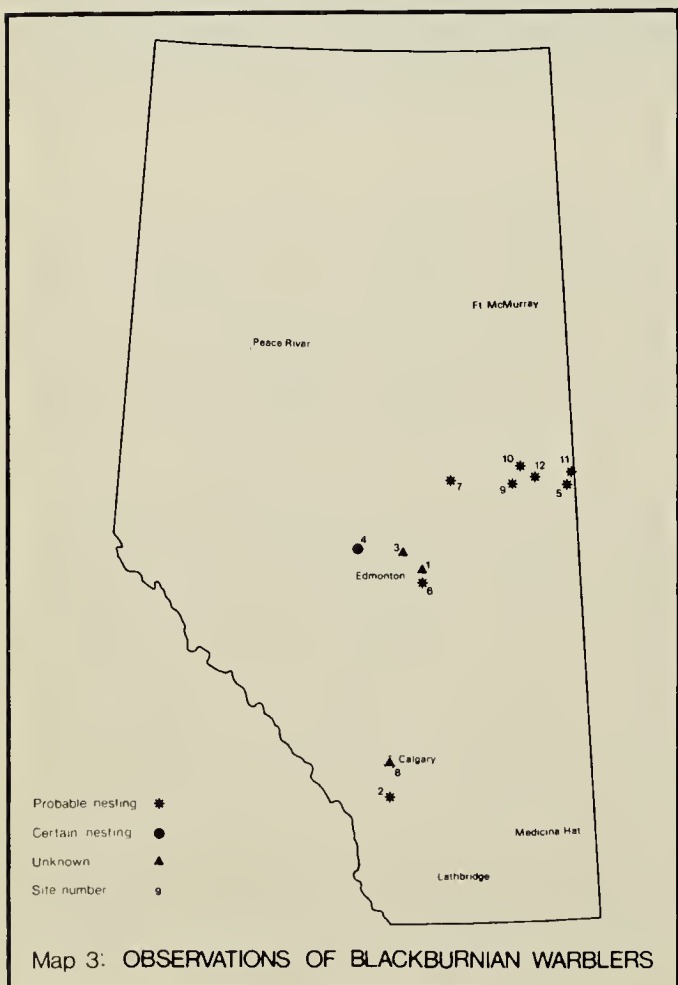
Site 1. An adult Blackburnian Warbler was collected near Edmonton in 1917; it is in the University of Alberta Zoology Museum. No other data is available.

Site 2. Taverner collected a specimen from the High River area on June 17, 1931. It is in the National Museum of Canada.²²

Site 3, 4. Near St. Albert, W. R. Salt observed a male Blackburnian, possibly a migrant, on May 13, 1939. Blackburnians were also observed by G. Pegg throughout the summer near Glenevis until 1956. Habitat: mature spruce.¹³

Site 5. D. Boag collected an adult male Blackburnian near Grand Center on June 9, 1959 (University of Alberta Zoology Museum). He heard several other males in the same mature spruce stand.

Site 6. E. Jones observed a singing male west of Ellerslie on June 22, 1964



in mature spruce woods. It probably was on territory.¹¹

Site 7. In the Skeleton Lake area Blackburnians have been observed on territory in mature coniferous forests.²³

Site 8. This warbler is a rare accidental in Calgary.¹

Site 9. On the south side of Pinehurst Lake on June 20, 1974, the Greenlees observed an adult male and female in a small stand of large white spruce (Prov. Mus. records).

Site 10. J. Keizer and R. Burns saw several Blackburnian Warblers in mixed woods around Touchwood Lake on July 6, 1976.

Site 11. W. Smith, W. Nordstrom and A. Gregg observed Blackburnians quite regularly on the south end of Cold Lake on June 8-9, July 5, and August 16, 1976. Habitat: mature mixed woods, preferred coniferous stands. These birds probably nested. On May 30, 1975, this species was observed there by G. Greenlee and M. Hennie.

Site 12. W. Nordstrom observed several Blackburnians around Wolf Lake on June 1, 1977 — one bird; June 9 — one; and July 5 — four. All were mature males in mature spruce and mixed woods.

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER (Map 4).
 Few records in Alberta.¹⁴

Site 1. This warbler was first recorded by T. E. Randall near Boyle on May 20, 1934. On July 4, he found a nest with young in the same area.¹⁵

Site 2. In early May of 1935, T. E. Randall observed five Chestnut-sided Warblers near Fawcett.¹⁵

Site 3. On August 8, 1938, M. Cole observed a small flock, possibly migrants, in Red Deer.³

Site 4. Bent states that a specimen was taken at Red Deer but no further information is available.²

and Dr. Henderson reported an immature bird on August 20, 1973, at Jenner Ferry in valley scrub along Red Deer River (Prov. Mus. records).

Site 11. On June 4, 1974, L. Butot saw a male in a weeping birch outside her residence in Calgary (Prov. Mus. records).

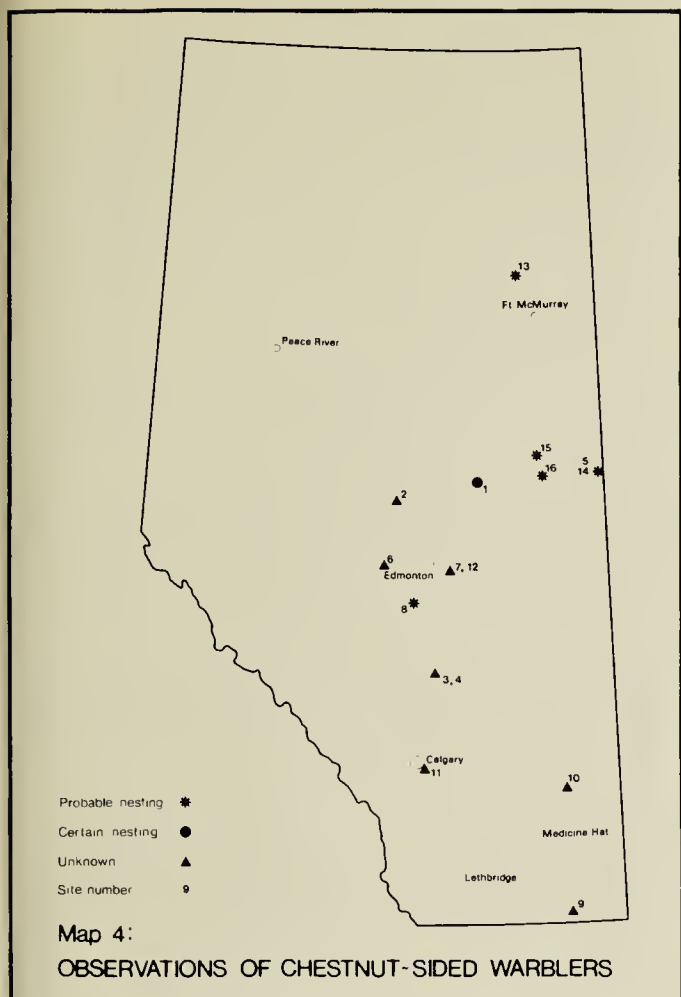
Site 12. This warbler was observed in Kinsmen's Park, Edmonton, by A. Smith on August 25, 1975. It was an immature and probably a migrant (pers. comm.).

Site 13. P. Sharp and W. Richardson reported this species south of Horseshoe Lake in 1975 — one bird on August 17 and four on September 8. They suggest the breeding range may include northern Alberta.¹⁸

Site 14. In the Cold Lake-Ethel Lake area between June 5-11 and on July 5, 1976, more than 16 observations of this warbler were recorded by C. Wallis, W. Smith and W. Nordstrom. The most seen in any one day was eight singing males and three females. Habitat: mature aspen with dense understory of hazel. G. Greenlee and M. Hennie also reported this species in the area on May 29, 1975.

Site 15. An adult male was collected five miles north of Touchwood Lake on July 7, 1976 by R. Burns and J. Keizer in aspen/alder habitat (Prov. Mus. record).

Site 16. Five adult male Chestnut-sided Warblers were observed in various locations throughout the Lakeland area during the summer of 1977 by W. Nordstrom. It is suspected they breed in the area. a) May 27: two birds seen in mature aspen with hazel and dogwood understory on west side of Ironwood Lake. b) May 30: two birds observed in mature mixed woods west of Touchwood Lake. c) June 1: one bird seen south of Wolf Lake in semi-open aspen with hazel and dogwood understory.



Map 4:
OBSERVATIONS OF CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLERS

Site 5. W. Haras reported this species from north of the French Bay campsite, Cold Lake, for June 29, 1962 (Prov. Mus. records).

Site 6. One bird was observed by R. Health near Lake Wabamun on September 20, 1970. It was probably a migrant.¹¹

Site 7. The first Alberta specimen was collected by Mrs. Blades on May 31, 1972, beneath her window in Edmonton. It was an adult male and probably a migrant (Prov. Mus. records).

Site 8. W. R. Salt collected an adult male and heard others near Pigeon Lake on June 15, 1972 in mature, fairly open aspen forest.¹³

Site 9. Eleven miles west of One Four in the Milk River valley a male Chestnut-sided Warbler was observed on May 29, 1973, by G. Greenlee in mature willows and other dense underbrush (Prov. Mus. records).

Site 10. E. Jones, G. Jones, C. Newell

Careful observation by naturalists in eastern Alberta, particularly, the east-central region, should provide additional information on breeding ranges and habits for the four species discussed above. Availability of proper habitat is a limiting factor to their distribution. Draining, filling, cutting, agricultural operations, and other modifications to wetlands and forests in this area have undoubtedly diminished suitable habitat for these birds. It is most important that we recognize this value of each habitat in order to ensure the continued success of this portion of Alberta's fauna.

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