

SASKATCHEWAN SPRING BIRD MIGRATION — 1982

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This is a summary of bird observations by more than 100 people from various parts of Saskatchewan for the period 1 March to 31 May 1982. The author is grateful for the compilations made for Moose Jaw, Regina and Saskatoon observations by Edith Kern, Bob Kreba and Bernie Gollop.

WEATHER

Spring was slow, with many species returning late. Cool weather and in particular a freak blizzard at the end of May were hard on insectivores, especially vireos, swallows and flycatchers. A return to wetter conditions in most areas produced a brighter picture among waterfowl and shorebirds. On 17-19 May a massive migration of passerines hit the south on a 400-mile front from Winnipeg to west of Moose Jaw. At Regina it yielded the best warbler wave in years and at Nicolle Flats, northeast of Moose Jaw, it enabled Moray Lewis to log 101 species in four hours.

RARE AND UNCOMMON BIRDS

Spring 1982 brought a rash of unusual birds. An asterisk indicates existence of the confirmation now customarily sought for formal recognition of a rarity report.

European Wigeon, Echo Lake 25 April by M. Callin and J. Nelson*.

Whimbrel, at Kannata 18 May by S. Cohrs *et al.*

The most exciting report of all, an **Eskimo Curlew** near Monica Slough, south of Regina 14 May by R. Kreba.

Glaucous Gull in first year plumage, Qu'Appelle River 16 May by S. Cohrs *et al.*

Two **Violet-green Swallows** on Jones Peak, west of Eastend 24 May by B. C. Godwin and K. M. Meeres*.

Northern Mockingbirds one near Saskatoon 16 May by B. C. Godwin and K. M. Meeres*; one in Regina 20 May by T. Riffel; and another sighting in Regina 29-31 May by A. Robinson, R. Kreba, v.ob*.

Varied Thrush at Tyner 23 April by L. McMiller *fide* S. Jordheim.

Wood Thrush conveniently present in F. Brazier's garden, Regina 29-31 May m.ob*.

Townsend's Solitaire at Regina 19 April by H. Moore.

Male **Black-throated Blue Warblers** in Regina: one 23 May by T. Bedford; the other, 27 May by C. Cowan.

Pine Warbler, also in Regina 17 May by J. Nelson.

Western Tanager, a male in full alternate plumage, Regina 3 May by T. Riffel and B. Luterbach*.

Cardinal in Saskatoon March through May by P. O'Neil, m.ob*. (presumably the same male present over winter).

Male **Lazuli Buntings** in Wascana Centre, Regina: one, 23 May by S. Cohrs *et al.*; and by C. Cowan and T. Riffel, one 24 May and two 25 May*.

Brewers Sparrows at Lodge Creek near Govenlock 22 May by B. C. Godwin and K. M. Meeres*; and at the Prairie Wildlife

Interpretation Centre (P.W.I.C.) near Swift Current, 26 May by C. Harris.

GENERAL SUMMARY

When relevant, a bird's presence on American Birds Blue List or on the Canadian threatened or endangered species lists is noted. Statistical arrival/departure data are in a separate appendix available on request.

The majority viewed Eared and Pied-billed Grebe numbers were down, possibly due to the 1981 drought. Several Eared Grebe colony counts were obtained, e.g., 375 on Rice Lake 30 May and 200 on Buffalo Pound 19 May (JW;ML). The usual spring Western Grebe congregations were noted on the larger lakes and reservoirs: Cypress 30, Lac Pelletier 125, Diefenbaker 110, Buffalo Pound 200, Bradwell 130, Wascana 35 (v.ob.).

Twenty-five White Pelicans in an alfalfa field southwest of Maple Creek was unusual and a count of 600 was received from Craven 23 April (BCG,KM;BL). A heronry near Fillmore had 17 Great Blues and Nicolle Flats had 25. Four Great Blue Herons arriving at Crooked Lake on 11 April were

greeted by solid ice (JH). Numbers of Great Blue and Black-crowned Night Herons as well as American Bitterns were believed to have declined again (v.ob.).

The U.S.-Canadian waterfowl breeding population survey showed Canada Geese up 87% over the ten-year average. Some impressive counts of migrating geese were reported: totals of 11,600 Canadas and 7,300 White-fronts moving north at Raymore 18-22 April (WH,SL) and 80,000 Snows congregated near Fillmore 9 May (FB) plus 24,000 in other south-central localities (PB;JH;m.ob.).

Three unusual species of ducks were found: a Black Duck near Hanley (PB); two Cinnamon Teal on the Frenchman River and another from Cypress Lake (CH,BCG); and a Hooded Merganser also on Cypress Lake (BCG). An early brood of eight downy young Mallards was seen near Saskatoon 27 May (S.N.H.S.). MB noted that the presence of pairs of Redheads and Canvasbacks around Dilke was unusual for that area. Flocks of 30 and 25 Red-breasted Mergansers were on Cypress and Yellow Lakes in the southwest (MG, JG;CH).



White Pelicans, Tobin Lake Reservoir

J. Polson

As usual, Turkey Vulture observations were mainly in the southwest (four birds) and the Qu'Appelle Valley (seven) (v.ob.). A vulture caused some excitement by moving into Moose Jaw (PK). Province-wide, accipiter reports totalled 13 Goshawks, 25 Sharpshinned and 30 Coopers. Red-tailed Hawks had a good migration and some respectable counts were logged on 10 April: 49 birds, Regina area (TR,CA), 39 birds, Saskatoon area (S.N.H.S.), and 27 birds, Stewart Valley (CH). Both of the less common Red-tailed Hawk subspecies were reported, 12 Harlan's being around Regina and a Krider's was at Saskatoon (TR,CA,BL;JW). Breeding Swainsons "seem numerous everywhere" (MB). Regarding 30 nest sites at Kindersley, "the crop looks good" (JMH).

The Bald Eagle picture was confusing: the south had more than average numbers during migration while central Sask. observers at Prince Albert National Park (P.A.N.P.), Foam Lake and Saskatoon noted otherwise — most unusual. The Marsh Hawk population may be coming back: "Definitely up" around Regina (RK), and five observers elsewhere each had a daily count of 20 or more. Eight of 27 Peregrine Falcons reported across the prairie provinces were in Saskatchewan (v.ob.) which included a pair performing a spectacular courtship flight over Wascana Lake (FL,TR,CA). At least seven pairs of Merlins were nesting in Moose Jaw (*vide* EK) and two territorial pairs were noted in Regina (*vide* RK).

Ruffed Grouse continued to be very low at least as far west as Prince Albert. Good Spirit and Moose Mountain Provincial Parks (P.P.), Sheho and P.A.N.P. all reported marked decreases (B&JA;RD;WN;MS), however, they remained common around Raymore (WH,SL). Sixteen and 19 Sage Grouse were on two strutting grounds in the Frenchman River Valley on 1 May (CH). Northbound Sandhill Cranes were on

the move on 17 and 18 April (v.ob.), 6,000 being estimated over Spring Valley and 10,000 passing Raymore (FB;WH,SL). Two seldom-reported Yellow Rails were detected in the marshes at Nicolle Flats (GAZ).

Only three Piping Plovers were recorded, two by CE at Buffer L. and a single near Regina by RK. Near Moose Jaw, flocks of ten and seven Ruddy Turnstone were the first for that area since 1978 (GAZ;S&GW). Unexpected was finding eight of the aptly-named Solitary Sandpipers on an island just three feet in diameter (JBG). Red Knots appeared twice, two on Last Mountain Lake 18 May and a surprising 50 on Pasqua Slough south of Regina 23 May (SC *et al*;JN). The peak counts on "peeps" and other sandpipers showed that Kutawagan Lake, north of Last Mountain Lake, and Saskatoon were the 1982 spring shorebird hotspots.

It was a good spring for less frequently seen shorebirds. Dunlins and Buff-breasted Sandpipers were further examples, with ten of the former (TR,TL, JN;CE) and 90 of the latter (TR;CE,BCG,KM), in the Regina and Saskatoon areas. Eight Hudsonian Godwits were near Saskatoon 8 April, with another two spotted 9 May (CE;MDG).

A large flock of California Gulls, 250 birds, was on the river at Saskatoon 22 April (CE). Over 2,000 Franklin's Gulls were in the breeding marshes at Rice Lake 30 May (JW).

Forster's Terns were located at six sites, the largest tally being 100 on Nicolle Marsh 19 May (ML). Last Mountain Lake where 200 were counted 22 May (WH,SL). Caspian Terns, seldom seen, surprised three observers, SC discovering one in the Qu'Appelle Valley 16 May, DF one on Ekapo Lake the next day (same bird?) and JBG one on Blackstrap Reservoir 23 May. Black Terns rebounded somewhat from their drought-induced absence, but large

colonies were apparently not being found.

The Mourning Dove scene was variable, SJ reporting numbers down drastically around White Bear, while HP noted there were lots at Oxbow again this year. HP saw a young dove fledge from an old Robin's nest on an early 25 May.

Stuart Houston remarked that Great Horned Owls were down, his bandings were 140 compared to over 400 last year. Other reports totalled 22 nests with 54 young (v.ob.). As last year during March and April, territorial-calling Screech Owls were heard along Wascana and Cottonwood creeks (v.ob.).

Few Common Nighthawks were tallied until the very end of May when a small wave occurred, Good Spirit P.P. counting nine, Moose Jaw 25 and Saskatoon 16 (B&JA;GAX;m.ob.). An unexpected visitor was a Pileated Woodpecker in Moose Mountain P.P. on 18 March (RD). Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers were down (v.ob.) — "very few in the woods" (WN).

Most flycatcher species were down (v.ob.), the only increase reported being Say's Phoebes (CH). However, Moose Jaw and Regina experienced a wave on 19 May, hundreds of *empidonax* being

on Nicolle Flats (ML) and Regina having its best flycatcher migration in years (RK). A flock of 50 Eastern Kingbirds was seen by B&JA on a late 30 May. Western Kingbirds were thinly reported and Saskatoon's May count totalled only 13 birds. An Eastern Phoebe was nesting on 25 April (DF). Moose Jaw recorded its first W. Wood Pewee since 1979 (ML) and in an unusual sighting 16 of those birds were insect hawking from a fence in Regina 24 May (TR). At Sheho WN remarked that the 9 March Horned Lark arrival was two weeks later than normal. Big waves evidently occurred on 4 March, MG seeing 1000's in the Central Butte area and on 21 March when JH estimated 5,000 along 6 miles of road near Grenfell.

The nine reports (v.ob.) from the Cypress Hills - Saskatoon belt of Rough-winged Swallows suggest observers are now taking the time to identify these birds. None of the reported colonies of the threatened Cliff Swallow exceeded 100 birds, an unusual occurrence.

Incursion by Crows into our cities was increasing; an estimated 100 were in Moose Jaw on 31 March (PK) and a roost in Saskatoon built up to 3435 birds by 7 April (JBG;m.ob.). Single White-breasted Nuthatches were found at Bethune and Spring Valley (DL;FB), as well as in Moose Jaw and Regina (*fide* EK&RK). Four Brown Creepers were spotted (LB;S&GW;S.N.H.S.); and even scarcer was the Winter Wren identified at Raymore 29 May (WH,SL). An exceptional finding was a well observed Rock Wren on a Dilke area doorstep 1 May (MB); and also distant from its usual haunts was one foraging in a ditch near Regina 8 May (TBe,CC). More to be expected was BCG's sighting of six Rock Wrens on Jones Peak 24 May.

RD provided an account of a Robin fighting its reflection: for 2 weeks it kept flying at the glass in a door, then constantly for a further 3 weeks it flew at



Eastern Kingbird

Juhachi Asai



Bohemian Waxwing

W. C. Harris

Windows of a nearby cottage and was also seen charging at the windows and side mirrors of a car. Mountain bluebirds were in unusual situations: one was in a Moose Jaw garden on a very early 1 March (PK) and at Kenaston two pair nesting by 8 April (LB); yet the first one at Sheho, on 13 April, was about two weeks late (WN). Extraordinary for spring was a high count of 40 bluebirds in the Regina area April (CA,TR). Only the Saskatoon May Count on the 30th tallied a Golden-crowned Kinglet. The huge flocks of Water Pipits in Alberta and Manitoba seemed absent here, a modest 35 on 11 May being our only significant report out of eleven records (WH;v.ob.).

Bohemian Waxwings hung on well into spring, Regina having 1,500 on 4 April. While observers in the south were noting the last Bohemians, MS was recording the first one for P.A.N.P. on 13 April. The May Count on the 15th tallied 17 Loggerhead Shrikes for Regina.

The 1 and 5 May sightings of Black-

and-white Warblers were very early (GAZ;B&JA). RK's daily tallies for 17-20 May of observers' reports of Tennessees illustrates the abruptness and size of Regina's huge warbler wave: 25/150/200/10 birds. Five seldom-seen Nashvilles were recorded at Regina, Saskatoon and Raymore 16-30 May (RT;FR;WH,SL). Yellows arrived inexplicably very late in the east-central region where first arrivals were 29 May and 1 June at Good Spirit P.P. and Foam Lake (B&JA;WN). The totals of uncommon (for the south) Magnolia, Cape May and Black-throated Green warblers were 32, 13 and 10 birds (v.ob.). "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen at White Bear (one) and Regina (three) (SJ;TR). Palms were more frequently reported than usual, 18 records over a lengthy 4-30 May period. These birds peaked at 50 on 20 May in Regina (v.ob.). Another of our scarce warbler species, the Connecticut was noted once in Regina 19 May by TR and three times on the Saskatoon May Count (JBG;CE). Observers did better with Mourning, 16 being counted province-wide. Three reporters remarked that Common Yellowthroats seemed fewer and Saskatoon's May Count registered nine compared to the more usual 30's and 40's.

Bobolinks were common around Saskatoon, seven being tallied 25 May (JBG *et al*) and 12 on the Mayday Count (v.ob.). Yellow-headed Blackbirds were up and impressive flocks of 450 were on the Valeport marshes and on Nicolle Flats (TR;ML). Early Redwinged Blackbirds were a flock of 20 males near Val Marie 15 March (SK).

Among the grosbeaks, Rose-breasteds were widely reported in good numbers, e.g., seven at Spring Valley 21 May and six near Lac Pelletier 23 May (FB;CH), but Regina and Moose Jaw were the hotspots, over 30 birds being tallied in each centre during the 19 May migration (m.ob.). As usual, Evenings were most numerous in east

and central districts, the peak being 200 birds near Oxbow in March (RD). The beaks of some Evenings were a light green by 2 April (MCh). An exceptional spring visitant was a Black-headed Grosbeak at Spring Valley 19 and 21 May (FB). Pine Grosbeaks may be in a low with only three localities reporting them, Moose Jaw, Raymore and Good Spirit P.P. (PK;WH,SL;B&JA).

The bulk of the Common Redpoll departures appeared to be 12-24 April as most (10) observers last-seen dates bunched into this period. Just prior there seemed to have been a distinct wave, some large flocks being reported, e.g., 400, 800 and 4,500 near Swift Current, Swanson and Raymore (BCG,KM;JBG;WH,SL). Red Crossbills showed up in just three reports, a female in Saskatoon, four in Regina Cemetery and three at Kenosee (JBG;TR;RD). Even fewer White-wingeds appeared: a female in Regina (TR), a singing male at Raymore, WH noting "not normally seen in spring". Few Rufous-sided Towhees were reported — for instance, the Saskatoon May Count was 31, and it was this low only once between 1969 and 1981. Lark Buntings often absent from the extreme north of the range, were widely reported in this area, e.g., from Foam Lake, Bradwell, Kenaston, Asquith, Saskatoon (v.ob.). At Webb 20 were counted on 23 May (CH).

Savannah, Grasshopper and Baird's sparrows were all scarce. Vespers were the most widely reported of grassland sparrows, with LB noting them as "the most common field sparrow," but RK remarked, "continues scarce." Unusual was a flock of 100 Vespers seen by BCG and KM 2 May near Dundurn. Single Sharp-tailed Sparrows were by Wascana Creek and near Raymore 15 and 24 May (RK;WH,SL). Regina's four sightings of Lark Sparrows (v.ob.) and one near Raymore on an early 7 May (WH,SL) were noteworthy.

Dark-eyed Juncos were reported throughout a lengthy migration period,

starting with an early 1 March at Moose Jaw and ending with two late birds on 15 May at Saskatoon (GAZ;BCG,BJ). An estimate of 1000 on 19 April made P.A.N.P. the junco hotspot (MS).

White-crowned and White-throated sparrows were going through in the 1st and 3rd weeks of May (v.ob.), with some not unexpectedly still being found at the end of the month (S.N.H.S.). Comments that Song Sparrows are "... scarcer each year" (WN) and were "... late and low" (CH) are not necessarily refuted by the finding of several hundred at Nicolle Flats during the big migration of 19 May (ML). The largest Snow Bunting flocks reported — small compared to previous years — were 600 on 23 April at Buck Lake and 200 30 April at Spring Valley (RK;FB).

OBSERVERS

Chris Adam, Bill & Joyce Anaka, Lawrence Beckie, Tony Bedford, Margaret Belcher, Tom Beveridge (TBe), Gerry Beyersbergen, Flossie Bogdan, Ian Brace, Frank Brazier (FBr), Phil Browne, Manley Callin, M. Christensen (MCh), Shirley Cohrs, Chris Cowan, Ruth Dixon, Chris Escott, Doug Francis, Mary Gilliland (MDG), Bob Godwin (BCG), Bernie Gollop (JBG), Michael Gollop, Jane Gollop, Chris Harris, Jean Harris (JMH), Wayne Harris, Don Hayward, Dale & Paule Hjertaas, Stuart Houston, John Hubbard, Brian Johns, Sig Jordheim, Edith Kern, Pat Kern, Stuart Keys, Eve King (DK), Bob Kreba (RK), Fred Lahrman, Sheila Lamont, Tony Lang, D. Laing, Moray Lewis, Bob Luterbach, Lola Mc-Miller, Kathy Meeres, Hubert Moore, John Nelson, William Niven, Pat O'Neil, m.ob. many observers, v.ob. various observers, Hazel Paton, Thelma Pepper, Tom Riffel, Annabelle Robinson, Frank Roy, S.M.N.S. Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, S.N.H.S. Saskatoon Natural History Society, Stan Shadick, Merv Syroteuk, Ruth Tempel, S. & G. Wait, Jim Wedgwood, Gus & Mary Zado (GAZ).