

RECENT SUCCESSFUL NESTING OF FERRUGINOUS HAWK IN MANITOBA

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On 4 July 1917, Talbot Criddle photographed a Ferruginous Hawk nest with nestlings near the family farm at Aweme, Manitoba (Fig. 1). Little did anyone know that it would be the last Ferruginous Hawk nest photographed in Manitoba until 1984. Hales reported this species nesting along the Assiniboine and Souris rivers in 1927;² these were the most recently documented nests. This species has never been a common nesting bird in the province, and in Saskatchewan in recent years it has been decreasing.⁴ An historical review of the occurrence of this hawk in Manitoba was compiled by Bechard.¹ New nest records presented by Bechard were based on sets of eggs in the collections of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology and the American Museum of Natural History. These egg clutches were collected as follows: one by C.P. Forge, 10 June 1907 near Roseisle; four by J.D. Currie, 10 May 1908 from nests in the extreme southwest; two by D. Ogg, 20 May 1923 and 2 May 1924 from nests near Pierson. A survey of birds in southwestern Manitoba from 1974-78 by Knapton failed to find any active Ferruginous nests.⁵ It was assumed by Bechard that the species was no longer breeding in the province.¹

On 2 July, the junior author and his wife Joan noticed two large buteos dive-bombing two coyotes in a pasture 10 km west of Lyleton. With a spotting scope they identified the birds as Ferruginous Hawks. A scan of the pasture revealed a nest with young in a lone Trembling Aspen tree. While they were watching the nest, one adult Ferruginous Hawk came into view and landed at the nest. A return visit on 4 July disclosed that



Ferruginous Hawk Brian D. Ratcliff

there were two young at the nest. Between 8 July and 17 July, verification of the occupancy of the nest by Ferruginous Hawks was made by Dennis Fast, Jerry Greenly, William J. Walley, Ralph J. Wang and ourselves. During this period the nest was photographed several times. On 17 July, Walley found and photographed three well-feathered young in the nest. Where this additional bird came from is not clear, but it could have fledged early and been on the ground during earlier visits. All three young had fledged by 19 July. An addled egg (60.65 mm X 48.05 mm) collected from the nest 23 July was delivered to Herb

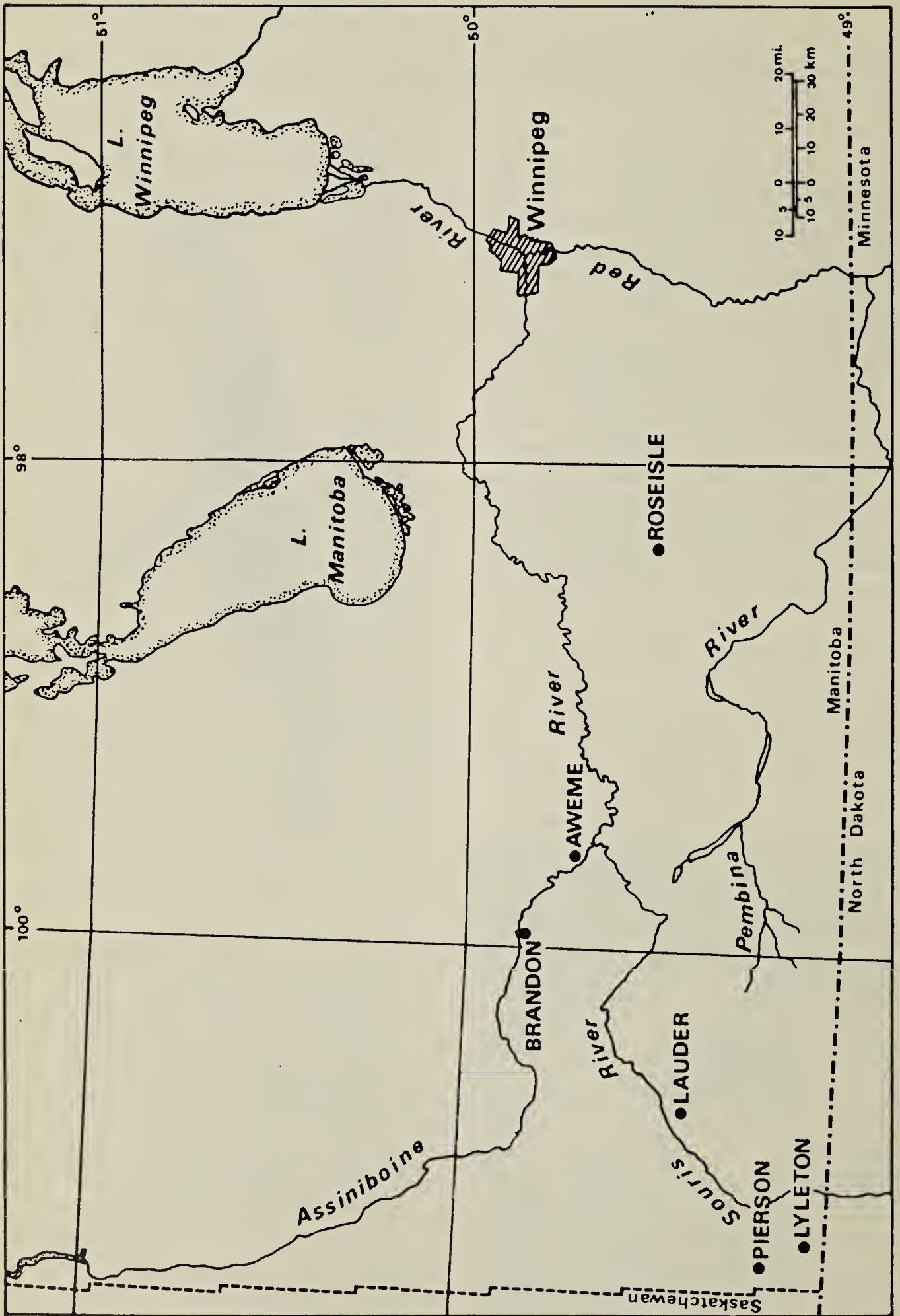


Figure 1. Map of extreme southwestern Manitoba showing place names mentioned in the text.



Site of Ferruginous Hawk nest

Brian D. Ratcliff

Copland, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature.

The nest was 4.6 m above the ground in a 6.1 m aspen tree. The tree was located in the centre of a 260 ha pasture. The nearest trees were in a bluff 200 m south; in this bluff was a Swainson's Hawk nest with three young. Another Swainson's Hawk successfully nested in the same pasture 300 m west of the Ferruginous Hawk nest.

A second pair of Ferruginous Hawks was observed building a nest on 15 April, 5 km west of Lyleton. The pair was observed copulating and often the female sat on the nest. Observations of the pair were made at the nest site on 16, 22 and 27 April. A major snow storm hit southwestern Manitoba on 28 April and approximately 25 cm of snow was recorded in the Lyleton area. After the storm, the nest was checked daily with a spotting scope and only one bird was seen near the nest on 2, 3, 13, 23, and 30 May. We walked to the nest tree on 27 June and found egg shell fragments in the nest. The egg shells were buried under a layer of cow dung, twigs and sod, materials characteristically brought to the nests by Ferruginous Hawks. A search for the pair

turned up two birds in a pasture 3 km south of the abandoned nest site.

In a pasture 6 km south of Lauder, six Ferruginous Hawks were observed perched on fence posts 17 July. Single birds were seen in the area 16 May, 1 June, 10 and 16 July. It appeared to be a family unit but a search of local pastures produced no nest.

We recorded 11 sightings of Ferruginous Hawks in southwestern Manitoba in 1983 and seven sightings in 1984 in addition to the above mentioned birds. Calvin Cuthbert reported spotting an unusual pair of Ferruginous Hawks in late May 1984, east of Pipestone. One of the birds was a dark phase and the other was the usual light phase.

Management practices by Houston in Saskatchewan and Shumutz in Alberta have proved very successful.^{3 6} They placed nest structures on top of 4 m telephone poles in pastures where trees were lacking. The hawks readily occupied these sites. There appears to be plenty of potential nesting trees in Manitoba, but a pilot project to set up some poles in large pastures along the Souris River may prove beneficial. This proposal is being



Young Ferruginous Hawks

William J. Walley

considered by the Department of Natural Resources.

We feel that the species has been overlooked in the past and quite probably has been nesting here in limited numbers. Since this hawk became designated as a threatened species by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), more people are starting to look closely at all raptors in attempts to sight Ferruginous Hawks. It is this interest by local birders that led to the discovery of the first recorded Manitoba nesting of the Ferruginous Hawk in 57 years.

We wish to thank the World Wildlife Fund (Canada) and the Manitoba Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Branch for their support of the Manitoba Burrowing Owl Survey. These Ferruginous Hawk sightings were made while conducting this survey. Horst Schell kindly prepared the figure. Thanks also to Robert W. Nero for his constructive

review of this report.

- ¹ BECHARD, M.J. 1981. Historical nest records for the Ferruginous Hawk in Manitoba. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 95:467-469.
- ² HALES, B.J. 1927. *Prairie birds*. MacMillan, Toronto.
- ³ HOUSTON, C.S. 1982. Artificial nesting platforms for Ferruginous Hawks. *Blue Jay* 40:208-213.
- ⁴ HOUSTON, C.S. and M.J. BECHARD. 1984. Decline of the Ferruginous Hawk in Saskatchewan. *American Birds* 38:166-170.
- ⁵ KNAPTON, R.W. 1979. *Birds of the Gainsborough-Lyleton region*. Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Special Publication No. 10 Regina.
- ⁶ SCHMUTZ, J.K. 1983. Artificial nests for Ferruginous Hawks in southeastern Alberta. Special report for the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division.