

MID-MARCH SINGING BY AMERICAN ROBIN AND VARIED THRUSH IN SOUTHWESTERN ALBERTA

MARTIN K. McNICHOLL, Department of Biological Sciences, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario L2S 3A1

The winter of 1976-1977 was one of unusual weather patterns throughout North America.⁶ This resulted in many unusual records of birds and bird activity all over the continent.¹¹ Debate as to whether these weather events were exceptional, or are part of marked new changes continues,⁶ and thus unusual and changing natural phenomena apparently associated with them should be carefully documented. In Alberta the winter was exceptionally mild, resulting in several records of active insects in February!^{7 9 13} Elsewhere, I have described the behaviour of Bohemian Waxwings "hawking" insects in the proposed Kananaskis Provincial Park, Alberta.⁷ In this note, I document two records of early singing in thrushes in the same general area.

In the early morning of March 12, 1977, Jim R. Salt, Alan N. Wisely and I watched an American Robin singing from the top of a pine near the ranger station for about 15-20 minutes. At 0930 on March 13, Wisely and I observed a singing Varied Thrush perched on top of a fir near the outlet channel from Lower Kananaskis Lake. Neither species had been seen previously on several trips to the area over the winter and neither was seen subsequently.

Early dates of arrival for the mountainous part of Alberta are scarce in the literature. In contrast to their winter distribution 20 years ago, American Robins are now frequently found in winter in the prairie provinces

even though most migrate.¹² East of the mountains in Calgary, arrival dates ranged from February 3 to March 31 from 1961 to 1970, but more recent compilations of arrival dates for Calgary omit this species, or state "wintered".^{1 3 4 5 8 10} The usual arrival date for the Kananaskis is unknown but there is a March 20, 1964 date for Banff, to the north.¹⁰

Winter records of Varied Thrush in Alberta are much scarcer. Boothman reported one at a Calgary feeder on February 1, 1975, citing this as the second winter record for the city.² The species also wintered there in 1977. Sadler and Myres stated that Varied Thrushes arrive in the mountains in April.¹⁰ Mountain arrival records near the Kananaskis include Banff record of April 19, 1965 and May 20, 1973, Cadomin record of April 24, 1972, and a Lake Louise record of May 4, 1976.^{1 3 8 10}

Thus, the Varied Thrush, and probably the American Robin appear to be early records for the mountainous parts of Alberta. The fact that both birds were singing is especially noteworthy.

These observations were obtained while we were employed by Peregrine Research & Documentation Ltd conducting vertebrate surveys for the Alberta Parks Branch.

¹ANONYMOUS. 1972. Dates of first observations of spring migrant birds in the

- Calgary area — 1972. *Calgary Field Nat.* 3:164-165.
- BOOTHMAN, H. 1975. Observations of a Varied Thrush. *Calgary Field Nat.* 6:277-278.
- BUTOT, R. 1975. Dates of first reports of spring migrant birds in the Calgary area 1975. *Calgary Field Nat.* 7:126-130.
- BUTOT, R. 1976. Dates of first reports of spring migrant birds in the Calgary area 1976. *Calgary Field Nat.* 8:72-75.
- BUTOT, R. 1977. First sightings of spring migrant birds in the Calgary area — 1977. *Calgary Field Nat.* 9:121-127.
- CANBY, T. Y. 1977. The year the weather went wild. *National Geographic* 152:798-829.
- McNICHOLL, M. K. in press. Bohemian Waxwings flycatching — in February. *Alberta Naturalist*.
- ⁸O'KEEFE, S., and V. LANG. 1973. Dates of first reports of spring migrant birds in the Calgary area — 1973. *Calgary Field Nat.* 5:51-56.
- ⁹REIST, J. D. 1977. Early insect records in the city of Edmonton: 1977. *Alberta Naturalist* 7:190-194.
- ¹⁰SADLER, T. S., and M. T. MYRES. 1976. Alberta birds 1961-1970. Provincial Mus. Alberta Nat. Hist. Section Occ. Paper No. 1. iv + 314 pp.
- ¹¹SMITH, K. 1977. The changing seasons. *American Birds* 31:292-301.
- ¹²SPEIRS, J. M. 1953. Winter distribution of Robins east of the Rocky Mountains. *Wilson Bull.* 65:175-183.
- ¹³THORMIN, T. 1977. Spring weather, butterflies, owls, etc.: a request. *Edmonton Nat.* 5:67.



American Robin

Fred W. Lahrman