

SOCIAL VALUES OF DESERTED ISLAND BIRDS

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Every once in a while applied scientists are afforded an opportunity to pursue curiosity in their field of endeavour. Such an occasion arose for me last January as I rediscovered an article about a test of opinion among ornithological workers in England.¹ I decided that such a test could be replicated at the Prairie Migratory Bird Research Centre (PMBRC) in Saskatoon, tried it and here are the results.

In late January 1979 questionnaires were handed to each of 12 co-workers with three intended for their wives. A single sheet of paper was used with the question "If you were cast away on a deserted island, which 10 Canadian birds would you most like to take with you and which five would you most like to leave behind?" The sheet had 10 lines under the heading "Take" and five under "Leave". There were also three lines under the heading "Main assumptions you made:" and an identifier number on the sheet. The number was intended to provide an illusion of objectivity to the analyst if not anonymity to the respondent. One respondent obscured the identifier, photocopied the questionnaire, gave copies to each of two married couples known to him, who also responded.

In all, 13 responses were received, four of them anonymous to me. Respondents unanimously agreed to leave House Sparrows behind if cast away on a deserted island (Table 1). Even the three responses not tabulated agreed on that. Some birds

were listed as families such as hawks, hummingbirds, etc., and thus not tabulated. Five responses were incomplete or listed domestic species like chickens and one response listed "jailbirds" and "bird-brains".

TABLE 1. Birds preferred on a deserted island by 10 Saskatchewan people.

Species	Voted Take	Voted Leave
Black-capped Chickadee	6	0
Western Meadowlark	6	0
Canada Goose	5	0
Ruffed Grouse	3	0
Great Horned Owl	3	0
American Robin	3	0
White-throated Sparrow	3	0
Common Loon	2	0
Pileated Woodpecker	2	0
Barn Swallow	2	0
Varied Thrush	2	0
Yellow Warbler	2	0
Northern Oriole	2	0
Vesper Sparrow	2	0
36 species	1	0
Double-crested Cormorant	1	1
Common Raven	1	1
Black-billed Magpie	2	2
Rock Dove	1	3
Gray Partridge	0	1
Brewer's Blackbird	0	1
Common Grackle	0	1
Herring Gull	0	2
Brown-headed Cowbird	0	2
Common Crow	0	5
Common Starling	0	6
House Sparrow	0	10

Swans, Hawks, Gulls, Hummingbirds, Swallows, Bluebirds and Blackbirds as families were given votes by some respondents and are not included.

In total 62 species were listed of a possible 150 if all responses had been complete, if only Canadian bird species had been listed and if each person's list had been entirely different. Some species were conspicuous by their absence such as the Sharp-tailed Grouse, Saskatchewan's symbolic bird. The Blue Jay was mentioned only once although all respondents had some knowledge of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society's journal. Fifty species were mentioned only to take, eight only to leave and four species would be taken by some people and left by others.

The data generally confirm the results obtained in England and allow me to form hypotheses of possible interest to social scientists.¹ Simply stated they might be: (1) only a few bird species are unpopular with many people, i.e., could be abandoned in a new life. (2) many bird species are popular with most people. Those statements could be made mathematically, the first possibly a gentle curve and the second possibly a steep straight line but not of much interest here. Perhaps the most interesting wildlife management problem revealed in a numerical way is the "disputed zone" in which the same species of bird is liked by some people and disliked by others.

In analysis of the responses as they came in, it became apparent that firm conclusions about people's preferences and possibly useful applications in decisions of what to do, where and why, would be perilous at the very least. That conclusion led to the decision to tabulate only 10 responses. Analysis of the results of the "Deserted Island Questionnaire" beyond the tabulation and limited conclusions drawn here needs more human understanding



Western Meadowlark Fred W. Lahrman

than I have or care to gain. An indication of the greater human understanding needed was the conversion of a "deserted island" question into an article headed "Desert Island Birds". A similar conversion was made in the heading for preliminary tabulation. I suspect some respondents made that mental conversion too. The main conclusion, confirmation of the results of a similar questionnaire in England, and speculation presented here could readily be a launching pad for investigation by others. Would Canadian Prairie farmers feel the same as Robinson Crusoe?

Acknowledgements

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¹SALES, D. 1973. Desert island birds. British Trust for Ornithology News, 61:5, October 1973.