

ADULT ALBINO YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD IN MANITOBA

D. F. BRUNTON, Box 757, Canmore
Alberta T0L 0M0, and H. L.
DICKSON, 2037 Honeywell Avenue,
Ottawa Ontario

Early on 19 September, 1978, we observed an albino Yellow-headed Blackbird along the Trans-Canada Highway near Virden, Manitoba (10.5 km east of Highway 26). It was in a flock of approximately 20,000 birds which we estimated to consist of 45% Yellow-headed Blackbirds and 55% Red-winged Blackbirds.

The bird was entirely white, with only a very pale yellow wash on the head, neck and upper breast, where the bright yellow of a normally-coloured Yellow-head is distributed. Although poor lighting did not permit us to determine eye colour, the eyes did not contrast sharply with the facial colour, suggesting that they were lighter than the typical dark brown of a normal blackbird.

We observed the bird for about 10 minutes and throughout this time it appeared to behave in the same manner as the other Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the flock which were foraging in a cut-over grain field. They displayed no particular interest in the albino, but Red-winged Blackbirds were observed diving at it each time it flew.

We are under the impression that pure (or nearly pure) albino blackbirds are not at all common. The fact that this was an adult male, which only assumes its yellow head colouring in the second year, is of additional interest. One would expect that an albino blackbird, having the

additional difficulty of an abnormal and conspicuous appearance, would not survive long in the wild. For one to reach full maturity may indeed be very rare.

THE HINTON ALBERTA, BLUEBIRD TRAIL, 1976-1978

TED W. CARTER, Box 62, Group 29,
R.R. No. 1B, Winnipeg, Manitoba,
R3C 2E4.

The Hinton Bluebird Trail was initiated in 1976 with 100 nest boxes. The results for that year were published in the March 1977 *Blue Jay* under the title "Bluebirds and Clearcuts" by G. A. Wilde. In 1977, 40 additional boxes were placed bringing the total to 140.

The nesting boxes were monitored during May, June and October, 1977, by G. A. Wilde, and May and July of 1978 by G. A. Wilde and E.W. Carter. All results were tabulated and are summarized in this report.

Of the 140 nesting boxes, 108 are located on or adjacent to clearcut areas and 32 boxes are along streams, in heavily forested areas or on steep slopes. Our results indicate clearcuts and other sites almost equally favoured with the 1977 figures showing occupancy of 22% of boxes on clearcuts as compared to 26% on the other sites. The 1978 figures support those of 1977 with 33% of boxes on clearcuts occupied versus 38% on other sites. Total occupancy has increased from 20 boxes in 1976 to 52 boxes in 1978 (See Table 1).

TABLE 1. Occupancy of Nesting Boxes

Species	Year	Boxes Used			
		Clearcut		Others	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Bluebird	1976	7	3.1	2	0.05
	1977	17	15.7	5	15.6
	1978	24	22.2	7	21.9
Tree Swallow	1976	2	2.0	—	—
	1977	4	3.7	3	9.4
	1978	14	12.0	5	12.5
Unidentified	1976	9	9.2	—	—
	1977	3	2.8	2	6.2
	1978	1	0.9	1	3.1
Destroyed by Man	1976	—	—	—	—
	1977	2	2.8	1	3.1
	1978	7	6.0	4	10.0
Destroyed by Red Squirrel Gnawing	1976	4	4.1	7	0.2
	1977	3	2.8	1	3.1
	1978	2	1.9	3	9.4

Problems include vandalism which is evident only on the most open sites. In 1978 10 boxes were partly or totally destroyed, the most since the program began. Competition for the boxes from Red Squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) occurred only on forested sites. This problem involved the use of three houses in 1978 for nests or food caches.

One other problem in 1978 was dead females or dead young found in six boxes. It is probable that the mortality was a result of attacks on the older birds by raptors such as the Merlin or the American Kestrel. These birds must find easy access to the open site boxes as all boxes containing dead birds were located on clearcuts. Furthermore four of the six boxes affected were located within a 1.5-mile radius. This may indicate that the nesting boxes are within the

home range of a predacious bird. A pair of Kestrels was seen in the immediate vicinity during the July, 1978, survey. Local logging truck drivers indicate that raptors are quite numerous along the Bluebird trail.

Success of the program is dependent on future generations of bluebirds and Tree Swallows returning to the area and discovering previously unused nesting boxes. Judging from the favourable results over the past 3 years, the number of birds occupying the nesting boxes will continue to increase.

Success of the program can be questioned if no new broods are leaving the nests. If the occurrence of dead birds should persist in the same area for another season it would be advisable to relocate the affected boxes.