

PIPING PLOVERS USE MAN-MADE HABITAT

FRANK A. SWITZER, 1301 Shannon Road, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4S 5K9.

In 1978 the Saskatchewan Department of Highways used Boundary Dam Power Station lagoon ash as a highway building sub-base on 25.9 km of No. 47 Highway north of Estevan. It was my job for the Saskatchewan Power Corporation to photo-document the excavation of ash from a lagoon immediately west of the Power Station.

The first series of pictures was taken in early June. While walking around the lagoon photographing the dewatering process I heard a strange bird call. There were several species of wading birds on an adjacent lagoon and I scanned them with binoculars but could not find the source of the call.

The second series of pictures were taken in early July when start of ash hauling was just under way. Again while walking around the lagoon I heard the strange bird call. Again I swept the adjacent lagoon with binoculars but could only see one small shorebird on an island-like deposit of ash. Because of the quicksand characteristics of bottom ash when lagoons are being filled I could not get close enough for a good look.

Upon returning home I listened to shorebird calls on Peterson's records. The call I heard at Estevan closely resembled the one for Piping Plover. I could hardly wait for the next trip to Estevan.

The last pictures of the excavated lagoon were taken in late August. Again I visited the adjacent active

lagoon and finally saw and photographed the source of my strange bird call. There were four Piping Plovers, two juveniles, a female and a male. I was only able to get pictures of the male bird against the slate grey bottom ash background. However, that was enough to determine that the bird, both from direct observation, and later from studying the picture, to be an adult male Piping Plover.

Other sightings of this bird in Saskatchewan have been made on Bigstick Lake, Old Wives Lake, Last Mountain Lake, Quill Lake, and near Indian Head. All these locations are farther north than Estevan and sightings were in non-modified habitat. The Estevan sighting is unique in that the Piping Plovers were using an industrial disposal site — an ash lagoon. They presumably nested on or near the lagoon and were using it as foraging territory. When I took the picture in August, all the birds were busy feeding along the ash shore line of the periferal lagoon water body.

Other shorebirds seen on the Boundary Dam ash lagoons were:
Killdeer — most often seen.
Upland Sandpiper — one observed on lagoon dike in June.
Spotted Sandpiper — observed throughout the summer.
Willet — observed throughout the summer.
Greater Yellowlegs — observed one in late August.
Lesser Yellowlegs — largest numbers in spring and fall migration period.
Baird's Sandpiper — observed only three during early spring migration.
Avocet — observed periodically throughout the summer.
Wilson's Phalarope — observed only in May.