

# BREEDING BIRDS IN SASKATCHEWAN WITHOUT DOCUMENTED NESTS

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Since the preliminary list of Saskatchewan birds by Mitchell in 1924,<sup>31</sup> the *Blue Jay* has for nearly 40 years been a major forum for publication of additional sight and breeding records. For 20 years the Saskatchewan Natural History Society has also printed solidly researched special publications, with a long-range plan to cover the extreme corners of the province, the major centers of human population, and selected areas of special ecologic or historic interest.

Much more important than the interesting study of stray accidentals is the study of breeding birds, fundamental to any future provincial list. A recent survey of the literature has revealed that there are published breeding records for Saskatchewan for 242 species. This number includes the extinct Passenger Pigeon, for which documentation is less than perfect.

In this review, a complete absence of documentation for 14 regular summer residents, and incomplete or unsatisfactory documentation for 19 others, was evident. We therefore compiled a list of unverified (designated UNV), of incompletely documented (INC), and of one fully documented but unpublished (UN-PUBL) species.

For full documentation there should be a record by a reliable observer of a nest, with eggs or

young, with a date and locality. Flightless or newly fledged young are satisfactory evidence of breeding, but the lack of any record of a nest places the species in our INC category. Space does not allow us to list all the sight records and specimen records nor the observations of singing males that appeared to be on territory. Instead, the reader may assume that we agree in general with the mapping of the summer range by Godfrey in his 1966 edition of *Birds of Canada*<sup>18</sup> and with the mapping of Gollop in his 1969 contribution to the *Atlas of Saskatchewan*,<sup>20</sup> unless notation is made to the contrary.

In truth, the ornithologist's traditional use of the term "breeding" instead of 'nesting' is a little ambiguous, as two of us learned from an encounter southwest of Swift Current. We had been told that Ring-billed Gulls were nesting at the Duncain Dam reservoir. When we arrived, two local farmers drove up in their half-ton truck to begin fishing. After a quick look showed no gulls in sight and no nesting islands in the upper end of the reservoir, we asked the farmers whether they had noticed any breeding gulls. We got an enthusiastic and affirmative response. "Oh, yes, last week there were hundreds of them, around the bend, less than a mile away." We trudged down the shore and got a

view of most of the reservoir, but not a gull was in sight. When we returned disappointed to the car, the same farmers were packing up their gear and putting their fish away. "We didn't find any gulls nesting, nor any place where the gulls could nest," we said. "Oh, was the reply, "You didn't ask about nesting. You asked about breeding. Last week there were hundreds of gulls, breeding all over the place. They were jumping on each other's backs, and going to it in great style. But we didn't see any nests."

**Great Egret INC.** There are two Saskatchewan breeding records. A pair nested in a Great Blue heronry east of Craven in 1955 and an unnamed farmer told Elmer L. Fox that he had watched from the distant hillside while the adults fed the three young in the nest.<sup>16</sup> Roney found egrets on a nest 10 m up in a tree in a heronry on Middle Quill Lake on 30 June 1976, found broken eggshells below the tree and heard young calling in the nest. He did not climb the tree.<sup>40</sup> Observations of eggs or definitely identified egret young, with exact dates, are not yet available.

**Cinnamon Teal UNV.** Shown as a query on Godfrey's map.<sup>18</sup> Males are seen across the southern third of the province every year, most commonly in the western half. The females cannot be separated in the field from the female Blue-winged Teal and it is, therefore, not surprising that we know of no records of nests or flightless young.

**Greater Scaup UNV.** Bent in 1923 gave the range as "probably still in . . . central Saskatchewan (Prince Albert), central Alberta (Buffalo Lake) . . ."<sup>6</sup> The fifth AOU Check-List in 1957 gave the range as "south to . . . North Dakota (rarely Lower Souris Wildlife Refuge, probably Devil's Lake)",<sup>1</sup> yet Stewart in 1975 did not list it as a breeding species in

North Dakota<sup>44</sup> and Salt and Salt in 1976 listed it only as a "rare transient" in Alberta.<sup>41</sup> Godfrey's map shows its range barely touching the northeastern corner of Saskatchewan.<sup>18</sup> One possible indication of breeding is for Campbell Island on Island Falls reservoir, where Stelfox noted a male on 20 June 1973, which behaved as if on territory.<sup>3</sup>

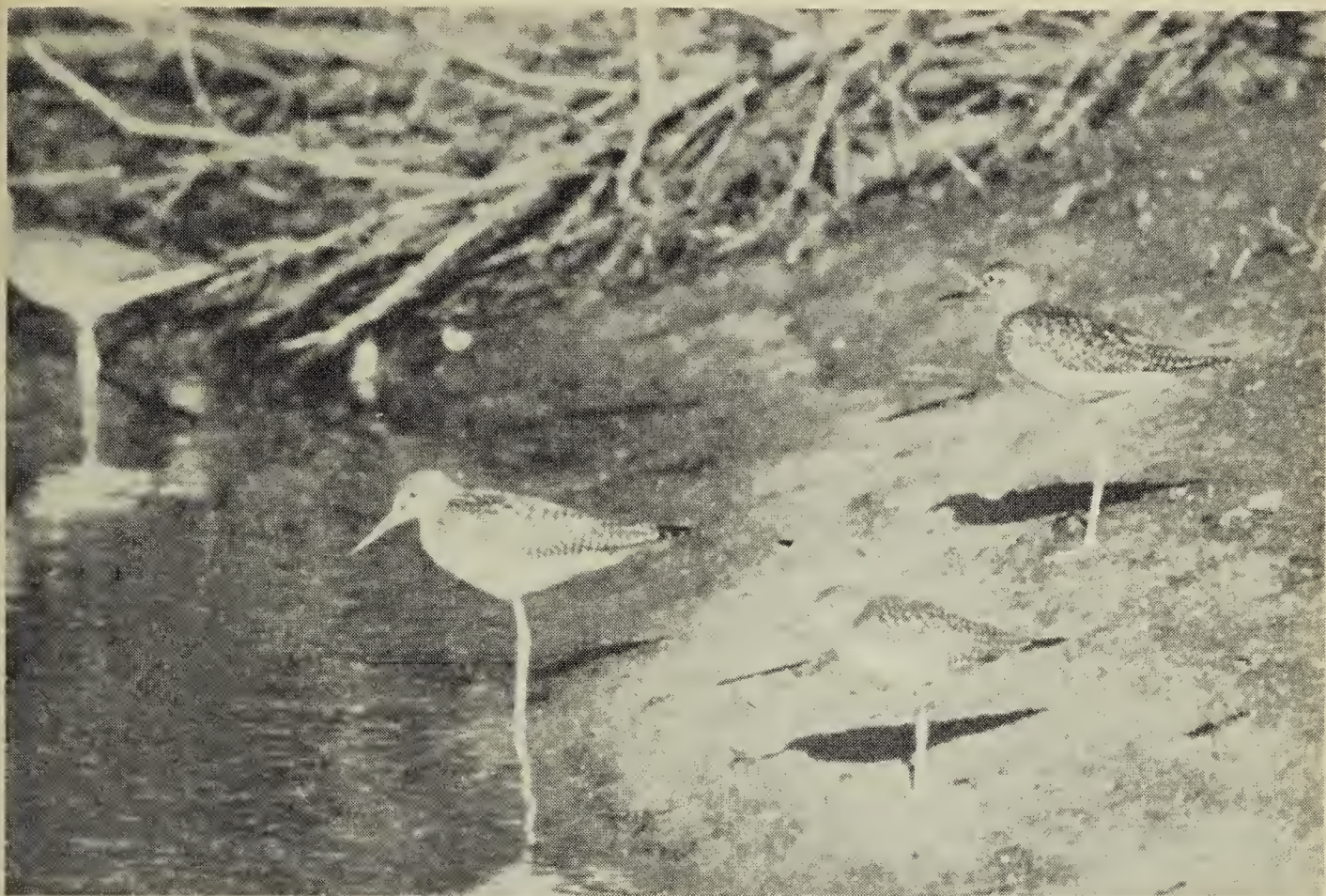
**Surf Scoter INC.** Francis Harper collected four downy half-grown young near the north shore of Lake Athabasca, southeast of the present site of Uranium City, on 28 and 31 July 1920. These were the first downy Surf Scoters known to science.<sup>33</sup> Nero found three broods on Little Gull Lake in 1962 with seven, eight and four young on 2, 6 and 9 July, respectively. The first two broods were newly-hatched and the third set were about one day old.<sup>33</sup> In 1963, Nero revisited Little Gull Lake and found a brood of six nearly full-grown young on 2 August and a half-grown brood of four on 3 August.<sup>34</sup> No nest has yet been reported from the province.

**Hooded Merganser INC.** There are only three published breeding records for Saskatchewan. John F. Ferry found two broods of four or five at the south end of Big Quill Lake on 10 July 1909.<sup>15</sup> J. B. Gollop saw a brood of seven almost full-grown young without parents on Brightwater Reservoir, west of Hanley, on 27 July 1968.<sup>21</sup> John Polson saw a female with a brood at the west end of Tobin Lake on 10 August 1976.<sup>2</sup>

The Prairie Nest Records Scheme contains a report of a nest with six eggs found on 12 June 1966, in a chimney nearly six miles west of Swan Plain. It was listed as a Wood Duck, then as a Hooded Merganser but more probably was a Common Goldeneye.

Erskine remarks that it "scarcely





*Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs*

Gary Anweiler

extends into the boreal region."<sup>14</sup> Godfrey's map shows only queries for its Saskatchewan range,<sup>18</sup> but hollow tree cavities should be checked along larger waters on the open prairie, in the parkland, and along the southern fringe of the mixed forest.

**Peregrine Falcon UNV.** While there is little doubt that this species nested along river valley cliffs, particularly rocky cliffs along northern rivers, there are no published records to our knowledge. There are rumors of former sites along river cliffs north of Lake Athabasca, without confirmation. Godfrey has no map for this species.

**Turkey INC.** A wild Turkey with at least four young in Cypress Hills Park, sighted by Wayne C. Harris on 22 July 1979, appears to represent the first breeding record for this introduced species.<sup>22</sup> No nest with eggs has yet been reported in the wild.

**Greater Yellowlegs INC.** There are two fully confirmed breeding records of flightless young. Nero found a chick one or two weeks old at Little Gull Lake on 11 July 1962.<sup>33</sup> Anweiler (mss.) caught a fully feathered but still flightless chick at Hanson Lake on 6 July 1972. No nest has been reported.

**Least Sandpiper INC.** Shown as a query on Godfrey's map. Two pairs were found on territory giving distraction displays at Hasbala Lake on 16-17 July 1963 and Anweiler found a newly hatched chick on a hummock in a bog at Milton Lake on 9 July 1964.<sup>35</sup> No nest has been reported.

**Short-billed Dowitcher UNV.** The closest evidence for breeding is for Montreal Lake where Farley M. Mowat in 1946 reported a "breeding colony that seem to belong to the recently invalidated 'hendersoni' race."<sup>32</sup> When he visited CSH in August, 1946, Mowat told about



collecting the adults for the Royal Ontario Museum collection. His field notes reported: "June 21, 3 on area of grass muskeg at south end of muskeg slough. 2 birds very agitated and flew around my head. Didn't locate a nest. One collected with bill 55 mm June 25, 5 or 6 birds at Muskeg L., 3 collected all with bills below 57 mm. All 4 skins from Montreal L."

Randall in 1942 found five dowitchers, probably of this species, at Niska Lake near Kazan Lake, but found no evidence of nesting.<sup>38</sup> Erskine said at Dore Lake "One bird appeared and objected to my presence on June 22 and 24, 1973 . . . perched and called repeatedly."<sup>13</sup> No nest or flightless young have been reported.

**Northern Phalarope INC.** Nero found a female with four downy chicks at Little Gull Lake on 2 July 1962.<sup>33</sup> No other Saskatchewan nesting reports are known and no nest has been found.

**Screech Owl UNV.** Godfrey's map shows the Screech Owl as occurring in southern Saskatchewan as far east as Regina, with a query for the Cypress Hills.<sup>18</sup> Flightless young have been found near Lyleton, Manitoba, within 15 km of the Saskatchewan boundary.<sup>27</sup> Belcher has been told of "an August 1979 record for Moose Jaw of a young Screech Owl extricated from a chimney" but a date and details of its powers of flight are lacking.<sup>5</sup> Three Screech Owls in the Prairie Nest Record Scheme are reported as nesting in old Crow and Magpie nests; these were undoubtedly Long-eared Owls. Almost all sight records are for fall, winter and spring with almost none in the presumed nesting season, yet it should be looked for in hollow trees in river valleys, particularly the Qu'Appelle, Souris and Assiniboine and their tributaries.

**Poor-will UNV.** Godfrey's map shows a small spot for the localized range in the Cypress Hills.<sup>18</sup> Elliott has described his 1965 observations along the Frenchman River, in the west block of the Cypress Hills, and in the Great Sand Hills east of Fox Valley,<sup>12</sup> but no evidence of breeding has been reported.

**Red-headed Woodpecker UNV.** The status of this species through 1966 was reviewed by Rosalind Taylor, listing some 69 observations, as far north as Prince Albert and Torch River, including three presumed breeding records.<sup>45</sup> Walter Raine's record of a nest with seven eggs at Moose Jaw on 15 June 1891 is suspect.<sup>28 37</sup> Macoun's records of "breeding" at the east end of the Cypress Hills in June 1894 and at "Stone Pile" on the Frenchman River in June 1895<sup>29</sup> are remarkably vague and do not tell us whether a nesting cavity was found, nor whether eggs or young were seen. Modern and more complete documentation would be welcome.

**Willow Flycatcher UNPUBL.** The former Traill's Flycatcher has been split by Stein into two valid species difficult to separate except by song. One of these is the Alder Flycatcher of the moist shrubby areas along the southern edge of the mixed forest in central Saskatchewan, for which we have adequate nest records. The other is the Willow Flycatcher which nests along the river valleys that project into extreme southern and eastern Saskatchewan.

There are no published records for the Willow Flycatcher, but the Prairie Nest Records Scheme has a record for a nest with four eggs found by Wayne C. Harris on 23 July 1971, in the crotch of a rose bush along a small creek near Ardath. Although farther north than anticipated, it gave a "fitz-bew" call.

**Dusky Flycatcher UNV.** Godfrey's map shows a spot representing the local distribution in the Cypress Hills, where they have been noted since H. H. Mitchell first discovered them there in 1921.<sup>30</sup> J. A. Wedgwood reported a pair "in a state of agitation" during the SNHS spring meet in the Cypress Hills, 11-13 June 1976.<sup>47</sup> No nests or flightless young have been reported in Saskatchewan. Four nest cards in the Prairie Nest Records Scheme from Conquest in 1960 and 1961 are far from this species' range, by an inexperienced observer, and obviously in error.

**Eastern Wood Pewee UNV.** The first Saskatchewan specimen of this species was collected by Ernest Thompson (Seton) in the southern edge of the Duck Mountains north of the present site of Runnymede on 14 June 1884. He found it to be "very common" in the "thick woods" or "higher, heavier timber", whereas the Western Wood Pewee commonly frequented the "open woods and willow thickets" only a few miles to the south, at his homestead.<sup>46</sup> Callin reports that they are regular in the Qu'Appelle Valley as far west as Round Lake, whereas the Western Wood Pewee is present in the valley from Echo Lake west.<sup>10</sup> Godfrey does not show its range extending into Saskatchewan. No nests or flightless young have yet been reported.

**Violet-green Swallow INC.** Violet-green Swallows can be found locally visiting holes in mud cliff faces along the southern border of the province. The first active nest, ready for eggs, was photographed on 14 June 1969, at Prairie Dog Butte east of Val Marie.<sup>25</sup> They were found flying to nest holes at Eastend on 19 June 1977, by Margaret Belcher<sup>43</sup> and at Ravenscrag in July, 1977, by Wayne C. Harris,<sup>43</sup> and as far east as the Goose Creek valley south of Con-

stance on 12 July 1975,<sup>8</sup> but in none of these instances was the contents of a nest examined.

**White-breasted Nuthatch INC.** The first Saskatchewan nest was found in Moose Mountain Provincial Park, four miles west of Kenosee Lake on 13 June 1959, by Ralph D. Carson.<sup>36</sup> It was carrying food to a nest cavity. Callin has reported another three instances of adults carrying food to nests, all in the Qu'Appelle area.<sup>10</sup> No nests have had their contents inspected. Godfrey's map shows a query placed in eastern Saskatchewan.

**Winter Wren UNV.** This species is a resident of the mixed forest, particularly of stands of balsam fir across the mixed forest as shown on Godfrey's map. Mitchell collected the first Saskatchewan specimen at Big River on 10 June 1922,<sup>30</sup> but we have no documented evidence of nesting. However, Hooper and Hooper reported an intriguing winter find: "A rounded nest of moss found on a spruce branch south of Dillabough, Jan./54, nest about four inches in diameter, contained a wren wing primary which W. Earl Godfrey reports as apparently that of a Winter Wren."<sup>23</sup> This might have been a dummy nest, since Bent reports the most common site for the active nest to be in cavities of roots of upturned trees or in low cavities in standing trees.<sup>7</sup>

**Mockingbird INC.** The only reported Saskatchewan nest record was from Dundurn where Dale Guthormsen had a male singing from 1 June 1977, with two young fledged on 21 July.<sup>43</sup> Godfrey's map does not include Saskatchewan within its range.

**Townsend's Solitaire INC.** The first Saskatchewan breeding record was of a pair feeding three recently-fledged young on 20 July 1979, in Cypress Hills Provincial Park. They



were sighted by Wayne C. Harris, who had found the pair on territory from 18 to 21 June, though he could not find the nest.<sup>22</sup> A nest has yet to be found. Godfrey's map does not include Saskatchewan within its range.

**Golden-crowned Kinglet INC.** Bob Godwin and John Polson observed a pair feeding recently fledged young in the Fort-à-la-Corne Forest Reserve during July, 1976.<sup>2</sup> This is the only definite breeding record for the province although Erskine found them regular in black spruce south of the Doré Lake airstrip in 1973 (pers. comm.). No nest has been found. Godfrey's map shows only two queries within northern Saskatchewan.<sup>18</sup>

**Bohemian Waxwing INC.** Randall observed a family of four young with flecks of down at Kazan Lake on 28 June 1942.<sup>38</sup> Shortt found three juveniles thought to have come from nests in the vicinity of Lake Athabasca on 17-19 July 1945.<sup>24</sup> No nest has been found.

**Townsend's Warbler INC.** The first breeding record of this species away from the mountains was documented by Wayne C. Harris at Fort Walsh on 18 July 1979 when he saw two adults feeding two recently-fledged young.<sup>22</sup> No nest has been found. Godfrey's map of course does not include Saskatchewan within its range.

**Nashville Warbler UNV.** Although Godfrey's map shows only a small breeding area at Prince Albert National Park,<sup>18</sup> this species is distributed in summer in the southern portion of the mixed forest across the eastern half of the province.

Dr. John Richardson collected a specimen at Cumberland House in 1827,<sup>39</sup> Ernest Thompson (Seton) noted it "in full song and evidently breeding" in the Duck Mountains near the present site of Runnymede on 11 June 1884,<sup>46</sup> and Fred G. Bard

collected the first specimen for the Saskatchewan Museum in 1939 in the Pasquia Hills.<sup>11</sup> We know of no records for nests or flightless young.

**Cape May Warbler UNV.** This species is sparingly distributed in the boreal forest from Prince Albert National Park and Kazan Lake north to Lake Athabasca, as mapped by Godfrey.<sup>18</sup> No nest has yet been reported from Saskatchewan, but it should be looked for near the top of a tall spruce.

**Black-throated Green Warbler UNV.** Erskine lists this as one of the three most typical species of balsam fir forest, scarce in young conifer stands, and rare in pure spruce.<sup>14</sup> Randall found it chiefly in young jack-pine at Kazan Lake in 1942.<sup>38</sup> Anweiler (mss) found it locally common in mature mixed woods at Big Sandy Lake. Although widely distributed across the mixed forest, no breeding evidence has yet been reported.

**Bay-breasted Warbler INC.** Erskine has described this as one of the three most typical species of balsam fir forest, particularly in the most mature stands. It is rare in pure spruce, except during spruce budworm outbreaks. It is one of five species of Saskatchewan warbler that is restricted to boreal coniferous forest.<sup>14</sup> Although widely distributed, there is only one breeding record, juvenals out of the nest being fed by adults at Flotten Lake on 26 July and 8 August 1948 by Godfrey.<sup>17</sup> No nest has yet been found.

**Orchard Oriole INC.** Saskatchewan's first breeding record was obtained at Fort San by Callin in 1974. The male began singing on 19 June and the young left the nest, on a spruce branch six feet from the trunk, on 17 July, as judged from the ground. The tree was not climbed.<sup>9</sup> Godfrey's map does not include





*White-winged Crossbill*

*Lorne Scott*

Saskatchewan within its range.

**Scarlet Tanager UNV.** At least 17 Saskatchewan records of this species were reviewed by Belcher in 1965,<sup>4</sup> and there have been sightings every few years since. The closest to a breeding record is the report of a pair watched from 7 June to 5 July 1976. They were on steep grassy slopes between two deep coulees along the bank of the Saskatchewan River near Nipawin and were seen carrying food by Bob Godwin.<sup>2 42</sup> Godfrey's map does not include Saskatchewan within its range.

**Evening Grosbeak INC.** The only Saskatchewan breeding record is Street's observation of a young bird

at Nipawin barely able to fly on 23 July 1957.<sup>26</sup> Anweiler (mss) observed a pair copulating at Jan Lake in June, 1963. No nests have been found.

**Red Crossbill INC.** In 1948 Godfrey had singing males present throughout June and the first half of July and collected juvenals which almost certainly were raised locally at Flotten Lake.<sup>17</sup> T. M. Shortt collected adults and striped juveniles, able to fly at Fond du lac on 15 and 16 July 1945.<sup>24</sup> In Saskatoon, Marie Gillespie had resident parents (one banded) bring a young bird, just able to fly, to her feeding tray on 31 May 1964 at 221 - 11th St. East.<sup>19</sup> T. J. Glassford at 203 - 9th St. also had crossbills



bring newly fledged young, barely able to fly, to his feeder, one year in the mid-1960's (pers. comm.). No nest has yet been found. There were at least two broods (adults feeding recently fledged young) in Moose Jaw in 1973 (Edith Kern, pers. comm.).

**White-winged Crossbill INC.** At Flotten Lake on 23 August 1948, Godfrey observed a juvenal recently out of the nest and still being fed by its parents.<sup>17</sup> Derek Beacham's unpublished field notes at Prince Albert report observations of a female carrying cones towards a presumed nest, and a juvenile crouched with fluttering wings while accepting food on 10 April 1968.

Godfrey's maps show a few other species whose ranges almost touch the northeast corner of Saskatchewan: Willow Ptarmigan, Parasitic Jaeger, Northern Shrike, Lapland and Smith's Longspurs. In the east one might also watch for Yellow-throated Vireo and in the south for Cattle Egret, Glossy Ibis and Field Sparrow.

NOTE: Godfrey has no maps for Trumpeter Swan, Mute Swan, Cattle and Snowy Egret, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Turkey, Whooping and Sandhill Crane, Rock Dove, Passenger Pigeon, Willow Flycatcher and House Sparrow.

<sup>1</sup>AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION. 1957. Check-list of North American birds, 5th ed. Baltimore: Lord Baltimore Press. 691 pp.

<sup>2</sup>ANWEILER, G. G. 1977. Annotated list of birds of the Nipawin area. Donald A. Blood & Associates. Prepared for Sask. Power Corporation. 30 pp.

<sup>3</sup>BARBER, S. R., H. A. STELFOX and J. D. BODEN. Wildlife (Saskatchewan). Saskatoon: Churchill River Study, Final Report 28. 272 pp.

<sup>4</sup>BELCHER, M. 1965. Status of the Scarlet Tanager in Saskatchewan. Blue Jay 23:117-119.

<sup>5</sup>BELCHER, M. 1980. Birds of Regina. Revised ed. Spec. Publ. 12, Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. 151 pp.

<sup>6</sup>BENT, A. C. 1923. Life histories of North American wild fowl, Vol. 1. Washington: U.S.N.M. Bull. 126. 244 pp.

<sup>7</sup>BENT, A. C. 1948. Life histories of North American nuthatches, wrens, thrashers, and their allies. Washington: U.S.N.M. Bull. 195. 475 pp.

<sup>8</sup>BLOOD, D. A., G. G. ANWEILER and J. POLSON. 1976. Wildlife impact study — Poplar River Thermal Project. Donald A. Blood & Associates for Sask. Power Corporation. 170 pp.

<sup>9</sup>CALLIN, E. M. 1975. First records of the Orchard Oriole in Saskatchewan. Blue Jay 33:176-177.

<sup>10</sup>CALLIN, E. M. 1980. Birds of the Qu'Appelle, 1857-1979. Spec. Publ. 13, Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. about 176 pp.

<sup>11</sup>DUNK, F. A. 1940. Annual Report, Provincial Museum, for the year ending April 30th, 1940. Regina: Dept. of Natural Resources. 4 pp.

<sup>12</sup>ELLIOTT, C. 1966. An extension of the known range of the Poor-will in Saskatchewan. Blue Jay 24:7-8.

<sup>13</sup>ERSKINE, A. J. 1974. Off into the wet green yonder: birds and plants of a boreal bog. Blue Jay 32:33-37.

<sup>14</sup>ERSKINE, A. J. Birds in boreal Canada. Can. Wildl. Serv. Report Series No. 41. 71 pp.

<sup>15</sup>FERRY, J. F. 1910. Birds observed in Saskatchewan during the summer of 1909. Auk 27:185-204.

<sup>16</sup>FOX, E. L. 1955. Great American Egret. Blue Jay 13(4):7.

<sup>17</sup>GODFREY, W. E. 1950. Birds of the Cypress Hills and Flotten Lake Regions, Saskatchewan. Ottawa: Nat. Mus. Canada Bull. 120. 96 pp.



- <sup>18</sup>GODFREY, W. E. 1966. The birds of Canada. Ottawa: Nat. Mus. Canada Bull. 203. 428 pp.
- <sup>19</sup>GOLLOP, J. B. 1965. Some 1964 bird records for the Saskatoon district. Blue Jay 23:13-14.
- <sup>20</sup>GOLLOP, J. B. 1969. Birds — breeding ranges. In: Atlas of Saskatchewan. Richards, J. H. and K. I. Fung, eds. Saskatoon: Univ. Saskatchewan, pp. 85-87.
- <sup>21</sup>GOLLOP, J. B. 1969. Review of Saskatoon 1968 bird observations. Blue Jay 27:150-153.
- <sup>22</sup>GOLLOP, J. B. 1979. Prairie Province region. Am. Birds 33:872-873.
- <sup>23</sup>HOOPER, R. and D. HOOPER. 1954. A preliminary list of the birds of the Somme district, Saskatchewan. Contr. No. 3, Yorkton Nat. Hist. Soc. 13 pp.
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- <sup>26</sup>HOUSTON, C. S. and M. G. STREET. 1959. The Birds of the Saskatchewan River, Carlton to Cumberland. Spec. Publ. 3, Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. 205 pp.
- <sup>27</sup>KNAPTON, R. W. 1979. Birds of the Gainsborough-Lyleton Region. Spec. Publ. 10, Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. 72 pp.
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- <sup>29</sup>MACOUN, J. 1903. Catalogue of Canadian Birds. Part II. Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, Queen's Printer, pp.219-413.
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- <sup>31</sup>MITCHELL, H. H. 1924. Birds of Saskatchewan. Can. Field-Nat. 38:101-118.
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- <sup>36</sup>NERO, R. W. and M. R. LEIN. 1971. Birds of Moose Mountain, Saskatchewan. Spec. Publ. 7, Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. 55 pp.
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