

NOTES ON BIRDS IN NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN, SUMMER 1976

D. M. SECOY, Dept. of Biology, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4S 0A2.

There have been few reports on the bird fauna of northern Saskatchewan, given the vast size of the area.¹⁻⁸ A short field trip, 9-15 July 1976, to the vicinities of Spalding Lake (57°14' N; 103°20' W) and the Key Lake mine (56°18' N; 103°32' W) provided observations on the midsummer avifauna of the area.

The first days were spent at a Saskatchewan Department of Mineral Resources camp located between two small lakes, unofficially designated as Ski and Party lakes, about 40 km northwest of Spalding Lake. The vegetation was a mature forest of black spruce, balsam fir and aspen poplar, with bearberry, Labrador-tea, sphagnum and reindeer lichen as the major ground covers. On 11 July, there was a 4-km traverse between two small lakes about 24 km north of Spalding Lake in an area which included, variously, thick young spruce stands, open mature spruce on granite outcrops, speckled alder swamps and wet and dry muskeg. July 12 was spent observing along the shoreline of Spalding Lake. The shore vegetation consisted of stands of black spruce and fir with occasional groves of poplar in damper areas. This lake was the only one visited which had islands of any size or number. From the plane, rocky islands, which were scattered throughout the lake, were seen to have large populations of gulls and were assumed to be breeding areas. This lake was the only area where gulls were numerous. On 14 July I flew to another DMR camp on Seahorse Lake, about 2 km west of Key Lake. This area had been recently burned and the major

cover was well-spaced, partly burned spruce. The very sandy soil did not support many grasses or forbs. The area was locally disturbed by mineral exploration.

A total of 33 species of birds was observed during this period. Information on some other species was given me by people who had arrived in the area earlier in the season.

Species List

COMMON LOON. Pairs or single birds were seen feeding and swimming on each of the larger lakes.

MALLARD. Three birds, a pair and a single female, were seen on Spalding Lake.

RING-NECKED DUCK. A single female with two large downy young was seen on 12 July.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER. A female with nine small downy young was flushed from cover in shore brush (scrub willows) early on the morning of 10 July.

RED-TAILED HAWK. Single adults were seen in trees along the shorelines of the lakes at both ends of the traverse.

BALD EAGLE. An adult flew into a tall spruce near the edge of one of the small islands in Spalding Lake. Later in the day an immature was chased along the shoreline by a Herring Gull.

SPRUCE GROUSE. A male was seen near Ski Lake. Several well-fledged young flew up from wet muskeg into small spruces on the traverse.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER. Two adults were calling and bobbing on a fallen log on the shore of Party Lake on 10 July. On 12 July, on Spalding Lake, two adults

- and two large immatures were flushed from shore cover.
- SOLITARY SANDPIPER.** Single adults were seen in two wet muskegs. Both were giving alarm notes, one while flying and the other from the top of a solitary spruce.
- HERRING GULL.** Adults and immatures were seen at Spalding and Key Lakes. From the plane the birds at Spalding Lake were concentrated around several small, rocky islands with some cover of low vegetation. A single adult flew over the Ski Lake camp on 11 July.
- BONAPARTE'S GULL.** Several adults and immatures were seen on Spalding Lake. A single adult was seen feeding in the lake at the beginning of the traverse.
- TERN.** A white tern was seen fishing at Key Lake on 15 July but was too far away to identify. Both Common and Arctic Terns have been reported from the general area.⁶
- COMMON NIGHTHAWK.** Common Nighthawks were heard every night from early evening through the night near the camps at both Ski and Seahorse Lakes.
- BELTED KINGFISHER.** A female was seen flying over Spalding Lake.
- COMMON FLICKER.** These were heard at both Ski and Key Lakes.
- WOODPECKERS.** An engineer for the exploration and mining company at Key Lake who had been bird watching in the area from April through July reported seeing Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Hairy Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, and Black-backed Three-toed Woodpeckers in the burned areas.
- YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER.** One was heard calling in a dry muskeg on traverse.
- GRAY JAY.** Pairs of these birds were seen around the camps at both Ski and Seahorse Lakes. A pair at the Ski Lake camp was scolded by a mixed group of Yellow-rumped Warblers and Dark-eyed Juncos.
- RAVEN.** One was seen calling from a spruce in dry spruce-fir forest on top of an esker near Ski Lake. Two others were seen in the open spruce stand between Seahorse and Key Lakes.
- BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE.** Several were heard and seen in the shore vegetation at Spalding Lake and small spruce trees in the wet muskegs on traverse.
- RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH.** One was calling in spruce along the shoreline of the lake at the end of the traverse on 11 July.
- AMERICAN ROBIN.** This species was seen and heard at the Ski Lake camp and in a birch grove on the shore of Spalding Lake.
- HERMIT THRUSH.** Territorial singing by this species was heard in the birch groves along the shore of Spalding Lake and from a tall spruce in a dry muskeg along the traverse.
- RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET.** A singing male and a female with caterpillars in her mouth, apparently near a nest, were seen near Ski Lake.
- YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER.** This species was common around Ski Lake in the birch and spruce. They were also heard and seen in the shore vegetation around Spalding Lake.
- BLACKPOLL WARBLER.** A male with insects in his beak called from a small spruce in a wet muskeg on traverse.
- COMMON YELLOWTHROAT.** A single male was heard at Spalding Lake. This is north and east of the breeding distribution as reported by Godfrey and was not seen in Nero's survey.^{3 6}
- RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD.** A male was singing in the top of a spruce along the shoreline of the lake at the end of the traverse.
- RUSTY BLACKBIRD.** A single male and a pair were seen near Party Lake. Another pair with insects in their beaks gave alarm notes from a small spruce in a wet muskeg on traverse.
- COMMON GRACKLE.** One was seen at the dock at Key Lake.
- PINE SISKIN.** These birds were seen in small family groups at Ski, Spalding and Key Lakes. They were usually in more open areas, such as along the shore or in open brush.



Common Loons

F. W. Lahrman

DARK-EYED JUNCO. Adult and immature birds were seen around the Ski Lake camp and in the open brush near Key Lake.

CHIPPING SPARROW. On 9 July a pair was feeding fully fledged young among fallen trees along the shore of Ski Lake.

HARRIS' SPARROW. Males of this species were heard calling from the shore vegetation of both Ski and Spalding Lakes. This is south of the breeding range as indicated by Godfrey and Nero.^{3 6}

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW. A single male was heard along the shore of Spalding Lake.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Drs. J. Lewry and G. Parslow, Department of Geology, University of Regina, and the Saskatchewan Department of Mineral Resources for accommodation and transportation and R. Barsi for assistance in the field.

¹DAVIS, D. W. and W. H. BECK. 1968. Additional bird species for Cree Lake. *Blue Jay* 26:179.

²ERSKINE, A. E. 1974. Off into the wet green yonder: birds and plants of a boreal bog. *Blue Jay* 32:33-37.

³GODFREY, W. E. 1966. The birds of Canada. *Nat. Mus. Canada, Bull.* 203. 428 pp.

⁴NERO, R. W. 1963. Birds of the Lake Athabasca region, Saskatchewan. *Spec. Pub. No. 5, Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc., Regina.* 143 pp.

⁵NERO, R. W. 1967a. Additional bird notes for Little Gull Lake, Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 25:11-14.

⁶NERO, R. W. 1976b. The birds of northeastern Saskatchewan. *Spec. Pub. No. 6, Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc., Regina.* 96 pp.

⁷SECOY, D. M. and E. MAW. 1978. Notes on summer birds at Waddy Lake, 1977. *Blue Jay* 36:207-209.

⁸WHITFIELD, D. W. A., J. M. GERRARD, W. J. MAHER, and D. W. DAVIS. 1974. Bald Eagle nesting habitat, density and reproduction in central Saskatchewan and Manitoba. *Can. Field-Nat.* 88:399-407.