



Bonaparte's Gull habitat north of Maidstone, Saskatchewan.

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ATYPICAL NEST OF BONAPARTE'S GULL

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Most authorities seem to agree that nests of the Bonaparte's Gull are made of sticks and twigs, lined with grasses and usually placed above the ground in the branches of spruce trees.^{1 2} In Saskatchewan this species seems to be most common along creeks and clear muskegs in the forest, particularly so in the western part of the province. There are a few reports of nesting south of the forest limits and the range of spruce in the prairie region. Early reports of breeding Bonaparte's Gulls on large prairie lakes are believed to have resulted from an error made by Raine⁴ who was subsequently quoted by Thompson⁶ and Macoun.³ (C. S. Houston, pers.

comm.).

In 1930 and 1931 R. D. Symons noted apparently breeding birds at Lamotte's Swamp near Jackfish Lake, Saskatchewan. This led to his discovery in 1932 of a Bonaparte's Gull nest made of dry reeds placed on matted reed clumps above the water in the marsh. It was also apparently the first known nest not in a tree. Symons and F. G. Bard visited the site in 1935 and noted that nests were lined with fine grasses and some small twigs.⁵ This discovery of marsh nesting Bonaparte's Gulls led to a series of articles by several authors in the *Blue Jay* from 1956 to 1969.

One other possible nesting south of the forest was a group of nine young Bonaparte's Gulls being fed by adults on a small lake in the Touchwood Hills south of Punnichy on the Gordon Indian Reserve (the equivalent of 3-27A-16-W2). These young were full grown or very nearly so, but were never seen flying. Occasional summering birds occur in this area as indicated by five winter plumage adults 18 June 1976 at Kandahar Beach on Big Quill Lake (W. C. Harris, pers. comm.).

On 10 June 1978 a most unusual gull nest site was visited. Discovered earlier by Dan and Tom Lamont, the nest had been under observation for some time. It was built on the mudflat of a temporary pothole (about 25 m by 8 m in size) in a cultivated field on NW 7-50-23-W3 (15 miles north and three west of Maidstone, Sask.). There was no vegetative cover since the slough had been cultivated the previous season and the surrounding field, up to about 3 m from the water was seeded to rapeseed which was less than 10 cm high. About 70 m to the west, across a road allowance, an aspen bluff provided the nearest cover.

The nest was constructed of woody roots and rootlets and lined with grasses and fine rootlets, forming a mound on the mudflat similar to what an Avocet nest in a similar location might look like. It contained three eggs and was attended by a single adult. The bird stooped at the intruders in protest — flying up and diving down in a steep U pattern. Eventually it perched on a pole of the power transmission line which ran near the slough and south across the field. Attempts to photograph it did not result in a clear enough slide for reproduction, but the bird can be identified as a Bonaparte's Gull. A visit to the nest later in the summer by Tom Lamont found it empty and

disturbed, as though by a predator, with no sign of the adult bird.

Breeding Bonaparte's Gulls are apparently not new to this area. Dan Lamont recalls observing similar birds, which he noted were smaller than the familiar Franklin's Gull, nesting among the reeds in the marsh next to Low Lake (E 2-50-24-W3; locally known as Hunter's or Foster's Lake and about 13 miles north and 4.5 west of Maidstone, Sask.) where hay was cut in the early 1930's. These nests however were similar to those found at Lamotte's Swamp, built among the reeds of the marsh. To the best of my knowledge this is the first time that a nest has ever been found on the ground.

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¹BENT, A. C. 1963 edition. Life histories of North American gulls and terns. Dover Publ., New York.

²GODFREY, W. E. 1966. The birds of Canada. Nat. Mus. Canada Bull. 203. Ottawa. 428 pp.

³MACOUN, JOHN and J. M. MACOUN. 1909. Catalogue of Canadian birds. Gov't. Printing Bureau, Ottawa. 761 pp.

⁴RAINE, W. 1892. Bird nesting in north-west Canada. Hunter Rose & Co., Toronto. 197 pp.

⁵SYMONS, R. D. 1967. Hours and the birds. Univ. of Toronto Press, Toronto. 224 pp.

⁶THOMPSON, E. E. 1891. The birds of Manitoba. Second ed. 1975.