

CROW PREDATES MALLARD DUCKLING

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On 15 July 1981 at approximately 1000 hours, I approached a pond 7 km WNW of Meacham, Sask. On stopping the vehicle, I noticed a Mallard hen with four ducklings about 15 m to my left. The hen commenced injury feigning behaviour while the ducklings swam to cover in emergent vegetation about 5 m distant. I was recording this brood count when I noticed a Common Crow flying along the water into the bulrush (*Scirpus*) where the ducklings were hiding. The crow seized a duckling by the neck with its beak and immediately the hen ceased its feigning and flew at the crow. This did not, however, interfere with the crow's visibly labored flight to a point on the ground about 30 m away (Figure 1). I went towards the crow and it abandoned the duckling. The skin had been torn away from around the duckling's neck and the bird died within a few minutes.

The duckling weighed 95 gm and measured 22 cm in length. Plumage characteristics corresponded to an age of about 16 days.²

Crow predation on ducklings is not considered to be a serious problem except locally and under atypical conditions.³ The work of Bennett showed that crow predation on ducklings increased as drought conditions became more severe.¹ Water levels on my study area were the lowest in many years. This, combined with the associated reduction in cover, could have been a contributing factor to the predation observed.

In a study of crow stomach contents, Sowls found no duckling remains in 66

adults but they were present in 4 of 55 nestlings.⁵ Kalmbach found duckling remains in 3 of 43 nestlings.⁴ A crow's nest in good repair and three fledgling juveniles were discovered within 70 m of the predation site. It is probably that this predation was the result not only of human disturbance but also of increased food demand by the young on the parental birds.

¹ BENNETT, L. J. 1938. The blue-winged teal, its ecology and management. Collegiate Press, Inc., Ames, Iowa. 144 pp.

² GOLLOP, J. B. and W. H. MARSHALL. 1954. A guide for aging duck broods in the field. Mississippi Flyway Council Technical Section. 14 pp.

³ GOOD, E. E. 1952. The life history of the American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos* Brehm. Ph.D. Thesis. Ohio State University. 190 pp.

⁴ KALMBACH, E. R. 1937. Crow-waterfowl relationships based on preliminary studies on Canadian breeding grounds. U.S. Dept. Agr. Circ. 433. 36 pp.

⁵ SOWLS, L. K. 1955. Prairie Ducks. The Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, Penn. and Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, D.C. 193 pp.



Mallard duckling.

J. B. Gollop

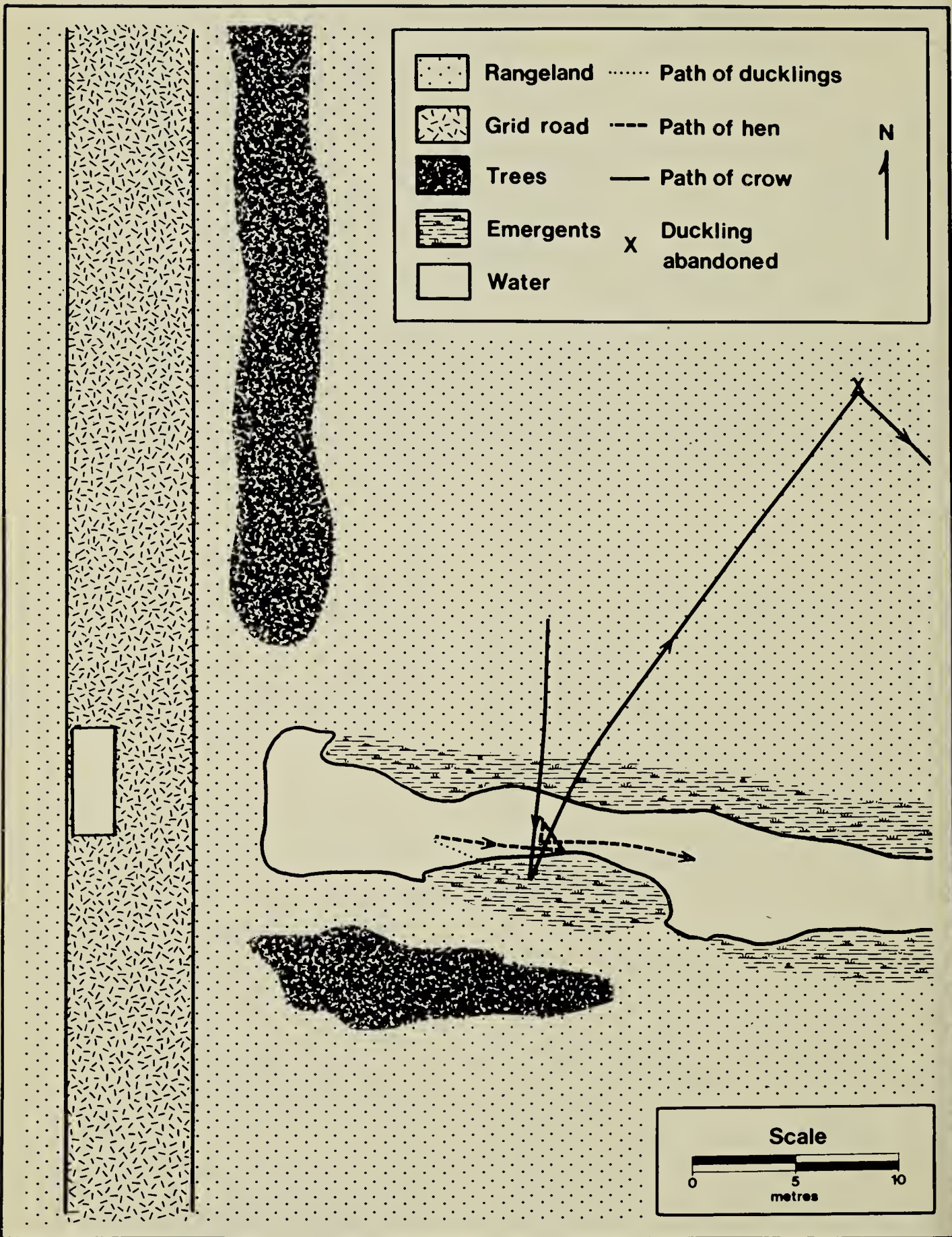


Figure 1. Movements of Common Crow, Mallard hen and ducklings.