

RARE BIRDS NEAR FORT QU'APPELLE, SASKATCHEWAN, 1984

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During 1984 there were a number of unusual birds in the Fort Qu'Appelle area. On 2 April I studied with binoculars a pair of Barrows Goldeneyes at the east end of Echo Lake at about 50 m distance. The oblong cheek-patch on the male was clearly seen. They were with a flock of Common Goldeneyes. The male Barrow's Goldeneye was seen chasing a Common Goldeneye drake away from his mate. Manley Callin in the *Birds of the Qu'Appelle* reported only one other record for the area (a single bird 12 October 1964 at Pasqua Lake).

On 16 May while watching a large flock of shorebirds along a marsh, about 1 km east of Edgeley, I saw two sandpipers that stood back from the shore, away from the Semipalmated, Least, and White-rumped Sandpipers which fed along the water's edge. They remained inactive for about 10 minutes while I watched them with binoculars at a distance of approximately 16 km. The rusty-coloured back, the light, but complete, breast band, and the slightly downturned bill identified them as Western Sandpipers. This is a new record for the Fort Qu'Appelle area. It is a species that has been only reported for Saskatchewan a few times, but it is yet unconfirmed by a specimen or photograph, so it is hypothetical on the Saskatchewan list. I was unaware of this at the time I saw them, or I would have looked up a photographer with a telephoto lens on his camera.

On 6 November Echo Lake froze over (the earliest on record). There were still plenty of ducks in the area. Normally, when this happens, the river is still open, and the ducks spread out along the river. This time it was different. Men had been working on

the PFRA dam at Fort Qu'Appelle and had the river blocked. Because there was no water flowing from Echo Lake the river had frozen over before the lake did. The ducks therefore congregated in front of the fish hatchery, along the south shore of Echo Lake, where a discharge of water kept the lake open in two spots along the shore. Just west of this a crack in the ice had opened up a few feet. The ducks massed together into these three areas. Ten species could be seen at one time. (I saw a total of 20 species of ducks at Echo Lake in 1984 out of the 29 species confirmed for Saskatchewan).

On 7 November I saw a male Barrow's Goldeneye in adult plumage crowded in with the other ducks. While I watched he dove under the water and emerged with a large crayfish in his beak. The other ducks attempted to get his meal away from him. At one point he dropped it and had to dive for it again. He finally managed to swallow it.

On the same day I saw a female Oldsquaw near the base of the crack in the ice. She was in the company of a small flock of Buffleheads. The small size and white head with dark cheek patch were noticed. The tail was pointed, but of normal length, showing that this bird was a female. This is the first record for the Qu'Appelle Valley since 1968. When I returned home and reported that I had seen an Oldsquaw swimming in the cold, November lake water, people gave me some doubtful glances until I explained that it was a duck that I had been watching.

Alice Laing, of Fort Qu'Appelle, went to the area near the fish hatchery on the

following day (8 November) and saw the Barrow's Goldeneye and the Oldsquaw.

During the Christmas Bird Count on 31 of December, I saw a female Three-toed Woodpecker on the trunk of a spruce tree at Fort San. The bird was close, so the bar-

red back and sides were clearly seen. This is the first record of this species for the Qu'Appelle Valley, although there are several records for Regina. It is an example of the many northern birds that have been pushed southward by this winter's extreme weather.

WINTER AVIAN ANOMALIES, RESTON, MANITOBA

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Reston is a village of approximately 600 people in Manitoba only 15 mi. (24 km) east of Saskatchewan and on PTH #2, southwest of Virden, Manitoba. Because it has a well-treed, 4.5-acre park with clumps of spruce, pine and tamarack and many shrubs and other trees, a four-row shelterbelt on the west side, numerous evergreens on private lots, and several birdfeeders, Reston experiences visits from a few boreal and western species of birds that might otherwise bypass the village.

On 23 October 1984 Mr. and Mrs. William Phillips observed a pair of nuthatches that sharply drew the couple's attention. The birds seemed only half the size of the usually seen White-breasted Nuthatches. It was quickly apparent, too, that both birds displayed a blackish line through the

eye and no white stripe above the eye, as on the Red-breasted Nuthatch. As well, the birds' heads were lighter in colour than that of the frequently observed White-breasted Nuthatch. Evidence plainly suggested these had to be Pygmy Nuthatches, typically found in southern B.C. pine woods.

Staying only one day on the Phillips lot, the "pygmies" foiled chances of Manitoba Rare Bird Alert Committee members observing this western pair of visitors. Interestingly enough, only two days previously near gale-force westerlies had crossed this area, possibly bearing the Pygmy Nuthatches through the Crowsnest Pass.

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For two winters now a Buffadee has visited the same Phillips lot. Last year it arrived 4 November and remained in Reston until the second week of February, 1985.