

# ARCTIC TERNS AND LAUGHING GULLS IN THE QU'APPELLE VALLEY

FRANK BRAZIER, 2657 Cameron Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4T 2W5, DAVID CHASKAVICH, P.O. Box 564, Broadview, Saskatchewan, S0G 0K0, and JOHN NELSON, 26 Lawson Street, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4R 3P7

The late Manley Callin and his twin brother, Elmer, for years annually brought together boyhood chums to explore their old haunts for birds. Since Elmer moved to Revelstoke, B.C., some years ago, he could join only occasionally. Exigencies of employment once in a while forced Don Weidl, or John Nelson, or David Chaskavich to miss a tour or so. A number of years ago Frank Brazier was invited to participate.

When Manley passed away on 6 November 1985 the survivors determined to continue the tradition in his memory. (Ill health finally forced Elmer's withdrawal.) The Third Annual Manley Callin Memorial Birding Foray was held 24 and 25 May 1988, with the southern (Ekapo) loop covered on the first day and the northern (Qu'Appelle Valley) loop on the second. At the last minute Don Weidl had to leave so only the three authors went on the Foray.

On the south side of Round Lake a flock of 33 Lark Buntings was the first notable find, on 25 May; hitherto every species counted had been expected. The most Lark Buntings Manley had recorded was eight.<sup>1</sup>

About 4:00 pm on 25 May the Foray reached Maple Grove, a resort on the north side of Round Lake. Low water levels left a long strip of cattails isolated about 30 m from the shore. The western end of the strip harboured a large collection of birds, settled and hovering,

including Black-bellied Plovers, Ring-billed and Franklin's gulls. After a passing boat put many of the birds into the air for a brief period, David asked: "What are the field marks of the Laughing Gull?" When told that the most noticeable marks are the wing-tips which are not patterned in black and white but are dark, he said "There is a Laughing Gull there!"

As birds in the air settled down, we moved along shore opposite to the mudbank they were sitting upon. Through a telescope we could see that there were Common Terns and two other terns which resembled Common Terns but which David declared had clear red bills in contrast to the black-tipped bills of the Common Terns. "Those must be Arctic Terns," he decided. The field guides at hand showed no other crestless North American tern with a wholly red bill in the breeding season.

Arctic Terns in the Valley near Fort Qu'Appelle had been reported earlier in May by Ronald Hooper. Using a telescope, he had studied two or three birds which had wholly red bills; Hooper believed they were Arctic Terns.

Using the scope we found that there were 13 species crammed onto this small mudbank. Because of the crowded conditions and the constant movement it could not be seen if the red-billed terns had shorter legs than

the Common Terns, nor could they be picked out in the air, so we saw only the one field mark, i.e. the wholly red bills.

We also studied two birds in the air which resembled Franklin's Gulls, but which had no black and white wing-tip pattern. The wing-tips were very dark; the trailing edges of the wings were white and much more noticeable than those of the Franklin's Gulls. This feature is mentioned by R.T. Peterson for the Laughing Gull, which we believed these birds were.<sup>3</sup>

This gull is on the hypothetical list of Saskatchewan birds by virtue of a sighting of two adults in flight 9 July 1975 near Chaplin, by D.B.O. and C.E. Saville who had good views of the birds with Franklin's Gulls, noting their larger size and the gray mantle shading into dark wing-tips.<sup>4</sup>

Proceeding westward the Foray added a notable Northern Goshawk,

the latest spring date ever recorded for the part of the Valley covered by Manley's book.<sup>1</sup>

To support Ron Hooper's sightings of Arctic Terns, and to add a new species (Laughing Gull) to the Qu'Appelle Valley checklist of birds from one small patch of mud within a few minutes is indeed a marvel.<sup>1 2</sup>

Manley would have approved!

<sup>1</sup> CALLIN, E. MANLEY 1980. Birds of the Qu'Appelle 1857-1979. S.N.H.S. Spec. Publ. No. 13., Regina.

<sup>2</sup> HOUSTON, C.S. and M.I. HOUSTON 1986. Additions to Callin's Birds of the Qu'Appelle. Supplement to *Blue Jay* 44(2).

<sup>3</sup> PETERSON, R.T. 1980. A field guide to the birds east of the Rockies, Fourth edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

<sup>4</sup> SAVILLE, D.B.O. and C.E. SAVILLE 1975. *The Can. Field-Nat.* 90:187.



*Arctic Tern*

Wayne Lynch