

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE NEAR MARSDEN, SASKATCHEWAN

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During a Christmas Bird Count in west-central Saskatchewan, a Mountain Chickadee was observed at a feeder at the farm home of Eileen Graham, located about 6.4 km e and 4.8 km s of the Marsden town site. The bird was first noted 12 December 1987, and it was a regular visitor until 10 February 1988. The feeder consisted of a 1.5 m by 30 cm wooden ledge 1.5 m above ground level; its attachment to an east-facing kitchen window sill afforded close-up observation. Frequent visits of the Mountain Chickadee were wit-

nessed by the author on Boxing Day, 26 December 1987 between 11:00 and 11:30 a.m. and again on 28 December 1987 for over an hour during mid-morning. Attempts to photograph the bird were unsuccessful. A search of the large, well-treed yard failed to produce further evidence of the Mountain Chickadee, however more than 50 Black-capped Chickadees were present, plus a flock of Evening Grosbeaks and several Hairy and Downy woodpeckers.



Mountain Chickadee at Marsden, Saskatchewan, on right. Black-capped Chickadee on left Eileen Graham



Saskatchewan Mountain Chickadee sightings in relation to general range

Prior to 1987 there was only one recorded Saskatchewan sighting. At Skull Creek the late Steve Mann had a Mountain Chickadee at his feed trays from 3 December 1966 through 22

April 1987.⁵ Belcher further mentioned this sighting in her biographical article about this well-known rancher-naturalist, and the species was listed as "hypothetical" in a review of the "Field

Check-list of Saskatchewan Birds," based on information received to 1 January 1981.^{1,3}

The most obvious diagnostic field marks of the Mountain Chickadee are the distinct white eyebrow line extending from the base of the bill, the pale gray sides, with back, flanks and sides tinged with buff.^{7,8} The species' preferred habitat is open coniferous forest, but it is known to forage in deciduous woods and thickets and is found in tree crowns to a much greater extent than the Black-capped Chickadee.² The call is a harsh *chickadee-dee*, *cha-dee-dee-dee*, and the whistle a three or four syllable *fee-bee-bee*, the first note always highest.² Mountain Chickadees range throughout the mountains of western North America from northern British Columbia and southwestern Alberta, south to northern Baja California, Arizona, New Mexico, and southwestern Texas, though possibly less prevalent on the coastal slope.² They are permanent residents of the Rocky Mountain regions of Alberta, regularly descending to lower altitudes and foothills in winter.⁷ They have been reported almost annually in Calgary from 1961 to 1970, with further sightings in Lethbridge in 1965 and Water- ton in 1966 and 1967.⁶

At Marsden, while the Black-capped Chickadees frequently disputed their own position in the feeding hierarchy, at no time were they observed harassing the Mountain Chickadee and the latter in turn appeared to totally ignore the Black-capped species (probably a wise

action if one is out-numbered 50:1). Only one photograph suitable for proof of identification was obtained by Eileen Graham and credit must be given to Ian Shirley, Veterinary Pathology Photography Lab, for an enlargement from the negative which appears with this article. Together with sightings at Fort Qu'Appelle and Skull Creek during the same count period, this photograph should lend some support to an argument for removing the species' hypothetical status.⁴

¹ BELCHER, MARGARET 1969. Steve Mann, rancher-naturalist of Skull Creek (1895-1968). *Blue Jay* 27(3):122-128.

² GODFREY, W.E. 1986. The birds of Canada. National Mus. Can., Ottawa.

³ HOUSTON, C.S., M.I. HOUSTON and J.B. GOLLOP 1981. Saskatchewan bird species — hypothetical and rejected. *Blue Jay* 39(4):196-201.

⁴ HOUSTON, M.I. 1988. 46th annual Saskatchewan Christmas bird count — 1987. *Blue Jay* 46(1):9-14.

⁵ MANN, S.A. 1967. Mountain Chickadee in southwestern Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 25(2):76.

⁶ SADLER, T.S. and M.T. MYRES 1976. Alberta birds 1961 - 1970. Prov. Mus Alberta Occ. Paper 1.

⁷ SALT, W.R., and J.R. SALT 1976. The birds of Alberta. Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton.

⁸ SCOTT, S.L. 1983. Field guide to the birds of North America. National Geog. Soc., Washington.