

WHERE WERE BRADSHAW'S 900 WESTERN GREBE NESTS?

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Fred Bradshaw published in the *Oologist* in 1929, the following short note titled "From Saskatchewan:"

"Last year [1928] [I] found what to me was an unusual colony of Western Grebes. Ninety-five per cent of nests were in open water. This year [1929] I visited the same spot and the lake is much lower. The old nests are all on dry land now and by actual count there were over 900 nests. These Grebes apparently are late breeders for the birds were in the water around the old site on June 5th and apparently had not yet started to build their nests. Last year [1928] on July 4th I waded through the nests and found only one young bird. I thought perhaps the first nests had been destroyed, but am now inclined to the opinion they are late breeders. The solid gray down of the young with reddish patch on the crown combine to make it a lovable looking chick."

The location of such a large colony seemed of importance, especially with the early evidence of dry-land nesting, so I looked up the Museum annual reports for 1928 and 1929, seeking clues. The 1928 collecting party was at Rush Lake, but listed only three grebe species, the Pied-billed, Eared and Horned, among 88 species of birds noted. The 1929 camp was near Val Marie and included only Horned and Eared Grebes among 75 bird species. I therefore wrote to the late Fred G. Bard on 10 May 1982 to ask whether he could help in the location of the 900-nest colony. Bard's undated reply to my query was as follows:

"I am inclined to think the Western Grebes were at Isle of Bays on Old Wives

Lake as Bradshaw visited Hugh McCrae a keen birder, fairly often." Bradshaw that year must have visited the Isle of Bay (1.75 mi. long,⁴ and 4 mi. out in the lake from McCrae's ranch) without McCrae. In 1982 Hugh McCrae, retired in Saskatoon and a regular attender of Saskatoon Natural History Society meetings, had no recollection of visiting such a large congregation of grebes.

McCrae told me that H. Hedley Mitchell of the Provincial Museum in Regina had once spent a month at his ranch on SW 6-14-28-W2nd, on the eastern shore of Old Wives Lake, 6 mi. west and 2 mi. north of the hamlet of Crestwynd. Fred Bradshaw, Game Commissioner and later Museum Director often came for a weekend, and once drove around Old Wives Lake by car, a difficult journey, using available roads and back trails. Other naturalist visitors to the McCrae ranch included collector Cyril Guy Harrold in May 1922, Neil Gilmour of Moose Jaw, and Ashley Hines of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, in 1925.

McCrae's father, Thomas, had taken Mr. Flickinger, photographer with the Ford Film Company, to the Isle of Bays in 1919 to make a movie entitled "Bird City," but the main bird colony on the island was then the American White Pelican. On another occasion Thomas McCrae had taken Fred Bradshaw, then Game Commissioner, to the island. Hugh himself had visited the island in 1920 with the Banff photographer, Byron Harmon.

Hugh McCrae had a scientific collecting permit so that he could collect unusual species, such as Dickcissel, for the

museum, from about 1925 to 1940, when he left the ranch for a position as assessor with the Department of Municipal Affairs. He retired in 1968 and regularly attended the meetings of the Saskatoon Natural History Society. He died on 21 August 1986.

Fortunately, there are definite numbers for the Western Grebe colony on the Isle of Bays for 4 other years: 300 pairs in 1928,² 64 nests in 1953,³ 48 nests in 1956, and 250 nests in 1957. In the latter 2 years they again nested on dry land.^{3,4,5} The 900 nests in 1929 reported by Bradshaw clearly are an all-time record number for dry-land nests of the Western Grebe anywhere.

- ¹ BRADSHAW, F. 1929. From Saskatchewan. *Oologist* 46:93-94.
- ² KNIGHT, L.M. 1967. Birds of the Moose Jaw Area. Moose Jaw: Moose Jaw Natural History Society. 73 pp.
- ³ LAHRMAN, F.W. 1957. Birds of the Isle of Bays, 1957. *Blue Jay* 15:106-112.
- ⁴ NERO, R.W. 1958. Dry-land nest-site of a Western Grebe colony. *Auk* 75:347-349.
- ⁵ NERO, R.W. 1959. Western Grebe colony. *Natural History* 68:291-294.



American White Pelican with abnormal bill, Saskatoon, July 1984

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