
LETTERS

OWLS

Last spring I reported having observed a Screech Owl on our farm near Southey, Saskatchewan (Nature Notes from Southey, *Blue Jay* 43(3):201). On 16 December 1985 about 11:00 a.m., we found an owl perched on top of a birchhouse in the corner of our back yard in Southey. The house is on top of a post about 12 ft. high. It was watching for a meal, I suppose, in the field adjacent to our yard and it sat there for quite some time. I was able to get a good look at it from our window and did take a picture of it. The vertical bars on its upper breast and the horizontal bars on its underparts and the lack of ear tufts convinced me that it was a Barred Owl. Why was it so far away from its usual habitat of wooded ravines? I believe this owl is also scarce and usually found in the northeast part of the Province. — *Gertrude B. Hillier*, Box 351, Southey, Saskatchewan. S0G 4P0

COLLECTING PALAEO- TOLOGICAL SPECIMENS

In 1984 I wrote an article on the legality of fossil collecting in Saskatchewan published in *Blue Jay* (Tokaryk, Tim. 1984. Collecting vertebrate palaeontological specimens in Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 42(2):75-76, and Tokaryk, Tim. 1985. Correction to collecting vertebrate palaeontological specimens in Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 43(2):127). Since then I have received some comments about the article which I would like to clarify.

Near the end of the article, I used the word 'pillaged' in reference to the collecting of fossils in Canada by foreign institutions after the turn of the century. I

regret using this word because if it were not for the American museums taking interest in our fossil beds, it might have been much longer before we realised the potential of collecting fossils, mainly in western Canada.

The point I was trying to make was that I, personally, felt that it had taken the Canadian government too long to realise this potential.

I apologise to everyone I might have offended, especially my American colleagues. — *Tim T. Tokaryk*, Earth Sciences Program, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4P 3V7

HUMMINGBIRDS — SAPSUCKERS

This photograph was taken a matter of weeks before the September 1985 *Blue Jay* arrived with an article on cooperation between sapsuckers and hummingbirds. During the summer my firm was involved in a highway surfacing project north of Maidstone, Saskatchewan. We had a site trailer set up in the shelterbelt-surrounded yard of the C & S Groceries about 20 km north of town. Several times in late August I was there for the day and noticed both species outside the trailer window, and on 15 August 1985, I snapped the picture which shows the sapsucker on the tree and the hummingbird buzzing in front of it. The sapsucker apparently visited the trees in the shelterbelt daily to eat bugs stuck to the sap, and the hummingbird followed it around, feeding on the fresh sap. The hummingbird would move in close to the sapsucker for a minute or two, feed, then retreat to a perch for a few minutes. The



sapsucker would methodically move up the tree and every few minutes the hummingbird would return for more. I assume this behaviour is most prevalent in the fall when other food sources for the hummingbird have ceased flowering. — *Christopher J. Escott, 271 Sylvian Way, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7H 5G1*

ALBINOS AND MEMORIES OF GROUSE

On 2 July 1984 I rode with David Watson of Swift Current to Stewart Valley and Riverhurst to see some fine Saskatchewan scenery. We headed south on #644 as we wished to see all the wildlife we could. After travelling southward several miles and coming to the edge of a wide hollow, we saw a car parked by the roadside. The occupants were watching three fox kits romping around the mouth of their distant hillside den.

We saw one glistening albino with the two normal red ones; we were told that there had been another which was not so white, but it seemed timid and went below. I kept the sighting quiet then, for I feared if it were seen in print, many would try to see and shoot the albinos. I hope they have survived and by doing so give others the pleasure of the rare sighting we had.

Years ago, I saw a black and white, crow-shaped bird south of Birtle. It was one of an early spring flock of crows, and although colored a lot like a magpie, it acted very much like a crow. I have also seen a partial albino robin near my home in east end Brandon, and my late wife also saw it.

I am now in my 75th year of birdwatching, and as a lad not yet 5 (years old) I had the rare experience of poking bread crumbs from the ventilator holes where both Sharp-tailed and Pinnated grouse scrambled for them. My two older sisters and I got our fingers pecked if we were too slow withdrawing them. — *Harold E. Watson, 220 Franklin Street, Brandon, Manitoba. R7A 5P3*

BIRD FEEDERS

Just as the eastern sky begins to show a rosy glow, there is a distant stirring of chirps and softly whistled trills in the large poplar bluff around our house. Soon the flocks come closer, and the birds, one by one, glide or flutter down to the feeding trays located in front of the living-room windows. Lady Luck smiled our way this year — we've never hosted so many feathered guests before. Good sized flocks of Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Grosbeaks and redpolls come regularly to the feeders, keeping the resident birds company.

For a number of years, one of our most pleasant winter activities has been feeding and watching the birds at the feeding stations. Here, in the parkland area about 25 mi. north of the Qu'Appelle Valley, usually about a dozen chickadees and a pair each of Downy and Hairy woodpeckers seem to be yard residents the year around. These birds eagerly accept offerings of suet and their antics and cheery calls brighten many a frost day. The suet is hung from a tree branch so house sparrows can't steal it.

When the first Evening Grosbeaks dropped by in mid November, sunflower seeds were hurriedly put out on a big tray (a screen window on legs) and were found by the birds. The original flock of 7 began to grow, and was near 30 by the end of January. (I wonder how they "pass the word along.")

Next to appear was a pair of redpolls, to share the sunflower seed scraps and also offerings of canary seed. They, too, increased to a flock of over two dozen.

Several Pine Grosbeaks appeared and began pecking the seeds from the ground below the trays. They were fed on the ground, first sunflower seeds and then flax, until they began using the trays. Up to 16 came in the flock; however, they are nomadic in habit, disappearing for a few days and then returning, usually when the weather gets colder. It is generally known that Pine Grosbeaks like flax but it was a surprise to observe that they preferred sunflower seeds.

On three occasions a flock of about 20 Bohemian Waxwings came calling. They ate dried Saskatoons and Chokecherries that were still hanging on the bushes. At times they flew down to the feeders to see what the other birds were eating, but seeds are not their preference (and raisins are too expensive) so they soon flew away.

We have tried cracked wheat, rolled oats and lentils but the seed-eating birds prefer sunflower seeds and canary seeds. Chickadees are also very fond of sunflower seeds.

Now that we know what foods attract the birds to our yard, we look forward to their company for years to come. — *Jean Hilton*, R.R. 1, Bangor, Saskatchewan. SOA OE0

UNUSUAL GREBE BEHAVIOR AND OTHER NOTES

In July 1985 I observed a behavior I had not witnessed before. Two Herring Gulls came flying over the slough, swooping at a Horned Grebe nest - one of the grebes, with an egg in its bill, dived; the second grebe did the same with the other egg. When the two grebes surfaced one started pulling the nest apart; the other brought material trying to patch the nest. The gulls were still flying around. The grebe seemed confused. I was prepared to spend much time observing the grebes, but a car drove into the yard and I had to leave. A gale-like wind and dust storm kept me from checking the slough the following day. When checked 2 days later the nest appeared abandoned. I keep wondering would the grebes, or could they, bring the eggs up again. Can someone shed some light on this strange behavior.

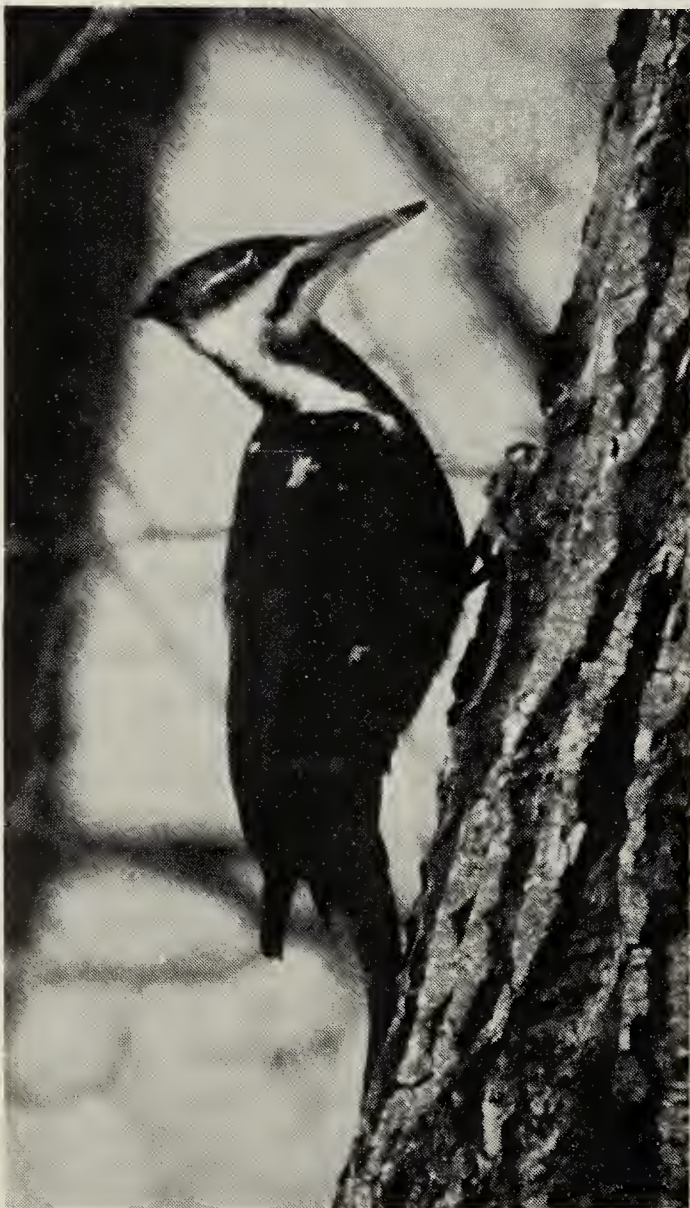
House Sparrows do not always win the fight. On 1 June 1985 I watched a Tree Swallow viciously attack a sparrow in mid-air as the sparrow tried to fly up to where a pair of Tree Swallows were nesting in a Purple Martin house. Both came tumbling down; after a wrestling match in the grass the swallow (smiling) flew back to the nest. The sparrow lay dazed, regaining its senses slowly, then flying away, with wounded pride I'm sure. The swallows raised their family with no more interruptions.

Do Great Horned Owls choose their nesting sites near food supplies? We heard much hooting during January and February and two owls were seen often, sometimes perched in trees, sleeping or watching as the men went about feeding the cattle. It didn't seem to bother the owls. Then, in early March it was discovered that a pair was nesting in trees near bale stacks, cow shed and where

cattle were fed. Mice are usually around feed stacks! What effect the owls will have on our chickens is something we'll have to wait and see. — *Flossie Bogdan*, Box 92, Spring Valley, Saskatchewan. SOH 3X0

PILEATED WOODPECKER

This Pileated Woodpecker was digging into a mature Balsam Poplar. They are active when the weather is mild in winter. The temperature when the picture was taken was about 0° C and the time about sunset. There are areas of climax forest - yet, so there is suitable habitat for them. — *Anthony Capusten*, 1139 River Street West, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. S6V 3A2



RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD

Just a note to say I had a male Rufous Hummingbird at the feeder on 12 August 1985. It was a cold day with rainy spells. I had 18 Ruby-throats also that day and the Rufous caused a great commotion. He certainly wasn't welcome; and he was gone the next day. This was my first sighting of a Rufous Hummingbird. — *Sarah Pavka*, Box 38, Livelong, Saskatchewan. SOM 1J0

SASKATCHEWAN PALAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

An increasing interest in palaeontology has been building up in Saskatchewan. People are becoming more aware that Saskatchewan has many fossils of various ages. To get a consensus of those interested in forming a Saskatchewan Paleontological Society, please contact:

Tim Tokaryk

Earth Sciences Program
Saskatchewan Museum of Natural
History
Wascana Park
Regina S4P 3V7
or telephone 787-9053 (office) or
337-3909 (home).

Please note that this is only to gauge if there is sufficient interest for such a society.

DONATION

A donation to the society has been made in memory of Bill Richards by the "Golden Eagles" of Saskatoon.