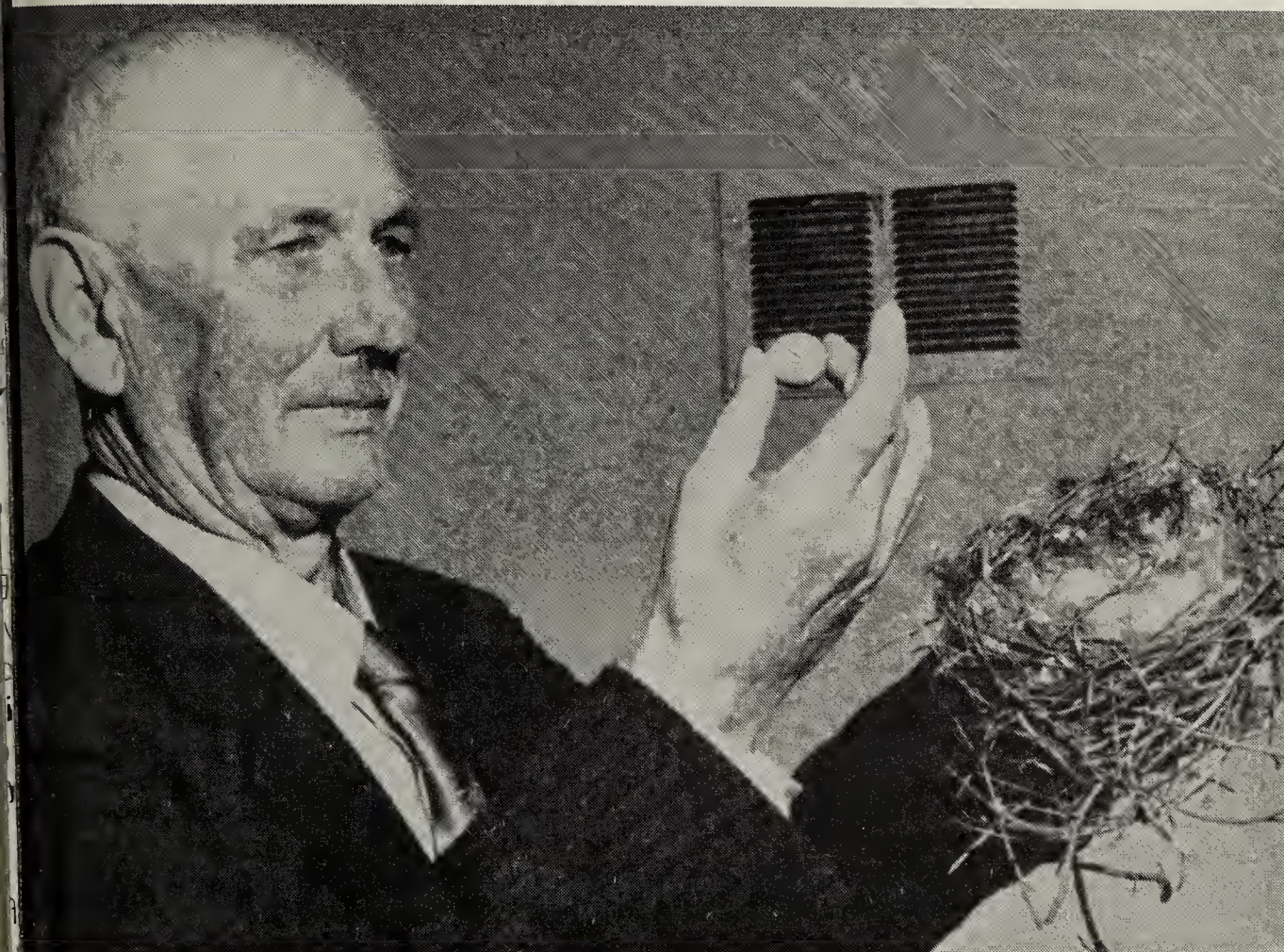


A.D. HENDERSON, ALBERTA'S FOREMOST OOLOGIST, 1878-1963*

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83725



A.D. Henderson

Anonymous

A.D. Henderson was the most prolific
Alberta's egg collectors. His writings
meticulously prepared records,
un at the turn of the century, provide
able information about bird life near
southern edge of the mixed forest —
haps Canada's area of greatest bird
iversity — from the early days of settle-
t.

Henderson located large numbers of
s, some of rare species, including
e nests of the Great Gray Owl than
other person. He made important
y observations of the nesting habits of

the Solitary Sandpiper and Bonaparte's
Gull and of the northward spread of
species such as the Black-billed
Magpie,¹⁸⁻³⁰ Mourning Dove,¹⁸ Upland
Sandpiper (a nest with 4 eggs on 18 June
1925), and Gray Partridge (first seen near
Westlock on 21 May 1925).⁵⁵

Henderson was born in Barrie, Ontario,
on 21 March 1878. He attended public
school in Barrie but also had some
schooling in France, Switzerland,
England and at Coronado High School in
San Diego, California, before finishing
high school back in Barrie. He then

clerked in his father's hardware store for 2 years before heading west with his boyhood friend and lifelong associate, Bob Dunlop, who was 10 years his senior.² The pair arrived by train in Wetaskawin, Alberta, on 2 May 1898, travelled to Rocky Mountain House, rafted down the river to Edmonton, and returned with seven horses and camping outfit to winter southwest of Rocky Mountain House at Prairie Creek.⁵⁹

In 1899, Henderson began ranching at Rossington, near the Pembina River, 60 km northwest of Edmonton. Four years

later he and Bob Dunlop opened trading posts, at Fort Assiniboine, Lac Nonne and at Belvedere (the former McDonald's Crossing ferry site on Pembina River) and for 2 years Henderson became a fur buyer in Edmonton. In 1914 he moved into the Peace River country to trap and hunt, leaving remaining store at Belvedere in capable hands of Annie Myrtle Beaton, whom he returned to marry on 12 December 1916. For the next 2 years the couple operated a store at Battle River north of Castor. They then returned to Belvedere and in 1919 purchased property



Solitary Sandpiper near nest site, top right on nest, lower right egg photographed by G.L. Holm

at the north edge of Lac la Nonne, where he later had up to 33 boats available for summer rental at "Henderson's each" (now Elk's Beach). Although popular, in 1925 he was defeated as the conservative candidate for the Alberta legislature when the governing party, the United Farmers of Alberta, promised a new railroad into Barrhead, across the Pembina River to the north of Belvedere. Henderson later said that he was much happier with the advent of the railroad in 1927 than he would have been as a member of the legislature.³

In the early years, Henderson collected only a few specimens, such as sets of Northern Goshawk eggs taken near Belvedere in 1903 and 1906. After settling down at Belvedere, egg collecting took up much of his time each May and June. His wife did the driving, usually "over terrible roads." South of Belvedere and east of Lac la Nonne there was another, marshy lake, Majeau Lake; here, many of Henderson's most important nest finds were made, such as the five sets of Solitary Sandpiper eggs found in nests previously built by American Robins in 1914, 1922, 1923,²³ ⁴⁰ by a Rusty Blackbird in 1927,⁴⁶ and by an Eastern Kingbird in 1941.⁵⁸

By the 1920s, Henderson's zoological expertise attracted a number of visitors, beginning in 1923 with Richard C. Harlow, head football coach at Colgate University; George Stuart 3rd, president of the Girard Trust Company in Philadelphia; and J. Fletcher Street of Beverly, New Jersey. Using the Henderson home as headquarters, the four zoologists ranged as far as the Pembina River and Lake Majeau. Annie Henderson, in a horse-drawn buggy, supplied their camps with bread and butter. Harlow, a big man and an avid tree climber, collected at least 100 sets of 40 species that year, including Red-billed and Eared Grebes, Blue-headed, Northern Goshawk, Broad-winged and Red-tailed hawks, and

Solitary and Spotted sandpipers. Harlow's most noteworthy find was two nests of the Connecticut Warbler on 15 and 20 June, with Henderson finding a third nest on 25 June. These were the first Connecticut Warbler nests for Alberta and the second, third and fourth for North America.⁵¹

Harlow returned in 1924, this time with Richard Rauch, the swimming coach at Colgate University. Harlow took 67 sets of 41 species, including Red-necked Grebe, Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Downy Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Least Flycatcher, Black-capped Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Northern Waterthrush, and three sets of Palm Warblers eggs, on 4, 11 and 14 June [WFVZ]. Rauch took five sets of Greater Yellowlegs and one each of Bonaparte's Gull and Saw-whet Owl [WFVZ]. Harlow and Henderson together found downy young of the Short-billed Dowitcher.⁶⁵

At the specific prodding of A.C. Bent, Henderson and his wife took a trip by car in 1925 across the Athabasca River at Fort Assiniboine and along the old Klondike Trail. They then took a team and wagon another 17 mi. northeast to muskeg lakes suspected of having nest sites of Bonaparte's Gull, and later retraced their steps and went 18 mi. west to a muskeg area beyond Goose Lake. Henderson was successful in finding six nests of the desired species; both A.C. Bent's introduction to Henderson's article in *Auk*⁴³ and Randall⁶⁴ claimed that Henderson was the second person in North America to find a nest of this species (Roderick Ross MacFarlane, a Hudson's Bay Company factor had collected 37 sets in the Anderson River area just south of the Arctic Ocean, in the late 1860s). Even more important, on this trip, Henderson collected the first adults, nest and eggs of a new subspecies of the Short-billed Dowitcher that was later named for him, *Limnodromus griseus hendersoni*.⁴⁹ ⁶⁵

Harlow and Rauch returned in 1926, this time accompanied by William Rowan, professor of zoology at the University of Alberta, who continued visits for 30 years. That year they took 67 sets of 37 species, including two more sets of the Connecticut Warbler⁵¹ and two more sets of the Short-billed Dowitcher.^{58 65} Harlow also took sets of the Olive-sided Flycatcher (three eggs, 15 June 1926); Western Tanager (four eggs, 6 feet out on the limb of a Jackpine, 60 feet above the ground, 6 June 1926); Ovenbird (five eggs on ground, 9 June 1926); and Northern Waterthrush (five eggs on upturned roots of spruce one foot above water, 17 June 1926) [WVZ].

Henderson was also visited in 1926 by Percy Taverner, Hamilton Laing and C.G. Harrold, who were collecting bird skins for the National Museum of Canada. Taverner stayed from 24 May through 26 July, but Harrold continued on until the end of September and Laing until 26 October. Harrold took yet another set of the

Connecticut Warbler on 20 July, which Taverner collected sets of the Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, American Coot, Sora and Slate-colored Junco and published notes on 205 species.⁶⁸

T.E. Randall spent several weeks with Henderson in 1927, taking nine sets which included eggs of the Common Snipe, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Song Sparrow and Red-breasted Grosbeak. [Randall's achievements and particularly his articles about wading birds in the prestigious set volumes, *The Birds of the British Isles* have been mentioned in a previous article.⁶⁰] F.M. Phelps of the Cleveland Tool Company visited in 1928 and 1931, and with Henderson found three nests of Sandhill Crane in the muskegs near Assiniboine.⁵³ H.W. Holbin of Cambridge, England, visited in 1929. Dr. Samuel Dickey of Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, came in 1940 and 1941. Edward J. Court, an engraver with the United States government and excel-



American Coot on nest

G.W. Beyersbe

...ee climber in spite of being handi-
apped following poliomyelitis, came in
1943; one egg set of Lesser Yellowlegs is
ow in the WFVZ. Frank L. Farley of
amrose, Alberta, visited in 1944, ac-
ompanied by Dr. P.T. Burtis of Oakland,
alifornia, who visited again the next
ear.⁵⁹ Two sets of Common Loon eggs
ken by Burtis are in WFVZ. Lieutenant-
olonel J.E. Scott, O.B.E., from Inverness,
otland, a former commissioner of a
ovince in India, visited in 1939 and
47.⁶⁶

Mr. and Mrs. F.F. Harris of Boston
ited in 1942.⁵⁹ Such visitors were usual-
guests in the Henderson home, some-
nes for a month or more. Henderson
o maintained an extensive correspon-
nce with other enthusiastic oologists,

particularly A.C. Bent, (to whose *Life His-
tories* he contributed a number of notes
and photographs) and Major W.M. Con-
greve, editor of *The Oologist's Record*.

Henderson's last published trip to the
"muskegs" was in 1948 when he found
two nests each of the Greater Yellowlegs
and Lesser Yellowlegs and three nests of
the Bohemian Waxwing. That year, when
their tent burned down with their sleeping
bags and extra clothing, they were forced
to find shelter at the nearest neighbor's
farm at 1 a.m.⁵ In 1951, in spite of "the
infirmities of old age," Henderson hiked
through snow in March to find three nests
of the Canada Jay, and later one each of
the Common Goldeneye, Pileated Wood-



er Yellowlegs

G.W. Beyersbergen

pecker and a Black-capped Chickadee set of 12 eggs.⁶

Henderson's construction of a nestbox for Common Goldeneyes in 1920 was possibly the first attempt to use an artificial duck-nest structure in Alberta. After having success the next June,³⁷ he then put up some smaller boxes in the hope of attracting a Bufflehead, but settled in 1925 for use by American Kestrels instead.⁵⁵

Henderson, nearly the equal of T.E. Randall in nest-finding ability,⁶⁰ found 14 nests of the Broad-winged Hawk by 1923,³² and 27 nests of the Northern Goshawk during his lifetime.⁴⁷ In 1924 alone he found 17 nests of the Great Horned Owl (the first incubating on 23 February),³⁹ seven nests of the Northern Hawk Owl, the first incubating on 5 March, and five nests of the Northern

Goshawk⁴² That year a Boreal Owl nest with four eggs was taken on 15 April and another with five eggs on 25 April. In 1925 he found another four nests of hawk owl, but lost the services of one of his paid climbers after a Northern Hawk Owl took the climber's cap off in his first sweep and then struck the climber "fairly on the face," cutting him in seven places including the forehead, nose, cheek, and the corner of one eye. Henderson hired a new climber, Harry, who was hit at the next two hawk owl nests, but avoided facial injuries. Henderson found only a few hawk owl nests in 1926, one in 1927, and none thereafter, as the southern edge of the mixed forest was converted into farmland.⁵⁵ The arrival of a son, Archibald Douglas Henderson in May 1927,³ also contributed to a decrease in field activities for awhile, though the boy later accompanied his father and mother on collecting trips.



Northern Hawk Owl

Wayne L. ch

Sometimes a single hole in a hollow tree was worth visiting in successive years. One such hole was home to a Pileated Woodpecker in 1924, a Bufflehead in 1925, a Northern Saw-whet Owl in 1926 and a Bufflehead in 1927. Another tree with two holes, one above the other, had a similar history, with the lower hole used by Pileated Woodpeckers in 1923, the upper hole by Pileateds in 1924, the lower hole by Northern Saw-whet Owls early in 1925 followed by Buffleheads later in the season in 1925 and 1926, while a Common Goldeneye used the upper hole in both 1925 and 1926. A nest used by a goshawk in 1906, 1913 and 1914 had a Great Horned Owl tenant in 1915 and 1923, before a goshawk used the same nest again in 1925.⁴⁶ Another nest was used by goshawks in 1913, Great Horned Owls in 1914 and Great Gray Owls in 1915. One nest visited in 1951 contained three active Common Goldeneye nests in cavities that were 4 and 6 feet distant, one above the other.⁶

Henderson found at least 14 nests of the Great Gray Owl. The master's thesis of K.M. Collins listed only 72 Great Gray nests in all of North America to that time and showed that between 1913 and 1925, at the height of his efforts, Henderson found more gray owl nests (13) than all other collectors in North America combined.⁴

Henderson politely corrected a misidentification made by F.B. Phillips, who claimed to have found a Rusty Blackbird nest in North Dakota. Henderson pointed out the different eye color of the two birds, the Rusty with a bright yellow iris, but also noted that all of his 14 Brewer's Blackbird nests on dry land near Belvedere had a lining of horsehair while not one of the 32 nests, all near water, of the Rusty Blackbird in the same area had a horsehair or moosehair lining.⁵⁷

By waiting, often for hours, for a good enough view of the adults to make



Great Gray Owl with young

R.E. Gehlert

identification certain, Henderson only rarely collected the adult bird at a nest for identification purposes; the Short-billed Dowitcher was one of the rare exceptions.³ All eggs were tested in water before he left the nest site; if the egg floated, this meant it was in advanced incubation, and was immediately returned to the nest.³

Henderson gave up egg collecting in 1954 and retired into Barrhead in 1957. In 1959 a banquet was held in his honor by the Barrhead Chamber of Commerce. Unable to attend due to illness, he was presented at his home with an autographed copy of *Birds of Alberta* by the president of the Chamber of Commerce and the local Member of Parliament.⁸ Following his death on 10 October 1963, Annie Henderson sold his collection of 8000 eggs of 930 species, many obtained through world-wide exchanges,

to Werner Haller of Switzerland.^{8 9} A small portion of his collection remains in California in the WFVZ where, at the time of a week's inventory in November 1963, there were 314 Henderson sets of species, including Common Loon (1), Solitary Sandpiper (15), Short-billed Dowitcher (2), Bonaparte's Gull (1), Northern Hawk Owl (5), Great Gray Owl (6), Boreal Owl (2), Pileated Woodpecker (9), Gray Jay (14) and Rusty Blackbird (16). In Canada, there are Henderson sets in the ROM for Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, White-winged Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Northern Goshawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Spruce Grouse, American Coot, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper (2), Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, G



Archibald and Annie Henderson

Anonym

Horned Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Gray Jay (2), Bohemian Waxwing (2), Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, and Rusty Blackbird.

Henderson's achievements are commemorated in the subspecific name, *Limodromus griseus hendersoni*.

Acknowledgements

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tories, the treasured mimeographed autobiography of Henderson, and a photograph of Henderson and his wife. A. Douglas Henderson provided a photograph of his father. Other libraries and museums provided assistance in many ways.

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Great Gray Woodpecker Larry Morgotch

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Gray Jay, often called Canada Jay or Whiskey-jack

Wayne L. ...

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WHOOPING CRANE VIEWING TOUR — 6 OCTOBER 1990

The endangered Whooping Crane is a most spectacular bird to see, being the tallest bird in North America. The annual Society tour to view migrating Whooping Cranes will depart from Saskatoon on Saturday, 6 October, 1990. The tour will travel in a passenger van and depart about 8:30 a.m. for a tour of up to 400 km in length. We plan to view some Whoopers in the morning and then observe concentrations of geese and Sandhill Cranes at sunset. Previous tours have witnessed the thrilling spectacle of 10,000 Sandhill Cranes arriving on the river at sunset. We will be using our Society spotting scope so that participants should get a good view of the Whooping Crane without disturbing the birds. The tour usually ends about 9:00 p.m.

The tour price, including lunch and transportation, is \$65. to SNHS members. Application forms are available by phoning (306) 955-3242, 343-1148 or 665-1555 in Saskatoon or 757-4476 in Regina. Application forms are also available by writing SNHS, Box 4348, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4P 3W6