

HARLEQUIN DUCK IN MANITOBA: AN UPDATE

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Introduction

In 1973 McNicholl reviewed ten observations of the Harlequin Duck in Manitoba.¹⁰ Of the ten, three were on the Hudson Bay coast, one was near The Pas, and six were in south-central Manitoba. Dates were lacking for three reports; the remainder consisted of two summer records at Churchill, and three spring and two fall records inland. All were single birds, except for three at Shoal Lakes in spring 1898, and two immatures at The Pas in September 1950.

Recent records indicate that the Harlequin Duck now occurs regularly in small numbers at Churchill, mainly in summer, and is probably a regular fall migrant (albeit very rare) in the south. Our interest was sparked by the presence of an adult male at Seven Sisters Falls hydroelectric dam in southeastern Manitoba (50°7'N, 96°1'W) in summer 1988. Here, we review recent observations of Harlequins

in the province, with special attention to the Seven Sisters Falls record, and discuss possible origins of these birds.

Summer Record at Seven Sisters Falls

The Seven Sisters Falls bird was first seen swimming in the tail-race of the dam by Mel Dagg, who reported it in his outdoor sports column in the Winnipeg Free Press on 6 August 1988. Dagg had identified it as a Harlequin Duck on 13 or 14 July, and possibly also saw it on 1 July (pers. comm. to Taylor). The duck was independently discovered by Jonathan Thompson on the evening of 24 July 1988, as it was foraging in the rocky pool just below the dam. The bird was observed for over 2 hours during which it floated downstream several times, only to return to the tail-race waters where it preferred to feed. Observation and photography of the ornately colored drake Harlequin were facilitated by its unwary nature (Taylor 1988: 1.) This lack of concern about ma-

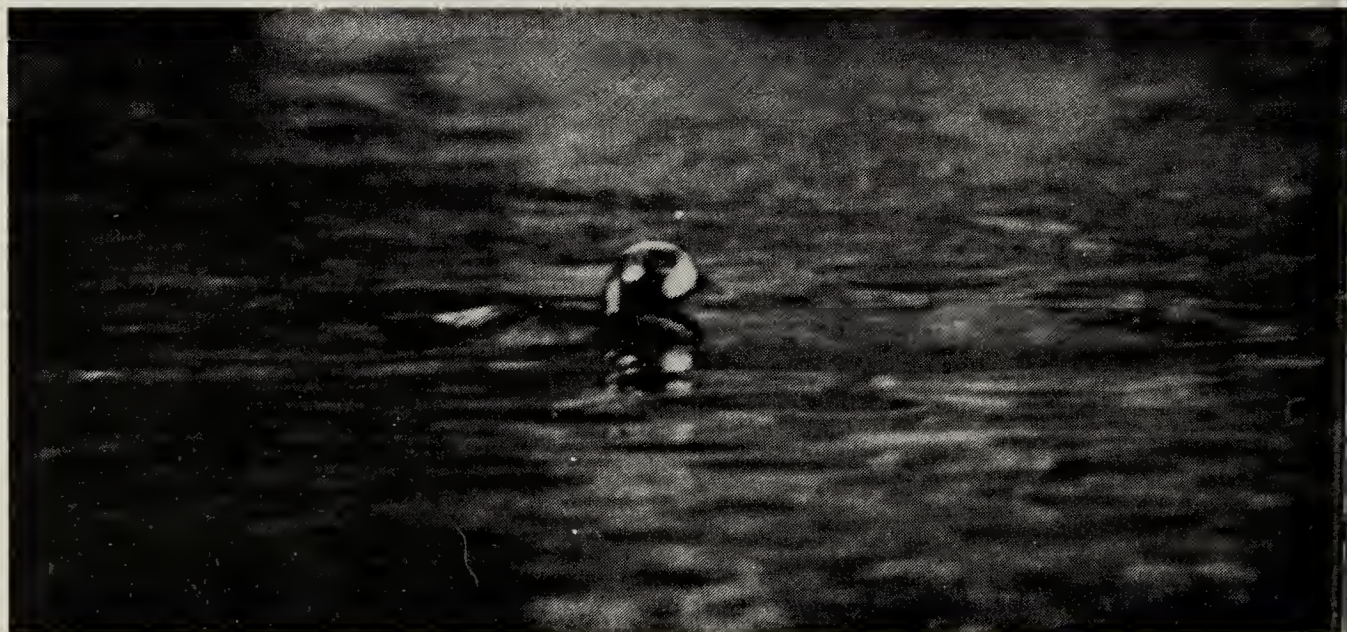


Figure 1. Harlequin Duck at Seven Sisters Falls dam, Manitoba (6 August 1988)

exhibited by Harlequin Ducks throughout their range, and probably stems from the fact that they are not a frequently hunted species.¹¹

The Harlequin was still present on 6 August 1988, when Taylor found it resting beside a rocky pool below the dam, and later photographed it swimming in the pool. It frequented this site until at least 8 August 1988, and was also seen by Martin Siepman. No further visits were made until early September, when the bird could not be found.

When seen by Dagg and Thompson in July, the Harlequin appeared to be in full alternate plumage. In August, however, it showed evidence of advanced prebasic molt in the body plumage, although it was still capable of flight. At this later date, the body markings were reduced and faded giving the body plumage a sooty or lead-colored appearance. The head and neck tracts were in the early stages of molt and

still appeared relatively distinct. The lower neck tract still displayed a well defined, nearly complete white collar marking which is much reduced in the drab basic plumage.¹

This is the first record of a Harlequin Duck in southern Manitoba in either July or August. There is a precedent, however, since a male was photographed on 11 July 1985 at an island in Lake of the Woods, near the Ontario-Minnesota boundary approximately 25 km from Manitoba.⁷ It was reported as the first summer record for Minnesota, but another male was observed in the northeastern corner of the state 3 days earlier.⁴ The Harlequin Duck is a rare but regular migrant and winter visitor in that state, primarily on Lake Superior.⁴ Also, a female was seen by M.M. Tremaine, 13-14 July 1966, on the Puskwakau River in east-central Saskatchewan.^{10 16} There is a more recent summer record near Hafford, Saskatchewan, where M. Wiercinski saw a

Table 1. HARLEQUIN DUCK RECORDS IN SOUTHERN MANITOBA, 1977-1988*

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Reference</i>
19 Nov. 1977	Victoria Beach, L. Winnipeg (LW)	Knapton et al. (1978)
Oct. 1979	Grand Beach, LW	AB 34:173 (1980)**
27 Nov. 1979	Lockport, Red River	AB 34:173 (1980)
Oct. 1980	Lockport, Red River	AB 35:195 (1981)
Nov. 1983	Grand Beach, LW	AB 38:215 (1984)
Sept. 1984	Lake Manitoba Narrows	W. Neily, pers. comm.
27 Oct. 1984	Grand Marais, LW	R.F. Koes, pers. comm.
Nov. 1984	Grand Marais, LW	R.F. Koes, pers. comm.
Oct. 1986	Patricia Beach, LW	AB 41:104 (1987)
Nov. 1986	Grand Beach, LW	AB 41:104 (1987)
Nov. 1987	Victoria Beach, LW	AB 42:92 (1988)***
1.-8 Aug. 1988	Seven Sisters Falls, Winnipeg River	This article
1 Nov. 1988	Pinawa road bridge, Winnipeg R.	R. Tkachuk, pers. comm.
June 1989	Steinbach sewage lagoons	D. Fast, pers. comm.
June 1989	Pine Falls, Winnipeg R.	P. Killeen, fide R.F. Koes
2 Nov. 1989	Victoria Beach, LW	R.F. Koes, pers. comm.

* Sightings were single birds except for the 7-15 Nov. 1987 observation where three birds were observed

** B = *American Birds*

*** incorrectly cited as Oak Hammock Marsh

male 11 July 1984. Spring records in Saskatchewan, Minnesota and southern Manitoba all extend into June.^{4 10}

Recent Records Elsewhere in Southern Manitoba

A female or immature male Harlequin at Victoria Beach, Lake Winnipeg, 12-19 November 1977, was apparently the first seen in southern Manitoba since 1963.^{8 10} Since then, however, there have been sightings in 8 of 12 years from 1978-1989. All known records are listed in Table 1. By coincidence, one sighting (November 1988) included a female or immature male on the Winnipeg River, just 3 km downstream from Seven Sisters Falls dam.

Most of the recent Harlequin sightings were between late October and late November either on Lake Winnipeg or major rivers (Red and Winnipeg) draining into that lake. All fall records involved females or immature males, whereas the two June 1989 records, like the Seven Sisters bird, were adult males. Most were singles, but a group of three was found by Koes and seen by many others at Victoria Beach, 7-15 November 1987 (precisely the same location as the 1977 bird). Five Harlequins, an unprecedented total, were seen in North Dakota in fall 1987.⁹

This increased frequency of Harlequin records in southeastern Manitoba since 1977 parallels an increase in observations of Surf Scoters and Black Scoters in the region.¹⁴ At least in part, this reflects recent interest in seabird watching around the large lake systems of central Canada. There is some indication, however, of a possible increase in wintering Harlequin ducks on the lower Great Lakes since 1981, so a real increase in the number of Harlequins in southern Manitoba is possible.¹⁹ Only a tiny fraction of Manitoba's lake and river shoreline is regularly visited by birders, so annual occurrence in late fall is likely.

Recent Records at Churchill

The first well-documented record of Harlequin Duck at Churchill occurred recently as 1970, but the species occurs there regularly in small numbers with a maximum count to date of 18 birds.^{10 12 18} Nearly all Churchill sightings have been in rocky areas near the Churchill River mouth at Cape Merry (Fig. 1). Representative records, which extend from June to October, are listed in Table 2. This increase in sightings probably reflects a real increase in numbers, though Churchill has become extremely popular with birding tours in recent years. Its bird-life had been studied in some detail for several decades prior to 1970 and the Harlequin was unlikely to be overlooked.⁵

Unfortunately, early records of Harlequin Ducks from the Hudson and James Bay region lack precise locality data. E.E. Thompson cites an interesting report by Hutchins in 1782 that Harlequins occurred on small rivers about 90 miles inland from the Hudson Bay coast.¹⁵ This report can be traced to Hutchins' sojourn at Albany, Ontario, based on a search of the Hudson Bay Company archives in Winnipeg (W.P. Neily, pers. comm.). Freeborn mentions one specimen collected in the Belcher Islands in 1927.² The closest known breeding locality to Churchill is near the Quebec shore of Hudson Bay. This population is disjunct from the known eastern breeding range, which extends to eastern Baffin Island and Ungava Bay on the north coast of Quebec.³

Possible Origins for Manitoba Harlequin Ducks

Harlequin Ducks exhibit a patchy, discontinuous distribution in North America. There are two fairly well-defined subpopulations. The Atlantic-eastern Harlequin Duck population breeds from Baffin Island south to Newfoundland, and winters primarily from the outer Gulf of St. Lawrence south to Long Island, New York.^{6 11} The more numerous

Table 2. HARLEQUIN DUCK RECORDS AT CHURCHILL, MANITOBA 1977-1988*

Date	Number/Sex	Reference
July 1977	4m, 3f	Walton et al. ¹⁸
Sept. 1977	3f (? imm. m)	AB 32:221 (1978)**
June 1978	1m	T.H. Davis, pers. comm.
July 1979	6m, 2f	AB 33:872 (1979)
Aug. 1980	9 unspecified	AB 35:195 (1981)
Oct. 1982	5 unspecified	AB 37:193 (1983)
2 June 1985	1 unspecified	M. Masse & D. Cargill, fide R.F. Koes
June 1985	1m	G. McCaskie & P. Lehman, fide R.F. Koes
July 1986	1m, 1f	R.F. Koes, pers. comm.
July 1988	6m, 2f	R.F. Koes, pers. comm.
June 1989	1m, 1f	R. Bowers & G. Langham, fide R.F. Koes
June-9 July 1989	2m	D. Hatch & R.F. Koes, pers. comm.
Oct. 1989	1f (? imm. m)	C. Johnson, pers. comm.

*Not a comprehensive list
 AB = *American Birds*

Pacific or western Harlequin Duck population breeds from near the arctic coast of the Yukon along the upper coastal plain of Alaska south to northern California and eastward through interior North America to Alberta south through Montana. Most of the western birds winter along the Pacific coast from the Aleutian Islands to northern California.^{6 11} Despite reports by some sources, in-

dividuals from these two populations cannot be reliably distinguished based upon variation in plumage or body morphology.

Most Harlequin Ducks sighted in southern Manitoba in both summer and fall probably arrive in the province as the result of postbreeding molt or dispersal movements from the western Harlequin



Figure 2. Harlequin Ducks at Churchill, Manitoba (July 1988)

Tom Will

population, particularly those birds breeding on the east slope of the Rockies in Alberta and the northwest United States. This would be an excellent explanation for the occurrence of adult male Harlequins in southern Manitoba. Male ducks often make extensive molt migrations to large lake systems which provide safety and abundant food resources during the flightless period.¹³ Erratic movements are also documented for juvenile ducks during the postfledging period when young birds may move from the natal areas during periods of premigratory restlessness.

Another more speculative theory for the origin of Harlequins in southern Manitoba is the possibility of a small, but growing breeding population outside the known nesting range, perhaps in the river-braided boreal forest region east of Lake Winnipeg. Much of this region is characterized by habitat similar to that available to many of the interior dwelling Harlequin Ducks. Many of the fall sightings may represent birds moving south from these breeding areas through the Great Lakes region to eventually arrive on the Atlantic coast wintering areas. This pattern is often observed in Surf and Black scoters, Buffleheads, and Common Goldeneyes.¹⁴

The Harlequin Ducks recorded during summer at Churchill, Manitoba may represent westward post-reproductive movements from birds breeding on the Ungava Peninsula or Baffin Island. Again, there is the potential that these birds are part of a small and widely scattered remnant breeding population in the Hudson Bay lowlands. Whatever its origins, the Harlequin Duck represents a welcome and ornate member of the avifauna of Manitoba.

Acknowledgements

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TURKEY VULTURES IN THE BIG MUDDY

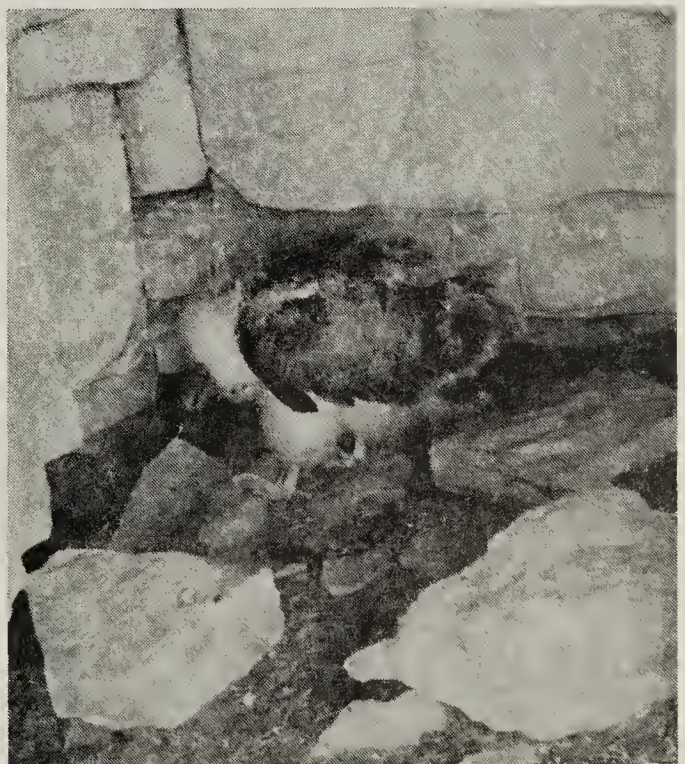
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During the summer of 1989 two Turkey Vulture nests were found in the Big Muddy Valley of southern Saskatchewan by the author and Martin Bailey. Both nests were located in rock outcroppings on dry hillsides.

A small cave under the lower edge of a rock shelf held the young at one site. Although getting into the cave was made difficult because of the narrow opening and the slight incline leading to the flat dirt floor, photographs taken on 11 July 1989 show two young covered in whitish fuzzy down with protruding black wing feathers, black faces and whitish legs. The landowner also photographed the young when they emerged from the cave at the end of July. He noted that he first saw them flying in mid-August and that they remained in the area until the very cold weather began in December (pers. comm.).

At the second site the actual nest was not found although a thorough search was made of the rocky outcropping where the adults were ever vigilant. On a subsequent visit to the site on 25 August 1989, two young were perched on top of

the rocks and photos were taken. Their heads were black and legs gray. A few wisps of down still stuck out in one or two places on their necks and backs. These birds were capable flyers.



Young Turkey Vulture

Tim Lichter