

HOUSE FINCH AND AMERICAN WOODCOCK AT SOMME, SASKATCHEWAN

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House Finch

While visiting at David Black's place in Somme on 30 April 1987, we were watching Purple Finches at his feeder which was a few feet away from a picture window. David's son Wesley said "That one bird is different," as he drew your attention to a specimen that was almost identical to the female Purple Finches except a little smaller and without the paler stripe over the eye. It was not a Pine Siskin as it had the stout bill so we assured Wesley that it must be a variation in the Purple Finch.

The next morning at home I saw the same situation at my own feeder which is 1 km from Black's. One female had a shorter bill, with no stripe over the eye, and was smaller than the Purple Finches we were with it. Upon checking my collection I realized that the birds that we had were female House Finches, which are on the hypothetical list for Saskatchewan, so I kept my camera ready for several days, but the bird did not return. This species has been previously reported in Saskatchewan at Saskatoon, Fort Qu'Appelle and Regina.¹

American Woodcock

On 23 June 1989 I saw an American Woodcock 6 km northeast of Somme. The next closest report is the detailed description of one that was observed on 1 May 1984 by Curtis and Marilyn Pollock near Hazel Dell which is about 65 km to the south.²

The morning of 23 June was overcast with a few spots of rain and I went down Nab Creek to look for bird's nests.

(I am not a nest robber I assure you, but some of my studies in nature have been to obtain nesting records of birds.) The area is open fields with aspens and willows along the banks and flood plain of the creek. At about 8 a.m. I came to an open area with scattered willows on the edge of a shallow pit where clay had been dug out for road building. All of a sudden a bird exploded from an open place between the willow, 2.5 m in front of me. As the bird raised straight upward for about 9 m to clear the brush, I could see immediately that it was a large-bodied snipe-type of bird with a brownish, barred back, rusty-orange rump, and a very long bill. The chunky body and broad rounded wings were partridge-like. As the bird flew there was a rustling of its wings, but no nasal sounding call like that of the Common Snipe and, when it got higher, I could clearly see that it was rusty-orange right through underneath from bill to tail. Immediately I thought to myself in utter surprise, "An American Woodcock!" It disappeared in a southward direction over the top of the nearby aspen bluff, probably to settle down again in the shrubbery near the creek.

The ground where I had flushed the bird was a very moist mossy area with a few sedges and dry leaves. Earthworms were present under the moss making this an ideal feeding place for a woodcock. Where the bird sat were several droppings showing that this nocturnal species had probably been there since daybreak.

When I returned to the area at 8 a.m. on 7 July and saw droppings here and there among the willows, I had the feeling

that I would see the woodcock again. Sure enough! It suddenly flew up in front of me the same as before. I was sorry that I was unable to see the bird on the ground, or get a picture of it as it is also only listed as hypothetical for Saskatchewan.

¹ HOUSTON, C.S., M.I. HOUSTON & J.B. GOLLOP 1981. Saskatchewan bird species - hypothetical and rejected. *Blue Jay* 39(4):196-201.

² POLLOCK, CURTIS 1986. American Woodcock seen in east-central Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 44():180-182.



American Woodcock on nest

Michael Monahan