

LAZULI BUNTING AT ROSTHERN

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Although the high temperature for the Rosthern areas in Saskatchewan on 14 May 1986 was a mild 13° C, much of southern Alberta was experiencing a record blizzard that day. The cold front and accompanying snow was forecast to be in our province, including Rosthern, overnight, with a predicted high next day of 4° C.

At 1930 h the sun was still shining through a partly cloudy sky; the town was bathed with hazy sunlight. A small, sparrow-sized finch landed in the freshly mowed grass about 5 m away from a back window. What a vivid contrast of attractive colouring — the lush green of new grass a background for a bird with bluish head, cinnamon-orange banded breast, and pure-white belly.

"That has to be a Lazuli Bunting," was my one thought as I reached for my Peterson's *Field Guide to Western Birds* to confirm my observation. It was the male, of course, which I was seeing, and it soon flew through a wire mesh fence and into some trees in a neighbour's yard. When I wrote up my sighting a half hour later, the sky had become completely overcast with the incoming weather system, and the lighting conditions had deteriorated considerably.

Godfrey reports that the breeding distribution of the Lazuli Bunting extends into southern Saskatchewan ("Shaunavon, Moose Jaw, Qu'Appelle Valley, probably Estevan, perhaps rarely Regina where a pair summered.")⁴ Belcher lists the species as an "occasional transient" for Regina.¹ Farther north in the province, Gilliland and Gollop refer to the bird's status at Saskatoon as a nonbreeding summer visitor, accidental ("reported in no more

than 8 of the 16 years from 1966-1981") /also transient during spring migration. In fact, in the period specified, there were only two sightings: 4 July 1973 and 14 May 1976.³ (Note that my sighting occurred exactly to the day a decade later than the last one for Saskatoon.)

To my knowledge, the appearance of the Lazuli Bunting at Rosthern, which is 60 km northeast of Saskatoon, represents, then, its most northerly occurrence in Saskatchewan. Pough states that these buntings "seem to have an especially strong tendency to move into new localities, at least in years of high populations."⁶ However, this one bird's brief visit here may have been related to the unusual weather conditions. I recall that my first contribution to *Blue Jay*, in 1963, dealt with several warbler sightings occasioned by the arrival of a marked cold front.²

¹ BELCHER, M. 1961. Birds of Regina, Spec. Publ. No. 3. Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc., Regina. 76 pp.

² FRIESEN, V. 1963. Warblers at Rosthern. *Blue Jay* 21:123-124.

³ GILLILAND, M. and B. GOLLOP. 1982. Revised date list of Saskatoon birds, 3rd edn. 9 pp.

⁴ GODFREY, W. E. 1986. The birds of Canada. Nat. Mus. of Canada, Ottawa. 595 pp.

⁵ PETERSON, R. T. 1961. A field guide to western birds. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 366 pp.

⁶ POUGH, R. H. 1957. Audubon western bird guide. Doubleday, Garden City, N. Y. 316 pp.