

EASTERN SASKATCHEWAN BIRDS HIGHLIGHTS — 1985

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My bird observations in the upper Assiniboine River area in 1985 began routinely enough through the winter months and in the early spring, giving no indication that before the year was through I would add 25 species to my Saskatchewan lifetime list, including several of the province's less common birds. In addition, my wife saw another two "new" species which, unfortunately, I did not.

In fact, I did not add a "first-ever" species until 21 May when a flock of about a dozen Lesser Golden-Plover appeared in the Hyas area, along with thousands of Lapland Longspurs which, although formerly common in the area during migration, I had never before seen.

It was about this time, although she did not record the date, that my wife saw a Whimbrel several miles north of Yorkton. As well, she had earlier seen a Prairie Falcon (rare in our area) and an Eastern Bluebird, and we both had seen a "Kridler's Red-tailed Hawk" and an unusual, white-headed robin earlier in the spring.

On 9-10 June we saw Forster's Terns and Turkey Vultures at Duck Mountain Provincial Park, as well as 10 species of warblers.

On 15 July along the nature trail at Greenwater Lake Provincial Park, we saw an Eastern Wood Pewee, identified clearly by sight as a pewee and by voice as the less common of the two pewee species in Saskatchewan.

On the Key Indian Reserve north of Kamsack, we observed an American Black Duck in company with several Mallards on 12 August and a week later at Cote Siding near Duck Mountain I noted a Sedge Wren while hiking alone along Little Boggy Creek.

On 26 August while visiting at Regina, we took a drive out to the Condie Wildlife Refuge where we saw a pair of Caspian Terns, my second sighting of that species.

On 9 September while returning home from Yorkton, I followed a "hunch" and turned in to Good Spirit Lake Provincial Park and began to walk the trail from the southern edge of the park center to the sand dunes. However, I immediately began encountering warblers, followed by several thrushes, including my first-ever Wood Thrush.

It flew up from the ground into a tall aspen and sat upright on a branch with a posture and profile which immediately struck me as being different from the other thrushes with which I am familiar. As I focussed my binoculars on the bird, I noted a very bold white eye-ring, and heavy round spots on its breast and sides, extending down even past the legs, becoming smaller on the throat and turning to streaks on the face.

Because of poor lighting (the bird was semi-silhouetted) I was unable to make a distinction in the coloration of the upper parts. To me they appeared uniformly dark, but I was concentrating on the spots and streaks which I knew were the markings of a Wood Thrush. Lowering the

binoculars, I slid my "Golden Guide" out of my back pocket, but I had no sooner opened on thrushes and noted the same features than the bird flew deeper into the woods and was not seen again.²

I did not see another "first" until 20 October when I got separated from the rest of the Natural History Society members who were heading up the east side of Last Mountain Lake for a field trip to conclude the annual meeting held the previous two days in Regina, and ended up on the west side of the lake instead, in the company of society members Bob and Suzie Kohlmeier of Saskatoon. There, while I was wondering what the other members were seeing that I was missing, we encountered a Red Knot, which helped reduce my disappointment at having missed the main excursion.

Finally, on December 29, on my fifth try, I located the Great Grey Owl which had been reported in the area northwest of Hyas since the 19th of the month, and obtained several excellent photographs. It was certainly an exciting conclusion to a bird-watching year which turned out to be very rewarding!

Note: The Great Grey Owl has remained and been seen almost daily in the area ever since, as recently as 8 March. On one occasion two were seen together, raising the exciting prospect that we may have a breeding pair.

¹ GODFREY, W.E. 1966. The birds of Canada. National Museum of Canada, Ottawa.

² ROBBINS, C.S., B. BRUUN, and H.S. Zim. 1983. Birds of North America. Western Publ. Co., New York, NY.



Great Gray Owl, Hyas, Saskatchewan

Curtis Pollock