A RECORD EARLY SEASON FOR MARSH-BREEDING BIRDS IN SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA

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The mild spring of 1987 produced many record early arrivals of migrant birds in prairie Canada.[5] Birds arriving early on the breeding grounds may have a head start on territory establishment and nest initiation. However, if weather conditions deteriorate, early arrival can also result in weather-related mortality risks, or it can force birds to use energy reserves that would normally be used to produce eggs.[3,4] Birds often respond to severe spring weather by reversing their migration direction, a seemingly wasteful expenditure of time and energy.[7] Therefore, most birds are faced with two conflicting problems: they must arrive on the breeding grounds early in order to claim a territory and breed successfully, but they must not arrive on the breeding grounds so early that their lives are endangered by severe weather. During 1987, mild early spring weather was followed by amenable weather conditions during late spring, and early migrating birds in the Minnedosa, Manitoba, area responded with record early nest initiations.

Waterfowl biologists have been conducting nesting studies in the Minnedosa area since the 1940s, so there is a wealth

Canvasback pair *F.W. Lahrman*

of data on nesting chronology for this area. From 1963 through 1972 Jerry Stoudt kept detailed field notes on the nesting chronology of Minnedosa's wetland birds.[6] Stoudt's research on Canvasback nesting ecology was continued by Jerry Serie and Michael Anderson, and is ongoing today. With Stoudt's data, up to 10 years of breeding phenology records are available for the Minnedosa area, and through Anderson's efforts, an additional 4 years of information on Canvasback and Redhead nest initiation dates are available.

The 1987 observations of 22 April for the first Canvasback egg and 27 April for the first Redhead egg represent the earliest *known* nest initiations by these two species during the last 25 years at Minnedosa. Of the 14 phenological events that were recorded in 1987, 11 events occurred earlier than the earliest observation reported by Stoudt, 2 events occurred on the same date, and only one event (first Sora egg) occurred at a later date (see – Table 1). The observation of 15 May for the first Sora egg was tied with the second earliest date in Stoudt's 10-year study.

The data show that early arrival on the breeding grounds can lead to record early nest initiations. Early nest initiation can be important for breeding productivity because early hatching offspring can have a higher chance of surviving through the coming winter, and because early nesting birds can have more time to renest if their first nests are destroyed.[1] [2]

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Courting Redheads *F.W. Lahrman*

Table 1. MIGRATIONAL AND BREEDING PHENOLOGY OF MARSH-NESTING BIRDS AT MINNEDOSA, MANITOBA, 1987 AND 1963-72

Event	*1987*	*Average 1963-72*	*Earliest (year) 1963-72*
Heavy migration of ducks	15 April	01 May	20 April (1964)
First Mallard egg	15 April	25 April	20 April (1969)
First Canvasback egg	22 April	02 May	26 April (1971)
First American Coot egg	30 April	11 May	07 May (1971,72)
First Blue-winged Teal egg	06 May	15 May	11 May (1966,71)
First Redhead egg	27 April	13 May	29 April (1971)
First Yellow-headed Blackbird egg	10 May	17 May	10 May (1969)
First Black Tern arrival	11 May	18 May	14 May (1969)
First Red-winged Blackbird egg	10 May	21 May	14 May (1972)
First Sora egg	15 May	23 May	10 May (1969)
First Ruddy Duck egg	16 May	31 May	22 May (1963)
First American Coot hatching	26 May	10 June	06 June (1965)
First Killdeer young	08 June	16 June	08 June (1965)
First hen Canvasback flocking	08 June	24 June	12 June (1964)

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[2] COWARDIN, L.M., D.S. GILMER and C.W. SHAIFFER 1985. Mallard recruitment in the agricultural environment of North Dakota. Wild. Monograph No. 92.

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Young Yellow-headed Blackbird
Gary W. Seib