

LETTERS

OBSERVATION OF SQUIRREL CARRYING YOUNG

With regard to a letter from E. Otto Hohn in the June [’93] issue of *Blue Jay* on “How do squirrels carry their young?”:

Several years ago we had a Red Squirrel that had made a nest under our back steps. One evening my husband and I saw her carry two of her young in the same manner as the European squirrel. This is the one and only time I have seen this and found it quite interesting to watch.

- *B. Jones*, 348 Parkway Boulevard, Flin Flon, Manitoba. R8A 0K1

HAWKS NEAR AVONLEA

I enjoyed reading about the “Hawk attack” by Jeremy Baumbek in December 1992 *Blue Jay*.

When walking on a field in July 1992, my daughter Gilbertha had a similar experience with a Marsh Hawk. She was not wearing a cap, so she pulled her jacket over her head. She too sped up her walk, to get away from that field.

Later a nest site with five young Marsh Hawks was discovered in the area.

I had a different experience with a hawk on 4 September 1992 — a cool, overcast, drizzly day. In the evening Nick, my husband, went to close in the chickens, but came back in a hurry to tell me that there was something he thought I would like to see. I am glad he did. On the chickens’ fence was an immature goshawk with a big, white chicken.

I watched the hawk pluck feathers and eat bits of meat. It did not seem to mind me when I walked slowly toward it. As I was about to pet its head, it flew to a nearby post. Not wanting to disturb it anymore, we closed the door to the henhouse and left, watching to see if the hawk would come back to the chicken. It did and then had a late supper.

The following morning the hawk was back at the chicken. Later perched in a tree visible from the window. The chickens were kept closed in until the hawk left our yard, which was three days later. Part of the chicken was left uneaten — a big chicken proved to be too much for one hawk.

No hard feelings about the chicken — it was a small price to pay for all the enjoyment hawks provide us by soaring and gliding over fields. And, we do not need to buy tickets to enjoy them.

- *Flossie Bogdan*, Box 207, Avonlea, Saskatchewan. S0H 0C0

THE HUMMINGBIRD EPIC CONTINUES

We received a female, Ruby-throated Hummingbird from Rhonda O’Grady in January 1993 (see September 1993 *Blue Jay*). She arrived in a white laundry hamper along with a box of components for her feed and instructions. Initially, we were planning to install her in an outside greenhouse, but heating problems arose, and she lived free in our home for several months. She perched in the top branches of a hibiscus plant on a stand near the largest window in our house. She would



"Buzz" in her hibiscus plant.

Terry Langelier

routinely fly around our living room at a distance of two inches from the ceiling, often orbiting the unused ceiling fan.

We fed the hummingbird a diet with several components plus as many fruit flies as she wanted. The plants on the stand — hibiscus, lipstick plant, and begonias — bloomed all winter. She inspected them regularly. Sometimes she would sit in a fig tree in our stained glass studio to be in the winter sun.

Come spring, we put another feeder outside the house within eye-shot of her customary perch. Eventually a male appeared, and Randy witnessed the two birds bobbing and hovering, one on each side of the window, probably courting. The time to release her came on the next warm, sunny, not-too-windy weekend at the end of May. We opened the basket and she hovered for a

second before she darted high into the branches of a dead poplar tree across the yard. Feeders were stationed about the yard, but with fruit trees and wildflowers in bloom, we doubted she would hang around. However, on occasion we see a female hummingbird at the windows where the plant stand is in the house, even though the feeder has been moved to a different part of the yard.

- *Terry and Randy Langelier, Box 306, Blumenort, Manitoba. R0A 0C0*

HUMMINGBIRD MEMORY

Hummingbirds never cease to amaze me with their gymnastics, their iridescent colours glinting in the sun, and their aerial warfare, among other things. Being very territorial, at times one will try to claim the feeder, sitting on a nearby perch and attacking any birds that come near.

At times, a collision will occur, but that is rare — they are all bluff, no fight.

And not the least amazing is what appears to be their ability to remember. Like the time we thought we had our very own hummingbirds. Well, sort of. One spring we were a bit late in putting out the feeder, which hung under the eaves, just in front of a large window. A hummingbird was seen circling the exact place where the feeder should have been. And I do not mean in the general vicinity of the window, but within a foot or so of the wire that was still hanging from the eaves.

Thinking that this was an isolated happening, we were astounded when the following spring it happened again. Could it be that the

hummingbird remembered? Being convinced that was so, we were not hesitant in telling others about it. But our self-importance was soon deflated; we found that other folk had observed the same behaviour. Apparently hummingbirds, when they arrive, at least in our area, check out large windows under the eaves where feeders are usually to be found. But it is hard to believe that they remember, having been away for almost six months, travelled a few thousand miles and visited many places. Whether or not they actually remember, I do not know. But I find it amazing that they try to locate something that, quite possibly, they fed out of six months previously.

- *Donald Dobie*, 3036 Mallard Street, RR#3, Victoria, British Columbia. V8X 3X1



Winter.

Bernie Gollop

NORTHERN WHEATEAR SIGHTED IN REGINA

Recently Mr. Frank H. Brazier wrote to me suggesting that I submit an account of a sighting of a Northern Wheatear. The event was originally reported in the Spring 1993 issue of *American birds*.

I saw the wheatear immediately outside our house's large kitchen window facing northward, at 2368 Rae Street in Regina. The date was Sunday, 6 September 1992. The time was mid-morning and the conditions were clear and bright.

Our breakfast table faces the window which gives an unimpeded view of the back garden, enclosed on all sides. It is a garden which migrating, small birds enjoy. We watch particularly closely during the migratory season. Further, we keep a good pair of binoculars and two field guides close at hand.

My wife and I saw an unusual bird. I am an experienced but by no means expert bird watcher. In the past I participated in bird counts on boxing day and in the spring. I have enjoyed the challenge since I was a child, and while I lived on several different continents. My wife has also developed an interest in birds. Between us we sought carefully an accurate description of what we were seeing. Since we had never seen this bird before I had to leaf through Bull and Farrand's 1977 *Audubon field guide to eastern birds*, comparing all sparrow-like possibilities. At page 284, plate 510, we found the

correct photo. I believe the bird we saw must have been either immature or in autumn plumage since the colours were not quite as pronounced as those in the guide, but the inverted "T" on the tail feathers was unmistakable.

What was most commanding, however, was the bird's behaviour. As we watched, the bird jumped repeatedly from the ground to the top of a tomato cage and back, almost frenetically. This display occurred no more than 4.5 m from us. The unusual behaviour is described in Peterson's *Field guide to western birds*, pages 184-85 and a line drawing of the immature bird is on page 250.

Presently the wheatear flew away but returned shortly for a confirmation view. Very considerate we thought. Had I been professional or even thought of the rarity of what we were observing I would have tried to photograph the bird, but then I might have risked missing him and failing to identify him (at least to our satisfaction). My wife and I continued to question our impressions until we became confident enough to report what we saw.

Although the event occurred a year ago, I refreshed my memory with the account I wrote at the time with the archival assistance of Robert Kreba of the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. It was he who reported originally to *American birds*.

- Jos. K. Roberts, 2368 Rae Street,
Regina, Saskatchewan. S4T 2G2



UPDATE ON THE VIOLET GREEN SWALLOW AT SASKATOON

I reported my observations of Violet Green Swallows at Saskatoon in Issue 2, Vol. 50 of *Blue Jay* (p. 109). Subsequently I was advised by Stuart Houston that a number of Violet Green Swallows had been observed during the summer banding program of Prairie Falcons along the Saskatchewan River valley. This was during the summer of 1992 in mid-June.

The banding program was carried out west and south of Eston in the vicinity of Glidden and Snipe Lake.

During the course of these observations Stuart reported that four nests of Violet Green Swallows were observed. Because of the banders' concern that they not disturb the falcons no check was later made to determine the conditions of the swallows' nests and the status of the eggs and young. Also, Stuart reports that no Violet Green Swallows were observed in 1993 which makes one wonder if the sightings made at or near Saskatoon were an aberration as opposed to a range extension.

- *D.H. Wright, Law Courts, 520 Spadina Crescent East, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7K 3G7*



Woodchuck.

G.J. Smith