
IN MEMORIAM

THE NATURAL HISTORY CONTRIBUTIONS OF H.C. GROSE

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Harry Grose's writings, field notes and bird's egg collection offer useful information about Saskatchewan breeding birds prior to the 1930s, beginning after his three-year stint as a homesteader.

From July 1907 through December 1908 he taught at Briarmound School #1273, three miles southeast of Foam Lake, then succumbed to the lure of free land. Homestead files in the Saskatchewan Archives show that Grose, "aged 21 years, single, farmer" filed homestead file 155245 on 9 September 1908 for the south-east quarter of section 27, township 29, range 11, west of the 2nd meridian, 7 miles south and 3 miles east of the village of Foam Lake. He built a granary, a stable and a house in September 1908 and resided there until 31 December that year and again from March to October 1909, from February to December 1910 and April to June 1911. To defray his farm expenses (what's new?) he taught at Adamson School in Foam Lake in January and February of 1911. His land was completely fenced and cross-fenced. He broke 25 acres in 1909 and another 5 acres in 1910, with 25 and 30 acres cropped in 1910 and 1911. In 1909, he donated 1½ acres for the school grounds of Wonderville School district #1015, next to the rural post office named Malby.

His natural history observations were made as a teacher, between his farming and pharmacy careers. He published "Report on Birds — Observations by H.C. Grose" in the Report of the Chief Game Guardian for the year ending 30 April 1917. In his introduction Grose remarked, "I have also found everywhere I go a lack of interest shown by all in bird knowledge. This is the fault of early training of the young. The teachers in the public schools are not teaching their scholars Nature observation. The reason is that they themselves have little or no knowledge of birds." He then provided a list of his bird observations, in the order of the arrival of the birds at Lanigan in 1915 and at Lang in 1916.

Grose's publication listed 91 species in tabular form, with seven columns of information including spring arrival dates, date when first common, and nesting information for 33 species, including a nest at Yorkton of a species spreading west with settlement, the Mourning Dove. Tree Swallows and Purple Martins then nested in holes in aspen trees. He listed only five species as year-round residents, the Sharp-tailed Grouse, Greater Prairie Chicken, Snowy Owl, Short-eared Owl and Black-capped Chickadee. Working with limited resources in the days before field guides were available, Grose

correctly identified most of the birds he encountered. His list of 86 migrant species incorrectly included the Purple Grackle, Wood Thrush and Field Sparrow. In 1915 and 1916 he saw redpolls on 1 and 2 March; the first Horned Larks on 13 March in both years; American Crows on 20 and 27 March; Slate-colored Juncos on 20 March and 1 April; and Western Meadowlarks on 1 and 9 April, respectively. Although there was little food available for them, one year Bohemian Waxwings, listed as rare, paid a visit on 3 March.

Grose also contributed to the Natural History Department of *The Saskatchewan Farmer*. From Lanigan he contributed columns about "The Grebe" (Jan. 1915, pp. 22-23), "The Snowbird" (Feb. 1915, p.4), "Gophers and Squirrels" (March 1915, p. 21), and from Lang, a column on "The Blackbirds" (November 1915) which occasioned the next month a letter correcting his mention of the Boat-tailed and Purple Grackles from the well-known naturalist, Stewart Criddle of Aweme, Manitoba.

His bird sightings from Mortlach in 1921 and 1923 are also extant, in the same format as the 1915-16 list, with first date, date first common and some nest records. His 70 species in 1921 included a nest of the Long-eared Owl found on 8 June in an aspen 15 feet above ground, containing 2 downy young and 2 pipping eggs, and a Short-eared Owl nest with 8 eggs on 26 May. Chestnut-collared Longspurs first appeared on 16 April and became common on 24 April; McCown's Longspurs appeared on 22 April and became common on 30 April.

In 1923, he listed 60 species with 12 nest records, including a Say's

Phoebe nest on 24 May and his first-ever nest of a Western Kingbird on 19 June in a maple tree.

Much of the Grose bird's egg collection is in the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History. There is a Western Kingbird set of five eggs from Medicine Hat, Alberta on 12 June 1912, as well as a Bank Swallow set. In Saskatchewan he collected sets of 60 species beginning with 16 sets at Lanigan in 1913 which included both Horned and Eared Grebe sets, each of 7 eggs. He visited the Quill Lakes in 1914 and 1915 to get sets of the Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican and Great Blue Heron. Included are a set of 10 Ruffed Grouse eggs from Melville on 10 June 1918; a single Sandhill Crane egg from Birmingham on 30 May 1918; a set of 10 Greater Prairie Chicken eggs from Melville on 10 June 1918, and a set of 4 McCown's Longspur eggs from Lucky Lake in 1931. His House Wren sets of 6 and 7 eggs showed the adaptability of this species before bird houses were available; the first, at Lanigan on 30 May 1913 was in an old tin can in an outhouse and the second at Melville on 10 June 1920 was in a coat sleeve. In 1924, the year he was principal at Wapella, he added only five species to his collection: Willet, Black-billed Cuckoo, Long-eared Owl, Blue Jay, Loggerhead Shrike. At Lucky Lake his interest in oology waned, and, with one exception, he ceased taking full sets except for a set of three Cooper's Hawks on 4 June 1926. He collected two eggs of the Killdeer in 1923, two Baltimore Oriole eggs on 10 June 1928, and three Yellow-shafted Flicker eggs in 1933, and, with no date given, collected a single egg of the Black-billed Magpie.

While at Lang, Saskatchewan, in

1918, Grose kept one of the earliest Saskatchewan records of plant phenology. His list of plants, complete with their Latin names, gave the first flowering date for 86 species. Similar lists for Mortlach recorded flowering dates for 75 species in 1921, but only 35 species in 1923.

His daughter, Eileen Blanchet, wrote from British Columbia in 1988 to tell me that her father's "egg col-

lection at home was always a part of my upbringing since it was a cherished experience to look at them and handle them. I remember being taken to the museum to see his collection there, which was more extensive than the one he kept at home." Later in his life, Eileen's father gave encouragement to a farm lad from the next hamlet at Tullis, up the line from Lucky Lake. The lad's name was Frank Roy.

HARRY C. GROSE, 1887-1992

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A pioneer Saskatchewan birder, teacher, pharmacist, and undertaker, Harry Grose died in Calgary, 20 April 1992. At the time of his death he was 105, Calgary's oldest citizen and one of the oldest persons in Canada.

Harry Grose was born on a farm at Goldstone, Ontario, 15 January 1887. A precocious child, he was allowed to attend school at the age of five and entered high school in Guelph at age 11. Like so many children born on the farm, he developed an early and lasting interest in nature. He attended Queen's University, Kingston, but before graduating decided to move West with the flood of settlers that were then beginning to populate the Prairies.

In 1905, at the ripe old age of 18, Harry landed in Manitoba. A short time later he moved to Regina where he completed his teacher training at what was then called "Normal School." His first teaching job was at

Otthon, Saskatchewan, southwest of Yorkton.

While teaching he continued his study of birds, compiling migration dates, looking for nests, and adding eggs to an impressive egg collection he had begun in Ontario. Most of his egg collection was later donated to the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History. He involved his students too, inspiring in them an active interest in everything from astronomy to botany. [His compilations of the spring and summer flowering plants of Lang (1918, 86 species) and Mortlach (1921, 75 species) still extant, carefully identify species by both their English and Latin names, noting periods of peak flowering.] In 1911, during his last year at Foam Lake, he even raised a family of six skunks. At the end of the school year when he decided to move, he sent his pets to the famous author-naturalist, Ernest Thompson Seton.