

# NOTES & LETTERS

## FIRST MARBLED MURRELET RECORD FOR ALBERTA

The Marbled Murrelet carcass pictured below was found by the author on the shore of Saskatoon Lake (NE/6-72-7w6) on 8 July 1994. No apparent cause of death could be determined. The carcass was forwarded to the Alberta Provincial Museum in Edmonton where it now resides as a skin.

- Gavin Moore, RR#1, Wembley, AB.

## A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

The author has analyzed the crazy-flight phenomenon of the Ruffed Grouse in several articles, including nine grouse collisions with our farm home in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2,3,4,5,6,7</sup> The conclusion was that more than a dozen distinct conditions may contribute to the flight or even initiate it but they are always complemented by the underlying

reason — the grouse's natural rocketing take-off and limited manoeuvrability. After a hiatus of 20 years, another grouse collided with the same house, and survived.

On 25 May 1995, shortly after 9:00 p.m. (the sun had already set), I entered our vacated, darkened farmhouse, three miles east of Rosthern. Scatter rugs askew on the living-room floor caught my attention, but not nearly as much as some movement up a far wall in the semidarkness. I was thinking "raccoon," but the fan-shaped tail identified the creature as yet another Ruffed Grouse.

I immediately went out, rather gingerly, not wishing to agitate the grouse into making a further "crazy" flight within the house. I left the living-room door and outer porch door open for its departure. My examination of the house's exterior revealed that the bird had gained entrance



*Marbled Murrelet carcass found at Saskatoon Lake, AB*

*Dave Robertson*





*A 1975 collision of Ruffed Grouse with farmhouse — same window, other pane. Both grouse survived.*

*Victor C. Friesen*

through a bedroom window, the left pane of the same window where another grouse had crashed through the right pane in 1975.<sup>3</sup> Both birds had broken through double panes of glass (10 x 20 in.) of storm and inside windows (see accompanying photograph).

When, after 10 minutes, no grouse had emerged, I re-entered the house, this time by way of the kitchen doorway. I heard some commotion in the adjoining living-room (all doors between rooms throughout the house had been left closed). Entering the room a second time, now from the kitchen, I saw the grouse perched on a curtain rod on the opposite wall. My appearance caused it to fly to the bedroom doorway and cling sideways to the 4.25 inch ventilation opening above the closed door.

The grouse, by its rapid movements and dexterity, seemed to be in fine fettle. The 1975 grouse, after its

collision, had remained stunned for an hour before walking away; this one, fluttering about, was keeping pace to a different drummer, as Henry Thoreau would say. How many hours, or days, had it been imprisoned in the house since its collision? Who could say? And how had it got into the living-room from the bedroom in the first place? Only through the narrow opening above the door.

When I slowly worked my way around the grouse to herd it towards the outside exit, it sailed down to the chimney corner, where it now had a straight-ahead view through the open doorways. But it remained standing, assessing the situation, for another five minutes.

I, meanwhile, was talking to it in low tones, trying to prevent it from flying into something once more. We continued looking at each other, until I thought, like Thoreau again (in his encounter with a woodchuck), that



we were beginning to feel mesmeric influences. Then, at a motion of my hand, it took off, with its typical exploding flight, safely exiting the house, although its stiff wing feathers clipped the porch doorway.

The next day I returned, in daylight, to put things aright and repair the broken window. The grouse, I found, might well have existed in the house for a few days, for it had tapped a food supply not usually found in a living-room. I had put out a dish of rolled oats and Warfarin, a mixture obtained from the rural municipality for combatting rats and mice. Containing nearly a capful, the dish was now completely empty, and there was no sign of any rodents who might have eaten it.

According to Bump and his associates, Ruffed Grouse may die after even minor injuries because of a disinclination to eat.<sup>1</sup> My grouse survived for several days; it not only ate readily but ingested a mixture poisonous to small mammals. The droppings throughout the living-room, even along the walls, told of its liveliness while captive in the house. In the interests of science, I counted the 134 "splats" in a room measuring 13 X 19 feet.

The bedroom, which it must have soon vacated and where there was no access to any food, had only one "splat." But in sweeping up the splinters of glass there, I counted some 160 feathers, mostly from the bird's ruff.

That a Ruffed Grouse could crash through a double window, fly up and squeeze through a narrow opening into a larger room, live on rolled oats and Warfarin for a period of time, then actively flutter about to elude a possible predator (the writer) before

making its rocket-like escape — all bespeaks the hardiness of this splendid bird.

1. BUMP, G., R.W. DARROW, F.C. ED-MINISTER, and W.F. CRISSEY. 1947. The Ruffed Grouse: life history, propagation, management. New York State Cons. Dept., Albany.
2. FRIESEN, V.C. 1971. The crazy flight phenomenon of the Ruffed Grouse. *Blue Jay* 29:121-124.
3. ——. 1978. Further observations of the Ruffed Grouse's "crazy-flight." *Blue Jay* 36:193-199.
4. ——. 1980. Crazy grouse comment. *Blue Jay* 38:135-136.
5. ——. 1985. Banging heads and taking notes. *The Drummer* 11:14.
6. ——. 1990. Ruffed Grouse: crazy-flight conclusions. *Blue Jay* 48:33-34.
7. ——. 1992. Drunken grouse theory doesn't stand up. *Saskatoon Sun*, Sept. 13.

- Victor C. Friesen, P.O. Box 65, Rosthern, SK. S0K 3R0

## **BAND-TAILED PIGEON AT MAREAN LAKE**

I saw a Band-tailed Pigeon while on summer holidays at Marean Lake, in east-central Saskatchewan, on the west side of Greenwater Provincial Park.

While picking Saskatoons in the Gaetz cottage subdivision on 1 August 1995, a male White-throated Sparrow made alarm calls. A bird, crow size, flew from above and behind me. This caused even greater excitement from the White-throated Sparrow. "Ah, a Merlin," I thought, but it did not fly like a Merlin and landed in a Saskatoon bush. I stopped picking Saskatoons to concentrate on the bird. What are you? With binoculars in hand, I walked cautiously closer. The sun was bright, high over head, near 11:00