

NOTES AND LETTERS

RICHARDSON'S GROUND SQUIRREL

On 12 July 1997, I was driving along my pasture fence when I noticed a strange shaped bird perched on a fence post some distance ahead. I stopped and using my binoculars I realized it was not a bird at all, but a Richardson's Ground Squirrel. I soon drove on and the gopher, as we commonly call them, remained on the post until I was within 20 feet of it, when it dropped off, head first and disappeared into tall grass.

I have often seen ground squirrels perched on rocks or mounds of earth in order to get a better view of the area, but this is the first time that I ever saw one on a post.

I measured the post and it was 4 feet tall with a 3 inch diameter, it had a slight lean of 3 inches to the four

feet so would not be the full 90° but would be something like 86°. It was round and had been peeled so would not be so easy to climb.

- Sig Jordheim, P.O. Box 544. Kyle, SK S0L 1T0

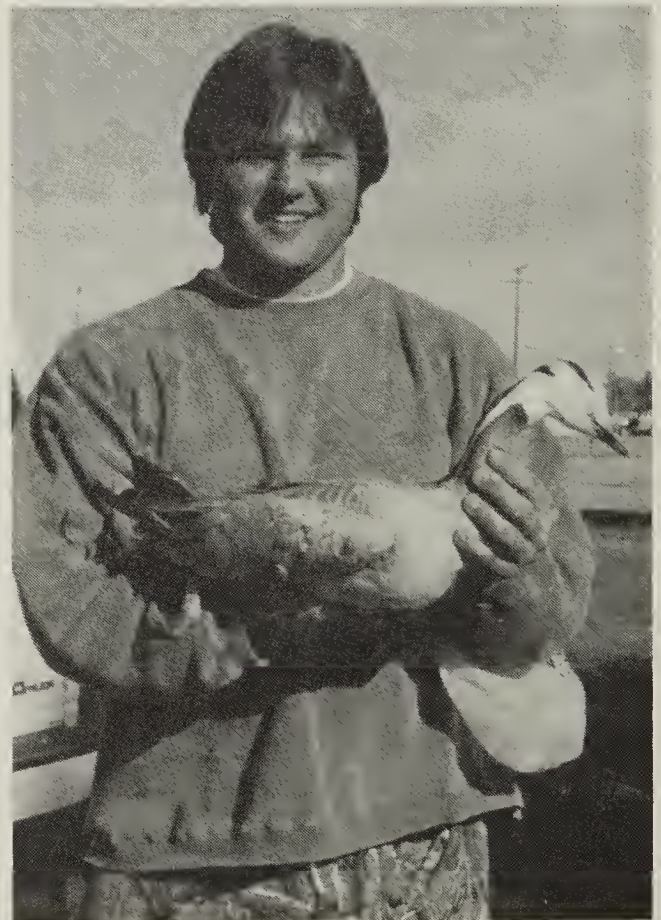
BAR-HEADED GOOSE SHOT IN SASKATCHEWAN IN 1996

In June of 1997, I was contacted by Bill Chappell of Ducks Unlimited in North Battleford about a record of a Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*) that was shot six miles east of Pierceland, Saskatchewan by Mr. John Chwelos of Dorintosh. His claim is that he shot the goose while with a goose-hunting party in October of 1996. This Bar-headed Goose (see photograph) was in a flock of Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens*) that were decoyed into a stubble field in



Richardson's Ground Squirrel

Peter Sulzle



Bar-headed Goose

John Chwelos

the morning prior to sunrise. As indicated in the photograph, the bird has all the field markings suggesting that it was correctly identified. It should be noted that this species does not breed in North America and because it is a recent introduction this record's status is in doubt. The National Geographic Society field guide states it is an Asiatic species, seen fairly commonly in zoos and private waterfowl collections. If anyone wishes more information on the incident, I would be willing to give you Mr. Chwelos's telephone number.

- Jim Elliott, c/o Nature Saskatchewan, Rm.206, 1860 Lorne Street, Regina, SK S4P 2L0

National Geographic Society, Field Guide to the Birds of North America National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C. 1995, p. 90.

EHRlich, PAUL R., DAVID S. DOBKIN and DARRYL WHEYE. 1988. The Birder's Handbook - A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds Fireside Books, New York. p. 666.

FIELD HORSETAIL

Common or Field Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) is a peculiar plant that can fool you as to its identity. Though it belongs to a family allied to the fern, it somewhat resembles a fungus at first sight. This leads you to a dead end in identification. It is this nature of the plant that can confuse you.

This horsetail has two separate stems that grow and mature at different times, but are connected underground by a spreading root system. The plant is a perennial. There are 10 species in this genus. One is listed as being poisonous to livestock. Some of the members are called scouring rushes.

The first or fertile stems (Figure 1) to appear above the ground are straight and erect with nodes surrounded by sheaths composed of 8-12 teeth. The stem is striated and hollow between nodes, brownish/beige in colour. The stem terminates in a cone-like structure composed of 10-12 whorls with as many florets in each whorl. This fruiting body (strobilus) produces spores. The stems soon ripen and wither away. As the stem contains no green, or a very faint hint of green, it gives rise to the assumption that it is parasitic or a fungal plant.

The second or sterile stems (Figure 2) appear shortly after most of the fertile stems have ripened and died. The sterile stems are quite different in appearance and can emerge long distances from the fertile stems, adding to the confusion. These sterile stems have whorls of slender branches which give rise to its name of "horsetail." These vegetative stems produce and store food



Figure 1. Fertile stems Anthony Hruska



Figure 2. Sterile stems Anthony Hruska

for the plant system only. In moist locations they can grow up to more than 12 inches.

It is noted that this plant is common and widespread. In this area I have not seen, nor recognized it for many years. This year there is a profusion of growth along the roadsides. Evidently the growing conditions were ideal. A small growth of the fertile stems would not attract attention, especially if the stems were far apart and few between. It would be easy to miss them as they disappear quite

rapidly. Also the plant may not produce sporangiophore stems every year. There are numerous massed patches along the roads where the fertile stems were not found, or observed, hence the conclusion that these stems were not produced at this time.

I wish to thank Dr. G.F. Ledingham, U of R, Biology Dept., for the identification of this plant. Also for his other observations which have been worked into our article.

- Anthony J. Hruska, Box 38, Gerald, SK S0A 1B0

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Of the 46 species of crane known to science, 36 are extinct.

Dinosaur fossils dated back to 70 million years have been found near the Cypress Hills.

Wilson's Phalaropes can rotate at 60 turns a minute to draw prey up from the depths.