
LETTERS

KAMIKAZE, THE SWAINSON'S HAWK

I write in response to Jeremy Baumbach's letter describing his experience with a Swainson's Hawk at Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area (NWA) (*Blue Jay* 50:233-234). I could empathize completely with his account of events.

Judging by his description of the bird and place he undoubtedly made the acquaintance of "Kamikaze," she lives near the east boundary of the NWA. Members of the public usually concentrate in the vicinity of the Regional Park, wetland basins of the interpretive trails so Jeremy is the first non-staff person I know of that she has attacked.

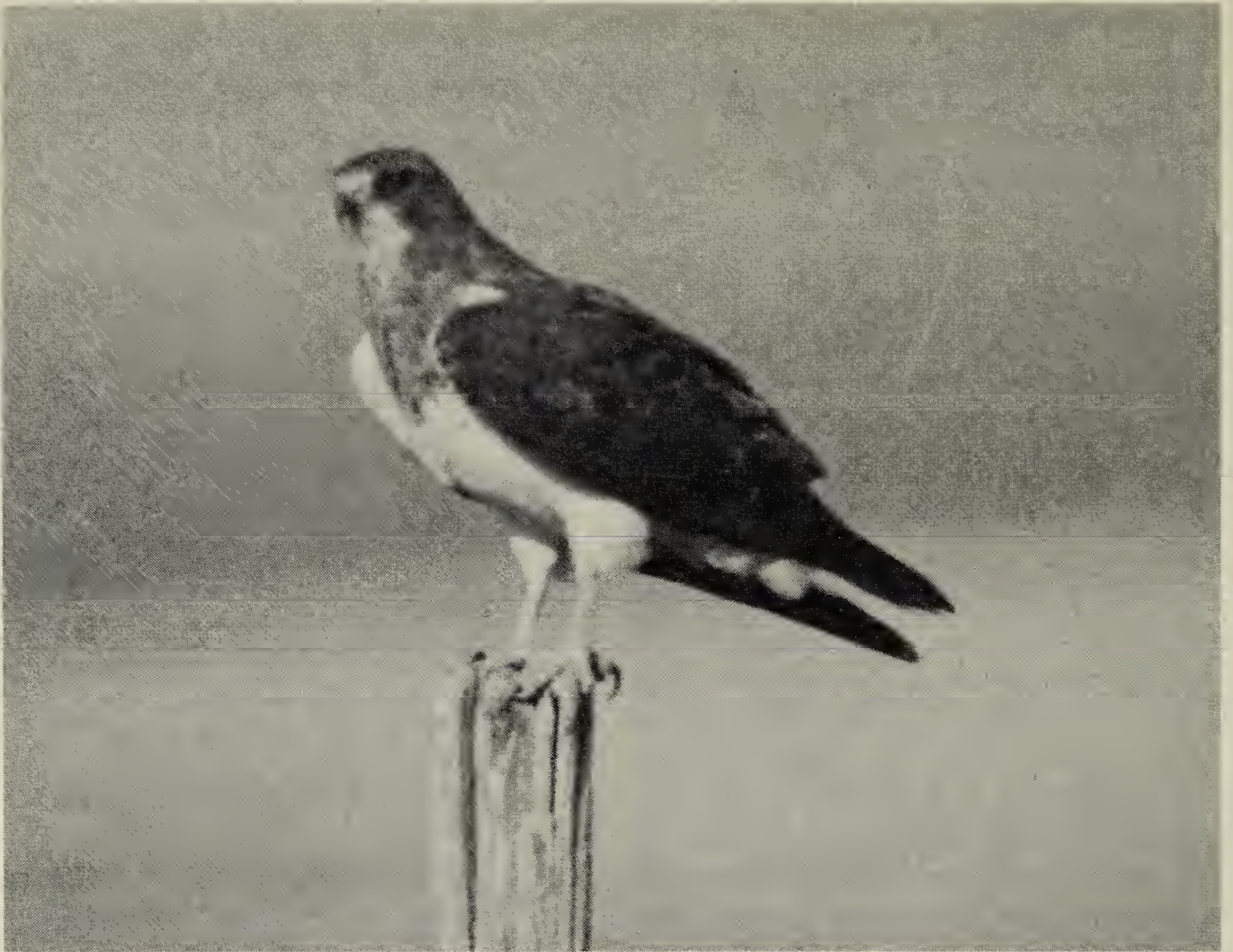
Many people who have conducted field work at Last Mountain Lake NWA have had startling encounters with this bird. Her aggression within her territory is legendary among the staff. Her past exploits include knocking one student off his moving all-terrain vehicle and numerous displaced hats and rearranged hair cuts not to speak of untold psychological damage. She usually balls up her talons before striking at your head but there have been several cases of scalp or facial lacerations. She inevitably takes you completely by surprise. The startling effect of a blood-curdling shriek and the feel of talons passing through your hair is not as visible as a cut but I feel it is a "scar" that takes a long time to heal.

She has been terrorizing the un-
way for five or six years that I am aware of; Wayne Harris told me she has been there for at least eight years.

All populations of raptors have a range of behaviour and a small percentage of the population is particularly aggressive. Kamikaze is an example of an extreme individual. Her defense of her territory would appear to have reached the point of being counter-productive. She attacks virtually anything within a certain radius of her nest and if the object of her fury remains she continues to harry it for as long as it takes to drive it out (she stoops my truck when I get in to leave). Wayne Harris tells me she has never successfully raised young. I doubt she is attentive to her nest long enough to satisfactorily perform incubation duties. Her mate never participates in attacks but circles with her or perches nearby. The female of another pair, two miles north of Kamikaze's territory, also stoops and harasses any intruder but she aims her attack several metres above your head and never actually strikes. It would be interesting to do genetic fingerprinting and see if these two females are related.

Jeremy wondered what prompted the attack. His presence in her territory was all it took. Most hawks are not like Kamikaze but since raptors are large powerful birds it would be wise to always be aware of their location.

Jeremy also wondered if his yelling and waving his hat scared her away. Yes and no. He would have been watching her while screaming. Kamikaze prefers sneak assaults and never attacks when we are looking at her. A glance in her direction every minute or so keeps her circling and watching for an opportunity. The flaw in this method is if you wait too long



Swainson's Hawk

Gilberta Liebelt

and turn to look late in the attack you may be badly hurt. Carrying something over your head acts as a deterrent or at least directs the assault to a distance over your head. I performed surveys every other week in the vicinity of her nest so there was no avoiding being attacked. I carried metre long marker flags over my head. Her strike would knock them out of my hand but that was preferable to a blow to the head.

I hope Jeremy returns to Last Mountain Lake to watch birds. There are many quality wildlife experiences waiting for him there but if he ventures near Kamikaze he had best keep an eye on the sky.

*Brenda Dale, 210-4999 98th Avenue,
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STRANGE NESTING BEHAVIOUR

In March 1991, in a stand of trees on a field near a slough, a Great Horned Owl was sitting in an old hawk's nest. About 24 April, we noticed that the nest had become much larger. Checking, we found a Ferruginous Hawk on the nest. On 1 May, we drove by to see if the hawk was still on the nest. What we saw was hard to believe — there was a Canada Goose on the nest. Later that afternoon a hawk was seen diving at the goose on the nest; the goose gave a weird call. In response to her call, the goose's mate took off in a hurry from a slough 1/4 mi. away.

The following day the goose was on the nest and all seemed well. A week later, Larry (my son) was working the field and noticed two goose eggs on the ground near the nest.

We drove by and found the pair of Canadas in the field and part of the nest torn down — as if something heavy tried to climb into it. Three eggs were on the ground.

Has anyone else seen different species of birds occupying the same nest in the same year?

At first we wondered what eggs were in the nest — owl, hawk, or goose. And, how did the goose manage to take over the nest from the hawk? (We are too old to be climbing trees. I would have loved to peek into that nest.)

On another field, in a small stand of poplars, a pair of Swainson's Hawks nested. In August we noticed that the leaves were all stripped off the trees, apparently by a small beetle, leaving the nest with two young hawks exposed to winds and the hot sun. They tried to keep cool by standing in the nest with wings outstretched. A week later one of the young was on the ground (fell or jumped) and found shade in the tall grass and weeds under the trees; the other was standing at the side of the nest and two days later was seen perched on a branch.

The beetle was about the size of a ladybug, brown with black stripes and dots. I saved a few beetles for identification.

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

GREAT EGRET

It was interesting to note where Mrs. Priestly had included notes on the Black-billed Magpie in 1943. Apparently, they weren't common at Yorkton at that time. Now they have become

quite common in the Swan River Valley, Manitoba, since I came here in 1960. I now see them all the way to east of Winnipeg.

I am writing to you of my wife and I seeing a Great Egret on 29 September 1992 in a pothole along the east side of Highway #9, just a few miles north of the Yorkton airport. It was quite unconcerned as it kept feeding while we sat and watched it. We are not skilful enough to be able to determine if it was an immature male or an adult. We wonder if it could have been associated with the Fulton Marsh further south. These birds have been nesting in Dog Lake, Manitoba, for the past few years. This marshy area would be the equivalent of the Fulton Marsh in habitat but about 160 miles further west and 40 miles further north.

Are there many sightings of the Great Egret in Saskatchewan and is it known if they are nesting there?

Hugh Hornbeck, Box 1480, Swan River, Manitoba. R0L 1Z0

AN UNUSUALLY TAME CANADA GOOSE

I would like to share a true story about a Canada Goose. My husband, Skip Irvine, spends most of the summer months at our cabin at Emma Lake, where he feeds a variety of birds. He began by feeding ducks down at the water, but now they come up to feed under our winter bird feeder, where there are plenty of sunflower seeds on the ground.

In August 1992 Skip had a Canada Goose follow him up from the lake and onto the deck of our cabin. He rushed into the cabin, got his camera and put some bread on the deck. The goose wandered around on the deck, checking things out, and making honking noises. My husband kept talking to it and trying to imitate the goose honks himself.

The goose ate the bread, and before long ate bread out of my husband's hand and out of his shirt pocket. He was able to stroke the goose under its bill and neck. The goose responded like a cat, by stretching its neck and seemed to enjoy all the attention it was getting.

My husband hoped no one was watching, as he felt somewhat foolish. But he did get some good closeup photographs of the goose.

I grew up on our farm, between Chelan and Kelvington, and we got our mail at Kinloch post office. My mother, Mrs. Linda Rodenburg, has been a

member of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society for many years, participating in the Cooperative Spring Migration Survey, and contributing six notes to the *Blue Jay* between 1952 and 1962. She contributed records to Don Hooper's recent book, *Birds of East-Central Saskatchewan, Kelvington to Kelsey Trail*. At 89, she is no longer able to see birds, but she still loves to hear us talk about them. We have become interested in birds because of her.

Barbara Irvine, 624 East Place, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7J 2Z3

Saskatchewan Amphibian Monitoring Project: Volunteers Wanted for Roadside Surveys

The Saskatchewan Amphibian Monitoring Project (SAMP) is part of a national and international effort to monitor amphibian populations in various regions. Some species have demonstrated dramatic declines in some areas. In prairie Canada there has been a recent decline in the number of Northern Leopard Frogs. However, there is almost no data to confirm the decline and status of this species, or the other five species of frogs and toads in Saskatchewan. Habitat loss from wetlands filling and draining, the effects of toxic chemicals, and the action of increased ultraviolet radiation upon amphibian reproduction are some of the issues of concern.

A roadside monitoring project similar to the Breeding Bird Survey has been developed to provide long-term monitoring of amphibians. This project requires the help of the many naturalists associated within the Saskatchewan Natural History Society (SNHS) and the local societies. The survey routes are short (10 stations 1/2 mile apart) and can be surveyed within two hours starting at sunset. They will be established near your home to minimize any travel time and to be convenient for surveying, possibly in areas which you may already visit regularly (e.g., favourite birding area). The route is surveyed three times within a six-week period from mid-April to the end of May. Survey instructions, data sheets and a cassette tape for identification of the six species of frogs and toads are provided.

This is an ideal way to spend some time in the outdoors during those beautiful spring evenings when life is awakening on the prairies and the spring migration of birds is underway, and this can be a fun family activity as well. You can contribute in providing important information to monitor these little-known species which are important indicators of the environment's health.

If you are interested in participating in this new SNHS program please contact the following for more information:

Saskatchewan Amphibian Monitoring Project
Andrew Didiuk, Saskatchewan Coordinator
314 Egbert Avenue

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 1X1

Tel.: (306) 373-2213 (home)/(306) 975-4087 (office)/FAX: (306) 975-4089