

# NOTES & LETTERS

## A MULTISPECIES INVENTORY IN THE PRAIRIE PARKLAND OF EAST-CENTRAL SASKATCHEWAN

In the spring and summer of 1994 the staff of Ducks Unlimited Canada (DU), Yorkton and volunteers from the Yorkton Natural History Society conducted plant and animal surveys on a local North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) project. The purpose of these surveys was to identify multispecies use of a DU/NAWMP Prairie Care program

area while promoting interagency co-operation.

DU has secured a 960 acre block of wildlife habitat, the Slywka, Docherty, Morrison and MacDonald projects, within a larger area called the Barvas Marsh complex. This complex encompasses approximately 2,560 acres and is located 26 km east of Yorkton along Highway 10 (Figure 1). The Barvas Marsh complex is a mosaic of native grass, forbs, shrub and tree species interspersed with a range of wetland

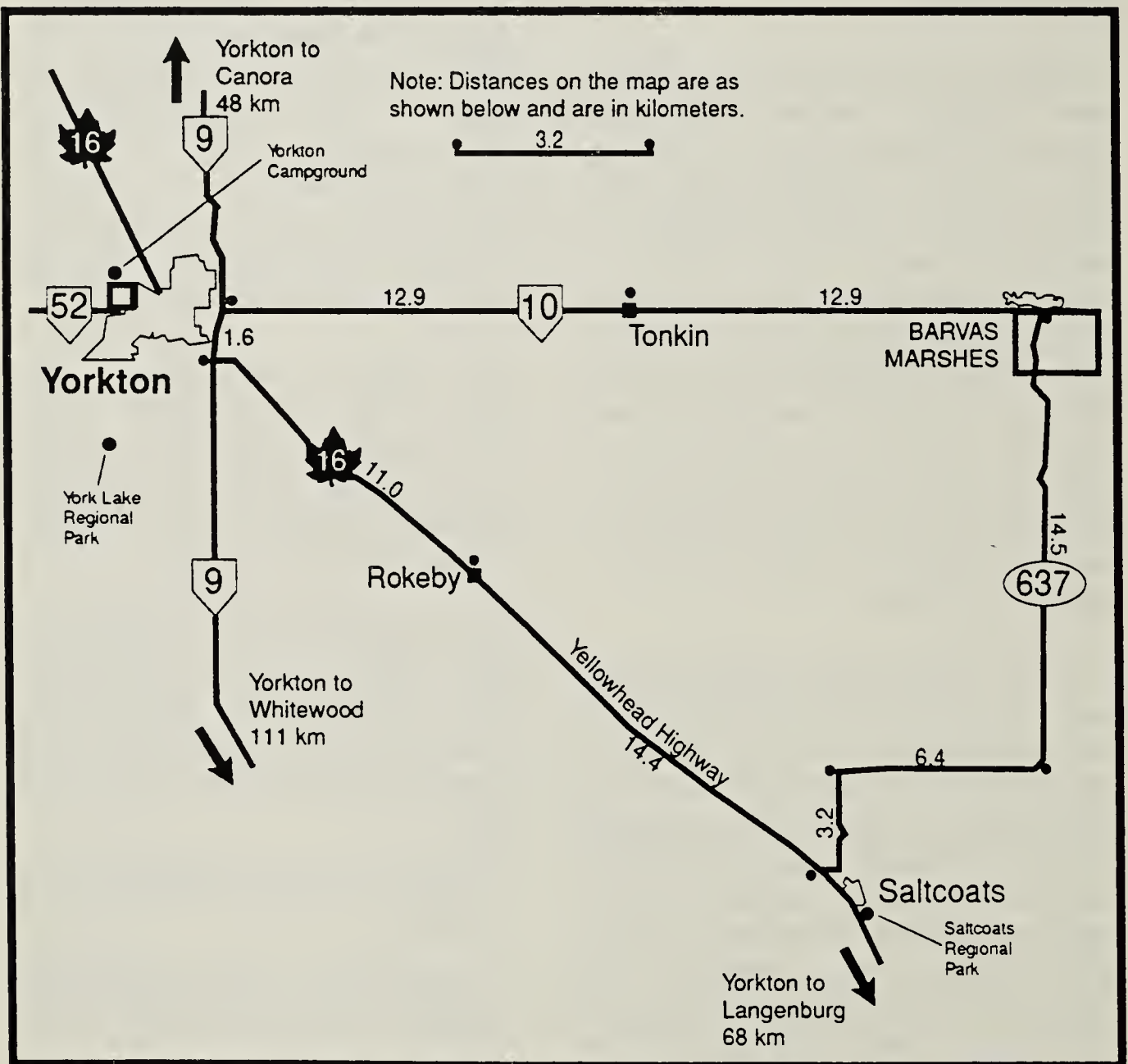
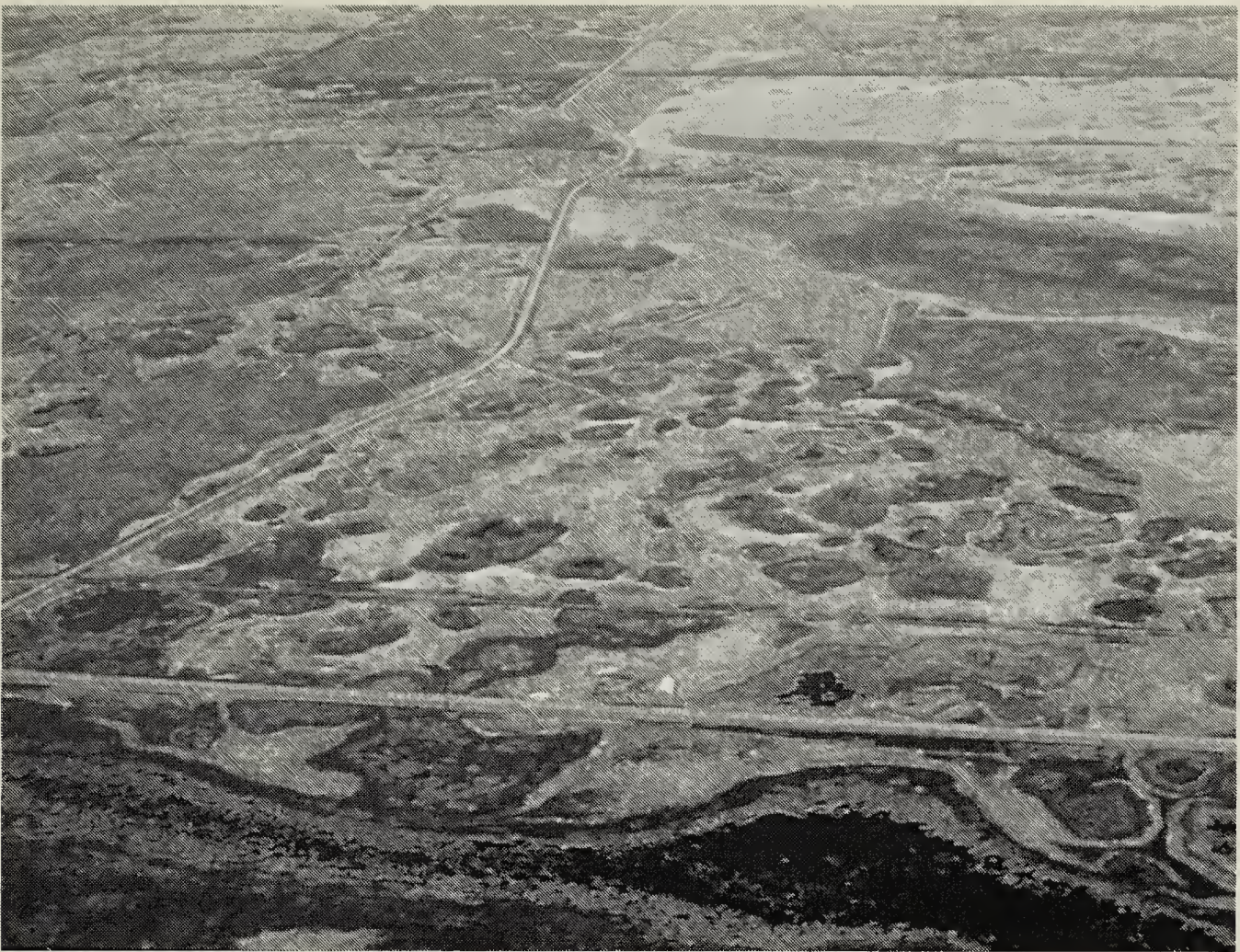


Figure 1. Location of Barvas Marsh Complex



*An aerial view of the Barvas Marsh complex*

*Rob Kirkness*

types. This area is unique because much of it has been left in an idle state for over 20 years. The Barvas area is a rare and large remnant of native prairie parkland habitat within a landscape of intensive cultivation.

In the spring of 1994, DU staff and Nature Saskatchewan members designed a field inventory plan to gather baseline data on the diversity of plant and animal life at Barvas. Surveys for 1994 focussed on the development of an avian checklist and a plant checklist. Volunteer birders surveyed the DU properties three times: once in mid-May, again in late May and once in mid-June. All birds seen or heard between 5:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. were recorded. A call response survey for secretive waterbirds was conducted after midnight, on three separate occasions in June. This survey revealed a population of Yellow and Virginia Rails not

previously identified. These were simple and extremely successful techniques for obtaining a list of bird species using the area. Baseline checklists include 72 species of birds to date. The majority of the bird species identified were residents. A plant species checklist was developed and volunteers made incidental observations throughout the summer. Ninety flowering plant species, 12 grass species, two tree species and five shrub species were identified. Rare prairie wildflowers such as the Large Yellow Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*) were not uncommon at the Barvas site. Participants also incidentally identified nine mammalian species and one species of reptile.

During the spring and summer of 1995 volunteers conducted several walkabouts on the complex and identified plant and animal species



*The secretive Virginia Rail*

*Guy C. Fontaine*

on the checklist. An amphibian call survey was also conducted and two frog and one toad species were identified. The inventory will be expanded in 1996 to include further amphibian, small mammal and insect surveys. Similar inventories are planned for other DU/NAWMP projects.

The accumulation of baseline data is critical to understanding and quantifying the biodiversity of the prairie environment. This information will also help to assess the impact of NAWMP programs on the prairie land base and enable resource managers to make better informed decisions. Baseline inventories are cost effective when the talents of volunteers from different groups are used. DU would like to thank all the people who participated in the surveys for their enthusiasm and generous donations of time and patience.

Throughout 1995 the Barvas

Marsh complex and the volunteer-run surveys piqued the interest of the media and the conservation community. An informative poster on the multispecies inventory was presented by DU and Nature Saskatchewan at the 4th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Workshop in Lethbridge, AB in February 1995. In June 1995 the area was showcased to DU members from across Canada and the U.S. who were participating in a workshop held in Saskatchewan. Two Saskatchewan newspapers also published detailed stories on the Barvas area. The Yorkton Natural History Society and DU-Yorkton were awarded the 1995 Nature Saskatchewan Annual Conservation Award. The complex has recently been designated a wildlife viewing area on a self-guided nature tour designed by DU's Nature Watch program (Tour #6 - Yorkton East, SK). The interest in natural areas such as the Barvas Marsh complex

is growing and it is hoped that the marsh can be used to educate and inform people about the importance of such sites and the need for their conservation.

Further information about the Barvas area and the multispecies inventory can be obtained from DU-Yorkton. All inquiries are welcome.

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## A SECOND BREEDING RECORD OF RED CROSSBILL IN REGINA

On 26 September 1989 at approximately 10:45 a.m. Elmer L. Fox and I watched a pair of Red Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*) feeding a fledgling in a tall spruce west of the Bandshell near the Albert Street Memorial Bridge in Regina. This observation represents a second breeding record for Regina. In *Birds of Regina* (Rev. 1980-SNHS Special Publication No. 12), M. Belcher reports that Dr. G.F. Ledingham observed a similar incident on 30 May 1976, citing it as a breeding record.

- *Frank H. Brazier*, 2657 Cameron Street, Regina, SK. S4T 2W5



*The rare Large Yellow Lady's Slipper*

*Ken Belcher*