

LETTERS

HOUSE FINCHES IN TISDALE IN 1992

In the June 1993 *Blue Jay* (51:113-121) there is a write-up on the House Finch in Manitoba in 1991. I sighted a House Finch in the spring of 1992 and again in 1993, but unfortunately did not get pictures of them at my feeder. My feeder is at my kitchen window and the birds were within six or seven feet of me. I checked very carefully with Peterson's bird guide for special identifying marks. At the time, I did not realize that these House Finches were not regular migrants. Others might be interested to know that the House Finch has been in the Tisdale, Saskatchewan, area.

- Harley S. Ranson, Box 23, Tisdale, Saskatchewan. S0E 1T0

LITTLE BLUE HERON AT LUMSDEN

Saturday, 8 May 1993, was a dull, overcast day. Thinking that it was a good day to find early warblers along the river bank, I took a walk late in the afternoon. I did not find warblers, but as I was about to return home, across the river (approximately 25 yards) in a dead tree hanging out over the river, a large bird was standing. I was not familiar with the bird, so I continued to watch it. It was very cooperative and I had an excellent view of it.

I returned home and as soon as I saw Godfrey's picture in the *Birds of Canada* I knew what I had seen. I came back to the spot and again we had a good view of it, fishing from some flotsam in the river. It was dark, slaty blue with long legs, long bill (partly white on top), almost purple over the head and neck.

Keith Barr came out on Monday morning and took some pictures and a number of others came during the day to see it. Although we looked for it, "Little Blue" was not seen again after Monday.

Knowing that it is an eastern seaboard heron, we wonder how it happened to be in our area.

- Betty Binnie, Box 382, Lumsden, Saskatchewan. S0G 3C0

A THIRD WINTER BLACK GUILLEMOT FROM CHURCHILL, MANITOBA

Nero recently reported a second winter occurrence of Black Guillemot (*Cephus grylle*) from Churchill, Manitoba.¹ This note reports a previously unpublished winter record which, chronologically, represents the second of three such sightings.

During the winter of 1984, local resident Joe Kowal found a strange bird sitting on a snow bank near the townsite grain elevator, being attacked by Common Ravens. While the exact date is unknown, Mr. Kowal indicated that it was during March 1984. The bird - a Black Guillemot - subsequently died, but was kept frozen until I prepared it as a study skin on 1 August 1984. Presently housed in the collection of the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, the specimen weighed only 246 g and had no body fat, suggesting that it was in dire straits when found.

While the appearance of Black Guillemots on shore during winter at Churchill seems to be a rare event, the species may be regular in nearby leads on Hudson Bay. In 1984 a local hunter and naturalist, Paul Ratson (pers. comm.), told me that

he had seen guillemots frequently during the winter while hunting seals at open water areas off Churchill. Researchers or government agencies that have an opportunity to fly over open leads off Churchill during the winter should be encouraged to look for this species, or any other birds, which might be present.

Joe Kowal should be commended for his interest in trying to help the grounded guillemot and his foresight in preserving the specimen. I would like to thank Kevin Burke of the Churchill Northern Studies Centre who kindly relayed the data from the specimen label to me.

1. Nero, R. W. 1992. Second winter record of Black Guillemot at Churchill, Manitoba. *Blue Jay* 50:113-114.

- *Doug McRae*, Box 130, St. Williams, Ontario. N0E 1P0

HOME GROWN DUCKS IN REGINA

One day in the spring of 1993, my wife and I noticed a pair of adult mallard ducks in the back yard of our home in south Regina. We were glad to see them again since they had nested in our yard on two previous occasions. They returned on several successive days and finally selected a nesting spot under a bush beside our small pond. After laying 12 eggs, the hen began the incubation process. This immediately dominated our backyard activities (don't make any unnecessary noise, don't walk too near to the nest, cut the lawn only when she is away on a feeding expedition). As soon as incubation began the drake was not seen again.

During the incubation we gradually established the hen's confidence. On one occasion we together routed a marauding cat which endangered the nest.

Authorities had informed us that the incubation period for duck eggs was 26-28 days but "our" brood hatched on the 35th day, after we had almost given up hope. The ducklings took a couple of exploratory dips in our pond, and then seemed ready to leave the nest behind. We decided the ducklings could not survive the trip of nearly two km to the lake without some assistance. We surrounded the nesting site with netting supported by stakes.

We managed to catch all the ducklings and put them in a pail where they peeped loudly in protest. Our plan to catch the mother was unsuccessful, despite the assistance of a helpful neighbour.

Finally, I started to walk slowly in the general direction of the lake, with a pail of peeping ducklings in one hand and a fisherman's dip net in the other. The mother duck began to follow along, expressing her anxiety with loud quacking. At the end of each block, I would set the pail on the ground and move away from it. The mother would waddle up to the pail to be sure the little ones were all right. We would then set off again, repeating the process at the end of each block. As long as she could see us and hear the peeping, the mother would walk behind or fly overhead. We must have made a strange procession along the street, followed at a discreet distance by my wife and our helpful neighbour in the car.

Finally we reached the shore of the lake and released the ducklings to be reunited with their mother. We are now hoping she will escape the predators and hunters so she can return to our yard next year.

- *Allan McLeod*, 37 Anderson Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4S 4R3