



Northern Mockingbird

Doug Collister

The gopher continued to store peanuts in his mouth — clearly the winner! On a separate note, while feeding the gopher, I noticed a caterpillar moving across the grass. I never gave it a second thought until I saw the gopher pick it up and begin to spin it in his paws. He would spin it for a few seconds and then stop and look at it. If the caterpillar moved, he would once more spin it, stop and stare at it. After four spins, he stopped and the caterpillar lay still. It was then that he proceeded to eat it. It was something that I didn't think he would eat, but I'm beginning to discover that with nature, you just never know!

- Carol Bessant, #901 — 2720 College Avenue, Regina, SK.

UNUSUAL BIRDS IN CENTRAL SASKATCHEWAN

Last summer (1994) we stayed in a number of different towns in the southwestern United States enjoying the oases of lush grass and spread-

ing trees between the miles of desert. In three places we spotted mockingbirds, our first sightings ever, though we had seen its cousin, the catbird, in central Manitoba.

One stay was for two weeks in June and we often saw the mockingbirds flying around the lush garden, often in pairs; the large white patches on their wings as well as on their tails (which often cocked up on landing) were quite distinctive. Their song was delightful too, and they became my favourite bird then.

On 16 October 1994, in Prince Albert, I was walking in the Crescent Heights area when I saw a bird alight on a post by the side of the street — a robin I thought, at a distance, but as I came nearer it cocked its tail and flew away, showing distinctive white patches quite clearly. I mentioned this to friends and they said they had seen a strange bird in the garden and couldn't think what it was. ... Further along the street, there it was again, scrabbling about

at the edge of the road, under a shady tree.

I walked by there twice more that month, seeing the bird the last time on 30 October, in a border under a window, apparently finding something to eat. Two days later came ice and snow and the bird was seen no more — did it fly south?

A week or two later someone else a couple of blocks away came home from work and found a grey bird dead on the top step having flown into a nearby window, leaving grey feathers. It was thought to be a Gray Jay who had, perhaps, gorged on the nearby rowan berries. It was put out in the garbage. I wonder?

I subsequently heard CBC Regina ask people to take part in the bird count starting 1st December and, in particular to watch for a late migrant, maybe a robin, a nuthatch, or even a mockingbird from the eastern United States. Presumably they have been seen around Regina from time to time. Nobody seems to have seen a mockingbird in these parts and many ask what it looks like. Any ideas as to how far they may spread?

Referring to the March 1995 edition of *Blue Jay*, I too saw a House Finch at a bird feeder about 5 miles south of Prince Albert in April 1992 — I had seen them at the coast. I have also seen a Ruby-Crowned Kinglet and a common Yellowthroat once on migration. Not too common, it seems.

Additionally, a group of us at Emma Lake in June 1991 spotted an American Avocet. We had seen this species between Prince Albert and Saskatoon earlier the same month. People here don't seem familiar with this.

- Maureen Wright, #518 — 24th Street E.,
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NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FROM CROOKED LAKE, 1995

In early June I returned briefly to my boyhood haunts at Crooked Lake in the Qu'Appelle Valley. On 12 July at Cedar Cove Resort I saw a tomato-red male House Finch in full song (a cross between a Vesper Sparrow and a domestic canary). There are two previous sightings for the Qu'Appelle Valley by Callin at Fort Qu'Appelle in 1979 (*Birds of the Qu'Appelle 1857-1979*) and in 1980 (Houston and Houston, *Blue Jay* 44:69-84). I am familiar with this species from my years on the B.C. Coast, where I found a nest in the English ivy covering the side of a lodge on Gabriola Island, and once saw a lovely male in full song on a shop sign in one of the grubbier downtown areas of Vancouver, with no vegetation in sight.

Even more exciting to me was the behaviour of an Eastern Phoebe. I was operating a blacklight trap for moths at Melville Beach. In the mornings an Eastern Phoebe was perched by the gauze cage, intently watching the moths flying about inside. One morning I released a few tent caterpillar moths while it was perched nearby, and it quickly took them on the wing. I soon found that three or four was its limit; it would then disappear for an hour or so. By the third day, it would take the fluttering moths directly from my fingers. At one point, while I was lying in the lounge chair nearby reading, it used my knee briefly as a perch. I took the opportunity to offer it a selection of arctid moths (*Hypoprepia*; *Spilosoma*; *Grammia*; & *Hyphantria*) whose showy red, orange or white colouration supposedly protects them by warning predators of their unpalatability. The phoebe wolfed them all down with no discrimination, wings and all.