
NOTES

THE SWIFT FOX

On 26 July 1996 while coming home from Kyle, 8 miles south and 6 miles west, I noticed what looked like a cat, lying flat on the edge of a summer fallow field, just across the ditch.

On getting closer I noted the ears were a little large and the nose a little long for a cat. After driving a quarter mile past, I turned around and drove slowly by again, and realized that it was either a Swift Fox or a young Coyote.

Again I kept going until a half mile past, then turned and drove slowly until just by the animal when I stopped. Now the animal stood up, took a few steps then stopped and looked at me, and having seen Swift Foxes before, I am certain that this was one.

The colour was very much like a Coyote, with a black-tipped tail but features of a fox, and the size of a cat.

The animal had dug out both ends of a culvert that had been buried with blow dirt for years, and had been there for some time.

I saw Lloyd Sather, the owner of the land, and asked if he had seen the animal and if he knew that it was a Swift Fox. He replied that he had seen it a few times, but thought that it was a fox that was not doing well.

Sig Jordheim, Kyle, SK.

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF A FEMALE AMERICAN ROBIN

5:30 a.m., 3 May 1996. I have just awakened and am lying in bed wondering what woke me. I hear a noise something like a light tap and then a brushing sound. I think it is the furnace coming on and the pipes expanding. No. It's also not like the noise you hear at -40° when the house contracts with the cold. I lie in bed and listen. The sound is intermittent and varying in intensity. The next time I hear the noise, I get up and sit at the kitchen table where it seems to be coming from down the hall. I go to the first bedroom and then the second. Then I hear and see something hit the window. When I look out, I see a female American Robin sitting on a spruce branch about two feet away. She flies at the window, hits it and flies back to the branch. I find this unusual as I thought that only males would defend their territory. This Robin seems to be seeing its reflection in the window and to be trying to chase it away.

I now close the blinds and go back to bed. The Robin continues her attack. This time I get up and remove the screen. This does not work either. I get up again and pull the blinds up to the top. The attack continues. I get up and open the window so the angle of reflection is different. The Robin still attacks the window, so I get up, close the window and put on the light, but this does not work. When she is about to attack again, I turn the light off and on as fast as I can several times. She still attacks, even with the light blinking. Off and on all day long the attack continues.

Next morning at 5:20 a.m. the Robin starts again. I get up and shut the bedroom door so I can't hear the noise, then go back to sleep. But I am determined to outwit the Robin. So I get up to get my pruning saw and cut off the branch she sits on, and a few extra branches; so that she won't be able to look across and see her reflection in the window.

With no branches to sit on, the Robin now sits on the top of the downspout at an angle from which she cannot possibly see herself. Still she attacks the window! The only explanation I can give is that this Robin is an Alice trying to get through the looking glass.

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WHOOPING CRANES INVADE SASKATCHEWAN

During the 1996 fall migration Whooping Cranes were observed in unprecedented numbers in Saskatchewan. At least 98 (including 10 young) of the estimated 165 ± Whooping Cranes in the Wood Buffalo-Aransas flock of Whooping Cranes were reported to the Canadian Wildlife Service Whooping Crane Hot Line between late August and the end of October. The cranes were observed from Meadow Lake to Estevan, with the majority of birds being within 100 km of Saskatoon. The Canadian Wildlife Service monitors this population and during the summer of 1996, 44 pairs of cranes nested. In late May and in June at least 32 chicks hatched, however, as is the norm, chicks disappeared as the summer progressed and only 14 were observed in mid August. As the birds arrive on their wintering grounds at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas they will be

counted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A total count of this population will be available by year end.

The new International Whooping Crane Recovery Team (an amalgamation of the Canadian and U.S. Recovery Teams) met for the first time this year. The team directs recovery activities for the cranes following guidelines laid out in the Whooping Crane Recovery Plan. A few of the activities that the team is involved in include: research into the habitat and food requirements of the cranes on their breeding and winter ranges; investigations into reintroduction techniques and suitable reintroduction areas; captive breeding for research and release; and introduction of birds into the wild.

For the past two years Canadian Wildlife Service staff, in cooperation with Parks Canada, have been investigating crane foods in the breeding area. Techniques used involve the identification and matching of carbon and nitrogen isotope levels in crane feathers and potential food items as well as analysis of crane droppings. Parks Canada staff have been using satellite imagery to map crane habitat and recently began classifying the habitat in the nesting area. U.S. personnel have and continue to investigate winter foods and habitat.

A new non-migratory flock (to replace the one that died out in Louisiana) is currently being established. Cranes, bred in captivity for release, are being introduced into the wild in Florida. To date about 50 birds survive with the oldest just arriving at breeding age. The Calgary Zoo, which produced their first Whooping Crane chicks this year will be sending three cranes to join others from U.S. breeding centres for release later this winter.