

had revealed no traces of the bird. Apparently the drag marks were those of the gander, but it seemed impossible that a coyote or fox could capture a goose, drag it for 100 yards or more, and then let it get away on the ice of a dam, which would safely hold up an animal. The only explanation I can give is that our dog Shep must have heard the commotion and driven the predator away. He is ever watchful of coyotes and foxes and even pursues hawks and owls when they come close. On one occasion he chased foxes away after they had injured two geese. Another time a fox had captured a turkey gobbler, torn out a mass of feathers and injured it so badly it had to be destroyed; tracks in the snow showed the fox had fled in haste.

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COURTSHIP BEHAVIOUR OF A PAIR OF BLACK-BILLED MAGPIES

On 2 March 1997, a cloudy, but bright, windless day, I had left Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, about 4 p.m. and at the Hwy. #1 sign permitting motorists a speed of 100 kph, I set the cruise control when that speed was reached. I maintained that speed when I reached the start of the area which, many years ago, was separate sand and gravel pits. My odometer read 1.8 k when I arrived at the point where the road levelled off, as it had climbed a little. At the same time I saw, almost straight ahead, but somewhat to my right and, perhaps, ten or twelve feet in the air, two Black-billed Magpies (*Pica pica*), performing the strangest rites I have ever seen.

The two birds were facing each other, only a few inches apart, up-

right, with their wings beating slowly, just sufficient to keep them airborne, and their tails were fanned. Their bills were open, but I could not hear anything as the car windows were closed. Because of their relative position to me, I was able to maintain speed, steer properly and still keep my eyes on the birds, so I know that they continued this nuptial performance until I passed them. I watched them for half a minute, maybe 45 seconds. The birds were so engrossed with each other that they took no notice of the car.

In my opinion, their behaviour could have only one possible result - copulation.

I described the above to my friend, Fred Lahrman, retired employee of the Royal Saskatchewan Museum in Regina, who told me that he owned a copy of Arthur Cleveland Bent's "Life Histories of North American Crows, Jays and Titmice" (1947) when I had coffee with him on 4 March. Next day, he told me that the Magpie's courtship behaviour had been seen and described only in "bits and pieces." He emphasized that was how it was described when I questioned the phrase.

I offer the above as the complete performance.

Footnote: On Monday, 5 March 1990, a cold (15°F at 7:00 a.m.) bright day I walked, after breakfast, in Wascana, where I saw five Magpies, one of which actually sang an attractive, melodious warble. Fred Lahrman told me that he, too, has heard them sing.

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