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# NOTES AND LETTERS

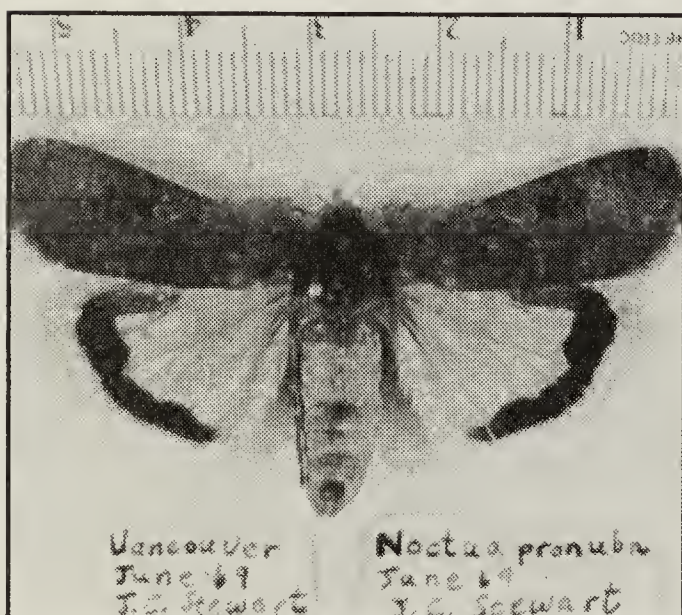
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## YELLOW UNDERWING (*Noctua pronuba* L.), A NEW MOTH IN MANITOBA

On the evening of September 5, 2000, a fresh specimen of a Yellow Underwing, with yellow hind wings fringed with black, was collected by myself and Kenneth. It was taken a block away from the confluence of two rivers, the Pasquia and the big Saskatchewan River.

The specimen is a bit on the small side by 4 mm when compared with specimens from Belgium and France in the author's collection. The species arrived in Canada only a few years ago and is now reported from widely separated areas. It will be interesting to watch its spread and further establishment in Canada.

- Walter Krivda, P. O. Box 864,  
The Pas, MB R9A 1K8



**Yellow Underwing specimen in the entomological collection at Olds College, AB**

**Courtesy Ernest Mengerson**

## [Editorial Note: THE INVASION OF CANADA BY THE YELLOW UNDERWING (*Noctua pronuba* L.)

The Yellow Underwing is an old world species of Owlet Moth (Noctuidae). It is a general feeder on a great variety of herbaceous plants. The caterpillar hibernates when it is almost full grown.

The first reported record from Canada was at Vancouver, B. C. in June 1969 by J. C. Stewart and the specimen is in the collection at Olds College, Olds, Alberta (Ernest Mengerson, pers. comm.). We have heard of no other reports for British Columbia, so it is unknown if it has become established there (or if the Edmonton record, referred to below, spread from there).

The next known Canadian specimen was taken at Halifax, N. S. in 1979. By 1998, Donald LaFontaine reported that it had spread from Halifax to central Ontario and Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> It is now reported to be so plentiful in eastern Canada that they get several inches of this one species in their moth light traps.

The first report of the Yellow Underwing from the Prairie Provinces is the collection from St. Victor, SK by Daniel Glaske at sugar bait on July 26, 2000 and another one on August 29, 2000.

On July 30 and 31, 2000, Gary Anweiler collected the first Alberta specimens of Yellow Underwing in Edmonton, AB. Walter Krivda collected the first Manitoba specimen on September 5, 2000.

The Yellow Underwing is a beautiful addition to our fauna, but it will have to

be watched to see if it becomes harmful to gardens or crops. At the rate it is going, it could become plentiful in Saskatchewan in a few years.

1. LaFontaine, Donald J., 1998. The Moths of North America, *Noctuoidea*, *Noctuidae*. Fascicle 27, Part 3. The Wedge Entomological Research Foundation.

- Ronald R. Hooper, Box 757, Fort Qu'Appelle, SK S0G 1S0 ]

## SWAINSON'S HAWKS OVER THE SOURIS VALLEY

On Friday afternoon, the 28th of September, 2001 while Carol Bjorklund was driving her school bus route, she saw over 80 Swainson's Hawks in a field southeast of Sedley. They were walking about the field feeding on grasshoppers.

The next morning at 10:15 AM below the dam at Nickle Lake southeast of Weyburn, Carol Bjorklund and I counted 1918 Swainson's Hawks flying over the dam in less than an hour's time. The flight was already under way when we arrived. The hawks were going with the first northwest wind that we had noted in the Weyburn area for weeks. The wind was a Beaufort 5 at ground level. The small temperature gauge that we carry read 15° C. The sky was cloudy.

We had been driving along a gravel road that dropped down into the Souris Valley and went south. From this location, 17 - 7 -13 W 2 , we had an excellent view of the hawks as they flew over us in kettles and in straggles. The kettling, an upward swirling on updrafts, gave us the opportunity to count the hawks as they went over.

The hawks stretched out over a half mile - the width of the Souris Valley.

Although the banks are hardly noticeable in many places, the differences in height of land built up for the earthen dam, the lake behind the dam, and dry fields below the dam along with the strong northwest wind created the conditions for updrafts to occur. While the topography of the Souris basin may not afford any spectacular cliffs – the basin in the Weyburn area is no more than one hundred feet high on either side of the river's flood plain – it nevertheless may provide enough additional lift for the hawks to ease their way out of Saskatchewan down on through the American plains states to Texas and then over Central America and on to the wintering grounds in Argentina. This topography may be similar to that of the Nueces River west of Corpus Christi, Texas where Paul Johnsgard and others see Swainson's Hawks, Mississippi Kites and other raptors and accipters in mid-September, and where 10,000 Broad-winged Hawks could be counted in one day passing overhead.

When Ron Martin of North Dakota found out over the Internet of our sighting of close to 2,000 Swainson's Hawks in the Souris River Basin, he posted a message stating that the previous largest number of Swainson's, 300, were seen flying south on September 26, 1986 on migration near Sawyer, N.D. where the birds left the southernmost bend of the Souris River and carried on south. Sawyer is southeast of Estevan on a loop of the Souris River that flows into the United States before it heads north into Canada again to join the Assiniboine.

Never before have so many Swainson's Hawks been seen flying in migration at one location in Saskatchewan. Our enjoyment in seeing so many hawks flying south on fall migration, while a chance



occurrence, was but one of many such observations along flyways running through the Great Plains. It was our luck to first bring this pathway to the attention of the Saskatchewan birding community.

Johnsgard, Paul, J. 2001. *Prairie Birds*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence. p. 65-66..

- *Martin Bailey*, 102 - 1833 Coteau Avenue, Weyburn, SK

## **MORTLACH'S EURASIAN INVASION**

In Mortlach, the year 2001 will be remembered for wind and lack of rain. In our little oasis, i.e. backyard, it will be remembered as the year of the Eurasian Collared-Dove invasion.

It started on June 4. We were experiencing another powerful southeaster and I noticed a large bird sitting on top of a nest box inhabited by a Tree Swallow. The swallow was valiantly trying to get this intruder off his roof.

I grabbed the binoculars to get a better look. It was something we'd never seen before. The bird was cream-coloured with a black neck band and resembled a dove. The closest thing in *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* was a turtle-dove. A cage bird, the turtle-dove sometimes escapes and is found in Miami and Los Angeles. Well, it was quite a wind!

I have access to a computer at the local Drop In Centre, so I typed Turtle Dove into the search window and found some web sites that described a "new bird soon to be seen in your area." From this I learned that we had a Eurasian Collared-Dove right in our backyard. The species, native to India, has expanded all over Europe, even into Scandinavia.

They were introduced into the Bahamas and migrated without assistance to Florida. Now they have arrived in Mortlach, SK.

On July 22, we noticed two more doves, a pair that was mating. A few days later, I counted four doves at one time. Two of them appeared to be smaller with barely any ring marking and I wondered if these could have been offspring of the mating pair.

We spent many hours watching and listening to the doves. They used our bird bath several times a day and sat in the tall pines in Mortlach's Vimy Park. Usually a magpie arrives in town in the fall. This year it was met with opposition; the Eurasian Collared-Doves chased it. Magpies are the only bird species toward which we observed aggression.

As fall approached, we wondered if the doves would migrate with the Mourning Doves. Surely, we hoped, they would go south before winter came. On October 7, there were seven collared-doves feeding in our yard. They stayed on the ground over an hour. But as of today, October 21, four were at the bird bath and feeder. If they have no migrating instinct, we wonder if they will survive a Saskatchewan winter.

- *Mary Flack*, Box 128, Mortlach, SK  
S0H 3E0

## **SUICIDAL RAVENS?**

On June 2, I noticed two separate incidents of parent ravens feeding young on top of beaver lodges. The young (one group of three, one of four) were nearly full grown but could only flap around, not fly. In both cases, they were very noisy, calling incessantly for the two days that I was present. It seems that this would almost be suicidal since the lodges were



attached to land, giving predators easy access. This was in the boreal transition zone about 60 km NE of Preeceville.

On June 5, I noticed the same situation 8 km NW of Preeceville in the parkland zone. It was the same scenario with three young and the same incessant squawking. After three days, they were gone. Whether they flew away or were eaten, I am not sure. Has anyone else seen this type of behaviour in ravens?

- David Weiman, Box 1000, Preeceville, SK S0A 3B0

## SURPRISE ATTACK

It was the morning of July 9, ten days before the annual Canadian Prairie Lily Show. I looked out my kitchen window and could not help admiring the blaze of colour created by hundreds of lily blooms. I could see many sparrows moving about in the west side of the lily patch, and then realized that they were sitting on the stems of the lilies. At first I

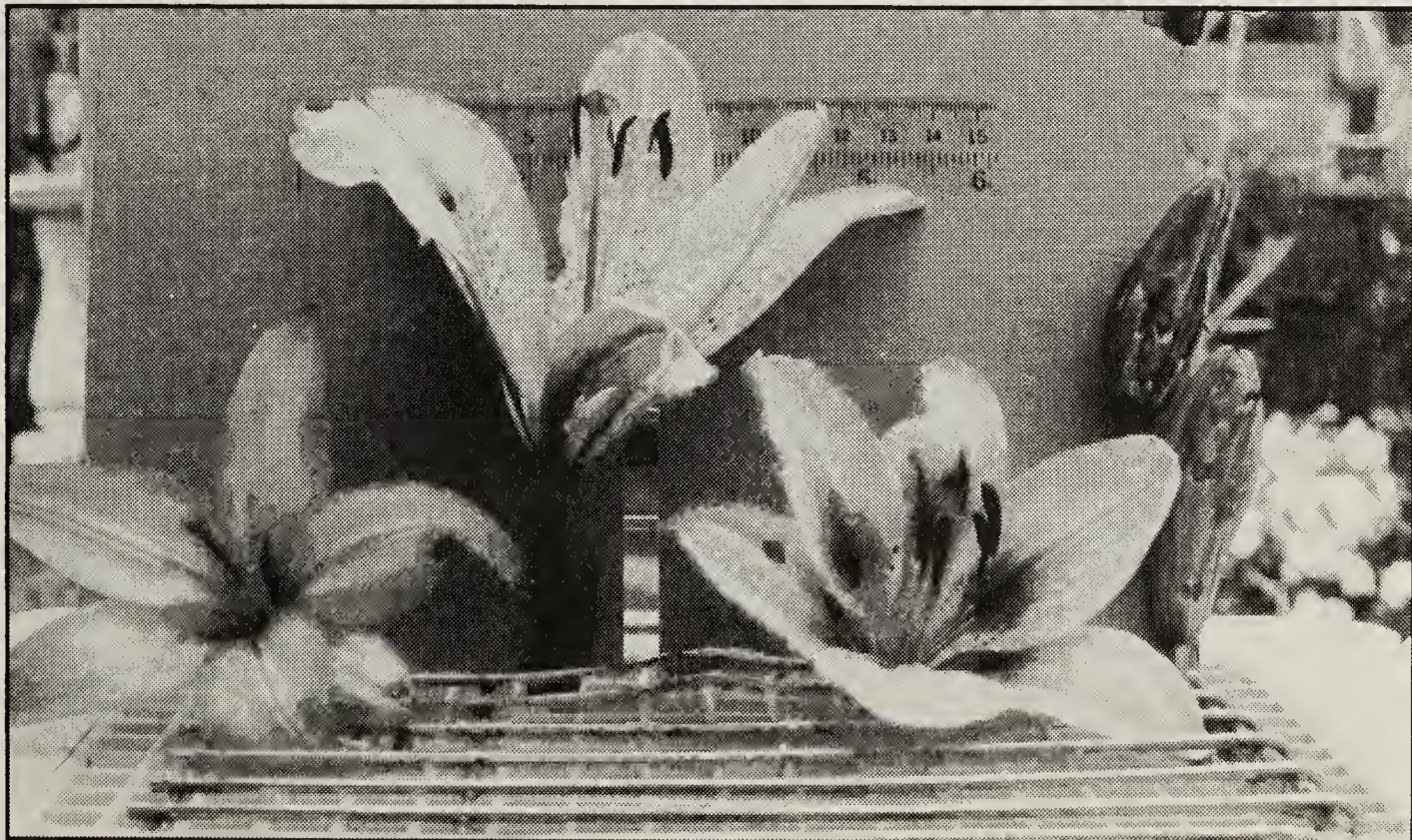
thought that there were only two or three dozen.

I didn't want them perched there so I walked down the garden path, clapped my hands and, to my surprise and horror, realized that there were at least a hundred sparrows in the flock. They left abruptly, but had enjoyed a wonderful picnic of lily petals, buds and the odd leaf. The damage was extensive. Many blooms opened bearing huge holes and torn petals. A few of the leaves were damaged as well. Our entries in the Lily Show were limited.

This invasion by my former friends – the cute and interesting sparrows – was a total surprise. We had never witnessed them sitting on the stems previously. Many kept returning to the lilies, although installing a scarecrow seemed to help some.

Perhaps *Blue Jay* readers can offer an explanation and a solution for next year.

- Nellie Dunville, 1329 - 12<sup>th</sup> Street East, Saskatoon, SK S7H 0E5



*Lily flowers damaged by sparrows.*

*Stan Dunville*



## HOUSE SPARROW SWIFTLY KILLS AND EATS CATOCALA MOTH AT THE PAS, MB

It is well known that birds eat insects, but it is poorly known which insects are eaten by which birds. Many insects are avoided by birds due to bad taste. It was therefore a bit of good luck when I saw a large moth (*Catocala relictata*) fall from a shop window to the ground. It was instantly attacked, cut to pieces and eaten in under two minutes by a House Sparrow. The entire event was unbelievably swift. Only the head with antennae attached and the legs were left lying on the ground. The sparrow flew off with the abdomen of the moth after the moth was swiftly pecked apart. I was able to view the entire event from behind a parked car.

This large underwing moth, covering most of one's palm, is most often called the white underwing moth (or relict underwing). It has peaks in abundance and was abundant in The Pas area in 1961. There is a good series of specimens in the writer's collection. It's not mentioned in the literature that this moth has a bluish tinge to it – particularly the underside if viewed under good light and at a certain angle.

Many insects are taken on the wing very rapidly by birds. This occurs so swiftly as to be invisible to the human eye.

- *Walter Krivda*, P.O. Box 864, The Pas, MB R9A 1K8



***Fox Squirrel who appeared for three days at a bird feeder in Regina.  
Photograph taken on 4 December 2000 by Diether Peschken***