
NOTES AND LETTERS

EASTERN PHOEBE HANGING BY A THREAD

Eastern Phoebes have nested on my cousin Jim Friesen's farm 3 miles east of Rosthern for the past 25 years. A slough a few hundred yards from the house provides mud for the nest and a good hatch of flying insects for food. Over time, the birds have nested in an unused chicken barn, the garage adjoining the house and on the socket of the porch light over the front door, refurbishing one nest at each location for several consecutive years.³

This year, as in the past few years, the phoebes nested on a window's top ledge under the eaves of an old two-storey home still on the property. The "untidy looking" nest is 12 feet above the ground, and besides mud, consists of the customary "dry grass,...fine fibres, rootlets and hair."^{4,6} It was the untidiness of the fibres that almost was the undoing of one of the builders.

In mid-morning of 24 May, Jim noticed a phoebe hanging motionless from the nest. Looped around its neck was a 3-foot fibre, possibly a strand of baler twine. After going for a stepladder, he was able to tear the cord in two, the phoebe still unmoving. The bird revived while Jim held it in his hand attempting to release the loop, and instantly flew off. Later in the day, both phoebes were back about the nest. In due time, egg laying, brooding and successful raising of nestlings followed.

Studies that feature anecdotal description mention no similar incident where nesting material proved hazardous.^{1,2,5}

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3. FRIESEN, V.C. 1983. (Un)usual nesting site of the Eastern Phoebe. *Blue Jay* 41:166-167.

4. HARRISON, C. 1978. A Field Guide to the Nests, Eggs, and Nestings of North American Birds. Collins, Cleveland.

5. PEARSON, I. G., ed. 1936. Birds of America. Garden City Books, Garden City, N.Y.

6. TAVERNER, P.A. 1928. Birds of Western Canada. Second Edition. National Museum of Canada, Ottawa.

- Victor C. Friesen, P.O. Box 65, Rosthern, SK S0K3R0

ADDITIONAL ROUNDLEAF MONKEY-FLOWER POPULATIONS IN MANITOBA

In the June 2002 issue of *Blue Jay*, staff of the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre (Cary Hamel, Ken De Smet, and Elizabeth Reimer) reported the discovery of three new occurrences of nationally rare Roundleaf Monkey-flower (*Mimulus glabratus*) in Manitoba. They also noted that surveys of springs along the upper Assiniboine River might reveal additional populations. In the summer of 2002, Cary Hamel and Elizabeth Reimer conducted an extensive survey of springs in this area and found three additional populations. Two were located in springs adjacent to the Qu'Appelle River near the Saskatchewan boundary west of

St. Lazare (Fig. 1), and one was near McAuley, at the top of a seepage slope above a tributary to Scissor Creek. Scissor Creek joins the Assiniboine River 19 km east of the Saskatchewan boundary. In addition, one population near Brandon, last reported in 1951, was rediscovered. With these additional occurrences, the total number of known Roundleaf Monkey-flower locations in Manitoba has risen to nine.



A spring-fed stream adjacent to the Qu'Appelle River, near the Saskatchewan/Manitoba boundary. Roundleaf Monkey-flower can be seen at the water's edge directly in front of the white birch tree.

Cary Hamel and Elizabeth Reimer

- Cary Hamel and Elizabeth Reimer,
Manitoba Conservation, Box 24, 200
Saulteaux Crescent, Winnipeg, MB R3J
3W3

FLYING SQUIRRELS IN BLUEBIRD NEST BOXES

On August 6, 2001, I took my two-year-old grandson to look inside one of our bluebird nest boxes. I believed that the box was unoccupied, and that opening the box would disturb no nesting birds. We were surprised to find inside the box a Northern Flying Squirrel, fast asleep. The squirrel blinked awake and stared at us, but did not flee. After calling my husband to come and see it, I closed the door. The squirrel was gone the next day, and did not return.

I have since learned that our neighbour, Hartley Woodward, made a similar discovery in one of his nest boxes that same summer, less than half a mile east of our home. We live 14.4 km north of the village of Treherne, on the south-facing rim of the Assiniboine Valley, in south-central Manitoba. Our nest boxes near the valley rim were occupied by flying squirrels which, evidently, live in or near the forested slopes of the Assiniboine Valley.

South-central Manitoba is home to the Northern Flying Squirrel subspecies *Glaucomys sabrinus canescens*.¹ The subspecies is "known to inhabit the full length of the Red River and the Assiniboine, west to at least Treesbank..."³, which is 70 km west of Treherne. Robert Nero reported finding a northern flying squirrel in the area of Haywood, Manitoba "...in small tree growth at a considerable distance from the more heavily wooded river valleys".² Haywood is 26 km east of Treherne.

Given their cavity-dwelling habit, it is not surprising to find flying squirrels sleeping in nest boxes, if the nest boxes are located near wooded areas. Two such finds in one summer, however, may be noteworthy.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Robert Nero for encouraging me to write this note, and for his helpful suggestions.



Northern Flying Squirrels

Hans Dommasch

1. BANFIELD, A.W.F. 1974. The Mammals of Canada. University of Toronto Press.

2. NERO, R.W. 1993., Northern Flying Squirrel and Red Bat caught on barbed wire. *Blue Jay* 51:215-216

3. SOPER, J.D. 1961. The Mammals of Manitoba. Canadian Wildlife Service, Wildlife Management Bulletin Series 1, No.17. Ottawa.

- Ardythe McMaster, Box 40, Rossendale, MB ROH 1C0

COMMON ROADSIDE SKIPPER VANISHES AT THE PAS, MANITOBA

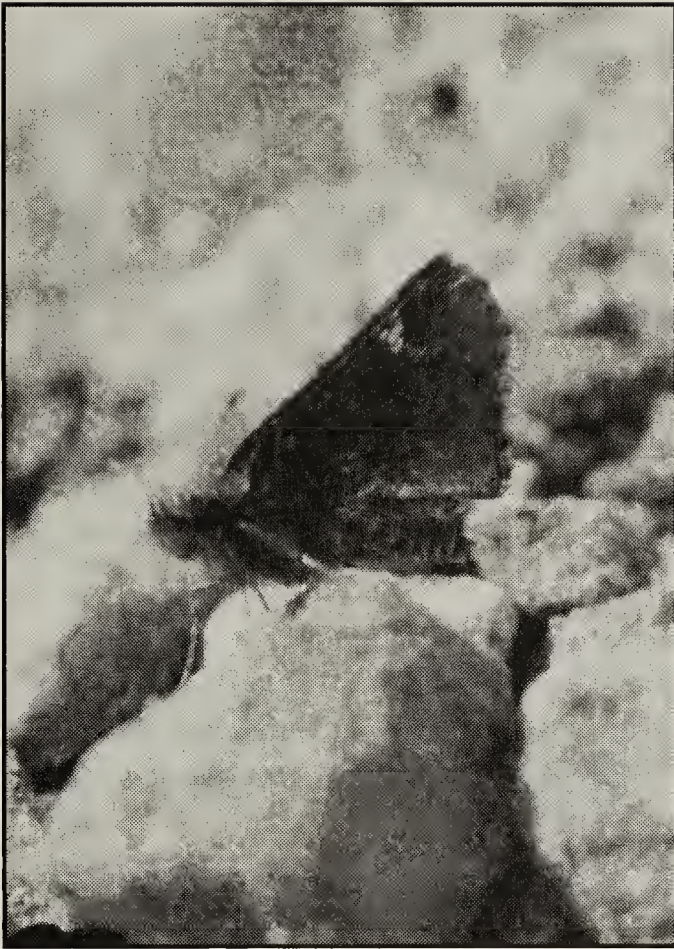
When I first started collecting insects at The Pas, some 50 years ago, this little skipper, *Amblyscirtes vialis*, was common along roadsides. I haven't seen one since about 1990. Although still common at Bjorkdale, it occurs in smaller numbers than previously (Ron Hooper, pres.comm. February 2002).

Klots gives the range as 'southern Canada'.¹ Is it possible that the Common Roadside Skipper extended its range to The Pas in the favourable decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but finally couldn't survive here? When most reference books give the range of a species, they tend to imply a static situation—once a species is recorded as a spot on a map, that it will always be there—and that our field collecting and explorations should try to document the further spread and expansion into new areas. Mention is seldom made that ranges and distributions are tentative, and that indeed some species have pushed too far north, for instance into really unfavourable areas for them, and that in consequence they will not survive there indefinitely.

As the drying out continues over the next decade, more and more species may constrict their present ranges. With future return of wetter years, they will resurge and spread their geographic ranges again. The study of butterflies can possibly be used as an index, or at least an adjunct, demonstrating climate change. To the weather people, this can be called the "Lepidoptera Effect."

1. KLOTS, A.B. 1951. A Field Guide to the Butterflies. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

- Walter Krivda, Box 864, The Pas, Manitoba R9A 1K8



Common Roadside Skipper

Juhachi Asai

LAZULI BUNTING IN SASKATOON

The letter about a Lazuli Bunting in the September 2002 issue of *Blue Jay* prompts me to report my observations of a Lazuli Bunting in my backyard in the Lakeview area of Saskatoon. I first observed the bird around 8 pm on 31 May 2002. I then saw it five separate times between 8:35 am and 6:45 pm the following day. I took several photos of it with my digital camera but unfortunately for some reason they are all out of focus. Nevertheless, the bird can still be positively identified as a Lazuli Bunting. I have put two of the pictures on my website:

http://members.shaw.ca/peteros/birds/LABU_7119.jpg

http://members.shaw.ca/peteros/birds/LABU_7121.jpg

- *Peter Hardie*, peteros@shaw.ca

EURYCEA TRIDENTIFERA

Poem by Mark Abley

A salamander, off-white, found
only in Honey Creek Cave
with remnant, atrophied eyes,
its home a void of light—
should anybody care if
the slippery creature dies?

No economic value,
not the future of the genus:
one of nature's small
astonishments, a blind
perpetual swimmer with
what my *Audubon* calls

a "snout depressed abruptly"
below the dissolving bedrock,
the persimmon-dotted hills...
No telling what it perceives.
If a city drained the aquifer
or some genius blasted the hell

out of Honey Creek and sent
its dwellers to kingdom come,
why grieve for a minute?
—Just the feeling, I imagine,
that this earth no longer belongs
to the wild things in it

and they vanish one by one,
hour by hour, pale morsels
of flesh that can hardly dream
what the world has swallowed up
since a few intrepid ancestors
made a cave their home.

Mark Abley, 2001. *Dissolving Bedrock.*
OVER THE MOON, Outremont, PQ

horn that was shed from the upper mandible (bill) of a female or male American White Pelican. Unique to the pelicans (Family Pelecanidae), these bill horns are composed of several erect horny plates that develop annually along with the alternate (nuptial) plumage prior to nesting; they are shed around the time the young hatch.^{1, 2} Shed bill horns probably drop into the water or to the ground in the nesting colony, in this case on an island in Doré Lake.

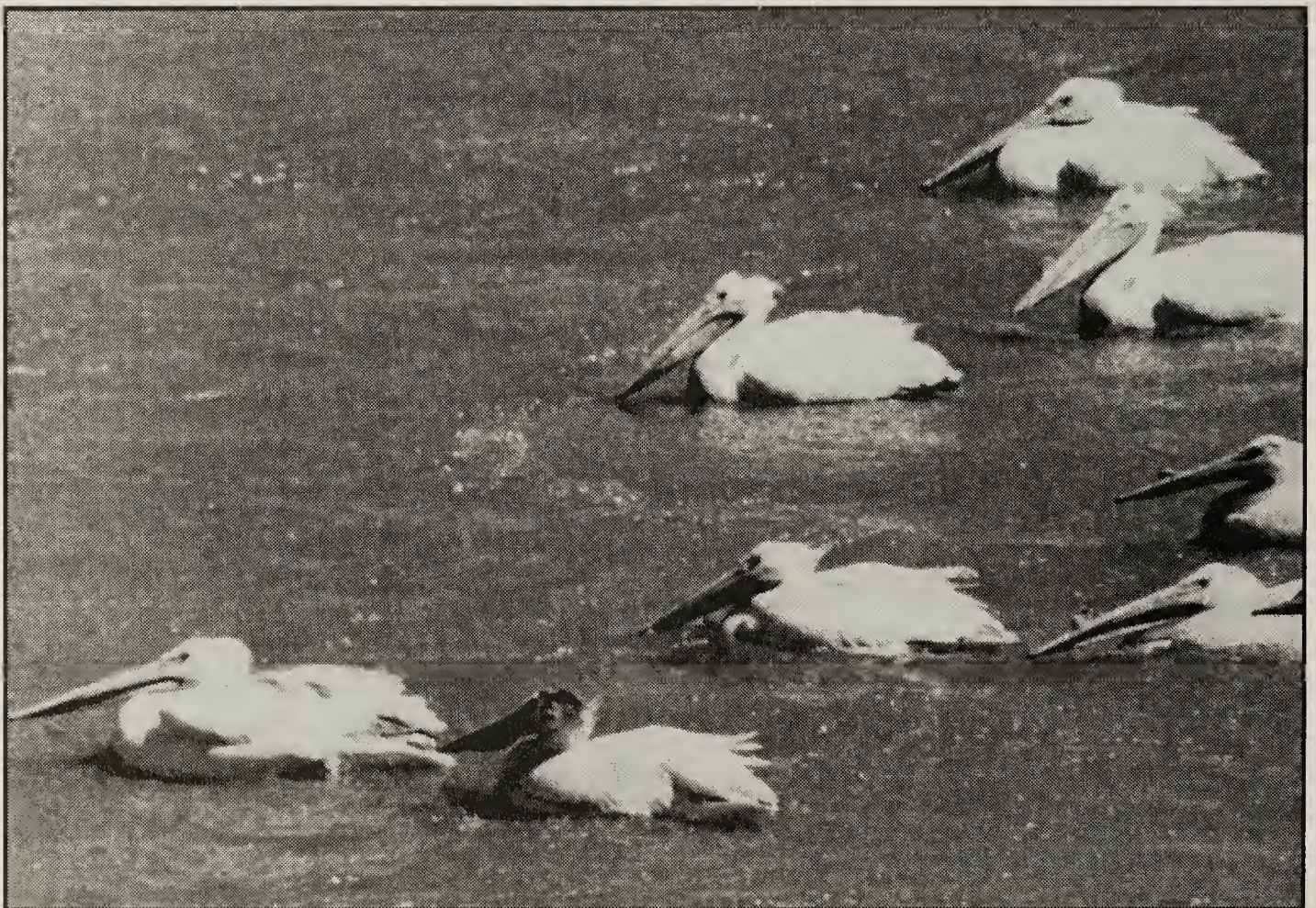
The horn apparently serves as a signalling device during and in the aftermath of pair formation.^{2, 3} Paired birds aggressively defend potential nest sites within the colony and frequent, vigorous jabs and snappings of the bills bring the bills into contact with one another. The jabs are directed toward the horn on the bill; this “target” structure may reduce the likelihood that the jabbing bills will puncture the fleshy pouch necessary for foraging.²

Although the bill horn may be essential for successful nesting, it presents a downside for pelicans in a world altered by

humans. While conducting research over the years at Delta Marsh, along the south shore of Lake Manitoba, I have encountered at least three dead pelicans with their bills entangled in discarded commercial fishing nets. Inspection revealed that the birds were caught by netting wound around the bill horns. The nets, draped over a side and back of the birds, impaired their mobility and prevented them from foraging. Death likely came slowly.

1. Campbell, B., and E. Lack (Eds.). 1985. *A Dictionary of Birds*. T and AD Poyser, Calton.
2. Knopf, F.L. 1975. Schedule of presupplemental molt of White Pelicans with notes on the bill horn. *Condor* 77:356-359.
3. Schaller, G.B. 1964. Breeding behavior of the White Pelican at Yellowstone Lake, Wyoming. *Condor* 66:3-23.

- *Spencer G. Sealy*, Department of Zoology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2



Pelicans, several with bill horns

Frank Switzer