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SEARCHING FOR EDWARD CALCUTT

C. STUART HOUSTON and MARY I. HOUSTON, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0J8.

Our story begins with Wells W. Cooke, North America's leading investigator of bird migration during the final two decades of the 19th century. Cooke began collecting early spring migration dates, beginning with 13 observers in eight states in 1882, and 26 observers in 1883. From these he calculated that birds traveled an average of 23 miles per day. Concentrating particularly on the Mississippi River valley, he was joined by three Manitoba observers in 1884 and another three in 1885, the latter including for the first time, Edward Calcutt. Calcutt lived just east of the Saskatchewan-Manitoba boundary near "Shell River post office,"¹ and a mile east of Minniska post office which was established in 1890 (8 km north of present Russell). Copies of Calcutt's 1885 migration dates were made available to Ernest Thompson [Seton] when he published *Birds of Manitoba* in 1891.⁴

In 1975, when we began updating the Yorkton area bird records, we realized that the Calcutt records from Shell River might

fall near the Saskatchewan boundary. At our request, Chan Robbins at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, sent us copies of the Calcutt records and correspondence. From these we learned that the Calcutt homestead was ten miles east of the Saskatchewan boundary, on section 26-21-28 WPM (west of the principal meridian or W1). Calcutt had, for those times, dates for an unusually large list of species (130).

Calcutt's Migration Dates

Since Calcutt was a farmer working outdoors much of the day, with bush and a small lake visible from his house (Figure 1), most species should have been recorded on the day they arrived. Those interested in climatic change will note that most species in the accompanying table, especially the earliest arrivals, came later in the spring than they do now over one century later.

Calcutt used many species names that are no longer familiar, but added marginal notes



Figure 1. Calcutt Lake

Mary Houston

giving descriptions of features for perplexing species. Using his notes and several references for checking old names, we have assigned current names to many of Calcutt's species in Table 1.^{3,4} Species readily identified were yellow-bird for Yellow Warbler, cherry-bird for Cedar Waxwing, and yellow-headed warbler for the Chestnut-sided Warbler. In early spring the "Longspur Lark" was the Lapland Longspur. In the prairie provinces, the "hen hawk" was either the Red-tailed or Swainson's but the date and location left little doubt that it was the former. The "Prairie Hawk" was the Northern Harrier. We were initially confused by Calcutt's use of the term "flycatcher" to include all warblers. The term "sanderling" might have included any of the "peeps." Birds not identified are listed for each of the three years at the bottom of Table 1.

Records of greatest interest were a pair of Whooping Cranes on April 30, 1885, and another pair on April 16, 1890. As elsewhere, Cliff Swallows built on buildings immediately, whereas Barn Swallows and Purple Martins remained only "transients" through 1885. Before Mourning Doves had

spread this far west, the five "wild pigeons" on June 15, 1885 were almost certainly Passenger Pigeons, as Seton assigned them; none was sighted in 1890 or 1891. The pallid northern subspecies of the Horned Lark, destined for the Arctic tundra, came through in numbers in late May.

Some easy-to-identify large species were not reported in any of the three years: American White Pelican, swan, Great Blue Heron, and Snowy Owl. Neither species of bluebird was reported. By 1890, Calcutt had either learned to identify, or perhaps saw for the first time: Ruddy Turnstone; Willet; Wilson's Thrush or Veery; Olive-backed or Swainson's Thrush; Orange-crowned Warbler; Savannah Sparrow; Chestnut-collared Longspur.

Our 2003 visit

We had a chance to visit the Calcutt homestead on October 26, 2003. Gary Halwas, who lives on the southeast quarter of section 26, directed us across his harvested stubble to the remains of a basement excavation on a tongue of treed land overlooking Calcutt Lake. He had not heard

TABLE 1. MIGRATION DATES for 130 species, MINNISKA, MANITOBA, 1885-1891

2004 Species Name	Name or description given by Calcutt	1885 #	1890 #	1891#
Greater White-fronted Goose	Large Grey Wild Goose	Apr 10 18	Apr 11 2	Apr 12 6
Snow Goose	Wavey or Snow Goose		May 20 8	
Canada Goose	Canada Wild Goose, five goslings in 1891	Apr 9 15	Apr 2 2	Mar 28 1
Brant?	Brant Goose		Apr 18 30	Apr 28 25
American Wigeon	Widgeon Duck or Bald Pate Duck	May 12 2	Apr 20 19	Apr 23 7
Mallard	Mallard Duck	Apr 6 12	Apr 13 2	Apr 7 2
Blue-winged Teal	Blue Winged Teal Duck	May 2 2	Apr 18 4	Apr 25 6
Northern Shoveler	Spoon Bill Duck	May 8 2	Apr 24 7	Apr 20 7
Northern Pintail	Pin Tail Duck	Apr 20 4	Apr 20 22	
Green-winged Teal	Golden or Green Winged Teal Duck	May 2 2	Apr 17 9	Apr 20 8
Canvasback	Canvas Back Duck	Apr 24 4	Apr 20 4	Apr 22 8
Redhead	Red Head Duck	May 3 2	Apr 20 16	Apr 22 15
Lesser Scaup	Blue Bill Duck	May 1 2	Apr 17 20	Apr 10 21
White-winged Scoter	Sea Duck with white stripe on wing	May 12 1	May 23 2	May 23 6
Bufflehead	Buffle Head or Butter Duck	Apr 27 2	Apr 21 4	Apr 21 12
Common Goldeneye	Golden Eye or Whistler Duck	Apr 28 1	Apr 20 2	Apr 21 3
Hooded Merganser	Mouming Duck or Hooded Merganser	May 11 8	Apr 28 2	Apr 28 6
Common/Red-breasted Merganser	Shelduck Duck		May 3 2	
Ruddy Duck	Fan Tail or Dun Duck, white face patch	May 23 1	Jun 2 8	Apr 26 21
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Common Sharp Tail Grouse		winter	
Common Loon	Northern Loon or Northern or Great Diver	May 4 2	Apr 19 2	Apr 21 12
Homed Grebe?	Common Grebe or Hell Diver	May 3 2		May 1 2
Red-necked Grebe?	Large Grebe	May 13 2		Apr 28 1
Western Grebe?	Hooded Grebe	May 11 2	May 15 7	May 1 9
Double-crested Cormorant	Common Cormorant or Crow Duck	May 13 4	May 29 18	May 20 4
American Bittern	Common American Bittern	May 4 1	Apr 29 2	
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Common Night Heron	May 16 1		
Turkey Vulture	Turkey Vulture	Apr 25 2	May 21 4	
Osprey	Fish Hawk	Apr 4 2	Apr 12 1	
Bald Eagle	Bald Eagle			Jun 2 2
Northern Harrier	Prairie or Marsh Hawk; Harrier Blue Hawk	Apr 9 2	Apr 14 4	Apr 4 2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Sharp Shinned Hawk			May 10 1
Red-tailed Hawk	Hen Hawk	Apr 5 1	Apr 3 1	
Golden Eagle	Golden Eagle		May 22 2	Apr 15 1
American Kestrel	Sparrow Hawk	Apr 14 1	Apr 3 1	Apr 22 1
Peregrine Falcon	Duck Hawk			Apr 8 2
Virginia Rail	Virginia Rail		Jun 6 1	
Sora	Water or Common Rail, short yellow bill	May 12 2	May 21 2	May 20 2
American Coot	Water Hen; nest, 13 eggs, 1885	May 12 2	Jun 7 6	
Sandhill Crane	Sand Hill Crane	Apr 19 2	Apr 15 3	Apr 14 2
Whooping Crane	White Crane, black wing tips	Apr 30 2	Apr 16 2	
Black-bellied Plover	Black Belly Field Plover		May 16 30	May 19 40
American Golden-plover?	Black Bellie Field or Golden Plover	May 26 50		May 16 1
Killdeer	Kill Deer Plover	Apr 6 1	Apr 7 1	Apr 11 2
Greater Yellowlegs	Large Yellow Shank	Apr 24 7		Apr 14 2
Lesser Yellowlegs	2nd size Yellow Shank	Apr 24 3	Apr 15 7	May 9 7
Solitary Sandpiper	Solitary Sandpiper Plover		May 31 1	
Willet	Willet Plover		May 31 2	
Spotted Sandpiper	Common Sandpiper, breeds here			May 9 2

Upland Sandpiper	Prairie Plover, peculiar call	May 4	2	May 11	4	May 20	4
Long-billed Curlew	Long-billed Curlew, rare here			Jun 7	3		
Ruddy Turnstone	Turnstone Plover			May 15	2	May 10	2
Sanderling?	small sanderling plover					May 19	35
Wilson's Snipe	English Snipe	May 4	1	Apr 16	3	Apr 18	2
Phalarope	Lake or Swimming Plover			May 16	15		
Franklin's Gull?	Black Head Small Gull	Apr 24	2	Apr 25	2	Apr 15	3
Herring Gull?	largest gull			May 4	1	Apr 19	1
Black Tern	Small Blue Tern, black breast, Keask	May 18	11	May 25	18	May 24	23
Passenger Pigeon	Wild Pigeon; ETS	Jun 15	5				
Black-billed Cuckoo	Black-billed Cuckoo	Jun 16	2	Jun 8	2	Jun 1	1
Great Horned Owl	Great Horned Owl	winter		Apr 2	2		
Barred Owl	Barred Owl			Jun 8	1		
Long-eared Owl	Long Eared Owl					May 21	2
Common Nighthawk	Night Hawk	May 24	1	May 27	1	May 26	4
Whip-poor-will	Whip Poor Will; stayed until August	Jun 20	1				
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Common Green Humming Bird	Jun 3	1	May 31	1	May 21	1
Belted Kingfisher	Kingfisher	May 1	1				
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Red Head and Throat Striped Woodpecker	May 3	2				
Downy Woodpecker?	Red-naped Small Striped Wood Pecker	winter		Apr 2	1	Apr 2	2
Northern Flicker	High Holder or Golden Wood Pecker	Apr 27	2	Apr 16	2	Apr 20	2
(Western?) Wood-pewee	Wood Pewee			Jun 9	2	May 23	1
Eastern Kingbird	King Bird	May 21	1	May 24	7	May 21	2
Loggerhead Shrike	Northern Shrike, breeds					May 12	2
Northern Shrike	Butcher Bird or Northern Shrike	Mar 14	1	Apr 8	2		
Red-eyed Vireo?	olive-green, white breast, sings constantly	Jun 8	2				
Gray Jay	Labrador or Hudson Bay Jay	winter		Apr 1	2		
Blue Jay	Blue Jay, on and off all winter, 1890-91	May 15	2			Apr 1	7
Black-billed Magpie	American Magpie			Apr 8	1		
American Crow	Crow or Common Crow	Apr 3	5	Apr 1	4	Apr 1	2
Common Raven	Common Raven			Apr 3	2		
Horned Lark	Horned or Shore Lark, pallid	May 23	50	Apr 1	6	May 21	31
Purple Martin	Purple Martin	May 23	1	May 22	4	May 25	2
Tree Swallow	Tree Swallow			May 1	20		
Bank Swallow	Bank Swallow	Apr 30	17			Apr 26	19
Cliff Swallow	House or Mud or Cliff Swallow	May 23	18	May 23	5	May 25	7
Barn Swallow	Barn Swallow, forked tail	May 30	4				
Black-capped Chickadee	Chick A Dee	winter					
House Wren	House Wren	May 17	2	Jun 1	2	May 20	2
Marsh Wren	March Wren			Jun 5	4		
Veery	Wilson's Thrush			Apr 19	1	May 21	2
Swainson's Thrush	Solitary Thrush or Olive-backed Thrush	Apr 30	2	May 31	4		
Hermit Thrush	Solitary Thrush or Hermit Thrush	Apr 18	2	Apr 21	1	May 13	3
American Robin	Robin	Apr 13	2	Apr 7	1	Apr 13	5
Gray Catbird	Cat Bird	May 18	1	May 26	2	May 22	2
Brown Thrasher	Brown Thrasher Thrush or Long-tailed Thrush	May 23	1	Jun 4	2		
Cedar Waxwing	Cherry Bird	Jun 5	5	May 30	21	May 22	7
Orange-crowned Warbler	Orange Crowned Warbler			May 31	2		
Yellow Warbler	Common Yellow Bird	May 15	3	May 29	4	May 20	3
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Yellow Crowned Warbler			Jun 4	3		
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Striped or Yellow-rumped Flycatcher	Apr 30	19	Apr 27	2		
American Redstart	Small Orange and Black Flycatcher	May 24	2				
Eastern Towhee	Towhee Bunting					May 8	1

American Tree Sparrow	Sparrow, White Wing Bar, breast spot, red pol	Apr 10	50	Apr 7	1		
Chipping Sparrow	Common Chipping Sparrow			May 1	3	May 16	7
Clay-colored Sparrow	Small Grey Bird; nest 4 eggs, 1985; ETS	May 18	9				
Vesper Sparrow	Sparrow, white tail feathers	Apr 29	2	May 1	6	Apr 29	3
Savannah Sparrow	Savanna Sparrow			Apr 30	1		
Song Sparrow	Song Sparrow	Apr 18	5	Apr 19	5	Apr 23	2
White-throated Sparrow	Sparrow, yellow spot over eye, ETS	May 6	2			Apr 27	14
Harris's Sparrow	Bull Finch or Black Head Sparrow	May 15	3	May 4	1	Apr 1	3
Dark-eyed Junco	Slate-coloured Snow Bird	Apr 8	1	Apr 4	1	Apr 8	5
Lapland Longspur	Longspur Lark					Mar 28	7
Chestnut-collared Longspur	Chestnut Longspur			May 31	3		
Snow Bunting	Snow Bird or Bunting	winter		winter			
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	Rose Breasted Gross Beak	May 16	1			May 23	2
Bobolink	Rice Bird or Bobolin; nest, 6 eggs, 1885	May 18	1	May 18	3	May 18	2
Red-winged Blackbird	Red-shouldered Black Bird	Apr 13	31	Apr 13	3	Apr 15	5
Western Meadowlark	Meadow Lark	Apr 12	1	Apr 12	2	Apr 7	1
Yellow-headed Blackbird	Yellow Head Black Bird	May 1	1	Apr 22	5	May 8	13
Rusty Blackbird	Rusty Black Bird			Apr 18	18	Apr 16	10
Brewer's Blackbird	Brewer's Black Bird					Apr 16	20
Common Grackle	Crow or Bronzed Black Bird	Apr 15	17	Apr 18	11	Apr 16	9
Brown-headed Cowbird	Cow Bunting	May 14	5	May 12	3	May 10	9
Baltimore Oriole	Baltimore Oriole	May 16	1	May 29	2		
Pine Grosbeak	Pine Gross Beak, last seen, Apr 12/90	winter		winter			
Purple Finch ?	Red or Scarlet Finch; ETS	Apr 30	1	Apr 18	7	Apr 19	2
White-winged Crossbill	White Wing Cross Bill			Mar 20	1		
Common Redpoll	Red Polled Linnet; last seen, Mar 21/90	winter					
American Goldfinch	Thistle Bird or American Gold Finch	May 24	1	Jun 3	2	May 24	1
Evening Grosbeak	Gros Beak, yellow	Feb 20					

Notes: ? after the name in left column indicates that identification is only probable.

ETS - identification corroborated by Ernest Thompson Seton, Birds of Manitoba, citing Calcutt's 1885 dates only.

Keask - a Cree name listed by Calcutt.

UNIDENTIFIED SPECIES (1885)

Black or Dark Brown Eagles, 2 on Apr 25, classed by ETS as Turkey Vultures.

"Very small dark grey" winter owl might have been a Boreal, too small for Northern Hawk-Owl, too grey for Saw-whet?

"Wood Thrush" - ERROR IN NAME — another hand (W.W. Cooke?) wrote: "probably Hermit".

"Solitary or Hermit Thrush" - another hand (WWC?) wrote: "probably Olive-backed". Solitary then meant Hermit Thrush.

"Greenish-yellow Flycatcher" with small white bars on wings = warbler. Could be Tennessee, Blackpoll or Pine Warbler.

"Sandpiper Plover," 2 on May 25.

UNIDENTIFIED SPECIES (1890)

flycatcher = warbler, "striped & blue" 3 on April 18, too early for Canada, too far west for Cerulean, so probably Yellow-rumped

"Olive-backed Flycatcher," 2 on June 5, might have been correctly identified — if not a warbler.

UNIDENTIFIED SPECIES (1891)

"Curlew Plover," 5 on May 15.

"Yellow-bellied Flycatcher," 5 on May 12, might have been correctly identified — if not a warbler.

of the name Calcutt, but later his friend Willis Kieper informed us that the lake on this section was known as Calcutt Lake. Calcutt had described this situation as follows in his letter to Cooke on February 7, 1885 in which he accepted Cooke's invitation to send spring migration records that year: "On my place there is a large bluff of poplar woods and a lake in front of the house of over ninety acres, and more birds visit this bluff than any other place in the county."

Calcutt's June 25 letter, which accompanied Calcutt's mailing of his first year of migration records, described the spring weather in 1885. "It has been a very unfavourable spring. ... The weather was so very cold and backward." However, he guessed that he had "not missed any birds unless a kinglet."

On our return to Saskatoon, we contacted the Manitoba Archives for Calcutt's homestead records. We expected four to ten pages of information, but to our surprise, Idelle Talbot, research assistant in Winnipeg, responded with photocopies of 120 pages. And what an interesting story they revealed! Calcutt was 53 years old when, on May 28, 1880, he arrived in western Manitoba, with his wife, Harriet, and their two sons, William and Albert. This was before homestead entries were available and he picked what he thought was suitable land, on what the surveyor later designated 26-21-29 WPM and "squatted" there. He had "pitched upon a nice situation, not knowing what land it was, but proved to be Hudson's Bay Co." Calcutt named it Lake View Farm.

Calcutt built a log house in November 1880. In March, 1883, he borrowed money and purchased section 35, due north of him, for \$2 per acre. The south or adjacent half was for William and the north half was for his son, Albert, then farming near Owen Sound, Ontario. By July 1885, the year before the railway reached Russell (which was four miles south and two miles west), Edward Calcutt had a log stable 16 x 24 feet

and a log granary 20 x 20. Acres under cultivation on the northeast quarter were: 8 in 1881, 12 in 1882 and 1883, and 24 acres in 1884.

The Calcutt occupancy of the northeast quarter of section 26 became legal on May 4, 1886, when letters patent were issued. However, it required more than another eleven years to obtain title to the adjacent northwest quarter, with about 100 pages of correspondence between Ottawa, Winnipeg, the land office at Birtle, and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) throughout most of this period. As Mrs. Harriet Calcutt explained in her letter to Mr. H.H. Smith, Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Winnipeg, on Aug 28, 1893, "We built our house and stables before the surveyors came & found our house was just on the line dividing the N.E. and N.W., our stable & granary on the latter quarter ... Our N.E. quarter has only 144 acres, 15 of it being in the lake... As squatters of nearly 13 years residence ... all this has worried me greatly - very few settlers are coming into this part - there is no money in farming, but simply a living - plenty of abandoned farms laying around." The fur trading company agreed to relinquish its title, in return for equally suitable land elsewhere. After much correspondence, the HBC finally accepted as a fair trade, NE 28-31-10w2, north and east of the later village site of Tuffnell, Saskatchewan.

On April 16, 1897, Calcutt's possessions were listed: a concrete house, 20 x 24 feet (built in 1887), shingled, one floor, with cellar, valued at \$250; three log stables, a log granary, a hen house and root house, with these additional buildings valued, with the well, at \$260 (based on the Homestead Inspector Report #914). The garden occupied half an acre and 50 acres were now under cultivation. Stock consisted of 20 cattle and three horses. The applied-for northwest quarter consisted of 90 acres of rough scrub land and hillside, none of it, other than the garden, fit for cultivation, and 70 acres of lake.

The final entry in the homestead file was for April 5, 1902, when Calcutt was 75 years old. His lawyers in Winnipeg wrote to enquire on his behalf whether patent could be obtained for “that portion of the land which was covered by the water.” We don’t know when Calcutt died. “Mrs. Calcutt,” probably Harriet, purchased a burial plot in 1901. We do know that Albert E. Calcutt, Edward’s son, then “squatting” without title on NW 14-22-27, five miles east and three miles south of the future site of the town of Inglis, near the western boundary of Riding Mountain National Park, witnessed his father’s signature in May 1897. Albert died

in Russell on September 17, 1897, at age 44, after a brief illness,² and is buried in the cemetery there. There are no tombstones on any of the three Calcutt plots.

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“There is much good land in the valley from the Fishing Lakes to the Assiniboine, but as it is flooded every spring, it is questionable whether it will ever be of much importance. For ten miles up there is an abundance of timber consisting of aspens, balsam-poplars, elm, black ash, oak, birch and sugar maple....In this wooded part the birds are innumerable. Kingfishers, blue jays, and Canada jays, catbirds, and American magpies, flitted from tree to tree uttering their discordant notes. Cherry-birds and pigeons were calmly and listlessly perched on the dense trees, having eaten plentifully of their favourite fruits, while the tyrant flycatcher, when alone or with some companions, chased and worried the crows, ravens, hawks, and eagles who tried in vain to escape from them. The beautiful white-bellied swallow swiftly skimming the surface of the river, helped in addition to enliven the valley.”

“The Birch Hills form the dividing ridge between the water which flows into the main Saskatchewan and the Assiniboine, or Red Deer and Swan Rivers. The remarkable profusion of flowers gives extraordinary beauty to large open areas; they generally occur in parterres of several acres in extent occupied by one species, here the yarrow, there the fireweed, then a field of a species of helianthus, followed by *Liatris scariosa*. When viewed from an eminence, the country appeared to be clothed with pink, white, yellow, and blue, in singular contrast to the uniform tint that prevails on the great prairies of the Little Souris.”

Henry Youle Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858*, p.378 and 406 .