
NOTES AND LETTERS

BIRD OBSERVATIONS FROM NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN, AUGUST 1973—REVISITED

Here are some clarifications, changes and additions I would like to make to "Bird Observations from Northern Saskatchewan - August 1973", published in the December 1998 issue of *Blue Jay*.

The title of the article submitted to *Blue Jay* was "Bird Observations from Northeastern Saskatchewan - August 1973". The title that appeared with the article and in the index (but not the table of contents) was "Bird Observations from Northern Saskatchewan - August 1973". Although some of the observations were made in what is technically called "northern Saskatchewan" (i.e. Stony Rapids, Fir Island, Lefty Falls, Black Lake), all three I.B.P. sites studied, which provide the bulk of records discussed in the article, are technically located in northeastern Saskatchewan.

Within the body of the text, I would like to make the following changes and clarifications: page 202; column 1; paragraph 2; line four - change "Black Scoter" to "Surf Scoter" in agreement with the title of the following species account; page 204; column 1; paragraph 4; lines 7 to 11 - change "Smith interpreted Nero's sighting as a confirmed breeding record, and further suggested that this was the only area in Saskatchewan where the species has nested" to "Smith listed this as a probable breeding record, as it involved a pair of birds in suitable breeding habitat".

Under Red-breasted Nuthatch, Nero in "The Birds of Northeastern

Saskatchewan" did not record the species; however, Nero in "Birds of the Lake Athabasca Region, Saskatchewan" listed several observations, including two breeding records for the Lake Athabasca Region. Nero further added new insight into the status of the species in Northern Saskatchewan with another article, 'Apparent Escape Behaviour of a Red-breasted Nuthatch' [*Blue Jay* 19(1):16-17], noting the species as 'surprisingly uncommon in the Uranium City area of Saskatchewan during May, June and July, 1960'.

I thank Alan Smith, Robert Nero and Guy Wapple for taking the time to alert me to errors and idiosyncrasies in my paper .

- *Wayne Renaud*, 9 Oakwood Ave. N.,
Mississauga, ON L5G 3L6
E-mail: werenaud@interlog.com

GOLDEN EAGLE RESCUE

On March 26, 1999, we arrived at our home, 19 km south of White Bear, Saskatchewan, (just northwest of Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park) to find an adult Golden Eagle sitting on the road, not far from our yard gate. The eagle was reluctant to move. Closer inspection showed that it was wet, muddy, and bedraggled. I thought it probably had lost out in a battle with the resident Golden Eagles, whose nest is only 2 km to the south. The muddy back of the bird suggested it had lain on its back, perhaps to defend itself with its claws. The behaviour of this bird was unusual. When I approached it, it would just look away, but when my dog approached, it stared at him with open beak, the expected reaction of an eagle to a human.

The eagle wore USFWS leg band No. 629-24951 which had been placed by David Miller and Stuart Houston on June 5, 1993, on Bob Houben's property in Snakebite Coulee, south of Demaine, 66 km to the east of where we found it. A nestling when banded, it was now nearly six years of age.

Next morning, tracks in the mud showed that the eagle had moved more than 1 km. It still was unable to get airborne, however, so I captured it and took it home. It greedily ate a freshly killed bantam chicken, and even devoured many of the bones. In the next two weeks, I fed it eight bantams and two pigeons.

Since it remained weak and unable to fly, Sue McAdam of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management took it on April 8th to Dr. Colette Wheler at the Small Animal Clinic of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon. Physical examination and x-rays showed no evidence of fractures or puncture wounds. However, the eagle did have extremely high blood levels of the enzyme creatine kinase, indicating that it most likely had sustained severe muscle damage. During three weeks of rehabilitation, it improved rapidly. On May 5, 1999, when the eagle was ready for release, Sue McAdam transported it from Saskatoon to the Saskatchewan Landing bridge. Members of the South West Naturalists and others watched it take to the air and disappear in a southeasterly direction.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Stuart Houston for his help in preparing this note.

- Sig Jordheim, Box 544, Kyle, SK
S0L 1T0

PEREGRINE FALCON ATTACKS HOT-AIR BALLOON

On 20 September 1998 while attending a backyard social function in the 600 block of Robinson St., in north central Regina, we witnessed the following behaviour by a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). At approximately 1830 hr, on two occasions in quick succession, the falcon attacked a hot-air balloon, which was drifting directly overhead! The bird flew towards the balloon in horizontal flight from the south and flew off in that direction after the attacks.

In both instances, the bird attacked the fabric of the balloon with its talons and momentarily held on. Both attacks were directed towards the approximate centre of the balloon which was generally rectangular in shape with a Canadian flag design. At the time, the balloon was approximately 50 m above the ground and drifting very slowly in a southeasterly direction due to the virtual absence of wind.

We speculate that the attacks we witnessed were either for territorial defence or hunting. Although we think the former more likely, the behaviour by the bird was bizarre in any case, given the size of the target relative to the bird. It is possible that the bird was a juvenile and naive in regard to hot-air balloons.

We are grateful to G.C. Sutter for his comments on an earlier draft.

- R. Mark Brigham and Anne C. Brigham,
6723 Gillmore Dr., Regina, SK S4X 3Z1

STOWAWAY IN A ROBIN'S NEST

As neighbours gathered for coffee on our front lawn in Estevan on a morning in mid-July, their springer spaniel seemed more than interested in a new toy, but this was something different. The new toy was tiny, ungainly and very much alive - a new-born bird that had been blown from its nest the previous evening. I gently picked it up and cradled it in my hands. With wings feebly fluttering and bulging eyes still closed, the baby bird clung precariously to life.

What kind of bird was it and what was I going to do with it? There was no nest to return it to, no frantic mother searching for it and it was certainly too young to survive on its own. The general consensus was to put it out of its misery, but having held this tiny life in my hands I could not bring myself to do that.

An American Robin had recently made a nest and laid a clutch of eggs in a Blue Spruce in our backyard. That was the answer, put the little bird in the

robin's nest and hope for the best. I placed the chick in the robin's nest and, as the day passed, my wife and I kept an anxious vigil. As we watched, the robin returned to the nest and found the hatchling nestled in amongst her eggs. She immediately flew off again. We worried that our interference might have caused her to abandon her nest altogether. However she returned a short time later, bearing a fat worm which she offered to the baby and which was accepted eagerly.

We named the little bird Foster and continued to watch the nest. After a few days, the robin's own two eggs hatched and the mother bird continued to deliver worms to all three babies. Amazingly, with each passing day this little unidentified stowaway was growing stronger and beginning to fill out, and although it became obvious (to us) that Foster was not a robin, the mother didn't seem to care.

Having had a head start, Foster was the first of his family to learn to fly. One



Foster in his foster home

Leigh Keess

day, after a few clumsy practices, he launched himself off the spruce bough and never looked back. This wonderful little fighter had beaten all the odds and was now on its way to joining the mob of Pine Siskins that visit the feeders in our yard. What an adjustment that must have been for a little fellow raised on fresh worms!

That magical morning and that little wonder of nature gave us nothing but joy and pride, knowing that sometimes when the winds blow and the bow breaks, a small miracle can happen on a quiet bay in southern Saskatchewan...just in time for the rest of his life.

(What species of bird is Foster? Eds.)

- *Colin Keess*, 430 Willow Bay, Estevan, SK S4A 2G4

AN UNUSUALLY TAME COWBIRD

In late July and early August, 1999, we observed unusual behaviour of a Brown-headed Cowbird in our neighbour's yard. It would listen for earthworms, dig them up, then eat them if they were small enough. It would run through the grass to scare up insects, catch them and eat them. It also ate mixed seed. It could fly well and roosted in trees at night.

When we walked away, it would fly after us, brush by our backs and land on the ground. Then it would run after us. We had to be careful not to step on it, as it was always underfoot. It would also come when we called.

When the neighbour, Abe Unruh, went into his house, the cowbird would follow him. He had to sneak into his house to keep it from entering. Then it would stand on his deck looking in. If Abe opened the patio door, the bird

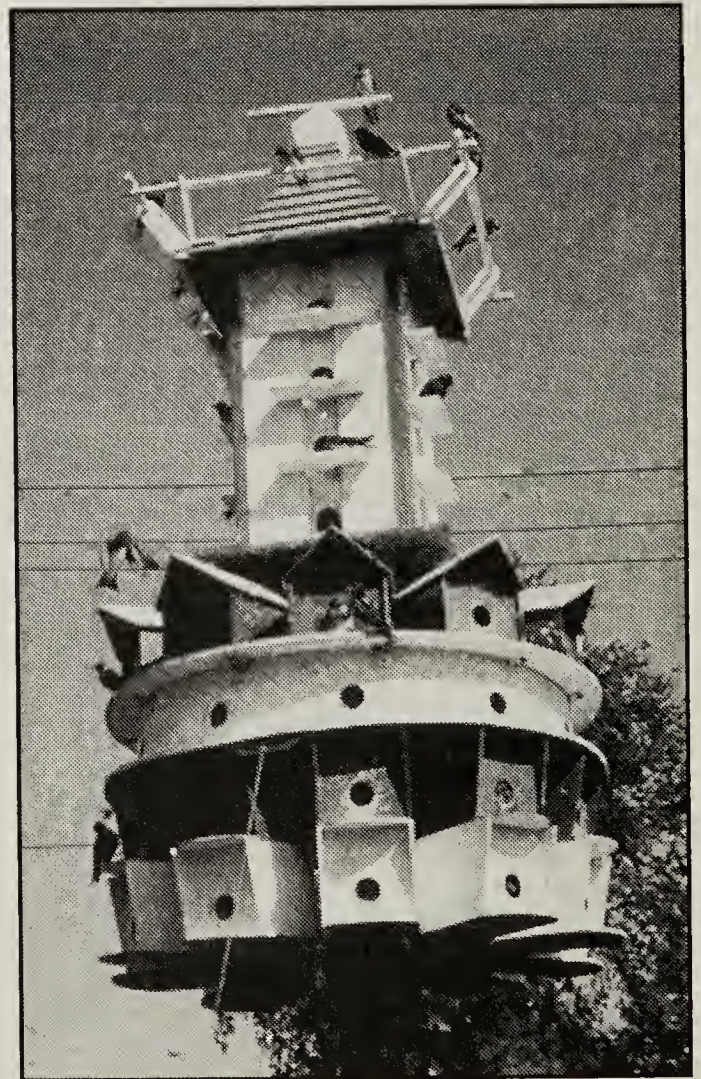
would enter. When Abe got into his car, the bird would sit on the hood until it was chased off, or lost its balance. We have no idea how the young bird became imprinted on humans; it had not been raised by any of our immediate neighbours or their children.

After about two weeks at Abe's, the cowbird moved to another place about a block away. They had lots of cats and I think that is how the story ended.

- *Barb Epp*, Box 164, Waldheim, SK S0K 4R0

PURPLE MARTINS

I am, and always was, a lover of Purple Martins, even when I was a child in Minnesota 88 years ago. I have now lived in Humboldt, Saskatchewan for nearly fifty years. We have three martin houses with about 50 rooms. There were times



Purple Martin house

W.Jane Bancroft

when many of them were occupied by these grand, friendly birds. I am sure that the same ones come back to the same place each year and know the people they live with. I can sit or work in the yard and wave and talk to them. They look at me and bomb down on me with cheerful chirps. They are friendly and social. I noticed that when a pair had their first hatch of chicks they invited all the other martins to look and showed what proud parents they were.

Let me tell you about a pair of martins who came late. Before their four chicks could fly, in late August, a cold spell came. All the martins left for the south, including the late pair who left their four young to fare for themselves. Here is what happened. Three of them could fly, one could not. It was rainy, cold and wet with no bugs in the air on which these birds live. The young one sat out in the rain, just outside the entrance, cold and forlorn. I picked it up and brought it into the house, fed it bits of fish (it would not eat meat) and put it into a box overnight. I fed it in the morning and put it on the ledge of its house, with the brothers and sisters flying about watching what was taking place. It rained all day and all night and I fed it for about three days. On the third day, the sun came out and the weather warmed up. I fed the chick fish again and put it on the door of its house. Now, of all the wonders, the brothers and sisters flew around gathering bugs and fed their little sister for a few days until she was strong enough to fly. The weather remained warm for a few weeks and by the end of that period they were all strong enough to fly south for the winter.

- *Henry Koep*, written by Henry Koep several years before his death in 1984 and submitted by Marjorie Koep, 2118 Clarence Ave S. Saskatoon, SK S7J 1L5

GREAT BLUE HERON AT CEYLON

Several times during August, a Great Blue Heron was seen near dugouts or large sloughs throughout the Ceylon district in southeastern Saskatchewan and twice we saw one gliding towards our dugout, 20 km from the park.

One hot evening, my daughters went for a swim at the Ceylon Regional Park. A long-legged bird was perched on the diving board. Thinking that someone was playing a joke, they started swimming toward it, but it was real – and the large heron flew away.

I glanced out my kitchen window one afternoon and saw a heron standing atop the power pole in our farmyard. It stood tall, regal and wet! Whether it had been feeding or bathing, I do not know, but it chose that high perch to preen itself. For 20 minutes it carefully cleaned and smoothed its feathers, moving its beak down its breast, over and under its wings, even its back, and those parts of its long neck that it could reach. Balancing on its right foot, with two toes gripping the edge of the post, it completed its toilette by scratching its ear and carefully cleaning its beak with a left toenail. With perfect balance it did all this without swaying a fraction of an inch. Finally, it gave a last shake and floated off into the air with magnificent grace.

Hérons are not common in this usually dry part of Saskatchewan, within sight of the Big Muddy Hills. In an average year, we have a single heron sighting, and some years none at all, so we suspect that all of our observations may have been of the same bird.

- *Wendy Caldwell*, Box 21, Ceylon SK S0C 0T0

FEWER GOLDFISH TO WINTER OVER

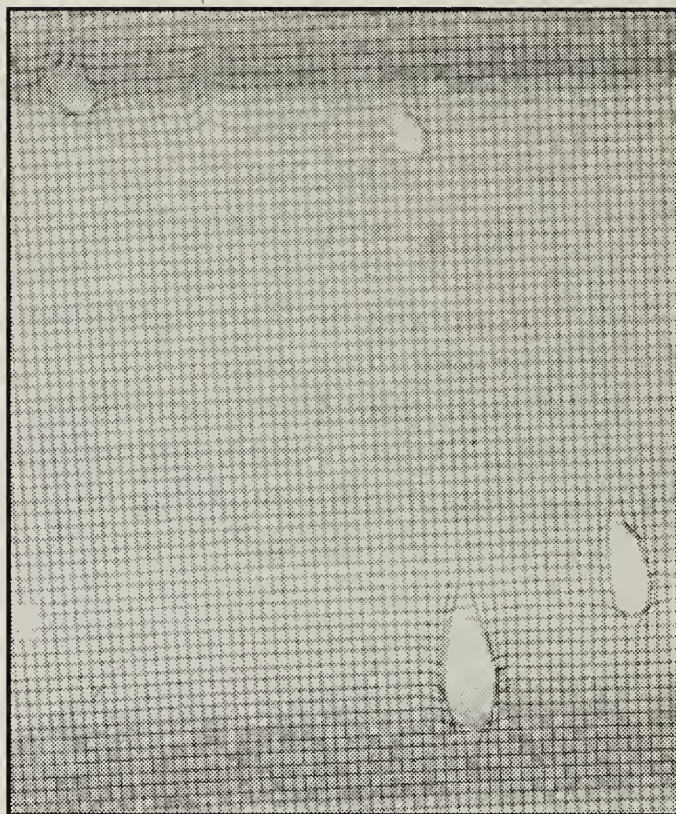
After being disappointed at the Wendland's swimming pool in Waldheim, a Great Blue Heron settled on Carol Hladun's fish pond for a feed on its way south. Carol tried to chase it away, to no avail. She tried putting a screen over her pond, but the heron stabbed holes in it to get at the fish. She then took the remaining fish into the house and the heron finally left. The heron was quite tame and didn't mind when Carol's son Shannon would sit by the pond and splash it with water.

- Barb Epp, Box 164, Waldheim, SK S0K 4R0



The culprit

Ted Williams



Beak holes in the screen over the goldfish pond

Ted Williams

POETRY

PATIENT PRETENDER

By Jean Mackenzie

Unkempt, shaggy, rag-tag
Great Blue Heron
hunches in water shallows
near the edge of the stream,
pretending
scrawny legs are brownish-green stalks,
chestnut thighs are plushy cattails;
waits motionless with infinite patience,
for unwary small fish confused
by whitish plumes resembling cloudy sky;
wades slowly, stealthily
to stalk slow-moving prey.
Quick thrust of snakelike neck,
lightning stroke of rapier bill -
another capture
by the camouflaged expert fisher.

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Jay Bookshop.