
NOTES AND LETTERS

A FOOL-PROOF METHOD OF PREVENTING WINDOW COLLISIONS

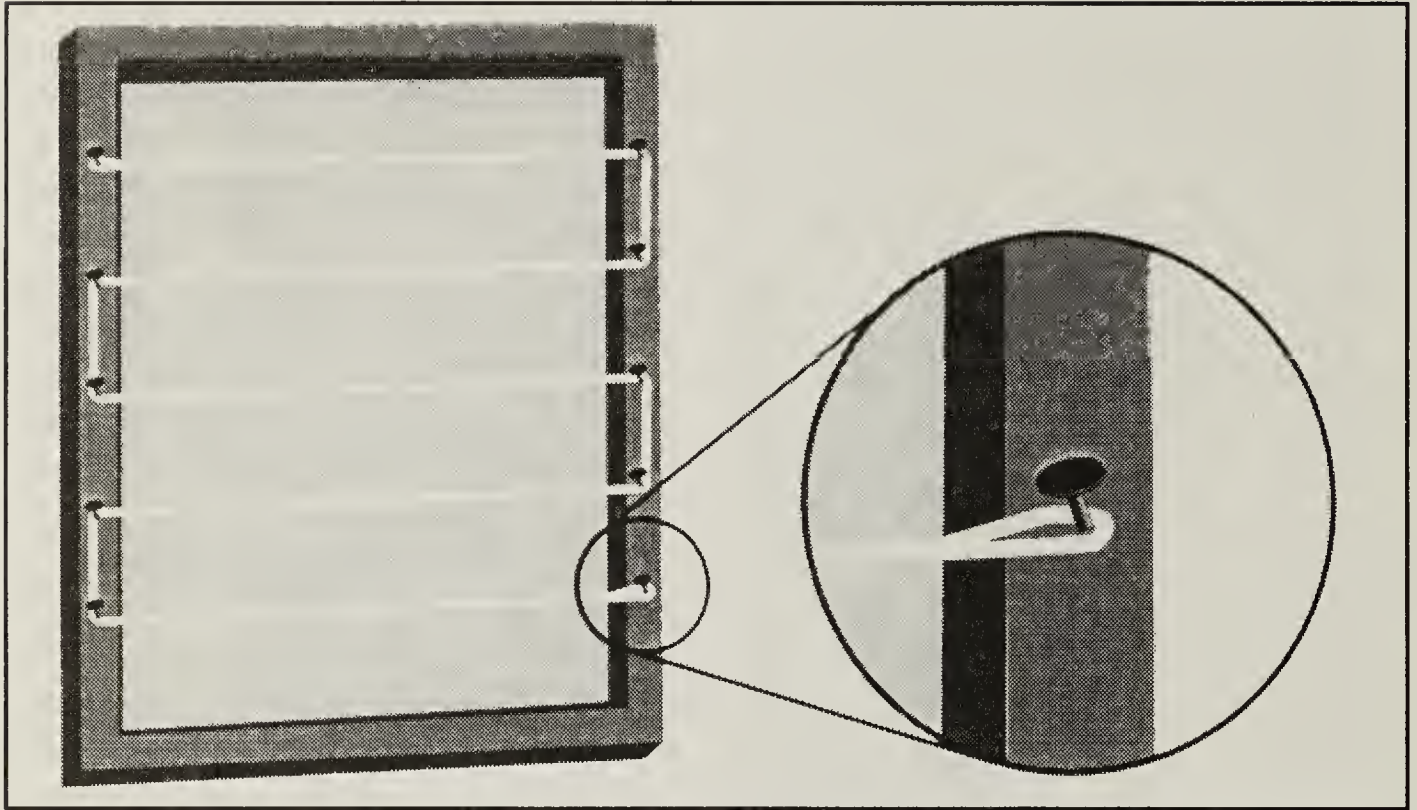


Figure 1. Position of nails and string on the outside of a window

Bird mortality as a result of collisions with windows is commonly experienced in urban settings but is surprisingly under-represented in bird literature. The species most vulnerable appear to be those of forest habitats, accustomed to flitting through available openings among trees. Common examples are juncos, chickadees, thrushes, and flickers. Ruffed Grouse collisions, although they have been reported, are uncommon.¹

Shortly after our family moved into a country home near Grandora, SK, we removed some internal walls, creating a single living space with large windows on both the east and west walls. During spring and fall migrations, bird window collisions were frequent and resulted in several deaths. Having observed that falcon silhouettes are not very effective

in preventing collisions, we tried the following method which, after more than 5 years, has proven 100 percent successful. I recommend this method to all readers. The instructions follow.

Position 3/4 inch nails at 6 inch intervals along opposite sides of the outside of the window frame (Fig. 1). Take care to place the nails opposite each other at the same level. Knot a permanent loop in a piece of braided nylon cord (approximately 1/16 inch diameter) long enough to cover the window, and place the loop over one of the lowest pair of nails. Stretch the cord horizontally to the opposite nail, then up and over the nail above it, and in this fashion, weave back and forth across the paired nails until the last one is reached. Cut the cord approximately 1.5 inches beyond the last nail and knot a loop in

this end as well, making it sufficiently short of the nail that the cord must be stretched to place the loop over the nail. It is important to use braided nylon as opposed to cotton or other material; the braided nylon stretches and maintains its tension in diverse weather conditions.

This method is effective because the visibility of the string by birds is not affected by light angle. Window glass reflects light coming in at an angle and thus mirrors the trees and sky so effectively that birds are unaware of a physical barrier. The stretched cord is sufficient to break up the mirror image and trigger avoidance.

We found that the stretched cord in no way hindered our own viewing enjoyment. Within a short time after installation we became oblivious to the cord. Window washing is no problem either; you simply remove the cord, wash the window and replace the cord again.

1. Friesen, V. C. 1995. A different drummer. *Blue Jay* 53(4):229-231.

- Peter Jonker, Box 232, Grandora SK S0K 1V0. email : peter.jonker@usask.ca

IDENTITY OF A SWALLOW RECOVERED IN BOLIVIA: A CORRECTION

Trevor Herriot's chapter, "Callin's Terrain," in his superb new book, *River in a Dry Land*, correctly tells of the Bank Swallow that went from the Qu'Appelle River to Bolivia. This reminded me of the sleuthing Callin and I did concerning the identity of this swallow.¹ Herriot is, however, less accurate in his claim that, without Callin, "this remarkable record would have been lost ... tucked away in the files of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service."³

Richard H. Carter, Jr. farmed most of his life immediately above the Qu'Appelle valley, two miles north of Muscow siding, west of Fort Qu'Appelle. One of Saskatchewan's three earliest bird banders, he banded 5240 individuals of 71 species between 1923 and 1961. His banding included 192 Barn Swallows and 68 Bank Swallows, as well as an astonishing 1470 House Wrens and 816 Slate-colored Juncos. (These numbers have been updated since Houston 1945⁴).

On 7 July 1929, as shown unequivocally by his original banding records, Carter visited a Bank Swallow colony in a bank not far from Sioux Bridge where Highway 210 now crosses the Qu'Appelle River west of Fort Qu'Appelle, between Pasqua and Echo lakes. That day, Carter banded 3 adults and 31 nestling Bank Swallows, using band numbers C3345 to C3378. Six years later in June 1935, Bank Swallow C3371 was found dead at El Carmen, Rio Madre de Dios, in northwestern Bolivia. In the intervening years the swallow presumably had made the southeasterly trip of 7765 km, back and forth 11 times, from Saskatchewan at 50° 40' North, 103° 50' West, south through Central America and on beyond the equator to 11° South, 67° West. Eleven such trips would give a minimum travel distance of 85,400 km – not bad for a bird that weighs 13 or 14 g.

Unfortunately, an error in data entry resulted in the recovery being registered as that of AOU code #613, Barn Swallow, rather than as AOU #616, Bank Swallow. This record was not lost in the voluminous banding files. Instead this unique and interesting recovery was cited, but incorrectly, as a Barn Swallow, by Frederick C. Lincoln in his 1939 book, *The Migration of American Birds*,⁶ and as a Barn Swallow by Allan and Helen

Cruickshank in their 1958 book, *1001 Questions answered about birds.*²

Richard and his brother, J. R. Carter, also had exceptional results from banding Red-tailed Hawks. Most years they banded the nestling Redtails in the one nest on each of their farms, probably in a river coulee. From 51 Red-tailed Hawk bandings there were a phenomenal 22 recoveries (43%, or 14 times the current rate of recovery from this species). This was a time when the public perceived that "the only good hawk is a dead hawk," and at least 18 had been shot. These 22 birds showed where Saskatchewan Redtails migrated and wintered. For this reason, when I began banding in 1943, I directed my raptor banding efforts largely to other species where little was known. The Carters had already provided the answers for the Red-tailed Hawk.⁵

1. Callin, E.M. 1980. Birds of the Qu'Appelle, 1857-1979. Special Publication No. 13. Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Regina.

2. Cruickshank, A., and H. Cruickshank. 1958. *1001 Questions Answered About Birds*. Dodd Mead., New York

3. Herriot, T. 2000. *River in a Dry Land*. Stoddart, Toronto

4. Houston, C.S. 1945. Saskatchewan bird banders. No. 4. R.H. Carter, Jr. *Blue Jay* 3:37.

5. Houston, C.S. 1967. Recoveries of Red-tailed Hawks banded in Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 25:109-111.

6. Lincoln, F.C. 1939. *The Migration of North American Birds*. Doubleday Doran, New York

- C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0J8

HOUSE-DWELLING RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS

In the spring of 1999, and also 2000, a pair of Wood Ducks attempted to nest on our farm near Kyle. I erected three new duck houses, hoping that they would choose one.

On June 21, 2000, I checked these three houses and found a pair of Rock Doves in one, four young kestrels in the second and on approaching the third, was buzzed by a pair of Red-winged Blackbirds. As I set up the ladder, a fledgling Red-winged Blackbird flew out into a nearby tree and, on peering inside, I saw a second juvenile lying in a well-made nest inside the house.

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

REDPOLLS IN 1999-2000

In the September 2000 issue of the *Blue Jay*, we read with interest about the Redpoll invasion and the banding of these birds. ...We first saw six Redpolls on our niger seed feeders on December 7, 1999; the numbers rose to flocks of more than 50 during January 2000, dwindled to 10 on March 21, 2000 and the last individual was seen on April 5. On three occasions, 28 February, 5 March and 6 March, we saw an individual banded on the right leg in flocks of redpolls (flocks of 20, 25 and 10 respectively).

- Trish and Dick Santo, 144 Delaronde Road, Saskatoon, SK S7J 3Y4

BIRDS THAT GLOW IN THE DARK

Each summer, we are privileged to have Barn Swallows nesting under the



Figure 1. Drawing to show the appearance luminous edges of the beaks of young Barn Swallows

roof of our front “deck” at our house in Silton, SK. The nest referred to in this article was behind one of the roof beams, a location that is very dark at night. A brood is raised in this nest each summer. When we go out our front door, we pass under the nest and the parents chitter and fly at us, or they sit on a nearby fence until we go away.

The fall of the year 2000 was special. A brood had been started in the nest when fall was already upon us. We thought that there would not be enough time for the nestlings to gain the strength and flying skill to migrate. The parent birds seemed to realize this. In order to feed the young in the short time they had, they ignored our presence as we went past their nest and actively fed the young birds well into the darkness of late evening.

One night, I looked out a window in a darkened hallway and in the pitch darkness of the nesting area there were three luminescent, blue, diamond

shapes. The edges of the beaks of the young birds were glowing! The parents were able to fly unerringly to feed them (Fig. 1). How the parents caught insects by only starlight and sky glow is something else to wonder about.

The young birds were soon ready to learn to fly and the parents were just as anxious as when the young were in the nest. Again they ignored us as we passed by and what seemed to be the flying lessons went on and on as the young birds strengthened their muscles.

One day, as happens here each fall, dozens of swallows were perched on the phone and power lines in our village. It seemed that swallows stopped here for two days to pick up the birds from Silton. Then the next day, they were all gone, including the young we had watched so anxiously. Their ability to join the migration was a tribute to the devotion of their parents and it was assisted by those glowing beaks.

This is the first time that I have seen the luminescence of the edges of bird beaks. Is this a well known phenomenon?

- Leonard H. Greenberg, P.O. Box 81, Silton, SK, S0G 4L0

REMOVAL OF NEST BOX MATERIAL

(Excerpted from a letter to Bob Nero, 11 November 2000)

The behavior pattern you describe [in *Removal of Nest Material from a Nest Box by White-breasted Nuthatches*, Blue Jay 58 (3), September 2000] is well known among European secondary cavity nesters. Practically all of them (tits, nuthatches, flycatchers, starlings) can, and do, remove some debris from their cavities before bringing new nest material to them. Often they try different cavities, intensively work for a day or two on one, then move to another one. This seems to constitute a normal component of their cavity selection process. This behavior, though, is limited to a short pre-breeding period in the early spring. Though it is widespread, it is not equally well reported....my statement of ignorance of causes of nest material disappearances [cited in the above article] did not pertain to those situations, but rather to cases in which old material disappeared, traceless, before the onset of spring. If you or your colleagues would have some observations showing that such cavity cleaning could take place also in autumn or winter, I would be very interested in hearing about them.

- Tomasz Wesolowski, Dept. of Avian Ecology, Wroclaw University, Wroclaw, Poland

TAME MOOSE AND ARBOREAL WOODCHUCK

In the early summer of 1999, a bison rancher near Hazel Dell in east-central Saskatchewan received an interesting surprise when he went to check his herd. It had been increased by one - a young moose. The animal was feeding among the bison as well as using their watering bowl and salt block (Fig. 1). It paid little attention to the owner of the herd. Around Christmas, it was joined by another young moose.

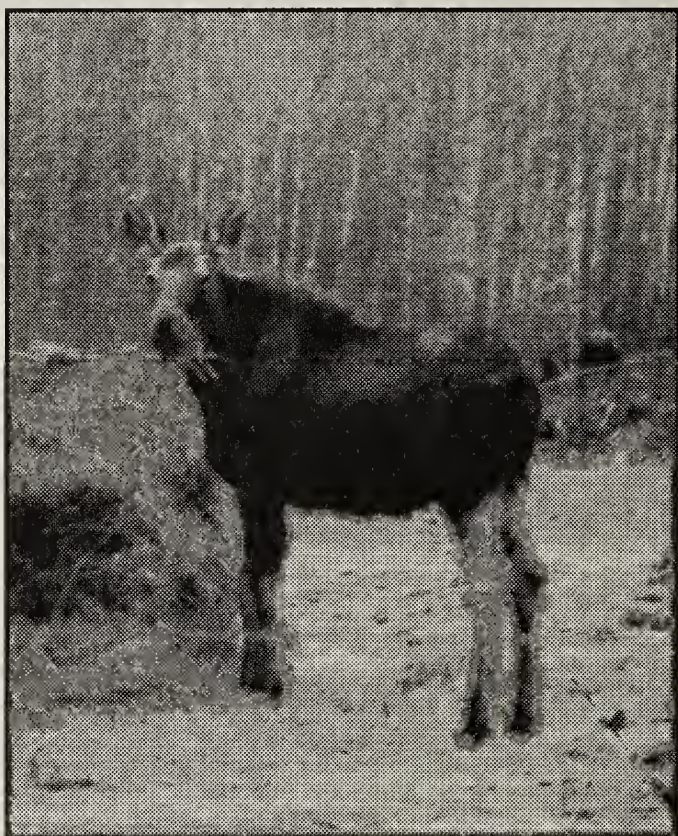


Figure 1. Moose inside the pasture fence, May 2000

Shirley Johnston

Some people thought that the moose should be released, but the general consensus was that "They climbed in; they can climb out." This proved to be true because sometime in late summer 2000 they were gone. With the coming of the hunting season, they may have been sorry they didn't stay where they were.

In early June 2000, while on a nature outing north of Preeceville, Saskatchewan, my wife Shirley, Dallas Fairburn and I saw a young woodchuck



Figure 2. Woodchuck in a poplar tree, June 2000

Shirley Johnston

at the side of the road. And this one, contrary to what they usually do, scampered across a ditch and climbed about four feet up a small poplar tree. He stayed long enough for photographs

(Fig. 2) and then climbed down and hid under some dead logs. Although we live in an area where woodchucks are not uncommon, we had never seen one climb a tree, nor has anyone else we have talked to.

- Don Johnston, Box 235, Lintlaw, SK

SNAKE ON A WIRE

At about 9:00 am on the sunny morning of July 23, 2000, I spotted a fairly large garter snake crawling along the lowest wire of the southern fence line of our Saskatchewan farm yard. I quickly went to get my camera and took several photos (Fig. 1 and 2). The snake, which remained relatively stationary, was about 22 to 24 inches in length. There were several other snakes in the vicinity. The snake remained on the wire for about 45 minutes. It disengaged itself rather quickly while I was doing something else and I didn't have a chance to record its descent.

Our yard site is at the extreme southeast corner of S.E.1/4 22-23-9-W2 (near Goodeve, SK). It is bordered



Figure 1. Garter snake on fence wire

Lorne Cherneski

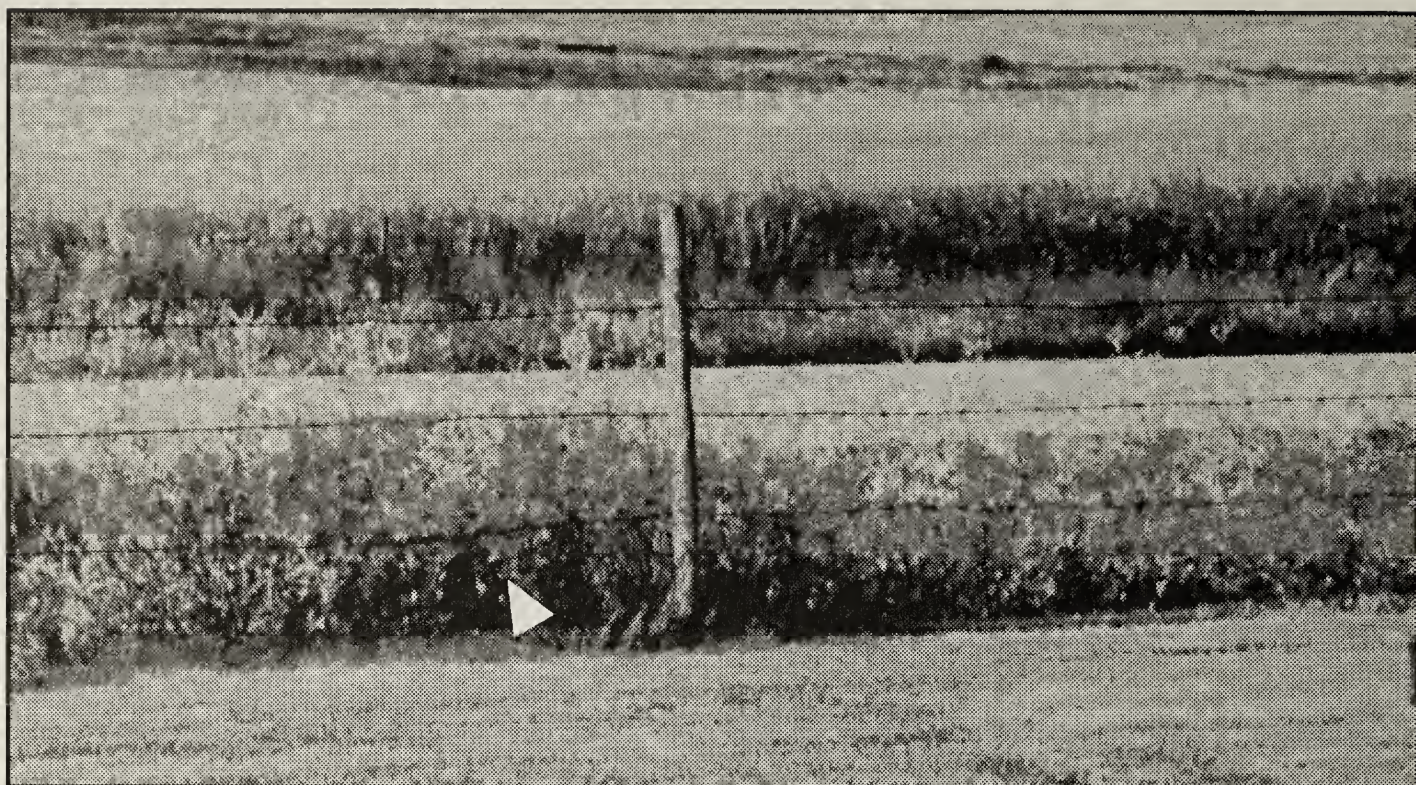


Figure 2. Fence with garter snake barely visible in centre of the picture on the bottom wire

Lorne Cherneski

on the south side by a farm access road (running east-west) and on the east side by a grid road (#617, running north-south). The fence line in question is atop a fairly high embankment, which has been the home for garter snakes for a number of years.

Each year, the snakes at this embankment occupy vacant Richardson's Ground Squirrel and Pocket Gopher burrows. We see garter snakes at this location frequently during the summer. On one occasion last July, I counted seven sunning themselves. They were of all sizes: some very small, some medium-sized and some adult. Each year, we find discarded snake skins in the area, some in "mint" condition.

- Lorne Cherneski, P.O. Box 1246, Swan River, MB, R0L 1Z0

[Editor's note: Not only is it odd for this Plains Garter Snake to put itself in this position, but it is unusual for a snake to bask in such an exposed location for this length of time!]

A RAFT OF BATS

For many years, we have had the pleasure of hosting bats over the summer. In the day, we could hear them rattling about in the attic of an old log house and between the insulation and the roofing material of a heated animal hutch. They used the bat house only once.

During the summer we have a number of rain barrels that catch water for the flower beds. We put lids on the full ones and floating wood in the ones that are not full to prevent drowning. Each morning I usually check the rain barrels in passing. Usually a few large bees need to be rescued, but once we even caught a small bird trying to bathe in a barrel.

One morning I was quite shocked to find five or six Little Brown Bats (*Myotis lucifugus*), soaking wet and crowded onto the piece of floating wood. Intellectually, I know that bats are excellent little creatures who have been given a bad rap, but to see a mass of wet ones instead of a couple of disgruntled bees was a bit startling.



Little Brown Bat, resting after rafting

Carol C. Clarke

They appeared cold, so we carefully removed their raft and placed them in the warm windowsill of the old log house and on a large plywood wheelbarrow that was leaning against it. Some climbed up the wall and some flew to the nearby trees where they immediately turned upside down for a nap.

After drying and warming up, one (Figure 1) turned upside down on the barrow, where it stayed most of the day. It left late in the afternoon.

No drowned bats were found in the rain barrel, so we were happy to have rescued the lot. However, we are unsure why, with so many bird baths available – one was about 6 feet away – that they decided to drink in the rain barrel. We fitted it with a screen lid and had no more bat rafting expeditions.

- *Carol C. Clarke*, PO Box 1478, Tisdale, SK, S0E 1T0



“The spectacular shifting sands [of the Lake Athabasca Sand Dunes] constitute the largest active dune environment in Canada, as well as one of the largest in the world north of 59 degrees latitude. Spread over a belt of some 1,500 square kilometres, largely between the major north-flowing rivers – MacFarlane River on the east, Dumville Creek and William River on the west – the extent of the dunes is such that from a distance, on cloudy days, they project on the sky a strange coppery glow.”

Stan Rowe, Home Place p. 97