
NOTES AND LETTERS

BUR OAKS, LARGE AND SMALL

In the June 2002 *Blue Jay*, there was an article on oak trees. An elderly couple who are friends of mine have a Bur Oak tree in their back yard in the city of Estevan. It is mature and for at least 12 to 15 years has been producing acorns. My friend says that it is hard to get the acorns before the squirrel comes for them.

Over the years my husband and I have transplanted small oak seedlings from her yard. They are growing well out on our farm, but the deer keep eating at them which makes it hard for them to grow taller.

You may find interesting some information that appeared in the Williston ND paper, ("Mayville farm has champion oak tree," *Plains Reporter*, October 30, 2002). Based on State Forest Service measurements, the largest Bur Oak in North Dakota is 83 feet tall, with a circumference of more than 12 feet and an average crown spread of 63 feet. Mayville is in the eastern part of the state.

Cheryl Andrist, Box 89, Estevan, SK S4A 2A2

OSPREY ATTACK ON A HARLEQUIN DUCK BROOD

At 5:00 PM on 27 August 1998, Mark Bugera, Rainer Ebel, Barry Godsolve and myself were setting up a mist net to capture a Harlequin Duck brood at the lower end of a pool in the McLeod River located in west-central Alberta. We had seen a fish jump in the pool so when we noticed an Osprey hovering overhead, we assumed that the Osprey used the pool for fishing and we ignored it.

We executed a perfect capture of the hen and all five of her ducklings which were able to fly a short distance (class III ducklings). After banding and releasing the birds downstream, we saw the Osprey suddenly dive at the brood. The Osprey hit the water but missed the ducklings. The hen immediately led the brood out of the water and onto the shore where they hid among rocks. The Osprey continued to hover and made faint attempts to dive, but after 2 or 3 minutes, circled around us and continued flying upstream.

This experience brought to mind another observation I had made with Mark Bugera the previous year on 7 June 1997. At 6:00 PM, we were watching a Harlequin Duck pair preening on the edge of the Gregg River which is a tributary to the McLeod River. The female suddenly crouched down, moved toward shore and hid beside a rock. The male also crouched down and did not move. We looked up and saw an Osprey flying upstream along the river. At the time, I assumed we were observing a generalized response to an aerial stimulus. Our 1998 observation of the Osprey attack on the harlequin brood suggests however, that the hen's actions may have been a species-specific anti-predator response.

- Beth MacCallum, 176 Moberly Drive, Hinton, AB T7V 1Z1.

COMPTON TORTOISESHELL DEATHS IN ABANDONED CARS

Recently in arranging the *Nymphalis* butterflies in my collections, I came upon a series of 52 specimens saved for me by Leonard Gareau. They were all found dead on August 20, 1989 at Swan River, Manitoba in abandoned cars on a farm. There were

over 70 specimens, but only 52 were in good enough condition to preserve as study specimens. The others were evidently eaten by mice or shrews. They form an impressive series well illustrating the great variation in pastel colours on the underside of the wings, resembling some African species in this regard.

Compton Tortoiseshells pass the winter as adults, and in searching for places to hibernate, could enter abandoned cars from the bottom. Once inside cars with tightly closed windows, they would be unable to escape and may have been killed by high temperatures in the cars.

The death of butterflies in abandoned cars is not new. I have seen crescents (*Phyciodes*) and many sulphurs so trapped - often only individually or only a few specimens over the years. I have not seen mention of this phenomenon in the published literature available to me in The Pas.

Considering the vast number of abandoned cars around North America, this butterfly carnage must be great in particular in the winter hibernating species. This may well be contributing to the decimation of butterflies from an extraordinary and unexpected source.

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

VARIED THRUSH WINTERS AT MELFORT

On January 2, 2003, Ray and I noticed an unfamiliar and colorful bird at our backyard feeder. We checked our bird books and consulted Stuart Houston, and identified it as a male Varied Thrush. "Rusty," as we called him, was shy and difficult to photograph but we finally got some shots with a telephoto lens through the window to confirm our identification.

Rusty seemed unable to crack the sunflower seeds in our feeder, so we put out a mixture of shelled sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, nuts, berries and suet. But his favorite food was bread, and a good friend, Joyce Koroluk, made him special loaves of bread filled with nuts and grain.

He would sit eating bread, all fluffed out, for long periods when the temperature was -20°C to -30°C. He would then move to an adjacent fir for awhile before coming back to the feeder. He got along well with the resident House Sparrows and Black-capped Chickadees.

As milder weather returned, Rusty's orange seemed brighter, he was sleeker looking and his back became a beautiful slate blue. He left us on April 7, 2003 after a stay of more than three months.

Stuart Houston informs me that only one other Varied Thrush, one at Stenen, has stayed successfully through the winter, as ours did. We will watch anxiously to see whether he will return to Melfort next winter.

- *Joyce Pannell*, Box 879, Melfort SK S0E 1A0.



Varied Thrush at our feeder