

# NOTES AND LETTERS

## FIRST SWAINSON'S HAWK BREEDING IN RESIDENTIAL SASKATOON

Buteos are relatively intolerant of human presence, and may desert their nest if a person climbs up to it, or even visits the foot of the tree during incubation.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true of Swainson's and Ferruginous hawks. Some pairs, however, are less fearful of humans. On the premises of the Jubilee Lodge in Eston, on July 14, 1995, an adult Swainson's Hawk attacked two ladies, both of whom suffered claw cuts, (one of them requiring sutures at the hospital), when they walked below the nest; conservation officers removed the nestling hawks from the nest and added one each to nests in adjacent rural areas.<sup>3</sup>

The first published records of urban-nesting Swainson's Hawks were from Regina, 1988-1991; Paul James reported one nest in a city park, two in coniferous trees in

residential areas, and two in industrial areas in this four year period. One of the latter was readily visible, without protective cover, on a signal gantry where a railroad crossed a street in the industrial area.<sup>2</sup>

In Saskatoon, two or more pairs have nested regularly within the city limits, but near the periphery, such as in the University of Saskatchewan fields and gardens, and near highway intersections both north and south of the city proper. Since 2000, a pair has nested on a busy thoroughfare, Millar Avenue, in the north industrial area.

In 2003, the first known nest within a Saskatoon residential area was discovered. The nest, invisible from most angles, was about 16 m above ground near the top of a spruce, in the front yard at 1020 Avenue B



*Swainson's Hawk nest with a view of the Kelsey Institute in Saskatoon, 23 July 2003.*

*Brenton Terry*

North (between Avenues 31 and 32). The owner of the home, José Perez, kindly gave permission for the first author and Brenton Terry to band the three young in the nest on July 23. The two adults, one light-phase and one medium-light, maintained a respectful distance, without making the alarm calls expected in a rural setting. The young grew and fledged under the watchful eye of area residents, who appreciated their new neighbors.

The location is a block from the east edge of densely packed, single-dwelling homes that extend over 5 km west to the city limits and 1.5 km north. We presume that the adult hawks did most of their hunting two city blocks to the east where there is an open industrial area, with rail yards, a flour mill,

and some grassy fields with a moderate population of ground squirrels, but University of Saskatchewan and airport haylands could each be reached with a 2.5 km flight.

1. HOUSTON, C.S. 1974. Mortality in ringing: a personal viewpoint. *The Ring* 80:157-161.
2. JAMES, P.C. 1992. Urban-nesting of Swainson's Hawks in Saskatchewan. *Condor* 94:773-774.
3. THOMPSON, V. 1995. Baby hawks taken from nest. *Eston Press-Review*, July 25, 1995.

- Marten J. Stoffel, Box 183, RR#4, Saskatoon, SK S7K 3J7 and C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0J8



## BLIND MULE DEER

Within a five day span in December 2002, the Saskatchewan Environment conservation officers at Leader, Saskatchewan, were called to investigate two Mule Deer bucks that appeared to be blind. Both bucks were 1.5 years old (yearlings) and appeared to be healthy, except for their eyes, which were clouded over and white.

The bucks were killed humanely and submitted to the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre, Western College of Veterinary Medicine (University of Saskatchewan) for examination. In the report for one of the bucks, Dr. Trent Bollinger stated: "The results of the examination showed the deer had inflammation, ulceration and edema of the corneas of both eyes which accounted for its blindness. These types of lesions are relatively frequent in cattle during summer months, but unusual in the winter. In North Dakota, there was a report of deer developing blindness and corneal ulceration after a severe winter storm caused the corneas to freeze. This is possibly what happened in this case."

In December of 2003, along the South Saskatchewan River northwest of Leader, I spotted another young Mule Deer buck that appeared to be blind. Since the wind was blowing my scent away from the deer, I was able to approach the buck undetected. Because it could not see, the deer was using all of its other senses to determine if danger



**Figure 1. Blind Mule Deer buck sniffing and trying to detect danger. December 12, Leader, SK**  
Kerry Wrishko.

was present. It spun around, sniffing the air with its ears forward, listening intently for any sound (Figure 1). The hair around its neck was standing up, not unlike a cat or dog when it senses danger (Figure 2).

The deer walked gingerly, going around some shrubs without running into them or tripping, to about 4 meters away. The deer's eyes were clearly white (Figure 2), similar to those on the deer seen a year earlier.

The deer finally made its way to a point downwind where, smelling the human scent, he attempted to escape. It ran for only about 10 meters, however, then started to walk away again, in a manner slow enough to let him "feel" his way to safety.

Although animals such as this provide an

interesting case study for scientists, and it is important for us to understand diseases that affect wildlife, this deer was not killed for examination. I felt that the two deer from 2002 had not revealed the cause of injury resulting in blindness and was hopeful that the condition might reverse itself.

A blind deer certainly does not have its full resources to avoid predators. However, if the deer had been killed, it would have had no chance of survival. This is a very difficult decision that is considered whenever we are faced with what we perceive to be wildlife in peril: should we intervene or let nature take its course?

- *Kerry Wrishko*, Box 70, Leader, SK S0N 1H0



*Figure 2. Close-up of blind Mule Deer, showing the white eyes*

*Kerry Wrishko*

## MORE ON WOLVERINES

Daisy Meyers writes from Leader, SK:

“In the article ‘Wolverine sighting south of Saskatoon’ in the March 2004 issue of *Blue Jay*, the editor’s note at the bottom states that there have been two previous reports south of their expected range. I would like to add a third wolverine. Enclosed is a photograph of an article in the April 18, 1979 issue of the *Leader News*, showing local trapper Larry Ausmus with a wolverine he had captured.” [According to the article, Larry trailed the wolverine for almost 10 miles before he shot it about 6 miles west of Leader “early Wednesday morning.” (*Leader News*, April 18, 1979). Eds.]

And from Beth Madden, Refuge Biologist at the Medicine Lake National Wildlife

Refuge Complex in Montana:

“In 1998, a wolverine was killed here on a sheep ranch just outside the town of Medicine Lake, Montana. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks made a taxidermy mount of the animal and it is on display here at the Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The local residents were fascinated to learn about this transient animal that had wandered so far from its natural range, and they have affectionately dubbed it “Wally” the wolverine (Figure 1).

“To help orient you, Medicine Lake is 22 miles south of Plentywood, Montana, which is about 15 miles south of the Regway, SK border crossing. We are a prairie and grain agricultural area, with the only trees found in planted shelterbelts.”



*Figure 1. Wolverine (“Wally”) from Medicine Lake, Montana*

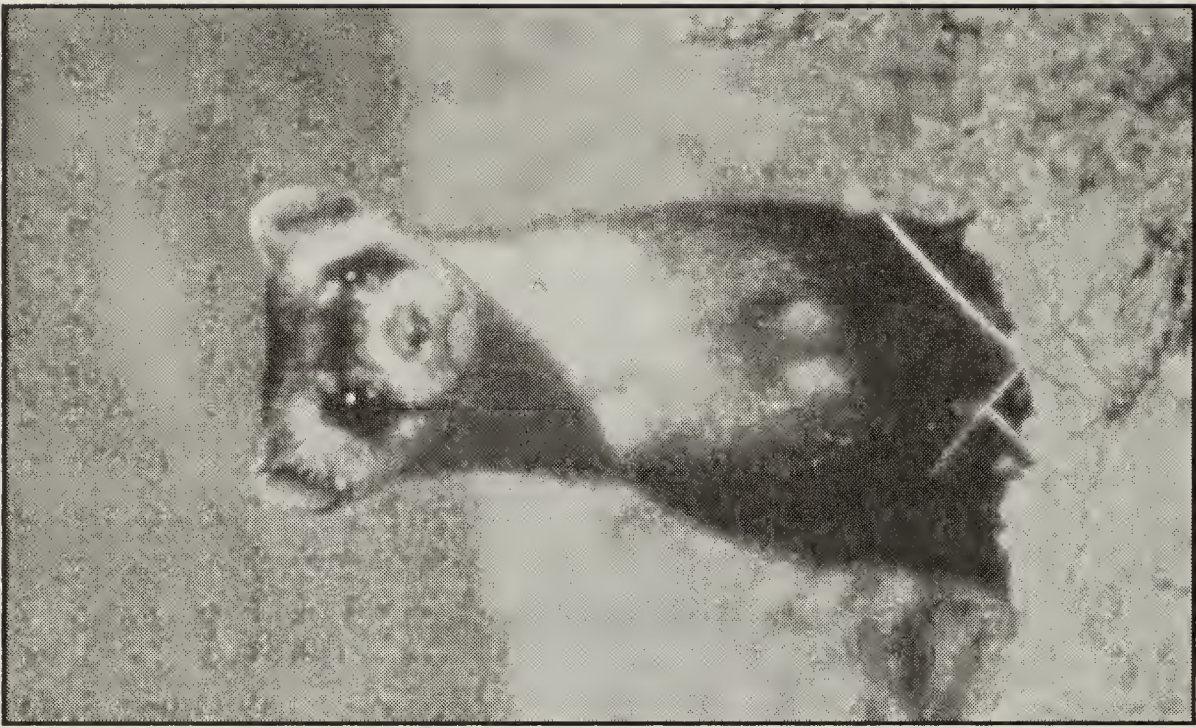
*Beth Madden*



*Figure 1. Long-tailed Weasel with typical facial markings, near Saskatoon  
Claire Jardine*



*Figure 2. Long-tailed Weasel with unusual facial mask, near Saskatoon  
Claire Jardine*



*Figure 3. Black-footed Ferret photographed by LuRay Parker, Wyoming Game & Fish Department*

# UNUSUAL “MASKED” LONG-TAILED WEASEL

While live-trapping Richardson’s Ground Squirrels near Saskatoon, as part of a study of infectious diseases, I observed a number of Long-tailed Weasels that were using the study sites as hunting grounds (Fig. 1).

One of these weasels had unusual facial markings, consisting of a dark brown mask extending down from the eyes (Fig. 2 and front cover). At first glance, these markings made the animal resemble a Black-footed Ferret; however, Black-footed Ferrets were extirpated from Canada by 1974 and, in any event, they always live in close association with Black-tailed Prairie Dog colonies, not with ground squirrels. Convinced that this must simply be an unusual colour variation of the Long-tailed Weasel, I consulted Peterson’s field guide to mammals and Banfield’s *The Mammals of Canada*.<sup>1,2</sup> According to these sources, the markings of this weasel were not typical of what one would expect around Saskatoon. However, Long-tailed Weasels in the southwestern United States have facial markings similar to those I observed.

I sent several pictures I took of the weasel to David Baron, the director of the Royal Saskatchewan Museum (RSM), and Harold Bryant, the Curator of Earth Sciences at the

RSM and former Curator of Mammals at the Provincial Museum of Alberta. Both agreed that the facial markings were unusual, certainly for an animal from the Saskatoon area. They sent the pictures to Gilbert Proulx, at Alpha Wildlife Research & Management Ltd., who, as it turned out, had seen a Long-tailed Weasel with similar facial markings a few years ago in Gwynne, Alberta (near Camrose). He only got a quick glimpse of the animal and wondered, like I did, if it could be a Black-footed Ferret. Unfortunately, despite hours of trying, he was unable to observe the animal again and had been “haunted by this observation for years”.

It appears that weasels with facial masks are not very common but I hope these pictures will bring peace of mind to other people who are lucky enough see one and wonder “could it be a Black-footed Ferret?”

1. BANFIELD, A.W.F. 1977. *The Mammals of Canada*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto

2. BURT, W.H. and R.P. GROSSENHEIDER. 1976. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of America North of Mexico*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

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“Gyrfalcon. Instead of a noble falcon or a circling falcon, the gyrfalcon is a ‘greedy falcon’. The word is not related to either *gyro*, ‘to circle’ as it does before swooping down upon its prey, or to *hieros*, Greek for ‘noble’ or ‘devine’. Gyrfalcon can be traced to Germanic origins.... The Low Latin *gyrofalco* and *girefalco* (which latter was corrupted to *gyrofalco* and gave rise to one erroneous etymology) came from *girvalke*, *gir* from the Old High German *giri*, ‘greedy’ and *valke*, ‘falcon’.” Edward S. Gruson, *Words for Birds*, p.73