

THREE BONAPARTE'S GULL NESTS AT SPRUCE LAKE, SK

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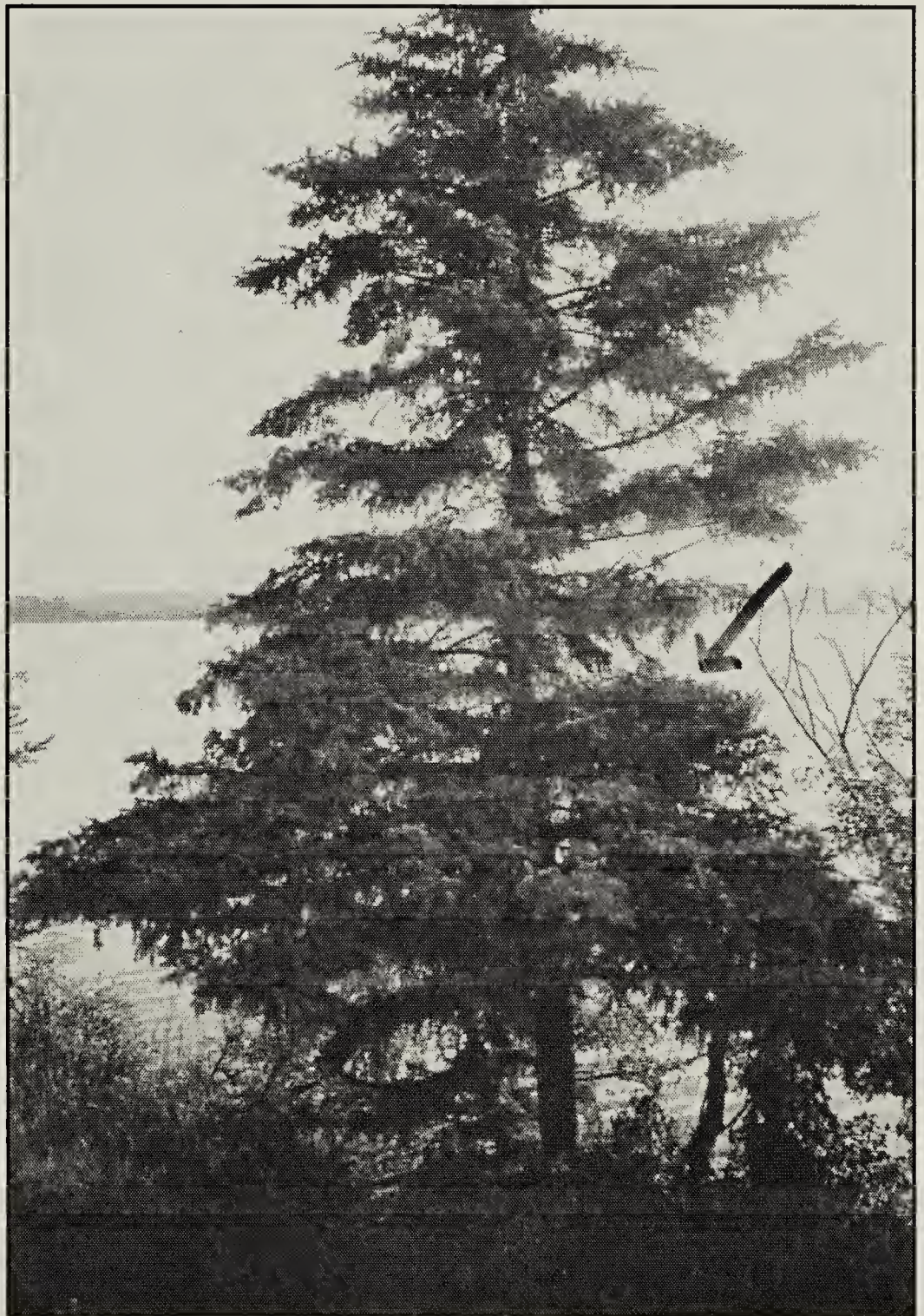
Our first sighting of a Bonaparte's Gull nest occurred on June 19, 2004, during the bus tour to Spruce Lake during Nature Saskatchewan's Spring Meet. Our entire party observed three pairs nesting, each in a small, solitary spruce, beside the lakeside trail on the north shore of Spruce Lake, 14 km south of St. Walburg. Stuart and I stopped again on June 20 and paid a third visit on July 18.

The first nest, in a spruce right on the bank of the lake, was 2 m above the lake level. An adult sat tight on June 19, but rose up to display at least two downy young on June 20. On July 18, one adult sat at the top of the spruce, then both adults dove at us.

The second nest, also in a spruce right on the bank, was about 60 m along the shore from the first nest (by GPS calculations) and 2.7 m above the lake level. The adult sat tight on June 19, but the following day

rose up sufficiently to reveal three young. Both adults dove at us when we returned on July 18.

The third nest was in a spruce 1 or 2 m from the lake edge, and another 225 m along the shore from the second nest. It was 3.5 m



Location of Bonaparte's Gull nest # 1 at Spruce Lake, on 19 June 2004
Mary Houston

above ground, too high to see into without disturbing the adult. On July 18, the nest had apparently fallen, but two adults dive-bombed us.

No young were visible on July 18, but the behaviour of the all three pairs of adults suggested persistent territorial defense or possibly one or more flightless young hiding somewhere in the vicinity. The commonest clutch size is three eggs. Young are said to remain in the nest for two to seven days after hatching, but no data are available concerning the age at first flight.¹

We thought it remarkable that the first and second nests were in the only two suitable spruce on that part of the lakeshore, and closer together than typical Bonaparte's Gull nests. Near Churchill, Manitoba, "individual

territories are large and inter-nest distances are usually >500 m."²

Bonaparte's Gull is the only gull "that regularly, indeed almost always, nests in trees."¹ As with most rules, there are exceptions; the best-documented marsh nesting of this species is for "Lamotte's Swamp" near Jackfish Lake, Saskatchewan, in 1931-1935 and again in 1955 and 1956.³

1. BURGER, J., and M. GOCHFELD. 2002. Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*). In *The Birds of North America*, no. 634 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Philadelphia, PA.

2. JEHL, J.R., Jr. 2004. *Birdlife of the Churchill Region: Status, History, Biology*. Trafford Publishing, Victoria, BC.

3. SYMONS, R.D. 1968. Atypical nesting of Bonaparte's Gull in Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 26:70-74.



SURPRISE EFFECT

Warm July afternoon
walking back to the car
while the dog explores afar
casting my eyes downward
blinking in the bright light
suddenly a swift shadow
flits across the path
look up in surprise
as a large dragonfly skims past
on gauzy transparent wings
glad to be reminded that
even such a fragile form
casts so solid a shadow.

- Bob Nero