
NOTES & LETTERS

GREAT HORNED OWLS WITH BROOD OF FIVE

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Horned Owl Young (5)

Bittern Lake, Alberta

Bendire, in 1982, seems to have been the first to record the marked regional differences in clutch size in the Great Horned Owl. This owl lays fewer eggs in the south and east and has a larger clutch in the north and west. Dr. William L. Ralph reported to Bendire from Indian River, near Titusville, Florida, that 60% of his Great Horned Owl nests contained only a single egg. In contrast, Bendire reported that in early March 1875, J.W. Preston found a nest with five eggs near Baxter, Iowa. All these eggs hatched. In Plumas County, California, Charles C. Neale took a set of five eggs. In Wyoming, Charles F. Morrison was said to have taken a set of six eggs, assuming his identification was correct.¹

Regional differences in clutch size have persisted. In Massachusetts, two eggs were the standard clutch in A.C. Bent's personal experience.² In Ohio, Jack Holt's 1964-1992 long-term study found 284 broods with one young, 584 with two, 40 with three and only one brood with four; for an average of 1.7 young per successful nest.⁴ Higher average brood sizes occur in Saskatchewan (2.21, n=3095 successful nests, CSH) and Alberta (2.37, n=494 successful nests, EP). In this century we have located only one published report of a five-egg clutch; a nest near Belvedere, Alberta, collected by A.D. Henderson.³

The purpose of this note is to add three more nest records with five young. On May 1979 ETJ banded five young, 2.5 to three weeks old, in an aspen 25 feet (7.6 m) above ground at Bittern Lake, Alberta. On 22 April 1983 ETJ and EP visited another nest with five young, 45 feet (13.7 m) above ground in a Balsam Poplar near Sherwood Park, Alberta, but only four were large enough to hold a band. CSH has never encountered a brood of five although he has banded 82 successful nests with four young, 492 nests with one young, 1570 nests with two young, and 999 nests with three young. One of CSH's nest finders, Pete Hill, had a nest of five young east of Duval, Saskatchewan in late May 1956. This nest was only nine feet above ground in willows; the young

were easily visible and readily counted from the seat of Hill's WD9 tractor.

1. BENDIRE, C. 1892. Life histories of North American birds with special reference to their breeding habits and eggs, Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge 28:376-389

2. BENT, A.C. 1938. Life histories of North American birds of prey, part 2. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, p. 302.

3. HENDERSON, A.D. 1924. With the early breeders. Oologist 42:50-57

4. HOLT, J.B., Jr. 1996. A banding study of Cincinnati area Great Horned Owls. J. Raptor Res. 30:194-197



Golden Plover

Stan Shadick

MY FIRST GOSHAWK NEST

BARRY USSELMAN, 414 Trotchie Crescent, Saskatoon SK S7K 7W1

On 5 May 1996 I was searching for shed deer antlers in aspen forest about ten miles west of Sonningdale when a pair of fairly large, swift-flying, tree-dodging hawks swooped at me. I quickly found two nests, about 35 yards apart. I didn't know what species they were.

On 11 May I returned and photographed the perched adult male with my telephoto lens. This confirmed his identity as a Northern Goshawk (Fig. 1). I left some camouflage netting for a future blind, but kept my early visits short, even though the site was 90 minutes travel from my home.

On 26 May I brought in lumber for a future blind. The female was crouched on her nest, almost invisible. On 2 June, as I put a ladder up an adjacent tree, the female took off from the nest. The male dived repeatedly, no doubt in an effort to frighten me off. I got further photographs of the male. On 9 June the female left her nest only after I had climbed the ladder. On 15 June a sheet of plywood was added to my blind, a cover behind which I could hide and take photographs. I stayed only 15 minutes. More plywood was added on 23 June to complete the blind.

On 30 June I came at 7 p.m. and was greeted by the female who dived at me before I climbed the ladder. I got my first sight of the two white, downy young, with black beaks and black eyes. It was a warm evening so I stayed for 90 minutes.

I returned at 5.50 p.m. on 7 July. The two chicks roused up. For the first time, they backed up to pass excreta over the edge of the nest. Feathers were

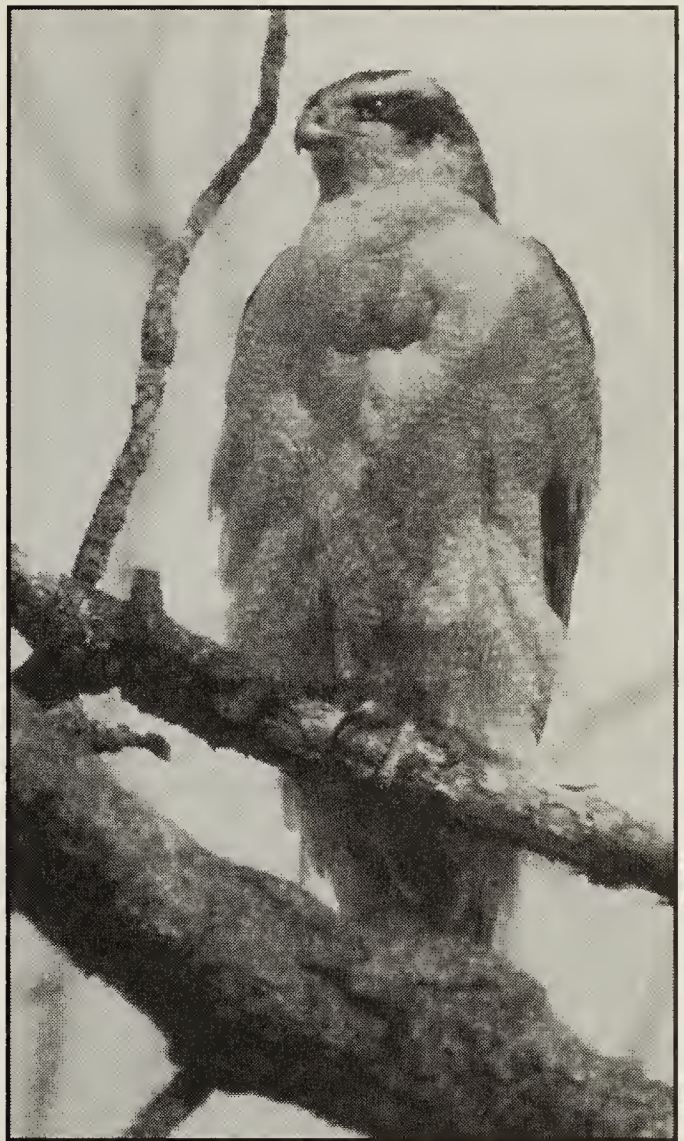


Figure 1. Goshawk, Saskatoon Area

developing. They were now stretching, flapping their wing stubs, and able to rip open the mammal the adult had brought, perhaps a ground squirrel from the alfalfa field 300 yards distant. They paid no attention to clicking of my camera shutter. I stayed till 8 p.m. but saw neither parent; presumably both were away hunting food for their hungry young.

At 5.45 a.m. on 15 July the female dived at me when I came, but then stayed away, except once to visit the nest briefly, the first such occasion with me in the blind, to bring unidentified food at 6.30 a.m. The arrival of food caused a loud chattering by her chicks.

At 5.45 p.m. on 18 July, I climbed into the blind without seeing an adult. Later the male streaked in, dropped an unknown prey item, and quickly left the nest. It was my first sighting of him since 23 June. The female didn't appear during my two hour stay.

On 21 July at 3 p.m. the nest was empty, but one of the young gave hunger calls for five minutes at 3.50. Again at 4.25 I heard the same or the other young calling from the ground. I searched but could not find them, and left at 5.45 p.m. On 25 July, the male swooped in and

dropped prey on the ground; the young responded. I rushed over but again the young must have been well hidden for I could not find them. They seem to have left their home range by 11 August, when nothing was seen or heard. I realize now that the 1996 nest was unusually late, since at this latitude in a normal year the young should have fledged by about 1 July.

In 1997, they used the second nest about 35 yards distant. The blind was too far away, so I made only two visits during the season.



Lesser Snow Goose

G. W. Beyersberge

PRAIRIE SHOREBIRD MONITORING PROGRAM

Location: Prairie Canada - Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

Project: To identify important lakes/wetlands used by Arctic breeding shorebirds during migration as staging/resting areas and by populations of prairie-nesting shorebirds. Participants would conduct counts on the lake(s) and provide information on species and numbers of shorebirds using the site during each daily count.

When: Shorebirds are found in the prairies from late April through October. Spring migration normally occurs from the first week of May into the second week of June with the peak in late May. Fall migration normally occurs from the first week of July through late September, with peaks in late July (adults) and the middle of August (juveniles).

Commitment: Repeat visits to a site during the peak spring and fall migration periods are encouraged in an effort to catch the peak numbers of the different species of shorebirds that may use the site. However, the number of visits is totally at the discretion of the volunteer.

Skills: Individuals must be able to identify shorebirds in the field, and count and/or estimate the numbers of birds using the site.

Logistics: Participants must supply their own transportation. A data form and instructions will be provided to volunteers for reporting observations.

Equipment: Binoculars and/or spotting scope and notebook.

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The greenish bark of aspen is photosynthetic.

DRASTIC DECLINES IN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE AND AMERICAN BITTERN

CHARLES ANDERSON, RR #1, Box 13, Rose Valley, SK S0E 1M0

I farm in parkland habitat, with many good marshes and wetlands, five miles west of Ponass Lake (15 miles north and four miles east of Quill Lake village, just six miles west of the western boundary of the area covered by Hooper's book, *Birds of East-central Saskatchewan*). I am very concerned about two species.

The deep, sucking, slough-pump noise of the American Bittern was commonly heard and birds were regularly seen every summer until about 1988, when their numbers crashed. For the first time in my life I went without hearing or seeing a bittern all summer for three consecutive years, 1991, 1992 and 1993. In 1994 I found a nest with four eggs, then saw and heard none in 1995 and 1996. Several were heard and one was seen in 1997.

The Sharp-tailed Grouse was also common until the mid-1980s with two dancing grounds present on my land. For six years, 1992-1997, inclusive, I saw only a few adults and not a single covey of young. In 1997 I didn't even see an adult until harvest, when a hen with three chicks appeared from a late hatch. My neighbours have remarked that they don't have any on their land,

either. I think the hunting season should be closed in Zone 40, which stretches from Kelvington and Wynyard north to Naicam and Greenwater Lake.

Not all the bird news is bad. I found my first four American Avocet nests in 1991 but they were flooded out with heavy rains; a nest with four eggs on the west side of Ponass Lake in 1994 was successful. Swainson's Hawks became commoner near Rose Valley as more land was cleared; I saw my first pair about 1984 and knew of three pairs in 1994, but only one pair nested in 1995 through 1997.

A Northern Hawk-Owl perched in my yard for a week in December 1996. My first-ever sighting of a Great Gray Owl was on 4 January 1997; not too long later I saw another near Archerwill.

The Western Kingbird, which has nested in Quill Lake village since about 1980, first appeared on my farm about 1985; by 1994 I had three pairs in my farmstead and another pair five miles farther east at Ponass Lake.

I wish to thank Stuart Houston for help in preparing this note.



Aster from Asteria, goddess of the stars, who cried when she saw no stars on earth and her tear drops turned into flowers.

RARE SIGHTING OF A PAINTED BUNTING

BRENDA FLOOD, Box 475, Leader, SK S0N 1H0

On May 26, 1997, I received a phone call at 6:15 pm from a friend of mine from Burstall, Saskatchewan. Elfreda LaSalle and her husband Lowell were looking at a very colourful bird at their backyard feeder. They were hoping I could help them identify it.

Elfreda began describing a bird with a very red breast, bluish purple head and yellowish green back. As I listened to her description, I paged through my bird guide asking for more details. I was thinking it had to be a Rose breasted Grosbeak, or a Purple Finch....but in my mind, she was describing a Painted Bunting that I had seen only in pictures. Or was she describing someone's escaped pet Gouldian Finch?

After much discussion about the size and other field markings of the bird Elfreda was describing, I suggested they may have a rare sighting of a Painted Bunting. The bird had been at their feeder for three days.

If it had not been so close to dusk that evening, my husband John and I would have drive to Burstall to look at this one! However, the sun was about to set and Leader is about 45 minutes away.

I was, needless to say, delighted when I saw Elfreda this fall and she produced these pictures they had taken. Indeed it was a Painted Bunting (*While the photographs prove the identity of the birds they were, sadly, not suitable for publication - Editor*).



The Gerard Clan - Banding Ferruginous Hawks and Merlins, Matador pasture near Kyle, Saskatchewan, July 1997.