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ADDENDUM: THE GREAT BUFFLEHEAD CRASH ¹

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After dealing with some exasperating details, I printed a final copy of "The Great Bufflehead Crash" ¹ and sent it off to the editors of *Blue Jay*. I also printed a copy for my Foam Lake correspondents, and mailed it on October 31st. Next day, I left on a trip into the interior of B.C. to watch - what

else - Buffleheads. When I returned a week later, some details and buffleheads had returned to haunt me.

My return to the coast nearly coincided with: a) the sixtieth anniversary of the Great Bufflehead Crash (November 4-5th), b) the first

major cold front sweeping over the prairies (November 5th), and c) a major influx of Buffleheads (November 6-7th) to their coastal wintering grounds.

A few days later, I received an envelope, postmarked Foam Lake. It contained a clipping from the *Wadena News*, dated November 1st 2000, concerning an eerily-familiar story: "Distressing situations are not reserved solely for the human species, a fact that was borne out in the skies over Wadena on Sunday night. As fog descended with the darkness of the evening, flocks of geese were heard as they passed overhead, traveling to the southwest on their way to Little Quill Lake. Shortly after the noise of the numerous passing flocks had abated, a flock could be heard approaching from the southwest, the opposite direction to which they should have been traveling. Hampered by the fog cover, they had apparently been unable to locate the lake and were convinced that the glow from Wadena's lights was actually Little Quill."

A note on the margin stated that the same thing happened at Foam Lake on the same night! Evidently, the weather conditions that caused the disorientation occurred within the Quill Lakes region. According to the reporter, the ground fog was fairly heavy, but there was a much heavier layer a distance above. The geese circled in confusion for the next few hours until the fog lifted. The reporter said it brought to mind another article in the *Wadena News* in about 1943 when dozens of ducks and geese mistook the towns' lights for the lake, and were killed when they hit power and telephone lines, trees and buildings. Such a coincidence of events! It seems that the Quill Lakes region must be the Bermuda Triangle of Buffleheads and their clan. These avian disasters, or near disasters, appear to arise from the rare coincidence of several possible events. This congruence of

factors includes freeze-up of large sloughs (a function of solar storage capacity), the weather (flights take advantage of the southward flow of dry polar air immediately following a cold front), and time of day (flights are initiated at dusk under clear skies). These factors come together within a restricted window of time on the prairies, around Hallowe'en, when fog gathers in spooky hollows, and the mercury-vapor illumination emanating from small towns beckons like illusory lakes. An invisible flight over the prairies, registered as nocturnal blips on airport radar screens, the mass exodus of Buffleheads is evident in the sharp peak of coastal-bound migrants through U.S. National Wildlife Refuges during the first week of November,² at "surprisingly similar times".³

Buffleheads and geese rarely fowl up their flight plans. But when they do, it makes the news.^{4,5}

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