
NOTES AND LETTERS

BULLSNAKE ON A BARBED WIRE FENCE

In the June issue of *Blue Jay*, I read Lorne Cherneski's interesting note about a Plains Garter Snake on a fence wire. I witnessed a somewhat similar occurrence with a bullsnake at about 9:00 A.M. on August 16, 2001 near Leader on the SW 1/4 of section 29, Township 23, Range 25, West of the 3rd meridian.

The morning was very hot (30° C) and dry. I was walking along an oat field with pasture fence on one side, when I saw a bullsnake curled up in the grass in front of me. It reared up, hissed and struck at me several times, although I was out of its reach. My uncle George Meyers, who was nearby, slid a stick underneath the snake and flipped it over the fence. He intended to put it in the pasture, where there was an abundance of gophers, but it fell across the top wire, wrapped its tail around the wire, stretched itself out on the top wire and appeared to go to sleep. The snake was still asleep on the fence when we left 15 minutes later. Unfortunately, I didn't have my camera with me.

- Daisy D. Meyers, Box 218, Leader, SK
S0N 1H0

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROTECTING LILY BLOSSOMS FROM HOUSE SPARROW ATTACKS

I note that Nell and Stan Dunville lost opportunities to enter some of their special lilies in the annual competition last July because of unexpected damage by sparrows.¹ Perhaps the strategies the Dunvilles have planned for the coming season are similar

to ours for keeping House Sparrows out of our raspberry patch. Unprotected small fruits such as Nanking Cherry, Saskatoons and raspberries are ruined when these birds damage them by pinching them, whether for fluid or food. In hot, dry weather such as we had last summer, this can be especially noticeable. Two tactics, alone or in combination, have completely protected our raspberries: (1) a plentiful supply of water to lure the birds to the opposite side of the house and (2) ribbons of plastic, 1" wide and 8" to 12" long, cut from patterned shopping bags. These are tied at 12" intervals to cords strung between the rows, just lower than the tallest plants. It is important to have these in place ahead of season. Good luck with your prize lilies next July!

1. DUNVILLE, Nellie. 2001. Surprise Attack. *Blue Jay* 59 (4): 209

- F. J. H. Fredeen, 410 Leslie Avenue,
Saskatoon, SK S7H 2Z1

SNOWY OWLS SOUTHEAST OF REGINA

Bird watchers Edwin and Dorothy Skene of Yorkton joined their grandson, Kiley Topliss of Balgonie on a sunny winter afternoon adventure, January 11, 2002, looking for Snowy Owls. The weather was unusually warm for Saskatchewan and snow was scarce. The trio headed south from Balgonie and travelled about 100 km within an area that extended 16 km south of Kronau and Lajord.

The trip was a resounding success. They spotted 18 owls; most of them on the ground taking advantage of the warm sunshine. The owls were mainly on farmland that had been seeded to peas and lentils.

The following day, they made the trip again, with Ron and Marion Peddle of

Regina who came along to view the scenery and the wildlife. Dorothy said, "In two and a half hours we saw 16 Snowy Owls and one Great Horned Owl in the same area – just a bit further east of the day before." She added, "It was a very overcast day with a cold wind and a winter rainstorm moving in. The owls appeared to be hunting. They were all on fence posts, SaskTel pedestals, granaries and power poles. We got quite a bit closer to the magnificent birds this time; they were visible from the roadside."

In addition to a delightful day of owl watching, Edwin Skene and Kiley Topliss reported sighting two crows and a porcupine in a field near Balgonie.

- *Linda Ungar*, 702-951 Commissioners Road East, London, ON N5Z 4N1

TURKEY VULTURE IN THE WESTERN ARCTIC

During the summer of 2001 there were reports of what was believed to be a Turkey Vulture in and around Aklavik, Northwest Territories (see map, following page). This is thousands of kilometres north of the range of turkey vultures in western Canada. Unfortunately, a positive identification could not be made. On 7 November, however, William Firth of Fort McPherson contacted the local wildlife officer, Johnny Charlie, to report a Turkey Vulture being bullied by a group of ravens on his front porch. The officer arrived at the residence to find a very cold, hungry and dazed turkey vulture backed up against a wall in the porch.

The bird was taken to the local wildlife office and plans were made to transfer it to the regional office in Inuvik some 180 km up the Dempster highway. This would be no mean feat because the ice road crossing the Mackenzie River was not yet suitable for vehicular traffic. The vulture was

transported in a pickup truck to the river crossing at Tsiiehtchic about 60 km east of Fort McPherson. There it was transferred to a snowmobile to cross the river, then to another pickup which had made the 120 km trip south from Inuvik. By the time the vulture arrived at the Regional Wildlife Lab Complex in Inuvik, the Rockyview Wildlife Recovery Centre in Madden, Alberta had been contacted and their staff had provided advice on the appropriate care of the vulture before it could be transported to their facility.

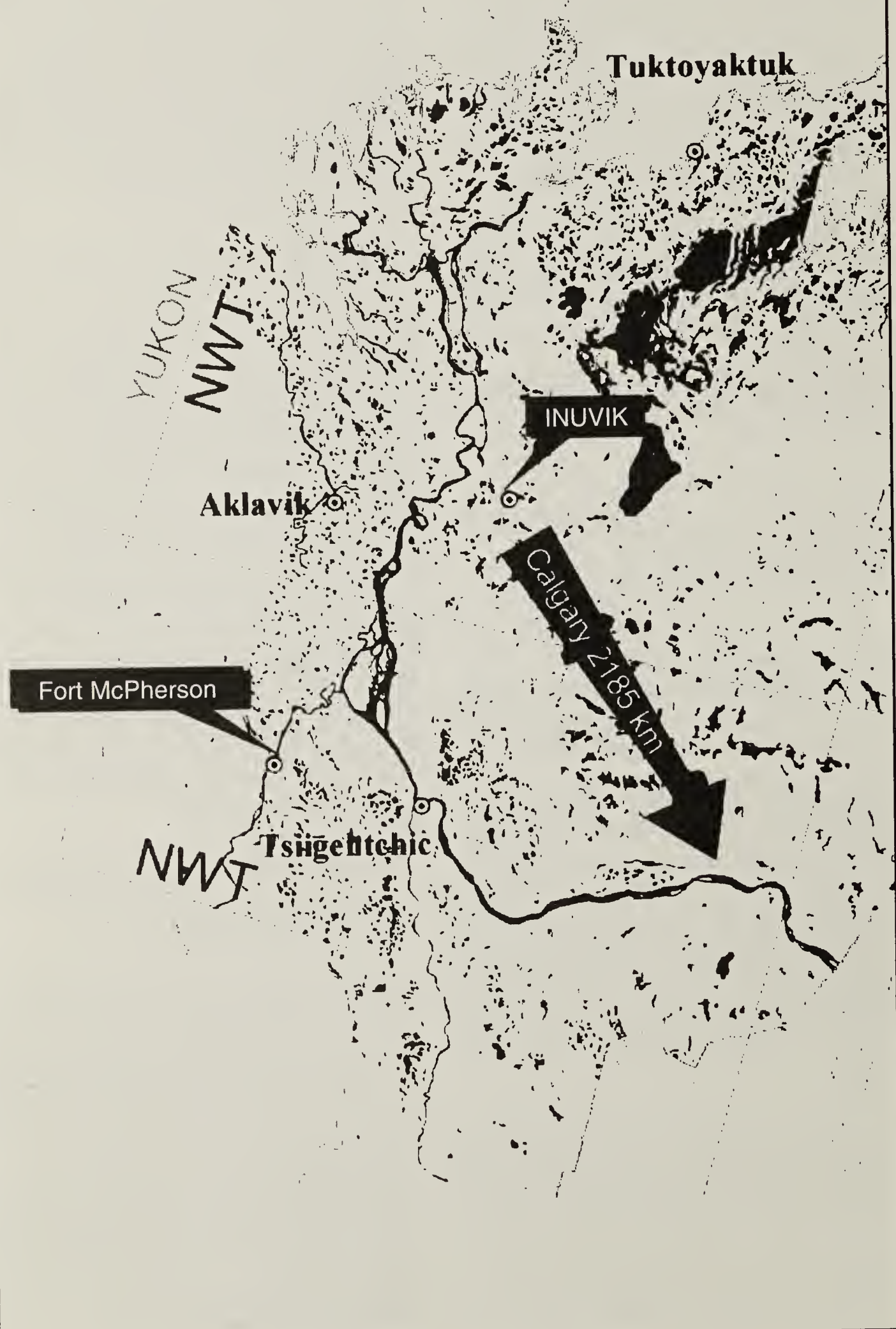
The vulture warmed up, ravenously ate the snowshoe hare and chicken provided to it, and became an immediate news item. This was no wayward juvenile bird, being at least 2 years old, so why was it stranded so far north in November when it should have been in its subtropical wintering grounds? It was fortunate that the weather had been relatively mild in the region for most of October and early November with temperatures rarely dipping below -18° C for extended periods. After spending a night recuperating in Inuvik, the vulture was flown courtesy of Canadian North to Calgary, with a layover in Yellowknife for a check by a veterinarian. It arrived at the Madden facility on 9 November, the first vulture at the facility in its 9 years of operation and a local television and newspaper celebrity.

- *Nic Larter*, Dept. of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development, P.O. Box 240, Ft. Simpson NT X0E 0N0.

Editor's note: The Rockyview Wildlife Recovery Centre cared for this bird from November 9 to December 2, when it was successfully released near the Canadian-US border. No illness or disability was detected other than that the bird was 25 to 30 % underweight when it arrived from Inuvik. A short article about the bird can be found in *The Recovery Review* 7 (4), December 2001, the bulletin of the Rockyview Wildlife Recovery Society, <www.rockyviewwildlife.org>.

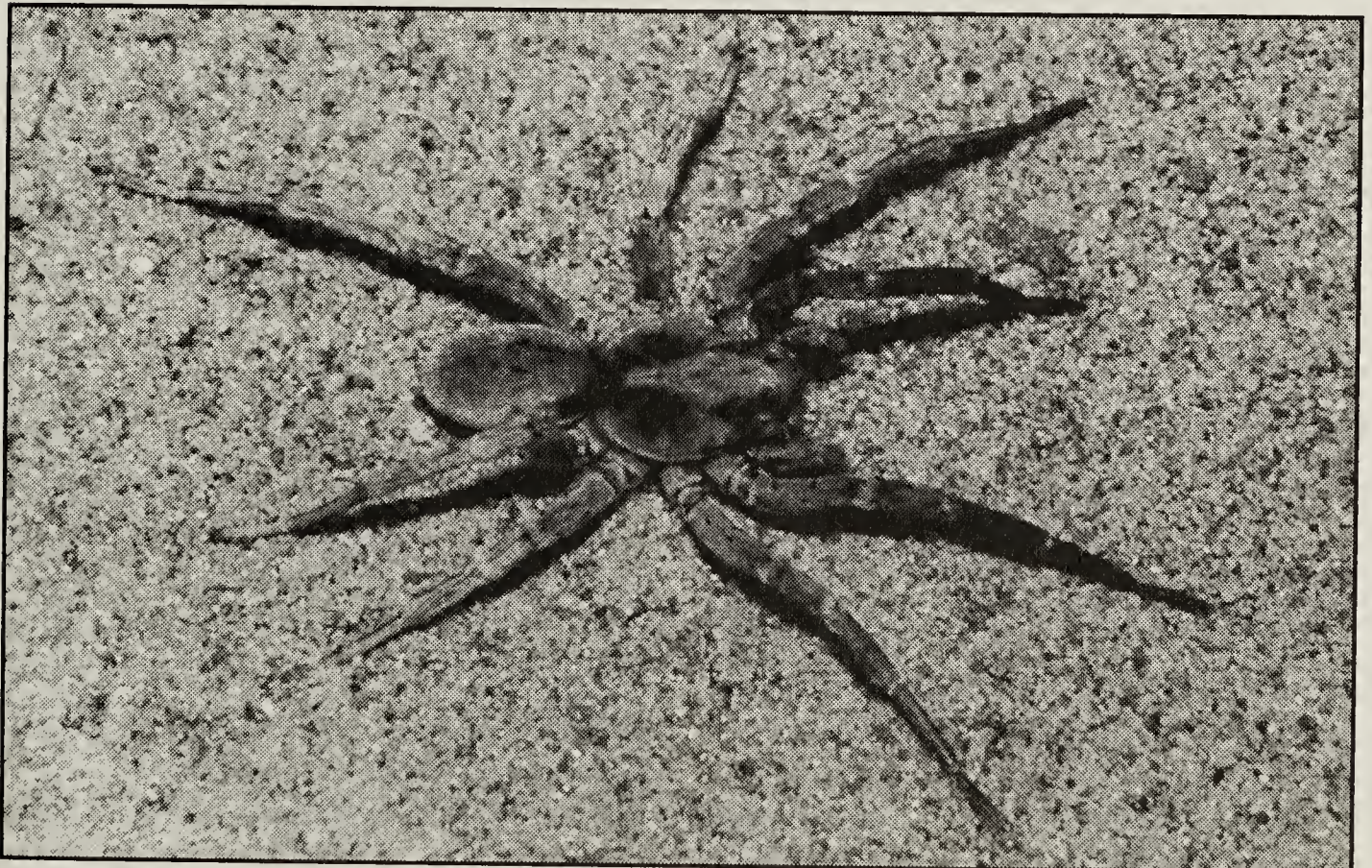
The northwest corner of the Northwest Territories.

Map prepared by Lawrence Lewis.





Turkey Vulture at the Rockyview Wildlife Recovery Centre in Madden, Alberta.
Diane Wittner



Burrowing Wolf Spider male with a body length 1.5 cm.
See Mystery Photo, page 62.

Don Buckle