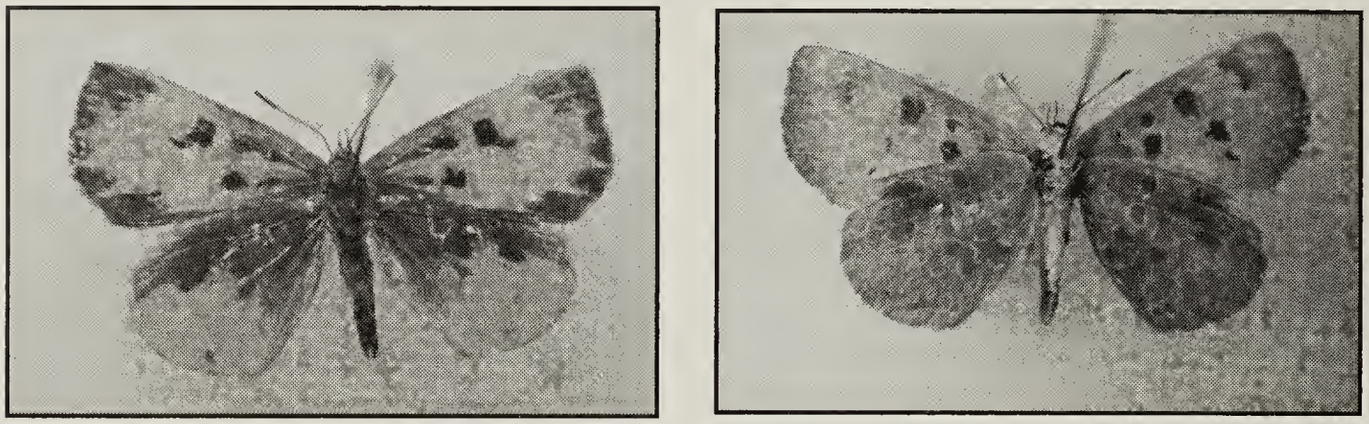
NOTES AND LETTERS

A NEW BUTTERFLY FOR SASKATCHEWAN



Harvester butterfly collected on 18 June 2003 in Duck Mountain Provincial Park. Dorsal view (left) and ventral view (right). ***Jeanette Pepper***

A butterfly species called the Harvester (*Feniseca tarquinius*) has been previously collected from eastern Canada and United States west to Aweme and Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba, and eastern North Dakota. It is unique in that it is the only species of butterfly in North America whose caterpillar is known to eat other insects instead of plants. Harvester caterpillars eat wooly aphids, particularly those that occur on alders, and are sometimes attacked and killed by ants that defend their "cows" (i.e. the aphids) from predators. Harvesters hibernate as pupae. The pupa looks like a monkey's head in shape and markings.

The adults have a wingspread of 28 to 34 mm. The wings are orange on the upperside and broadly edged with black. The underside is dull brown with darker brown, roughly circular patches edged with white. It is reported that they never visit flowers (but some authors disagree with this); instead they feed on aphid honeydew that is secreted on leaves or twigs.

Sometimes it takes detective work to find a new kind of insect. I reasoned that Duck Mountain Provincial Park in Saskatchewan is similar to the Riding Mountain area in Manitoba, so I went there in late May 2002 to look for the Harvester. The day turned cloudy with no butterflies flying, but I did find a area of Green Alders (*Alnus viridis*) along a bicycle trail.

I searched the same area again on June 7, 2003. Again it turned cloudy and I saw only two butterflies. Progress was made, however, for wooly aphids were found on the Green Alders discovered the previous year.

My wife and I returned to Duck Mountain Park on June 17, 2003 and did a butterfly count. The day was beautiful and warm, with hardly a cloud. Along the same bicycle trail I collected one specimen of the Harvester as it flew rather slowly along. I laughed at such good success. This is a species that my brother Don and I had looked for in eastern Saskatchewan for 50 years.

The specimen I took is in good condition, but it is not fresh. The fact that only one was seen is probably because it was near the end of the expected adult season for the early brood of this species.

I hope to return about two weeks earlier next year–on a sunny day– and get a better idea of how many adult Harvesters are in the area.

- *Ronald R. Hooper,* Box 757, Fort Qu'Appelle, SK S0G 1S0

COPPER UNDERWING AT THE PAS, MANITOBA

I have routinely collected insects at The Pas since 1947 and have never before collected a Copper Underwing moth (*Amphipyra pyramidoides*). It therefore proved a surprise to find one sitting on a stucco wall by the bus depot in town on the morning of 13 August 2003. The specimen is in the writer's collection. In Winnipeg and other southern areas of the province this moth regularly occurs in autumn, and in some years, in good numbers.

- *Walter Krivda*, P.O. Box 864, The Pas, Manitoba R9A 1K8.

Editor's Note: The Copper Underwing commonly occurs in deciduous woods in south and central Saskatchewan north to Shoal Lake and Red Earth. It comes more readily to sugar bait than to lights. A photograph of the moth can be found in "Check-list of Saskatchewan Moths Part 9: Quakers and Borers" by Ron Hooper, *Blue Jay*, Vol. 49(3), September 1991.

COMMON CRANE NEAR LEADER, SK

On December 29, 2003, I spotted a large crane-like bird feeding adjacent to some cattle north of Leader, on the north side of the South Saskatchewan River. I thought it might be an injured Sandhill Crane that did not migrate south with its brethren. When I looked through my binoculars I recognized that it was not a Sandhill Crane, but a bird I had never seen before and one that was not in my Peterson's Field Guide.

In Leader, I could not find it in any of the bird identification books in the Saskatchewan Environment office where I work. After a search on the internet, I identified it as a Common Crane, also known as European Crane and Eurasian Crane. I went back to look at the bird and confirm its identity through my spotting scope but when I tried to approach it for a photograph, it flew away.

I notified local bird watcher Daisy Meyers who located it and included it in her Christmas Bird Count. I also notified Al Smith and Brian Johns of the Canadian Wildlife Service in Saskatoon who informed me that the Common Crane is of Asian origin and customarily breeds in Siberia. Since 1957 there have been only 14 confirmed sightings in North America, with nine of those in Nebraska as the birds accompany Sandhill Cranes on migration to Texas. There has been only one previous report of a Common Crane in Saskatchewan: 5 km west of White Bear on November 10, 1998 by G. Peterson.

This Common Crane was alone, and had spent about two weeks 8 km due north of Leader. We can only speculate how it ended up there.

On January 8, Jason Herzog, who was working in the area, also saw the bird. He did not recognize it but took several digital photographs that, interestingly enough, eventually found their way to Al Smith, who confirmed that it was the same Common Crane (Figure 1 on page 6).

Alas, the story does not have a happy ending. On January 8, 2004, my work partner, Kevin Fitzsimonds, spotted an eagle feeding on something on the ground. Upon close inspection, he discovered the eagle (believed to be an immature Bald Eagle) was feasting on the Common Crane. We retrieved what was left of the crane and will submit it to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum in Regina for their collection.

- *Kerry Wrishko*, Box 70, Leader, SK S0N 1H0. E-mail: wrishko.family@sasktel.net

WHERE DO DRAGONFLIES GO TO DIE?

I don't normally think of dragonflies, let alone invertebrates, choosing a place or time to expire, something associated with the folklore on elephants or perhaps with our own species, but this summer I observed several dragonflies that seemed to be exhibiting this behaviour.

In central Saskatchewan, while my daughter and I were visiting a small pond intense with dragonfly activity, we observed several adults plunging onto the surface only to be trapped by the surface tension and usually ending stuck upside down. At this first site, on August 24, 2003, we recorded six individuals of five species of *Aeshna*, or Darner, dragonflies performing this: 1 each of *Aeshna constricta* (Lance-tipped Darner), *A. juncea* (Sedge Darner), *A. canadensis* (Canada Darner) and *A. subarctica* (Subarctic Darner), and two *A. eremita* (Shadow Darner). All six were females and all had varying degrees of tattered outer wing margins. One would assume that these individuals had seen their share of aerial battles or mating attempts, and that these were rather "mature" specimens. When we looked on the surface, there were dozens of dragonflies littering the pond in varying states of decay that had broken the surface tension and were floating right-side up. I identified several more of the above mentioned species, but there were also many *Leucorrhinia* spp. (Whiteface) and *Libellula quadrimaculata* (Four-Spotted Skimmer) This pond was approximately 1-3 m across and 10 m long with an edge of sedge and rushes, and with emergent Pondweed (*Potamogeton* spp.) and Yellow Pond Lily (*Nuphar variegatum).*

Two days later, while at Waskesiu Lake, five of us were enjoying one of the final swims of the summer. Around us many *Aeshna eremita* were hawking above the beach and the water, and once again, splashing onto the surface of the lake and getting stuck upside down with the surface tension. We collected about 16 specimens from the water and the beach, including three by my nearly four-year-old nephew. Three were males and, once again, some had rather tattered wing margins.

Dragonflies almost seem Osprey-like in how they can extract themselves from the surface, somersault in the air and carry on. Mating or battling pairs perform this stunt with both individuals leaving the water either singly or attached together as a copulating pair. However, these observations I made in late August of aged individuals suggest that the dragonflies intended to remain in the water to die. On August 26, I observed two individuals about 15 m off shore, plunge into the water and remain fluttering upside down on the surface for up to 15 minutes. Their fluttering frequency diminished to the point where they eventually cooled down and became almost totally motionless. I revived these sad-looking females who never did take flight again and instead became permanent specimens in my collection instead of replenishing the lake with nutrients. Has anyone seen this "suicidal" behaviour before and drawn the same conclusion?

- *Gord Hutchings*, 971 Arundel Drive, Victoria, BC V9A 2C4 E-mail: odonatas@uvic.ca

Tattered Aeshna subarctica female, August 24, 2003

Gord Hutchings

WOLVERINE SIGHTING SOUTH OF SASKATOON

At 8:15 AM on Wednesday, November 26, 2003, my wife, Carry, and I were driving east on the summer road that runs along the north boundary of the 96 quarter sections of land which comprises the Dundurn Military Base and Community Pasture south of Saskatoon. We were nearing the railroad tracks when we noticed a dark brown animal briefly stop in the middle of the road and then lope south at an accelerated rate, only to disappear in the tall grass. I got out of the van and walked to the fence hoping to follow the animal in order to look at the tracks, but I was stopped by a NO TRESPASSING sign. We did not see the animal again. Carry and I simultaneously asked, "What was that?"

Over the years, we have seen many badgers, white tailed deer, coyotes, racoons, foxes, stray dogs, an escaped wild boar, a turkey vulture, several elk and one emaciated cow moose. I checked several books available about mammals, and the animal which we saw that morning fits the description of a wolverine. It had a brown/black coat and the tail was clearly visible. I remember thinking that it ran far back on its 'fetlocks' just as, unfortunately, some of my Arabian horses did. The hind end appeared a bit taller than the front end. It had a very distinct lope, which accelerated from a canter to a gallop.

While it is possible to confuse the sighting of a wolverine with a badger, I'm absolutely certain that this was not a badger. Having grown up on a farm in rural Saskatchewan, I have seen countless badgers, and in the summer of 2003 watched a family of five badgers (one adult and four young) living in the ditch on Highway #219, between Grasswood Road and Baker Road. When a badger runs, it appears to run rather wide-legged. The animal that we saw ran at a lope.

It's a rare occasion when we don't see wildlife when driving on the summer road, especially at sunrise or sunset. What we saw at 8:15 AM on November 26, 2003, however, was totally unexpected!

- *Wayne Dueck*, Box 9, RR #5, Site 506, Saskatoon, SK S7K 3J8

Editor's note: There have been two previous reports in *Blue Jay* of wolverine sightings well south of their expected range. One was shot and killed at a farm about 50 miles west of Beechy on 17 May 1963 (Vol. 21 page 119). The other was seen about 20 miles north of Moose Mountain Provincial Park in July 1972 (Vol. 30, page 261).

A SASKATCHEWAN GATHERING OF SWAINSON'S HAWKS IN FALL 2002

On September 21, 2002 around 1600h, while travelling through the Dirt Hills on Highway 334 approximately 9 km northeast of Kayville (55 km west of Weyburn), my wife, Megan, and I noticed a few Swainson's Hawks circling over the stubble fields west of the highway. Four or five more were sitting in the field below. Remembering a previous experience on September 23, 1986 when I observed a flock of 86 Swainson's Hawks 16 km north of Kyle, SK, I decided to investigate further. Over the next kilometer, at least 40 hawks were counted in the fields or circling, most of them west of the highway but a few to the east as well. They appeared to be grounded by unsettled weather: cloudy skies and cool temperatures (+5°C) with wind gusts of 30-40 km/hr driving short bursts of horizontal rain.

A ridge parallels the road about 500 m west of the highway where most of the hawks were so we turned into the stubble field and drove westward to the top of the ridge. We flushed 30 or 40 more hawks en route, and then travelled north for about a kilometre beside the highway, scanning in all directions. There were Swainson's Hawks everywhere!

We headed south once again on the highway to get a thorough count since most of the birds seemed visible, either in the air or perched in the farmyards along the road where many had settled into trees. It was a remarkable sight to see 12-15 perched in a single dead aspen tree! Through this 1.5+ km stretch we conservatively estimated that there were 200 Swainson's Hawks in this gathering. The variety of different plumages was astounding, with only about 10% having the typical adult plumage one is accustomed to seeing in summer. A small proportion (<10%) were dark phase birds.

Similar concentrations of this species have been occasionally reported from the south of the province. These include 100-200 in the Regina area on 16 September 1960,[2] 300 about 27 km south of Elrose on 14 September 1981, 700 near Tullis on 16 September 1959,[4] 200-400 in the Mantario area in late August 1987,[3] 400 near Weyburn on 28 September 1986 (Guy Wapple pers. comm.), and 1918 near Weyburn on 28 September 2001[1].

1. BAILEY, M. 2001. Swainson's Hawks over the Souris Valley. *Blue Jay* 59: 207-208.

2. CARSON, R. D. 1960. A migratory Congregation of Swainson's Hawks. *Blue Jay* 18: 158

3. MCGRATH, B. E. 1988. Saskatchewan Flock of Swainson's Hawks. *Blue Jay* 46: 90

4. ROY, J. F. 1996. The Birds of the Elbow. Special Publication Number 21. Nature Saskatchewan.

- *Robert Wapple*, 740 4th Street East, Saskatoon, SK, S7H 1K2

RETURN OF THE FROG

Over the past decade when I have gone out on field trips in sedgy moist woodland in the vicinity of The Pas, I have not seen a single frog or toad. Toads were abundant in the 1950s under the incandescent lights at street corners in town. Many would fall through the steel grating into the water in the sewers and drown.

It therefore proved to be gratifying recently to hear from people living along the Rall's Island Road abutting on Grace Lake. They observed that 'baby frogs' have been so abundant for three years now that people stopped cutting their lawns for a few weeks as the frogs moved inland from the lake.

- *Walter Krivda*, P.O. Box 864, The Pas, Manitoba R9A 1K8

Wood Frog ***Wayne Lynch***

UNUSUAL SKUNK MORTALITY

At approximately 1000h on 27 September 2003, I discovered an adult male Striped Skunk that had been killed by an automobile, probably in the hours just prior to dawn, on U.S. Highway 89, 4 km west of Vaughn, Montana. The skunk's head was securely confined within an empty plastic jelly jar (Figure 1). Presumably the skunk had inserted its head into the 32 ounce jar while trying to feed upon faint remnants of the jar's original contents. Upon dissection, the entire gastrointestinal tract was found to be empty although the animal was in good nutritional condition.

Condensation within the jar, and wear and tear on the outside, suggested that the skunk had been trapped for anywhere from one or two to 24 hours. The tightness of the fit was such that the skunk could be suspended from the jar with minimal slippage and indicated that the skunk probably would have never released itself from its plastic predicament. The skunk's demise on the highway, a presumably swift event, was perhaps fortunate.

The author has previously commented on unusual human-related mortality of wildlife.[1,2] The rather bizarre incident reported here not only highlights yet another human-related environmental disturbance, specifically, litter or improper garbage storage and disposal, but also reaffirms the potential impact of automobile-related deaths, for which more quantification is warranted.

Acknowledgements
The author wishes to thank Mark Tischendorf and Pat Gero, who assisted with evaluation and photographic documentation of this skunk.

Figure 1. Skunk with head trapped in a 32 oz plastic jelly jar (knife for scale is 16.5 cm long) ***Jay Tischendorf***

1. JAY TISCHENDORF, JOHN-EDD BROWN, KELLY HEPWORTH, and EDWIN WILAND. 1995. Raptor electrocutions on the Pawnee National Grasslands. *C. F. O. Journal, Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly*, 29(1):11-12.

2. JAY W. TISCHENDORF and CHARLES L. JOHNSON. 1997. Long-eared owl snagged on barbed wire fence. *Blue Jay* 55(3):200.

- *Jay W. Tischendorf*, American Ecological Research Institute (AERIE), P. O. Box 1826, Great Falls, Montana 59403

FISHING IN FEBRUARY?

Where's the water?

The water is white and the fish feathered.

Touchdown...

...and success!

Great Grey Owl banding by Marten Stoffel in northern Saskatchewan, February 21, 2004. Photographs by Carol Blenkin