
NOTES AND LETTERS

A QUERY FROM THE DISTANT PAST – MAGPIES VERSUS “HUNS”

Table 1. Locations of Gray Partridge (“hun”) and Black-billed Magpie sightings

Location	No. huns	No. magpies
NE of Delisle	6, 11	8 × 1
Near Harris	11, 7	6 × 1, 1 × 2
Near S. Sask River bridge	10	1 × 4
Stewart Valley	5	0
N of Swift Current	8	1
Total	58	21

On 8 March 1962, I drove from Saskatoon to Swift Current, on a chilly winter afternoon with high overcast and a stiff NE wind sending scurries of snow over the road. Birds were few, and well-scattered, mostly Horned Larks.

En route, I also noted seven coveys of Gray Partridges (“huns”), but was more intrigued to realize that all of the Black-billed Magpies that I saw (21 in total; Table 1) were within a couple of miles of a hun covey. In between, there were stretches of 16, 36, 86, 6, and 12 miles with neither huns nor magpies.

Huns have large clutches, so they must lose a lot of each year’s reproduction over the winter, but it seems unlikely that scavenging such losses would keep magpies in their near vicinity regularly. Were my observations merely coincidental (i.e., was the sample size too small), or have others noted similar associations and, like me, neglected to report them before now?

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LYNX PREDATION ON A YOUNG BEAVER

On 27 March 2001, I found clear evidence that an adult Canadian Lynx had killed and eaten a young American Beaver in Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba.

Two days before, beaver tracks were observed where an individual had exited a pond via two separate burrows under

the snow and ice. The pond had no open water and it appeared that the level of water impounded by the beaver dam had declined over the course of the winter. Based on the tracks, the beaver was collecting branches from a live White Spruce (*Picea glauca*) and was dragging them back to the burrows.