

EARLY SASKATCHEWAN BIRD BANDERS*

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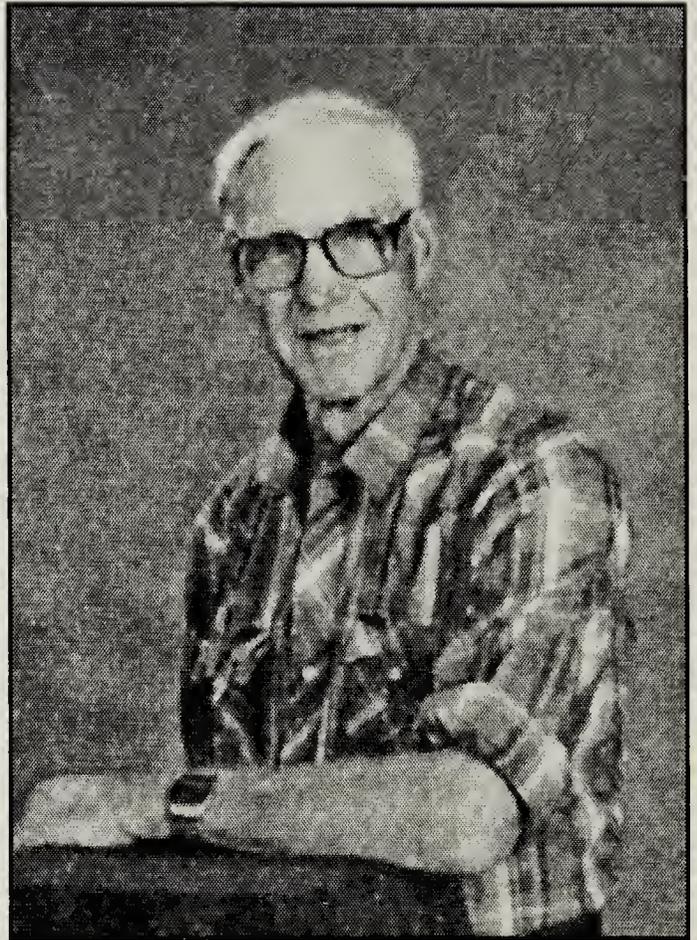
This article completes the series on Saskatchewan residents who began banding prior to 1955. Banders are presented in a roughly chronologic order of their active years of banding as shown by the dates after their name. Localities are within Saskatchewan unless stated otherwise.

Edmund LaVallee, 1932

LaVallee, when living at Cupar, obtained banding permit #00245 on May 18, 1932. Schedules show that he banded only three birds that year, two House Wrens and a Black-capped Chickadee, yet he did not give up his permit until he moved to Strasbourg on July 17, 1939. The sole chickadee he banded spent two winters at the farm home of Henry Anderson, near Product post office south of Kandahar, before Anderson was able to capture it by hand and read its band number. It had traveled 80 km NNE, the greatest distance known to have been traveled by a Saskatchewan-banded chickadee.

Thomas Harper, 1933-1940

Tom Harper, permit #00238, began banding west of Simpson in 1933. By 1940 he had banded 418 birds of 29 species. From these he had 12 recoveries, including a Downy Woodpecker found at a nest hole at Young, about 32 km NNW, the following March. Four Yellow-shafted Flickers were recovered: one found dead locally, one caught by a cat the same fall in Minnesota, one recovered in Louisiana, and another found dead in Texas over a year after it was banded. An American Robin drowned



Tom Harper

nearby. Mallards were shot in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Oklahoma and two in Texas.

Tom's father, Chris Harper, had come from Kendal, Westmoreland, England. Chris arrived in Davidson in April 1906; early in 1914 he and Mary Findlay, a Scots lass, were the first couple to be married in the Anglican Church in Simpson. Tom, their first child, was born on December 17 that year. The Harper farm home was 10 km south and 5 km east of the Hedlin homestead (see below).

R.C. Willett, 1937-1939

Bob Willett, permit #00318, banded 186 birds of 17 species when he lived at Cochin, beside Jackfish Lake.



Bob Willett

Nearly 60 years later, in 1995, he published a one-page vignette, "I was a teenage birdbander" in the Western People section of the *Western Producer*.

Bob Willett was 15 when he and Robert D. Symons spotted an albino American Robin. It was among a flock that stayed later than usual to benefit from thousands of freeze-dried berries left by a late-September frost around the cottage area at Jackfish Lake. With the help of Symons, local game warden, naturalist, and friend, Willett was able to obtain a bird banding permit as soon as he turned 16 in May 1937. Also under Symons' tutelage, Willett built houses and ledges for swallows, bluebirds, wrens, phoebes, and robins, so that he could band the nestlings. He built a drop trap to band migrating American Tree Sparrows

and Slate-colored Juncos. It was operated by pulling a string that dropped an inverted screen box over birds on the ground.

Willett banded 1,286 birds of 17 species. From these, he had four recoveries or encounters. (An 'encounter' is the all-inclusive term that includes birds found dead or alive, whereas 'recovery' should be restricted to birds found dead). An adult House Wren returned to nest again in a nest box the

following year. An Eastern Kingbird was killed three days after banding by a larger bird, perhaps a crow, and a Western Meadowlark was found dead two days after banding. His *tour de force* was to band a single Bobolink and have this "rice bird" caught on its winter territory in Louisiana.

Homer Myers, 1937-1939

Homer Myers, permit #00344, banded 245 birds of 22 species at Rabbit Lake. He had three recoveries. A Barn Swallow was tangled in a net two weeks after banding and an Eastern Kingbird was caught in a fish net locally. A Western Meadowlark (then common, but by the 1990s no longer breeding in the area) was shot in Oklahoma.

When Myers' pre-1955 recoveries were retroactively entered into the

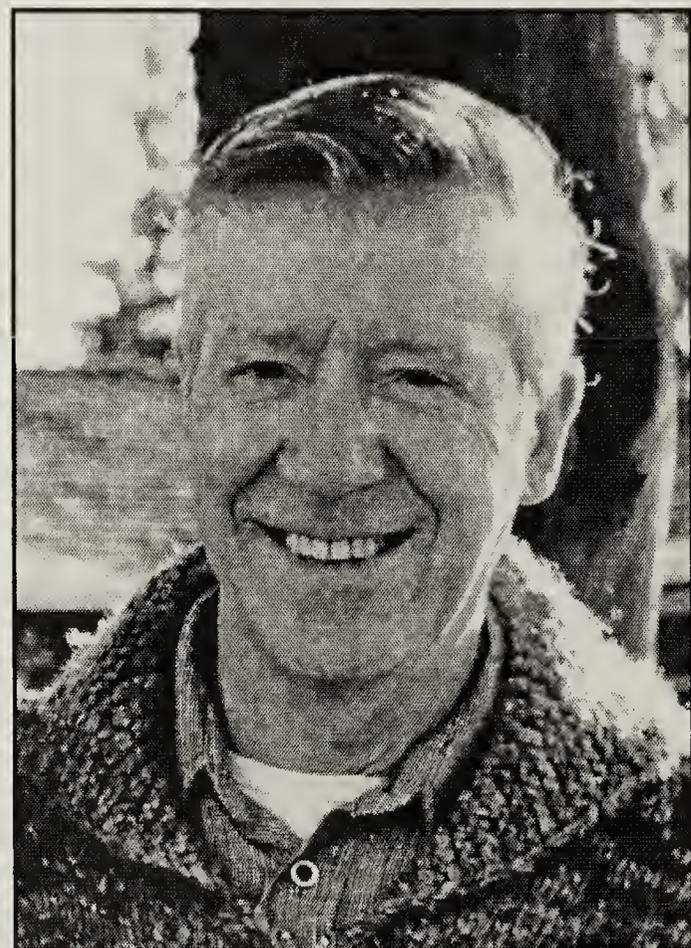
computer, a clerk in the banding office ascribed to them the latitude and longitude of a small lake, Rabbit Lake, southeast of Redberry Lake, rather than the true banding site, the village of Rabbit Lake where Homer Myers lived, 75 km to the northwest.

Arthel Simard of Cabri, 1938-1939

In 1938 and 1939, Arthel Simard, a storekeeper at Cabri, banded 70 birds of 16 species (under permit #00467), including the first Prairie Falcon and the first adult male Cinnamon Teal banded in Saskatchewan. He had six recoveries. Both of his banded Black-billed Magpies were shot locally. The only Prairie Falcon he ever banded was found injured 16 days after banding. From 52 waterfowl banded, he had a Mallard and a Gadwall shot locally, and a Blue-winged Teal shot in Montana.

Ralph and Alan Hedlin, 1938-1939

Ralph and Alan Hedlin took up bird banding in 1938, encouraged by Hartley Fredeen, with whom they corresponded through the Young



Alan Hedlin

Cooperator's section in the weekly farm newspaper, the *Western Producer*. Ralph and Alan, cousins, lived 4 km apart in the Hawkshaw School district near Renown, and shared permit #00362. Ralph and Alan were, in fact, double first cousins; their fathers, Oscar and Frans, had married two Neatby sisters, Edith and Margery.

Ralph and Alan banded 430 individuals of 24 species, 104 of which were banded by Alan in 1938; Ralph carried on alone in 1939. Together, the two lads had seven recoveries: a Swainson's Hawk killed locally, a Loggerhead Shrike recovered at Gainsborough (395 km to the southeast), and American Crows at Tichfield and Lanigan, Saskatchewan, and in Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas.

Ralph Hedlin later became associate editor of the *Country Guide*. In 1951, he wrote a glowing article that brought in 102 new memberships to the *Blue Jay* in its first year of printed format, a big membership boost. His sideline writing included a fine reminiscence of his boyhood adventures with a coyote named Ayaoo, published in *Field and Stream* in 1956. When Ralph left the farm magazine, he founded Ralph Hedlin Associates, a sophisticated economic and policy consulting firm.

Alan Hedlin was a radar mechanic attached to the RAF in the Second World War, then specialized in forest entomology and worked for eight years at the Forest Nursery Station at Indian Head. After 1955, he pursued his career in British Columbia, where he retired in 1979.

Arthur Ward, 1939-1957

In 1926, Fred Bradshaw sent Ward two bands from Regina, to place on two young Black-billed Cuckoos. This

roused Ward's interest, but it was not until 1939, when he was 64, that Ward obtained banding permit #00426 and set up a banding station on his farm near the hamlet of Burnham east of Swift Current. During the 19 years from 1939 to 1957, he banded 2,820 individuals of 87 species and four additional subspecies. After he moved into Swift Current in 1948, he continued to band birds during visits to the farm. The species with the most individuals banded were Clay-colored Sparrow (328), Slate-colored Junco (305), White-crowned Sparrow (300), and American Robin (246). He also banded Say's Phoebes that built nests on his farm buildings each year, and Western Kingbirds which were initially rare, but increased as the trees grew in what was once treeless prairie habitat. By use of a water-drip trap, he banded 17 species of warbler, mainly in migration, an exceptional achievement on the open prairie at that time.



Arthur Ward holding a young Black-crowned Night-Heron, 1937

In 1915, Ward obtained 2,000 trees from the Indian Head Forest Nursery Station to plant as a shelterbelt. To water them, he hauled many barrels of water by stoneboat from Rush Lake Creek, (locally called Cutbank Creek),

4 km to the south. Twenty years later his farm grove formed a small oasis on the open prairie.

Examples of banding events that provided dates for birds rarely seen on a farm shelterbelt on open prairie are Golden-crowned Kinglet, October 7, 1946; Townsend's Solitaire, August 8, 1949; Varied Thrush, September 7, 1949; Yellow-breasted Chat, May 27, 1949; Dickcissel, June 22, 1953; Bullock's Oriole, one each on August 7 and 8, 1943; Red Crossbill, July 18, 1950; White-winged Crossbill, October 13, 1946 and again on June 20 1947. On January 18, 1954, he caught a European Starling, one of a very few wintering individuals.

Ward had several "returns," i.e. birds that came back to the banding location in subsequent years, including a Barn Swallow that returned after four years and an American Robin after three. His six recoveries included a Mallard that was shot at Mecca, California and a Mallard and two robins that died locally. A Brown Thrasher was killed in a storm near Lucky Lake on June 23 of the year after banding, and an American Robin was killed by a cat at Kerrobert on July 24, two years after banding. These two offer possible evidence of northward natal dispersal from Burnham of 80 km for the thrasher and 220 km for the robin.

Arthur Ward was born near Wombwell, north of Sheffield, England, on September 12, 1875. He came to Canada at age 27 and filed for a homestead, SE 30-15-11w3, 19 km east of Swift Current, on May 31, 1903. After working during the fall and winter in Manitoba, he returned to build a shanty and a stable on the homestead in April. A branch line railroad did not reach Burnham, the end of the steel, until 1931; the post office opened in the hamlet in 1933.

He was the first councillor for Division 5 of the Rural Municipality of Coulee, and later served as its reeve. In 1907 he obtained a license to mine lignite coal in the coulee south of his farm, but after supplying coal for the Swift Current hospital for a few years, the coal was soon mined out. After a courtship by correspondence, Emily Hinchcliffe arrived from Wombwell on February 7, 1913; they were married on March 13.⁴

Ward subscribed to the *Blue Jay* from its beginning late in 1942. An account of the first 198 birds he banded appeared in the second issue of volume 3.³ When the first annual meeting of the new Saskatchewan Natural History Society was held in October 1949 to continue publication of the *Blue Jay*, Ward was one of five elected to the executive. He gave at least one talk at an annual meeting and contributed 35 notes to the first 13 volumes of *Blue Jay*. One article dealt with bird banding and another recounted the delightful happenings at a Yellow Warbler nest in a "creeper" 15 cm from the glass wall of the arbour in his garden. He died in Swift Current on January 5, 1958, at age 82. His wife, Emily, died in 1979, nine months after her 100th birthday.

Ronald and Donald Hooper, 1954-1956

Between 1954 and 1956, the twin Hooper brothers, Ronald and Donald, permit #00723, banded 177 birds of 26 species, including 63 Slate-colored Juncos and 22 Harris's Sparrows, on the family farm north of Somme. No recoveries resulted. Dedicated naturalists, they compiled a preliminary list of the birds of the Somme area in 1954 and in 1992, Don published *Birds of East-Central Saskatchewan, Kelvington to Kelsey Trail*, as the first in the Manley Callin series.¹ In 1973 Ron published *Butterflies of Saskatchewan*.²

Bryan J. Isinger, 1954-1956

Bryan J. Isinger, permit #00807, banded five nestling Purple Martins at Big River in 1954 and four at Yellow Creek in 1956. No recoveries resulted.

Early banders not assigned a permit number

No band permit numbers were assigned retrospectively to four banders, whose banding schedules were unexpectedly discovered by myself and Mary during research at the Bird Banding Laboratory at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center at Laurel, Maryland, in 1990. Lawrence B. Potter of Eastend banded 3 Mountain Bluebirds in 1929. Mrs. T. Willers of Viceroy and Ellisboro banded 188 birds of 30 species, chiefly robins, wrens and Barn Swallows between 1927 and 1931. O.C. Furniss of Prince Albert banded 39 individuals of 5 species in 1932 and 1933. E.H.M. Knowles of Regina banded 15 birds of 6 species in 1934.

1. HOOPER, D. 1992. *Birds of East-Central Saskatchewan, Kelvington to Kelsey Trail*. Special Publication #18, Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Regina.
2. HOOPER, R. 1973. *Butterflies of Saskatchewan*. Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources, Regina.
3. HOUSTON, C.S. 1945. Saskatchewan Bird Banders. *Blue Jay* 3:16.
4. WARD, C.. 1986. *Ward Family History, 1770-1985*. 99 pp. Published privately. A copy is housed in the Saskatchewan Archives.

*Number 23 in a series of articles on Saskatchewan bird banders