

NOTES AND LETTERS



Figure 1. *Loggerhead Shrike nest in grain binder, August 2005* *Kylie McRae*

A LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE NEST IN A RUSTING GRAIN BINDER

On June 11, 2005, a Loggerhead Shrike nest in a rusting antique grain binder was observed by a group of people from the Nature Saskatchewan Spring Meet touring the Butala homestead at Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area, about a one hour drive southwest of Eastend, SK. (Figures 1 and 2) The nest contained five recent hatchlings. There were no suitable shrubs nearby for nesting. The adult Loggerhead Shrikes, however, did have plenty insect prey and barbed wire fencing for impaling and storing their prey. It was fascinating to watch them forage and lead us away from their nest. I am wondering how common it is for Loggerhead Shrikes and other songbirds to use disused machinery as nest sites.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Peter Butala, Bob MacFarlane and the Nature

Conservancy of Canada staff for a wonderful tour.

- *Robert Warnock, 3603 White Bay, Regina, SK S4S 7C9 , E-mail: <warnockr@accesscomm.ca>*

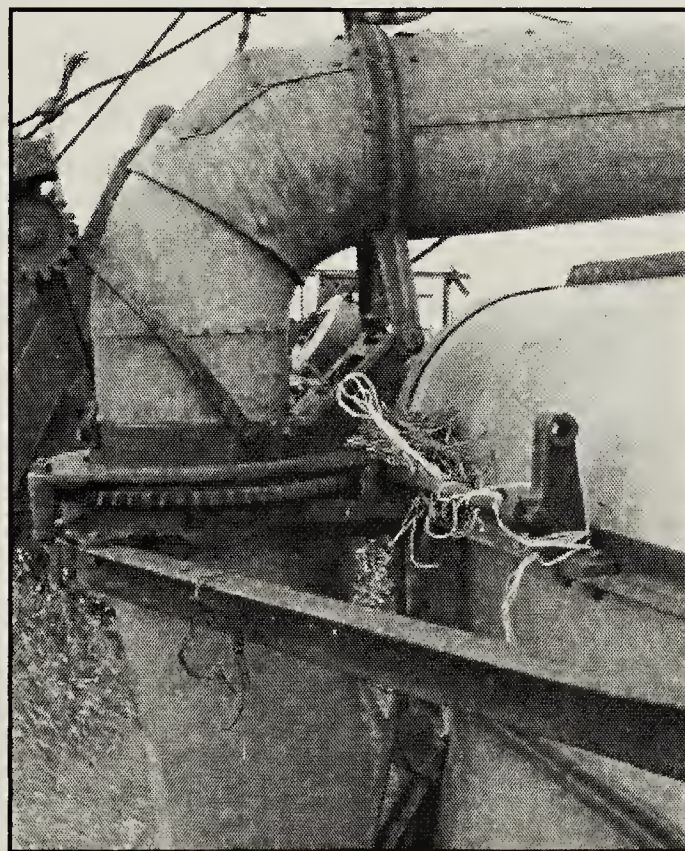


Figure 2. *Location of Loggerhead Shrike nest in grain binder, August 2005* *Kylie McRae*



Loggerhead Shrike in a Caragana hedgerow south of Consul, SK on June 1, 2002
Guillermo Perez



JUVENILE NORTHERN GOSHAWKS AT GOOD SPIRIT LAKE, SK

This summer our yard was invaded by two juvenile Northern Goshawks. On Friday, August 19, Joyce watched the two standing in and drinking from, a small bird bath on the ground only 12 metres from the kitchen window. Our bird baths are a story in themselves. Of the eight scattered around the yard only one is “store-bought” and it is the least popular. The hawks were in the most popular one—a discarded cast iron oven door from an old wood-burning cookstove.

The young hawks showed little fear of us so we viewed them in all positions with and without binoculars. They were brown with heavily streaked underparts, speckled on the back and had a visible but not distinct supercillium—love those technical terms—I would call it a stripe over the eye. The size was larger than a Cooper’s. The begging call, which

goes on endlessly, was a long plaintive screech. The only observation of an adult was one flushed immediately when I came around the corner on our road. All I saw was a blue-grey hawk. The juvenile sat there until I drove within five meters of it. Normal breeding habitat for this species is the boreal forest. We live on the south side of Good Spirit Lake, 59 km NNW of Yorkton and about 100 km south of the boreal forest. The juveniles were flying well. Would they have migrated or did the species nest locally in undisturbed woods consisting of Aspen and Balsam Poplar forest? A previous nest in the Bredenbury district in 1992 was verified by Stuart Houston.¹

1. HOUSTON, C. S. and W. ANAKA. 2003. Birds of Yorkton-Duck Mountain. Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Regina.

- Bill & Joyce Anaka, 301 - 57 Russell Drive, Yorkton, SK S3N 4B6

ISABEL PRIESTLY'S LEGACY

I've always enjoyed reading the Notes and Letters section containing natural history anecdotes from around the province. However, in looking back over the decades, it's apparent that there are now far fewer submissions from rural and junior naturalists, and it seems that the Blue Jay is becoming more of a scientific journal than a natural history journal. I wonder whether this is due to changing demographics and urbanization, or whether it's an inevitable trend toward scientific reporting and the domain of specialists. At any rate, we appear to be diverging from Isabel Priestly's vision of the Blue Jay, as stated in Volume 4 (1) (Oct. Nov. Dec. 1945) : " We have always tried to present material in the 'Blue Jay' in an informal manner, just as if two or three nature lovers had got together and were exchanging experiences. At the same time we have always tried to present facts which are scientifically correct."

I'd like to encourage this policy by sharing three observations from my summer sojourn back to the prairies:

1. **June 24, 2005.** Rocky Mountain House to Luseland, Saskatchewan along the 52nd parallel. Nearly calm. Large numbers of butterflies flying north over the highways, throughout the width of Alberta and into Saskatchewan. Many "road kills". At home, in Luseland, the garden is alive with these butterflies, and my mother, Mrs. Valerie Finley, says that she has never seen anything like it. She thought they were Painted Ladies and had heard on the radio that the invasion was a widespread phenomenon, originating from somewhere far to the south.

2. **June 29, 2005.** Luseland. The long drought is over and the country is green as Ireland. Discover nest of Lark Sparrows with three young in old robin

nest in Blue Spruce in our front yard, and a Merlin nest with two young in our backyard. This is the first breeding record of the Lark Sparrow for the area, and the first time that Merlins have nested in town for many years. In the subsequent week, I found four other pairs of Lark Sparrows on territories within the town, one of which was using an abandoned robin nest (from which it later fledged four young). Thus it seems that 2005 (and the end of a drought ?) coincided with a northern expansion of the Lark Sparrow. I'm curious whether other naturalists in the province witnessed this invasion. Are Lark Sparrows capable of building their own nests?

3. **July 10, 2005.** Luseland. I'm surprised to realize that the European Starling, an invasive species that was once very common, is now rather scarce. And though I've noticed it for several years, it is evident that the once-common Common Grackle, has all but vanished. I haven't seen a single bird in town. Why, I wonder, and have other rural naturalists noticed similar trends?

Species invasions and declines are interesting phenomena, particularly noticeable to observant naturalists / hunters / farmers / ranchers etc. who have resided in a locality for some time. It's politically correct now to refer to this body of knowledge, gained through long experience on the land, as "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" but it's plain old natural history when recorded "in the 'Blue Jay' in an informal manner, just as if two or three nature lovers had got together and were exchanging experiences." I'd strongly encourage local naturalists to submit their observations to the *Blue Jay* for posterity sake, and to keep Isabel Priestly's legacy alive.

- James K. Finley, 10232 Summerset Place, Sidney, BC V8L 4X2

POETRY

DEATH OF A MONARCH

It lay spread upon
the shorn dry August lawn
wings trembling slightly
so that I knew it was alive
but what a difference from
the agile flier we'd seen earlier
or was this a different one?
Only after I carefully lifted it
up upon my hand
did I realize it was injured
missing one pair of legs
abdomen a bit askew
but still I wanted it to fly
so held it aloft in bright sunlight
letting you admire its fine color.
When I moved it upward
its fragile wings slowly tilted
but it wouldn't, it couldn't, fly.
We left it clinging to a shrub
where it stayed overnight...
still alive the next day
it could flutter but not fly...
a sad grounded monarch.
I thought later to bring it indoors
but when I went back out
it had disappeared, somewhere
disheveled, lost, left.

- Bob Nero

GEESE LANDING

Totally transfixed, the dog and I,
at the sight of the first fall flock
of Canada geese in early August
twenty, no thirty-plus silent birds
elegant, familiar great forms
turning and dropping down
legs dangling, braced to land
joining a small group of geese
quietly foraging just yards ahead of us
on the mowed grass at the ballfield.

This is what wings are for, I thought,
thrilled, excited by the varied positionings
cupped wings embracing the cool, damp air
a highly controlled falling
a group maneuvering of immense quietude
as they neatly, adroitly landed.

- Bob Nero