

NOTES AND LETTERS

BLACK-NECKED STILT FAMILY AT LAURA, SK



Three young (background) and one adult (foreground) Black-necked Stilts near Laura on 23 July, 2007
George Tosh

A family of two adult Black-necked stilts and four young was spotted in a slough just east of Laura, SK by Tom Lawton of Delisle, July 22, 2007. George Tosh photographed the stilts the next day. The above photograph shows three well-developed young in the background with one adult closest to the photographer. The young differ little from adults in body size, but note the brown backs and the much shorter, less colorful legs visible in the photograph on the inside front cover.

These photos document the third breeding record of Black-necked Stilts in the Saskatoon Bird Area.¹ In 1987, a pair of stilts was first noted on May 30 in a shallow slough at the north end of Blackstrap Reservoir; a nest containing four eggs was observed on June 9, but a short time later the eggs were predated and the birds left the area. Two

years later, in June, 1989, a pair successfully nested on an island in a big slough just west of Bradwell Reservoir. Three chicks survived throughout July; only two fully grown young remained when the family group was last seen on August 18. Incidentally, another likely indication of breeding in the area was Michael Gollop's sighting of three flying young near Blucher, August 10, 1989.

To date there has been no indication of stilts nesting farther north in Saskatchewan than the Saskatoon Bird Area.

1. LEIGHTON, A. L., J. HAY, C. S. HOUSTON, J. F. ROY and S. SHADICK. 2002. Birds of the Saskatoon Area. Special Publication No. 23, Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Regina

- J. Frank Roy, 912-606 Victoria Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0Z1

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES FEED ON SPIDERS

On 25 March 2007, I was birding near the duck pond in Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg. A chain link fence about 80 cm tall and situated inside a paved trail, surrounds the pond. A pair of Black-capped Chickadees were actively feeding along the top of the fence ahead of me. The temperature was about 5° C on a sunny morning with a light wind. About 30 cm of snow remained on the ground. The pond was frozen.



Figure 1. Spider on chain link fence where chickadees were feeding on 25 March 2007

As I reached the place where the chickadees were feeding, nothing was visible. I knelt, and after about half a minute, I was surprised to find a small brown spider on the wire. More searching revealed more spiders, some were on webs between the top triangles of wire above the horizontal bar. Some were actively traveling on their webs between adjacent triangles (Figure 1). The bodies of the spiders were 2–2.5 mm long.

Several specimens were collected the next day. I contacted Terry Galloway, an entomologist at the University of Manitoba and he passed the specimens on to Anita Stjernberg, who

was kind enough to look at them. Because they were all juveniles, no identification to genus was possible. However, one specimen was a running crab spider (family Philodromidae). The others were orb-weavers (family Araneidae). The specimens were placed in the collection of the J. B. Wallis Museum at the Department of Entomology at the University of Manitoba.

The spiders were not noticed on the fence on subsequent visits, nor were chickadees observed feeding along the fence. Black-capped Chickadees are known to feed on spiders as well as caterpillars, beetles, moths, ants, insect

eggs, plant lice, wild fruit, seeds and suet.¹

1. JAMES, R. 1979. *Glen Loates Birds of North America*. Cerebrus Publishing Company, Prentice-Hall of Canada, Scarborough, ON.

- Tom Reaume, 212 Sherburn St.,
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Editor's Note: Quite a number of species of spiders and insects are active under deep snow in the winter. In some habitats, on sunny days with above zero temperatures, and most commonly in early spring, but occasionally in early winter, spiders will emerge and wander around on the snow surface and on vegetation.

TURKEY VULTURES ON PASQUA LAKE

On June 6, 2007, I watched a group of eight Turkey Vultures through my telescope. This is the only sizable aggregation of this species that I have ever seen. They were perched on the south shore of the west end of Pasqua Lake, west of Fort Qu'Appelle, SK and appeared to be watching the carcass of an American White Pelican just offshore. Individual members would fly over this carcass at close range, then be splashed by a wave and retreat back to shore. Clearly none wished to risk

getting wet. The carcass did not reach shore and after at least ninety minutes they all flew away. Later that evening, the pelican washed up. The vultures returned and it was eaten in no time. On June 9 about 9.30 a.m., I counted 14 Turkey Vultures at the same location, spreading their wings, perhaps to warm up.

- *Brendan Balon*, PO Box 2456, Fort Qu'Appelle, SK S0G 1S0

TRANSFORMATION

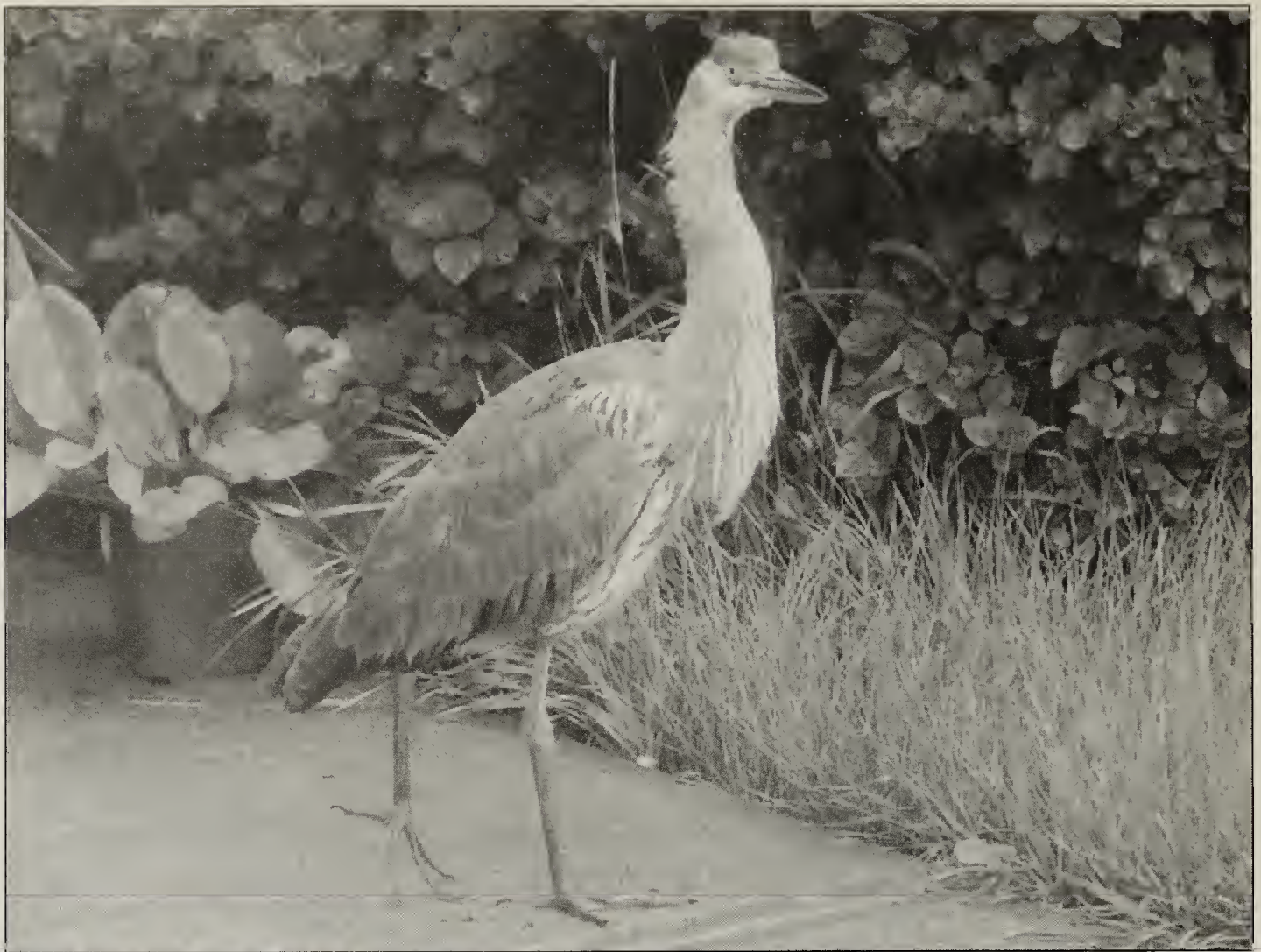
One chilly and drizzly day in June 2006, Melanie Freeston glanced out a kitchen window and saw an odd, cartoon-like bird standing on the walkway. Melanie and her husband live

in the Neilburg area where they have quite a lot of wildlife coming near their house. The grumpy-looking bird stood around in the vicinity of the house most of the day.



What is this odd, cartoon-like bird?

Melanie Freeston



The Great Blue Heron becomes stately when the skies clear — Melanie Freeston

When the skies began to clear, it turned into a stately Great Blue Heron and left for parts unknown.

- *Christine Pike*, Strathdene Farm, Box 97, Waseca, SK S0M 3A0

SWAINSON'S HAWK RECOVERY RECORD OF 18 YEARS

Through information from biologist Jose Sarasola in Argentina and Marc Bechard in Idaho, via Stuart Houston in Saskatoon, I learned of the recovery of a Swainson's Hawk I had banded on 17 July 1988 near Cereal, Alberta. Band No. 987-87121 was one of a number banded on a ranch where I had been banding Swainson's Hawks for several years. The bird was found dead of unknown causes in Quemu Quemu in LaPampa province in Argentina in February 2007.

Stuart calculated that this bird, making 18 trips northward and 19 trips south, would have travelled over 400,000 km in its lifetime, assuming an average direct-line minimum of 10,760 km per trip. Certainly for me the minimum 10,760 km distance is the longest recovery distance in my long banding career, which goes back to 1940. Permit #0740.

- *Edgar T. Jones*, 119 Creekside Terrace, 291 Blackburn Drive E. SW., Edmonton, AB T6W 1B9



A pair of Turkey Vultures on top of an old abandoned house along side the grid road east of Edam, SK on June 24, 2007. Garry and Ian DeBusschere



Once we stopped our car they went into this spread wing stance and stayed like that for 5 or 10 minutes. They were still like that when we drove away. The pictures were taken from our car. Garry and Ian DeBusschere

ALBINO PURPLE MARTIN NEAR SASKATOON

A pale-coloured Purple Martin hatched around July 5 in a clutch of four nestlings. On July 17, while doing nest checks, I noticed that this bird was different and thought it might be an albino due to its red eyes. On July 19, when banding the nestling, Mary Houston confirmed that it was indeed an albino. From that point on, we took pictures of it on an almost daily basis. It was basically the same as its siblings except for the red eyes, pink skin and white feathers. (See photograph on inside back cover.) The Albino fledged successfully on August 2 at about 10:30 a.m., at an age of 28 days. It has been a true pleasure to have hosted such a rare and unique individual.



Albino Purple Martin, 21 July 2007.

G. Parent

- *Gerald J. Parent, RR#5, Site 503, Box 40, Saskatoon, SK S7K 3J8*



Albino Purple Martin with three nestlings, 28 July 2007.

G. Parent



Albino Purple Martin receiving instructions from adult before first solo flight, 2 August 2007.
G. Parent

WHITE BARN SWALLOWS NEAR USHERVILLE, SK

Figure 1 shows two of the three white Barn Swallows born to a pair of typically-coloured parents on approximately July 10, 2007 on the Fialkowski farm (NW 5-38-5 W2nd), 1 mile west of Usherville. The photograph was taken on July 19. The white birds did not have red eyes and a fourth young in the nest had

normal coloration. The swallows managed to leave the nest and, as of August 11, they were flying around the Fialkowski farm.

- Micheal Fialkowski, Box 187, Endeavour, SK S0A 0W0. E-mail: <fialkowski84@hotmail.com>



Figure 1. Two of the white Barn Swallows, photographed on 19 July. They were unable to fly at this time because their feathers were wet.
M. Fialkowski

EASTERN PINE ELFIN IN SASKATOON YARD

On 11 May 2007, while taking care of some yard work in my grandparent's back yard in Saskatoon, I noticed a small brown butterfly that I was pretty sure I hadn't seen before. I was able to catch it and take it home for identification. Using assorted field guides, I narrowed it down to a Pine Elfin, but was unsure whether it was an Eastern or Western Pine Elfin. I took photographs before releasing it and sent them to Mike Gollop, who identified it as an Eastern Pine Elfin. (See inside back cover.) Mike also noted that this was a first record for Saskatoon.

- Andy Salisbury, 2232 Ewart Avenue, Saskatoon, SK

Editor's note: This individual could have been a stray from the McDowall area, where the species occurs regularly. Other possible explanations for its appearance in Saskatoon are that the species is expanding its range southward among planted pines or that this individual was transported to Saskatoon on a pine tree.

EUROPEAN SKIPPER POPULATION EXPLOSION AT THE PAS, MB

In July 2005, European Skippers rose in clouds in front of hay cutting equipment in the hay fields 12 miles west of The Pas, only to settle and rise again. This is remarkable considering that I collected my first specimen of this species on the Grace Lake Road on 14 July 1998 - a short seven summers before. This is only seven generations since its first arrival in the area around The Pas. This is an exponential population explosion.

The endless availability of Brome Grass (*Bromus inermis*) used as caterpillar food may have precipitated this local population explosion. It will be intriguing to see how quickly it will cross the Saskatchewan River and move westwards. Brome Grass has been planted along roads and this will provide food for the larvae. Specimens taken on the Grace Lake Road all nectared on alfalfa, a plant that also occurs in quantity along roadsides.

My experience with this species in Manitoba goes back to the early 1970s

when I first collected it behind the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg some 450 miles to the south.¹ It had rained during the night, producing puddles a few inches deep in the gravel next to the museum. Numbers of Grey Coppers were sitting around the edge of a puddle, drinking. It had the makings of a hot day. On walking behind the museum and to the river edge, I saw a small, pale orange skipper flying in numbers among the tall grass. On netting a specimen, I recognized it as the European Skipper, *Thymelicus lineola*. I was familiar with it from specimens in my collection from England, France and Switzerland. In the afternoon, more of the skippers could be seen skimming the tops of the high Brome Grass. I was able to collect a good study series, now preserved in my collection. About 4% of the specimens were cream-coloured.

1. KRIVDA, W. 1976. The European Skipper, (*Thymelicus lineola*), a new Manitoban butterfly. *News of Lepidopterists Society* 5:5

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

MALLARD WITH UNUSUAL BEAK

These photographs of a female Mallard were taken in early May 2007 by David Coates near his acreage in the Milk River district of southern Alberta. At first glance, it appears that the bird is deformed, with a second bill on the right side. However, close examination of the photos suggests that the original bill may have been cut

or split. It is hard to imagine what kind of accident would cause this.

Otherwise, the bird looked normal. She was one of a pair when first spotted in a roadside ditch. The male quickly flew away and after David got a couple of photographs, this bird followed.

- Bill Monro, 1419 - 7A Street N. W.,
Calgary, AB T2M 3J9



Unusual beak on female Mallard

David Coates



The same bird, showing the other side of the beak which looks normal. The tip of the split portion of the beak on the other side extends a bit below the lower edge of the beak in this picture.

David Coates