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## FIELD CHECKLIST OF SASKATCHEWAN BIRDS

ROBERT KREBA. 1983. Museum of Natural History, Saskatchewan Culture and Recreation, Regina. 4 for \$1.00

This, the 6th edition of the Saskatchewan check-list, continues a series begun in 1947, and published under the auspices of the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History since the 2nd edition in 1954. On good card stock, it measures 17.5 by 10 cm, after being folded in three. The provincial list of fully accepted species, which totalled only 265 when compiled by H.H. Mitchell in 1924 (*Can. Field-Nat.* 31: 101-118) rose to 297 in 1954, 325 in 1969 and now 336 species in 1983. The total of hypothetical species has increased from Mitchell's 29 to the present 38.

The number of bird species does not show signs of reaching a plateau or saturation point, but continues to increase at almost a steady rate. This is a reflection of a continent-wide phenomenon. Birders are out in increased numbers. They are armed with more sophisticated guides and better binoculars, telescopes and cameras, and they range farther afield for more days of the year. Some species met with on a chance basis, and thought to be irregular stragglers, are now appreciated to be predictable and regular visitors. When a truly haphazard straggler does appear, it has a greater chance of being spotted by an experienced birder.

There are important changes from previous lists. Most useful is the provision of breeding status with notation

of "B" for 241 proven breeding species, of "b" for 14 species suspected but not proven to breed, and of "(B)" for 8 species formerly known to breed. The 38 hypothetical species are in the appendix, no longer scattered through the text in their regular sequence within parentheses, as was done in previous editions.

Any compiler of such a list is plagued with grey-area judgement calls. Especially difficult to assess are unpublished word-of-mouth reports, use of which causes a potentially confusing discrepancy with what has been in print. For example, David Hatch's photograph of the European Wigeon has not yet been published. The Screech Owl is listed as a verified breeding species on the basis of the young owl "extricated from a chimney in Moose Jaw" in August 1979, without any details as to its powers of flight or where its nest might have been (Belcher 1980). One might presume that this owl either had been raised in the chimney or that it had some flight capability, but Kreba tells us that he saw the bird in the Moose Jaw Zoo the next day, when it was unable to fly. (Although territorial individuals have been present in the Qu'Appelle and its tributaries, such as at Hidden Valley near Regina, each year since, breeding attempts there apparently have not yet been documented). More straightforward is the Poor-will, for which the first Saskatchewan nest was found in 1983 near Fort Walsh. We hope full details of this will be published soon.

One species (Townsend's Warbler) is in the interesting position of having a breeding record (adults feeding flightless young) and yet the species, without any identifiable photograph or

specimen, is relegated to the hypothetical list. In contrast, the difficulty of handling published information is exemplified by Kreba's allocation of full status to the Black-necked Stilt, on the basis of a set of eggs collected at Qu'Appelle in 1894 by Edward Arnold, apparently without seeing the parent birds. Godfrey (*Auk* 86: 562-563) has declared this record to be "not acceptable" because of the possibility that the eggs were merely small eggs of the American Avocet. Kreba tells us that the 1977 nest record of the stilt in Alberta has caused Godfrey to reconsider the acceptability of the Qu'Appelle record, but such a change in opinion is not yet in print. Even if accepted, the situation is similar to that of Townsend's Warbler, a breeding record of an undocumented species. The Indigo Bunting is listed as a documented breeding species, although the breeding record is for a male Indigo mated to a female Lazuli Bunting. There are two species, Great Egret and White-breasted Nuthatch, listed as suspected but not proven to breed for which there is published breeding evidence.

Proof that such a list is never static is evident from the additions during and since its publishing. Hypothetical Bar-tailed Godwit and Great Black-backed Gull sightings were published while the list was in preparation. Recognizable photographs of Barrow's Golden-eye taken since publication will now elevate this species to the fully accepted list, and a photograph of the King Elder will place this new species on the full list. We have also learned of the sighting of a Common Eider at Midwest Lake by Martin McNicholl in 1979 and expect publication of this record.

Although the interval between the 5th and 6th editions of the Saskatchewan list, 14 years, is much the longest to date, the delay has allowed use of the terminology of the newly-

published 6th AOU list. There is one exception: Kreba uses "Northern Raven," whereas the ABA and the 5th and 6th AOU lists all use "Common Raven." Although if the choice were mine, I would vote with Kreba for "Northern" rather than "Common," ("common" being used in the old English sense of "ordinary" without any implication of numerical abundance). However, there can be only one standard for North America and it is the AOU list. With this exception, the new Saskatchewan list is an extremely handy reference for the new AOU names and sequence. It offers an up-to-date reference list for accepted, hypothetical and breeding species, and is a handy card for recording of sightings in the field.

Every Saskatchewan birder needs a packet of these cards, and ornithologists in neighboring jurisdictions need at least one. Kreba is to be congratulated on a job well done. — Reviewed by *C. Stuart Houston*, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8

## LORDS OF THE HIGH ARCTIC, A Journey Among the Polar Bears

RICHARD C. DAVIDS. 1982. Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York. 140 pp. 90 color photos, hard cover, 7" x 10", \$29.95.

Richard Davids, author, and photographer Dan Guravitch, Ph.D., have given us a book of unexcelled beauty. The prose is clear and informative; the photographs are splendid. Author and photographer have been watching polar bears in the wild for five years, spending long periods in their habitat in the Arctic, from Churchill to the

Beaufort and Chukchi seas, from Baffin Island in the east to Barrow in the west, in Alaska, on Admiralty Island, on the north and west borders of Hudson Bay, and at Coral Harbour. They spent long hours in the field with biologists studying polar bears, with Canadian and Alaskan Eskimos, and with various Europeans living in the region. The author demonstrates a sound familiarity with the literature, listing 138 sources for "Further Reading."

The foreword is written by Dr. Ian Stirling, a prominent authority specializing in the study of the population, ecology and behavior of polar bears.

The book is easy reading, humorous, thoughtful, and intimate. The author leads the reader gently into the world of the polar bear, describing the quest undertaken by himself and the photographer to understand better the nature of this large carnivore, by observing and photographing bears in all seasons and in all moods. It is a highly popular account, but it describes many actual events with the keen gusto of a first class naturalist-writer. "The ice of the ocean," says the author, "is their hunting platform, their home of sweet content. Away from it, they are restless and nervous." There is little doubt that Davids, who lives in Minnesota, found the land of the polar bear attractive. He writes: "The arctic is a beautiful, haunting land. The skies are often intensely blue, the snow so white that the horizon is a firm line that separates ice and sky as if a child had drawn it." His powers of observation are applied equally well to the polar bear: "A bear stalks a resting seal only rarely, but when he does it is a memorable sight. He moves forward behind any hummock or chunk of ice, zig-zagging his way; in the open he flattens himself like a rug, neck and snout on the ice, snaking forward propelled by slow pushing with his hind feet, stopp-

ing dead when the seal lifts its head. The moment comes when the bear knows he is detected, or perhaps he can no longer restrain himself. In a few giant leaps he is on the seal, swatting it with a paw that may weigh as much as fifty pounds."

Fortunately for tourists and naturalists who want to get a close look at wild polar bears, there is ready opportunity at Churchill, Manitoba. Large numbers congregate in fall along the seacoast from Cape Churchill west to Churchill, waiting for Hudson Bay to freeze over so that they can go out on the ice and hunt seals all winter long. Regular polar bear tours are now available and the number of travellers to Churchill in October and November has increased rapidly in the last few years. Many of the bears wander into the town where they have long been a problem. That problem, however, has largely been solved through the resourcefulness of the Manitoba Department of Natural Resources and town authorities: a large, multi-roomed jail has been constructed to house recalcitrant bears until the Bay freezes and they can be released, an effective public education system has been implemented, and a vigilant corps of Conservation Officers and RCMP have developed efficient ways of dealing with bears and people.

Davids writes: "The people in the town of Churchill, Manitoba, have proven that man can live happily — though sometimes precariously — with nature, if he chooses. Last time I lunched at the Churchill Café, I overheard someone say: 'Bears were here long before people.' The village council has no intention of eliminating polar bears, which add flavor, distinction, and excitement, something frontiersmen have always liked."

The photographs in the book tell a story in themselves. Guravitch, a



*Polar Bears*

*Dan Guravitch*

Canadian from Ontario who now lives in Mississippi, is a superb photographer and his subjects are both powerful and endearing. I especially liked the photos chosen to show behavioral aspects: bears pacing, feeding, interacting with each other, even playing. The captions under a series of photos of four and then five bears read: "Ashore until hunting resumes, bears — even adult males — form lasting friendships, even to the point of sharing food ... When a stranger appears, the tranquility ends. Bear interactions are as stylized as a ballet."

Davids ends this marvelous book with these statements: All mankind has a stake in the arctic. For every species of plant or animal we exterminate by design or accident, we diminish the beauty, the excitement, the grandeur of our planet, reduce it to a life of

asphalt and golf balls, survival and little else.

"How empty the arctic would be without its lordly bears. For me, every encounter with one is brushed with magic; I have the distinct feeling that I have had an audience with royalty. Here is a creature that doesn't shrink from the sight or sound of humans but accepts them as interesting fellow animals.

"A big female was buffeting my plastic container of water. I couldn't keep from shouting, 'Get away from here.' She left it and came up close, fixing her black eyes on mine. 'Why?' she seemed to be saying, 'What gives you authority over this land?' "

— Reviewed by *Robert W. Nero*, Wildlife Branch, Box 14, 1495 St. James St., Winnipeg, Manitoba. R3H 0W9