

# I MARRIED A BIRD BANDER

CATHY WYLIE, 43-23 Central Place, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 2S2

Non-birders are a common species. Most of the members of this species have very little understanding of what it means to be a birder. Occasionally they may have encountered a birder standing at the edge of a lake on a cold wet day peering at black spots out in the water. The only remaining impression of this brief encounter would be the realization that the birder lacked the sense to come in from the rain.

There was a time when I was a member of the more common species. I am now enduring the painful, but interesting process of converting to a dedicated birder. This is partly out of self defense since my husband is a dedicated birder who spends most of the weekends in the spring and summer banding with Stuart Houston. I was taken along on one trip in July of 1983 to be initiated into the art of banding. Clearly no one can say they have met all the requirements until they go on "The Pelican Weekend."

Imagine my delight at the prospect of awakening at 2:00 in the morning to make the trek to Redberry Lake. The sunrise was beautiful. We watched it from the middle of a quagmire of Saskatchewan gumbo while we tried to coax our vehicle back onto more solid mud.

By five o'clock I was standing on the shore of the lake. This was three hours into our trip and I still had not seen a bird. There were, however, an abundance of large winged creatures buzzing around my head delighted at the prospect of breakfast.

After an uneventful trip across the

lake in a canoe, I finally saw my first birds. As we approached the island, thousands of gulls swarmed into the air, squawking because they had been disturbed so early in the day. I was finally awake myself and was quickly dispatched to run after baby gulls. The chicks were not thrilled with this. They excreted and/or regurgitated their breakfast all over my hands while their parents dive-bombed from overhead.

Six hundred Ring-bills and Californias were banded and then we moved on to the Pelicans. The gulls had not wanted to be banded, but they did not protest nearly as much as the baby pelicans! When we pulled an individual from the closely packed "pod" they protested vehemently from both ends of their bodies. I had been warned it would be a smelly day.

The highlight of the trip was the quest for the scoters. Many of the dense gooseberry bushes on the islands had a resident scoter on her nest. The first one was the most fun. Ten brave birders cautiously surrounded the gooseberry bush. All of us were under strict instructions to be ready to tackle the scoter which we hoped would come flying out. After attacking six bushes in this manner we finally flushed a large female scoter. I thought it would be much larger than it was, since so many of us were needed to tackle it!

Now I have been officially inaugurated, and am looking forward, with some trepidation, to forthcoming banding trips. Next time I will make sure I wear a hat.