

CHARLES J. GUIGUET'S BOYHOOD ACTIVITIES AS A NATURALIST AND COLLECTOR AT SHAUNAVON, SASKATCHEWAN

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Charles J. Guiguet's far-reaching contributions to the field of natural history in British Columbia — focused particularly on seabirds and insular mammals — have been chronicled extensively.¹⁻³ Less well known is that Guiguet's interest in natural history took hold in Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, where he was born in 1915, shortly after his parents immigrated to Canada from France. By the time he graduated from high school in Shaunavon in 1935, his interest in the natural world had developed, initially under the influence of supportive parents. In his spare time, Charles's father, Laurent Guiguet, a carpenter and painter, assembled a collection of insects, mostly butterflies⁴, to which the younger Guiguet contributed, but most of his activities focused on collecting birds and mammals. These led to an interest in museums, whereby Charles eventually parlayed his experiences into a lifelong career as a field biologist and museum curator, in British Columbia, to where his family moved in 1936. Guiguet's boyhood activities as a naturalist and collector, strongly supported by teachers at his school and staff of the local museum, and influenced by established naturalists and ornithologists, provide a glimpse into the state of natural history in southern Saskatchewan nearly 100 years ago.

A Naturalist in the Making

Guiguet's collecting activities in Shaunavon were undertaken in association with his teachers at the local school and the staff of the recently opened Grand Coteau Museum (GCM, now Grand Coteau Heritage & Cultural Centre; hereafter Museum). In the winter of 1932, the Museum engaged the services of a taxidermist, Frank D. Steffan, who quickly set about augmenting the Museum's exhibits.⁵ Realization of the need for additional mounted specimens, Steffan instructed a group of local boys, including Guiguet, in the art of taxidermy. Charles quickly showed promise, winning first prize in a taxidermy contest held early in 1932, the year following the opening of the Museum.⁶ One of the founders of the Museum, and the judge of the contest, was Charles F. Holmes, a pioneer naturalist-rancher who homesteaded south of present-day

Dollard, just west of Shaunavon.^{6,7} The winning mount "was an ordinary white pigeon, mounted with its wings outspread as if ready for flight."⁶ In commenting on this specimen, Holmes called attention "to the immaculate work which had been done, not one blemish appearing on the bird, and also to the fact that the mounting of the bird with wings outspread was always more difficult to do than in any other posture."⁶ The number and identities of the birds and mammals Guiguet mounted for the Museum and his school is not known because of a dearth of records, but his Coyote (*Canis latrans*) is currently on display (Figure 1), as are at least two birds, an albino Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix*) and a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*).

Pivotal to Guiguet's early development as a naturalist and curator were two visits to Shaunavon by James A. Munro, ornithologist and



FIGURE 1. Coyote (*Canis latrans*) mounted by Charles Guiguet is on exhibit at the Grand Coteau Heritage & Cultural Centre, Shaunavon. Photo credit: N.L. Sealy.

Federal Game Officer for the western Canadian Provinces, and prodigious bird collector.⁸ In June 1931, Munro addressed students in Grades 5 to 10 in the local school on the economic value of birds, showing slides of nests of several species of Canadian birds and their habitats.⁹ Charles was in Grade 10 and was undoubtedly among those present. One may imagine the effect of Munro's talk on young Charles. Less than a year later, he won the taxidermy contest held at the Museum and, in 1933, a second opportunity arose for the boys to meet with Munro.¹⁰ This time, Munro was a guest at the Holmes homestead during one of his tours of inspection of waterfowl habitats on the Prairies.¹¹ Probably arranged by Holmes, Munro showed Guiguet and other boys how to properly prepare study skins for permanent storage in a museum for scientific study.¹⁰ It has been stated that the specimen used for instruction that day was a Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) that school children had shot³, but this has not been confirmed. Guiguet later prepared two ferret specimens that were presented to the National Museum of Canada, leaving the whereabouts of the putative demonstration specimen unknown. Soon, armed with his own scientific collecting permit issued by the Federal Government — the youngest person to qualify at the time¹⁰ — and newly acquired skills, Guiguet began to prepare specimens accompanied with the locality and date of collection, and other pertinent information that confirmed, in some cases, records of historical importance and first occurrences of species in Saskatchewan and Canada.

A constant throughout the Shaunavon years was Holmes's recognition of Guiguet's potential as a museum biologist and collector. Holmes's support was important

because of his stature in the local community. Stuart Houston highlighted many of the contributions Holmes made to the development of Shaunavon through memberships in the Fish and Game League and Canadian Club, and as a founding member of the Grand Coteau Museum.⁷ Noted previously, Holmes had judged Guiguet's winning entry in a taxidermy contest but, in turn, Holmes was the beneficiary of Guiguet's collecting skills.

The collections

I wondered whether any of Guiguet's specimens became part of Charles Holmes's collection and if his hand in collecting and/or preparing them was indicated on the labels, or whether Holmes took credit for the specimens. Holmes's collection consisted of more than 600 specimens, mostly birds but also of several mammals. The Holmes family eventually presented about 500 specimens to the Alberta Provincial Museum, now Royal Alberta Museum (RAM), in Edmonton, in 1980⁷ (J. Hudon, email, 6 September 2019). Lesser numbers of specimens had been transferred to Saskatchewan Natural History Museum, now Royal Saskatchewan Museum (RSKM), in 1963 (D. Frier, email, 25 June 2019), Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), several of which were taken later by his son, Paul M. Holmes (B. Millen, email, 15 July 2019), and National Museum of Canada, now Canadian Museum of Nature (CMN; G. Rand, email, 7 September 2019). At least 15 study skins (8 birds and 7 mammals) Guiguet collected in the years before the family left Shaunavon also are catalogued in the CMN. Originally deposited in the Museum, these specimens were transferred by volunteer curator Herbert F. Hughes to the CMN in 1935 (G. Rand, email,

29 May 2019), where they still reside.

Holmes was named as collector of most specimens, including those taken at Shaunavon, but there were a few exceptions. In addition to the specimen of Calliope Hummingbird (*Selasphorus calliope*) noted below, Guiguet's name was given as collector of two species: adult female Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulous*; RAM Z80.120.178) taken on February 1932 and adult male Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*; RAM Z80.120.315), 11 May 1935. In addition to Holmes's name as collector credit was given on two specimens of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*; RSKM_BIRD_A-3367, A-3368) to Laurence B. Potter at Eastend, another rancher-naturalist of the Cypress Hills¹², and Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*; RSKM A-2728) prepared by H. Hedley Mitchell, who compiled the first catalogue of Saskatchewan birds.¹³ If Guiguet had collected and/or prepared specimens that became part of Holmes's collection, he was given credit.

Among Guiguet's specimens registered in the CMN are two Black-footed Ferrets, the first (CMNMA 12682) salvaged near Shaunavon in 1934 (Figure 2), whereas the other specimen (CMNMA 14078) was taken near the former hamlet of Senate in the extreme southwestern corner of the province, in 1935, and submitted salted for preparation later as a study skin. They are among the few Black-footed Ferret specimens, and the last, catalogued in museums that provide permanent records of occurrence of this species at the northern edge of its historical range¹⁴⁻¹⁶, before the species largely disappeared from the Saskatchewan landscape.

A specimen of Black-footed Ferret (Figure 3), faded after years



FIGURE 2. Labels attached to specimen of Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*; CMNMA 12682) taken at Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, 23 November 1934, and prepared by Charles Guiguet. Photo credit: G. Rand.

on exhibition in the Museum, was killed in a haystack near Val Marie, Saskatchewan, in 1965¹⁶, about 30 years after Guiguet left Shaunavon. The specimen disappeared about 20 years ago during renovations of the Museum's natural history room (K. Attrell, email, 22 May 2019). Upon realization of the rarity of this species, the mounted ferret may have been transferred to another museum for permanent storage, but there is no record of this, and contacts with several curators (see acknowledgements) did not turn up this specimen.

Black-footed Ferrets had been recorded as last observed in Canada in 1937 and were formally designated as extirpated in 1978¹⁷, but this record and several accepted observations revealed its presence through the mid-1980s, "well beyond the range of Black-tailed Prairie Dogs."¹⁶ The population declined rapidly in the early 1900s, caused in part by cultivation of habitat, programs to eradicate the Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys*

ludovicianus), the ferret's principal prey, and diseases.^{17,18} Efforts to re-establish the Black-footed Ferret in Saskatchewan are underway.¹⁹ Guiguet's specimen of Black-tailed Prairie Dog (CMNMA 12681, 31 July 1934) taken at Shaunavon provided another permanent record of this species' occurrence within the radius of historical colonies recorded in Beck's *A Guide to Saskatchewan Mammals*.¹⁵

Other mustelids also were of interest. In late November 1932, a note appeared in the local newspaper stating that a dead weasel recently received by the Museum had been "forwarded to Ottawa & not satisfactorily identified." It lacked black on the tip of the tail, but because the skull was not submitted, its identity as a Least Weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) was not confirmed.²⁰ Guiguet's two specimens of Least Weasel (CMNMA 12679, 24 August 1935; CMNMA 12680, _ 1934) confirmed Shaunavon as another locality within the species' range in southwestern

Saskatchewan. Although those specimens were not recorded in Beck's Guide¹⁵, others of this species were listed from nearby Eastend (taken by J. Dewey Soper²¹) and at Skull Creek, taken by Steven A. Mann, another of the rancher-naturalists of the Cypress Hills whose legacy of observations and specimens endure.¹² Still in Holmes's collection and therefore not included in Beck's Guide, was a Least Weasel later presented to the Saskatchewan Natural History Museum (now Royal Saskatchewan Museum, RSKM_Mamm_2271) collected at Dollard around 1929. Holmes's specimen may have been among the mounts held in the Museum at the time, to which Guiguet referred in one of several pieces published in the local newspaper under the heading "Student News."²² In addition to this specimen, Holmes presented three preserved Long-tailed Weasels (*M. frenata*; CMNMA 11758-59, 12298), taken in 1933, to the CMN (G. Rand, email, 4 September 2019).

The scent glands of ferrets and



Figure 3. Mounted Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) killed near Val Marie, Saskatchewan, in 1965. Photograph courtesy of Grand Coteau Heritage & Cultural Centre, Shaunavon.

weasels presented special challenges to the young taxidermist, but the preparation of a specimen of the Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) caused quite a stir in the local school, as revealed in the following tribute to the museum's curator.²³

The mammals department was aided by science teachers. Jack [Hughes] tried to stay out of trouble but one incident is worthy of note. The subject for mounting was a skunk, the student taxidermist was Charles Guiguet. Jack made sure that he knew the correct procedure for removal of the scent gland, and left, leaving Charles to finish and lock up. The next day was Saturday. On Monday the schools opened as usual, but immediately all the students of the junior building were sent home. Charles had removed



FIGURE 4. Silver-haired Bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*, CMNMA 12247) taken by H.L. Dixon at Govenlock, Saskatchewan, on 7 June 1933, was prepared by C.J. Guiguet. H.F. Hughes, curator of the Museum at the time, was named as collector. Photo credit: G. Rand.

the scent glands just fine. Then, ... he had left them neatly on the heat register of the Grade Eight classroom. The school was closed for two days. The museum survived [but apparently the mounted skunk did not]. Charles went on to become the head of the Mammal Department in Victoria, B.C.

Guiguet's bat specimens brought further accolades. His specimen of Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*; CMNMA 12683) collected at Shaunavon on 1 September 1934 was apparently the first specimen of this species taken in Saskatchewan.²⁴ A Silver-haired Bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*; CMNMA 12247) was taken at Govenlock in the extreme SW corner of Saskatchewan by Dr. Hugh L. Dixon, rancher-veterinarian, on 7 June 1933 (Figure 4). Guiguet's preparation of this and other specimens elicited praise from Rudolph M. Anderson of the National Museum of Canada, who wrote to the local newspaper: "Please convey my compliments

to Charles Guiguet for the fine makes of skins he is turning out."²⁵ Reference was made to this Silver-haired Bat specimen in the first compilation of Saskatchewan bat records²⁴, whereas this specimen and another allegedly taken at the same locality and on the same date were tabulated in an update of this species' status in the Province²⁶, although only one specimen was catalogued in CMN (G. Rand, email, 4 September 2019).

Credit goes to Guiguet for helping to sort out the identities of hummingbirds that occurred in southwestern Saskatchewan. Identification of hummingbirds, particularly females and juveniles, was difficult without specimens. Laurence Potter, a friend of Holmes¹², noted that "Hummingbirds are seen not infrequently in flower gardens, but public opinion in general is opposed to shooting, so their identity, whether rufous, calliope, or ruby-throated, remains

undetermined.”²⁷ Sight records of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*) were backed by one found dead at Eastend in August 1925.²⁸ Several Rufous Hummingbirds (*Selasphorus rufus*), another western species, were found dead, in late July and early August.²⁷⁻³¹ None of these specimens was located, although a badly decomposed bird was entered into the Museum’s catalogue, salvaged on 13 August 1932. Since then, with more than 30 records, Rufous Hummingbird is designated as a straggler in Saskatchewan³¹, whereas the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is common and regularly breeds in the Province.³²

The status of another western species of hummingbird in Saskatchewan — Calliope Hummingbird — remains as “accidental” on the basis of Guiguet’s specimen³³, a juvenile shot (not found dead³⁴) in a Shaunavon

garden on 22 August 1935 (Figure 5).^{28,35} Holmes forwarded the specimen to the National Museum of Canada where its identity was confirmed by ornithologist Percy A. Taverner.²⁸ Guiguet was eventually credited with collecting the specimen³⁵ (RAM Z80.120.396), which was among the bulk of Holmes’s collection transferred to the Royal Alberta Museum.⁷

A family group of Northern Flickers (*Colaptes auratus*), taken at Shaunavon on 23 June 1934 (CMNAV 25913-20), were “hybrids” of yellow-shafted and red-shafted colour phases, possibly collected in early recognition of the significance of the plumage. Guiguet’s specimens and others collected and noted by Godfrey²⁸ provided early evidence of contact between breeding Yellow-shafted Flickers and Red-shafted Flickers in southwestern Saskatchewan.³⁶

After Shaunavon

Charles Guiguet’s early life as a naturalist in Shaunavon was not unlike that of many other young naturalists. He received considerable encouragement and support along the way, first on the home front, and later from teachers in his school and the staff of the local museum. With his solid work ethic, he seized opportunities and honed his collecting skills through a succession of mentors, all of which placed him in good stead for a career as a field biologist and curator. Success eventually led to the curatorship of birds and mammals at the British Columbia Provincial Museum (BCPM; now Royal British Columbia Museum), but not before he gained additional experience assisting with other projects. Now in British Columbia, Guiguet was invited to join a field party organized by Hamilton Mack Laing to collect specimens for Anderson, now Chief, Division of Biology at the National Museum. Laing was embarking on a four-year faunal reconnaissance of several regions in British Columbia and was able to hire one assistant each year, starting in 1936.³⁷ Charles was hired on the strong recommendation of Anderson and, as it turned out, he stayed on as a member of the field party for the next four years (Figure 6). Anderson endorsed Guiguet’s collecting skills in a letter to Laing in 1936³⁸:

Mr. Charles G. [sic] Guiguet ... 20 years old, [has] passed senior matriculation at Shaunavon, Saskatchewan. He has collected for Shaunavon “Grand Coteau Museum” for several years, and makes good mammal and bird skins, and has sent me a number. He needs a job and some encouragement. H. F. Hughes [volunteer GCM curator] thinks he is a coming naturalist, if he gets half a chance. He wants to go to college if he gets enough money ahead to make a start. If



FIGURE 5. Calliope Hummingbird (*Selasphorus calliope*, RAM Z80.120.396) taken by Charles Guiguet at Shaunavon on 22 August 1935. Photo credit: J. Hudon.



FIGURE 6. About two years after leaving Shaunavon, Charles Guiguet is shown preparing a specimen of the North American Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*), near Stuie, British Columbia, 16 September 1938. Photo credit: Hamilton Mack Laing; image G-03674, courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives.

you take Guiguet you will have one boy who is willing to work at anything, industrious and full of ambition, who will be able to help you turn out a good line of mammal and bird skins, and help at any kind of work around camp.

Word of Guiguet's collecting skills likely reached Laing through additional sources. Considering that Guiguet was a protégé of Holmes, and that Holmes had hosted James Munro at the family homestead, and that Munro knew both Anderson and Laing, the level of Guiguet's skills likely had become general knowledge. All of these men knew Ian McTaggart-Cowan, under whose guidance Guiguet soon was collecting specimens for the BCPM and the University of British Columbia (UBC), and under whose supervision Guiguet studied zoology following service in WW II. A long and mutually beneficial association ensued between Cowan, the mentor, and Guiguet, initially the student. Their association began in the era of museum collectors and curators, but it transitioned

to the documentation of wildlife distribution and abundance. Many activities conducted by the two men have been highlighted in recent tributes to Cowan.^{39,40}

Guiguet was hired by the BCPM in 1948. During his long career he undertook field inventories that took him to some of the most remote and difficult-to-reach regions of British Columbia, including many sites along the Pacific coast where he contributed new information on the biology of coastal fauna, especially seabirds^{41,42} and insular distribution of mammals.⁴³⁻⁴⁵

Giving back

Guiguet gave back to his community. He was an active participant in school activities, including sports, and his popularity led to his election as leader of the cheer-leading team.⁴⁶ He penned numerous contributions for the local newspaper, some under the heading of "Student News", and he sent updates of his activities back to his home town after

moving to the west coast (Figure 7). Particularly impressive was Charles's encouragement of other boys to participate in taxidermy sessions in the museum and in the establishment of a museum in the school from which all students benefited, and apparently the teachers, too. Correspondence between the school's principal and Chief Game Guardian in Regina, archived in the Grand Coteau Heritage & Cultural Centre, however, revealed concern that one museum in Shaunavon was enough.⁴⁷ With assurance that specimens would not be duplicated, and strongly supported by the principal and teachers, a compromise was reached and specimens for display were distributed between the school and local museum. Feral pigeons were used for the taxidermy lessons. The community showed its appreciation by honouring Charles and his brother Marcel, "when a capacity crowd of young people filled the Legion Hall at a farewell dance", before the family left for British Columbia.⁴⁸

Epilogue

I knew Charles Guiguet, initially through correspondence while preparing to conduct field research on seabirds in British Columbia in the early 1970s. A few years later, while on sabbatical leave at the British Columbia Provincial Museum, I was able to discuss with Guiguet projects planned for Barkley Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I tapped his vast experience gained while he worked at many localities along the coast, including my first study site, Langara Island on Haida Gwaii. Charles always responded in great detail to my inquiries, with an eye to enhancing the success of our endeavors. More recently, Charlie's field notes have provided important observations in support of work

Charles Guiguet, formerly of Shaunavon, and now of Vancouver, B.C., has joined a survey group for the National Museum for the summer. This is good news to Charles' many friends in Shaunavon, who will wish him success in a work for which he is well fitted. He was the enthusiastic member of many collecting parties for the local Grand Coteau Museum, and specimens of his work at the museum would indicate that Charles has a gift for this work, and his position as collector and cook with the national museum party will be a novel experience and a help in furthering what Charles hopes to make his life's employment.

FIGURE 7. Charles Guiguet updated his friends in Shaunavon, stating he had joined a field party of the National Museum of Canada led by Hamilton Mack Laing. *The Shaunavon Standard*, 25 June 1936.

underway on a volume focused on ornithological exploration and research on and near Langara Island. Guiguet was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Pacific Seabird Group in 1995. He died in Victoria on 27 March 1999, but his accomplishments live on.

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and Sheila Norton located the Anderson letter archived in the Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives, respectively. I am indebted to curators of the Beaty Biodiversity Museum, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (Ildiko Szabo); Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa (Gregory Rand); Royal Alberta Museum, Edmonton (Jocelyn Hudon); Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria (Lesley Kennes); Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Burton Lim, Brad Millen, Mark Peck); and Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Regina (Danae Frier, Ray Poulin, Cory Sheffield). N.L. Sealy assisted in many ways throughout this project. Mark Guiguet put his family's stamp of approval on the final version of the manuscript.

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