

FIRST NEST RECORDS OF THE PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*CALIDRIS MELANOTOS*) FOR MANITOBA

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The Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) has long been considered an uncommon migrant in Manitoba and a transient in spring and fall at Churchill.

To help document its timeline and history in Manitoba, and Churchill in particular, the following notations would apply. In 1934, Taverner and Sutton referred to this species at Churchill as “A transient, more common in autumn than in spring”¹ and they offered no suggestion that this species had ever nested in Manitoba. In 1955, Mowat and Lawrie gave one spring record for Churchill and suggested that this species was rare in that area and in locations to the north such as Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk).²

In 1970, Jehl and Smith stated that “Pectoral Sandpipers are uncommon at Churchill” in spring and more common in fall.³ As well, they stated that “We have no evidence that Pectoral Sandpipers nest anywhere in the region.” In 1975, Cooke *et al.* referred to the Pectoral Sandpiper as a rare summer visitor on Cape Churchill.⁴ In 1983, Lane and Chartier showed this species as irregular in spring and more common in fall, with no suggestion of breeding at Churchill.⁵ In 1986, Godfrey gives the breeding range as being along the coast of Yukon and Northwest Territories, Banks Island, and Melville Island, Bathurst Island, Victoria Island, Devon Island, northern Baffin Island,



FIGURE 1: Well concealed nest of Pectoral Sandpiper, 2 July 1983. Churchill, Manitoba. Photo credit: J.M. Richards.

Prince of Wales Island, Adelaide Peninsula, Southampton Island in Nunavut, Northern Ontario (Cape Henrietta Maria), and Churchill, Manitoba.⁶ He also used summer records for the Prince Patrick and Bylot islands without evidence of breeding. He based his claim of breeding at Churchill on the 1983 record below.

In 2018, Johnston (*in* Richards and Gaston) added Cornwallis Island, King William Island, Mansel Island, Prince Charles Island, and the Boothia Peninsula to the breeding range in Nunavut.⁷ In 1988, Chartier continued to show their occurrence as spotty and irregular; however, only by then was it shown as having bred in Churchill.⁸ In 1994, Chartier showed the Pectoral Sandpiper as a species you are “lucky to find” in summer and “may see” during spring and fall migration and lists it as having bred in the past.⁹ Her statements revolve around known

nesting attempts in 1983, 1987 and 1992. In the 2003 book, *The Birds of Manitoba*, it is listed as a common and widespread migrant in Manitoba, and a rare and irregular breeder on the coast.⁹ This is based on three nesting attempts near Churchill as well as courtship displays observed at Cape Churchill (La Pérouse Bay) in 1984.¹¹

In 2004, Jehl referred to this species at Churchill as uncommon.¹² He mentions the 1983 nest found there (but gives no date) and the fact that males were engaged in mating displays near Cape Churchill in 1983 and 1984 although no nests were found there. He concluded that it was possible that nesting took place both years. He cites Moser and Rusch (*ibid.*) saying that in 11 previous summers on the Cape, this had not been previously observed. Of interest here, more recent studies have confirmed the general status of this species in Manitoba. For example,



FIGURE 2: Pectoral Sandpiper incubating four eggs, 2 July 1983. Churchill, Manitoba. Photo credit: J.M. Richards.

there were only nine sight records for this species included in the data base during the monumental 2010-2014 Breeding Bird Atlas period, and none were considered as possible breeding birds in Manitoba during that time.¹³

The discovery of an occupied nest on 1 July 1983 by Jim Richards, Bruno Kern and George Trafford would appear to be the first nest record for Churchill and for Manitoba. This was confirmed at the time by Herb Copland at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, as well as by shorebird expert Lou Oring, who was shown the nest by Richards on 4 July. A search of Prairie Nest Record Scheme cards housed at The Manitoba Museum and a literature search, produced no nest records prior to July 1983 and none since June 1992.

Richards and Kern noted a male at a lek engaged in typical courtship display; low fluttering flight and emitting 'booming' sounds on 18 June 1983, as well as on 22 June at Mile 5.3 along the Launch Road at Churchill. On 23 and 30 June, at least two males were engaged in courtship displays there. We shared our findings with a visiting birder, George Trafford from Scotland who was keen on seeing nests and

suggested that he should keep watch on the area as did we. We found a nest with four eggs (female incubating) on 1 July in open, wet subarctic tundra. The nest, well concealed on one side in a clump of dry grass, was a shallow scrape lined with leaves and other dead vegetation. The nest, eggs, and adult were photographed by Richards on 2 July. The nest still contained eggs and was being incubated on 4 July. There was no sign of the two males or any additional nests on any subsequent visits by any of us over the next several days. It is unknown whether this nest was successful or not.

Jim Briskie and Dawn Sutherland



FIGURE 3: Nest/four eggs of Pectoral Sandpiper, 2 July 1983. Churchill, Manitoba. Photo credit: J.M. Richards.

found a nest (second for Churchill and for Manitoba) near Twin Lakes, Churchill on 16 June 1987. The nest was beside a clump of sedge, and the habitat was wet, soggy open peatland. On that date the nest contained four eggs and the female was incubating. A male was engaged in courtship display nearby. The nest was inspected about five days later and the eggs were cold, and no adults were seen in the area. The nest was checked again about four days later and the eggs were still cold, and again, no sign of the adults. This nest was considered deserted.

In 1992, 4-5 males displayed persistently near the 'Golf Balls' along Launch Rd., and at Twin Lakes near Churchill, and Jehl (*ibid.*) found a nest with four eggs on 18 June at Twin Lakes; this would be the third known nest for Churchill and Manitoba. The eggs were found to be cold on 28 and 29 June and led him to the conclusion they were deserted.

Mention should be made of possible reasons for this species to linger south and east of its regular breeding range. Summer 1992 was particularly cold up north (Mt. Pinatubo eruption) and may have forced birds to short-stop on their way north. Similar conditions may have existed in the other years that there were breeding attempts.

Acknowledgements

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Nature
SASKATCHEWAN

SPRING MEET 2022

JUNE 17, 18 & 19, 2022 REGINA/AVONLEA, SK

Friday, June 17

Refreshments will be available; coffee, tea, cookies, muffins

6:30 p.m. Registration at the Atlas Hotel in Regina

7:30 p.m. Speaker TBA

8:30 p.m. Logistics and program outline/instructions for Saturday

Saturday, June 18

8:30 a.m. Board bus to depart from Regina to tour Avonlea badlands, Missouri Coteau and Claybank Brick Plant

12:00 p.m. Lunch break at Claybank Brick Plant

5:00 p.m. Cocktails

6:00 p.m. Banquet

7:00 p.m. Speaker TBA

Sunday, June 19

9:00 a.m. Annual General Meeting at the Atlas Hotel in Regina

SUGGESTED ACCOMMODATIONS

Atlas Hotel

Block reserved under Nature Saskatchewan until May 13, 2022. Call 1-844-586-3443 (toll-free number) to reserve your room.

Additional details, and a registration form, will be available in the next issue of *Blue Jay* and on the Nature Saskatchewan website. Please note that plans are subject to change due to the COVID-19 pandemic and may be revised to follow the latest public health guidelines.