

ANOTHER BLACK WITCH MOTH RECORD FOR SASKATCHEWAN (CORRECTION)

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: This article was initially published in *Blue Jay* 80.4, regrettably with a number of errors. Below is the revised copy.

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The article by Cedric Gillott in *Blue Jay* 79.2 has encouraged me to report another sighting of a Black Witch Moth, although it was more than 10 years ago near Stranraer, a tiny village in the Herschel Hills about 20 miles west of Rosetown. There is quite a tale behind this sighting.

Dorothy (Stratillo) Seibold grew up in the small village of Herschel, Saskatchewan. At a young age, she began collecting flowers and things of interest to her. Later, she became a piano teacher, photographer, local history buff, and writer. In 1958, she married Lloyd Seibold and raised four children on the family farm near Stranraer. One of Dorothy's passions was taking pictures and displaying her photographs at Ancient Echoes Interpretive Centre (AEIC), located in the former Herschel School. The centre focuses on the ecology of the local area, including the native petroglyphs and the discovery of marine fossils in the Coal Mine Ravine.

On 24 June 2013, I was volunteering at AEIC, doing some studies of rock alignments around Herschel. Michael Williams, geologist and keen birder, was helping me while we also kept our eyes peeled for butterflies up in the high country. As we prepared to go there, a black butterfly, obviously a swallowtail, flashed by on the breeze. We went to the petroglyphs, on a very high hill, and encountered another swallowtail (possibly the same one). Michael had thoughtfully brought his net. We captured it and hustled back to our house to get some photos of it and to call Dorothy Seibold in Stranraer, because we thought it might be a new species for the area and knew she was preparing a display of her collection of butterfly photographs the next morning (we sent the photos to Anna Leighton, who had the butterfly identified and let us know that it was a black form of an Anise Swallowtail).

The next morning, Dorothy hung her display in the AEIC gallery. The first photo was a Tiger Swallowtail, and the second



Dorothy Seibold's framed picture of the Black Witch moth displayed at Ancient Echoes Interpretive Centre in 2013.



Dorothy Seibold (holding camera) and Dave and Sue Neufeld. Photo credit: Muriel Carlson.

was the butterfly we captured the day before. Talk about speed! Then I looked at a third picture. It was a giant among moths. My first Black Witch Moth (*Ascalapha odorata*). We were ecstatic! And from little ol' Herschel (and Stranraer). But just how she captured it made an even better yarn.

In July of 2012 there was a family wedding at her son's farm, and a large tent was erected to house the guests. At some point, after dark, something large and brown flew into the tent. It created quite a stir. Some thought it might be a bat. But not Dorothy. She ran for her camera and photographed the creature, which turned out to be a Black Witch Moth.

But that was not to be the end of this tale. Since then, over three different years, I have personally sighted the black species of swallowtails at five locations in the hills and further north in the high hills above and north of Plenty, fluttering along the steep pinnacles of those hills, all on windy days. I was always with friends and, on one occasion in the Toft Hill Pasture near Stranraer, a group of four butterflies were newly hatched on a Missouri Currant plant less than 20 feet away. These specimens

were deeply coloured, with deep yellow bands on the outer wing. We observed them for several minutes but had no camera with us. I believe this indicates that there is a viable population there.

So schedule a trip out there in late June. Book a couple of rooms at the Herschel Retreat House and make a weekend of it. Great birds, butterflies and the Coal Mine Ravine deserves a second look, too. We developed a checklist of birds there as well, and there may be more surprises.

Dorothy Seibold is no longer among us, but her pictures still echo. I wonder how many other records she may have found.

Dedicated to Dorothy Seibold with edits provided by her husband, Lloyd Seibold, and children, Linda Klassen, Richard Seibold, Grant Seibold and Mark Seibold. 🐦



A photo, by Dorothy Seibold, of a Blue Jay — her favourite bird. Image courtesy of the Seibold family.