

# AMERICAN AVOCETS NESTING IN EAST REGINA IN 2024

Fraser Hunter

Regina, SK S4V 0L8

fraser.hunter@sasktel.net

On 30 April 2024, I observed an American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) on the shoreline of Pilot Butte Creek (PBC) in east Regina, SK (lat 50.4367 N/long -104.5480 W). This was my first sighting of an avocet on this creek in the 40-plus years that I have lived near the creek.

PBC has a fairly small drainage area but has significant water contributed by several city storm drains. The channel is only 5-10 m wide. After the spring freshet, the typical summer flow is sluggish and only 15-30 cm deep. The vegetation in the creek's channel and immediate riparian area are cleaned out every few years as the channel becomes obstructed with cattails (*Typha*) and other marsh vegetation. This vegetation removal process last took place in 2021 and the channel was still essentially vegetation-free in spring 2024.

The single avocet was observed in this location for several days but heavy rainfall in early May 2024 raised the creek's water level by 0.75-1 m and the avocet wasn't observed at this location again.

On 25 May 2024, while my grandson and I were cleaning up the east shoreline of PBC, about 200 m north of the earlier sightings, we encountered six adult avocets. They were aggressively guarding the shoreline with ground and aerial tactics. On subsequent visits to the area, the avocets continued to defend a 100-m long stretch of the creek. However, we neither observed nor searched for avocet nests. The avocets were peacefully co-existing with numerous Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and Gadwalls (*Anas strepera*), which were also using the creek in early June (Figure 1).

On the evening of 16 June, two avocet chicks were observed on the west shoreline of the creek (Figure 2). They appeared to be one-to-two weeks old, and were active on the shoreline.



FIGURE 1. Two adult avocets guarding the shoreline of Pilot Butte Creek in May 2024.

As the chicks passed by ducks, the adult avocets actively harassed the ducks with aerial dives and, occasionally, physically struck the ducks from above. The ducks flew for a few metres but resettled on the water. It appeared from the ducks' muted reaction that this wasn't the first occurrence of this aerial and physical harassment.

The second half of June 2024 was quite wet and the significant rain event of 27-28 June brought the month's precipitation to above 100 mm. PBC responded with inundation of all the shoreline previously utilized by the avocet chicks. No avocets were observed on PBC after 26 June. Several questions arise:

- Did the significant water rise, following the 10 June rain event, flood out the other avocet nests or

was only one nest attempted by the three pairs of adult avocets?

- Did other chicks drown in early June or were they lost to a predator?
- What happened to the avocet chicks in late June — did they fledge, perish or move to another location?
- Did the narrow width of PBC contribute to the aggressive behaviour of the adults in protecting the avocet chicks?

It will be interesting to see if the avocets return to this nesting area in Spring 2025. I hope so, as this was a truly unique birding experience.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the many positive suggestions that were made by the reviewers of this paper. 🐦



FIGURE 2. An adult avocet and two chicks on Pilot Butte Creek.