

SOLOMON J. DARCUS'S NESTING RECORDS OF BIRDS IN THE CYPRESS HILLS REGION, SASKATCHEWAN, 1920

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Introduction

Naturalists and ornithologists were drawn to the Cypress Hills and surrounding grassland and wetlands of southwestern Saskatchewan and southeastern Alberta in the early decades of the 1900s. Most spent only a few days or weeks collecting specimens in the area, whereas different circumstances saw naturalist and egg collector, Solomon J. Darcus (Figure 1), spend a little more than one year in the region in 1919–20. This was during a break in a protracted move from New Brunswick to take up permanent residence in British Columbia. After emigrating to Canada from Ireland in the early 1900s, Darcus served in France during World War I. Upon his return to Canada in 1919, and following a brief visit with family and friends in Fredericton, New Brunswick, he boarded a train for Maple Creek and the Cypress Hills. His final destination was the homestead and

ranch operated by his sister May (née Darcus) and brother-in-law, Ernest W. Allen, near Battle Creek, southwest of Cypress Lake (Figure 2). Darcus arrived on 20 July 1919 and remained there for little more than one year. He recorded detailed notes of the birds observed throughout the fall and winter and the first arrival of some species in spring, but most of all he pursued his passion for egg collecting that resulted in many nesting records for the area, some of which were supported by egg sets now held permanently in museums. These and other records are detailed below.

Many species were new to him, amid a landscape not previously experienced. By late October 1920, Darcus was back in Fredericton, but a few months later he travelled to British Columbia, initially to the west coast of Vancouver Island, before settling permanently in the southern Okanagan Valley.^{1,2}

Darcus did not publish his observations of birds in the Cypress Hills region, which meant they were unavailable to early students of the birds of that region³ and of Saskatchewan.⁴ Through correspondence in the ensuing decades, however, some of

Darcus's discoveries began to reach the ornithological community. In particular, records were sent to Herbert Friedmann in response to pleas for information to be included in catalogues of species parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*).^{5,6} Correspondence with Allan Brooks, among the important naturalists in the Okanagan Valley at the time, brought to light additional details of the records from the Cypress Hills region. And in a letter packed with information written to the editor of a nature column in a Montreal newspaper after he returned briefly to New Brunswick, Darcus commented that he had been “a close student of ornithology for some twenty years and have always read the Natural History column with keen interest.”⁷

On 31 October 1920, he observed a Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) associating with a flock of American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*) near Fredericton. Although the bird was far out of range, he was confident of his identification, stating “I was very familiar with the yellow-headed blackbird on the marshes in the Cypress Hills in Saskatchewan, but this is the first time



FIGURE 1. Solomon John Darcus (1886–1973) and hiking gear, Canyon Ranch in the southern Okanagan Valley, 1926. Courtesy of Penticton Museum and Archives (PMA 3243).

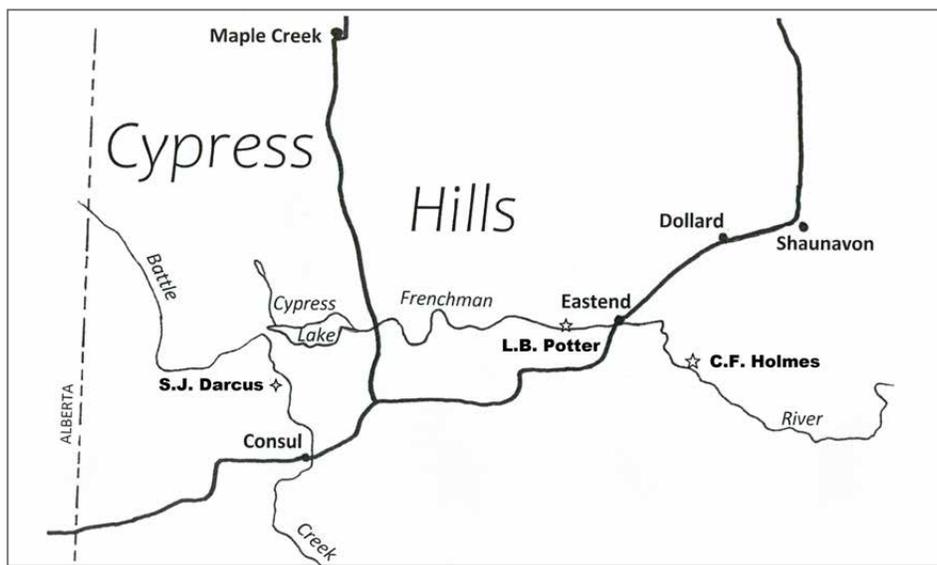


FIGURE 2. Darcus observed birds during a stay of a little more than one year (1919–20) at his brother's-in-law ranch near Battle Creek (49° 25' 57" N, 109° 50' 53" W) in the southern reaches of the Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan, before settling permanently in British Columbia. Battle Creek eventually flows into Cypress Lake, as mapped in Godfrey's account of the birds of the Cypress Hills region.² The locations of the homesteads of naturalists Laurence Potter and Charles Holmes are denoted by stars. Sketch map prepared by N.L. Sealy.

I have met with it east of Manitoba.”⁷ The editor, Ernest Ingersoll, commented that “The presence of a yellow-headed blackbird in New Brunswick is the first instance on record, I think; but it has been observed occasionally as a straggler to Ontario and Quebec. Ornithologists will be glad to know of the abundance of birds in the Cypress Hills.”⁸

Nesting records

I initially extracted details of observations and nesting records from digitized copies of Darcus’s field notes and scans of photographs⁹ provided by grandson, Patrick J. Darcus, from notes transcribed by Jeannine Darcus. Having recently received the original notes, I checked everything again and uncovered a few more nesting records in photo albums. (Darcus’s field notebooks and photographs are now held in the Penticton Museum & Archives, to augment already-archived material and a portion of his egg collection.) Notes prepared during Darcus’s stint in the Cypress Hills region covered the period from arrival on 19 July 1919 through 3 June 1920, when the notes had been removed. I relied on egg sets and photographs for egg dates and natural history notes recorded after 3 June. Most photographs, some undated — taken by Darcus more than 100 years ago — are faded or out of focus, but they back up early records of the discoveries during his brief stint in the region. As nests were generally visited only once, clutches may have been incomplete and their initiation dates were approximate. The notes revealed often difficult conditions under which Darcus worked — usually alone — and a work ethic characteristic of other naturalists that were active in this region at the time, and whose observations also were made when time could be spared from the demands of rural life.¹⁰ Twenty-mile walks during all seasons, frequently called “tramps”, with some requiring overnight stays in deserted “shacks”, were conducted regularly. Quoted passages from Darcus’s notes provide glimpses into the weather, habitats and other conditions that surrounded the discoveries of the nests, and status of several species, some of which would become critically endangered.

Common among egg collectors, eggs collected by Darcus during his stint in the Cypress Hills region passed from collector to collector² before being deposited permanently in the following museums: Canadian Museum of Nature (CMNAV), Ottawa, Ontario; Royal Alberta Museum (RAM), Edmonton; Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM), Victoria; and Western Foundation for Vertebrate Zoology (WVZ), Caramillo, California. Photographs of nests and eggs reproduced in the species accounts were taken by S.J. Darcus.

Annotated list of species

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*). Darcus recorded large numbers of Eared Grebes (*P. nigricollis*) and a few pairs of Western Grebes (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) in spring, whereas the presence of the Horned Grebe was confirmed in an undated, labeled photograph of a nest that contained three eggs (Figure 3).

Sora (*Porzana carolina*). Darcus described his first encounter with this species: “Fine day [11 May 1920] after a wet night; strong easterly wind with temperature between 55°[F] and 60°. I made the acquaintance of another new bird today, the Sora Rail. It was in some bushes by the creek and swam across to the opposite shore after being disturbed. I had a good opportunity of observing it at close quarters. Its bright yellow bill was very conspicuous and black forehead and chin.” On 13 June this species was encountered again and a nest with eggs was photographed.



FIGURE 3. Nest and eggs of Horned Grebe, Cypress Hills region, Saskatchewan, 1920.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*). First observed on 22 March 1920, when “... ten [were] observed flying northward”; about

40 were recorded on 25 May. A nest was photographed, showing its construction amid outbuildings on the Allen ranch (Figure 4). One nest with four eggs placed amid low bushes was depredated by 23 May, “...evidently by [American Crows]”, which were nesting in the vicinity; Darcus did not observe the event.



FIGURE 4. Nest and eggs of Canada Goose, Cypress Hills region, Saskatchewan, 10 June 1920.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). Two flocks were observed on 25 March 1920, with Northern Pintails (*A. acuta*). Darcus photographed a Mallard’s nest constructed in an abandoned hawk’s nest.

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*). In addition to individuals observed above with Mallards, a nest was photographed on 27 June 1920.

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*). In the letter to the Montreal newspaper quoted above, Darcus mentioned nesting by the American Avocet⁷; one egg set (RBCM E0151A) from two nests observed was collected on 29 May 1920 (Figure 5). In the notes for that day, Darcus described the discovery of this nest during one of his “long trips to the hills”, this one with horses.

On one of the lakes we saw the first young ducks of the season, a pair of Pintails, with young ones. There were quite a number of other ducks to be seen, Mallards, Canvasbacks, Baldpates [American Widgeons], and numbers of American Eared Grebes. At one small lake at which we stopped for a short time we found two pairs of American Avocets nesting, one nest containing four eggs, and the other one. The nests were in dry situations, amongst stones just hollows lined with a little grass. The birds were very much excited when the

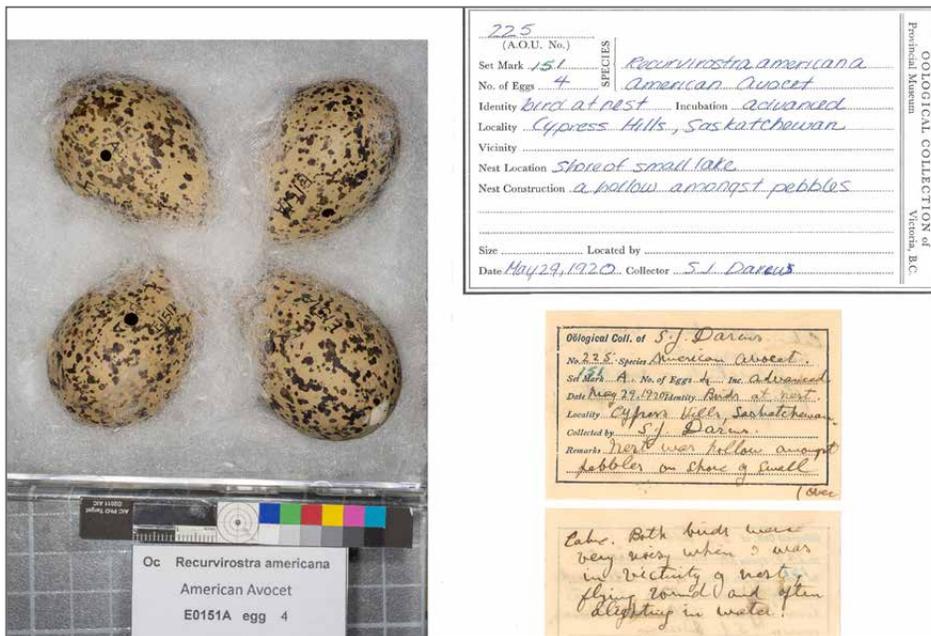


FIGURE 5. Set of American Avocet eggs (RBCM E0151A) taken in the Cypress Hills region, Saskatchewan, 29 May 1920; data-slip is penned in Darcus's hand. Courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum.

vicinity of the nests was approached. The avocet is an excellent swimmer, frequently alighting in the water.

The next morning, following the night spent in a "shack" near a lakeshore, Darcus and an unnamed companion, "constructed a raft with some poles and crossed to the island", where they observed avocets, but nesting was not indicated.

Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*). Also in the letter quoted above⁷, Darcus commented on an article "from a Saskatchewan correspondent, [who] stated that the long-billed curlew is now extremely scarce. I am glad to be able to state that in the part of the Cypress Hills in which I was last spring and summer, I met with [this species] and found several nests on 8 June [1920]..., which I photographed 'in situ'" (Figure 6). Darcus recorded an individual on an island in the lake visited above on 30 May and on the following day while "crossing the prairie."

The article and "Saskatchewan correspondent" to which Darcus referred were not identified, but the correspondent may have been Hedley Mitchell, who had been working west of Eastend before Darcus arrived in the summer of 1919. They evidently did not meet, but did they correspond? Mitchell was especially interested in the Cypress

Hills and its birds, and published notes on several little-known species recorded during the summer of Darcus's arrival, although the Long-billed Curlew was not among them.¹¹ Five years later, Mitchell stated that the Long-billed Curlew was "[a]pparently decreasing in numbers in some parts"¹², which corroborated what Laurence Potter, a local naturalist who ranched near Eastend, noted: "Twenty-five years ago the Long-billed Curlew swarmed everywhere; today it has become a rarity in the [Frenchman River] valley, but a few may yet be seen on the prairie."¹²

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferous*). First observed on 13 April 1920, but followed by several individuals observed on 26 April, "... becoming quite common now on the flat ground by the creek." Nests: 29 May, 1 egg ("hole amongst stones lined with pebbles").



FIGURE 6. Nest and eggs of Long-billed Curlew, Cypress Hills region, 8 June 1920.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*). Darcus initially had difficulty distinguishing between Common Tern and Forster's Tern (*S. forsteri*), but a colony of the former species on an island visited on 30 May 1920 contained "... six of the Terns' nests containing eggs from one to three in number."

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*). An undated photograph of a nest and four eggs was taken near Battle Creek.

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*). Darcus flushed an American Bittern and three Wilson's Snipes (*Gallinago delicata*) "from some rushes" during a long walk in the hills on 24 June 1920. A bittern's nest had been discovered on 13 June (Figure 7).

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*). Darcus's description of a Least Bittern at Coulee Lake in the Cypress Hills was considered plausible and augmented the species' status as hypothetical in Saskatchewan, but his assertion of breeding was questionable.¹³ Darcus visited Coulee Lake as he travelled south of Maple Creek on his way to his brother's-in-law homestead on 19 July 1919. He was impressed with the many species of birds observed there but there is no mention of an observation of a Least Bittern.⁹ Nevertheless, Darcus later recounted an observation of this species to Allan Brooks, naturalist and wildlife illustrator¹⁴, whom he met during his residency in the Okanagan Valley. In a letter written on 17 May 1930



FIGURE 7. Nest and eggs of American Bittern, Cypress Hills region, Saskatchewan, 13 June 1920.

to Charles F. Holmes, one of the early rancher-naturalists of the region who homesteaded south of Dollard^{10,15}. Brooks listed several specimens of birds from southern Saskatchewan that he desired for his collection. Last on this list was the Least Bittern, to which Brooks added that “I have added the last [species] as I have just had a visit from [S] Darcus who says he found it breeds at Coulee Lake south of Maple Creek.” Had Darcus collected birds, as he did their eggs¹, this record may have been confirmed and the species would have been removed from the hypothetical list. That occurred a few years later when a specimen of Least Bittern was collected some years before 1927 at Moon Lake, south of Saskatoon.^{13,16} The species’ status in Saskatchewan is currently listed as “Accidental.”¹³

Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*).

Spring arrival: 3 April 1920. Darcus first noted nesting on 27 May: “... a pair... nesting amongst some low bushes not far from the house by [Battle] creek. The male is doing the nest building. He has been bringing sticks to the nest all day carrying them in his talons. I only saw the female in the vicinity of the nest for a few minutes. At times the male has been performing antics in the air taking head dives and soaring and screaming. He is a fine specimen in the light blue phase of plumage.” A clutch of six eggs was collected on 10 June (RBCM E0157A) — “in dry situation on ground among low bushes. Composed of twigs and dry grass” (Figure 8) — apparently from this nest.

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*).

Spring arrival: 15 April 1920, becoming common by 1 May; frequently noted as “numerous.” On 30 May, Darcus and companions found themselves in the “higher ranges” of the Cypress Hills. “Early in the afternoon we broke camp, hitched up the team and started for the highest range of the Cypress Hills... We soon arrived at the highest point of the hills. Here we are in wooded country, a great contrast to the prairie. Saw several Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawks, Swainson’s Hawks and American Sparrow Hawks and found an old hawk nest with young Horned Owls in it about a week

old.” On 31 May, they found a kestrel’s nest with four eggs “in an old Flicker’s hole in a dead stump ten feet from the ground.” Not mentioned in his notes was whether this clutch was collected that day, or, whether it was collected the following day when it contained five eggs. This egg set was eventually catalogued in the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (WFVZ EN-10481), but it cannot now be located (R. Corado, pers. comm., 15 October 2024).

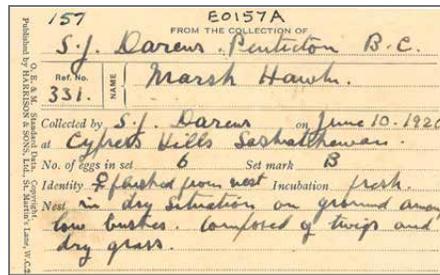


FIGURE 8. This data-slip accompanies a clutch of six Northern Harrier eggs (RBCM E0157A) collected by S.J. Darcus in the Cypress Hills region, Saskatchewan, 10 June 1920. Courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum.

Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*). Spring arrival: second week of April 1920.

The two clutches from among the 15 nests Darcus discovered provided an important early reference point for the documentation of the decline of this species in Saskatchewan, and revealed the region still supported “reasonable numbers” of the species.¹⁷

American and Ferruginous rough-legged hawks were among several species Darcus had not observed prior to his arrival in the Cypress Hills region. He recorded American Rough-legged Hawks regularly throughout the nonbreeding season in 1919-20, whereas the first Ferruginous Hawks returned during the second week of April 1920. In his notes for 2 May, he referred to a nest on “the clay cliff by [Battle Creek]”... the hawks have been in the vicinity for three weeks and added more sticks.” After an arduous trek on 9 May, Darcus described the collection of three eggs (RBCM E0149A) from another nest:

As [Battle Creek] is in flood and is a raging torrent I could not cross it so follow [sic] its winding course for some miles upstream. The Ferruginous Rough-legged Buzzards had three eggs in the nest in the Willow bush by the stream. The species is apparently the

first of the family to nest here. It is a very useful species destroying numbers of gophers or prairie dogs. In fact it seems to subsist almost entirely on that little pest. There was one hanging on a branch beside the nest. The nest which apparently has been used for several years was composed of sticks and birch with grass and chips of horse manure.

Darcus described Battle Creek, “... south of the Cypress [Hills] [as] quite a large stream with marshes in places.” The second clutch, of four eggs (RBCM E0148A), was taken on 16 May 1920 (Figure 9) from a nest “... in a large Poplar tree. A few hundred yards up the coulee another pair was nesting in a Poplar tree 35 ft. from ground.” Darcus noted that this species appears to be the most common of the large hawks and the first to nest. Two more nests were recorded, on 23 May (3 eggs, “not far from the lake”) and 24 May (4 eggs, “the lowest one seen, being only six feet from the ground”). Darcus was impressed as four nests were discovered “in this part of the hills within a radius of two miles.”

Swainson’s Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*).

Spring arrival: 11 April 1920, “several in light phase.” Darcus commented that Swainson’s Hawk “is the most common hawk there. Both the [Ferruginous] rough-leg and Swainson’s hawk are very useful species, their prey consisting of that injurious little animal, the gopher [Richardson’s Ground Squirrel, *Urocitellus richardsonii*]. I have seen many gophers strung up in the willows and on the edges of the hawk’s nest; the male bringing them to the female while she is incubat[ing].” Five nests in willows: 23 May, 2 eggs; 24 May, two with 2 eggs (both photographed), 3 eggs, and 4 eggs. Darcus commented that “[this] species is almost three weeks later in nesting than the Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawk.”

Of a dozen nests noted, two egg sets were collected on 24 May 1920 (WFVZ EN-29153, 3 eggs; WFVZ EN-29154, 4 eggs): both nests were built of “... sticks, lined with grass in willow”, 9 and 10 ft. from the ground, respectively. Having noted that the Ferruginous Hawk nested earlier than Swainson’s Hawk, Darcus’s observation of “a pair of Swainson’s Buzzards repairing an old stick nest on a



FIGURE 9. Set of Ferruginous Hawk eggs (RBCM E0148A) collected by S.J. Darcus in the Cypress Hills region, Saskatchewan, 16 May 1920. Note variation in spot patterns among the eggs. Courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum.

cliff”, on 25 April, probably involved the Ferruginous Hawk, which returned in spring about this time, as acknowledged above. “Proceeding up the Coulee the first hawks [sic] nest I found was a Swainson’s with three eggs. The nest of the Swainson’s Hawk is not nearly as large as that of the Ferruginous and all I have seen were built in the top of the willow while the Ferruginous Rough-legged which builds a much larger nest, constructs the nest about half way up in the bush or in the crotch of a large popular tree.”

Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*). Year-round resident. Nests: 30 May 1920, discovered “... in an old hawk nest with young Horned Owls in it about a week old. It was in a large poplar tree on the edge of a dense wood. We saw no sign of the parent birds.” This nest was apparently photographed on 1 June.

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*). The “Flickers” that Darcus observed frequently were of the “yellow-shafted” form. Had Darcus collected specimens, “hybrids” between this and the “red-shafted” form may have been identified.³¹⁸ First observed on 4 May 1920, “apparently crossing the prairie now to the wooded country northwards.” Nests: 24 May, “... in a hole six feet beneath the [Ferruginous] hawk’s nest”; 30 May, “several pairs... nesting in old stumps”; 31 May, “quite common all incubating now.”

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*). First recorded on 24 May 1920: “... has arrived now. I met with it the past two days everywhere in the hills and flats where there are bushes.” Darcus reported a nest of this species parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird “from Saskatchewan.”⁵ Other than mentioning the kingbirds’ arrival in spring, Darcus did not note details, such as number of eggs of host and cowbird, of this or most other records of parasitism. That he generally visited nests only once meant it was not determined whether the cowbird’s

egg was later removed by the kingbird, which is the typical response to cowbird parasitism by this species.¹⁹ In the notes for 15 August 1919, however, Darcus “saw Kingbirds in several places and one by the house here is feeding a young cowbird.” Also lacking details, this was a rare record the Eastern Kingbird feeding a fledged cowbird²⁰, and one overlooked in a recent compilation of cowbird hosts on the Canadian prairies.²

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*). Darcus observed the Northern Shrike (*L. excubitor*) during his residence in New Brunswick, and several times in winter in the Cypress Hills region, but a “new” species, “White-rumped Shrike” (Loggerhead Shrike), was observed on 9 May 1920, attending a nest “in a Willow Bush close to the bush which contains the nest of the [Ferruginous] Rough-legged Hawk... The nest was completed and the bird was sitting on it but there was nothing in it. Further along the creek I met with another pair of Shrikes”; 20 May, nest with two eggs; 23 May, nest with four eggs.

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American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). Robins were frequently noted as numerous and their pleasing song was appreciated throughout the spring. On 23 May 1920, “Robins are numerous and serenaded us until late in the evening”; on 1 June, “The wooded valley resounded with song of the American Robin.” Nests: 16 May, ‘just building their nests’; 24 May, four eggs.

Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*). Year-round resident. Nest: 24 May 1920, five eggs; other nests found but not detailed in the notes.

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*). One observed on 30 March 1920, but additional individuals and flocks were observed during the ensuing week. Nests: 16 May, “nests containing eggs”; 23 May, “[a] number of Crow’s nests in willows contained eggs”; 30 May, “pairs of crows nesting in willows and Pines.”

Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*). Individuals and flocks were observed regularly throughout the winter and spring and by 11 April 1920, “are to be seen in pairs now.” Nests discovered on 30 April (two eggs) and 6 May (two nestlings “about three days old”) prompted Darcus to comment on the species’ early nesting, “where there is still much snow on the ground.” Another nest contained three eggs on 16 May about which Darcus stated “[t]he species only lays two or three eggs in its first clutch”, whereas the last nest noted, on 18 May, contained five eggs. Recently fledged young observed on 15 May. A parasitized nest with three eggs plus one cowbird egg taken on 8 June was reported to Friedmann.⁵

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*). First recorded on 27 May 1920: “The bank swallows which arrived at their nesting quarters last Sunday have been busy since then excavating in the bank by the creek as the bank sloped this spring destroying their old nesting holes.”

Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*). Spring arrival: 4 May 1920; “... its song is to be heard”, and by the following day noted “... as very common now.” Although not noted in his field notes, Darcus reported

a parasitized nest (contents unknown) discovered in June 1920.⁶

Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*). This species was “... very common on the prairie” by 4 May 1920. Darcus provided one of the earliest records of cowbird parasitism on this species, which Friedmann acknowledged: “... Darcus sent me data on one record from Saskatchewan — a parasitized nest he found at Cypress Hills on June 1, 1920.”⁶ The egg set, if collected, cannot be located, and the nest’s contents is unknown.

Thick-billed Longspur (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*). First observed on 7 May 1920. Darcus correctly recorded this species as McCown’s Longspur, but the common name was changed recently to Thick-billed Longspur by the American Ornithological Society, in an effort to remove eponymous names of birds.²¹ The eggs from a nest containing three eggs recorded in his notes on 20 May was apparently not collected, whereas information gleaned from the accompanying data shows another clutch of three eggs collected on 29 June (CMNAV E5591) (Figure 10). Darcus’s record of cowbird parasitism on this species was among the earliest recorded

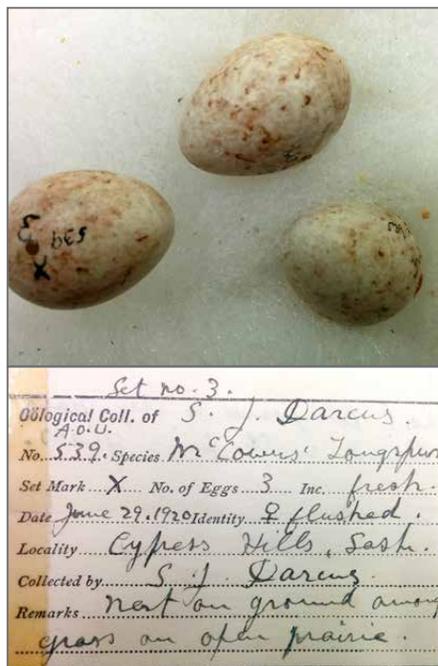


FIGURE 10. Unparasitized set of Thick-billed (formerly McCown’s) Longspur eggs (CMNAV E5591) collected by S.J. Darcus, Cypress Hills region, Saskatchewan, 29 June 1920. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Nature.

for this species, which Friedmann acknowledged: “Darcus sent me data on one record from Saskatchewan — a parasitized nest found at Cypress Hills on June 7, 1920.”⁶ If collected, this egg-set was not located.

Brewer’s Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*). Darcus recorded the first spring observations of Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) and Brewer’s Blackbird on 2 May 1920. He described that day as “the first real spring day we have had, the sun being quite warm and there was very little wind.” He found at least two Brewer’s Blackbird nests, the first on 28 May (eggs not located, if collected) was “built on the ground amongst low bushes and containing six eggs.” The other nest contained two blackbird eggs plus two Brown-headed Cowbird eggs (RBCM E178A, E179B) taken near Battle Creek on 26 June (Figure 11).



FIGURE 11. This parasitized clutch of Brewer’s Blackbird (RBCM E0178A, E0179B) was collected by S.J. Darcus near Battle Creek, Cypress Hills region, Saskatchewan, 26 June 1920. The nest contained two blackbird eggs and two cowbird eggs. Courtesy of the Royal British Columbia Museum.

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*). Spring arrival: 2 April 1920. Darcus described the discovery of a meadowlark's nest with five eggs (RAM Z83.70.361): "Early in the afternoon we broke camp hitched up the team and started for the highest range of the Cypress Hills. On the way up we found a Meadow Larks [sic] nest with five eggs." Noted on the data slip was the "nest well concealed in tuft of grass."

After the Cypress Hills

Darcus left the Cypress Hills region in the fall of 1920 and nothing in his field notes indicated that he ever returned. Following his sojourn in the region, he began a new chapter that was highlighted by experiences with many new birds and their nests observed on the west coast of British Columbia and eventually in the southern Okanagan Valley. Egg collecting continued, initially focused primarily on seabirds,^{22,23} but Darcus's conservation ethic grew in the ensuing decades and he became guardian of the Vaseaux Lake Bird Sanctuary²⁴, which was established in 1923 and remains today. His lectures on birds were well received by local naturalists²⁵, and his expertise on a wide array of nature was sought by others, among them, naturalist H.J. Parham, whose book, *A Nature Lover in British Columbia*¹, included reminiscences of Darcus's years in residence in the South Okanagan. Darcus's egg sets have made their way into museums across North America and in Europe, and many sets held in the Penticton Museum & Archives were listed in reports of the British Columbia Nest Record Scheme. All in all, Darcus's place among the pioneering field naturalists in British Columbia was assured; previously hidden contributions to ornithology in Saskatchewan add another facet to his legacy.

Acknowledgements

Patrick J. Darcus responded with great interest and supported numerous inquiries regarding his grandfather's field activities in the Cypress Hills region. He provided digital copies of field notes painstakingly transcribed from the original notes by his sister,

Jeannine Darcus, and scanned several photographs. Patrick eventually sent me Darcus's photographs and original notes that stretch through the early 1960s, which are now permanently held in the Penticton Museum & Archives, British Columbia.

Thanks to personnel of the following institutions who augmented online searches for egg sets or provided additional information or photographs of egg-sets: René Corado (Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, Caramillo, CA); Gavin Hanke and Lesley Kennes (Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria); Jocelyn Hudon (Royal Alberta Museum, Edmonton); Dennis Ooman (Penticton Museum & Archives, Penticton, BC); and Gregory Rand (Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa). Hudon scanned a letter from Allan Brooks to C.F. Holmes that is archived in the Royal Alberta Museum. I thank the anonymous reviewer for insightful comments on the manuscript. Noreen L. Sealy sketched the map.

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