

THE WHOOPING CRANEBy E. W. VanBlaricom,  
Tisdale.

"I've seen a Whooping Crane!"

"When?"

"Less than an hour ago!"

"Where?"

"Down on McKechnie's Lake!"

"Where's that?"

"Six or seven miles south of Valparaiso on section 3. I went down that way this morning to see about some combining. On the way home, there, on the other side of the lake, was Mr. Crane. I had no field glasses. I was all alone. I was afraid of scaring him so came in at once. Can I borrow your field glasses? I am going back."

This was on September 26th, 1950. Kathleen and I had been at our midday meal when, after a decided knock at the door, came barging in our good friend, "Sunny" Arnold, an amateur naturalist and a keen ornithologist - an ardent fan of the BLUE JAY, who lives on a farm where the Hanging Hide Creek crosses Provincial Highway No. 3.

Arnold shouldn't return alone. There should be at least two to verify the find. Three would be better. In a question of minutes it was decided. He'd return in his truck to the farm, gather together his waders and camera and we'd pick him up. For once in a long married life dishes were left unwiped, unwashed and even ungathered. Rain was beginning to fall, but that didn't matter. We'd have gravel most of the way and besides one doesn't see a Whooping Crane every day.

Westward on No. 3 we sped. Six miles and we were on Arnold's farm. He was ready. Into the car went waders and camera and then himself. We were off. Fifty miles per hour is the limit but the road would take it. One mile west of Valparaiso we turned south and before long we were approaching the fairy land of gold and scarlet that surrounds McKechnie's Lake. Over new breaking as far as we could go. We abandoned the car and started to creep towards the lake under Arnold's directions. Fortunately, the bulldozer had piled a screen of roots and brush at the junction of the ploughed land and standing trees. We felt fairly safe from observation.

Slowly we raised our heads. Arnold pointed. Across the lake a quarter of a mile away, directly south of us at the east end of a huge beaver dam was our Whooping Crane! Not alert and on guard as we had expected, but taking his noon siesta. Through the glass we saw the hugh white body. Yes, there on the wings were the black markings as plain as could be. The legs? They were not quite visible. Perhaps the water was too deep. Anyway the head and neck would be the key. But these were tucked under his wing. The field glasses passed from hand to hand. Yes, there before us was one of the long sought for Whooping Cranes!

The glasses continued to pass back and forth. Three minutes, four minutes, five minutes. It started to rain. We were getting wet. We were uncomfortable. Apparently he also was getting uncomfortable. He stirred. From underneath his wing came forth a long neck, a big head --- with a yellow fish-net underneath it!!

"I'll be darned! Only a White Pelican!"

Slowly we made our way back to the car. As he stepped in Arnold remarked, "Wasn't it fun while it lasted!"

RAMBLES AND THOUGHTS

By Elizabeth Cruickshank

It was mid-October and cold as we started out for a walk. The golf-course, we thought happily, would be deserted. How green that playground looked as we walked fearlessly across the fairway. But tomorrow it might be covered with snow!

This green mantle which covers the earth, how symbolic of all that is good in man's history! we muse as we hurry along. We view the grass through the soul's eyes of the great philosopher Tagore:

"In the world's audience hall the simple blade of grass sits on the same carpet with the sunbeams and the stars of midnight."

Our thoughts on grass, however, were interrupted as we rounded the bend of the creek. Before us was a flock of Franklin Gulls in flight formation. If the picturesque herring gulls down home can be poetically called "wild orchids of the sea," surely our Franklin Gulls may be called the wild orchids of the prairie. These feathered friends of the prairie farmer are such a joy to watch in flight -- so free, so graceful.

Ordinarily the sight of my dog, we Fogarty Fegan, who loves to chase anything that moves, would have made the birds rise and fly away at once. But these birds were of a different mind -- they remained as they were, three dozen or more airmen obeying a silent command.

Fogey barked at them; they moved a few feet in unison without rising. Cautiously he went nearer -- they moved back as they were.

Feeling like intruders we went on our way. An hour or more later they were in the same position. Homeward bound as we turned on the crest of the little hill to take a last look at the sunset we saw them rise as one and fly into the blazing glory. We felt uplifted as we, in spirit, soared aloft to share with them a glimpse of heaven beyond.

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We had hoped to say farewell again this year to the robins in the same trysting place as last year -- the dry creek bed. These feathery trusting "Robins wearing the feathery fire; whistling their whims on the low fence wire" always pull at our heartstrings. When winter comes, of all the birds, we miss them most. We did not seem them go. But we were partially recompensed.

One bit of the creek still retained water that had attracted some long-legged birds. In the spring we had watched two pairs of Willets house-keeping farther east on the creek shore. We thought the families had had a reunion before leaving here. Coming close, however, we saw that their bills were longer than willits; and upturned.

Pedersen's Field Guide suggested Hudsonian Godwits. As they flew, the white rump and dark under-wing were confirmation. We checked at the museum to make sure. For a week we saw the group, varying in number from one to sixteen. On November 1, the last time we saw them, there were twelve.

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ADVENTURE WITH A CEDAR WAXWING

By Doug Gilroy

It was getting on in July and most birds had completed their nesting duties, but here I was, searching through a green grove of young maples in the hopes of finding new material to photograph with my color camera.

Near the outside edge of the grove and perching on the end of a dead limb was a Cedar Waxwing. "That fellow," thinks I, "is on guard duty; there must be a nest near by." I went on very cautiously peering here and there through the heavy foliage. Suddenly, about three feet away, I spied a little black eye peering back at me from behind a black mask. It was the female Cedar Waxwing sitting on her nest. As she hopped off I was thrilled to see five spotted greyish eggs.

This nest was not more than four feet from the ground and in a lovely setting. What a perfect set-up for pictures. My heart was singing with delight; already I had visions of a perfect shot with the adult bird sitting on the edge of the nest and the five eggs below her.

A few minutes later, and I had a dummy camera placed at a certain angle a scant fifteen inches from the nest. The idea, of course, was that the waxwings would soon find it was a harmless object and go on with their nesting duties as if there was nothing there at all. Later it would be replaced with a real camera and pictures would be made by setting it off by means of remote control.

Two hours later I dropped back again to see how things were going. The area had a deserted feeling; no waxwings could be seen at all. I put my hand in the nest and my heart sank to find the eggs stone cold. Down came the false camera and I departed, hoping against hope, they would return again.

The next morning I visited the spot again; this time I felt even more horrible for the eggs were still cold and clammy. But as I left I felt sure I had a glimpse of one of the parent birds. During the afternoon I stole back and to my delight what did I see but the guard sitting on the twig again. I peered through the branches and there was the female once more on her eggs. Hurrah! The world was bright again. I had not broken up a happy home and maybe I would still get some pictures; only this time I would wait until the young were hatched before setting up any dummy cameras. Then I knew it would be safe, for it takes a mighty lot to make a bird desert once the young have hatched.

A few days passed, then one morning as I dropped by I saw a very lovely sight -- both parents were sitting very close together at the edge of the nest. They were watching the contents of the nest and I'm sure their eyes were shining with happiness, for when I looked into the nest, two young were hatched and another was just breaking his shell.

The next day the dummy camera went up again and all went well this time; in fact, it got so that she would feed her young with my standing less than two feet from the nest and I could now photograph her with no trouble at all. How beautiful she looked at such close range and how interesting it was to watch the method of feeding! She would alight on the edge of the nest with apparently nothing in her bill. Five gaping mouths would greet her; then giving a little gulping motion, an insect would suddenly appear in her bill - this was fed to one youngster; another little gulping motion and a berry appeared - this was fed to the next young one and so it went till all were fed with a various assortment of groceries. This Waxwing experience was one of the nicest I had all summer, and one I shall always remember. The pictures obtained were shown at the annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, October 27.

BIRD BATHS

By L. T. McKim

Mr. Yanchinski's mode of constructing a bird bath is a good one. Here is mine. Place a ring of stones on the ground and hollow the earth out a little. Put in some sand and then shape the pool with cement. For cracks in pools there is a plastic cement mixture which sells for thirty-five cents. I fixed four long cracks in my duck pond in about ten minutes.

On September 16th my wife and I saw the birds listed below around our bird bath and lily pool. The water trickles down over stones into the bath and then into the pool. Birds are attracted by falling water. All but two of the species noted were seen while we ate lunch.

Northern Water Thrush, Red Start, Yellow-throated Warbler, Junco, Song Sparrow, House Sparrow, Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, Hummingbird, Wren, White-throated Sparrow, Warbling Verio, Hairy Woodpecker, Myrtle Warbler, Robin, Solitary Verio, Magnolia Warbler, and another unidentified warbler.

(Surely it must be a record to have so many bird visitors call during one brief lunch period. With this as a goal, dozens of our members will be constructing bird baths first thing next spring, and, wherever possible, will be supplying running water. ED.)

HELP THE BIRDS THROUGH THE WINTER

Want to do the game birds of your area a good turn? Then build them a feeding station and pass out a few free meals, now that the tough part of winter is here.

Your winter feeding station need not be elaborate, but it must meet certain requirements. First, it should be located where birds can come and go safely. The edge of a swale or brushy marsh, a protected corner of a wood lot, and a weed-grown fence row near heavy cover are ideal spots. It shouldn't be placed where birds have to cross open fields to reach it.

A lean-to type of shelter of old boards, brush, evergreen branches, or cornstalks makes a good station. So does a corn shock set up at the edge of thick cover and torn open, with feed scattered inside. Or put grain under a brush heap, a low-spreading juniper clump, or other natural shelter. Be sure your shelter is open so that predators can't trap the birds inside.

Pheasants like ears of corn nailed to boards and placed just above the snow. Wheat screenings and cracked corn are popular fare with quail. Keep the station supplied regularly, so the birds will get used to it.

Game men have learned that a well-fed bird can withstand extremely low temperatures. It is when hunger whittles down his resistance that cold finishes the job.

Give the birds a little of your time and consideration now.

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I noticed with interest, in the last issue, some observations from Mr. Thos. M. Beveridge, R. R. 1, Regina. He was stationed at Red Deer Army Camp for a time during the war, and attended some of the meetings of the Alberta Natural History Society here. I was glad to have word of him again.

-- E.R. Wells, Red Deer, Alta.

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