



SPRING 2017 VOLUME 75.1

BLUE JAY





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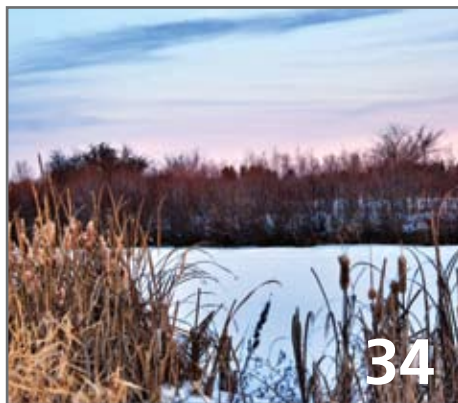
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Becky Quist, Nature Saskatchewan Office Coordinator, shares the beauty of A.E. Wilson Park in Regina in this issue's edition of Human Nature.



Dr. Branimir Gjetvaj



Photo credit: Nick Saunders

ON THE FRONT COVER

A Northern Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*) photographed near the kilometre 36 marker on Highway 919 on January 28, 2017. Saskatchewan's second recorded Northern Pygmy-Owl was observed by Stan and Jan Shadick at this location on December 27, 2016, and a group of nine birders returned to the area on January 28, 2017 to relocate the owl. Turn to page 22 to read Stan and Jan's story of their successful quest for this bird.



Photo credit: Brenda Rutz

ON THE BACK COVER

Brenda Rutz took this photo of a Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*) while camping at Beatty Lake, north of Green Lake, Saskatchewan in early June. "This was near a small slough close to the lake . . . there was a small family of Gray Jay and I was lucky to get this shot without too many branches in the way," she says.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dr. Branimir Gjetvaj
President, Nature Saskatchewan

It appears we live in an increasingly polarized society, where there is little understanding of opposing views and little interest in accepting other perspectives. People tend to form groups exhibiting political views and values similar to their own, which affects our beliefs, behaviours and decision making. Scientists call this type of interaction "homophily" or "love of the same." Although homophily makes communication easier and improves relationships, it can cause our social groups to become segregated and tightly knit. The danger is, if we get stuck within our own familiar group, this will impact our exposure to diverse viewpoints, gathering of information and even our learning processes.

People are turning away from media such as newspapers and television and turning towards social media to get news and information. In a 2015 paper published in the journal *Science*, Bakshy and co-workers examined the type of news that millions of Facebook users share, what information these users were presented with, and what they were ultimately reading¹. The authors found that Facebook "friends" were less likely to share and read information from sources that aren't aligned with their own viewpoints. Why is this important? Isolation in like-minded social networks can inhibit communication and exchange of knowledge between various groups.

Social network structures can also affect human behaviour, the primary force driving environmental change. In a 2016 study of large-scale tuna fisheries in Hawaii, scientists looked at how social networks impact shark bycatch, which occurs when sharks

are caught unintentionally in a fishery that is designed to catch other fish². This is not only costly and dangerous to fishermen, but represents a global environmental problem. They found that fishermen primarily shared information within their own social group. The information sharing was strongly correlated with the level of shark bycatch; fishermen that exchanged information with groups that have a lower shark bycatch also exhibited a lower level of bycatch. The study showed that biases toward within-group communication could deter the dispersal of sustainable behavior that can have a direct impact on ecosystem health.

Have you noticed that Nature Saskatchewan meets always attract the same group of people? We gather within our own narrow social network, enjoy spending time in nature, and "preach to the converted." Have we tried to expand our network with people who might not necessary think or behave the same way we do? The upcoming Spring Meet at Candle Lake in early June of 2017 is a perfect opportunity to expand our little social network. We are planning a program with diverse outdoor activities, suitable to families with children and people who love spending time in the outdoors, but have not been exposed to the focused nature viewing aspect. I challenge you to invite a friend, a neighbour, or a co-worker and his / her family to join us for the Spring Meet. Let's paint our existing social network with a little bit more colour.

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January 1 for the Spring issue, April 1 for the Summer issue, July 1 for the Fall issue, and October 1 for the Winter issue. For detailed information, please see the "Guidelines for Authors" under the Publications section of the Nature Saskatchewan website.

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Rendek Elm Forest. Photo credit: Jonah Alain

CELEBRATING NATURE SASKATCHEWAN'S VOLUNTEER STEWARDS

Name of Sanctuary: Rendek Elm Forest Nature Saskatchewan Salutes Mo Alain

Rob Wilson
Director, Nature Saskatchewan

How did you initially become involved as land steward on behalf of Nature Saskatchewan?

In 1979, Don Hooper — a local naturalist — organized the purchase of the land from Alex Rendek. Twelve



Mo helping with Northern Saw-whet Owl banding at Marten Stoffel's, Nature Saskatchewan Fall Meet. Photo credit: Gloria Stang

years later, other local naturalists joined to form the Hudson Bay Natural History Society. I was part of that group. In 1991, the Rendek Elm Forest Sanctuary opened and I, along with Don Hooper, became a steward for Nature Saskatchewan. Our group did volunteer work. This work was particularly focused on construction of trails among the magnificent elm trees and spectacular Ostrich Ferns. I continue as the steward of this sanctuary to this day.

Why do you continue your involvement?

It is a beautiful spot. Shortly after establishment of the sanctuary we discovered the first evidence of the presence of Dutch Elm Disease. By 1992, the large elms of the forest had been destroyed. Nature is now taking a new course on the land as a succession of vegetation exploits the new environment. I am curiously watching nature take its course. This area also has a history. Prior to

ownership by Alex Rendek, it was known as Pope's Crossing (named after a local homesteader) because of a spot along the Red Deer River that is suitable for fording. My parents used that crossing. This place therefore also has historical significance to me.


Has this been a solitary undertaking?

I have already mentioned others who were interested and who helped. Today the monitoring and the volunteer labour is done by my wife, Gloria, and me.

Is there something about the land that you wish to draw to the attention of Nature Saskatchewan members?

Those interested in visiting the sanctuary are advised that currently it is nothing like it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The elms are present only as suckers. The Ostrich Ferns, although coming back, are nothing like they were. Eighty-seven species of plants, some rare, have in the past been identified. Today we do not know how many species survive. Once the diseased elms fell, the shade was removed allowing for early succession by thistles. The fallen trunks have created a jungle of deadfall rendering access to the area very difficult. In addition, due to current wet conditions, the access road is nearly impassable.

Nature Saskatchewan is responsible for seven parcels of land that have been designated as sanctuaries. Nature Saskatchewan is working to improve its policies and processes with regard to these land holdings. A voluntary steward is found for each parcel. The steward "keeps eyes and ears open" and periodically reports to Nature Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mo Alain. You are truly a "voice for nature." 



Old Man on His Back, Saskatchewan. Photo credit: Branimir Gjetvaj

SAVING THE WORLD'S MOST ENDANGERED ECOSYSTEM STARTS AT HOME

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Ask any Canadian kid to name the world's most endangered ecosystem. Chances are you'll hear one of the following answers: 1) rainforests, 2) coral reefs, 3) leave me alone*.

Ignoring the last answer, there's a good reason why kids, and most other people, think that these are the most endangered ecosystems — the planet's most critical and urgent habitats for conservation. Tropical rainforests and coral reefs are incredibly important for protecting the planet's biodiversity. They are a cornucopia of millions of species and display the incredible and beautiful forces of life that create diversity.

There is no question that they are threatened. We are continuing to lose tropical rainforest, and coral reefs are at increasing risk from pollution, rising water temperatures and ocean acidification (the latter two a consequence of climate change).

Tropical rainforests and coral reefs are also the focus of international campaigns to protect biodiversity, to protect "hotspots" of species diversity. I was brought up in an era when every hamburger had a topping of guilt that it was clearing Brazil's rainforests. Many of the world's biodiversity hotspots are within tropical rainforests and coral reefs, and they are the focus of education and awareness campaigns that are on Canadian news and in Canadian classrooms.

Now, what if I told you the world's most endangered ecosystem isn't

tropical rainforests or coral reefs. It's a different habitat. And one that is much closer to home than you might think.

Conservation scientists spend a lot of time generating and gazing at maps and data. Much of this information is used to help prioritize important places for conservation. Places where conservation could protect and prevent the endangerment of species and habitats.

Endangerment comes down to risk. The risk of losing a species, habitat or ecosystem for future generations. When we look at the risk factors for endangerment: past loss, current amount of conservation, potential for future loss — the winner (actually the loser) are temperate grasslands, including the good old Great Plains of Oh Canada that stretch across southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and the grasslands of B.C.'s

interior. The world's most endangered ecosystem is right here at home.

Globally, temperate grasslands cover about eight per cent of the Earth's land surface.¹ They generally exist in the interior of continents where there is not enough rain and snow fall to support forests. There are many reasons why temperate grasslands are endangered. They are the original breadbasket of the world. Over 50 per cent have been converted to crops and other land uses.¹ Much of the remaining are intensively grazed, replacing what were some of the planet's greatest concentrations of wild grazing animals with cattle, goats and sheep. Around the world, temperate grasslands are faced with continuing habitat loss, fragmentation and desertification, impacting both biodiversity and local people that rely on healthy grasslands for their livelihood.

The loss and continued threats

to temperate grasslands has been recognized for almost a decade, and they have been identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as the world's most endangered ecosystem.² An analysis of global habitat loss and conservation found that temperate grasslands had the highest Conservation Risk Index compared to all other terrestrial ecosystems.³ This high risk is a result of large scale conversion of and very few protected areas. A global analysis in 2016 found that the greatest impacts and land use pressures to ecosystems are found in temperate grasslands.⁴

Canada's temperate grasslands mirror the fate and state of this ecosystem around the world. Over 70 per cent of Canada's prairie grasslands have been converted.⁵ In some regions, including Manitoba's tallgrass prairie region, the losses have been over 99 per cent, prompting the government of Manitoba to be

the first jurisdiction in Canada to list tallgrass prairie as an ecosystem at risk.^{5,6} A 2010 report on the status and trends of Canada's major habitat types found that our grasslands are the only major ecosystem type that is impaired, and continuing to decline.⁵ A recent study found this continued decline is significant. Between 2009 and 2015, the annual rate of grassland conversion in North America's Great Plains was two per cent, with some of the highest conversion rates in Canada.⁷

Protection of all ecosystems, from tropical forests to coral reefs to arctic tundra, is important. What makes Canada's temperate grasslands different is the urgency of their conservation need. Yes, we need to direct resources to places like the Amazon rainforest, but when we directly compare the loss and conversion of rainforest to temperate grasslands, your feeling of conservation urgency may shift

northward. While we have lost 20 per cent of the Amazon rainforest, over 70 per cent of Canada's prairies are gone. While the continued conversion of the Amazon rainforest is continuing, the continued conversion of Canada's prairies is happening faster.⁷ We are witnessing the loss of a core Canadian landscape in this generation.

The endangerment of grassland habitat in Canada has cascaded into the endangerment of many grassland species. Over 60 Canadian species at risk depend on this habitat, including species that symbolize our grasslands such as Plains Bison (*Bos bison bison*), Swift Fox (*Vulpes velox*) and Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus urophasianus*). The 2016 report on the State of North America's Birds concluded that many grassland birds are rapidly declining, and some species have lost over 70 per cent of their population in the last 40 years.⁸ The songs of birds such as Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*), Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) and Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) are slowly dimming on our prairies.

The loss of Canada's grasslands is a loss for Canadians. In addition to wide open prairies, our grasslands also contain wetlands, lakes, rivers and valleys. Canada's grasslands support fishes, waterfowl and breathtaking avian migration spectacles as millions of birds stop to rest and feed on their way to the boreal and arctic. In an ecosystem that is created by a lack of water, grasslands are critical for allowing water to infiltrate into the ground, providing base flow to rivers and streams, and holding water during floods. Grasslands are also important for carbon storage, with intact native prairies proving to be particularly effective at sequestration and long-term storage in their deep and extensive root networks.

Grasslands can also showcase how people and nature can co-exist. Many of Canada's grasslands have a long history of sustainable cattle grazing. This grazing has supported generations of prairie ranchers, can help to maintain grassland health and benefits many species of prairie wildlife.

The loss of Canada's prairies is also a loss for the world. One of the last places on Earth to protect grasslands at a meaningful scale are the grasslands of North America's Great Plains, and despite a loss of 70 per cent, Canada has some of the largest and best sites remaining. A global assessment of critical places for the conservation of temperate grasslands finds a place on the map here at home, highlighting the importance of our conservation efforts in Canada.²

There is hope in the conservation of our grasslands. We have already proven that cooperation and conservation can save prairie species. From early efforts to protect the last wild Plains Bison that roamed the prairies in the late 1800s, to the establishment of "regeneration" national parks[†] to save Pronghorn (*Antilocapra Americana*), to the return of the Swift Fox in 1983, Canadians have shown a passion and ability to conserve and restore our grassland heritage. The Nature Conservancy of Canada has protected over 80,000 ha of grasslands, including large intact areas such as Old Man on His Back in southern Saskatchewan, and there is a key and immediate opportunity to conserve large areas of prairie and maintain local ranching economies by protecting Community Pastures^{††} in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Witnessing the rapid loss of habitats and species at a global scale can bring on feelings of both urgency

[†]Canada established four national parks in Saskatchewan and Alberta to recover populations of Pronghorn antelope and Plains Bison. With the recovery of these populations, these parks were delisted on July 17, 1947.

^{††}In Saskatchewan alone there are almost 700,000 ha of community pastures.

and helplessness. It can also be easy to think of it as someone else's issue and that direct responsibility lies elsewhere. Here in Canada we have opportunities to protect and restore habitats that are important for Canadians, and important for the world. We have an opportunity to protect and restore our grasslands.

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PAINTED REDSTART AT PINAWA, MB: FIRST RECORD FOR THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES



FIGURE 1: The first day: Painted Redstart pauses briefly on a garden fence in Pinawa, MB, October 27, 2016. Photo credit: Jack Frederick

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On the morning of October 27, 2016, Pinawa residents Jack and Val Frederick twice observed a beautiful, unfamiliar warbler in their garden. They photographed and identified it as a Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*) — an outstanding rarity anywhere in Canada or indeed the northern U.S.A. They contacted Anita Drabek, who relayed the news to me and a few other birders; altogether six of us saw the bird that day, and many more photographs were taken (Fig. 1).

News of the bird was posted that evening to Manitobabirds, a provincial online discussion group, after some discussion of the large number of visitors it was likely to attract. Since it was evidently moving around the neighbourhood, general locality information was provided, rather than a specific address, to avoid undue pressure on individual Pinawa residents. The bird aroused much interest, attracting an estimated 70 to 100 birders and photographers from as far afield

as Brandon and Minnedosa during the 12 days of its recorded stay. This number is small in comparison to a similar rarity in more populous regions, but places it near the top of single-bird events in Manitoba. Most visitors were successful in their quest, and many residents willingly opened their backyards to help strangers view the bird. The final sightings were on November 7; the bird was not located by intensive searching on November 8, nor on any subsequent visits.

Identification

The Painted Redstart is a fairly large, slightly long-tailed warbler; the Pinawa bird was in unmistakable adult plumage (sexes are similar). Extensive white areas in the wings and tail contrasted with the black plumage, especially in flight. The highlight was a large, rich red patch on the lower breast and belly; a white fleck below each eye was also noted (Figs. 1 to 3). Molt from juvenile to Basic I plumage is typically complete by September, so it is possible that this Painted Redstart was a hatching-year bird.¹ Though it was mostly silent, its characteristic

siskin-like call was heard on several occasions, sometimes in extended bouts of repeated calling, both while perched and in flight.

Normal range and habitat

The Painted Redstart's breeding range extends from parts of southern Arizona and southern New Mexico through Mexico to northern Nicaragua. Breeding is rare, local, and apparently irregular in southern parts of California, west Texas, and possibly Nevada and Utah (mostly in and near Zion National Park).¹⁻⁴ Northern populations are mostly migratory, but small numbers overwinter in southern Arizona.¹ Away from the known breeding localities, 100+ records for California occurred primarily in fall and winter months in the southern third of the state.⁵

Breeding and wintering habitats are mostly oak, oak-pine, and oak-juniper woodlands, often in riparian settings, and tending to favour lower elevations in winter.¹

Vagrancy pattern

Individuals have previously been found on rare occasions in fall as far north as British Columbia, Montana, Minnesota, Michigan, southern Ontario, Ohio, New York, and Massachusetts, and in spring in Wisconsin.^{1,6} As expected, occurrence is more frequent in states adjoining the breeding range, especially southern California but including Kansas and Colorado, and there is also a small cluster of records in the Gulf States and Georgia but excluding Florida.^{1,6,7} Curiously, there is a broad contiguous band of states with no records across the entire continent from Oregon and

Washington through the Mississippi Valley to the Carolinas and several other Atlantic states.⁶

The first Canadian record of a Painted Redstart occurred at the community of Balsam, north of Pickering, Ontario in 1971; the bird was first observed on November 4, captured on November 15, and survived in captivity until at least January 1972.^{8,9} In their account of this record, Speirs and Pegg cited previous northern records at Marblehead Neck, Massachusetts on October 18-19, 1947; Madison, Wisconsin on April 22, 1965; and near Cleveland, Ohio on November 15-22, 1970.⁸ The second Canadian record was a multiple-observer sighting, supported by detailed descriptions, at West Vancouver, British Columbia on November 4, 1973.¹⁰ The Pinawa bird appears to constitute Canada's third record, after a 43-year gap, and is the first to be recorded in the Prairie Provinces.

New York State's first Painted Redstart was discovered at a feeder at Dansville, Livingston County on December 14, 1979 and survived there for about six weeks; its depredated remains were discovered on January 26, 1980.¹¹ The first state record for Michigan, at Gladstone Bluff, Delta County on November 12-13, 1983 was confirmed by photographs.¹² Coincident with the Pinawa bird, a Painted Redstart was photographed near Marathon, Wisconsin on November 1, 2016, furnishing (if ratified) a second state record.¹³ In Minnesota, a single-observer sighting at Mille Lacs Lake on September 30, 1992 was accepted by the state records committee on the strength of a detailed sketch and description.^{14,15} A second Minnesota sighting on May 25, 2007 was not accepted because of inadequate details.¹⁶ Montana's first Painted Redstart



FIGURE 2: The last day: Painted Redstart aglow in the sunshine in Pinawa, MB, November 7, 2016. Photo credit: Josiah Van Egmond

was seen at Clinton on November 7-13, 1987 and documented with photographs.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ A report from Nevada, Missouri on October 19, 1986 appears not to have been accepted, because the species is absent from the current state checklist.^{20,21}

Seven of the 10 accepted northerly records summarized above occurred between October 18 and November 22. The Pinawa, Manitoba record (October 27 to November 7, 2016) fits this pattern exactly, and is consistent with misoriented migration followed by establishment of a feeding area (see below). Given this known pattern of long-distance vagrancy, the provenance of the Pinawa bird is not in doubt, *i.e.*, there is no evidence of, nor any need to invoke, prior captivity or human-assisted migration.

Observations on feeding territory and foraging in Pinawa

During its 12-day recorded stay, this vagrant Painted Redstart was observed repeatedly within a small area of Pinawa, centred on two residential streets (Landsdowne Avenue and Stanley Avenue),

associated gardens, and a narrow, intervening buffer strip of natural woodland. The estimated minimum size of this feeding area (polygon formed by outlying sightings) is 5 ha.

One attraction seemed to be delayed leaf fall of several cultivated trees (*e.g.*, willow, Siberian elm, and silver maple) and vines (*e.g.*, bittersweet), whereas leaf loss was essentially complete in native deciduous trees and shrubs. The trees with persisting foliage appeared to provide the best available foraging for lingering invertebrate prey during the first week. The bird was also noted foraging at all levels from ground to canopy in bare trees and shrubby tangles, and it also perched frequently on roofs and eavestroughs. Its short-term prospects were greatly enhanced by unseasonably mild weather, with daytime temperatures often well into the teens and occasionally the low 20s Celsius. Conditions were generally cloudy for the first week and sunny thereafter, with minimal overnight frost. On November 4, Michael Loyd and others observed the Painted Redstart catch two housefly-sized insects during a sunny spell. On November 6, Christian

Artuso saw it foraging, nuthatch-like, in bark crevices on a leafless tree (Fig. 3). Except for the bird's apparent preference for lingering foliage while available, these observations are in broad agreement with the statement by Barber *et al.* that Painted Redstarts forage from ground level to tree tops, predominantly on small and large twigs, trunks of trees, and to a lesser extent on leaves.¹

The bird's movements were less "butterfly-like" than those of the American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*), which is not a close relative. Nevertheless, several observers noted both wing-drooping and tail-fanning movements, displaying the conspicuous white markings, as it foraged. The context of these movements (*e.g.*, response to potential competitors or predators; prey flushing) was not determined.

Although many birds of other species were attracted to feeders and natural foods within its territory, the Painted Redstart rarely mixed with them and apparently did not visit feeders. It was noted only in brief association with Black-capped Chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*) and once with a late-migrating Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata*). It shared treetop feeding



FIGURE 3: Painted Redstart foraging in bark crevices on a leafless tree in Pinawa, MB, November 6, 2016. Photo credit: Christian Artuso

areas with both Red-breasted Nuthatches (*Sitta canadensis*) and White-breasted Nuthatches (*S. carolinensis*) without obvious interaction. Solitary behaviour seems to be the norm for vagrant Painted Redstarts, though the West Vancouver individual associated with chickadees and other small birds.¹⁰

The Painted Redstart appeared lively and flew strongly throughout its stay in Pinawa. One can only speculate on the reasons for its disappearance during an unbroken mild spell; possibilities include predation or accident (such as a window strike), ongoing migration or wandering, or demise through declining physical condition as the insect supply dwindled.

Acknowledgements

I thank Jack and Val Frederick for their timely reporting of this exceptional rarity, and the many residents and visiting birders who made it a positive occasion for both the local and birding communities. I also acknowledge Christian Artuso, Anita Drabyk, and Rudolf Koes for helpful comments on draft manuscripts. Christian Artuso, Jack Frederick, and Josiah Van Egmond kindly allowed me to include their photographs with this article, and Michael Loyd shared observations and photographs.

NOTE: All web pages cited below were accessed and verified on December 20, 2016.

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OBSERVATIONS ON EARLY-SEASON COURTSHIP AND ABORTED NEST-BUILDING IN CEDAR WAXWINGS



Figure 1. Chironomids (midges) swarming along the south side of the dune-ridge forest, Delta Marsh, Manitoba, mid-June 1986. Delta Marsh is in the foreground.

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A common sight over the course of the breeding season of passerine birds at Delta Marsh, Manitoba, is the vast numbers of adult midges (Insecta: Chironomidae) that emerge from the benthos of wetlands in this area in spring and summer. The massive swarms, sometimes the sum of overlapping emergences, are concentrated above and along the dune-ridge forest that separates Lake Manitoba and Delta Marsh (50°11'N, 98°19'W).¹ The largest swarms are visible to the human eye for distances of up to one kilometre or more (Fig. 1) and are accompanied by an audible hum.² The swarms involve huge numbers of chironomids (hereafter, midges), many of which alight on the vegetation (Fig. 2), sometimes weighing it down. Lacking mouth parts, these insects do not eat, only mate, then die a

few days later.^{2,3} Before this happens, however, huge numbers are taken as food by the dozen or so species of songbirds that nest in this riparian forest, for their own nourishment and as food for their young.⁴⁻⁹ Some midges are captured in the air, but most are gleaned from the surface of the foliage.⁹

The first large-scale emergences of midges each spring generally occur during the last days of May and/or first days of June (Fig. 3), around the time when most species in the ridge forest begin to lay eggs.^{4,6-9} One exception is the Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). At Delta Marsh, Cedar Waxwings nest in all or most years but the number of nests varies and the first eggs are not usually laid until late June through July; nestlings in a few nests are still being provisioned after the middle of August.^{10,11}

In some years, I observed the sudden appearance of Cedar Waxwings during the last few days of May, usually coinciding with particularly massive emergences

of midges. Waxwings fed on the midges, gleaning most from the foliage, but some individuals sallied out from perches to capture them on the wing. I also observed putative males feeding midges one by one to females, who ingested them. These actions differed from one aspect of typical courtship behaviour recorded for this species, in which males and females pass food items back and forth until in many cases females ingest them.¹²

The most interesting observations were of female waxwings that started to build nests (males also contribute to the construction of nests¹³) only to stop construction a few days later after the midges had died. The unfinished nests were abandoned and the waxwings left the area. In some years the same or different waxwings returned and initiated clutches in late June and July.

I summarize anecdotal observations of the behaviour of Cedar Waxwings that appeared in the ridge forest during the

emergence of midges throughout the last days of May and first days of June, and compare them with dates of typical nesting later in the season.

Methods

The observations of Cedar Waxwings presented here were made during studies of the reproductive and foraging ecology and diets of songbirds in the dune-ridge forest (mid-May to mid-August, 1974-1986) and over the first several years of a study of the interactions between the brood-parasitic Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) and hosts (mid-May through July or mid-August, 1987-1996).

An important part of the work at the outset was regular sweep-net sampling of the foliage conducted by students to quantify the availability of invertebrate prey over the course of the songbirds' breeding seasons.^{4,6-9} This sampling revealed the emergence of adult midges in late May and the first days of June in most years, and serves as a backdrop for the observations presented below. A sample of sweep-net results is given in Figure 3, based on work conducted by G.C. Pohajdak in the ridge forest in 1982-1984.⁹ Those results reveal a preponderance of midges among the invertebrate fauna in late May and early June in 1982 and 1984, and in early June, 1983⁹ (Fig. 3).

Clutch-initiation dates of unmarked Cedar Waxwings were obtained opportunistically in the ridge forest at four nests (1981 [n = 1], 1986 [2], 1996 [1]), whereas 29 dates were recorded at nests inspected through incubation and nestling stages during a study of host nest defense (1989 and 1990)¹⁴, and at six nests inspected through clutch completion in a study of time of day of egg laying (1992).¹⁵ Clutch-initiation dates of nests



Figure 2. (Above) swarming midges; (below) adult midges alighted on foliage.

whose clutches were complete when discovered were calculated by back-dating 17 days from the determined date of hatching — 5 days for laying (1 egg/day) plus the 12-day mean incubation period.¹² For nests with nestlings, clutch-initiation dates were calculated by back-dating 37 days from the approximate date of nest departure, based on a 15-day average nestling period plus the 22 days of the egg stage given above. The 39 clutch-initiation dates plus dates of five aborted nests (noted in the observations summarized below) are plotted in weekly periods in Figure 4. These dates reveal a separation of about three weeks between aborted and most active nests, *i.e.*, nests that received at least one egg.

Observations

1977 – This was the first year in which I recorded an influx of Cedar Waxwings into the ridge

forest at the end of May. Waxwings were observed gleaning midges from the foliage by May 28, but courtship feeding was not observed. Nevertheless, construction of two nests was under way on May 31, about 15 m apart in Manitoba Maples (*Acer negundo*). The outer shells appeared nearly complete, although I could see through parts of them. Construction on these nests had not progressed when I viewed them from a distance two days later, to minimize disturbance, but they had been abandoned.

1981 – I did not detect an influx of Cedar Waxwings in the ridge forest this year, but an incomplete nest discovered on June 13 had been abandoned. Laying was recorded in the only active nest inspected in 1981, on June 16, one of the two earliest clutch-initiation dates recorded among all nests (Fig. 4). Midges had been abundant in the ridge forest since the middle of May.⁷

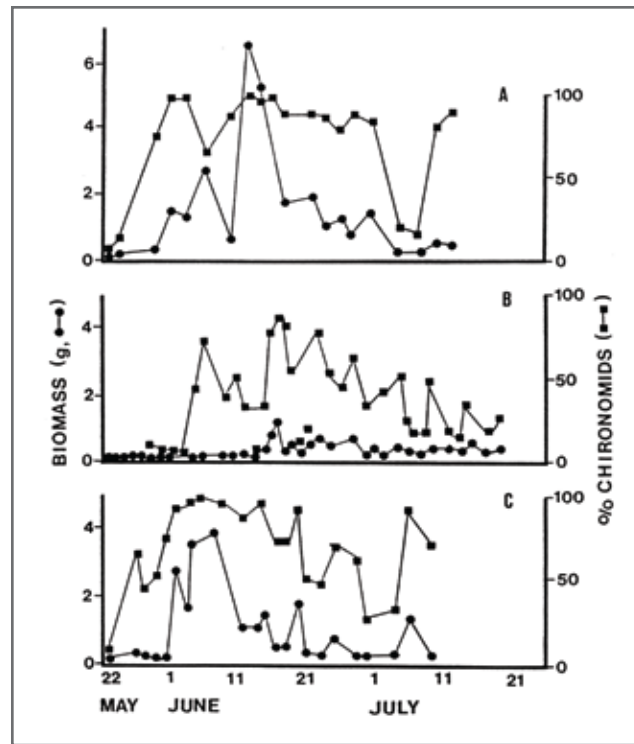


Figure 3. The total biomass (dry weight, g) of invertebrates sampled by sweep-netting in the dune-ridge forest, Delta Marsh, Manitoba, and the proportion of the biomass that was due to adult midges (A, 1982; B, 1983; C, 1984). Data are from figure 6 (page 29), of Pohajdak.⁹

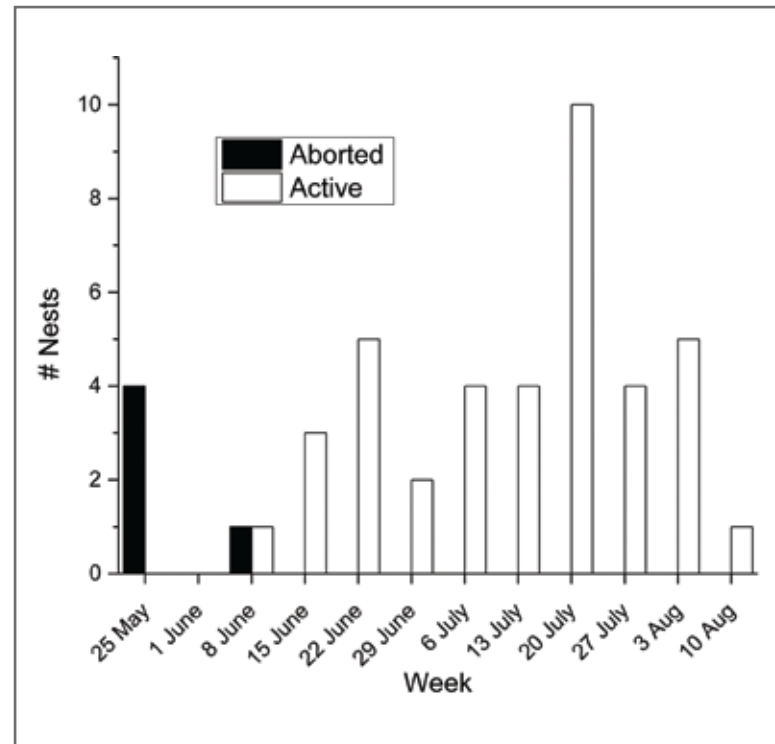


Figure 4. Dates of nests aborted during the early building stage (solid bars) and clutch-initiation dates of Cedar Waxwings (open bars), dune-ridge forest, Delta Marsh, Manitoba. Aborted nests were recorded in 1977 (2 nests), 1981 (1) and 1985 (2); clutch-initiation dates were recorded in 1981 (1 nest), 1986 (2), 1989 (18), 1990 (8), 1991 (4), 1992 (5), and 1996 (1).

1982 – An influx of flocks of Cedar Waxwings in the ridge forest (one flock was of ~50 individuals) occurred as midges were beginning to emerge on May 30, but the waxwings were gone by June 5 before the midges had dropped out of the sample (Fig. 3). I observed waxwings taking midges but not building nests, at least on the portion of the ridge forest I regularly traversed that spring.

1983 – Cedar Waxwings were present during an emergence of midges June 6 to 8 but neither courtship feeding nor nest construction was observed before the birds disappeared.

1985 – On May 26, during overlapping emergences of midges, I observed a putative male Cedar Waxwing feeding a midge to another waxwing, before the second individual, apparently a female, carried a piece of material to a nest-start on a branch of a Manitoba

Maple. The next day the waxwings were gone and the nest was abandoned, despite the continuing emergence of midges. A repeat of this scenario, although likely involving different birds, occurred on May 31, during the same emergence of midges. A Cedar Waxwing picked up material in a Peach-leaved Willow (*Salix amygdaloides*) and carried it to a nest-start in a nearby maple. Joined by another waxwing, the original bird then flew down the ridge forest and out of my sight. The waxwings were not observed again and this nest, which also was never finished, was abandoned. Eleven active nests were recorded in my field notes in July but the contents were not inspected.

1991 – Emerging adult midges were conspicuous from May 24 to 30, but I did not record Cedar Waxwings in the portion of the ridge forest I regularly traversed until clutches at four nests were initiated between July 20 and 24.

Discussion

The appearance of Cedar Waxwings in the dune-ridge forest in late May is consistent with spring-arrival dates recorded elsewhere in Manitoba^{16,17}, including Criddle's records from the southwestern portion of the province, compiled a century ago.¹⁸ Egg dates derived from the Prairie Nest Records Scheme summarized in *The Birds of Manitoba* spanned the period June 11 to August 19,¹⁷ compare similarly to the span of clutch-initiation dates of June 11 to August 6 in the dune-ridge forest (Fig. 4), or August 23, when days of egg laying and incubation are included.

What is apparently unappreciated, however, is the initiation of nest construction by Cedar Waxwings around the time of spring arrival, apparently in response to a pulse of abundant but ephemeral prey, followed by the abandonment of unfinished nests. Cedar Waxwings

apparently move widely and possibly sample the food supply before settling down to nest — behaviour that reflects the species' lower tendency to return to the same breeding sites in subsequent years.¹² Early nests take five to six days for construction¹², therefore, construction of nests that received eggs by June 11 would have been initiated by June 5 or 6, and confirm that some of the earliest nests of the season do become active. Their infrequency, however, dictates caution when confirming their status.

Cedar Waxwing nests have been reported in May, but in these cases it was not determined whether eggs were laid, *i.e.*, the nests had become active. For example, in *The Birds of Manitoba*, an early nest was noted under construction on May 27 (year not given), but it was apparently not determined whether it received eggs or had been abandoned before completion.¹⁷ In *Birds of the Saskatoon Area*, an “[a]ctive nest” was observed on the early date of May 22, 1973¹⁹, but its status also was not confirmed.

Nest abandonment by Cedar Waxwings has been recorded frequently by other investigators^{12,13,20} but the stimulus for desertion is difficult to pinpoint — whether it is disturbance at the nest by the investigator, interaction of adult waxwings with potential predators, inclement weather, a change in food availability, parasitism by the Brown-headed Cowbird, or some other factor.^{12,14,20,21} In a five-year study of breeding Cedar Waxwings in Ohio, 60 of 144 nesting attempts (42 per cent) failed during the nest-building stage, 55 per cent due to bad weather, whereas the other nests had not received eggs¹², possibly having been aborted early in the season, although this was not stated. Observations at Delta Marsh and

those published in other studies of Cedar Waxwings and other species of songbirds during the breeding season reinforce the need for careful observations, preferably backed up by controlled experiments in the field, before ascribing a cause of the abandonment.²¹

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to former graduate students, J.V. Briskie, D.G. Busby, D.M. Guinan, and G.C. (Biermann) Pohajdak, whose studies of foraging and diet ecology of passerine birds in the dune-ridge forest provided the backdrop for the observations presented here. Todd J. Underwood prepared the graph of the nest dates and J. Paul Goossen offered constructive comments on the manuscript. Research conducted at Delta Marsh over the years was funded chiefly by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, augmented by important in-kind support provided by the Delta Marsh Field Station (University of Manitoba).

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LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE FAMILY NEAR MORDEN, MANITOBA

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In Manitoba, the Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) nests primarily in the southwest corner of the province.^{1,2} Although the shrike's range and population in Manitoba has decreased, there is evidence that Loggerhead Shrikes occasionally nest in other areas in southern Manitoba where few have been documented in recent years.^{1,2,3} In 2015, a recently fledged Loggerhead Shrike family group was observed near Snowflake in the Pembina Valley, about 185 km east of the species core provincial breeding range.³ In this note, we provide additional evidence of Loggerhead Shrikes nesting in the Pembina Valley Region of south-central Manitoba outside of their core Manitoba breeding range.

On May 15, 2016, C. Wall observed an adult shrike on a fence post, 5.4 km south of Morden. The shrike was quite active, flying to the tops of evergreens, a utility wire and deciduous trees on and adjacent to a ~5 ha acreage that had shelterbelts, an idle pasture, a tree-lined driveway and lawn areas. Wall's observation of a shrike in the same vicinity twice during the first week in June suggested it was on territory. On June 11 and 23, J.P. Goossen visited the site and observed an adult shrike chasing a Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) and hunting

in the vicinity of a shelterbelt on the north side of the acreage, providing further evidence of the shrike's territoriality.

On June 26, both observers confirmed for the first time that there were two adult shrikes in the vicinity of the shelterbelt. When Goossen returned the following day, a shrike carrying food into the evergreens precipitated a search that turned up a magpie nest and two other nests, none of which were checked for contents. On June 29, Goossen returned to find both adults perched near a cup nest. One of the adults had food in its beak and young were heard begging from the nest. The nest, located about 3.2 m up in a spruce tree (*Picea sp.*), was examined more closely three days later and found to be empty except for a couple of small eggshells. Feathers, some of them unsheathed and outside of the nest and on the ground, suggested that at least one of the young had been predated. Based on an approximate 39-day egg laying, incubation and nestling period for the Loggerhead Shrike, and assuming the young had fledged since the last visit, we estimated that egg laying (minimal estimate of four eggs in this case) had probably been initiated about May 25.^{4,5} In Manitoba, the clutch size of Loggerhead Shrikes averages six, so egg laying could have begun about two days earlier.⁵

The empty nest, signs of depredation and the absence of adults or young in the area suggested the shrikes' breeding attempt had failed. However, on July 4, B. Ginter saw a family of shrikes about 100 m south-southeast of the nest. Both adults were seen hunting and capturing insects for at least three fledged young (Fig. 1) that were seen in ash (*Fraxinus sp.*) trees along the driveway. Visits to the nesting area on July 9 and 21

by Wall and Goossen, respectively, revealed at least one adult and a single fledgling. On August 1, Wall observed a single young hunting along a grassy coulee nearly 600 m south-southeast of the nest. Since it is not unexpected for family groups to be split up at that age, with a portion of the young accompanying each adult, (K. De Smet, pers. comm.), these later sightings are not necessarily representative of the number of young that may have survived.

The habitat observed to be used by this nesting pair of shrikes included a mixed shelterbelt for nesting and a small idle pasture, mowed lawns, a grassy roadside allowance and a riparian coulee for hunting. Adjacent to these habitats were hayland and cropland. The shelterbelt where the nest was located consisted of two rows of spruce trees and one row of ash trees. The nest was located in the interior row of spruce about 70 m from a public road.

Although shrike pairs in southwestern Manitoba occasionally nest in open conifers in shelterbelts or around farmsteads, hedgerows consisting of caraganas (*Caragana sp.*), Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) and green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) have been preferred (K. De Smet, pers. comm.). In other portions of their provincial nesting range, outside of the extreme southwest, nesting records in scattered spruce and mixed shelterbelts appear to be much more common (K. De Smet, pers. comm.). In this regard the habitat used by the 2016 nesting pair is not atypical of that used elsewhere in southern Manitoba outside of the shrike's core breeding range.

The breeding record near Morden is about 35 km east-northeast from where a fledged family of shrikes was seen in the Pembina Valley in 2015 and 220 km east of the shrike's primary breeding range in southwest Manitoba.^{2,3} There have been no Loggerhead Shrike breeding records for the Windygates to Emerson region of south-central Manitoba



Figure 1: Fledged Loggerhead Shrikes near Morden, Manitoba (July 4, 2016). Photo credit: Ben Ginter

for at least three decades, although the occasional shrike has been seen or reported in that area during the summer (K. De Smet, pers. comm.). More recently, the shrike's rarity in this part of the province was verified by the fact that no Loggerhead Shrikes were recorded despite hundreds of hours of bird surveys in this area during the Manitoba Breeding Atlas project (2010-2014).² The closest observation of a shrike during the atlas project was near Cartwright, about 100 km west-southwest of the Morden site and the nearest breeding record about 100 km northwest near Glenboro.²

In nearby North Dakota, Loggerhead Shrikes were reported breeding in Ramsey County before 1950, about 120 km southwest of the Morden site.⁶ In Grand Forks County, about 145 km south-southeast of the Morden site, Loggerhead Shrikes breed fairly regularly but in small numbers (D. Lambeth, pers. comm.). Observations are usually limited to an occasional pair, family group or fledged young, especially near Kelly's Slough National Wildlife Refuge.

The two Pembina Valley regional records are significant because they provide evidence that Loggerhead

Shrikes occasionally still nest beyond their core breeding area in the province. The records also show that breeding occurs at least sporadically in portions of their former nesting range in south-central Manitoba.¹

Given that Loggerhead Shrikes were reputed to return to former nesting sites, we wonder what the 2015 and 2016 successful nesting efforts might mean for shrikes returning to the Pembina Valley Region.⁷ Philopatry in adult Loggerhead Shrikes tends to be lower than nest site re-occupancy rates.⁷ The return rate for shrikes banded as adults the year following banding or relocation to a study area in southwestern Manitoba was only 16 per cent (22 of 140 adults), yet the re-occupancy of territories was high (47 per cent) mostly by different individuals than those of the previous year.⁸ Return rates of young to the study area in which they were raised were even lower. Of the 3,176 young banded as nestlings in southwestern Manitoba from 1987-1993, only 74 (2.3 per cent) returned to the study area in subsequent years and even less (0.85 per cent) for those returning the year following banding.⁸ Although the above return rates suggest that

we may be fortunate to have any of the 2015 or 2016 adults or young returning, the fact that both pairs were successful, and that adult Loggerhead Shrikes return to former breeding sites in greater numbers than those that failed, lends hope that one or more may return and perhaps expand their nesting efforts in south-central Manitoba.⁸

Acknowledgements

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JUNE 2 - 4, 2017

CANDLE LAKE / HANNIN CREEK EDUCATION & RESEARCH FACILITY

Friday, June 2

Light supper provided

5:30 p.m. Registration
at Hannin Creek Education &
Research Facility

7:00 p.m. Program
– Welcome to Hannin Creek
– Presentation of Saturday
Activities

9:00 p.m. Bat Vocalization
with Jim Bahr
(weather dependent)

Accommodations/Lodging:

SEVEN 8-PERSON BUNKHOUSES ON
SITE AT HANNIN CREEK EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH FACILITY
\$75 per bunkhouse/per night
(Breakfast included)
All bedding and towels must be
brought with you

- Until May 1, all available bunkhouse
space will be held for families with
children/youth wishing to attend
the meet. After May 1, all available
bunkhouse space will be open to
anyone wishing to reserve. Please see
Registration form on page 20.

HOTELS/MOTELS/LODGES
Candle Lake Junction 306-929-3133
Ponderosa Pine Lodge 306-929-2488
Candle Lake Golf Resort 306-929-2211

CAMPING
Saskatchewan Provincial Sandy Bay
Campground
Minowukaw Campground

Saturday, June 3

Breakfast on your own

8:30 a.m. "The Geology of
Central Saskatchewan"
Tour (Option A)

8:30 a.m. Morning Owl Banding
(Option B)

8:30 a.m. Hannin Creek Activities

12:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. Hannin Creek Activities

5:30 p.m. Cocktails (cash bar)

6:30 p.m. Banquet

7:00 p.m. Presentation/Speaker
– Boreal Forest Owls
Harold Fisher (B.Sc; Long time Nature
Saskatchewan Member, hunter,
fisherman, naturalist and avid birder)

Sunday, June 4

Breakfast on your own

9:00 a.m. Annual General Meeting
at Hannin Creek

Maps with excellent prairie pothole
birding hotspots located immediately
south of Prince Albert will be available
if you wish to bird on your way home.

(Canoes/PFDs will be available until
day's end for use after AGM)

Driving Directions: Using Google Maps
App on phone will add 40 minutes.
Please use instructions provided. From
Candle Lake town site, go northwest on
secondary highway 265 approximately
16 kilometres. You will pass Sandy Bay
Provincial Campgrounds, then a view
of the lake on your right, Trout Pond
on your left and several subdivisions.
Watch for the sign that says "Hannin
Creek Educational Facility 7km" and turn
right on to the sand road and follow the
power line into the camp (stay right).



2017 SPRING MEET – FIELD TRIPS

The Geology of Central Saskatchewan

Enrollment limited to 20 participants, vans will be
provided. Extra cost \$25 per head, bag lunch included.
Tour will depart from the townsite of Candle Lake at
8:30 a.m. Will return by 3:30 p.m. in time for the evening
program.

All day field trip led by David Halstead (Author of the
Dragonflies of Saskatchewan, and a MSc graduate in
geography) and Lorne Renouf (RPF). See the challenges
of managing an active sand dune complex near a busy
provincial park. Explore the shoreline of ancient Lake
Agassiz and visit the scenic Push Moraines of Narrow Hills
Provincial Park. History will be brought to life and current
issues in forestry will be highlighted along with the
natural splendors that this field trip will encounter.

Morning Owl Banding

Enrollment limited to 12 participants
– No additional cost for this field trip.
Participants will meet at Candle Lake townsite at
8:30 a.m. to car pool and return to the Hannin Creek
Education and Research Facility for lunch and participate
in afternoon choice of activity.

Subject to nest box occupancy and the progress of the
nesting efforts, please join Harold as he checks nesting
boxes in the Candle Lake area. Boreal Owls, Northern
Saw-whet Owls and American Kestrels might be
encountered along the nest box trail. Depending on the
progress of the nesting cycle, participants may have an
opportunity to help band owls at the nest boxes.

Hannin Creek On-Site Activities

Birding and Plant Walks

Enjoy late spring as the boreal comes alive with bird song
and flowering plants. Nestled along a creek system, the
Hannin Creek facility has walking trails that move from
mature jack pine, into black spruce, mixed forest and
riparian habitats. Join our local birders and botanists to
explore the biodiversity of this patch of the southern
boreal forest. The group will be led by Jim Bahr (wildlife
biologist) and Joanne Marchand (botanist). The tour will
move along reasonably level ground with short forays into
more densely vegetated plots.

GPS and Smartphones as Field Tools

Join Teal Fisher and Ryan Galbraith of Saskatchewan
Polytechnic's Geographic Information Science program
for a hands-on experience using GPS units or your
smartphones directly linked to satellite imagery of the
landscape you are exploring. Learn how to use your
smartphone as a navigational device to guide you on your
natural history outings. Teal and Ryan have a knack for
making the complexities of modern technology easy and
fun to employ on a day-to-day basis.

Canoe and Interpretive Trip

Paddle the still waters of scenic Hannin Creek with
Hamilton Greenwood and explore the riparian habitat,
hydrology, and the beach ridge where the creek meets
Candle Lake. Canoes, PFDs and paddles will be provided
along with an experienced canoe guide and instructor.
Novice to expert canoeists may find this a relaxing and
enjoyable trip. Work collaboratively to prepare a shore
"snack" of fresh walleye and other wild edibles.

Youth Programming

Go on an adventure amongst the trees! Keep your eyes
and ears peeled for what you might encounter as we
explore the sights and sounds of Saskatchewan's boreal
birds. Use what you've learned to attract birds in your
own backyard by being creative and making a bird feeder
from recycled materials (provided). Keep cool next to the
water as we pond dip and explore what lurks beneath
the surface and complete the afternoon by hunting for
treasure.

JUNE 2 - 4, 2017

CANDLE LAKE / HANNIN CREEK EDUCATION & RESEARCH FACILITY

Name: _____
Address: _____
Postal Code: _____
Telephone: _____
Email: _____

(Registration includes Friday evening social & Saturday's lunch & evening banquet meals)

Nature Saskatchewan Member Fees

Registration Fee: **\$80.00** x _____ = \$ _____
Registration after May 26: **\$100.00** x _____ = \$ _____

Non-Member Fees

Registration Fee: **\$100.00** x _____ = \$ _____
Registration after May 26: **\$120.00** x _____ = \$ _____

Youth Fees (16 and under)

Registration Fee: **\$25.00** x _____ = \$ _____

TOUR OPTIONS

(Please select one & indicate)

OPTION A: The Geology of Central Saskatchewan

Enrollment limited to 20 participants, vans provided – bag lunch included
(EXTRA FEE - \$25/per person)

OPTION B: Morning Owl Banding

*Enrollment limited to 12 participants
(NO extra fee)

*If you are choosing Option B, please indicate which one activity is your preference for the afternoon. If you have chosen neither option, please indicate which two activities are your preference (one in morning, one in afternoon).

- GPS & Smartphones
 Interpretive Canoe Trip
 Bird/Plant walk

ON-SITE ACCOMMODATION:

*Until May 1, all available bunkhouse space will be held for families with children/youth wishing to attend the meet. After May 1, all available bunkhouse space will be open to anyone wishing to reserve. Please indicate if you are wanting to be put on a waiting list for a May 1 booking.

PLEASE REMEMBER ALL BEDDING AND TOWELS MUST BE BROUGHT WITH YOU (breakfast provided)

Family Reserving Bunkhouse (8 single beds)
= **\$75/night**

I'd like to be called/emailed May 1 to reserve space
Phone Number or Email : _____

NOTES:

Do you have any dietary needs or allergies (please circle)?
YES or NO
IF YES, what are they? _____

PLEASE CHECK BOX IF YOU PLAN TO BE PRESENT FRIDAY EVENING

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE: \$ _____
(including any extra tour & accommodation cost)

Payment by Visa/Mastercard:
Card #: ____/____/____/____ exp: ____/____

Payment by Cheque:
(Make cheque payable to Nature Saskatchewan)
Mail, e-mail or call our office to register:

Nature Saskatchewan
206-1860 Lorne Street
Regina, SK S4P 2L7
info@naturesask.ca
1-800-667-4668

HUMMINGBIRD RECOVERS FROM THE COLD



On the morning of September 7, 2016, Trevor Anderson stepped out on his front step and saw a sopping wet and cold hummingbird sitting motionless.



Trevor, Kaila and Margaret made a small open box and tucked some soft face cloths on the bottom of it to help dry and warm the hummingbird.
Photo credits: Margaret Anderson



As the hummingbird drank the sugar water and started drying out, and as it regained its strength, its green colour first re-appeared on its back before showing up again on its head.

Trevor Anderson and Kaila MacDonald
922 Broder Street, Regina, SK S4N 3P6

Margaret Anderson
920 Broder Street, Regina, SK S4N 3P6

After a particularly cold September rainstorm, Trevor stepped out on his front step and saw a sopping wet and cold hummingbird sitting motionless on the step. It was the morning of September 7, 2016. The tiny bird had its eyes closed and its feathers were a deep black colour. The normal shimmering green coat of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) was not there.

Trevor quickly brought his partner Kaila and his mother Margaret on to the scene and the three of us went to work to help this feathered friend. We made a small open box and tucked some soft face cloths on the bottom

of it to help dry and warm the bird. Then we made the prescribed sugar water mixture that we use in our hummingbird feeders (one part white sugar to four parts water).

We then set about trying to feed the warm sugar water by dipping its bill in the cup of the sugar water. As this did not work too well, we then tried to feed it through a clean eye dropper. We filled the dropper and carefully held the end of the dropper near its bill squeezing a small drop of water out of the end of the dropper. To our delight the bird's tiny black tongue flicked into the dropper — it wanted to drink! As it lay in the box, its little wings were spread out on the cloths and, other than moving its beak to seek more water, it was not moving much.

We continued watching and feeding this bird for more than an

hour. As the hummingbird drank and started drying out, we saw an amazing thing. Its tail was the first part of its feathers that turned green and as it regained its strength, the green colour moved up its back and then on to its head. Then you could see our little friend start to ruffle its feathers and move its wings back to its sides. It was remarkable and so thrilling to see this transformation.

While watching this, the clouds broke up enough to provide some sunshine and added warmth for our friend. A few more minutes of drying in the sun enabled this beautiful young hummingbird to launch out of our rescue box up into our elm tree. It sat there for a few minutes and then flew off out of sight. We all hoped it would head south as soon as possible to avoid further cold Saskatchewan fall showers! 🐦

SUCCESSFUL QUEST FOR A SECOND SASKATCHEWAN NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL



On January 28, 2017, a group returned to the area in which Stan and Jan Shadick found a Northern Pygmy-owl and were able to locate one as well (possibly the same owl). Photo credit: Nick Saunders

Jan and Stan Shadick
903 Temperance St.
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0N3

Reason for Quest:

The Northern Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*) appears to be one of the most difficult birds to observe in Saskatchewan. We had previously heard them calling from a few sites in British Columbia and Arizona but even there had never managed to obtain a good view of this species.

Incentive:

We have enjoyed many winter owling expeditions organized by Marten Stoffel for the Saskatoon Nature Society. From time to time, he would pique our interest by suggesting that we should one day look for a Northern Pygmy-Owl in Saskatchewan, although his own attempts in far western Saskatchewan had failed.

He knew that at least one pygmy-owl had been observed near Cold Lake, Alberta, which is immediately adjacent to Saskatchewan. Marten also commented that chickadees north of Green Lake, Saskatchewan would respond to his playback call of a Northern Pygmy-owl suggesting that they had probably encountered this species. Marten suggested that this species might be found some winter north of Meadow Lake Provincial Park.

Research:

Saskatchewan's only confirmed record of a Northern Pygmy-Owl was discovered by Richard Gruchy near La Ronge on October 12, 2014. The owl was observed and photographed by Christi Gruchy and Chris Giesbrecht from a distance of about 4 m before it flew to a nearby tree, and eventually departed. Details will be published in the upcoming two-

volume "Birds of Saskatchewan." The eBird distribution map shows several records of Northern Pygmy-Owl in forested regions of Alberta north and west of Edmonton. When we were researching its known distribution in Alberta, the only eBird record farther east was a single owl photographed at Shaw Lake, about 100 km NW of Cold Lake, Alberta by Everett Hanna on November 28, 2016 (eBird checklist .S32775355).

Plan:

Since Jan and I were spending Christmas in Edmonton and at least one Northern Pygmy-Owl had been spotted this winter NE of Edmonton, we added an extra day to our return trip to combine a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) with a search for a Northern Pygmy-Owl along Highway 919 north of Meadow Lake Provincial Park. This highway runs north out of the park only 5 to 9 km east of the Alberta border. It is used to service some oil wells north of the park. Because the B&B in Pierceland, Saskatchewan was not available, we chose to spend the night before our quest at a motel in Cold Lake, Alberta.

The Quest:

We had breakfast at the motel at 08:00 h (07:00 h Alberta time) on December 27, 2016 and then drove to Pierceland, Saskatchewan and then north along Highway 21 into Meadow Lake Provincial Park and turned onto Highway 919. We brought a bluetooth speaker for the cellphone so that we could play the owl's call from the Audubon Birds app on my cellphone in hopes that a pygmy-owl might respond.

Our first three stops along Pierce Lake produced in turn a single chickadee; a Hairy Woodpecker and a few Black-capped Chickadees; and

a pair of Gray Jays. None appeared interested in our playback of the owl's call. About 10:00 h, we reached the Cold River, the southern edge of our Martineau River CBC that we now begun. At this stop, about four Boreal Chickadees came out of the woods to investigate the playback of our owl call.

During the next three hours, we slowly drove north along Highway 919 to its northern limit. At the Martineau River crossing and at a few other stops, we had Gray Jays and Boreal Chickadees come out of the woods to investigate the playback of the owl's call.

At about 13:00 h, we made a stop for lunch along the return trip. After playing the owl's call, several Gray Jays plus a small group of Boreal Chickadees and two Red-breasted Nuthatches immediately responded, quite agitated, flying from bush to bush, seemingly trying to find the source of the sound. Here we heard a single toot similar to the call of the owl following each playback. However, we did not find any owl. Might a jay have imitated an owl call?

About 14:00 h, at the kilometre 36 marker on Highway 919, our playback immediately attracted a mob of Gray Jays and Boreal Chickadees, two Blue Jays and, to our delight, an American Three-toed Woodpecker. The woodpecker was quickly forgotten when we heard a series of single toots exactly matching the pygmy-owl's call on our Audubon Bird app. It came from a cluster of mainly spruce trees about 100 m east of the road. We were nearly certain that this sound must be coming from the target of our quest and walked quickly toward the source of the toots. The flock of Boreal Chickadees and Gray Jays had now moved to this location and were creating quite a noisy ruckus, with four jays calling from the top of an aspen.

Below the jays, an amazing, incredibly tiny owl, less than half as large as a Gray Jay was perched facing

me. It had the shape of an owl but with a rectangular tail jutting out at an angle quite unlike that of any other owl. Except for its tiny beak, the shape of this bird reminded me more of a puffbird from Panama than any typical Saskatchewan owl. Through my 10X42 Swarovski binoculars, the owl was gray-brown with tiny white dots on its forehead. Its chest was dark and its belly had widely spaced vertical stripes. Its eyes were yellow.

The owl then flew to the top of a spruce above us where Jan was able to find it. From the rear, its strange tail was barred with white horizontal stripes. Its back was dark with white spots. The bird then flew to another tree where Jan got a better look.

I then took out my cellphone but the phone instantly switched off. Thinking that the phone's battery was too low, I ran back to the car to get the scope and Jan's phone to try for a photo. Unfortunately, the owl flew away and we were not able to hear or see this amazing owl again. After checking Google maps at home, I would suspect that this spot is at 54.69997 degrees north latitude and 109.84862 degrees west longitude.

For the remainder of the afternoon, we searched along the "East-West" road within the count circle for any other owls. We thought the habitat looked promising for Northern Hawk Owls or Great Gray Owls but could not find any. The first-ever Martineau River CBC yielded 70 individuals of 11 species.

We think we were very, very lucky to find our Saskatchewan Northern Pygmy-Owl on December 27. As Marten Stoffel often states, "you need a horseshoe" (for luck).

Because northwestern Saskatchewan north of Meadow Lake Provincial Park is sparsely settled and has not been extensively birded, we wonder whether this second Saskatchewan sighting was a chance one-time visitor or whether the actions of other bird species might indicate



A male Northern Pygmy-Owl brings food to young owls in the nest cavity. Photographed in June 1989 near Nojack, Alberta. Photo credit: Bob Gehlert

that a few more Northern Pygmy-Owls visit in winter. Jan thought that we should call our pygmy owl the Q-bird, because its small body resembled a capital Q and because the bird was "sooooo Qute!"

Advice:

1) Organize a group and take at least two vehicles along Highway 919. Although there was a single tire track, we saw no soul north of the mouth of the Cold River for the entire day. Cellphone coverage was spotty and we might have been up the creek if we had encountered any car problems beyond the reach of cellphones.

2) Bring a cellphone app plus a speaker to broadcast the call. Note that the owl did not fly toward us in response to playback. Presumably, it just started calling from its perch when we played its call.

3) Bring a working camera and a cellphone to record any owl hoots.

4) Plan to spend the nights before and after your search at the Pierceland B&B. It is a very long drive home from Pierceland. After a brief stop in Battleford, it was almost midnight when we made it home. 🦉

DEANNA TROWSDALE-MUTAFOV A TRIBUTE TO HER LIFE AND OVER 25 YEARS OF DEDICATION TO NATURE SASKATCHEWAN



Deanna Trowsdale-Mutafov's determination and passion for the environment is something to aspire to. Through her work with Nature Saskatchewan, and her many volunteer initiatives, she always worked toward a better understanding of our natural environment and fostering an appreciation for all living creatures.

Deanna was a leader and role model for youth and young professionals in Regina and across southern Saskatchewan for nearly 30 years. She took part in outreach work to engage the community, schools, and youth groups in climate change programs such as the citizen science program PlantWatch. She also spent years as a leader with the Outdoor Environmental Education Department with the Regina Public School Board educating hundreds

of youth about conservation and the natural world with presentations about various wildlife topics and climate change.

Deanna was an agent for change. For example, she coordinated many documents such as the environmental guide for rural youth in Saskatchewan entitled "The Importance of Biodiversity and Sustainable Agriculture Practices." This also included her piloting a biodiversity manual for rural schools in southern Saskatchewan for youth aged 12 to 14.

Deanna was a dedicated volunteer for her community. She was an active board member with her local community association since 1994; was the greens-keeper for her community park; coordinated many school-wide environmental initiatives with the local schools; continuously

wrote environmental articles for her community papers, newspapers, environmental newsletters, and e-bulletins; she was a board member with Nature Saskatchewan from 2001-2006 serving as the Education Director; and, was a representative on the City of Regina Waste Reduction Plan committee starting in 2008.

Deanna received numerous awards over the years, being recognized for her contributions and dedication to her passions. She received the Fellow's Award in 2009 with Nature Saskatchewan, for many years of time and service to the organization in both a volunteer and work capacity; the Thomas G. Brydes award for leadership and commitment to ecological monitoring at the national Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Conference in 2006; and, a recognition award for many years of volunteer service in community organizations in Regina in 2003. In 2014, Nature Saskatchewan was honoured to nominate Deanna for, and she was the recipient of, the YWCA's Women of Distinction award in Science, Technology, and Environment.

Deanna's time and dedication to Nature Saskatchewan goes back to 1991, when she was one of the first conservation research assistants for Operation Burrowing Owl, a program that works with landowners to conserve habitat for the endangered Burrowing Owl. She was then hired the following field season to raise awareness about threatened birds, mainly the Ferruginous Hawk and Loggerhead Shrike. Interestingly, she also conducted a random survey that

year with Saskatchewan landowners about the pesticide Carbofuran and published the results in the Nature Saskatchewan journal, *Blue Jay*. She was a driver for research, education and awareness right from the beginning of her time with the organization. In March 1993, Deanna was hired as the Administrative Manager until fall 1994.

After a couple of consultant projects with the Canadian Council, for the hazardous waste task group, and the Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council, Deanna took some time to raise her two wonderful children, but never stopped being engaged and volunteering. As mentioned, she was a board member with Nature Saskatchewan from 2001 to 2006 — so she never left the organization, she just took on a different role. Deanna even made a conscious effort to bring her children, Kris and Selena, into the Nature Saskatchewan office from their birth and showed them her commitment to our natural world.

In 2003, Deanna was hired by Nature Saskatchewan and Nature Canada as a consultant and coordinated the project "The Wood River Biodiversity Blitz," highlighting

local biodiversity and educating locals on the importance of sustainability in the wood river watershed. In 2006, while Deanna was working as a leader with the Outdoor Environmental Education Department of the Regina Public School Board, she launched the Saskatchewan PlantWatch program for Nature Saskatchewan, engaging citizens to record first bloom dates of common plants to monitor climate change over time. In 2009, Deanna left her role with the school board and took on the position of Executive Director for the Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds. Deanna continued to coordinate PlantWatch as well until 2011, when she came on as the full-time Education/Conservation Manager with Nature Saskatchewan. It was then that she established the International Bird Areas Caretakers Program, for 52 important bird areas in Saskatchewan, and she administered Nature Quest and Inner Nature programs and the Last Mountain Bird Observatory. Deanna worked with the Linking Communities initiative, bringing international communities together and she continued to manage the PlantWatch program and encourage the public to engage in citizen

science. She worked relentlessly to keep all levels concerned with climate change involved.

Those that have worked with Deanna described her as inclusive, encouraging, inspiring and thankful. She could both recruit and retain volunteers; she never lost sight or became complacent; and she kept up with and inspired others through example. She truly was a living example of a conservationist.

Deanna was and will continue to be a true inspiration and mentor to many. We will continue to do as she did — not only be encouraging to others, but be the example to encourage others.

"Deanna was taken from this beautiful earth to start her spirit journey on Friday, December 9, 2016, far too young at the age of 54. In January 2013, Deanna was diagnosed with a very rare cancer, Leiomyosarcoma (LMS). It came as a shock, but Deanna vowed to fight this with all she had, and she did until the very end. Anyone who knew Deanna knows her passion and love for the natural earth and all life." (www.legacy.com/obituaries/leaderpost/obituary.aspx?pid=183115569#sthashGlvUNzf.dpuf). 🐦



TREE SWALLOW NEST BUILT ATOP DEAD ADULT TREE SWALLOWS

Donald J. Stiles
20 Lake Wapta Rise SE
Calgary, AB T2J 2M9
stilesdj@shaw.ca

An interesting observation was e-mailed by Dick Stauffer, member of the Calgary Area Nestbox Monitors since 2001, on September 14, 2016. "Cleaned out the boxes this morning, had a TRES (Tree Swallow) nest built over 25 dead adults in one box, and not one had a band on." Location was 9 km S of Olds, AB, Lat/long 51° 42.718' N, 114° 07.190' W. Figure 1 shows the nest removed intact and the Tree Swallow nest built over the dead adult Tree Swallows. In spite of the thick nest, six young were fledged. Figure 2 shows the dead Tree Swallows after being inspected individually for bands.

In 2016, Stauffer monitored 276 nest-boxes southwest of Olds, AB. This resulted in 42 first brood and three second brood nesting attempts for Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*), fledging a total of 168 young; and 148 nesting attempts for Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*),

fledging a total of 536 young.

Stiles noted that "It is likely that these birds were on migration in the spring farther north to a place where no banding is being done. Most monitors have found an occasional dead adult Tree Swallow (or sometimes more than one) in boxes in spring, often due to starvation caused by cold weather, but this must be a record."

Additional Information of Interest:

Spencer G. Sealy
Department of Biological Sciences
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB

Capturing most of their insect prey on the wing, Tree Swallows tread a fine line when they return to the breeding grounds each spring, where they risk encountering early spring storms. The first returnees may be more likely to find a suitable nest site — abandoned woodpecker cavities or, now, nest-boxes erected for their use — but if they are hit with bad weather, the prolonged rain or

snow and reduced temperatures may temporarily eliminate the flying insects. With the insects gone, suddenly, swallows are left with little or no food. Searching for insects that are no longer there soon reduces the swallows' energy reserves and increases the risk of death by starvation. One option, however, is for swallows to seek shelter to conserve energy and "ride out" the storms, as apparently was done by the Tree Swallows found dead in Alberta early last spring, as reported above.

Tree Swallows have been recorded previously seeking temporary shelter during inclement weather in abandoned woodpecker cavities and, again, as noted above, in nest-boxes, both sites typically used for nesting by this species.¹⁻⁵ During similar periods of duress, Bank Swallows (*Riparia riparia*) may seek holes or burrows in embankments, whereas Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) huddle in old nests in barns or under bridges, thus, also using species-specific nest sites.^{3,5} Remaining still in a cavity or nest-box conserves energy, but an individual's heat loss would be reduced

even more when several swallows huddle together, as they lower their body temperatures and enter a form of torpor.⁵ Too many swallows crowded into one nest-box, however, may result in suffocation of individuals trapped at the bottom of the cluster. This is apparently what happened at the nest-box near Olds, AB, but as Donald Stiles noted, 25 dead Tree Swallows in one box must be some kind of a record! Some individuals on top of the cluster may have survived and left the box when the weather improved, before the new nest was constructed over the dead swallows.

How long the swallows were in the box before they died, whether from heat-loss and starvation, or from suffocation, or whether the birds at the bottom of the cluster were the first to die, are not known. In one case in Manitoba, six Tree Swallows that were stacked one on top of the other in an old woodpecker hole were dead, but two other individuals at the bottom of the cluster were alive, but weak; one succumbed soon after removal from the cavity, the other survived long enough to be able to fly away.⁵ Observations have suggested that by the time most swallows have sought shelter under these circumstances they were already weak and possibly close to death.^{3,5} Joining a cluster to reap energetic advantages seems to be balanced by the risks of dying from that association.

1. Dence WA (1946) Tree Swallow mortality from exposure during unseasonable weather. *Auk* 63:440.
2. Anderson DW (1965) Spring mortality in insectivorous birds. *Loon* 37:134-135.
3. Sealy SG (1966) Swallow mortality at Moose Mountain. *Blue Jay* 24:17-18.
4. Smith A, Lane N, Patmore H, Robinson B, Barnes D, McGowan M (1984) Twenty-third annual nestbox report from Brandon, Manitoba. *Blue Jay* 42:44-46.
5. Weatherhead PJ, Sealy SG, Barclay RMR (1985) Risks of clustering in thermally-stressed swallows. *Condor* 87:443-444. 🐦



Figure 1: The nest removed intact and the Tree Swallow nest built over the dead adult Tree Swallows. Photo credit: Dick Stauffer



Figure 2: The dead Tree Swallows after being inspected individually for bands. Photo credit: Dick Stauffer

POETRY

Lost Poem of Highway 16

Somewhere near Maidstone
By a railway crossing
I saw a big raven
Mantled over a road-mangled meal.

There were two magpies
Up to their usual tricks
Trying to steal a morsel
From their dangerous, stoic cousin.

One'd hop in close
Then the other'd try
Hoping raven would lunge
And the other could dash in.

Raven wasn't buying it
He stood over the kill
Tearing, bolting down meat
Never gave magpies the satisfaction.

Their patience gave first
One got too close
Raven pounced, pinned him
Squeezed a hopeless, terror'd squawk.

Another angry, scared scream
From his victim's mate.
She flew up, round panicked
Their cries futile, past desperation.

Raven lifted his head
Watched her fly and shriek
Then his gory heavy beak
Was over his writhing, flapping prey.

Then, it was strange
He carefully, delicately
Unclenched his talons
Lifted his foot, freed the magpie.

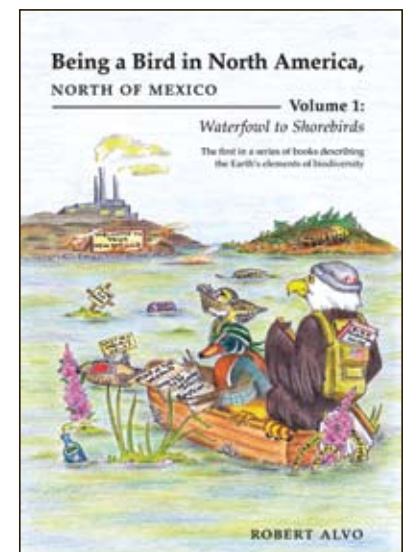
I didn't know magpies
Could fly that fast.
They dissolved into the sky
As light, quick, as a snuffed flamed.

The raven fixed me then
With a bright, straight stare
He went back to his work
And I drove on to mine.

George Grassick
Box 205, Lumsden, SK S0G 3C0
ggrassick@sasktel.net

BEING A BIRD IN NORTH AMERICA: WINNER OF AUTOGRAPHED COPY

The Winter 2016 issue of *Blue Jay* included a book review on Robert Alvo's *Being a Bird in North America, North of Mexico, Volume 1: Waterfowl to Shorebirds* and readers were given the chance to enter to win an autographed copy of the book. *Blue Jay* is pleased to announce that the winner of the draw is Katharine Schulz of Winnipeg, MB. Congratulations, Katharine! *Being a Bird in North America* is available at McNally Robinson in Saskatoon and Winnipeg, on Robert Alvo's website at www.babina.ca and on Amazon.ca.



A BELATED RECORD OF CANADA LYNX SOUTH OF THE BOREAL FOREST DURING THE MID-CONTINENTAL IRRUPTION OF 1962–1963



Canada Lynx south of Black Lake, Nopiming Provincial Park, Manitoba, August 2, 2010. Photo credit: Christopher Staniforth

Spencer G. Sealy
Department of Biological Sciences
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
Spencer.Sealy@umanitoba.ca

An unprecedented number of Canada Lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*) were recorded south of the boreal forest across the Canadian Prairie Provinces and north-central United States in 1962–1963, with additional records extending into 1964.¹ Canada Lynx were recorded during this irruption in the grassland regions of southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba^{1,2-4}, as well as Minnesota⁵, Montana⁶, North Dakota⁷, and south to Iowa.⁸

For the record, I document another observation, long buried amid field notes, of a Canada Lynx observed in southern Alberta in late spring 1963, within the span of this irruption. From early May through mid-September 1963 and 1964, I

assisted wildlife biologists associated with the Fish and Wildlife Division of the Alberta Department of Lands and Forests. In both years, I worked primarily out of Brooks, Alberta, through early July each year, ear-tagging Pronghorns (*Antilocapra americana*) and monitoring Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) and other waterfowl populations. During the remainder of both summers I conducted brood surveys of Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix*), Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) and Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), and participated in aerial surveys of Pronghorns. These and other activities took me at various times to all regions of southern Alberta.

On June 19, 1963, while observing nesting American Avocets (*Recurvirostra americana*), a Canada Lynx appeared suddenly from the vegetation at the edge of a nearly dry slough, about 6 km west of Cassils

(50°35' 12" N, 112°2' 9" W), or 16 km west of Brooks, Alberta. The lynx stood silently about 25 m in front of me before it walked slowly away and disappeared about 30 seconds later behind a patch of dead Cattail (*Typha latifolia*). It did not re-appear during the several minutes I waited, motionless, and I did not follow it or otherwise attempt to locate it again. There were no trees around or in the vicinity of the slough. An undated record of a lynx killed near Brooks in 1963⁴ may have been the individual observed above.

My immediate reaction to the presence of this felid was that it was a Bobcat (*L. rufus*), considering that the site was within its known range in southern Alberta. With my binoculars trained on the individual for about 20 seconds, I was able to record a general lack of spots in the pelage and the presence of black hairs on the tip of the tail, which are among the characteristics of Canada Lynx⁹, but I did not obtain a photograph that would have substantially increased the value of the record.¹⁰ I had previously seen only one Canada Lynx, and had skinned one road-killed individual, but I had never observed a Bobcat.

This was the only Canada Lynx I observed in southern Alberta in 1963 and 1964, and no Bobcats were observed. I realized at the time that the observation of a lynx so far out on the prairies was unusual, but it was not until later that I became aware that there had been a mid-Continental irruption of this species that year and many lynx had been reported across the prairie region.

Published reports of Canada Lynx in southern Saskatchewan began appearing in *Blue Jay* when one was observed near Maryfield¹¹ and two individuals were reported near Beechy,

one of which was killed in a snare.² Reports of more than two dozen lynx observed or shot in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta followed, through 1966. Up to 50 lynx were captured in the Calgary area, 36 of them within the city's boundaries, between March 18 and November 3, 1963.¹² Many of those lynx were sent to zoos around the world. Stomach contents of two lynxes sampled during this irruption, one from an individual taken at Calgary, the other taken near Brooks, revealed opportunistic use of prey available on the grasslands: Richardson's Ground Squirrel (*Urocitellus richardsonii*) and Gray Partridge, respectively.⁴

The most comprehensive account of this irruption, accompanied by maps and photographs, focused on the occurrences of Canada Lynx in North Dakota, beginning in 1961–1962.⁷ About 200 individuals were shot, trapped or otherwise killed, predominantly in the northeastern counties of the State. Most individuals were identified as adults, but putative family groups were observed and some juveniles were killed, which suggested that some individuals had reproduced.⁷ By contrast, most individuals examined in the Calgary region were identified as young adults¹², although this was not confirmed. From these observations the question arises of whether most or any of the dispersing individuals returned or would have returned to the boreal forest after conditions had changed.

The movements by Canada Lynx into unfamiliar prairie habitats occurred at a different time, when lynx and other large predators were generally looked upon as liabilities, and many of the lynx were killed. We live in a more enlightened era now, and recognition of the importance of large predators in our ecosystems has resulted in the removal of most bounties and increased legal protection.

Epilogue

The merit of publishing another anecdotal record of Canada Lynx obtained more than 50 years ago during a major and well-documented invasion of the prairies may seem questionable. Indeed, the record was among dozens reported — many of individuals trapped and shot — that does not add another locality of occurrence, because another or the same lynx was taken in the Brooks area of southern Alberta about the same time.⁴ This record would have been among the many others, however, that were emerging at the same time, revealing that a major invasion of Canada Lynx was underway, if it had been published in the months immediately closer to the time of the observation. The movements of this large predator on to the grasslands in the early 1960s was adequately documented with captures of live animals and specimens, which constitute the most reliable occurrence data for rare or elusive species.¹⁰ Anecdotal records of occurrence, that is, unverifiable observations or their sign, are given much less weight as evidence of occurrence.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the scattered visual records, placed against a back-drop of specimens¹³, contributed to the documentation of the extent of the movements of the lynx in time and space.

Anecdotal occurrence data (unverifiable observations of organisms or their sign) are ranked low in a list of evidentiary standards that are useful in documenting occurrence of rare or elusive species.¹⁰ This ranking was used recently in an assessment of the status of Canada Lynx populations on the Alaska Peninsula, with visual observations — historical and recent — augmenting the more valuable specimen and photographic records.¹³ The characteristics of the lynx invasion considered here were documented from the most reliable evidence (*i.e.*, specimens and identifiable photographs of the animals and their sign).

Acknowledgements

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CATS AND BIRDS: SAVE BIRDS' LIVES BY KEEPING YOUR CATS SAFE

Marla Anderson
Conservation & Education Manager
Nature Saskatchewan

By now it is common knowledge that many bird species in a variety of habitats are declining. The release of "The State of North American Birds" report by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative in May of 2016 reported what many of us already knew. Birds need our help, and fast! The report identified that 27 per cent of our grassland bird populations and 19 per cent of our boreal forest bird populations are in serious need of action. It is a priority that we protect their habitat not only here but on their migratory grounds as well. It is also important to protect these birds from other factors that lead to their death. Habitat loss is not the only reason that bird populations are declining. In fact, one of the major causes of bird deaths is cats.

Environment Canada research estimates that, in addition to the impacts of climate change and habitat loss, 150 to 350 million birds

a year die as a result of cats. If you own a cat, you may have had your cat bring you a "gift" of a dead bird to your doorstep. You may be upset that your cat killed such a beautiful creature but what is scary is cats will only bring home a third of the prey that they kill. That means your cat may not have killed just one bird but three. According to the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, more than five million households have cats and many of them have more than one. Therefore it is estimated there are 10 million owned cats. That is potentially a lot of cats free to roam around and hunt. Now, that does not mean that all cats kill birds, but a large number of them do and not just fully grown adult birds but fledglings, nestlings, and even eggs. The domestic cat is not native here and our birds have not evolved to defend themselves against this invasive species.

So what is the solution? Keep your cats indoors, of course! Yes, that is the best solution and most cat owners are doing just that.

According to surveys, about 60 per cent of owned cats are kept happily and safely indoors! Keeping your cat indoors not only prevents them from harming birds and other small animals, but it will also reduce the chances of your cat getting hurt, injured, or lost. It can be difficult to train your cat to be an indoor cat, but it is possible. It does, however, require a lot of patience and some work keeping your cat entertained.

The best way to have a happy indoor cat is to enrich its indoor environment. This can be done in many ways and here are some suggestions, provided by the Humane Society, that work. Place a cat shelf right next to a window to allow your cat to look outside. Cat furniture such as cat trees or cat gyms will add more space to its territory. Cats love to be up high, and so this will increase their vertical territory. Scratch posts are a necessity. Observe where your cat scratches — is it a soft or hard surface, vertical or horizontal, or maybe it's your couch or carpet — and choose a scratching post that resembles its preference. Cat toys and interactive play will keep your cat busy and entertained and has the added benefit of strengthening the bond between you. If your cat responds to catnip, sprinkle some in its toys or try some cat grass which is a great way to bring a little of the outdoors inside.

Keeping your cat indoors is not the only solution, however. If you cannot keep your cat indoors there are other options to prevent your cat from being injured or injuring birds while still allowing the cat to enjoy the outdoors. Ever heard of a "Catio?" It is a screened in,

outdoor structure for cats and can be as elaborate or simplistic as you would like. Of course, there is always the option of harness training and walking your cat. Again this may take time, but most cats can be trained to "walk" on a leash. They will not walk in the same manner as a dog, but it will allow them to get some outdoor exercise safely. So if you cannot keep your cat inside, please try to keep it safe when it is outside. The life of the birds, as well as your cat, may depend on this.

If none of the above options are possible and letting your cat outside to roam unsupervised is still the only way to keep your cat happy, the final

option is to buy it a cat clown collar! These colourful collars make the cat more visible to the birds that they are hunting and studies have found that cats kill 87 per cent fewer birds by wearing them. Collars with a bell do not seem to have the same effect as the clown collars, but using both will most likely work best. It is important to note that this does not protect hatchlings or fledglings and it also does very little to protect your cat from other things that can harm it outdoors.

Farm cats, which are kept because of their ability to hunt and reduce rodent populations on farms, can and will kill and injure just as many

birds as the urban cats in the city. Farm cats are a whole other problem and one that requires a lot more research and innovation on how to prevent the death of many bird species. At the moment, all we can suggest is to have your farm cats spayed or neutered to prevent the population of cats from growing and contributing to the feral cat population.

Owned cats are only part of the problem, and perhaps a more severe issue is feral cats. How to get rid of the feral cat population is an ongoing battle. Programs such as Trap Neuter Return are in place in many areas across both Canada and the U.S., although none are known to occur here in Saskatchewan. This program has been shown to reduce the number of feral cats as the cats can no longer reproduce and so there are fewer cats to harm birds. Euthanasia of feral populations has not been shown to reduce the number of feral cats because when you get rid of a colony another just seems to move into the territory of the previous colony. The feral cat population is unknown but is estimated to be in the millions across Canada and managing it is an ongoing effort. The best way for us to help with this problem is to spay and neuter our pets, especially if they are free to roam and/or are farm cats, and do not feed stray cats. If you want to give them a good life, adopt them.

Controlling the cat population and keeping your cat safe is the best way to make a difference and help the bird population. If you would like to know more about how to keep your cat safe, please visit the Humane Society or check out Nature Canada's Cats and Birds website at www.catsandbirds.ca. Take the pledge to keep your cat indoors. 🐾



Juvenile Brewer's Blackbird. Photo credit: Marla Anderson



Cat wearing a BirdsBeSafe collar. These are available online at www.birdsbesafe.com or at Wild's General Store in Saskatoon. Photo used with permission from BirdsBeSafe.

CATS AND BIRDS: A YEAR IN REVIEW

Sarah Cooper
Nature Canada

The end of February marks the first anniversary of our work on the issues around cats and birds!

In one short year, we've set up an amazing network of partners across the country. National partners such as Bird Studies Canada, Earth Rangers and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies each bring unique expertise and perspective to the table. Our list of regional and local partners has grown too, and now includes not only the founding provincial partners, but also wildlife rehabilitation centres, cat rescues, land trusts and bird observatories.

All our partners are essential to successfully creating a Canada that is safer for cats and birds, and each one is a voice for change in their community. Our partners have created resources as varied as a Local Governments Brief on the issue to "DIY Cat Shelf" (a wall-mounted shelf that cats seem to love). We have also participated in municipal advocacy efforts, shared Cats and Birds posts into their social media feeds, distributed brochures, postcards and bookmarks, recruited local partners and generally helped spread the Safe Cats, Safe Birds word.

The national campaign created several resources for cat owners, as well as a number for use by specific types of partners. One example is a

handout for humane societies to use when an owner reclaims a lost cat — Never Lose Your Cat Again; another is for wildlife rehabilitators to use when someone brings in a bird that has been injured by his or her cat. These difficult situations are also invaluable 'teachable moments' — opportunities that must not be lost.

But there is one partner who's done more than any other to get the public's attention, and that's Margaret Atwood. September saw the publication of *Angel Catbird*, her first ever graphic novel. Published by Dark Horse Comics in tandem with our campaign, *Angel Catbird* earned more than 1,500 media mentions in 2016, most of which referred to the website at <http://catsandbirds.ca>.

Here are a few highlights:

"A comic book with a conscience ... statistics appear in banners throughout the novel ... highlighting the potential dangers to [cats] ... as well as the harm they can cause to birds." — *CBC*

"The book is peppered with statistics on the dangers outdoor cats face, as well as how they contribute to bird deaths and the environmental impact of declining songbird populations." — *Metro News*

"Atwood seeks to make 'Angel Catbird' more than a standard superhero fable but a comic book with conscience, using the format

as a way to bring awareness to bird conservation." — *CTV News*

There was also a lot of international coverage, prompting several calls for other countries to adopt our approach:

"Ms. Atwood ... is using the book to raise awareness for Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives, a program led by Nature Canada, the oldest conservation charity in the country." — *NY Times*

"The project, which is being published in association with conservation charity Nature Canada's Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives initiative ..." — *The Guardian*

"It's a bird, it's a plane ... it's *Angel Catbird!* ... The graphic novel is also a part of a Nature Canada initiative, Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives, to help raise awareness about animal rights and protect wildlife." — *Buzzfeed*

The second volume of *Angel Catbird*, *To Castle Catula*, comes out on Valentine's Day. Volume 3, *The Catbird Roars*, will be published in July.

This coming year we will focus on creating a school program to educate children about the issue; continue to build our pilot in Guelph and initiate another in Edmonton; launch a municipal prize in recognition

of progressive cat policies; and revise our approach to the pledge on our website. Instead of asking cat owners to keep their cats from roaming unsupervised, we will ask all Canadians to join us in making Canada safe for cats and birds. Follow up emails will then suggest specific actions for the various categories of people — cat owners will be invited to explore healthy

alternatives to letting their cats roam unsupervised, and non-cat-owners will be asked to spread the word in other ways. After all, keeping cats and birds safe is an issue for all Canadians, not just those who have cats.

Come join the movement! Take the pledge at <http://catsandbirds.ca>. Volunteer. Advocate. Help Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives. 🐾

MEMBERS CAN NOW ACCESS SECURE MEMBER AREA OF NATURESASK.CA

As of January 17, 2017, members are now able to login to the secure member area on the Nature Saskatchewan website using their own email address. The first time you visit the member area of www.naturesask.ca you will need to enter the email address you have registered with Nature Saskatchewan into the "forgot my password" form. You will then be sent your personal password. Please note that we currently do not have the ability for members to choose their own password. If your email address is not working or you need assistance in any way, please feel free to contact the office at 306-780-9273 or 1-800-667-4668.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE



Piping Plover **Burrowing Owl** **Sprague's Pipit**

Are you interested in completing a native seeding, wildlife-friendly fencing, or an alternative water development project for species at risk?

We can help! Financial assistance is available!

Contact Nature Saskatchewan at **(306) 780-9833** for more information.



POETRY

The Doe

I see a jumper doe
Still, looking my way
Alert, watchful but unafraid
As I bring Tasha and Molly to heel
Before they spot her.

In her fresh, tan spring coat
Her sylph-like frame
Seems almost liquid
Enshrouded in drifting mist
From the cool aspen bluffs
As they warm to day.

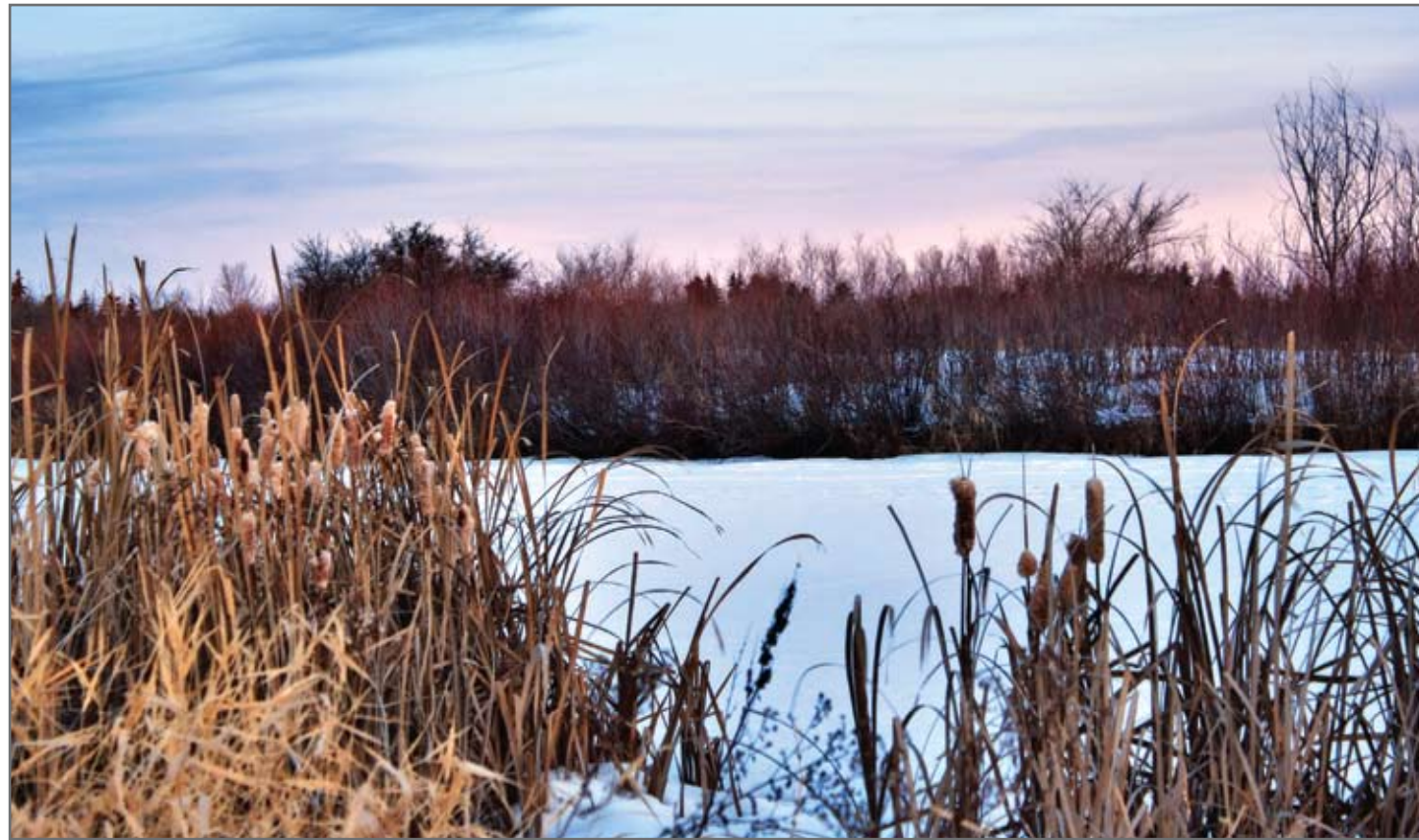
Then, as though a wraith,
With three, four leaps
Of exquisite, sinuous, flawless symmetry,
She vapourizes entirely
Curtained by the shield
Of the cool, misted dawn.

George Grassick
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Photo credit: Nick Saunders

HUMAN NATURE



A. E. Wilson Park in Regina, SK. Photo credit: Becky Quist

Becky Quist
Office Coordinator, Nature Saskatchewan

"I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in." - John Muir, John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir

Oftentimes we envision ourselves somewhere far away from where we are — somewhere we can escape to. For me, breaking free from the mundane to a world of green and abundant with life is all but a quick walk to a path within eyesight, while looking out my back door. A.E. Wilson Park in Regina is part of my every day scenery — a green space I consider part of my backyard and, for that, I'd be hard pressed to find somewhere else I'd rather live in the Queen City.

As the geese fly overhead and the sun rises high, their formation above beckons me to follow to a place of reflection and calmness, a place to gather my thoughts and gain balance, to reconnect with nature.

Crossing the foot bridge over the babbling Wascana Creek and glancing toward the flowing water I can see muskrats stealthily rushing near the shoreline, seeming as though they're on a mission to complete while the Killdeer scuttle along the sandbar back and forth in the distance, trying to confuse any passerby. Nearby the Wood Ducks are meandering peacefully through the ripples of water next to the pelicans, who so gracefully dip their pouched beaks through the glassy creek.

Across the way there are cormorants lounging in the warm air next to shore, drying their wings,

as if in praise of the return of the summer sun. Above my head I notice the plethora of bird life, like Purple Martins swinging themselves through the breeze to feast on the plentiful insect life. Is that a Western Painted Turtle I see? Is that a heron in the pond? What else is there to see in this piece of paradise?

Passing under the McCarthy Street Bridge, past the Dieppe Memorial, I take a short detour to one of two man-made 'islands' — Prairie Island. The island is full of interpretive signs that talk about the significance of native prairie and species, and the Red-Winged Blackbirds hide in the brush while the sun beats down on my back. There are prairie wildflowers to smell and grasses to touch and if I listen closely, the cacophony of life all around me is in symphony. As the insects buzz by, this place calls me home. The prairie

is in my soul.

After departing the prairie grasses, I venture across another small bridge to Boreal Island, an enchanted grove of trees that offers solace and quiet as the sun breaks through the pine boughs and branches of the birches. The light is softer here; the air moves slower and suggests shade for my warm skin from the high sun. My dogs walk along with me, enjoying the surroundings and I take a moment to remind myself I'm still in the city.

As I walk around the creek, I see familiar faces from my many strolls and visits, enjoying their time outdoors and you can feel the sense of fellowship here. The community is all the more strengthened and exemplified in its efforts to grow crops in the community gardens. Not only can one grow a garden here but also enjoy the chance at a glimpse at the ever-rare Loggerhead Shrike. A species at risk, making home in the park. What a lovely sight to see. Also comforting is the participation by the City of Regina in the Nature Saskatchewan Stewards of Saskatchewan program. Through that partnership they show their care for the park and the space and the species there by continuing to conserve that beneficial habitat.

The sun is setting — I've been out all day. The spectacular sunset this province offers is radiated through the exceptional scene of this park. This park, this delight, this piece of Regina that will welcome anyone — critters and humans alike — can be visited any time of year when you need that extra dose of nature. So, why not take a walk?

Human Nature is an ongoing series for Blue Jay. In each issue, we will feature someone's favourite/memorable nature spot in Saskatchewan. Please contact editor Annie McLeod if you are interested in this opportunity. 🐦



Photo credit: Kim Mann

Mystery Photo Winter 2016 (below)

ANSWER:

The creature pictured here, which spends its summers in much of Saskatchewan and has captured a rodent, is a Great Blue Heron.



Photo credit: Nick Saunders

Mystery Photo Spring 2017 (above)

THE QUESTION IS: Found in Saskatchewan, what species of insect is this (picture shows its thorax)? Hint: it is named for the pattern of the lateral thoracic stripes, which are either thin lines or four spots.

Please send your answers to Blue Jay editor Annie McLeod at bluejay@naturesask.ca or by letter mail: 3017 Hill Ave. Regina, SK S4S 0W2.

Those with correct answers will be entered into a draw for a prize from Nature Saskatchewan.

Have you taken a picture that may make for a good mystery photo? Send it to Annie using the contact information above.



Nature
SASKATCHEWAN

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