



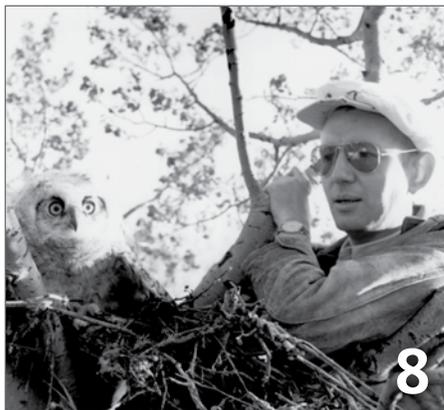
SPRING 2018 VOLUME 76.1

# BLUE JAY





Peter Taylor documents exceptionally large numbers of Purple Finches that overwintered in southern Manitoba from November 2016 to December 2017.



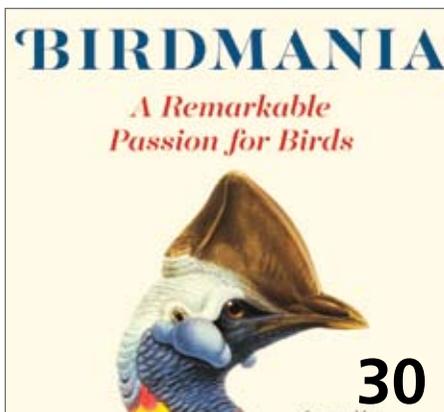
Stuart and Mary Houston — after 75 and 63 years of banding, respectively — have retired Stuart's banding permit obtained in 1943. See page 8 for the backstory, a table of all birds banded under permit 00460, and for a collection of remembrances from those who spent time banding with the Houstons.



Based in Brandon, Manitoba, 'Friends of the Bluebirds' celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2016. Turn to page 21 to read more about this group, the work it does, and what members have learned and observed with respect to Bluebirds throughout the years.



Spencer Sealy provides an account of a pair of Evening Grosbeaks that were observed feeding on pupae of the Forest Tent Caterpillar during the breeding season of 1976.



Bernd Brunner's *Birdmania* is richly illustrated with striking paintings and sketches of birds, feathers and eggs. But the author's subjects are not birds themselves — rather, they are individual human beings who have for one reason or another become obsessed with birds. Turn to page 30 to read a review of this book.



Ellen Bouvier shares why the Gem Lakes in Narrow Hills Provincial Park hold a special place in her heart in this issue's edition of Human Nature.

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>5</b> Exceptionally High Numbers of Purple Finches Wintering in Southern Manitoba, 2016–2017<br/>Peter Taylor</p> <p><b>8</b> The Houstons, Banding Dynamos, Retire Permit 00460<br/>Ron Jensen</p> <p><b>19</b> Nature Saskatchewan Spring Meet 2018</p> <p><b>21</b> Friends of the Bluebirds Still Going Strong in Manitoba<br/>Donna Firby Gamache</p> | <p><b>23</b> Photography</p> <p><b>24</b> Evening Grosbeaks Feeding on Pupae of the Forest Tent Caterpillar in the Dune-Ridge Forest, Delta Marsh, Manitoba, Spring 1976<br/>Spencer G. Sealy</p> <p><b>26</b> Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas: 2017 Season Highlights<br/>LeeAnn Latremouille and Kiel Drake</p> <p><b>28</b> Celebrating Nature Saskatchewan's Volunteer Stewards<br/>Rob Wilson</p> | <p><b>29</b> The Nature Notebook: The Climate Crisis and Saskatchewan<br/>Jared Clarke</p> <p><b>30</b> Book Review <i>Birdmania: A Remarkable Passion for Birds</i><br/>Joel Cherry</p> <p><b>34</b> Human Nature<br/>Ellen Bouvier</p> <p><b>35</b> Mystery Photo</p> |
|--|---|---|

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

**Dr. Branimir Gjetvaj**

President, Nature Saskatchewan

People of Saskatchewan take pride in the large contribution that agriculture brought to our province. We produce food that supports livelihoods well beyond provincial borders, food “to feed the world.” Global population is expected to grow to over eight billion by 2030, demanding more and better quality food as average wealth increases. In response to the heightened demand we have already seen, agricultural production has increased by growing high-yielding crops on more land. However, it did so with increased irrigation, mechanization and the rampant use of agro-chemicals to boost production levels.

Industrial agriculture, practiced on large-scale monoculture landscapes,



## ON THE FRONT COVER

A Song Sparrow photographed at Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park in July 2017.  
Photo credit: Nick Saunders



## ON THE BACK COVER

A Red Squirrel photographed on the Highland Trail at the centre block of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park on September 3, 2017.  
Photo credit: Annie McLeod

has had profound social and environmental impacts. Farming at ever-increasing scales accelerated a decline of rural communities, and millions of acres of natural vegetation have been cleared for planting row crops, with a drastic reduction of native habitats and biodiversity. Globally, agriculture is the leading cause of biodiversity loss, and this pressure may increase with further cropland expansion and intensification<sup>1</sup>. Overuse and mismanagement of pesticides and fertilizers have resulted in the loss of pollinator species and pollution of surface waters and aquifers. Agriculture is considered to be the single largest driver of environmental change<sup>2</sup>, and at the same time it is also the most impacted by these changes. The ability of industrial farming systems to withstand disturbances caused by climate change could be diminished if we continue with the business as usual. Less diverse and more specialized farming systems could experience larger loss of crop yields after extreme weather events. Improving diversity on the farm and landscape level is an important contributor to climate risk reduction.

Producing a sufficient amount of affordable and healthy food is essential for global food security. A narrow focus on maximizing crop yields will not be sufficient to accomplish this goal. In the current paradigm of food production, agricultural intensification aims to increase outputs while keeping the ecological footprint as small as possible. This is achieved by maximizing resource use efficiency, like adjusting fertilizer and water inputs. The main focus is still on productivity, however; the sustainability of food production through reducing environmental impacts comes as an after-thought. If we want to move agriculture from its current role as the world’s single largest driver of environmental change, we need a



Dr. Branimir Gjetvaj

paradigm shift — a new “system thinking” in which the sustainability of food production and the maintenance of agricultural ecosystem services (e.g. nutrient flow, climate stabilization and flood control) and protection of biodiversity presents the core strategy for agricultural development<sup>3,4</sup>.

Real progress in increasing agricultural productivity, improving livelihoods and strengthening climate change resilience will come from applying ecosystem-focused natural resource management through agro-ecology practices such as agroforestry, diversified crops and integrated crop-livestock systems. Advancing on-farm sustainable practices is only a partial step. We need to think boldly and set up multi-functional landscapes with a mosaic of natural, semi-natural (such as shelterbelts and grassland strips) and agricultural lands to take advantage of ecological processes, biodiversity and stability that nature already provides.

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# BLUE JAY

Blue Jay, founded in 1942 by Isabel M. Priestly, is a journal of natural history and conservation for Saskatchewan and adjacent regions. It is published quarterly by Nature Saskatchewan.

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# EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH NUMBERS OF PURPLE FINCHES

## WINTERING IN SOUTHERN MANITOBA, 2016–2017



**FIGURE 1.** Purple Finches and a Pine Siskin (extreme right) at a Pinawa, Manitoba feeder on December 26, 2016. Bold dorsal streaking on the female-plumaged Purple Finches and the adult male's bright rump are typical of the eastern subspecies. Photo credit: Linda Huisman

**Peter Taylor**

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This article documents exceptionally large numbers of Purple Finches (*Haemorhous purpureus*) that overwintered in southern Manitoba from November 2016 to March 2017. The Purple Finch breeds across Canada from British Columbia and southern Yukon to Newfoundland and southward to parts of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Two subspecies are recognized: the eastern *H. p. purpureus* breeds as far west as the British Columbia interior, whereas *H. p. californicus* occurs along the Pacific coast. There is a large east-west component to migration of the eastern subspecies, which normally winters in the eastern United States and southern regions of eastern Canada.<sup>1,2</sup> Southern Manitoba

lies at the northwestern extremity of this winter range. Migration of the western subspecies is partly altitudinal, combined with north-south movements bounded by southern British Columbia, California, and Arizona.<sup>1</sup>

In Manitoba, Purple Finches breed primarily in the southern half of the boreal forest.<sup>3,4</sup> They visit feeders, sometimes in large numbers during spring migration (late March to mid-May), but wintering birds are typically singles or occasionally small flocks. While an increase in winter records was noted during the last quarter of the 20th century, Christmas Bird Count (CBC) totals of 30 at Cypress River - Spruce Woods on December 26, 1988 and 33 near Seven Sisters Falls (Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet CBC area) on December 28, 1996, as well as a flock of 14 at Victoria Beach on January 16, 1993, were considered especially

noteworthy.<sup>3</sup> Although occurrence in winter remains sporadic, somewhat larger numbers have been recorded more recently, for example, a then-record total of 53 on the 2002 Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet CBC.<sup>5</sup>

Fall migration of Purple Finches in Manitoba is normally almost complete by the end of October. Thus, frequent sightings of small flocks in southern Manitoba in November 2016, both at feeders and at seed-bearing trees and shrubs, indicated that an unusual event was shaping up for the 2016-2017 winter. This was borne out by an extraordinary total of 382 Purple Finches recorded on the 2016 Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet CBC; while about 70% were found within the town of Pinawa, some were recorded by all but one of the seven parties of counters. Altogether in Manitoba, 729 Purple Finches were found on 15 of 21 counts; the previous record province-wide tally was 121 in 2008, with an average of 40 on two to ten counts between 2000 and 2015, inclusive.<sup>5</sup>

### Christmas Bird Counts and other counts

The Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet area lies at the southern fringe of the boreal forest in southeastern Manitoba. The next-highest 2016 CBC totals in the province were also in partly settled, forest-edge settings (130 at Glenboro - Spruce Woods and 62 at Cypress River - Spruce Woods); these totals contrast with just two individuals in the urban/suburban Winnipeg count, despite more intense coverage. Unusually high counts extended west and north to Brandon (46), Minnedosa (24), Riding Mountain National Park (30), Dauphin (12), and Hodgson (17).<sup>5</sup> Purple Finches were also conspicuous at several feeders on Hecla Island (Lake Winnipeg) in January 2017. In Saskatchewan, altogether 43 Purple Finches were noted on seven of 95 counts, with

most at Whitewood (20) and Nipawin (11); this is more than usual, but not a record.<sup>6</sup> Similar patterns for Manitoba and Saskatchewan are evident for the Great Backyard Bird Count (February 17-20, 2017) and for eBird records as a whole for winter 2016-2017.<sup>7</sup>

I monitored the overwintering abundance of Purple Finches in Pinawa by counting them on 7-km walks on February 19 (during the Great Backyard Bird Count), March 15, and March 23, 2017, as well as observing them more casually throughout the winter. The three walks followed a convoluted route covering roughly half of the town-site, but taking in all known major feeder locations and concentration areas. Results, along with counts of other finches and selected CBC data, are compiled in Table 1.

The CBC data indicate that finch numbers were generally high on the 2016 Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet CBC, with the significant exception of the Evening Grosbeak, recently declared a species of Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.<sup>8</sup> Only the Purple Finch was far above the previous range of fluctuating numbers. In general, "winter finches" are noted for their nomadic behaviour, linked to varying food supplies that result in highly variable numbers at given localities from year to year.<sup>9,10</sup>

The walking-count totals for Purple Finches in Pinawa, together with day-to-day observations, indicate that large numbers survived the winter,

with many departing a little ahead of the normal spring passage (late March to mid-May). Fairly high but not exceptional numbers (up to several dozen) were noted at some Pinawa feeders during the latter period. High survival has also been inferred in other winters with smaller incursions, when localized concentrations were sustained throughout the season (personal observation).

Other information derived from the walking counts includes sustained high numbers of redpolls (especially at feeders) to mid-March, a midwinter influx of Pine Siskins (also mainly at feeders), and the normal March departure of Pine Grosbeaks, which are always in the vanguard of spring migration.<sup>11-13</sup> The relatively low walking-count totals of both Evening and Pine grosbeaks are partly due to the late-morning/early-afternoon timing of the walks, after the typical, local morning peak of feeder activity for these two species (personal observation).

The number of colourful adult male Purple Finches was estimated at about 20%; one feeder photograph showed just two adult males in a flock of 20. Assuming a 1:1 sex ratio, this suggests a high proportion (~60%) of hatch-year birds, because young males moult from female-like Basic I (sub-adult) plumage into Definitive Basic (adult) plumage during the July-November period of their second year.<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of the House Finch (*H. mexicanus*) as a breeding

species in many prairie towns and cities, since the first individuals arrived during the 1980s, means that misidentification of House Finches as Purple Finches (or *vice versa*) by some observers is a potential confounding factor.<sup>4,14,15</sup> Indeed, this is an ongoing issue for CBC compilers. Based on the author's field observations and correspondence, however, it was not a significant factor in the Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet area during the 2016-2017 winter. The House Finch remains a rare visitor to Pinawa and has not been detected there for some years. It is an uncommon breeder at Lac du Bonnet and some nearby communities, but the local population appears to be migratory. The species has been recorded just once on the Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet CBC: 24 birds on December 28, 2002. This coincided with the previous high count for Purple Finches, and the presence of both species within the count area at that time was verified by the author (as CBC compiler).

### Food supply, regional patterns, and interpretation

Although large numbers of Purple Finches frequented well-stocked feeders (Fig. 1), they were also attracted to abundant crops of seeds on a number of wild and cultivated trees and shrubs, especially Black Ash (*Fraxinus nigra*), ornamental Amur Maple (*Acer ginnala* cultivars), and lilacs (*Syringa* sp. cultivars). My notes for February 19, 2017 state that while some Purple Finches were visiting feeders, where they mingled with redpolls and siskins, and others were still attracted to Amur Maple and lilac seeds, the majority were feeding in flocks of up to 20 on buds in Trembling Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and other deciduous trees. Purple Finches feed heavily on aspen catkins during spring migration, so it was interesting to see them feeding on these winter buds.<sup>3,11</sup> On March 15, glaring light made it challenging to scan treetops, while a stiff breeze seemed to be discouraging Purple Finches from treetop feeding, a plausible explanation for the somewhat reduced count. By March 23, however, it was evident that most Purple Finches, as well as many other finches, had

**TABLE 1: Summary of counts of Purple Finches and other finches in and near Pinawa, Manitoba.**

SPECIES	CBC, <sup>a</sup> 30 DEC 2016	CBC, 10-YEAR AVERAGE <sup>b</sup>	CBC RECORD (YEAR)	WALK, 19 FEB 2017	WALK, 15 MAR 2017	WALK, 23 MAR 2017
Pine Grosbeak ( <i>Pinicola enucleator</i> )	422	297	742 (1996)	47	4	0
Purple Finch ( <i>Haemorhous purpureus</i> )	382	6	382 (2016)	325	212	48
Red Crossbill ( <i>Loxia curvirostr</i> )	1	0	8 (1979)	0	0	0
White-winged Crossbill ( <i>L. leucoptera</i> )	47	37	151 (2009)	0	0	0
Common Redpoll ( <i>Acanthis flammea</i> )	587	214	852 (1987)	449	493	92
Hoary Redpoll ( <i>A. hornemanni</i> )	12	5	45 (1984)	1	0	0
Undetermined redpoll ( <i>Acanthis</i> sp.)	24	13	--	0	0	0
Pine Siskin ( <i>Spinus pinus</i> )	22	2	259 (1987)	97	75	33
American Goldfinch ( <i>S. tristis</i> )	0	0	55 (1979)	0	0	0
Evening Grosbeak ( <i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i> )	241	405	1663 (1995)	32	51	27

<sup>a</sup> All CBC totals refer to the Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet count circle, which is centred at 50.1775°N, 95.9664°W.

<sup>b</sup> Ten-year averages are for the period 2006-2015.

departed (see Table 1).

Remarkably, the 2016 Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet CBC total was the highest of 1,079 North American counts reporting Purple Finches during the 2016 CBC period, though only third in birds per party-hour of field effort (6.72).<sup>5</sup> These birds were evidently part of a broader regional concentration, with the next three highest counts (excluding the Pacific Coast) being at Kenora, Ontario (292; 27.8 per party-hour; previous record 134 in 2014), Grand Marais, Minnesota (223; 4.90 per party-hour; previous record 35 in 2008), and Thunder Bay, Ontario (195; 2.09 per party-hour; all-time record 449 in 2002). The Atikokan, Ontario count was also noteworthy, with the second-highest total per unit of effort (97; 13.6 per party-hour; previous record 83 in 2002). These five count localities lie within fairly narrow ranges of latitude (47.8 to 50.2°N) and longitude (89.3 to 96.0°W), near the northwestern extremity of the published winter range.<sup>1</sup> A brief review of Christmas counts in preceding years shows regional concentrations in New England (especially New Hampshire) in 2015 and Wisconsin in 2014, but no obvious regional peaks in 2011 to 2013.<sup>5</sup>

In eastern North America, Purple Finch migration is characterized by biennial incursions into the southern U.S. as far as the gulf states.<sup>1</sup> While this alternation has been attributed to varying cone crops in the northern portion of this finch's wintering range, this explanation is problematic because conifer seeds do not appear to be a major component of the Purple Finch's varied winter diet of seeds and fruits.<sup>1</sup> Koenig and Knops conducted a 30-year, continent-wide analysis of boreal finch numbers and coniferous seed crops.<sup>9</sup> They concluded that Purple Finches erupted following years when breeding densities were high, for reasons apparently unrelated to the conifer seed crop; the variability in numbers was much less than for other boreal finches. Banding records indicate fidelity of Purple Finches to breeding sites, but not to wintering locales.<sup>2</sup>

The 2016-2017 winter incursion in southern Manitoba and neighbouring regions may be attributed to short-

stop migration of birds originating somewhere in western Canada, prompted by an abundant and varied food supply. While the author lacks detailed data on food availability, there has been some decline in bird feeding in Pinawa since about 1990 (probably due to demographic changes in the town), and the 2016 Amur Maple seed crop appeared to be unusually heavy. The eastern and western subspecies are distinguishable by differences in vocalization and plumage; in particular, the western subspecies has more diffuse markings in female-type plumages.<sup>1</sup> No such differences were noted during the winter incursion described here, suggesting that only the expected eastern subspecies was present.

The Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet area has long been a hot spot for winter finches, with Evening and Pine grosbeak CBC totals often in the top 10 for North America. Finches with more southerly winter ranges (Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, and American Goldfinch) are usually either scarce or absent, but CBC data show occasional spikes that are far above the low long-term averages (Table 1).<sup>5</sup> It may therefore be many years before a comparable Purple Finch incursion occurs again in Manitoba. None was recorded in the 2017 Pinawa - Lac du Bonnet CBC, and the species was scarce or absent on 2017 counts throughout Manitoba and northwestern Ontario.

## Acknowledgements

I thank J. Paul Goossen, Richard W. Knapton, and Rudolf F. Koes for helpful comments on a draft manuscript, an anonymous reviewer for further comments, and Linda Huisman for use of her photograph.

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# THE HOUSTONS, BANDING DYNAMOS, RETIRE PERMIT 00460

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Mary and Stuart Houston — after 63 and 75 years of banding, respectively — have retired Stuart's banding permit obtained in 1943. The backstory and selected Saskatchewan banding history follows.

As a boy growing up in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Stuart — at age 12 — was given a copy of Taverner's *The Birds of Canada* by two aunts<sup>1</sup>. He put Canada's leading bird book to good use identifying local birds. One day, however, Stuart observed a group of birds feeding on dandelions that weren't readily found among the illustrations in his book. Stuart's father advised him to visit Isabel Priestly, who helped to identify the birds as American Goldfinches.

Mrs. Priestly had come to Canada as a war bride in 1918, settling at Yorkton in 1935. A trained botanist, previously active in Winnipeg with the Manitoba Natural History Society, Mrs. Priestly invited Stuart and a few friends to join her on her weekly walks around Yorkton. She wrote a weekly nature column in the *Yorkton Enterprise*. Bird records collected

during the weekly hikes, plus historical records from John Gunn and Frank Baines, who respectively resided at Good Spirit and Crescent Lakes, were compiled in July 1942 into a five-page *List of the Birds Identified in the Yorkton District in Recent Years*, typed and mimeographed by Stuart Houston and which was priced at 10 cents.

Because R.J. Priestly was the Sifton Press representative in Yorkton, a rave review by A.G. Lawrence in *Chickadee Notes*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, was quickly reprinted in the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* and the *Regina Leader-Post*. Over 100 orders flooded in and many included bird observations from their locality. This quickly led to the creation of the Yorkton Natural History Society, which included four high school students: Harvey Beck, Stuart Houston, Vernon Barnes and Ray Adams. Stuart, as secretary-treasurer, kept track of membership, typed stencils for and mimeographed the quarterly bulletin, *The Blue Jay*, on a primitive open-drum copying machine. Student members hand-coloured the stencilled letterhead, *The Blue Jay*, in blue crayon for the first two years. Stuart's life as a naturalist had begun in Grade 9!

Due to the war effort, biologists



Stuart Houston holding a Great Horned Owl.  
Photo credit: Glen Grambo

for banding waterfowl were in short supply. Stuart, at 15 years in July of 1943, was approached by B. W. Cartwright, chief naturalist for Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) to band ducks. On the advice of Hoyes Lloyd of the Canadian Wildlife Service in Ottawa, Stuart omitted his age on the banding permit application. One had to be 18 to obtain a banding permit. The ducks were banded under Ducks Unlimited 00077 permit, and other species under Stuart's 00460 private permit, for a record 75 years of banding. At an American Ornithologist's Union (AOU) meeting in the 1960s, the head of the USA Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL), Allen Duvall, sought out Stuart and "volunteered that this was the only time during his tenure at the banding office that the U.S. FWS knowingly concurred in the issue of an under-age permit."<sup>2</sup>



Stuart and Mary Houston at Redberry Lake. Photo credit: Dr. John Gerrard Sr.

The first ringing (a British term for banding) by Stuart was in 1943, when he banded 556 ducks in 31 days, for which he was paid 10 cents a duck.<sup>3</sup> The third year, over 2,100 ducks were banded in three months at 20 cents per duck, which yielded \$427, big money for a teenager. The year-round exciting recoveries arriving in the mail from Puerto Rico, Jamaica and Cuba<sup>3</sup> after the first brief season were more important than money. Blue-winged Teal were shot on almost every Caribbean island.

In 1945, DUC offered Stuart a University scholarship to study wildlife management at the University of Wisconsin under Aldo Leopold, or ornithology at Cornell University under Arthur Allen. Stuart declined, saying, "If I take that offer, what would I do for a hobby?"<sup>3</sup> He was accepted into medicine and graduated with an MD from the University of Manitoba — his parents' alma mater — in 1951; that year, Stuart married Mary Belcher, a teacher at Yorkton Collegiate, and he joined his parents' medical practice for nine years.

A 53-page booklet summarized results from the banding of 63,826 waterfowl by DUC between 1939 and 1950, and 22,270 were banded in Saskatchewan. Stuart's contribution to the total number banded was 5,011.<sup>4</sup> Banding was now both a hobby and an obsession.

Seth Low of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Chief of the BBL in Patuxent, Maryland, brought two mist nets — a new technology and at his own expense — to Stuart and Mary in Yorkton on August 19, 1954, instructing them on set-up and use of the mist nets along a road allowance. They quickly caught one Gray Catbird and one Yellow Warbler. While dawn mist netting for Wilson's Snipe on September 20, 1961, a Pectoral Sandpiper was caught and that sandpiper was shot on May 28, 1963, near Yanskiy, Yakut, U.S.S.R. — a distance of 5,735 km.<sup>5</sup> Of the 1,008 Pectoral Sandpipers banded in 1960, two were recovered in the U.S.S.R.

**TABLE 1.1 Summary of banding records attributed to C. S. Houston, permit 000460, in banding code order.**

SPECIES	BANDING YEARS	# OF YRS	# BANDED
Western Grebe	1944,59,77,81	4	5
Red-necked Grebe	1943	1	2
Horned Grebe	1944,46,57,67,74	5	6
Eared Grebe	1957	1	58
Pied-billed Grebe	1948,54,59	3	3
Herring Gull	1967,69,73,78	4	45
California Gull	1955-58,60-73,75-89	32	9855
Ring-billed Gull	1953-58,60-73,75-87,89	35	20448
Franklin's Gull	1957,60,65-68,70-72	9	1330
Caspian Tern	1956,64,65,69,73,78,85,89	8	395
Common Tern	1952,54,56-58,61,63-73,75-81,84,86	26	3107
Black Tern	1966,67	2	2
Double-crested Cormorant	1953-58,60-61,63-73,75-87,89	33	4674
American White Pelican	1954-58, 60,61,63-87	31	5512
Common Merganser	1974,76,83,92	4	5
Red-breasted Merganser	1969	1	1
American Black Duck	1945	1	2
Ruddy Duck	1948	1	1
Mallard	1944-48,55-60,67,68,70,72,73,76,87-89,2001	21	2029
Gadwall	1943,52,60,67,75,77,83,86,90	9	17
American Wigeon	1943,44,45,46,48,52,59,60,67	5	94
Green-winged Teal	1943-46, 48,57,58,76	8	82
Blue-winged Teal	1943-48,55,57,58,65-68	13	1501
Northern Shoveler	1943,45,46,48,57,58,60,64,65,67,68,71-73,88	15	78
Northern Pintail	1944-46,48,53,56-58,61,64,67,68,70,71,75	17	642
Redhead	1943-46,48,57,67	7	378
Canvasback	1943-46,48,67	6	94
Lesser Scaup	1943-46,48,58,64,71,77,79,83	11	17
Ring-necked Duck	1957	1	5
Common Goldeneye	1958,74-89	18	148
Bufflehead	1945,75	2	11
White-winged Scoter	1955-58,60,61,64,66-71,73,75,76,81,82,83	19	113
Lesser Snow Goose	1985	1	26
Ross's Goose	1985	1	4
Greater White-fronted Goose	1985	1	2
Canada Goose	1946,67,78,81,85,87,88,92,95,2000,01,06	12	51
Cackling Goose	1985	1	2
Tundra[Whistling] Swan	1974	1	5
American Bittern	1943,44,46,48,55-57,69	8	20
Great Blue Heron	1944,53,54,57,58,69-71	8	84
Black-crowned Night-Heron	1944,46,47,48,55-57,64,68-71	14	247
Sandhill Crane	1987	1	1
Sora	1944,53,61,68	4	5
American Coot	1943-46,48,58,60,67,69,71,77	13	746
Red-necked Phalarope	1967,70	2	4
Wilson's Phalarope	1973	1	4
American Avocet	1972,73,75,99,2003,05-07	8	27
Wilson's Snipe	1945,48,61,72,82	5	12
Short-billed Dowitcher	1967	1	1
Long-billed Dowitcher	1967	1	1
Stilt Sandpiper	1946,67	2	5
Pectoral Sandpiper	1961,65,67	3	19
Least Sandpiper	1948,65,67,70	3	110
Semipalmated Sandpiper	1945,65,67,70	4	162
Marbled Godwit	1945,53,65,80,2007	5	11
Lesser Yellowlegs	1948,65,67	3	15
Willet	1944-46,56,63,73,74,79,87,96-98,2005	13	23
Upland Sandpiper	1944,61,68,84,86,91,99,2000	8	12
Spotted Sandpiper	1956,58,61,63-70,72,73	13	37
Long-billed Curlew	1961,74,78,81,87,88,95,2003	8	15
Killdeer	1946,48,52,53,57-59,61,64,65,67,70-75,79,81,83,85-92,97,99,2000-05	36	121
Semipalmated Plover	1965,67,70	3	20
Piping Plover	1963-73,84	12	39
Ruffed Grouse	1948,55,58,66,67	4	4
Sharp-tailed Grouse	1944,46,53,54,68	5	5
Eurasian Collared Dove	2003,05,06	3	6
Mourning Dove	1953,59,60,62-65,68,69,71,73,78,89,93,98,2002,05,08,09	19	53
Turkey Vulture	1972,74,2003-16	16	1448
Northern Harrier	1944,46,52,54-57,59-61,64,66,67,69-78,80-83,87,80-83,87-91,95,97,98,2000,01,05,06,08	40	526



Stuart and a Great Horned Owl. Photo credit: Hans Dommach

Great Horned Owls became a special interest of Stuart's in 1958. Bill Horseman was able to climb a tree like a bear — he essentially walked up the side of the aspen on the soles of his running shoes while using his hands above to hold onto the tree trunk itself. While he was moving from slough to slough near Saltcoats, trapping muskrats, 15-year-old Bill had found 10 Great Horned Owl nests in which 22 young were banded.

John Bull's summary of the seasons in *Audubon Field Notes* termed this "an outstanding piece of field work."<sup>6</sup> The banded Great Horned Owl nestlings total increased to 70 in 1959 and jumped to 151 in 1960 when three pairs of farm youngsters at Dubuc, MacNutt and Invermay each found 15 owl nests and earned a Peterson Field Guide apiece. Stuart's love relationship with Great Horned Owls brought his total to 7,776, (Table 1) before he turned his major species over to one of his many climber helpers, Dr. Martin Gerard, in 1994. "The success of an owl bander depends not so much on his own efforts as the help he receives from others ... Most of the owl nests reported ... were in response to a request in Doug Gilroy's nature column, 'Prairie Wildlife,' in the *Western Producer* farm newspaper ..."<sup>7</sup>

In 1958, Maurice Street and his daughters visited Yorkton. A shallow pond beside Upper Rousay Lake held 10 Blue-winged Teal ducklings. Maurice sent the slowest runner, Mary Houston, deep into the muck of the shallow pond to scare the brood on

to the dry grass of the shore. As the ducklings headed for the grass, Stan Houston, Margaret Belcher, Maurice and his two daughters caught all 10, including a final desperate rush of 100 m by Maurice. Four distant band recoveries (40 per cent!) resulted: McGregor, Minnesota (October 4, 1958); La Gorgona, Valle, Colombia (November 23, 1958); Tustus, Venezuela and Lake Ariguanabo, Bauta, Cuba (both in 1962).<sup>8</sup>

To band large numbers of birds per hour, and provide large numbers of recoveries, Stuart and Mary banded colonial birds on islands in lakes, with Redberry Lake their favourite site for American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, California and Ring-billed Gulls, and Common Terns. The banded gull timing was perfect

for R.F. Oldaker, who from 1958 to 1964 possessed infinite patience at the Vancouver city dump. He kept each banded California Gull (CAGU) in sight until all eight numbers around the circumference of a band could be recorded through his homemade telescope. Oldaker collected notebooks full of incomplete numbers, but managed to read 39 complete CAGU bands from Saskatchewan. California Gulls arrived in Vancouver on August 12, 1960, August 11, 1961 and August 11, 1963. They wintered along the Pacific coast, returned to the city dump when one and two and often three years old, and did not return to Saskatchewan lakes to breed until four years old!<sup>9</sup>

Ring-billed Gulls (RBGU) — 23,866 banded by four banders (Houston, Bard, McClanahan and Lyon) in Saskatchewan, with 538 recoveries — were so numerous they allowed separate mapping each month. The distance traveled southward was calculated between 10 and 35 km per average day for seven select RBGU. Of the total recoveries, 42.4% (228 birds) were in western Canada, 32.1% (173 birds) were in 29 USA states and 25.5% were in 15 Mexican states with five states outside expected wintering range. Per cent recoveries of RBGU averaged 2.38%, but showed a steady



A group of Yellow Creek students observing a Great Horned Owl being banded by Stuart; Mary watching. Photo credit: Rosemary Nemeth

decline from as high as 5% before 1950 to less than 1% in 1979 and 1984.<sup>10</sup>

Franklin's Gulls (1,330) banded at Rice Lake west of Saskatoon provided only two recoveries, one of which was noteworthy — a dead Franklin's Gull at Puerto Caldera, Chile on February 3, 1973.<sup>11</sup>

Stuart and Mary jointly or individually have provided articles to *The Blue Jay* almost every year. Most recent articles include the vulture banding crew's wing-tagging efforts, and an article on the oldest Saskatchewan Osprey at 19 years, three months and Great Horned Owl at 25 years, nine months — two of our oldest and most-studied raptors.<sup>12</sup>

Mary, as a Stuart sub-permittee, has banded 8,021 Mountain Bluebirds and 20,815 Tree Swallows (Table 1) as part of a project for the [Nature] Saskatoon Junior Naturalists that began in 1969. Two hundred boxes, readily accepted by Mountain Bluebirds, were built in the Houston basement to "bring back the bluebirds" — from 10 young banded in 1969 to 21, 53, 157 and 329 in successive years, then dropping following adverse spring weather to 125 in 1983 and building back up to 403 in 1991. When Mary's arthritis prevented her from climbing highway ditches to birdhouses, she turned over the bluebird trail to Melanie Elliott and Greg Fenty in 2005. Gerald Parent had offered the perfect solution in 2001 for an elderly arthritic bander, seating Mary at a table beneath a beach umbrella and bringing her each Purple Martin in sequence — 4,886 of them for her to band with ease over 16 years. Even more impressive, Mary holds the North American record for banding the most Bohemian Waxwings — 5,387.<sup>11</sup> Her preferred method of capture for Bohemian Waxwings was baiting banding traps with Mountain Ash berries in their backyard. From dawn to dark on March 12, 1967, Mary handled 271 waxwings in a single day, banding 81 'new' bohemians and 190 'repeats.'<sup>13</sup>

Many people have helped Stuart

**TABLE 1.2 Summary of banding records attributed to C. S. Houston, permit 000460, in banding code order.**

SPECIES	BANDING YEARS	# OF YRS	# BANDED
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1955,65,66,74,2005,08,09	7	20
Cooper's Hawk	1945,47,53,56,58,60,65,67,69,70,73-75,79,80,82,83,88-93,98-2009	35	255
Northern Goshawk	1955,65-67,72,78-81,92,97,98,2001,03,05,07-09	17	45
Red-tailed Hawk	1945,46,53,57-61,64-2009,11,12,16	58	1095
Harlan's Hawk	2004,09	2	2
Swainson's Hawk	1944-46,48,53,55-58,60,64-2009,11-13,17	58	4864
Broad-winged Hawk	1965,74,78,84,97,98,2003,04,08	8	15
Rough-legged Hawk	1975,2000,01,04,05,08,09,12	7	24
Ferruginous Hawk	1958,60,61,69-2013	47	4239
Golden Eagle	1960,61,63-2002,08,09	51	332
Bald Eagle	1965,67,72,73,76,80,81,84-90,92,2000,01,09	18	79
Gyr Falcon	2002,07,10,11	4	4
Prairie Falcon	1959,70,71,73-2009	40	813
Peregrine Falcon	1960,61,81,2016,17	5	14
Merlin	1957,60,61,64,72-2012,14	46	1069
American Kestrel	1958-60,64-70,72-83,85-2009,17	49	1087
Osprey	1965,67,73,75-2004	33	624
Long-eared Owl	1947,52,58-61,64-69,71-81,83-94,96,97,99-2010,12,14,17	52	749
Short-eared Owl	1959,60,64,67,69,70,74,75,78,83,86,93,97,2001,02,05,06,08	17	277
Barred Owl	1960,61,88-93,2001,04,07	11	19
Great Gray Owl	1956,83,84,86,88,89,91,92,94,95,97,98,2000-07,09,10,12-14,17	25	202
Boreal Owl	1960,97,99,2001,05,08,09	7	54
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1959,60,64,67,72,73,2001,04-09,12,15	14	1439
Eastern Screech-Owl	1946,88,89	3	18
Great Horned Owl	1946,48,52-61,64-2009,11,14,17	59	7776
Snowy Owl	1954,67,2000-06,09,11,12,15	13	107
Northern Hawk Owl	1969,2000-14,16,17	17	234
Burrowing Owl	1947,61,67,88	4	14
Black-billed Cuckoo	1963	1	1
Belted Kingfisher	1959	1	13
Hairy Woodpecker	1956,61,82,84,85,87-89,92,95,97,2004,09,13,16	15	24
Downy Woodpecker	1954,55,57,60,61,85,88,92,2000,04,08,09,10,16	13	22
Yellow-bellied Woodpecker(Sapsucker)	1954,59-61,65,67,69,70,91,2008	10	16
Pileated Woodpecker	1970&2008	2	8
Yellow-shafted Woodpecker	1945-47,49,53,56,59,65-69,71,72,78,85,95,96,98-2006,08-10,12-14,16	33	118
Red-shafted Woodpecker	2007	1	1
Common Nighthawk	1945,46,63	3	4
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	1946,48	2	3
Eastern Kingbird	1944,65,67,69,70,72,73,75,79	9	40
Western Kingbird	1971,73,75,80,83,2000,02,04	8	44
Eastern Phoebe	1958,65,66,87,2001,06	6	40
Say's Phoebe	1968	1	5
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	1965,68	2	3
Western[Alder] Flycatcher	1965,66,68	3	10
Least Flycatcher	1945,55-58,61,65,66,69	9	36
Horned Lark	1967,74,82,2003,05	5	5
Black-billed Magpie	1954,58-61,64-2009,10-13,15,16	55	1302
Blue Jay	1959,71,76-82,84-2016	42	294
Gray Jay	1952,2006,08,09	3	14
Common Raven	1968,90,95,2000,02-09	12	109
American Crow	1945,52-54,57-61,64-69,71-75,77-93,95,97-2007	49	592
European Starling	1955,57,59,64-67,69,71,87,88,2000,02,05,06	15	77
Brown-headed Cowbird	1961,65,66,69,99,2000,06,12,15	9	15
Yellow-headed Blackbird	1961,66-68,70-72	8	49
Red-winged Blackbird	1944,45,58,62,65,67,68,73,74,78,2000,02,03,05	14	74
Western Meadowlark	1945,54,2005	3	9
Baltimore Oriole	1946,47,53,59-61,64-66,68,70,71	12	21
Brewer's Blackbird	1967,68,72,78,91-93,99,2003-06,14	13	35
Common Grackle	1944-54,56,60-71,73-82,84-2016	70	1346
Evening Grosbeak	1959,68,70-73,75,76,78,83-89	15	943
Pine Grosbeak	1969,72,86	3	44
Purple Finch	1953-55,57,60,65,67,68,71-73,76-79,81,83,84,86,89,96,98-2000,02,03,11,12,15,16	33	416
House Finch	1995-2017	22	955
Red Crossbill	1964,70,73,96	4	34
White-winged Crossbill	1969,88	2	5
Hoary Redpoll	1960,66,69,72,74,78,86,88,92,2000,02,04,07,13	14	39
Common Redpoll	1960,62,64,66,69,70,72,74,76,78,85,86,88-90,92,94-96,2000,02,04,05,07-09,13	27	3226
American Goldfinch	1958,67,90,2013-15	6	12

find nesting raptors, climbed trees to the nests, gone over cliffs attached by rope and climbing harnesses or herded smelly young pelicans and cormorants at Redberry Lake in the early morning hours before the sun got so hot that it could give heatstroke to nestlings no longer sheltered by their parents. What follows are heavily edited excerpts of such remembrances:

**Leif Nordal, Bulyea, farmer, naturalist and excellent nest finder.** His son Gary said "Dad passed away three years ago but liked to spend his springs driving the countryside looking for owl nests."

**Sig Jordheim, Kyle, naturalist, farmer at 95 years young recalls.** "A Swainson's Hawk struck Stuart's head and flew off with his cap. A Golden Eaglet in Prime Coulee took flight; I retrieved the bird and placed it back in its nest to be banded. Stuart was always in a hurry to get to the next banding site."

**Frank Roy, Tullis/Saskatoon, childhood pen pal, long time friend, teacher, naturalist, and Stuart's publication editor.** "I recall going to Redberry Lake to band pelicans and cormorants which puked on me as I sat in the back of the boat. I told Stuart I was not coming banding again!"



Mary banding a bird. Photo credit: Lynn Oliphant

**Doug Whitfield, Saskatoon, naturalist, banding crewmember.** "In 1965, I reported a Great Horned Owl nest and was invited to witness the banding of its young. I soon became a regular participant in Stuart's banding activities, where I met and befriended Jon Gerrard. This led to several years of widespread eagle banding in northern Saskatchewan and a contract from the CWS to carry out a quantitative survey of the Saskatchewan eagle population ... Without Stuart's enthusiastic mentorship none of this would have happened. Our knowledge of the province's Bald Eagles would still be stuck at 1966 levels. It is hard to overestimate the effects on my life from knowing him."

**Lorne Scott, Indian Head, naturalist, master bander, former NDP Minister of Environment, retired Reeve of his RM.** "In one of Doug Gilroy's Prairie Wildlife Columns in the Western Producer in the winter of 1966, there was a note, please contact Stuart if you know of Great Horned Owl nests. I wrote that I knew of three nests at Indian Head. Stuart replied that he would come. My Dad was sceptical that anyone would travel 200 miles to band owls. Sure enough, a well-used vehicle with aluminum ladders on the roof roared



Stuart at an Osprey platform at Loon Lake. Photo credit: Dr. Frank Scott

into the farmyard, scattering chickens and sending the dog under the porch. Stuart and his crew, including Doug Whitfield, never left the vehicle, saying 'Jump in, we need to band the owls and be on our way.' Dad was shaking his head; no one had ever come to his farm without coming into the house for a visit. Stuart returned in June to band nestling Red-tailed Hawks.

A life-long friendship has been maintained, with Stuart and Mary as mentors, advisors, critics and a steadfast source of inspiration and encouragement. Countless others have also been introduced to nature conservation and some have pursued life-long careers in the wildlife field. For 70 years, thousands throughout Saskatchewan have benefited from their passion, knowledge, dedication and encouragement. What a legacy!"

**Wayne Renaud, Valley Centre/Toronto, naturalist and wildlife consultant.** "My brother Don and I first met Stuart on July 7, 1968 when he came to band a brood of Long-eared Owls near Valley Centre. On June 8, 1969, his entourage banded young in nests of six Short-eared and six Long-eared Owls and nests of Northern Harrier, American Crow, Black-billed Magpie and European Starling. Stuart was instrumental in my decision to go to university



Stuart banding a Golden Eagle. Photo credit: Hans Dommach

instead of a technical school. During five years working on my B.Sc. in Saskatoon I helped band Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcons, Ferruginous and Swainson's Hawks, Great Blue Herons, American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Ring-billed, California, Franklin's and Herring Gulls. Always the consummate team player, he and Mary ... hosted dinners at their house."

**Spencer Sealy, Battleford/ Winnipeg, PhD ornithologist, professor emeritus University of Manitoba.** "My banding began when I was a high school student in Battleford, focused then on birds of prey. When I had a tally of upcoming nestlings soon ready for banding, I notified Stuart by letter and he sent me the appropriate number of bands in the mail, or on the bus. At the first Great Horned Owl nest, I was struck in the face by the female owl; wearing safety glasses and a leather jacket, the damage was minimal, but I became ever more careful ... In 1962, I obtained my own banding permit, with a strong and convincing supportive letter from Stuart to the banding office." Spencer was assisted by climbers: brother Ted Sealy, and Harold Fisher, now a well-known bander near Prince Albert (pers.com. CSH).



Stuart and Mary Houston - September 28, 2006.  
Photo credit: Bob Lampard

**TABLE 1.3 Summary of banding records attributed to C. S. Houston, permit 000460, in banding code order.**

SPECIES	BANDING YEARS	# OF YRS	# BANDED
Pine Siskin	1964-69,72,73,84,91,92,94-2002,04-17	33	1429
Lapland Longspur	1960	1	1
Vesper Sparrow	1965, 2006	2	16
Baird's Sparrow	1945,64	2	3
Savannah Sparrow	1945,62,65,67,70,2014	6	59
Grasshopper Sparrow	1964	1	1
Harris's Sparrow	1944,45,54-61, 63-68,74,75,81,94-2017	43	401
Eastern White-crowned Sparrow	1996,2000,05,07,08,13-17	7	18
Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow	1945, 46, 52, 55-69, 72, 74, 94-2017	48	789
White-throated Sparrow	1944,45,49,52-56,58-69, 71,72,74,75,77,80-82,88-20117	57	4475
American Tree Sparrow	1955-61,63-65,67-69,98,2004-12,14,16,17	26	115
Chipping Sparrow	1945-48,52,53,59,60,63-66,68,69,92,95-97,99-2005,07-2017	36	390
Clay-colored Sparrow	1945,55-60,63-70,96,97,2004,05,07-11,14,16,17	26	375
Slate-colored Junco	1945,54-61,63-70,73-85,87-2017	61	7846
Oregon Junco	1967	1	2
Song Sparrow	1958-61,63-67,69,2005,08,09,15,16	15	55
Lincoln's Sparrow	1945,46,53,58-69,72,79,81,88,92,96-2017	43	717
Swamp Sparrow	1967,69,2010	3	4
Fox Sparrow	1958,61,65-69,74,89,2005,07-15	19	88
Spotted Towhee	1964-66,75,95,2011,12	7	16
Northern Cardinal	1980	1	1
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	1956,58,61,64-66,68,70,95,96,2002,05,13-15	15	30
Indigo Bunting	1961	1	1
Lark Bunting	1960	1	1
Western Tanager	1979	1	1
Purple Martin	1954,57,59,81,2001-16	20	4886
Cliff Swallow	1958	1	1
Barn Swallow	1945,53,56,58,60,63,65,67-78,80-82,84,85,89,90,2003,04,06	29	628
Tree Swallow	1946,69-2009,11	43	20914
Bank Swallow	1944,45,54,67,71,81,	6	130
Bohemian Waxwing	1953,58,60-72,74-79,85,87-89,91,94,95,97,99,2000,01,03,05-08,11,13,14,16	41	5392
Cedar Waxwing	1956,58-61,66-68,72,73,78,79,87,91,99,2002,05,07,08,10,15	21	86
Northern Shrike	1977,85,88,2004,06,08,09,12	8	17
Loggerhead Shrike	1955,64,68,69,71-75,79,81,84,88,94-2008,10	29	415
Red-eyed Vireo	1960,61,65,67,79	5	14
Philadelphia Vireo	1965,67,69	3	4
Warbling Vireo	1965,67,69	3	3
Blue-headed Vireo	1958,65,67	3	4
Black-and-white Warbler	1959,65,66,69,79,2016	5	12
Nashville Warbler	1955,57,61,67,2016	5	6
Orange-crowned Warbler	1957-61,65-69,2006,10,13-15	15	154
Tennessee Warbler	1955-60,62-69,79,2014	16	125
Cape May Warbler	1960,65,66,68	4	11
Yellow Warbler	1946,5456,58,60,63,65,66,68,69,71,2001,10-12,14-16	18	63
Myrtle[Yellow-rumped] Warbler	1944,49,54-61,63-69,71,74,77,2002,03,07,09-12,15,16	29	339
Magnolia Warbler	1959-61,65,67-69,79,2007	9	18
Chestnut-sided Warbler	1965,66	2	3
Bay-breasted Warbler	1960,65,67-69	5	17
Blackpoll Warbler	1955,58,63,65-69,2009,10	10	67
Western Palm Warbler	1956,58,59,64,66,67,2002	7	8
Ovenbird	1945,58,61,64-70,79,92,2003,06,08-10,13-17	22	156
Northern Waterthrush	1945,49,57,59-61,64-69,84,2016	14	64
Connecticut Warbler	1967 & 2013	2	2
Mourning Warbler	1954,61,65-68,79,2010	8	19
Common Yellowthroat	1958,60,65-69,2015	8	21
Wilson's Warbler	1960,61,65-70,79	9	29
Canada Warbler	1965,79	2	3
American Redstart	1954,61,65-69,79	8	31
House Sparrow	2005-2009	5	10
American Pipit	1967	1	2
Gray Catbird	1945,53-56,58,60,64-66,69,2014-16	15	37
Brown Thrasher	1955-57,59,64-66,69,72,74,82,2003,11,14-16	15	30
House Wren	1945-47,54,57,59,60,66-69,74,76-85,87-2001,03-06,08,10-15	47	474
Brown Creeper	1953,56,57,59,69	5	6
White-breasted Nuthatch	1976-78,82,88,90,92,2004,07,10-13	12	16
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1959,60,65,68-70,72,74,75,77-81,83,85-91,93-2016	45	186
Black-capped Chickadee	1948,52-68,71-2017	65	1455

**Glen Fox, Kindersley, naturalist, friend and banding sub-permittee.**

"I was one of Stuart's sub-permittees and banded in the Kindersley area. He was a HUGE influence in my birding career. I learned to mist net with Stuart and Mary at Beaver Creek. The most memorable occasion was a week or so one autumn 60 years ago, where Sandy Macaulay (future Ducks Unlimited Biologist) and I mist-netted and banded shorebirds with and for Stuart and Mary, at Rice Lake, a wetland west of Saskatoon, my first experience with shorebirds in the hand."

**Harold Fisher, Battleford/Prince Albert, naturalist, retired high school teacher, master bander.**

"Strangely enough, I have never been on a banding excursion with Stuart! ... Quite unusual for a man whose influence on me has been so profound ... In 1962 or 63, I became friends with Spencer Sealy, a protégé and sub-permittee of Stuart's. He was five years older but we made a great banding team, in part because I was a fearless and skilled tree climber. Spencer instilled in me a life-long

passion for birds and the need for proper documentation of natural events ... " [Harold Fisher met Stuart in the late summer of 2007] "when my daughter Shelly was awarded the Houston prize in Ornithology from Gary Bortolotti, we joined Stuart and Mary for tea at their home."

"Within a week I had a banding sub-permit and mist nets set up for Saw-whet Owls. And so began the nightly ritual of checking nets, banding owls, and submitting a daily log of data to Stuart via email. Every detail had to be checked for accuracy ... he encouraged me to procure a master permit and has been my advisor in almost every aspect of my banding. During the last few years of Stuart's Turkey Vulture program, I became part of the wing-tagging team and actually accompanied Stuart afield to a new Turkey Vulture site. Stuart's accomplishments, 75 years of banding, hundreds of books and publications, the hundreds of thousands of birds banded — all simply incredible. Stuart has set the bar for those who follow."

**Penny Davis and Frank Scott, Loon Lake/Saskatoon, MDs, pilots, naturalists.**

"What sticks in our minds about Stuart's banding in Loon Lake area was the way he and Mary were able to encourage and engage young would-be banders and tree climbers. His favourite tree to climb in Loon Lake, we always kept for him to band on, lots of branches and a perfect angle! We called it 'Stuart's tree'. We roasted a lamb for the BBQ during the Osprey weekends. The first weekend we planned to eat early. Stuart was so eager to go out again after dinner to band more birds that he stood next to the barbecue and cut meat off the outside of the lamb as it cooked so that one more nest could be banded before nightfall! In consideration of us on Sunday morning, Stuart decreed early morning banders made their own coffee and breakfast. Finally, we have Stuart and Mary to thank for making wonderful banding (and slightly crazy) friends over many years."

**Jon Gerrard, Saskatoon/Winnipeg/Ottawa, MD, a federal MP, and junior cabinet minister.**

"Growing up in Saskatoon in the 1950s and 60s, I was fortunate enough to be invited on banding expeditions with Stuart and Mary Houston. These ranged from banding migratory warblers and sparrows, to rappelling down a cliff to band Golden Eagles.

One of my favourites was getting up at 2 a.m., having breakfast with Stuart and Mary at their home and heading to Redberry Lake ... Occasionally, it was also possible to catch a White-winged Scoter coming off its nest. When I was eight and nine, my job was to catch as many young gulls as possible and bring them to Stuart or Mary. We had come suitably prepared with old clothes and a hat for protection from white squirts of excrement.

I also revelled going with Stuart to band Great Horned Owls. Stuart repeatedly reminded us of two young men near Yorkton who had each lost an eye when climbing to a Great Horned



Mary and Stuart. Photo credit: David Stobbe

Owl nest. A parent owl swooped in noiselessly and inserted its talon into the human eye ... As he drove, Stuart would regale us with stories.

I learned about keeping meticulous records. I learned bird identification by sight and by song, I learned about looking after our environment and I developed a great appreciation not only for wildlife but also for the history of Saskatchewan and particularly the history of the early bird watchers and record keepers ... On long weekends, we would travel with a cooler filled with sandwiches, oatmeal cookies, and gallon thermoses of iced tea, carefully prepared by Mary. In the evening, we would stay in a small town hotel — with its beds often only there because they were a requirement if the establishment wanted to have a bar. It was as Stuart said 'seeing Saskatchewan first.' I have followed in Stuart's footsteps becoming a physician and having an avocation banding birds — in my case Bald Eagles at or near Besnard Lake in northern Saskatchewan. Stuart Houston was an example in recording and in writing up our findings enabling our eagle project to continue every year since 1967. Thank you, Stuart and Mary, for inspiring me and so many others to become involved with birds."

**Ross Lein, Saskatoon/Calgary, PhD, ornithologist, biology professor University of Calgary.** "I went banding with Stuart, Mary and their oldest son Stan on only one occasion, to Redberry Lake to band gulls in the summer of either 1966 or 1967. First, Stuart maintained a stream of stories related to banding or ornithological history, during the trips up and back. Second, there was a single-minded attention to banding as many birds as we could during the shortest possible time. Although an 'amateur' in a field that was becoming, and has become, increasingly professionalized, Stuart's drive and enthusiasm in banding many thousands of birds resulted in important insights into the biology of a number of species.

**TABLE 1.4 Summary of banding records attributed to C. S. Houston, permit 000460, in banding code order.**

SPECIES	BANDING YEARS	# OF YRS	# BANDED
Boreal Chickadee	1953,87	2	2
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1967-69,99,2010	5	14
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1956,60,65-69,2005	8	17
Townsend's Solitaire	1987	1	1
Veery	1966	1	1
Swainson's Thrush	1955,56,58-61,64-70,79,2003,04,06-16	27	297
Grey-cheeked Thrush	1955,56,58,61,65-69,71,96,2002,10	13	116
Hermit Thrush	1955,57-59,61,63,65-69,72,74,2003-06,08,15	19	158
American Robin	1944-61,63-70,72,74,76-78,85,87,91,92,94-97,99-2016	57	493
Varied Thrush	1984,2008,14	3	3
Eastern Bluebird	1966,74,75,77,78,86,95,97,98,2007	10	54
Mountain Bluebird	1966,69-2009	42	8028
Hybrid bluebird, Eastern/Mountain	1974	1	5
		<b>Total</b>	<b>151888</b>

In addition, his life-long interest in the history of ornithology and banding in Saskatchewan and western Canada has documented the development of our understanding of the bird life over several centuries. Thirdly, he has encouraged and mentored dozens of individuals with an interest in birds. Many of these have assisted in his banding projects (and continued their own) and a number have gone on to careers related to ornithology. I was one of a cohort of Saskatchewan teenagers in the late 1950s and 1960s whom, at least in part as a result of Stuart's example and encouragement, pursued occupations that 'let them spend their time doing what they loved.'"

**Moe Mareschal, Birch Hills, naturalist, retired high school biology teacher, Canadian Army Reservist.** "Stu made a commendable effort to keep those people in the loop who helped locate raptor nests with young. Some of my former students still remember watching the climbing and banding. My most memorable episode of 'Banding with Houston' occurred when during a five-year stint with the Reserve Army, I was late in returning from a training session. Stu and Crew were waiting at our home; I finally arrived and was hustled, still in Battle Dress, into Stu's venerable Toyota Land Cruiser. Off we went at a rather high speed ... booting east past the elevators in Birch Hills when there were flashing lights and a RCMP

siren. Stu rolled his window down to tell the Corporal that we had two owl nests to visit quickly before total darkness. He leaned down and looked at me, ignoring Stu momentarily to shout, 'Mareschal, what the hell are you up to now?' Silence rang loudly for a few heartbeats, but I waved at the policeman. The RCMP decided that the paperwork wasn't worth the effort and let us go into the gathering darkness where we banded at only one nest; the other was in a dead aspen and not safe. Later I received a phone call from the local United Church asking why Dr. Stuart Houston was making a donation to the Church's renovation plan in my name. The donation was equal to the normal fine for speeding."

**David Miller, Saskatoon, physiotherapist, banding crew member and Great Horned Owl crew leader.** "Had Dr. Houston's talk to the Natural History Society in 1986 been less engrossing, had his slides of owls, eagles, hawks, and falcons been less enthralling, and had his invitation to join his banding expeditions (with the added inducement of 'all the peanut butter and raisin sandwiches you can eat') been less exciting, I might have paused to contemplate my pathological fear of heights before I strode forward to volunteer. But as they say, 'fools rush in...'

Stuart is an inexhaustible font of information on any number of topics:

ornithology of course, and the history of Canada and the fur trade and medicine, and ... the list goes on. He's a born teacher, and his enthusiasm is infectious. At the end of a weekend of banding, I have my head stuffed full of fascinating details about bird behaviour, the early days of medicare in Swift Current, where to look for the signs of tuberculosis on a chest X-ray, and why it is essential to know the legal land description of your father's farm. I see the world through new eyes.

There is a sense of ritual and festival to the banding expeditions. Stuart promises the banders that they will meet 'the nicest and most observant people in Saskatchewan — most observant because they find the owl nests, and nicest because they take the trouble to tell me about them.' And in this, as in so many things, he is right. The arrival of the banders is special, too, for the families who have been reporting nests to Stuart for years. 'There would be something missing



Osprey platform. Photo credit: Jean Harris



Ferruginous Hawk nesting platform. Photo credit: Jean Harris

from the spring,' a farmer tells me, 'without Dr. Houston and his crew.'

But Stuart himself sums up the attraction of bird banding best: 'It's the greatest field sport known to man.'

**Kelly Wylie, Saskatoon/Ottawa, computer consultant, naturalist, banding crewmember.** "My first recollection of Stuart was on a nature outing near Saskatoon. There was a need for someone to climb a tree to inspect a Goldeneye nest cavity. I volunteered. As I descended, Stuart said to me "I should take you banding with me." That was the start of a long friendship and many climbs to nests with young requiring bands on their leg. Full helmet and leather jacket were a necessity with Goshawks, as they would almost always try to knock the climber out of the tree. I remember: sitting in the nest with a Bald Eagle that was almost full size, trying to distract it while also trying to grab both of its feet before it could grab me; tying a rope just under the nest and throwing it over to another tree then climbing down and up the other tree and pulling the first tree over so I could reach into the initial nest; running back to the truck from a nest tree because we were in a hurry and then being VERY grateful that I was running because the skunk that I did not see missed when it tried to spray me; being amazed at Stuart's incredible memory for nest sites — he could drive right to them in the middle of nowhere and rarely had to refer to his old leather briefcase full of Saskatchewan topographical maps; driving backward — sometimes there was nowhere to turn around so we had to back out. Mary joked about Stuart having spent almost as much time backing up as driving forward.

Mary Houston was part of the support team for those trips. Among other things, she ensured that we had plenty of food, iced tea and water. The coolers were always ready to go. She must have spent many hours making sandwiches. I developed quite a liking for the peanut butter and raisin

sandwiches. In addition, she had her own (backyard) banding projects.

I also assisted Stuart with his computer banding entries, making him one of the first Canadian banders to submit all his banding records by computer — and he had a LOT of records to submit each year. This was in the 1980s when personal computers were just becoming popular. Having the data on computer meant that the ability to analyse the data changed dramatically."

**Cathy Wylie, Saskatoon/Ottawa, author, naturalist, and bander's wife.** Cathy often accompanied husband Kelly and Stuart on weekend banding trips documenting an infamous Redberry Lake banding trip on a July day in 1983 — *I Married a Bird Bander*.<sup>14</sup>

A second article, *Unparalleled service: A Tribute to Dr. C.S. Houston*, details Stuart's contributions to Saskatchewan natural history.<sup>3</sup>

**Mike Blom, Saskatoon/Peace River, Alberta, naturalist, master bander, forestry officer.** "Stuart was the reason I started banding back in 2003. I remember going out for Ferruginous Hawks in June and Swainson's Hawks in July. We would pile into his 4Runner and go all weekend, driving muddy trails in PFRA Pastures to band as many nestlings as we could. He (is) a great mentor."

**George West, Saskatoon, real estate agent.** I recall: "Kindersley, Swainson's Hawk nest, a single tree in the middle of a pasture. Huge nest, 4ft. in diameter, 50 mph wind. I climbed the tree, made it around the nest, banded three hawks, and came down. (The banding crew) said, 'We thought the tree would break.' It was moving 6 to 8 feet in the wind; Lake Diefenbaker, Houston call(ed), a friend has a Swainson's Hawk nest to band in a coulee. Went to the beach, had to take a boat across the lake. Boating up the coulee, a huge nest is in a poplar tree. The bird glides off the nest; IT'S A GOLDEN EAGLE (7.5 ft. wing span). We can't band the young one. Don't

have an eagle band; at Laura, Houston called, he had an owl in the turret of a barn just off the highway by Laura. I have to climb aboard. He (Stuart) said you can do it. The barn is the hip roof style. (We) put up a ladder, 24 ft., throw a ball of string over the barn, pull a climbing rope over the barn. Houston and a professor anchor the rope, I climb up the barn, walk to the turret, two owlets to band. I am banding the owls when SMACK, the female hits me from behind. My nose touches the barn roof. Lucky, I am straddling the barn roof. She comes back twice. Fortunate not to be knocked off the roof; a Houston Tree — towards the end of the day Stuart was moving slower. We were driving east on Highway 16 when I said, 'There's one in a nest.' Back we went. The nest was in a tree about 8 ft. off the ground by a train track. Houston said, 'I'll band the owlets.' We held him up so he could band the birds. That is 'A Houston Tree'; Mary would always make a lunch for the day's drive, oatmeal cookies, sandwiches; and making a run down to Outlook country, it was an ugly day — tremendous winds, and rain. We came to a nest 40 ft. up in a tall old poplar. Climbed the nest, no young. Houston said there had been birds here for years. I looked around, found two dead young that had been blown out of the nest. Damn!"

**Bohdan Pylypec, Yellow Creek/Saskatoon, naturalist, wildlife researcher University of Saskatchewan.** "I first met Stuart back in 1960 when he gave a talk about banding Great Horned Owls at Kinistino High School. He encouraged me to submit nest record cards — notably American Goldfinches and Cedar Waxwings at Yellow Creek, and he encouraged me to submit articles to the *Blue Jay* as a "Young Naturalist" — *Weasel's Fight with a Gopher*<sup>15</sup> about my experiences at Yellow Creek. Later, I accompanied him when he banded Prairie Falcons and Golden Eagles at the Matador IBP site."

## The Owl-banding Song

(To the tune of "Swinging on a Star")

by David Miller

Stuart Houston is a doctor with distinguished white hair,  
He's witty, he's urbane, he's debonair;  
Renowned for scholarship, he's known for brain,  
But as Mary is my witness, I'm not sure he's really sane,  
For every May he gives out a manic howl,  
And he goes off to Band the Owl.

Chorus:

One bad ankle and two bad knees  
Cannot keep him out of the trees,  
He's got a dreadful, contagious disease,  
That makes him want to Band the Owl.

The owl is a birdie who's got beautiful eyes  
And talons to give banders a surprise;  
She's pleased when you climb up to her nest of sticks,  
She's polite when you give bracelets to her darling chicks;  
She says, "I'm glad that you could come, I hope you're fine,  
*And now I'm going to claw your face off, rotten swine!*"

Chorus:

She's doing ninety-five when she hits,  
It could scare you out of your wits,  
And then she rips your shoulders to bits ...  
Gee but it's fun to Band the Owl!

The Bander is an acolyte to Stuart the priest,  
He swears he's not afraid of man nor beast.  
He smiles at altitude, he laughs at pain,  
He's long on adventure but he's short on brain,  
And when his wife says, "Stay at home Dear," he just growls,  
"Don't come between me and my owls!"

Chorus:

He's got the Houston Horned Owl Disease,  
It makes him wanna climb up tall trees,  
And let his manhood swing in the breeze,  
All for the chance to Band the Owl.

Chorus reprise:

Mary's peanut butter, raisins, and bread  
Seem to drive away my terror and dread,  
And though you think that I'm right out of my head,  
I really love to band  
(It's hard to understand)  
Their beaks are sharp, their breath is foul,  
*Oh God, I wanna Band the Owl!*

**Kelly Koziy, Hendon/Weyburn, naturalist, sub-permittee bander, finder of 144 successful Great Horned Owl (GHOW) nests near Hendon.** “As a child, I had been told of the ‘Owl Doctor’ who had visited the farms of both my parents and grandparents. Through the next several years, on a May weekend, Dr. Houston answered a stream of questions I had about the owls and bird banding, his crew would band the owls in nests I had found. Then for four years David Miller came in Stuart’s other vehicle, more battered and with much less clearance, and he and I took turns banding. I helped with pelicans and cormorants once. When I moved to Weyburn in 1997, Dr. Houston gave me a banding sub-permit for banding GHOW again, adding Ferruginous and Cooper’s Hawks, Prairie Falcons, and Golden Eagles.”

**Gary Anweiler, Yorkton/Edmonton, ornithologist, wildlife consultant.** “My first contact with Stuart was in grade seven or eight in Melville, to join him on the Yorkton Christmas Bird Count, a short bus trip distant ... I was exhausted by the end of the day and fell asleep on the return trip. Fortunately, I awoke as the bus was leaving Melville and managed to stop it and get off in time. In May, Stuart, Bill Horseman and I banded nestling Great Horned Owls; I shinnied up to the nest and banded my first young Great Horned Owl. When I watched Stuart band at the second nest, I realized I had put my band at the previous nest ABOVE the knee, not below it as Stuart did. We at once returned to the earlier nest to re-band the owlets on the tarsus. Not an auspicious beginning. 1960 was an unprecedented irruption year for Boreal Owls (BOOW). That spring Stuart had a weekly bird program on television, and arranged for me to bring a banded BOOW to show the audience. Television had just arrived ... By now, I had spent a summer in Wisconsin with the Hamerstrom Northern Harrier research and was trained in handling

raptors. The little BOOW owl, wearing appropriate jesses, flapped and perched on my hand.”

*Stuart received enough phone calls of BOOWs at farm sites to band 25 individuals in 1960, surpassing the total of 20 BOOWs banded by all North American banders combined to 1957. Stuart’s good friend Chandler Robbins, working at the BBL, had checked the BOOW banding records and confirmed Stuart had banded more BOOW during the irruption year than the total recorded in the banding records at the BBL.*<sup>16</sup>

**Ron Jensen, Naicam/Saskatoon, naturalist, fisheries ecologist, hummingbird bander.** “I have traveled many miles with Stuart and learned that it is entirely possible to travel Saskatchewan yet rarely drive on an asphalt highway. I have come to use the term ‘Houston Highway’ to describe dirt trails where a vehicle had driven that season heading in the desired direction which nearly always worked out to be a shortcut.”

Stuart and Mary have banded birds in Saskatchewan for 75 and 63 years respectively. Spring migration in 2017 included the final banding of 100 juncos while 863 University Drive was being prepared for sale. Stuart held the lowest active banding license, 00460, in North America.

As a side note, the two banders with the longest North American banding records knew each other and were good friends. Stuart and Chandler Robbins finally met each other at the International Congress of Ornithology, after 20 years of corresponding. The Houston and Robbins families each occupied an entire stairwell [series of rooms] in Jesus College, University of Oxford, Oxford, England from July 24-30, 1966. Chandler S. Robbins’ 76 years of banding edged Stuart by a single year. Their good friend, Chan to Mary and Stuart, Dr. C. S. Robbins — Golden bird field guide series author — was 98 when he died at Laurel,

Maryland on March 20, 2017.

I thank those who gave so freely of their recollections of Stuart and Mary. Mary and Stuart who graciously read, edited, provided unpublished details, and photographs for the article. Frank Roy who critiqued and shortened the article twice, to Annie McLeod who provided the space in the Blue Jay and unknown editors who provided thoughtful comments.

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# SPRING MEET 2018

**JUNE 8-10, 2018    CORONACH, SK**

## **Friday, June 8**

Beverages and cookies provided

**6:30 p.m. Registration**  
at Coronach Town Hall

**7:30 p.m. Storytelling**  
with Kristin Catherwood —  
Intangible Cultural Heritage  
Development Officer with  
Heritage Sask

**8:30 p.m. Tour information**  
and logistics to be explained

## **Saturday, June 9**

**6:45 a.m. Breakfast**  
provided at Coronach Town Hall

**7:45 a.m. Board bus**  
for 8:00 a.m. departure

**8:00 a.m. Tour**  
Our tour will be taken on a coach  
bus and accompanied by a guide  
from Coronach Tourism with stops  
around the Big Muddy Valley, which  
include Castle Butte, Big Beaver  
Nature Centre and General Store,  
Effigies, and a lunch stop at the  
Burgess Ranch with a presentation  
on Outlaw history by Tammy Burgess  
and an exploration of Big Muddy  
Lake Important Bird and Biodiversity  
Area.

**5:30 p.m. Cocktails**  
at Coronach Town Hall

**6:30 p.m. Banquet dinner**

**7:30 p.m. Presentation**  
given by 2017 Nature Saskatchewan  
Conservation Award Winner  
Dr. Jon Gerrard and Naomi Gerrard:  
"Learning from 50 years with the  
Bald Eagles of Saskatchewan's boreal  
forest"

## **Sunday, June 10**

**8:00 a.m. Breakfast**  
provided at Coronach Town Hall

**9:00 a.m. Annual General Meeting**

\*REGISTRATION (including cost)  
ON BACK SIDE OF PAGE\*

## **ACCOMMODATION SUGGESTIONS**

\*Please consider booking  
early as Coronach has limited  
accommodations\*

### **In Coronach:**

#### ***Country Boy Motel***

143 Railway Avenue West (Highway  
18 going through town). Visa and  
Interac accepted.  
(306) 267-3267

#### ***Poplar River Campground***

5 km east of Coronach on  
Highway 18. Cash or cheque only.  
(306) 267-2005

#### ***Coronach Campground***

Located at the end of Centre Street  
in Coronach next to the Sportsplex  
<http://coronachrec.wix.com/coronach>  
(306) 267-2318 (Sportsplex)

#### ***Country Flavour Bed & Breakfast***

Northwest of Coronach off of  
Highway 18. Cash or cheque only.  
(306) 267-4507 or (306) 267-7895

### **In Willowbunch:**

#### ***Jolly Giant Motel***

(306) 473-2345

# SPRING MEET 2018

**JUNE 8-10, 2018**

**CORONACH, SK**

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Postal Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any dietary needs or allergies (please circle)?

YES or NO

IF YES, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Spring Meet Fees (\*Includes Saturday and Sunday  
breakfasts as well as Saturday evening banquet meal).

**Member Early Registration Fee**

(prior to May 25) **\$120 x** \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Member Late Registration Fee**

(after May 25): **\$135 x** \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Non-Member Early Registration Fee**

(prior to May 25) : **\$135 x** \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Non-Member Late Registration Fee**

(after May 25): **\$150 x** \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Banquet Tickets**

**\$25/ticket x** \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL AMOUNT DUE: \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment by Visa/Mastercard:**

Card #: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

exp: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

**Payment by Cheque:**

Make cheque payable to Nature Saskatchewan

Mail, e-mail or call our office to register for the 2018  
Spring Meet:

Nature Saskatchewan

206-1860 Lorne Street

Regina, SK S4P 2L7

info@naturesask.ca

1-800-667-4668 or (306) 780-9273

NOTES:



Female Eastern Bluebird. Photo credit: Luc and Donna Gamache

# FRIENDS OF THE BLUEBIRDS STILL GOING STRONG IN MANITOBA

**Donna Firby Gamache**  
Box 453  
MacGregor, MB R0H 0R0  
(204) 685-2574  
lucgam@mymts.net

Two years ago, 'Friends of the Bluebirds', an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS), passed an important milestone. Based in Brandon, Manitoba, 'Friends' celebrated its 40th anniversary since its formation in 1976, with the aim of promoting recovery of the province's bluebird population.

Friends of the Bluebirds is the legacy of John and Nora Lane of Brandon who began to notice a sharp decline in bluebird numbers, as early as the 1950s. Both species were decreasing — the Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*), a sky-blue species found mainly in the western part of Manitoba, as well as in Saskatchewan and Alberta; and the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), a slightly darker bluebird with a reddish-brown chest, found in south-central and eastern sections

of Manitoba, as well as in more easterly provinces. In the past, both species usually built nests in cavities hollowed out by woodpeckers and squirrels, or in decaying dead trees, but these were in ever-shorter supply as woodlands were converted into croplands. Competition from House Sparrows and European Starlings was another problem.

By 1959, John Lane realized that the decline was serious; his records showed that he had seen fewer bluebirds each year. One solution, he believed, was to provide nesting boxes, so he and Nora began to put out lines of bluebird houses on fence posts along rural roads. They also organized the Brandon Junior Bird Club, for youth eight to 18. Over the next 15 years this group built and set out nearly 5,000 boxes covering much of south-western Manitoba, and as far west as Broadview, Saskatchewan.

John Lane died in 1975, but the following year some of his supporters established Friends of the Bluebirds to carry on his work. Today the group is still going strong. An all-volunteer

association, it now has nearly 100 active or supporting members who build and set out boxes across southern Manitoba. They hold two meetings a year, in spring and fall, but most of their work is directed to building, maintaining and monitoring nest boxes. There are no definite requirements or commitments, and no membership fees, although many members also join the North American Bluebird Society (NABS).

Members are encouraged to monitor nests several times each summer, every two weeks if possible, to determine how many eggs are laid and how many young are fledged. In fall, nest boxes need to be cleaned out, with some preferring to leave them open over winter and then reclosing them in early spring.

Statistics from 2015 show 45 individuals or teams sent in reports from about 50 lines, with a total of 1,561 boxes reported. However, since some members do not regularly monitor or report their numbers, it is estimated there may actually be up to 2,500 nest boxes being maintained. Some look after only a



Male Mountain Bluebird. Photo credit: Luc and Donna Gamache

few boxes; others have up to 100 or more! A couple of members are also involved in banding bluebirds.

Over the years, members learned that bluebird lines near pastureland usually do better than those beside crops, due to better habitat. A few trees can help provide perching spots. It is also better to have boxes at least 1/2 km from barns or granaries to discourage House Sparrows. To avoid House Wrens, which also may take over bluebird nests or destroy eggs and fledglings, don't place boxes too close to trees and shrubs. For Mountain Bluebirds, the usual recommended size for nest boxes is 5" by 5" with an entrance hole of 1 9/16", but for Eastern Bluebirds the box can be smaller, often 4" by 4" with an entrance hole of 1 1/2". Some of our members comment that Eastern Bluebirds often choose the smaller boxes first. The smaller ones are also less attractive to House Sparrows and Tree Swallows (the swallows are welcome, but this is a *bluebird* organization first and foremost.) For either bluebird species, recommended wall thickness is a minimum of 3/4" (NABS suggests 7/8") because thicker walls provide better insulation against cold or heat. If both bluebird species are present, make sure there are at least some of the larger sized boxes.

One side effect of all the bluebird houses is an increase in the number of Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) using nesting boxes — an additional benefit, since they are also on the decline in eastern North America. To prevent them from disturbing bluebird nests, many birders place two houses close together; swallows can use one and leave the other for bluebirds. Most members also keep track of swallow eggs and fledgling numbers.

Another interesting development over the years is the gradual spread westward of Eastern Bluebirds. It seems that they are pushing most of the Mountain Bluebirds to the farthest west part of Manitoba. Recent Friends' statistics show some Eastern Bluebirds as far as the Saskatchewan border. Birders in the eastern part of Saskatchewan have noticed Eastern Bluebirds nesting there, too.

Very rarely the two species have been known to inter-breed and produce hybrid fledglings. Friends' statistics show a few such nests in 2015 and 2016, with at least two of these producing fledglings. In 2015, there were six nests of the two mixed species — three of these were one on top of the other by the same pair (male Mountain Bluebird, female Eastern Bluebird) and none were successful. Another nest (male Mountain Bluebird, female Eastern Bluebird) produced three fledglings, and the remaining two nests were found but we have no additional information on these. In 2016, one hybrid nest was found with five eggs, two of which fledged. See [http://www.mbbbluebirds.org/?page\\_id=227](http://www.mbbbluebirds.org/?page_id=227) for these statistics.

I find it surprising, when reading the journal published by the North American Bluebird Society, that no affiliate group is listed for Saskatchewan. There

are many Bluebird trail operators in Saskatchewan, but no formal Bluebird Society. However, I found information on the 'Bittner box' — a somewhat different type of bluebird nesting box which was developed by Ron Bittner of Abernethy, Saskatchewan. Those interested in trying this box should check out [http://www.virtualsk.com/current\\_issue/better\\_birdhouse.html](http://www.virtualsk.com/current_issue/better_birdhouse.html).

If someone is interested in joining the Manitoba 'Friends', they are more than welcome. Attendance at the twice yearly meetings in Brandon is not required — just a desire to help out these beautiful species. Volunteers are always needed to take over existing lines or establish new ones. Even if you don't want to monitor the nests, but do want to help these birds, consider putting out some nest boxes. If you need information on building nest boxes, check their website at: [www.mbbbluebirds.org](http://www.mbbbluebirds.org).

If someone is interested in starting up a Saskatchewan group, information can be obtained from the Brandon website above, or from the NABS website at [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org). 🐦



Male Eastern Bluebird. Photo credit: Luc and Donna Gamache

# PHOTOGRAPHY

Dan Loran shared the following photos, taken this winter at his home in Indian Head, SK. One day, he photographed a Fox Squirrel eyeing up the bird feeder. Dan's hanging log feeder has seen a lot of action this winter, with visits from Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, Black-capped Chickadees, the odd Blue Jay, and House Sparrows. At one point, even a Sharp-shinned Hawk briefly showed up to check things out!

Thank you, Dan, for sharing these pictures. If you have any photos you would like to share, please send them to the editor at [bluejay@naturesask.ca](mailto:bluejay@naturesask.ca) for inclusion in an upcoming issue of Blue Jay. 🐿️



Fox Squirrel.



Sharp-shinned Hawk.



A Downy Woodpecker, a White-breasted Nuthatch and a Black-capped Chickadee.



Male Evening Grosbeak. Photo credit: Annie McLeod

# EVENING GROSBEAKS

## FEEDING ON PUPAE OF THE FOREST TENT CATERPILLAR IN THE DUNE-RIDGE FOREST, DELTA MARSH, MANITOBA, SPRING 1976

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During the summer of 1975, moths of the Forest Tent Caterpillar (*Malacosoma distria* Hbn.) laid eggs in the narrow dune-ridge forest that separates Lake Manitoba and Delta Marsh, Manitoba (50°11'N, 98°19'W).<sup>1</sup> This infestation was more visible the following year when the larval caterpillars caused extensive defoliation throughout

the ridge forest. Fewer caterpillars were detected in 1977, and defoliation was patchy.<sup>2</sup> It was part of a broader outbreak of Forest Tent Caterpillars documented across the Canadian Prairie Provinces, which was recorded initially in the early 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Larval caterpillars were detected in the ridge forest only in 1976 and 1977, during ongoing studies of the breeding ecology of birds in this habitat. Black-billed Cuckoos (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*), Bay-breasted Warblers (*Setophaga castanea*), and Baltimore Orioles (*Icterus galbula*)

enhanced their reproductive success in response to the sudden availability of this abundant insect prey in the ridge forest.<sup>2,4,5</sup> One pair of Evening Grosbeaks (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) was observed feeding on pupae of the tent caterpillar during the breeding season in 1976. This was the only year this species was recorded in this season during the more than 35 years (1974-2010) in which we worked in the ridge forest. On June 18, 1976, two adult Evening Grosbeaks, a male and female, were perched about 2 m apart and about 3 m high

in a defoliated Manitoba Maple (*Acer negundo*). They frequently uttered "soft calls", similar to those described previously.<sup>6</sup> Each bird consumed at least two pupae during 15 minutes of observation, but when I returned to the site a few hours later, both birds were gone and the species was not observed again despite a thorough search for a nest in the ensuing days.

The Evening Grosbeak is known to respond to outbreaks of spruce budworm (*Choristoneura fumiferana* (Clem.)) and other caterpillar larvae<sup>7</sup>, but predation reported here added another species to the list of predators on the Forest Tent Caterpillar.<sup>8</sup>

We did not observe Evening Grosbeaks in the ridge forest prior to the breeding season in 1976, but single females were recorded in other years: May 11, 1982, May 12, 1984, and May 25, 1986, and a flock of four (two pairs of adults) was observed by Daniel M. Guinan on May 6, 1981. These dates coincide with late dates of departure from the wintering areas.<sup>6,9</sup> Evening Grosbeaks were not observed at any time in spring or summer in the ridge forest in subsequent years. Observations beyond the ridge forest at Delta Marsh shed little light on the movements and breeding of Evening Grosbeaks in the region, although Winnipeg Christmas Bird Counts were in the hundreds during the 1970s, with a peak recorded in 1976.<sup>9</sup>

The observation of a single pair of Evening Grosbeaks, regardless of the species' propensity to move widely in search of food at various times of the year<sup>7</sup>, by no means confirms that the one-time appearance of a pair of Evening Grosbeaks in the ridge forest in late spring was a response to the presence of tent caterpillars, or that it was a coincidence. Most larval caterpillars had pupated

by the time the grosbeaks were observed,<sup>4,5</sup> and it was this stage of the insect's life cycle on which the birds fed. This pair or other pairs of Evening Grosbeaks may have nested undetected elsewhere in the ridge forest, although we routinely covered more than 20 km of the ridge forest in our work each year, including in 1976. The Evening Grosbeak's mobility and known propensity to respond to outbreaks of budworms during the breeding season prompted me to document this occurrence in late spring in the dune-ridge forest at Delta Marsh.

### Acknowledgements

I am indebted to numerous graduate students and field assistants with whom I worked at Delta Marsh over the years, and who passed along bird sightings. The early years of our research were funded chiefly by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the University of Manitoba Research Grants Program, augmented by important in-kind support throughout provided by the Delta Marsh Field Station (University of Manitoba).

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## POETRY

### A Change of Season

A gray spring day  
somber bleached grasses  
motionless  
patched with grimy snow  
ridges of it  
crumbly blackness.

The background sky  
uniform dark slate  
lowering  
scrawls of dry trees mark  
bottom edges  
one vast stillness.

#### Victor C. Friesen

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# SASKATCHEWAN BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

## 2017 SEASON HIGHLIGHTS



Trumpeter Swans were observed in three areas over the course of the 2017 breeding season. The Strawberry Lakes east of Regina hosted two pairs of swans, one of which was accompanied by a brood of five cygnets. Photo credit: Kim Mann

LeeAnn Latremouille and Kiel Drake  
skatlas@birdscanada.ca

The Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas is off to a great start as data from the inaugural 2017 season continues to be submitted. Thanks to our intrepid volunteers and partners, breeding birds were documented from all four corners of the province, setting the pace for the years to come.

This five-year project (2017-2021) aims to document the distribution and relative abundance of Saskatchewan's breeding birds by harnessing the collective efforts of the birding/naturalist community, wildlife professionals, and private/crown industries. Atlasers recorded observations of breeding birds and used a set of criteria to report on behaviours, ranging from birds that were simply "observed" to behaviours that suggest a bird is "possibly," "probably," or "confirmed" as a breeder. As in other jurisdictions, the province is divided into 10x10 km atlas squares — a total of 6,914 squares in the province — in which the atlacers spend time searching to find as many species as possible.

To date, 235 atlas registrants have contributed 2,250 hours of survey effort reported from 628 atlas squares, documenting breeding behaviours for 252 species. The process of reviewing

the resulting 35,000+ observations is underway and will give rise to discussions regarding the breeding intent of both common and rare birds that were encountered during the first field season. Currently, all records are provisional and subject to the review.

Progress maps are now available on the atlas website ([sk.birdatlas.ca](http://sk.birdatlas.ca)). Each species observed in the province has a map illustrating in which squares it has been detected and what level of breeding evidence was observed. The maps page also hosts summary statistics maps, such as the Hours of Survey Effort map shown in Figure 1. Progress maps will update every two weeks during the summer, with intermittent updates occurring the rest of the year.

June 2017 was windy in Saskatchewan, which made for poor point counting conditions over much of the province. Despite the uncooperative weather, atlacers still managed to complete an impressive 1,189 point counts. Point counts are critical to enable calculating estimates of relative abundance so we are hoping for better June weather conditions in the years to come to allow catching up on point counts.

Supplementing the point count effort was the use of bioacoustic technology, a first for Canada's national atlas program. Both handheld

and autonomous recorders were used by volunteers and partners alike to make recordings of birdsong. Once analyzed, these recordings will provide data similar to that of an in-person point count. Several handheld recorders were recently purchased by the Atlas Office for upcoming years in hopes of empowering more atlacers to collect this critical information.

### Highlights

The atlas got off to an unexpectedly early start in January 2017 when birders noticed White-winged Crossbills behaving unusually in southern regions of the province. A bumper crop of spruce cones in the south encouraged this nomadic species to breed, with breeding confirmed around Regina, Saskatoon, Broadview, Cypress Hills, Humboldt, Elrose and Edenwold.

The most widely encountered species, perhaps unsurprisingly, was the ubiquitous Red-winged Blackbird, having been reported from ~63 per cent (394) of the sampled atlas squares. Following closely behind were American Robin (58 per cent of squares), Mallard (53 per cent of squares), Barn Swallow (53 per cent of squares), and Clay-colored Sparrow (50 per cent of squares).

Trumpeter Swans were observed in three areas over the course of the breeding season. The Strawberry Lakes

east of Regina hosted two pairs of swans, one of which was accompanied by a brood of five cygnets, confirming breeding. Pairs were also observed near Endeavour and on the southern portion of Hasbala Lake in the extreme northeastern corner of the province. Known haunts in the Cypress Hills and Greenwater Lake areas should be carefully searched in the upcoming years.

Other interesting sightings include Black-necked Stilts nesting in three atlas squares between Herbert and Chaplin and a male Black-throated Blue Warbler observed singing during a point count near Radisson. Near Eastend, a Sage Thrasher was observed singing in proximity to suitable nesting habitat, and Field Sparrows were heard singing in Grasslands National Park and south of Roche Percee. Regional Coordinators were surprised at the number of locations where the uncommon Orchard Oriole was detected and Common Ravens appear to be continuing their return to former ranges, further expanding out of the parkland and onto the plains with breeding confirmed in the Regina area.

Nearly 7,000 individuals of 26 species listed under the Species at Risk Act were reported to the atlas,

including the endangered Greater Sage-Grouse, Sage Thrasher, Piping Plover, and Burrowing Owl. The recently listed Barn Swallow was the most commonly reported (3,126 individuals), followed by Bank Swallow (1,187 individuals) and Bobolink (605 individuals).

Partners at Environment and Climate Change Canada successfully completed several remote squares in northeastern Saskatchewan, providing much needed data from remote difficult-to-reach locations. Three multi-day floatplane excursions provided crews with great birding opportunities; highlights include Surf Scoter, Mew Gull, Arctic Tern, Parasitic Jaeger, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Bohemian Waxwing, White-crowned Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird, and Common and Hoary Redpoll. Although a few of these species were not assigned breeding codes at time of observation, some may have been making nesting attempts and will no doubt provide the review committee with much to discuss!

The Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas relies on the power of volunteer birders of all skill levels; if you are interested in contributing your observations to the project,

please consider joining us. For more information about the project and to register, view maps, and see upcoming events, visit the project website at [sk.birdatlas.ca](http://sk.birdatlas.ca). The atlas team can be reached by phone at 306-249-2894 or by e-mail at [skatlas@birdscanada.ca](mailto:skatlas@birdscanada.ca).

The Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas is the result of a partnership between Bird Studies Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Nature Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation. Important financial support for the project comes from Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Saskatchewan Fish and Wildlife Development Fund, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Wildlife Habitat Canada, Weyerhaeuser, The McLean Foundation, Tolko Industries Ltd., K+S Potash Canada, and the Baillie Fund. 

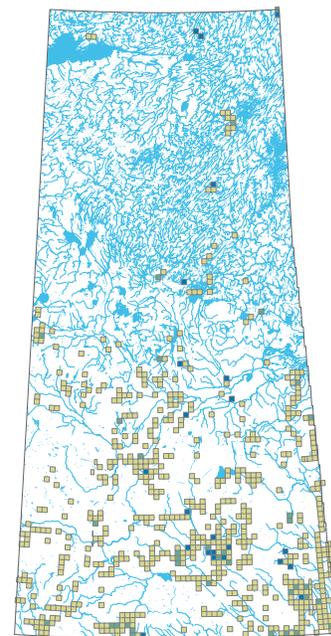


Male Black-throated Blue Warbler. Photo credit: Annie McLeod



**Hours of Survey Effort**

- <10
- 10-19
- 20+
- Not Surveyed



**FIGURE 1.** Hours of survey effort for the Saskatchewan Breeding Bird Atlas.

# CELEBRATING NATURE SASKATCHEWAN'S VOLUNTEER STEWARDS NAME OF SANCTUARY: KETCHEN LAND



## Nature Saskatchewan salutes steward Dallas Fairburn

Rob Wilson  
on behalf of Nature Saskatchewan

**Rob Wilson • How long have you been/were you associated with the Ketchen Land Sanctuary?**

**Dallas Fairburn •** I believe I have been a volunteer for nine years.

**RW • How did you become involved as a land steward on behalf of Nature Saskatchewan?**

**DF •** I have been a member of Nature Saskatchewan for many years. The society, knowing that I held a membership, contacted me requesting that I consider becoming a steward for the Ketchen Land. I think they asked me because I live in close proximity to the sanctuary.

**RW • Are you willing to continue in 2018?**

**DF •** Yes I will continue to act as a volunteer for Nature Saskatchewan.

**RW • Why do you choose to continue your involvement?**

**DF •** I support the work of Nature Saskatchewan and have supported the organization for many years. I am a bird watcher and a bird feeder. I have a soft spot in my heart for all aspects of nature. I have the time and I am pleased to be able to do a little work on behalf of Nature Saskatchewan.

**RW • Has it been a solitary undertaking?**

**DF •** There are others who take an interest in the Ketchen Land sanctuary. Recently Norman Johnson helped me to install a sign identifying the property as Nature Saskatchewan land.

**RW • To your mind, is there something special about the Ketchen Land sanctuary?**

**DF •** I am pleased to see some property set aside to provide sustainable habitat for a multitude of species of plants and animals. It is a good spot to search for birds, especially during the migration periods.

*Nature Saskatchewan is responsible for seven parcels of land and is working to improve its policies and processes with regard to those lands. Each parcel has a volunteer steward (or stewards) who "keep eyes and ears open" and who periodically report to Nature Saskatchewan.*

*Thank you, Dallas Fairburn.  
You are a "voice for nature." 🐦*



Photos by Morley Maier



**Jared Clarke**

Science has always been a big part of my life. In high school I took every science class I could. In university I acquired a Bachelor of Science in Biology. After a few years I went back to school and got an After Degree in Education specializing in high school science. Today, I try to get kids in my class excited about science while I conduct my own research during my spare time. So, naturally, when I had the opportunity to extend my knowledge of climate science this past October, I had to jump at the opportunity. I applied and was accepted to attend the Climate Reality Leadership Corps training being held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The Climate Reality Project was created by former Vice President Al Gore following the release of the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. This three-day workshop brought together 1,430 people from 32 different countries to learn about the climate crisis and how we can make a difference. We heard from Mr. Gore himself repeatedly over the session, as well as seven world class scientists whose areas of study included glaciers, coral reefs, forests, and climate change. It was an amazing experience to attend the workshop.

# THE NATURE NOTEBOOK: THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND SASKATCHEWAN

After attending this conference, I am more certain than ever that we need swift action to deal with the climate crisis. Climate change is real. It is being caused by us. And we have all of the technology we need to deal with it today. We just need our politicians to put our Paris Climate Agreement promises into action.

The science is clear that we are in trouble in Saskatchewan if we do not act. We can expect, and are seeing, more intense and longer lasting droughts, while at the same time more intense storms with greater downpours, which will increase flooding events. We can expect significantly decreased crop yields (which we already saw this past year due to the drought and extreme heat). Particularly relevant to naturalists, Deer Ticks — which carry Lyme Disease — are expected to aggressively expand into Saskatchewan in the near future, as they have now done in Manitoba (only 64 out of 26,625 collected in Saskatchewan since 2008 have been Deer Ticks). But most troubling is the expectation that 50 per cent of land-based species may go extinct by the end of this century due to climate change. This is hard to wrap one's head around, but it is not an unreasonable prediction given the extreme environmental changes that are beginning to take place.

It scares me a lot what scientists are telling us is going to happen within the next 80 years. But I left the leadership training with a great sense of hope. We can turn things around — we have everything we need today. But we need our politicians to hear our calls for climate action today. Climate change is not a partisan issue. The most important action you can take is to

contact your MLA, your MP, your town, city or RM councillors and tell them you support real climate action that will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Tell them you support transitioning to a renewable energy grid. You can also look at your own carbon footprint and take action to reduce your impacts.

The science is showing us we need to act. Scientists are telling us we need to act. The question is, will we? I say yes! There is too much at stake.

*Jared Clarke is a Grade 6/7 teacher and biologist who lives on a small farm near Edenwold, SK with his family. He hosts a nature radio program called The Prairie Naturalist on Thursdays at 6:00 p.m. on 91.3 FM CJTR in Regina. Follow him on Twitter @jaredclarke5 or on Facebook @ThePrairieNaturalist. 🐦*

## POETRY

### Spring's Regalia

The backlit poplars' catkins, grayish  
adornment in a pale green forest,  
are aureoles of misty haze with  
pastel-soft glimmerings, suspended  
but seeming unattached--amorphous.

**Victor C. Friesen**

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# BIRDMANIA: A REMARKABLE PASSION FOR BIRDS

BERND BRUNNER, GREYSTONE BOOKS LTD, 2017. 304 PP., HARDCOVER. \$39.95.

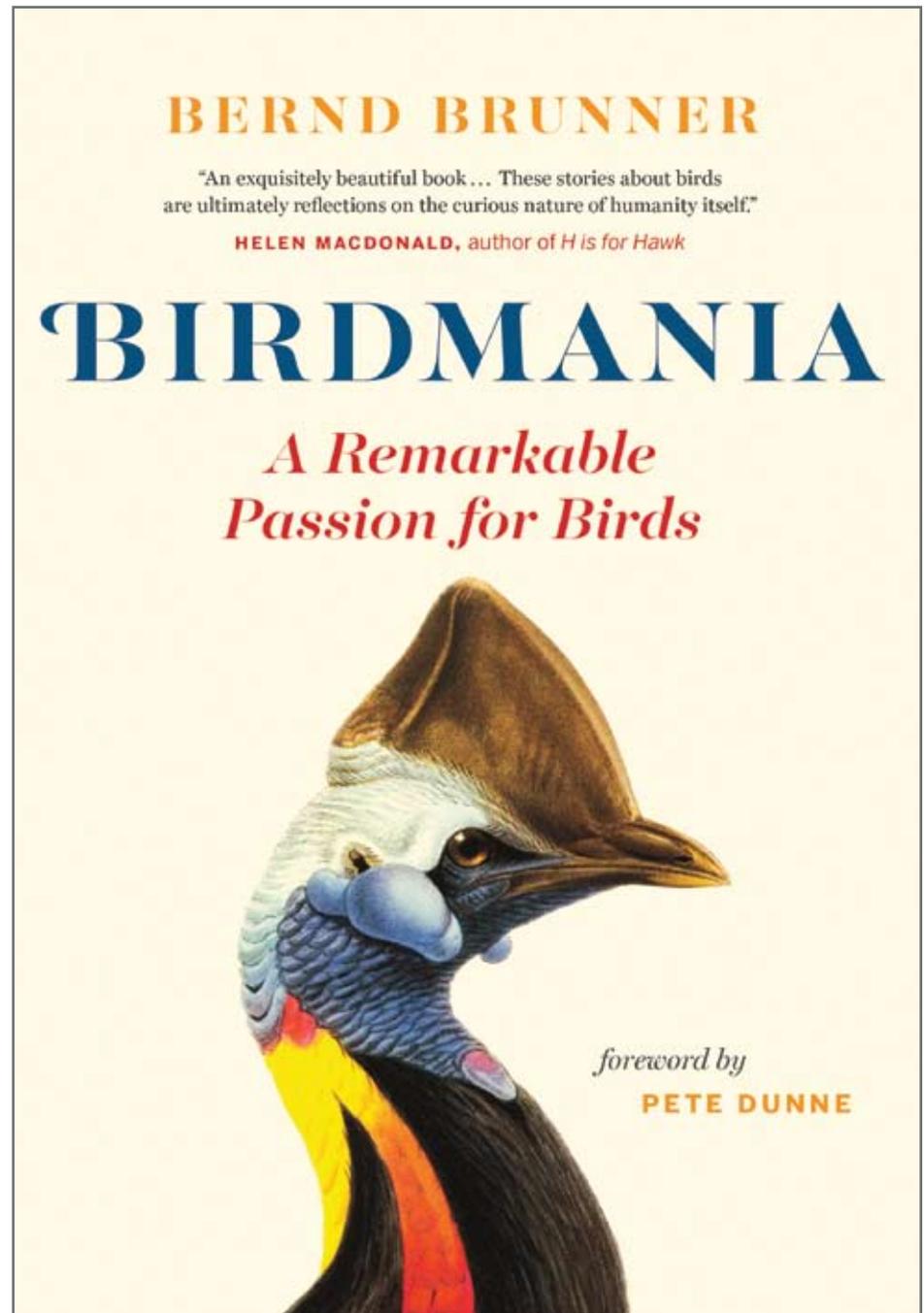
Review by Joel Cherry  
Regina, SK

*Birdmania* is richly illustrated with striking paintings and sketches of birds, feathers and eggs. But author Bernd Brunner's subjects are not birds themselves — rather, they are individual human beings who have for one reason or another become obsessed with birds. Brunner states in his introduction that his loosely organized collection of short biographies is simply a matter of sharing stories both well-known and obscure, but an overarching theme of humanity's changing relationship with the natural world can be sensed throughout the narrative.

Brunner sets the stage for his study of bird enthusiasts by referring to the central place that birds occupy in human mythology dating back to cave paintings. He also discusses the long-established tradition of falconry, which remains popular in some parts of the world, as an example of harmonious cooperation of humans and birds.

However, when this beautiful book sheds light on the more recent past, it illuminates its fair share of harshness. Worldwide birdmania took off in a big way in the 18th and 19th centuries as European museums and private collections filled with tens of thousands of bird skins and carcasses that had been collected during overseas expeditions. Exotic birds were viewed with tremendous fascination, and fashionable bird collections drew massive crowds.

With limited opportunity to observe live birds in the wild in this era, the general understanding of birds was shallow and superficial. When Ferdinand Magellan returned to Europe from Asia in 1522, he brought with him the skins of birds of paradise. The islanders who had preserved the skins removed the legs and feet along with the bones and flesh, and so for more



than 200 years it was believed that the birds never touched the ground until they died. Similarly, the 19th century Englishman John Gould owned a collection of 5,000 hummingbird skins and published a six-volume collection of paintings of hummingbirds before he saw a live one in person. When he did, he was shocked to find that the tiny birds stayed aloft on incredibly rapid wingbeats rather than floating like

butterflies as he had expected.

Although Brunner takes some care to consider bird collecting in the context of its times, he does not hide his distaste for egg collecting. The British Oological Association continued to promote egg theft well after the practice was outlawed in the 1950s. To these often wealthy hobbyists, the rarity of a bird only made the eggs more desirable (Peregrine Falcons, for example, have



Red-naped Falcon. In John Gould, *Birds of Asia*. London: published by the author, 1850.



Little Owls. In Johann Conrad and Eduard Susemihl, *Die Vögel Europa's mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Temminck's Manuel d'Ornithologie*. Stuttgart: Balz, 1839–52.

beautiful red eggs). The wealthy English lawyer George Lupton stole the eggs of a single female guillemot every year of the bird's life because he was so entranced with the patterning of her eggs. Presumably he was not upset that the guillemot never had a chance to raise a chick.

Near the dawn of the 20th century, conservationism and an emphasis on viewing live birds in their natural habitat began to



Hummingbirds. In Ernest Haeckel, *Kunstformen der Natur*. Leipzig und Wien: Verlag des Bibliographischen Instituts, 1899–1904.

displace caging and collecting as the prime interests of bird lovers. In 1889, the naturalist Frank M. Chapman concluded a two-year search for the rare and severely declining Carolina Parakeet by shooting 15 of them. America's only parrot species would be extinct within three decades. Brunner speculates that it may have been remorse for his actions as a hunter that motivated Chapman to start the first Christmas Bird Count, a tradition that thrives to this day.

While modern birders have traded their guns and cages in for binoculars and cameras, the urge to capture and collect remains in the form of modern 'Big Year' birding and the staggeringly huge 'life lists' maintained by zealous globe-trotting birders such as the late Phoebe Snetsinger. I was left to reflect on how my own actions have benefited or harmed these

fascinating creatures with which we are fortunate to share every corner of the world. Even with modern birding ethics and protections in place, it is important to remember that the activities of birders can be harmful to the creatures that we love.

Alternately, more people must be brought to love and appreciate birds if there is to be a chance of taking positive action to slow and reverse global population declines. Brunner shares numerous stories of modern bird lovers putting their passion for birds to good use in promoting conservation. This includes George Archibald, whose work to bring Whooping Cranes back from the brink of extinction included going as far as dressing in a crane costume and performing mating dances. While the current situation looks dire, *Birdmania* shows that there may be hope if only people can open a window and listen for a while. 🐦

# WANTED

## Loggerhead Shrike (*Threatened*)

Songbird with black face mask and contrasting black, grey and white plumage and a hooked, black bill. Prefers open habitats and thinly wooded areas, including dense or thorny bushes, such as shelterbelts.



## Burrowing Owl (*Endangered*)

Small owl, 9 inches tall with long, featherless legs; plumage is brown and white with beige spots. Most active during dawn and dusk. Found in grassland areas of southern Saskatchewan, sometimes nesting in ditches or cultivated fields.

## Monarch (*Special Concern*)

Bright orange butterfly with marked black veins and wings bordered with two rows of white spots; wingspan is 10 cm. Occurs in southern Saskatchewan, where milkweed and wildflowers grow.



## Piping Plover (*Endangered*)

Small, grey bird with a single black band around its neck. It has a black forehead band, short orange legs and a black-tipped orange bill. Found on sandy, gravelly or pebbly shorelines.

## Northern Leopard Frog (*Special Concern*)

Green to brown with dark spots and two light ridges running along its body from its eyes to its lower back. Found in aspen parkland and grasslands, in and around water. Prefers ponds, marshes, pools and sometimes slow-moving streams.



**Report Sightings to Nature Saskatchewan at:  
1-800-667-4668**

# Nature SASKATCHEWAN

*Without your voice, ours becomes a whisper.  
Help us protect Saskatchewan's ecosystems and wildlife.*

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_  
Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Would you like to subscribe to all electronic communications? Yes   
Would you like to receive our e-newsletter? Yes

### 1. I wish to enroll/renew my annual membership

\* All memberships run on a calendar of January 1st - December 31st

	Print Version	Electronic Version
Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25
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\*I would like to purchase a Life Membership (*You will receive a tax receipt for \$725*)  \$750  
 Print      OR       Electronic

### 2. I wish to make a one time tax-deductible donation in support of:

- General Programs
- Last Mountain Bird Observatory
- Scholarship Fund
- Bird Species at Risk Programs (OBO/SFS/POS)
- Land Conservation Fund
- Rare Plant Rescue Program
- Nature Legacy Fund

*Donate Online @ [www.naturesask.ca/support](http://www.naturesask.ca/support)*

### 3. I wish to become a monthly donor by joining the Nature Savings Plan:

(Income tax receipts are issued annually-- please provide credit card information or void cheque)  
Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

#### Fee Totals

Nature Saskatchewan Membership \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Nature Saskatchewan Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- Cheque (*payable to Nature Saskatchewan*)     Visa     MasterCard     Cash

Card # \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_      Expiry: \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder's Name: \_\_\_\_\_      Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# HUMAN NATURE



Narrow Hills Provincial Park. Photo Credit: Tourism Saskatchewan/Paul Austring

**Ellen Bouvier**  
Communications Manager  
Nature Saskatchewan  
Regina, SK

I will admit, it took me a while to decide just where I wanted to write about for this article. I am one of those people who connects deeply with where I am. It has started to become a joke in our family that on every camping trip we venture out on, I always exclaim that “this [campground/ lake/park] is the best we have ever been to. Let’s come back again next year!” Of course, by the time next year comes we have discovered a new treasure that is “the best!” So, I thought long and hard about where my heart truly is. The answer that appeared was the Gem Lakes in Narrow Hills Provincial Park.

It wasn’t until my adult years that I discovered this beautiful little piece of our province. My father is an avid fisherman and always boasts that the best trout fishing is in October on a little lake called Piprell Lake. But the catch is that the best fish bite very early in the morning. So the idea he tried to convince us of is to get into a cold boat, on a cold and sometimes snowy

morning, and wait for the fish to bite. This was an idea that my husband loved but my mother and myself not so much.

Our solution was that the men can go fishing and the women can go hiking (once the sun was up and it was warmer out). From Piprell we would drive to the Gem Lakes. The rest of the world seemed to dissolve when we arrived at our destination. There was no sign of anyone else and only the sounds of nature could be heard. The water was clear and calm and it became an exciting challenge to find the next lake around the corner. My mother and I had always been very close and this time we had to chat and explore, with none of the modern distractions, is something that I will always treasure.

The two of us had hiked together many times but we were certainly different types of hikers. I happen to be one that likes paths and destinations. I like to know where I am going and what will be on the other end of the trail. My mother was not that type. She liked to follow deer paths and random other ‘paths’ that I don’t think were even paths. It wasn’t long before she convinced me to follow a deer path

that seemed to go around Jade Lake. The journey around the lake was easy for the first bit but, as you can guess, the path ended about halfway around. I would have naturally turned around but she argued that we had already seen that part of the path and what was ahead was still a mystery. So we climbed over fallen trees, jumped across rocks and pushed bush until we made it all the way around. In the end, we didn’t find anything of note but what we did find was the joy and wonder that exploring nature can bring. We returned to Piprell Lake and the Gem Lakes for three more years before my mom passed away in 2013. I was thankful that on our last trip we were able to bring my two year old son with us. Of course, this time the exploring was limited to rocks and bugs, but it was still a wondrous time to share together.

I am proud to say that although I am still more cautious, I have learned that you don’t always have to follow a path; and, in fact, if you head off of the trail you may find something you didn’t even know you were looking for. Happy hiking and enjoy making your own path! 🐦



Photo credit: Jack Wilkinson



Photo credit: Fran Kerbs

## Mystery Photo Spring 2018 (left)

THE QUESTION IS: The abdomen of what insect is shown in this picture?  
Hint: it is one of the best known insects in Canada.

Please send your answers to Blue Jay editor Annie McLeod at [bluejay@naturesask.ca](mailto: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.

## Mystery Photo Winter 2017 (above)

ANSWER:

The Winter 2017 Mystery Photo showed an owl pellet and the leg of a raptor (possibly a Sharp-shinned Hawk). Since the leg was found with the pellet, the predator (likely a Great Horned Owl) swallowed the leg whole and regurgitated it with the pellet. The pellet would have been regurgitated long after the bird consumed the meal, so the leg likely would not have been detached with the pellet landing beside it hours later.

Have you taken a picture that may make for a good mystery photo? Send it to the editor for possible inclusion in an upcoming issue.



*Nature*  
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