

Prairie Provinces



Rudolf F. Koes | Peter Taylor

Some heavy mid-June rains tracked from southern Alberta across Saskatchewan to northern Manitoba. Otherwise the period was generally hot and dry, interspersed with occasional violent thunderstorms. Following last summer's rains and substantial spring runoff, lake levels remained high from central and southwestern Manitoba across much of southern Saskatchewan to parts of southern Alberta. This provided excellent nesting conditions for many water and marsh birds but displaced or disrupted some colonies of Western Grebes, Eared Grebes, and Franklin's Gulls. Lack of shoreline habitat reduced Manitoba's endangered Piping Plover population to four known pairs at one location, but the species apparently fared much better in Saskatchewan. Following an early spring migration and generally benign breeding season, fall passerine migration started one to two weeks early, with a July record total of 2318 birds banded at the Delta Marsh Bird Observatory, Manitoba.

Abbreviations: Oak Hammock (Oak Hammock Marsh W.M.A., MB); Whitewater (Whitewater Lake W.M.A., MB).

WATERFOWL THROUGH CRANES

A Tundra Swan pair hatched 3 young at Patience L., SK, but only one cygnet survived by 18 Aug (PH). Wood Duck is now strongly established in w. Manitoba, as shown by 75 young at a Dauphin city park 26 Jul (CC). A male Eurasian Wigeon delighted many observers at Oak Hammock 5-25 Jun (BR, m.ob.), while a male Harlequin Duck remained at Seven Sisters Falls, MB 2 Jun-3 Aug (TH, PP, m.ob., ph.). At Clear L., AB, 500 Buffleheads formed an unusually large mid-summer flock 24 Jun-2 Jul (TK). Impressive concentrations at Churchill, MB 11 Jun included 3000+ Common Mergansers and nearly 300 Red-throated Loons (CC, Birdquest). Eighty ad. Red-necked Grebes was a good count near Irricana, AB 23 Jul, and breeding success was apparently high (TK). Wandering

American White Pelicans were noted at North Knife L. in n. Manitoba (*vide* BC).

Five Great Egrets were reported from three Alberta locations in Jul (LBe, SC, MK). It was another bumper year for waders at Whitewater, with peak counts of 11 Great Egrets 10 Jun (WC, MW) and 4 Snowy Egrets 28 Jul (GH), plus an ad. Little Blue Heron 8 Jun (BDL et al., m.ob.). Several Saskatchewan reports of Cattle Egrets included 20+ near Aberdeen 26 Jun (NC, DC), and the Oak Lake, MB colony discovered last year was active again, albeit with reduced numbers (RBz). Eight small Cattle Egret colonies at Whitewater totaled 47 nests, most in association with Black-crowned Night-Herons (RBz). A Yellow-crowned Night-Heron visited Oak Hammock 13-14 Jul (AM). Three White-faced Ibis nests were found at Whitewater (RBz), where the highest ibis count was 16 White-faced and at least one Glossy in late Jul (GH, LV, CA et al.). Other high counts included 14+ White-faced Ibis at Chaplin L., SK 24 Jul (RE) and up to 10 at Lizard L., MB (CC), while one was



This Least Tern at Calgary, Alberta 4 July 2006 provided the first confirmed record for the province. The Prairie Provinces have just a handful of records of this species. Photograph by Anne Elliott.

seen intermittently farther e. at Oak Hammock (m.ob.).

By a concerted effort, 84 Turkey Vultures were banded at 46 Saskatchewan nests (SH). A Sharp-shinned Hawk appeared at Churchill 17 Jun (BDL et al.). Ferruginous Hawk numbers slipped a little in sw. Manitoba for the 2nd consecutive year (KDS). Yellow Rails were again fairly prominent near Calgary, AB, including 2 birds e. of the city at Langdon 15 Jul (RB). Whooping Cranes were seen in all three provinces: 3 near Pierceland, AB 4 Jun (CM) and 2 near Saskatoon, SK 3-4 Jun (Mitzel family, SS et al.), while the St. Adolphe, MB bird was last reported 12 Jun (GH).

PLOVERS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Snowy Plovers added spice to Piping Plover surveys at Chaplin L., SK: 2 on 20 Jun and 3 on 22 Jun (PG). At the n. tip of their range, three Mountain Plover pairs nested near One-four, AB (RKn et al.). Two successfully nesting pairs of Black-necked Stilts at Whitewa-

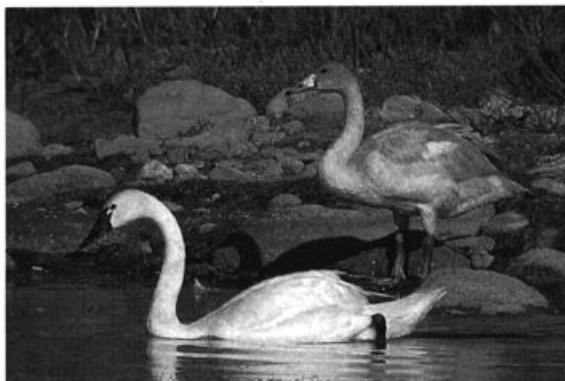
ter furnished Manitoba's first breeding record (KDS, m.ob.). Otherwise, shorebird highlights were limited to an unseasonable Hudsonian Godwit at East Shoal L., MB 28 Jun (KG), a Whimbrel at Silver Bay, L. Manitoba 7-8 Jun (LdM), 2 Western Sandpipers at Clear L., AB 22 Jul (TK), and a concentration of 600 Wilson's Phalaropes near Strathmore, AB 23 Jul (TK). One of two Little Gull colonies at Churchill was predated by ravens, while 2 ad. and one subad. Ross's Gulls were last seen there around 14 Jun (BC). Two rare larids made disappointingly brief appearances, but both were photographed for first confirmed provincial records: a second-year Black-tailed Gull at Churchill 29 Jun (BC et al., ph. JG) and a Least Tern at Policeman Flats near Calgary, AB 4 Jul (NS, ph. AE, m.ob.).

Eurasian Collared-Dove is seemingly establishing more slowly in Manitoba than in Saskatchewan, but a pair probably nested again at Lyleton (KDS), and there were reports of 3 near Winkler (JP, LBr) and 2 at Crystal City (MT). Black-billed Cuckoo made a strong showing in parts of s. and cen. Manitoba, with several morning counts of 11-13 birds (m.ob.) and an exceptional total of 33 on the Whitemouth L. B.B.S. 24 Jun (CCs). A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was seen near Rat River W.M.A., MB 6 Jun (LV). Following last winter's incursion, many Northern Hawk Owls remained to breed in se. Manitoba, with at least six broods observed in Jun (m.ob.). A pleasant surprise was the total of seven breeding pairs of Burrowing Owl in sw. Manitoba (plus two unconfirmed), though only two pairs were successful (KDS). Few Great Gray Owls were reported, except for at least 7 ads. and 6 imms. near Water Valley, AB 10 Jun (MS et al.). A Common Poorwill was noted near Taber, AB 3 Jul (LBe).

While Chimney Swift numbers remain low, outlying reports in Jun included 2 as far w. as Weyburn, SK 17-26 Jun (SW, MB, CB) and 2 well n. at The Pas, MB 23 Jun (DR). A *Selasphorus* hummingbird, most likely Rufous, visited a Hodgeville, SK feeder 31 Jul-1 Aug (MP). A Lewis's Woodpecker highlighted a Sheep River Valley, AB field trip 25 Jun (BW et al.). Hairy Woodpeckers continue to push their range limit at Churchill, with a nesting pair again this year (BDL et al.).

PASSERINES

Well out of range were a Great Crested Flycatcher at Calgary 18 Jun (MSw) and Western Kingbirds in n. Manitoba at McClintock 13 Jun and Churchill 14-15 Jun (BDL). Always exciting, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was near Meleb, MB 18 Jun (RBg). Though still quite numerous in a few spots, Loggerhead Shrike



Tundra Swans have nested south of their normal range in Saskatchewan on a few occasions in recent years. An adult is shown here with its sole surviving cygnet at Patience Lake on 18 August 2006. Photograph by Peter Hardie.

continues to decline; nest totals at a study area in extreme sw. Manitoba were down to about 40 (from 327 as recently as 1993), and predation losses were high (KDS). Clearly an escapee, a Hooded Crow came to light this season at Whitecourt, AB, where it has visited feeders for four years, accompanying American Crows and departing with them each winter (DP, m.ob., ph., vt. ET).

Northern Wheatears attended a nest, outcome unknown, at Churchill's Ft. Prince of Wales 29 Jun–11 Jul, for a first Regional breeding record (ph. A&DW, BC et al., KH). Eastern Bluebirds raised 2 young near Anzac in ne. Alberta (DH, JE), probably the northernmost nest record for this species, which continues to displace Mountain Bluebird in sw. Manitoba. A Wood Thrush sang lustily during a B.B.S. stop near Hadasville, MB 17 Jun (WC, MW) but could not be found again.

Four Northern Mockingbirds Regionwide,

from Calgary to Winnipeg, was a typical summer tally. Sage Thrasher maintains a toehold in the Region; a nest near Wild Horse, AB contained five eggs 25 Jun (RKn, GHr, HT), and a single bird was well seen at the w. edge of the Great Sand Hills, SK 1 Jun (RW). An American Pipit lingered at Laurentia Beach, MB 7 Jun (DO). A Northern Parula visited Regina, SK 6 Jun (RL, m.ob.). Cape May Warblers made a good showing in sw. Alberta forests, including 3 singing males at Brown-Lowery P.P. into Jun (m.ob.) and one at Bragg

Creek 25 Jun (KC).

Tantalizing songsters, hinting at breeding in Manitoba, were a Western Tanager in Riding Mountain N.P. 9 Jun (Birdquest, *vide* CC) and a Spotted Towhee near Miniota 10–11 Jul (LV). Lark Buntings were numerous in parts of s. Saskatchewan, with about 60 in the Tribune area 29 Jul (V&DT) and good numbers w. of Tompkins the same day (SW). Baird's Sparrow numbers in sw. Manitoba remained disturbingly low (KDS, m.ob.). Well out of range were a Northern Cardinal at Lumsden, SK 9 Jun (CP), a territorial Black-headed Grosbeak near Coulter, MB 30 May–Jul (KDS et al., m.ob.), and a Lazuli Bunting at Newdale, MB 11 Jun (SSw, JB). Also noteworthy, an Eastern Meadowlark sang near Blumenort, MB 2 Jun (VR). An American Goldfinch furnished just a 2nd Churchill record 14 Jun (BDL), and an Eurasian Goldfinch visited a feeder near Minnedosa, MB 19 Jun (LBo).



Northern Wheatears at Fort Prince of Wales, Churchill, Manitoba provided the Prairie Provinces Region with its first nesting record, well south of the known range. Here the male is seen carrying food 29 June 2006.

Photograph by Allen and Della Wells.

Observers (provincial compilers in boldface) C. Artuso, R. Austin, M. Bailey, R. Barclay, R. Bazin (RBz), L. Bennett (LBe), R. Berger (RBg), C. Bjorklund, L. Blanchette (LBl), L. Boys (LBo), J. Bradley, L. Braun (LBr), G. Budyk, N. Calkett, S. Cameron, B. Chartier, W. Christianson, L. Cocks, D. Cork, K. Corkery, C. Curtis (CCs), C. Cuthbert, L. de March (LdM), K. De Smet, H. den Haan, B. Di Labio L. Dudragne, M. Dudragne, R. Dudragne, A. Elliott, J. Elser, R. Ewart, K. Gardner, P. Goossen, C. Gratto-Trevor, J. Gordon, D. Hall, K. Hannah, P. Hardie, M. Harrison, A. Hartley, K. Hedegard, T. Hince, G. Holland, G. Holroyd (GHr), S. Houston, R. Knapton (RKn), M. Koivula, T. Korolyk, G. Krätzig, H. & B. Lane, T. Lawton, J. Luce, R. Luterbach, C. Manly, A. & S. McLeod, A. Mickey, family Mitzel, D. Oakford, D. Pederson, J. Peters, C. Pollock, K. Porteous, R. Porteous, P. Pratt, M. Priebe, D. Raitt, V. Reimer, B. Robinson, N. Seneviratne, J. Shadick, S. Shadick, A. Smith M. Spitzer, M. Swingle (MSw), S. Switzer (SSw), V. & D. Thomas, M. Treble, H. Trefry, E. Tull, L. Veelma, M. Waldron, B. Walker, G. Walleyn (GWy), G. Wapple, R. Wapple, S. Weir, A. & D. Wells. 🌐

SA Parts of the Region enjoyed the strongest **Dickissel** irruption since 1973. Birds were concentrated mainly in se. Saskatchewan and sw. Manitoba, with scattered sightings w. to Maple Creek, SK (AH, AS, *vide* PG) and e. to the Red River valley, MB (LB, GH). Peak counts were 37 along roads se. of Oak Lake, MB 14–15 Jun (GB), 18 s. of Estevan, SK 16 Jun (KH), 18+ near Weyburn, SK 4 Jul (RL), and 14 near Lyleton, MB 11 Jul (LV). Reports extended from 6 Jun through 21 Jul. As usual, most were concentrated in alfalfa fields, and it is unknown whether any won the race to fledge young before the fields were mown.

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