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Cliff Hope at Attawapiskat Lake in 1939

by
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The following article was prepared largely from information gleaned from the field notes of Cliff Hope (Journal numbers 12 and 13) in the archives of the Royal Ontario Museum. Hope's experience there would have provided additional insights. However, I think sufficient detail was preserved to provide a good idea of what he encountered at Attawapiskat Lake.

Hope left Toronto on 2 June 1939 with L.A. Prince and W.B. Scott, travelling by train to Sioux Lookout. From there they flew with Canadian Airways to Lansdowne House on Attawapiskat Lake on 4 June. They were met by the Hudson Bay Factor, a Mr. Bastow, who had arranged accommodation in a Revillon Freres Trading Company House, now owned

by the Hudson Bay Company. The party remained at Lansdowne House until 25 August.

Lansdowne House (52° 14'N, 87° 53'W) lies on the end of a narrow peninsula on the south side of Attawapiskat Lake in the midst of the Boreal Forest in the central part of northern Ontario (Figure 1). The physical location of the town meant that his ability to move about was very restricted. Walking, he could go only south along the narrow peninsula. The party had a canoe, but windy weather restricted travel on such a large lake on many days. The difficulty is perhaps exemplified by their landing on the lake, in what he describes as a "50 to 60 mile/hour" wind (80 to 100 km/h), when "the first touch on the water bounced the

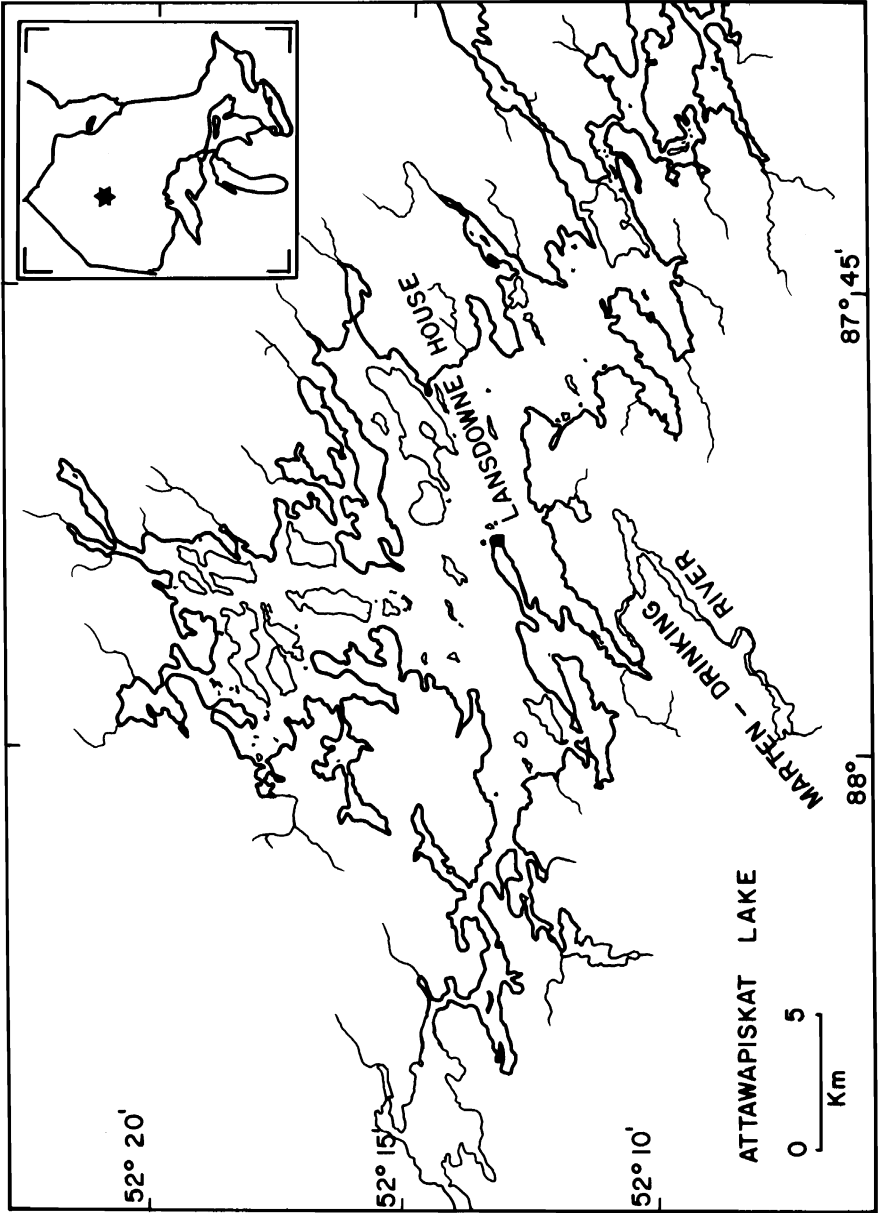


Figure 1: Map of Attawapiskat Lake, Ontario.

plane up 30 feet" (9 m), breaking one of the struts on a float. They had to find a sheltered spot to land and taxi for 30 minutes to manoeuvre to the post. They seem to have experienced a great deal of cool and rainy weather through the summer.

They were able on a number of occasions to canoe directly "across" the lake, a half hour paddle, and walk inland to a smaller boggy lake there. (Across apparently meant to the southeast, as he describes an inlet before reaching the river to the lake.) This was apparently the only small lake visited. They visited the few tiny "gravelly" islands offshore of the peninsula, the one larger island about one mile northwest, and some unspecified islands also in that direction. They also made a four day trip southwest to the mouth of the "Drinking River" (presumably the Marten-Drinking River) after a half day delay because of wind, and arriving just prior to another thunderstorm. Only once does he mention paddling for three hours in a northeasterly direction and back without staying. Any of the canoe trips could have been perilous on such a large lake.

When flying in he reports the country was well wooded, but dotted with numerous small lakes and some open muskeg. On the end of the peninsula in the environs of Lansdowne House, there was a lot of scrub willow, birch, poplar and dogwood, but otherwise the peninsula seems to have been covered largely with spruce woods, with some mixed woods near the base. Weather on the more exposed peninsula may have kept trees smaller as he comments about taller spruce trees on the opposite shore. The lake visited on

the opposite shore was apparently wooded to the shore except for a few alders near the water. Apart from some marshy areas along the shores of the Marten-Drinking River, no marshes were found. Also along this river some mixed woods and even predominantly deciduous patches were found. Some Jack Pine was present there as was Tamarack, but the latter only as small trees.

Hope received considerable assistance from Prince and Scott, and he helped collect for them also. A few specimens were secured from the native people. In addition to fish, amphibians, birds and mammals, the party collected some insects, mollusks and plants. I have indicated when breeding evidence was found by *, and when specimens were collected by #. Details of nesting records and specimens collected are in the Royal Ontario Museum.

A party of four geologists travelled north on the same train and landed at Lansdowne House the day after the ROM party. Led by Vic Prest, they were on their way to Rowlandson Lake, about 30 km northeast of Lansdowne House. They were there from 7 June to 13 August and contributed a list of bird species seen and nests found there. These are mentioned where they add to Hope's observations from this part of the province.

Hope's notes indicate the name of the lake is derived from white rocks in the lake.

- Common Loon**, *Gavia immer*: * # Rare near Lansdowne House, as they were frequently shot for food. A pair with a downy chick was found on the small inland lake. A nest was also found at Rowlandson Lake.
- American Bittern**, *Botaurus lentiginosus*: # Only one bird was seen, 1 August. This young of the year was probably locally raised, although habitat was scarce. The species was also seen at Rowlandson Lake.
- Green-winged Teal**, *Anas crecca*: # The only sighting was of four young of the year, all capable of flight, on 5 August.
- American Black Duck**, *Anas rubripes*: * # A newly hatched young was brought to Hope on 21 June, and a single adult was seen 27 July on the Marten-Drinking River. Young were apparently seen at Rowlandson Lake.
- Mallard**, *Anas platyrhynchos*: * # A single nearly feathered but still flightless young was brought to Hope on 31 July. It was with an adult and apparently other young.
- Ring-necked Duck**, *Aythya collaris*: * # Two females with broods of five and six recently hatched young were encountered 23 July on the small inland lake.
- Common Goldeneye**, *Bucephala clangula*: Seemed to be relatively rare. He identified only five birds on three occasions, the first on 30 June. Some other unidentified ducks may have been of this species.
- Bufflehead**, *Bucephala albeola*: Only two birds were seen, flying past their "camp" on 5 June.
- Common Merganser**, *Mergus merganser*: # The only merganser identified, and only four were seen. Old nests on the gravelly islands suggested they may have tried to nest in the past.
- Osprey**, *Pandion haliaetus*: # It was rare with single birds seen on three occasions over the lake, and at the Marten-Drinking River a single bird was seen three days in a row.
- Bald Eagle**, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*: Reported at Rowlandson Lake.
- Northern Harrier**, *Circus cyaneus*: The only record was a single bird seen on 20 August.
- Northern Goshawk**, *Accipiter gentilis*: Reported from Rowlandson Lake.
- Red-tailed Hawk**, *Buteo jamaicensis*: Reported from Rowlandson Lake.
- American Kestrel**, *Falco sparverius*: # Seven birds were seen on five occasions, the first not until 25 June.
- Merlin**, *Falco columbarius*: * # A pair at a nest with five small young was found 25 June. The only other bird identified was one on 17 August chasing shorebirds on the point.
- Spruce Grouse**, *Dendragapus canadensis*: * # Was probably fairly common, encountered on six occasions, twice with broods of young.
- Ruffed Grouse**, *Bonasa umbellus*: * # Was probably common in appropriate habitat; patches of birch and alder. The first of six broods was encountered 26 June, but no others were seen until the end of July, perhaps because habitat was limited.
- Semipalmated Plover**, *Charadrius semipalmatus*: Single, probable migrants, were seen 4 June and 23 July.
- Killdeer**, *Charadrius vociferus*: # A single bird was encountered 27 June on a gravel shore in the post clearing.
- Greater Yellowlegs**, *Tringa melanoleuca*: It was reported from Rowlandson Lake, but at Lansdowne House only one unidentified yellowlegs was noted flying over.
- Semipalmated Sandpiper**, *Calidris pusilla*: # He saw four and six on two days in early August. He also observed a Merlin chasing a flock of about 25 unidentified "peeps" on 17 August, probably this or the following species.
- Least Sandpiper**: *Calidris minutilla*: # Nine birds were seen over three days in early August.
- Herring Gull**, *Larus argentatus*: # Seen rather infrequently and only in ones and twos until August when small flocks were encountered. Although he found no evidence of nesting, there were numerous islands in the lake where they could have nested. Several young of the year were seen on 9 August, but they were flying well. Nests were apparently found at Rowlandson Lake.
- Common Tern**, *Sterna hirundo*: # From one to three birds were seen on only four occasions, suggesting they may not have bred on this lake.
- Common Nighthawk**, *Chordeiles minor*: # Rather uncommon, usually seen singly at irregular intervals throughout the summer.

- Belted Kingfisher**, *Ceryle alcyon*: Two birds were seen 27 July and one on 20 August.
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, *Sphyrapicus varius*: * # A pair at a nest of nearly fledged young was found 27 July near the mouth of the Marten-Drinking River. That was the only encounter.
- Downy Woodpecker**, *Picoides pubescens*: * # Much less numerous than the Hairy Woodpecker. It was seen only once prior to the end of July. Then a juvenile accompanied by an adult male on the 27th, and another juvenile with a female parent on the 28th were seen, both near the mouth of the Marten-Drinking River.
- Hairy Woodpecker**, *Picoides villosus*: * # Seen sporadically throughout the summer, usually single birds in tall spruce woods. A young of the year with a female parent was located 8 July. A nest was reported at Rowlandson Lake.
- Three-toed Woodpecker**, *Picoides tridactylus*: * # Uncommonly encountered one or two at a time. A nest with young was found 24 June at the edge of a wet alder and willow area beside spruce woods.
- Black-backed Woodpecker**, *Picoides arcticus*: # The most commonly encountered woodpecker usually in black spruce bogs. One to three were seen on half the days in early June at least, but evidence of breeding avoided his notice.
- Northern Flicker**, *Colaptes auratus*: # Very rarely seen, except along the Marten-Drinking River where two or three were seen each day.
- Olive-sided Flycatcher**, *Contopus borealis*: # Uncommon, but encountered most days. No nests or evidence of breeding were noted.
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**, *Empidonax flaviventris*: # Uncommon, but regularly encountered. No evidence of nesting was secured, but a nest was reported from Rowlandson Lake.
- Alder Flycatcher**, *Empidonax alnorum*: * # A common species, seen almost every day. The only evidence of breeding was a group of three flying immatures apparently still being fed by a female parent on 4 August.
- Least Flycatcher**, *Empidonax minimus*: * It was a common species also. Nests were found 10 June (under construction) and 20 June (fresh eggs).
- Eastern Kingbird**, *Tyrannus tyrannus*: Single birds were seen on three separate occasions, all in the clearings about the settlement. Such occurrences, well north of the then known breeding range, have subsequently proven to represent potential breeders.
- Tree Swallow**, *Tachycineta bicolor*: Although a fairly common species seen most days, no nests were located.
- Bank Swallow**, *Riparia riparia*: It was reported from Rowlandson Lake.
- Gray Jay**, *Perisoreus canadensis*: * # Fairly common and seen most days throughout the summer. Young of the year were seen several times with adults in June and were undoubtedly locally raised.
- American Crow**, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*: * # One or two were seen frequently. A couple of old nests in cedars on the island northwest of the point may have been built by crows, and a single nest with young was found 30 June near the base of the peninsula in fairly dense mixed woods.
- Common Raven**, *Corvus corax*: Never seen or heard until 20 August when a single bird flew over calling.
- Black-capped Chickadee**, *Parus atricapillus*: * # A relatively rare species, the only evidence of breeding was two recently fledged flying juveniles with an adult male in mixed woods at the base of the peninsula on 30 June.
- Boreal Chickadee**, *Parus hudsonicus*: * # Uncommon, and very inconspicuous until young were out of the nest. Family groups with recently fledged young were seen 10, 12 and 17 July in spruce forests.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch**, *Sitta canadensis*: [* ?] # Only one bird was ever seen, a flying young of the year on 5 August, that may have been raised locally.
- Brown Creeper**, *Certhia americana*: * # Uncommon in spruce and mixed woods, nests were found 9 June (with eggs) in a black spruce bog and 27 June (with well feathered young). Family groups were also seen 17 July and 5 August.
- Winter Wren**, *Troglodytes troglodytes*: [* ?] # Uncommon in spruce woods; the only evidence of breeding was an empty nest in upturned roots visited by a singing male.

- Golden-crowned Kinglet**, *Regulus satrapa*: * # Encountered on only two occasions; however, on 17 July two groups of adults and flying young were seen in spruce forest.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, *Regulus calendula*: * # Fairly common; family groups with recently fledged young were encountered 14 and 17 July.
- Swainson's Thrush**, *Catharus ustulatus*: * # A very common and conspicuous species; 14 nests were found between 7 June and 15 July.
- Hermit Thrush**, *Catharus guttatus*: * # It was uncommon and inconspicuous. A single unaccompanied flying juvenile on 23 July was the only evidence of breeding at Attawapiskat Lake. A nest was reported from Rowlandson Lake, however.
- American Robin**, *Turdus migratorius*: * # Common, and although seen virtually every day, no nests were ever found. On 5 July, when a single immature bird was found, breeding was established. Only one other juvenile was ever seen, on 11 August.
- Cedar Waxwing**, *Bombicilla cedrorum*: * # Groups as large as a dozen were common. The first of four nests was found on 13 July. Hope watched one nest frequently that he found on 25 July with two eggs. Its four eggs hatched 8 August, and on 21 August before the young flew, he examined the young for waxy tips on the secondaries. One definitely showed waxy red, two had only an "indefinite suggestion", and one showed none at all.
- European Starling**, *Sturnus vulgaris*: Hope saw two birds on the day of arrival, flying along the shore close to the point. Only 17 years after first reported breeding in Ontario, they had penetrated to this remote settlement. However, none appeared to remain to nest. He saw two on 5 and 6 June, and four on 10 June, but none thereafter.
- Solitary Vireo**, *Vireo solitarius*: # Rarely encountered, usually only single birds, and he was not able to find evidence of breeding.
- Philadelphia Vireo**, *Vireo philadelphicus*: * # It was identified decidedly less frequently and in smaller numbers than the Red-eyed Vireo. He flushed a female from a nest under construction on 23 June. A subsequent nest, located 26 July, with three newly hatched young, also contained an infertile egg. Nests were in aspen woods with alders in the understory.
- Red-eyed Vireo**, *Vireo olivaceus*: * # It was common in the area. A nest was found 3 July in poplar woods with alder-willow understory. As late as 16 August a second nest, still containing one "lice" infested young was located near the settlement.
- Tennessee Warbler**, *Vermivora peregrina*: * # Fairly common; flying juveniles in family groups were encountered 18 July, 9 and 11 August.
- Orange-crowned Warbler**, *Vermivora celata*: * # It was uncommon; a group of four flying juveniles encountered 26 July was the only evidence of breeding.
- Yellow Warbler**, *Dendroica petechia*: * # The most commonly encountered of any species at Attawapiskat Lake, inhabiting the scrubby growth on the peninsula and adjacent islands. He located a dozen nests between 7 June and 6 July.
- Magnolia Warbler**, *Dendroica magnolia*: * # Although seen almost every day, it was uncommon. Three nests were found between 9 June and 15 July.
- Yellow-rumped Warbler**, *Dendroica coronata*: * # It was a common species, and although no nests were found, he four times watched adults feeding recently fledged young between 11 July and 15 August. On 19 June he records coming upon one singing "a perfect rendition of the Mourning Warbler's song". Since he had not yet found that species there (and never did) he went to find it. He said the song was so convincing he had it marked on his checking card. Surprised by what he found, he watched it for some time, but "it gave no attempt of the typical myrtle song".
- Black-throated Green Warbler**, *Dendroica virens*: # A rare species, seen only four times.
- Palm Warbler**, *Dendroica palmarum*: * # He encountered two juveniles 21 July apparently accompanied by a parent, and one immature 8 August for his only observations.
- Bay-breasted Warbler**, *Dendroica castanea*: * # Uncommon and not widespread, the only evidence of breeding was some flying young being fed by adults on 8 July. They were on the large wooded island to the northwest of the point, and thus were probably from a nest on that island.
- Blackpoll Warbler**, *Dendroica striata*: [* ?] # Rare, but probably bred sparingly nearby. A singing male in breeding condition 13 June in appropriate open black spruce bog, a female with an incubation patch 17 July, and an immature with traces of juvenile plumage 15 August all suggest breeding.

- Black-and-white Warbler**, *Mniotilta varia*: * # It was uncommon; a juvenile bird still accompanied by a parent on 9 August was the only evidence of breeding.
- American Redstart**, *Setophaga ruticilla*: * # Relatively rarely encountered, and the only evidence of breeding was the observation of a brood of four young accompanied by an adult on 9 August.
- Ovenbird**, *Seiurus aurocapillus*: Reported only from Rowlandson Lake.
- Northern Waterthrush**, *Seiurus noveboracensis*: * # A common species seen daily. He found a nest with eggs 19 June, and stubby-tailed young on 8 July to confirm breeding.
- Connecticut Warbler**, *Oporornis agilis*: (* #) # It was decidedly rare. He encountered only one singing male at the edge of a small bog lake until 15 August when he collected a single immature bird. The immature, although flying, was probably raised reasonably close by, and was the first specimen evidence indicating breeding in the province.
- Wilson's Warbler**, *Wilsonia pusilla*: * # A relatively common species in wet open alder and spruce woods. He located two nests with eggs 16 and 20 June, and observed juveniles a couple of times in early August.
- Canada Warbler**, *Wilsonia canadensis*: (* #) # A very rare species encountered on only three occasions. However, a very agitated female carrying food 21 July suggested breeding.
- Chipping Sparrow**, *Spizella passerina*: (* #) # Although very rare, it probably nested as a juvenile bird was taken 8 August.
- Le Conte's Sparrow**, *Ammodramus leconteii*: (* #) # A single flying juvenile was the only bird of this species encountered. It was in tall grass in the post clearing on 16 August, probably raised not too far away.
- Fox Sparrow**, *Passerella iliaca*: (* #) # While it was a very rare species there, it probably bred locally. A single male was singing on 13 June, and no further birds were found until 4 August when two young of the year, still retaining some juvenile plumage, were secured.
- Song Sparrow**, *Melospiza melodia*: * # One of the most abundant species, with 10 to 20 seen on numerous days. A single nest was found 11 June and young of the year a couple of times in July. A nest was also reported from Rowlandson Lake.
- Lincoln's Sparrow**, *Melospiza lincolni*: * # It was uncommon, but regularly encountered throughout the summer. He was elated to find a nest 20 June at the edge of a spruce bog. He comments that he had searched in vain for four years for the nest of this species.
- Swamp Sparrow**, *Melospiza georgiana*: * # It was locally uncommon. Although no nests were found, flying juveniles were encountered half a dozen times after 18 July.
- White-throated Sparrow**, *Zonotrichia albicollis*: * # This was one of the commonest species of the woodlands there. He found four nests between 9 and 24 June.
- Dark-eyed Junco**, *Junco hyemalis*: * # Fairly common, seen most days throughout the summer. Young of the year in family groups were encountered several times after 8 July. A nest was reported from Rowlandson Lake.
- Lapland Longspur**, *Calcarius lapponicus*: * # A single bird, probably a migrant, was secured 13 June in the post clearing.
- Red-winged Blackbird**, *Agelaius phoeniceus*: # Rare, encountered on only four occasions. Hope never found what he considered suitable marsh habitat until visiting the Marten-Drinking River, and he found only a single bird in a small marsh there.
- Rusty Blackbird**, *Euphagus carolinus*: # He had only one observation through June and most of July. However, in the last few days of July and through August he saw small flocks virtually every day, among them being young of the year raised elsewhere, although probably not too far away.
- Brewer's Blackbird**, *Euphagus cyanocephalus*: # A single male was collected 5 June in the post clearing. It was foraging silently on the ground. At that time it was not known to nest in Ontario, and there had been only a very few observations in the province.
- Purple Finch**, *Carpodacus purpureus*: = Uncommon in June, and evidence of breeding was only indirect as an immature was collected in August when the species was seen more commonly.
- White-winged Crossbill**, *Loxia curvirostra*: = Seen sporadically throughout most of July and August when small groups or flocks of birds were noted.

Common Redpoll, *Carduelis flammea*: [* ?] # Only a single bird was encountered on 13 August in deciduous growth near the settlement. It sat quite still and silent. Plumage was that of a juvenile, the skull was "clear" and the ovaries "vague". Given the young age of the bird, a time of year when migration is unlikely, and that redpolls do at least occasionally nest far south of their more usual tundra habitats, it seems probable that this bird was raised somewhere in the vicinity of Attawapiskat Lake.

Pine Siskin, *Carduelis pinus*: Only two individuals were encountered, 6 June and 23 July.

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*: # Hope secured a female on 5 June. A resident informed him that two had been about the post for some time, but she thought her cat had caught the other one.

As might be expected, Hope and the others had a difficult time with blackflies and mosquitoes. He several times noted they couldn't stay out long because of them. Indoors, he also records making a "mosquito hat" for his bed. Even if weather and flies had not been troublesome, being nearly surrounded with water of such a large lake, he faced considerable difficulty in gaining access to a wide selection of country. The canoe trips he does record across expanses of open water seem somewhat heroic considering that he was unable to swim, (L.A. Prince, pers. comm.).

However, he recorded 86 species at Attawapiskat Lake and had breeding evidence for 42 of them. Most of the rest probably bred reasonably close by and he had an indication of that for 10 additional species. Prest recorded 53 species at Rowlandson Lake, half a dozen of which were additions to those seen by Hope.

Of the observations he made, perhaps the most notable concerned the breeding of Connecticut Warbler and Common Redpoll, and the occurrence of European Starling and House Sparrow. In addition the Philadelphia Vireo egg was only the second "clutch" taken in Ontario, the Lincoln's Sparrow nest was the fifth found in the province, and the Wilson's Warbler nests were the third and fourth.

The six most numerous species were Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrow, Swainson's Thrush, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush, and Least Flycatcher. These reflect the shrubby nature of the habitat about Lansdowne House and the open wet forests elsewhere.

Of the birds not recorded, there are some notable absences. Not seeing Common Snipe, Greater Yellowlegs, Sharp-tailed Grouse and Savannah Sparrow indicates clearly that the wetland habitats that support them just weren't available where he was able to travel. The absence of Northern Hawk Owl, Bonaparte's Gull and the dearth of waterfowl suggests partly a lack of habitat, or that any that did show up were eaten. The remoteness of the location may partly explain why there were no Barn Swallows, but why there were not more ravens is a mystery.

The Boreal Forest can be a difficult place to work. His efforts, with those of Prince and Scott, provided a useful summary of the summer bird life there at that time and a useful reference for today.

Acknowledgements

For the observations presented here I am indebted to the late Cliff Hope. However, I would also like to acknowledge recent correspondence with Dr. L.A. Prince who accompanied Hope to both

Favourable Lake and Attawapiskat Lake. Dr. Prince indicated that at Favourable Lake they had a canoe and did portage it through the bush for many kilometres in order to access remote lakes. When setting and hauling nets in lakes near the mine they tied two oil drums under a couple of poles strapped across the struts of the canoe. These "outriggers" prevented overturning. But they were not portaged to other

lakes where everyone took their chances, including the nonswimmer Hope. Dr. Prince also indicated that the raft used on Rathouse Bay was the property of the local people who were very helpful at all times.

The librarians at the ROM provided access to Hope's journals, and Charlotte Goodwin made copies for me. The figure was prepared with the assistance of Brian Boyle in the ROM Photography Department.

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Red Crossbills Feeding at Mineral Sources

by
Ron Tozer

Introduction

The habit of various cardueline finches, including the Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*), to feed on sand and salt spread on road surfaces in winter has been widely observed and reported (e.g. Meade 1942; Lawrence 1949, 1982; Bent 1968; Terres 1982). Very small stones (in the "sand") are ingested as a source of grit required for digesting vegetable material in the gizzards of these granivorous birds (Lawrence 1949, Ehrlich et al. 1988). However, the apparent attraction to salt is not as readily explained, even though it has been known for a long time (e.g. Fisher 1888). Red Crossbills have been observed feeding at a wide variety of seemingly unusual mineral sources, including: coal ashes on which salt had been thrown, soapy dishwater, and snow discoloured by

dog urine (Lawrence 1949); material from cattle salt blocks (Marshall 1940); salt spilled around ice cream freezers (Dawson et al. 1965); and "the material left in salt pork barrels" thrown outside lumber camps (Bent 1968)! It has been suggested that finches may be attempting "to satisfy a requirement for some mineral that they do not obtain in sufficient quantity in their food" (Dawson et al. 1965) when they undertake such behaviour.

Observations of various feeding activities by Red Crossbills recorded in Algonquin Provincial Park increased my interest in the subject, and so I undertook a search of the literature to learn more about it. This article summarizes what I found, and documents some of the sightings from the Park.