

This information is taken from the Four Seasons Environmental Centre materials prepared in 2007. Many thanks to Ken Duncan and Kela Graphics for spearheading the project and Glen Hvenegaard, Chad Winger, Susanna Bruneau, and Kim Macklin for the research and writing on the FSEC project.

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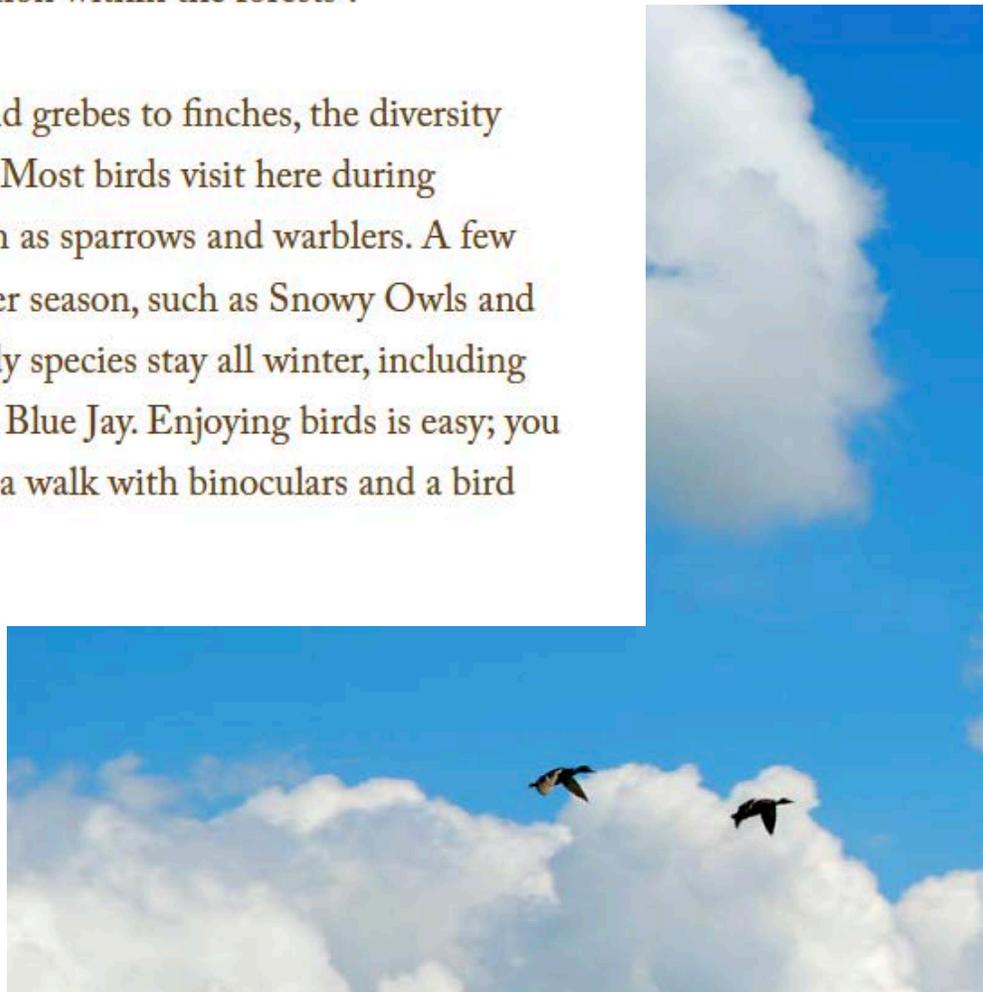


Birds

Birds of the Camrose Area

The Camrose area is contained within the aspen parkland ecoregion of Alberta, the province's most diverse region for birds. This region hosts a wide variety of habitats including wetlands, riparian areas, aspen forests, shrublands, native prairie, cropland, and urban areas. Each habitat, and combination of habitats, offers a unique set of characteristics desired by birds. In addition, Alberta lies along a major migration route for birds. Unfortunately, little of the aspen parkland remains in a natural condition, thus changing species composition, abundance, distribution, and location within the forests¹.

From hummingbirds to eagles, and grebes to finches, the diversity of birds in this area is significant. Most birds visit here during their summer nesting season, such as sparrows and warblers. A few species visit only during the winter season, such as Snowy Owls and Bohemian Waxwings. A few hardy species stay all winter, including the Black-capped Chickadee and Blue Jay. Enjoying birds is easy; you can set up a bird feeder, or go for a walk with binoculars and a bird field guide.



Despite our richness of avifauna, there are a number of species that are extinct, extirpated (no longer present in Alberta), and at risk. Though active programs are providing aid for some species, others are still struggling, mostly due to habitat degradation due to human expansion. Some species of birds are able to adapt more readily to agricultural development and urbanization than others. Alberta has some birds that stay here year-round and many more that visit over the summer months.

Bird Watching

What to look for when birding

When you're trying to identify a bird through your binoculars, there are a few key features to look for²:

Overall shape & type of bird

All "types" or groupings of birds have a similar body form. Though there are many forms, ducks, birds of prey, shorebirds, woodpeckers, sparrows, hummingbirds, and many other groups have identifiable shapes. These are sometimes included in bird pamphlets and field guides.

Colour

General colouration of birds is a good way to narrow your search. Be careful, as breeding plumage is different than non-breeding plumage, and juveniles are often colored differently.

Coloration, stripes, and banding on the head and chest are important, as is rump colouration.

Wings

Noticing the shape of the wings (pointed or rounded ends, broad or slender) is also very important, and when you learn to identify different kinds, can tell you about their lifestyle. Another characteristic of the wings to notice is the colouration, banding patterns, and any coloured bars or patches on the wing. Some of these colourations are only visible when the bird flies.

Shape of Tail

The shape and length of the tail can help distinguish between very similar species. Tails can be rounded, V-shaped, or straight across. How the tail is held while flying is important, and some splay the tail, while others keep it in tight.

Habitat & Range

As is true with animals, birds prefer a certain type of habitat. As birds rarely leave their preferred habitat if it is available, it is easier to identify what species of birds you are seeing in a particular area. Range maps in field guides can help you identify if that bird occurs in the area you are located.

Size

Some closely related birds are very similar in colour and shape, but vary in size. There may be a size difference between males and females. Body length (and general girth) is the primary measurement. Wingspan is more important for the birds of prey (eagles, hawks, etc), vultures, herons and cranes, and to some extent in ducks.



Behaviour

The visibility (openness) of the species, the way it walks, and the way it flies can all be used as identifiers. Where and how the bird feeds (treetops, ground, on the wing) are also good clues. As well, how it holds itself while flying, and where and how the legs and neck are held is also important.

Song/call

Birds can also be identified by their song or call. This is harder for some birds, while it is easier for some of the very distinct calls. However, calls change from breeding to non-breeding season, and some birds are mimics, such as the Blue Jay and the Grey Catbird ³.

If you can see where the nest is located (if it nests in Alberta) that may be an indicator as well. If you walk through the forest without a trail, watch out underfoot. Some birds nest on the ground, like the Short-eared Owl.

History and Conservation

In the Camrose area in the early 1900s, the greatest asset to recording the natural history was Frank Farley. He lived at Driedmeat Lake from 1907 onward, made daily recordings and worked with other ornithologists in east-central Alberta. He conducted numerous banding studies on gulls on Bittern Lake⁴. In his book *The Birds of the Battle River Region*, Farley documents all the birds he saw and their natural history, as well as other animals in the area at that time.

Extinct Species

Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*)

Up until about 1875, it was quite plentiful in the Camrose area. They started to suddenly disappear, and were extinct shortly after due to over-hunting⁴.

Exirpated Species

Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido americanus*)

In the Camrose area, it was a rare resident, but individuals were shots on a number of occasions in the area and now no longer present here. It was never very abundant, but was common in Manitoba⁴.

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*)

The Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) was once very abundant over all the prairies and locally as well, with the concentration in eastern Alberta and central Saskatchewan⁴. At the beginning of the 1900s, wildlife specialists became greatly concerned about the possible extinction of the whooping crane and it was given full protection by the law. As of 1928, the last record of a breeding pair of whooping cranes in Alberta was 1905, though numerous small flocks were seen in 1927⁴. In the 1940s, the population was estimated at 15. Now, through intensive conservation programs, there are over 200 individuals. The Whooping Crane is classified under the Red List as “At Risk” in Alberta and under the Alberta Wildlife Act and COSEWIC as “Endangered”⁵. The only known current breeding area of the whooping crane is in Wood Buffalo National Park, but rarely may be seen flying on its migration route³. It is no longer nests in the Camrose area.



Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramis longicauda*)

The Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramis longicauda*) used to be a common nesting summer resident, very abundant around 1892, but declined in numbers very quickly with increased settlement⁴

White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*)

The White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*) used to have a widespread distribution. However, it no longer breeds commonly in the southern third of Alberta and is in decline elsewhere in the province. It has been extirpated from parts of the states⁶ It was common in the Camrose area⁴ before its decline noticed early last century, around the 1940s. In Alberta, it is classified as sensitive⁶.



American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

The American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) used to be a common summer residents in the Camrose area around 1908. After the area was homesteaded, they went to more remote places⁴. It may still be found, but has almost entirely disappeared from this area. A few have been found recently in the Camrose area.

Introduction of non-native bird species from other countries and continents can be damaging to the native species by causing competition for resources, whether they be nesting areas or food.

Changes and Conservation

As with some herptiles and many mammals, habitat destruction and fragmentation are the significant contributors to the loss of bird species. The challenge for ornithologists (scientists who study birds) and conservation biologists is that some birds require different habitat for feeding and for breeding.

As noted by Fisher & Acorn (1998) and Frank Farley (1932), many birds have become rarer since settlement across Alberta and in the Camrose area. This can be due a number of reasons. Though negative attitudes towards birds have been a cause of problems in the past, issues regarding habitat are more important to the long-term survival of species.

Loss of wetlands for agricultural purposes has been a contributor to decreasing abundance of any of the waterfowl and other water-related birds. Organizations like Ducks Unlimited and North American Waterfowl Management Plan have helped to protect wetlands, as well as re-establish new wetlands in the Camrose area. Loss of wetlands is still occurring, but now, it is due to drier-than-average conditions over the last few years. Beaverhill Lake, an important bird sanctuary and migration stop-over northeast of Camrose, has become much in size. Beaverhill Lake used to be home to important colonies of American White Pelican and Double-Crested Cormorants, both of which are “priority one species” (emergency listings for species facing a significant risk to their well-being)⁷. The loss of this wetland would be detrimental to these species. Management of water use has been a part of wetland conservation for many years, though in drought years, stricter measures may need to be taken.

Another significant conservation issue relates to changing habitat use of birds throughout the year. For birds that remain year-round in Alberta, they often change habitats and food sources from

breeding season to the rest of the year. This can make conservation of critical habitat more difficult. The other major component of this issue is the migratory nature of many species of birds. For birds migrating out of province, either to other provinces or territories, or to other countries, different conservation issues may affect the birds. Birds traveling to other countries, such as the Swainson's hawk, may encounter threats that are not present in Alberta, such as harmful pesticides. Different protection status or lack of laws enforcing conservation leave birds open to persecution. Different environmental concerns also exist in foreign wintering grounds. In early February 2007, 18 whooping cranes were killed in a flood in Florida, their wintering grounds.

Conservation strategies for woodland bird species should revolve around maintaining optimal patch size and wooded corridors to maintain species diversity. The area of a patch can serve as an indicator of the presence and quantity of bird species¹. In larger patches of aspen forest, there is greater species diversity. The smaller the patches of habitat, the more edge effects influence species composition and quantity of those species¹. The patch size affects

the abundance of species that prefer the forest interior the most, such as grouse and hairy woodpecker, that prefer to be further from the edge of the forest ¹. Other birds, like some sparrows, prefer the edge, so with larger patches, these species would be less abundant. However, to provide an accurate measure, specific requirements for each species must be investigated.

In the urban landscape, patches separated by development can be connected through the use of natural corridors, parks, as well as wooded streets⁹. This would help to reduce the problem of habitat fragmentation for some species of birds. Though the tolerance of human disturbance would vary in bird species, alternate feeding and breeding sites may encourage the populations of those birds. Generalists would be more adept to utilizing a broader range of resources found in the wooded street corridors. Specific life-history traits of species would be a factor in their use of wooded corridors ⁹.

The use of the street corridors as connections between patches could be an effective management tool. However, specialist species require higher connectivity between patches than generalist species to provide increased safety and survival probability⁹.

The Camrose area has a number of non-native species. The House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*), and Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix*) were all introduced, some from Europe, others from Eurasia. The reasons for introducing the birds vary, from wanting to increase game hunting to a fanatical Shakespeare club wanting to locally release starlings as it was mentioned in the author's plays. Some have not caused any noticeable harm, while others, like starlings, negatively impact native cavity-nesting birds³.

Getting Involved with Birds!

Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN), Alberta Conservation Association, and other volunteer bird programs:

Alberta Bird Atlas Update Project (FAN)

Alberta Birdlist Program (FAN)

Alberta May Species Counts

Christmas Bird Count

Important Bird Areas Program (FAN)

Living By Water Project (FAN)

Nocturnal Owl Monitoring

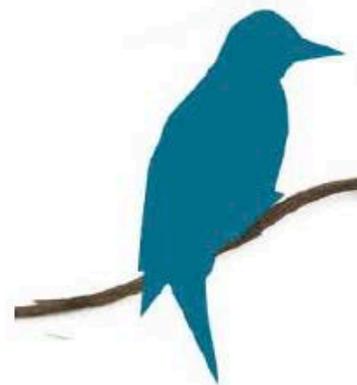
North American Breeding Bird Surveys (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov>)

Opportunities for Birders

Prairie Nest Records Scheme

Provincial Bird Species List (FAN)

Annual Beaverhill Snow Goose Festival Tofield
<http://www.tofieldalberta.ca/snowgoos.htm>



Project FeederWatch and other programs

<http://www.bsc.eoc.org> (go to National Programs)

Become a member and volunteer with Ducks Unlimited Canada

Join the Wildrose Outdoor Club (meets at the Camrose Railway Station)

Help protect all birds! If you have large windows at your work, business, or residence, place black bird decals on the windows to help prevent birds from hitting the windows. Though most birds that hit a window are just stunned, many birds are killed each year.

Hang up bird feeders! A variety of birds will visit feeders. Different birds prefer different seed or food, so read up on their favorites. It is important to remember that if you feed birds during the winter, have a few feeders still available during the summer.

Attracting hummingbirds to your garden! Hummingbird feeders are available at many garden stores, in which you put a sugary mix, simulating flower nectar. Instructions come with the feeders. To attract hummingbirds naturally, plant flowers in your garden that they like. Take a walk to see our hummingbird and butterfly garden to see the selection to add to your own garden.



Waterfowl and other water-related birds

(* breed in the Camrose area)

The waterfowl and other water-related birds form a diverse group in Alberta and the Camrose area. Cranes, grebes, plovers, ducks, geese, and herons are all represented in the Camrose area during the summer months. Even within the ducks, there is a great variety. All species of waterfowl and water-related birds are either summer residents or migrants. As they are restricted by open water, occurrences in winter are exceptions due to abnormal circumstances.

With many of the waterfowl, primarily ducks, females are plain mottled brown to camouflage with nesting habitat. Males are typically more colourful for attracting mates. Some birds are similar in colouration between the sexes. The male ducks are also generally larger than the females.

Loons and Grebes

Common Loon (*Gavia immer*)

Featured on the old Canadian \$20 bill.

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) *

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) *

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*)

Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) *

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

The Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) is listed as “sensitive” in Alberta¹⁰. This grebe is very rare in this area, but has been documented in recent years at Driedmeat Lake¹⁰. This grebe has a long neck, with dark upperparts and white underparts, and a yellow bill. It dives to feed on small fish and aquatic invertebrates³.

The Western grebe is sensitive to human disturbance. Increases in crowd numbers and water recreation sports cause disturbances forcing grebes to temporarily leave the nest. Destruction of nesting habitat for lakeside property and beach access has also impacted the Western Grebe¹⁰.

Geese, Swans, and Ducks

Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*)

In the Camrose area, the Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*) is a familiar name due to the annual Snow Goose festival in Tofield, at Beaverhill Lake. These geese stop over on their migration north to their breeding grounds in the Arctic. In their spring and fall migrations, they are very abundant⁴. They are all white except for their black wing tips and orange beak and legs. They feed on aquatic vegetation, grass, roots, and waste grain³. In their breeding grounds in the Arctic, adults eat a lot of roots and rhizomes, as well as fresh shoots in spring. Both goslings and adults browse heavily on leaves of sedges and grasses¹¹.

These geese are so abundant that they are causing a great deal of habitat degradation from overgrazing¹¹. The population has been increasing at a rate of around 7% per year; in 1996, the population was thought to be about 3 million birds. This increase is attributed to a number of factors. The increase in agriculture has provided more food for them on their migrations. Increased protected areas and management areas have given them safe refuges. At the same time there has also been an overall decrease in the number of waterfowl hunters¹².

The Snow Goose is a keystone herbivore species. The absence or presence of this goose significantly affects the diversity on the Arctic plants¹¹.

Snow Goose (Chen caerulescens)



Ross's Goose (*Chen rossii*)

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) *

Our national bird, the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) is fairly large (55-122 cm). It is a common summer resident in Camrose and surrounding area, easily found in lakes, rivers, farmland, and in parks. They usually fly in the characteristic V formation to decrease drag in flight⁴.

Like swans, the Canada goose forms life-long mating pairs. They feed on grasses, roots, and aquatic vegetation. They have become the subject of much concern as they have increased significantly since 1970. This large population of geese has caused a considerable damage to crops in the United States and in the aspen parkland regions of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Specific management issues are being discussed to control the population and to minimize crop damage.

The Canada Goose was featured on the old Canadian \$100 bill.

Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) *

The Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) is a threatened species in Alberta, federally listed as vulnerable¹³. Though Camrose has its resident trumpeter swans, few of the wild swans stop here. Small flocks stop over on the way to Elk Island or farther north, and may be seen on various lakes. A re-introduction program was initiated at Elk Island to re-establish an extirpated population. Over hunting and habitat destruction in the early 1900s led to the near extinction of these birds¹³. They feed on tubers and roots of aquatic plants in shallow, stable, unpolluted fresh water. They also require high abundances of aquatic invertebrates. Trumpeter swans form life-long mated pairs. For breeding, they require areas of low disturbance and a muskrat or beaver house or island on which to build nests¹³.



*Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) **

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) *

Eurasian Widgeon (*Anas penelope*)

American Widgeon (*Anas americana*) *

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) *

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) *

Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) *

Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*)

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) *

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) *

The Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) has always been a common summer resident in Alberta and the Camrose area⁴. The population has fluctuated greatly, and overall trends point to a decline of the pintail³. This species appears very elegant. The male has a chocolate brown head with a long slender, white-fronted neck. The back is dusty grey with a black patch under the wing. The tail is black. The female is mottled brown. The name of this duck comes from the long tapering tail feathers³.

Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*) *

Redhead (*Aythya americana*) *

Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*)

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*)

Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*)

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) *

Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicilata*)

Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) *

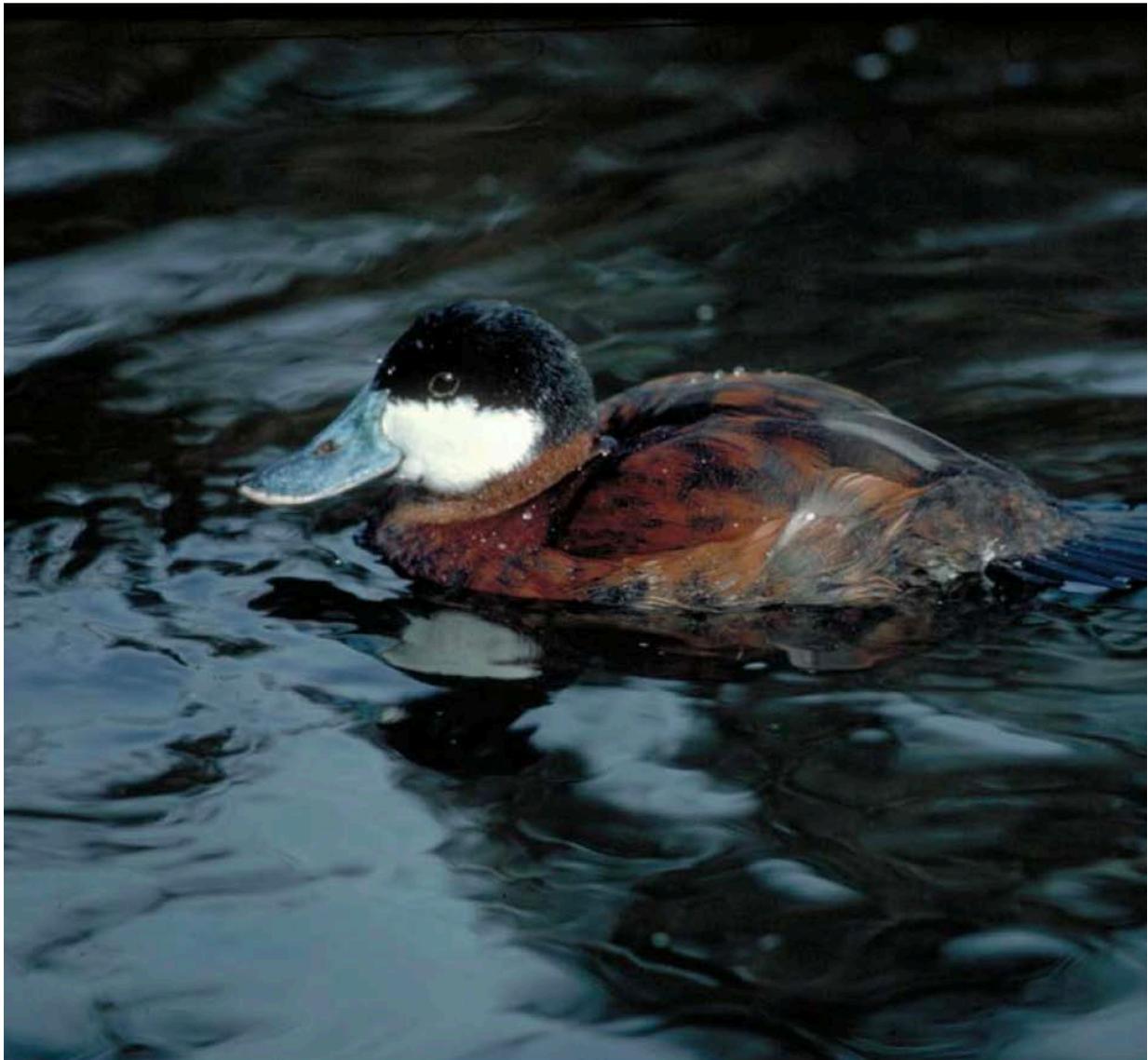
Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*)

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) *

The Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) is common in Alberta, and in Camrose⁴. It is quite distinct with the blue bill on the males. They have very energetic courtship displays. It is also the only member of the stiff-tailed ducks in Alberta, a group that commonly holds the tail at an upward angle³



Ruddy Duck (Oxyura jamaicensis)

Rails and Coots

Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*)

Sora (*Porzana carolina*) *

American Coot (*Fulica americana*) *

Large Colonial Birds

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

Double-crested Cormorant (*Palacrorax auritus*)

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) *

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) *

In the past, the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) was an uncommon summer resident in the Camrose area⁴. Today it is regular summer visitor, often seen in the cattails along Camrose Creek and the edges of other water bodies³. The Great Blue Heron is a large, blue-grey bird, with a long curved neck and long dark legs. It stands and waits for its prey to swim along within the grasp of its long yellow beak. The head has slightly dark plumes out the back. Unlike cranes, herons hold their neck folded over their backs when they fly with their legs trailing behind³.

They feed on small fish and mammals, as well as amphibians and reptiles. For their large size, you would not think these birds

nest in trees...but they do! They often form breeding colonies, or rookeries. These colonies are sensitive to human disturbance, so if you discover one, watch from a distance³.

Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Cranes

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*)

The Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) was once very abundant over all the prairies and locally as well, with the concentration in eastern Alberta and central Saskatchewan³. At the beginning of the 1900s, wildlife specialists became greatly concerned about the possible extinction of the whooping crane and it was given full protection by the law. As of 1928, the last record of a breeding pair of whooping cranes in Alberta was 1905, though numerous small flocks were seen in 1927⁴. In the 1940s, the population was estimated at 15. Now, through intensive conservation programs, there are over 200 and classified under the Red List as “At Risk” in Alberta and under the Alberta Wildlife Act and COSEWIC is “Endangered”⁵. The only known current breeding area of the whooping crane is in Wood Buffalo National Park, but rarely may be seen flying on its migration route³. It is no longer nests in the Camrose area.

Shorebirds

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) *

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

American Golden-plover (*Pluvialis dominica*)

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

Pipling Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) *

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americanus*) *

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*)

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*) *

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) *

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)

Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*)

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*)

Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*)

Short-billed Sandpiper (*Limnodromus griseus*)

Long-billed Sandpiper (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*) *

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*)

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) *

Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) *

Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) is the only breeding phalarope in Alberta. Though they are uncommon through most of Alberta, they are common in the Camrose area³. In the past, they were less frequently seen⁴. Like sandpipers, they prefer shallow water areas. They eat aquatic invertebrates while swimming, and poke for food with their long, narrow bill³.

Unlike most other waterfowl discussed, these birds exhibit polyandry, meaning females mate with more than one male in breeding season, and leave the males to care for the eggs and young. In this case, the males are plain-coloured for camouflage. The females have more vivid colours. They have a grey cap with a black eye line and white eyebrow. The chin is white, with a rust-coloured throat. The belly is white to grey, and the brownish-black back and wings³.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

Gulls and Terns

Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*)

Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*)

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)

California Gull (*Larus californicus*)

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Forster's Tern (*Sterna foreseri*)

Black Tern (*Chilidonias niger*) *

History & Conservation

The loss of wetlands has been detrimental to many species of waterfowl and other water-related species of birds. There have been many efforts over the years to monitor and protect waterfowl and provide appropriate management. Farley (1932) did much banding research on Ring-billed and California Gulls at Bittern Lake. In 1916, the Treaty to Protect Migratory Birds was enacted in the federal governments of the United States and Great Britain (incl. Canada) to equalize the protection given to waterfowl (and other migratory birds). Along with that treaty, the Migratory Birds Convention Act in Canada closed the hunting season on migratory waterfowl from March 1 to September 1, and was later revised for additions in 1995¹⁴. These policies initiated population monitoring, banding projects, and the establishment of bird sanctuaries. Bird sanctuaries were established at Miquelon Lake and Oliver Lake (near Miquelon Lake) in 1917. Beaverhill Lake Natural Area was designated in 1987¹⁴.

Organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) were set up as some of the primary monitors. Ducks Unlimited was established in Alberta in 1938 and NAWMP in 1986¹⁴.

Get Involved with Waterfowl!

Ducks Unlimited- become a member or volunteer!

Tofield Annual Snow Goose Festival at Beaverhill Lake



Birds of Prey

(* breeds in the Camrose area)

In Alberta, there are a wide variety of raptors, or birds of prey. There are 17 species of eagles, osprey, falcons, hawks, and related birds, and 12 species of owl³. Many of these species are at risk or may be at risk⁶.

In the Camrose area, all species of hawks, eagles, falcons, osprey and related birds in Alberta have been seen at one time in the Camrose area¹⁵. Seven species of owls have been seen in the in the Camrose area (Olson, 2004). In almost every species of eagle, hawk, falcon, osprey, and associated birds, females are larger than males. In owls, females are often larger, but are regularly the same size (Fisher & Acorn, 1998). Most of the species of raptors are only summer residents. However, some are only here for the winter (eg. Snowy Owl), and others remain for the entire year (Great Horned Owl). Many species of hawks have both a light phase and a dark phase. Some have classified these phases as subspecies, but others just cite them as variations.

Osprey and Eagles

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) are very rarely seen in Camrose, but rare migrants stop at Miquelon¹⁵. They have historically been uncommon around Camrose, This large (56-64 cm, wingspan: 137-183 cm) raptor is dark brown on the upper parts, with mostly white underparts. While in flight, the tail and wing feathers are banded with white and dark bands, with dark wrist patches. As these raptors only eat fish, they require lakes and streams that provide a steady population of fish. Watching them fish is quite spectacular. They do a headfirst dive into the water, slightly bending in the wings. Just before they hit the water, they extend their talons forward. As their feathers are water-repellant, a slight submersion is easily handled. Ospreys are neither an eagle nor a hawk. Though they are a bird of prey, ospreys are in their own family³. The osprey was featured on the old Canadian \$10 bill.

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

The Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is uncommon in the southern part of Alberta³, but there has been sightings in Edmonton, and are rarely seen at Miquelon. Adults have a white head and tail, dark brown body, yellow beak and feet. Immature bald eagles can resemble golden eagle, as yearlings are brown with a dark bill and some white on underwings. Two-year old have a wide white band at base of tail with a light belly and underwings. Females tend to be slightly larger than males³.

Bald eagles are also present at the Forestburg^{***} hydro dam for most of the year. The open water of the cooling ponds keep ducks present, which the eagles pry on. As the ducks get weaker, it is easier for the eagles to prey on them, but when the ducks are gone, the eagles leave.

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) *

The Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) is uncommon throughout Alberta and in the Camrose area, but does breed in the area ⁴. This large raptor (76-102 cm; wingspan 2-2.3 m) is dark, with gold around the head and neck, and the rest of the body being dark brown. The large beak is used to hunt ground squirrels and other rodents, rabbits, and grouse³.

Harrier and Hawks

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) *

The Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) is a common summer resident (March-October) in the Camrose area, at Miquelon, and over most of central and southern Alberta (Fisher & Acorn, 1998; Olson, 2004). Historically, they have always been quite common in this area⁴. Harriers are about 41-61 cm in length, and have a wingspan of 112-119 cm. They have a white rump, with the back colours varying from grey (males) or brownish (females) to reddish (immature). All have a streaked breast, flanks, and sides with dark tail bands and black wing tips. Harriers hunt over marshes,

meadows, and fields. The wings are held slightly above horizontal, unlike most hawks and eagles. It is easy to distinguish by its unique flying. It tends to fly quite low, skimming over the grasses looking for prey, such as small mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and some invertebrates³.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*)

The Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) is common in the area³. Historically, it has been a regular summer resident⁴. This small hawk (25-30 cm; wingspan 51-61 cm) is found in dense to open forests. As a woodland hawk, the short, rounded wings give it agility to move through trees to pursue its small avian prey. The Sharp-shinned hawk is blue-grey, and a white chest with red horizontal lines. The tail is long and straight, with a straight end³.

Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) *

This woodland hawk is uncommon in the area, found in mixed and riparian woodlands, as well as suburban areas⁴.

Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

The Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) is an irregular to rare summer or year-round resident in Camrose and area^{3,4,15}. Depending on the time of year, it can be found in forests and woodlands, or parks and farmland. It is fairly large, with a blue-grey back. The chest is lightly barred, and the head has a dark crown and eye stripe³.

Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo paltypterus*)

The Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo paltypterus*) is very rare in this area and an uncommon summer resident in the past^{4,15}. Prefers deciduous trees near water. This hawk has mottled brown upperparts with russet barring on the chest. The tail is broad with black and white bars. It feeds on small mammals, young birds, as well as amphibians and insects⁴.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) *

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) is a common summer resident in the Camrose area, preferring the open agricultural areas surround the city³. However, there is evidence of a decline in their numbers since 1990¹⁶. In 1931, they were uncommon summer resident, not even six pairs in the area. They used to be more plentiful in about 1910's, but were slaughtered for no reason. Helpful in agricultural areas as they are fond of gophers. With



*Swainson's Hawk (Buteo swainsoni) **

the decrease of these hawks, gopher numbers increased. One pair can eat about 350 gophers in a summer⁴. They primarily eat small rodents, but will eat snakes and large insects. These hawks make the longest migration of all raptors, traveling to the southern tip of South American³.

These soaring raptors have long, pointed wings and a tail that is narrowly banded. There are two colour phases of this hawk. The light-coloured phase is more common. In this phase, they have a dark bib and white underparts and wing lining with dark flight feathers. In the dark phase, the entire chest, back and wings are dark brown⁴.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) *

The Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) is very common in the open country fields, in mixed forests, and by roads in Alberta's aspen parkland and in the Camrose area^{4,15}. It primarily eats Richardson's ground squirrels, but eats a variety of small mammals, rabbits, birds and herptiles.

According to Farley (1932) and Fisher & Acorn (1998), there are many colour phases, often classified as separate subspecies ("Harlan's Hawk"-dark; Krider's Hawk"-light). The main colouring is light mottling on the back, darker wings, and rusty-red tail feathers (Fisher & Acorn, 1998).



*Red-tailed Hawk (Buteo jamaicensis) **

Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*)

The Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) is very rare in this area, preferring the open areas, grasslands, and badlands surrounding Red Deer and south^{3,4,15}. The abundance of this hawk appears to be limited by availability of open grassland habitat¹⁶. It has rust shoulders and back with dark wing tips. The underparts are light, and the tail is tipped with rusty red. It preys primarily on ground squirrels, rabbits, but will also eat snakes and small birds (Fisher & Acorn, 1998).

Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo laopus*)

The Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo laopus*) is common in the open plains during migrations in fall and spring, as it nests in the Arctic and usually overwinters in southern Alberta, though records from been made of it here in winter^{3,4}. It primarily eats rodent, but will take small birds, amphibians, and large insects (Fisher & Acorn, 1998).

The head, back, and top half of the chest are light reddish-brown. Dark tail, and bottom half of chest and wings. Its legs are feathered right to the feet, giving this hawk its name⁴

Turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

Falcons

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) *

As the smallest falcon (19 cm; wingspan 51-60 cm), the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is the only raptor that perches on power lines. They used to be a common summer resident⁴, but now is locally considered irregular¹⁵, though throughout Alberta it is considered common⁴. They are found in open fields and agricultural areas, as well as in forests and at forest edges. They eat primarily insects and small vertebrates³.

The American Kestrel is one of the most colourful of our raptors. Its head has two sideburn markings on each side, with a blue and rusty cap and a small beak. It has a plain, light chest with a few dark to rusty spots. The male is more colourful, with rusty and blue backs, and a rusty tail with a black end and white terminal tip. The females have rusty to brown backs with a barred tail with a black end and white terminal tip⁴.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) *

The Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) is a common summer resident in the Camrose area, though it used to be uncommon³, though throughout Alberta, it overwinters in larger cities (Fisher & Acorn, 1998). Found in suburban areas and mixed forests. It feeds on nestlings, small flying birds (eg. waxwings), and some large insects. Both sexes have streaked underparts. Males have blue-grey head caps, backs, and tail with dark bands. Females have brown head caps, backs, and tails³.

Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)

The Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) is very rare in the Camrose area, and has always been uncommon here^{3,4}. It has been found at Beaverhill Lake regularly. Currently, they are labeled as sensitive in Alberta. They are found in open areas, but breed in river valleys. It is brown on the upper parts, with a light face with a dark sideburn under the eye. The underparts are light with brown spotting³.



Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is quite rare or uncommon, and is currently listed in Alberta as threatened. In the early 1900s, they were fairly common in central Alberta. They arrive in late March/early April and stay until October. Females are larger than males, with females 43-48 cm long and a wingspan of 109-117cm. Males are 38-43 cm long with a wingspan of 94-109 cm. Adults are blue-grey, with dark sideburns and hood, and light underparts with dark spots. Flying, peregrine falcons have pointed wings with long narrow dark-banded tail³.

Though typically found in a variety of habitats, critical habitat is unknown as these animals did not decline because of habitat loss (Corrigan, 2002). Peregrines are found in meadows and other open areas, as well as near lakes and streams, and increasingly in urban areas. Peregrine falcons take a variety of avian prey, as well as arthropods and mammals. To catch their avian prey (primarily pigeons) they can dive at speeds about 360 km/h, making it one the fastest raptor³.

The story of the peregrine falcon is somewhat complicated. This bird was used originally for traditional falconry practices. However, population numbers were decimated by DDT in the 1950's and 60's. In 1971, was listed as endangered. By 1973, there were no known breeding pairs in Alberta.

Much work has been over the past number of years to re-establish peregrine falcons in the central region of Alberta by re-introduction using a captive-breeding program using wild birds caught. By 1992, pesticide levels had dropped enough not to interfere with reproduction. In 2001, 12 wild breeding pairs (24 adult birds) plus offspring were banded. The Alberta Peregrine Falcon Recovery Team (2005) wants to reach 70 territorial pairs by 2010 and have at least a replacement rate greater than 1.25 young/pair/year.

Locally, Camrose resident Dr. R. Wayne Nelson raised peregrine falcons for reintroduction into the populations in British Columbia and Kananaskis.

Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

The Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) is a very rare winter resident in the Camrose area (Farley, 1932; Olson, 2004). This large falcon is found in open areas and around marshes. It eats other birds, such as the Rock Dove (pigeons) and waterfowl. The upperparts are usually a dark grey-brown with light, slightly streaked underparts³.

Owls:

Most owls are nocturnal, preferring to do hunting at night, though some may be seen hunting in the day as well. They are excellent night-hunters, as they have keen hearing and big eyes to see in the dark. They all have talons, and eat primarily rodents, but some will eat other prey.

Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)

Our provincial bird, the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*), is one of our most common owls. The population of central Alberta in 2003 was 137; in 2004 there was 273 (Beaverhill Bird Observatory, 2004). It has always been a common year-round resident in the Camrose area⁴. Mixed forests, riparian woodlands, shrubland, and agricultural areas are all good habitat to find the great horned owl. The best place to find them in deciduous forests along rivers or creeks. Great horned owls are large birds (46-64 cm long; wingspan 91-152 cm), the second largest owl, next to the Snowy Owl. Great horned owls are light grey and dark brown, with mottled backs and horizontal barring on the chest. Of course, the “horns” are ear tufts. Most great horned owls are the typical light grey and dark brown, some have been recorded that are very light; almost white⁴. They are rare, and have been classified as a subspecies *B.v. subarcticus*⁴. It eats a variety of rodents, waterfowl (even geese!), some fish, and skunks⁴.



Great Horned Owl

that nests on the ground.

Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*)

The Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) is an uncommon year-round resident of the Camrose area, preferring spruce woods but can be found in deciduous forests⁴. In central Alberta, there were 111 in 2003, and in 2004, there were 269¹⁷.

These small owls (18-23 cm) are the second smallest owl found in Alberta, and the smallest found in this area. It feeds primarily on mice and voles, but also on large insects, songbirds, and shrews. It caches its prey in its hole in trees, allowing it to freeze, and then thaw it out when it is needed. It has a rounded head with brown upperparts spotted with white, and a rusty-striped chest⁴.

Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*)

The Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*) is an uncommon or rare year-round resident in the Camrose area, preferring mixed forests near open meadows³. In central Alberta in 2003, there were 36; in 2004, there were 45¹⁷. This small owl eats small rodents, and, like the saw-whet owl, caches some of the prey³. This owl has a rounded head with a spotted forehead. The upperparts are brown spotted with white, while the underparts are light with rusty streaks³

Long-Eared Owl (*Asio otus*)

The Long-Eared Owl (*Asio otus*) primarily here during the summer, but a few stay through the winter. They are rare/uncommon; in central Alberta; there were nine in 2003, and 28 in 2004¹⁷. Around 1932, the Long-Eared Owl seemed to be increasing in numbers on account of increased cultivated area causing an increase in mice, the primary food of this owl⁴. Today, they are considered infrequent in the Camrose area, and across Alberta³.

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)

In the past, they were common summer residents, occasionally overwintering in the Camrose area⁴. In central Alberta there were two survey in 2003, and zero in 2004¹⁷. Today, they are infrequent, still often overwintering in Alberta, and likely nests here¹⁸. The size of the population revolves around the vole populations³, though it also eats shrews and mice¹⁸. This species of owl may be at risk, but are fairly common in grassland & parkland areas¹⁸. Around Beaverhill Lake in 2005, there was a population eruption, with hundreds in the area. It is the only owl besides the burrowing owl

Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*)

The Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) is the largest owl found in Alberta. Snowy owls come south from their Arctic breeding ranges. This bird has been described as common some years, and very rare other years^{3,4}. The frequency of snowy owls is largely linked to the abundance of meadow voles and deer mice, though it also eats weasels, hares, grouse, and lemmings³. They can be found in open country November to April. Males are almost entirely white with very little black marking. The larger females have dark barring on breast and upper parts³.

The Snowy Owl was featured on the old Canadian \$50 bill.

Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*)

The Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*) is an irregular winter visitor from the north, but have been known to reside year-round^{3,4}. They used to be more frequent in the Camrose area, back in the late 1890s⁴. This owl has a long tail, and has a finely barred chest. It eats small rodents and birds³.

History and Conservation

As mentioned earlier, a number of species of raptors and owls are on provincial and federal lists of species at risk. The causes of these declines come from a number of factors. Loss of habitat, pesticides, and destruction out of ignorance have all played a role in population declines.

Many species of raptors, most notably the Peregrine Falcon, have encountered issues with the use of pesticides (such as DDT) in the mid 1900s that reduced reproduction rates. Though use of these types of pesticides was banned in Canada and United States, some places where the raptors migrate to (ie. South America) still use bioaccumulative (build up in the ecosystem and take a long time to break down) toxic pesticides that many be influencing some species, such the Swainson's Hawk¹⁶. Some of the North American species, such as the peregrine falcon, are still recovering.

Other species have been victims of human ignorance in the past, and many were killed, such as the Golden Eagle and the Swainson's Hawk because they were viewed as destructive⁴. Owls, because of their primarily nocturnal habits, have been largely unknown.

Extirpated Species

The Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) is listed on the "Endangered" list federally, and has "Threatened" status in Alberta. The range of this owl used to extend to include the Camrose area, though there are no confirmed reports of it ever being in the area.

Get Involved with Raptors!

Central Alberta Nocturnal Owl Survey

Watch on your drive! Look on the tops of power poles, fence posts, and in trees on your drives around the city. On warm days, look in the sky to watch for raptors soaring on the thermals.



Birds of Prey

Year-round

Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)
Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)
Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)
Long-Eared Owl (*Asio otus*)
Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)
Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*)
Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*)
Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*)

Seasonal

(S=summer, W=winter, M=migratory occurrence)

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) S
Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) S/M
Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) S
Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) S
Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) S
Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) W
Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo paltypterus*) M
Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) S
Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) S
Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) S
Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo laopus*) M
Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) S
American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) S
Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) S
Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) S
Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) S/M
Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*) W
Long-Eared Owl (*Asio otus*) S
Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*) W
Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) W
Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*) W

Songbirds or Perching Birds (Passerines)

Passerines, though commonly referred to as songbirds or perching birds, include birds that are indeed great singers and are commonly seen perched on a branch or wire. However, some non-passerines also exhibit some of these characteristics. Passerines are defined by morphological characteristics, most notably that their feet have three toes going forward and one backward, and none have webbed feet. They also have a special tendon running up the back of the knee which locks into place when the bird perches³. This gives the bird a very firm grip, allowing the bird to sleep without worrying about falling.

Corvids

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) *

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) *

The Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) is common year round, found in cities, deciduous forests, and agriculture areas (Fisher & Acorn, 1998). However, historically, it was uncommon in this area and seldom seen on the open plain⁴. The blue jay is 28 cm, and as its name implies, it has blue upperparts and feather crest. The underparts are white, and there is white on the wings and small black bands on wings and tail. It eats a variety of foods, from berries to baby birds⁴.



*Blue Jay (Cyanocitta cristata) **

Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*) *

Though currently the magpie is very common in the area year round³, this has not always been the case. The magpie was very common around the time the bison were present in the area. When the bison disappeared from the area, so did the magpies. The magpies did not come north of Red Deer. It was not until 1911 that they reappeared in the Camrose area⁴. It can be found in many habitats, including open agriculture areas, cities, riparian thickets, and open forests³.

The black-billed magpie is a very attractive bird. It has a black back, breast, and tail. The wings are black and white, and the belly is white. It forages primarily of garbage, carrions and insects. It picks ticks off of the large ungulates³.



*Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*) **

Flycatchers

Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*) *

Western Wood-pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) *

Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*)

Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*) *

Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) *

Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*)

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) *

The Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) is a common nesting summer resident of Alberta and the Camrose area, found often in the parkland of Alberta^{3,4} The kingbird is named for its red crown (not often visible), but it is no less a tyrant. It is fearless, attacking crows, hawks, and even humans that enter its territory. Both males and females have black upperparts and white lower parts, with a white tip on the tail. The red to orange on the small crest is usually only seen in breeding season. They are insectivorous, catching insects in mid-air³.

Shrikes & Vireos

Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*)

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) *

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)

Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*)

Larks and Swallows

Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)



Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) *

Purple Martins (*Progne subis*) are one of the biggest birding attractions in Camrose. It is generally uncommon as a summer resident in Alberta, but has been increasing since the early 1900s⁴. Nests are usually near open water, and properly placed condos should be placed appropriately.

The purple martin is the largest member of the swallow family, and as such is insectivorous. They eat dragonflies, bugs, flies and mosquitoes in mid-flight. The males are the most brilliantly coloured, having glossy blue upper and lower parts with black wings and tail tip. Females have blue on the back, but have brown on the wings and tail, with a light grey chest. The wings are pointed and there is a slight fork in the tail (Fisher & Acorn, 1998).

In the river valley and in private property near the creek, purple martin condos have attracted these colorful and useful birds to Camrose. Condos are best for purple martins as they are colonial nesters. Annual surveys are done of the condos.



*Purple Martin (Progne subis) **

As part of the Camrose Wildlife and Greenspace Stewardship project, Purple Martins have emerged as a flagship species for the city. Beginning in 2002, the project's main goals are to provide education and management advice related to wildlife and greenspace in the city. To this end, the project has hired a stewardship coordinator, coordinated interpretive events, enhanced habitat, monitored species and habitats, involved the public, and evaluated management options. The project has emphasized Purple Martins because of their interest to people, amazing flying abilities, dependence on nesting cavities, and ready use of nesting structures.

Several partners are working on the project, including the City of Camrose, Camrose and District Fish and Game Association, Augustana Faculty – University of Alberta, Camrose Ski Club, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Alberta fish and Wildlife, and the Wildrose Outdoor Club. We thank Dan Olofson for serving as a catalyst for Purple Martin and the many other volunteers who are involved.

First, the project is taking on many educational initiatives. Weekly educational events focus on various wildlife and greenspace topics. A purple martin event in each of the past 2 years has been well-attended by the public. Newspaper articles have highlighted martin behaviors, nesting possibilities, and conservation issues.

Second, the project has enhanced purple martin nesting by erecting state-of-the-art nesting structures in the most suitable city habitats. These new nest houses are much more effective than previous versions. An earlier bird monitoring project assessed current use and highlighted potential nesting sites. With funding from the Fish and Game Association and Canadian Tire, and with support from the City, we erected 7 structures in 2003 and hope to add another 3-4 by the end of 2005.

Third, beginning in 2002, the project has begun an annual purple martin monitoring program. All martin houses have been monitored for nesting species, location, and habitat characteristics. Since then, about 70-89 purple martin houses were noted each year. Of these, 19 were host to martins. About 30 were occupied by house sparrows, and a few houses are shared between species. The new nesting structures have been most successful in attracting martins, increasing the number of martin pairs from 8 in 2003 to 68 in 2006.

Fourth, the project encourages local involvement in encouraging martins. Each of the new nesting structures has a “martin-keeper” who is responsible for maintaining and monitoring a nearby box, which involves removing House Sparrow nests. These people also record the spring arrival time, nesting success, and fall departure times. The “martin-keepers” have developed into an energetic and active conservation group. In addition, the stewardship coordinator provides information to other residents with martin nesting structures to provide advice on how to improve the chances of attracting martins.

Purple Martins have captured the attention of residents and visitors of Camrose. They ignite interest in both dedicated and casual wildlife watchers. Hopefully, such interest will translate into conservation efforts for all wildlife and their required habitats.

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) *

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) *

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) *

Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) *

Chickadees, Nuthatches, Creepers, and Dippers

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) *

The Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) is one of four species of chickadee found in Alberta. The black-capped prefers the mixed forests, birdfeeders, and aspen forests found in Camrose and surrounding area. It is very common here, and has been across the prairies for some time⁴.

As their name suggests, they have a black cap and bib with white cheeks. Their back is grey with white underparts. It eats insects and spiders, conifer seeds, and is a regular at birdfeeders⁴, preferring small sunflower seeds.

For a hands-on experience with chickadees, visit Chickadee Trail near Gwynne in winter time! Feeding chickadees, both boreal and black-capped, as well as nuthatches, is a great way to interact with the birds. Remember your birdseed!

Boreal Chickadee (*Poecile hudsonicus*)

Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*)



*Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) **

White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)

Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*)

Kinglets, Wrens, Bluebirds, and Thrushes

Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*) are common summer residents of the Camrose area, especially in agricultural areas, though are found in forests and at the forest's edge⁴. Though they nest in natural cavities, such as woodpecker nests, they also like nest boxes, especially as these are able to protect their nests from Starlings. These boxes can be seen along agricultural fences. The abundance of bluebirds can vary greatly from year to year⁴.

The male is entirely a brilliant blue with a dark beak. The female is mostly greyish-brown, with blue wings and a blue-grey back. This bluebird is insectivorous, meaning it eats just insects³.

Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*)

Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*)

Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*)

Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*)

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*)

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) *

The American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is a cheerful-sounding bird, welcoming the day with its cheerful song, and singing happily after a rain. It is a common summer resident found in forests, on ranches, and in cities³. They have become more common since the land was settled⁴.

As a type of thrush, the robin eats berries, insects, and invertebrates³. You can often find them running along the ground, listening for the movements of earthworms. They are about 25 cm long. The upperparts are dark, with a bright red chest, and a white throat streaked with black. Males are darker than females, and young robins have speckled chests³.

The Robin was featured on the old Canadian \$2 bill.

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*)

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) *

Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*)

Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*)



American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) *

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*)

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) is a common migrant though Camrose and surrounding area^{3,4}. It has been seen at Mirror Lake and in the valley in mid-April. They are small (10 cm) and olive green with dark wings and short tail. The wings have white bars and the underparts are light. The males have a red crown³.

Mockingbirds and Thrashers

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) *

Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*)

Starlings, Pipits & waxwings

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) *

American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*)

Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spraugeii*) *

Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*)

Though we get both waxwing species in the Camrose area, the Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*) is the species abundant here throughout the winter. In town sites, they very common during the winter, and are uncommon throughout the summer in coniferous forests to the north (Fisher & Acorn, 1998). They are always found in large flocks that move in fluid, synchronized waves. These flocks may also have a couple of Cedar Waxwings³. It was “an irregular visitor”⁴ in winters in the past. With increased urbanization, they likely found more winter food, encouraging their numbers.

The Bohemian Waxwing is about 20 cm long, with a yellow tip at the end of the tail, and a cinnamon-colored head crest. The head is cinnamon with black mask and chin, and a grey-brown body. Yellow and white patches are found on the wing. The tail is rusty-red underneath. Wherever there is a mountain ash tree, you will eventually see the waxwings. They depend on berries in winter. The tree will be covered with waxwings, and shortly, the tree will be stripped of all the berries³.

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) *

Warblers and Tanagers

Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrine*)

Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*)

Nashville Warbler (*Vermivora ruficapilla*)



Cedar Waxwing (Bombycilla cedrorum)

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) *

Being one of Alberta's most common wood warblers^{3,4}, it is easily recognized. It is found in the Camrose valley and around Mirror Lake in summer. The male is slightly more brilliant canary yellow than the female. Both have greenish wings and tail with black. In the breeding season, the male has red streaks, while the female is either plain or has faint streaks. It is the average size of wood-warblers, about 13 cm³.

Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*)

Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*)

Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*)

Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*)

Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*)

Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum*)

Bay-breasted Warbler (*Dendroica castanea*)

Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*)

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*)

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)

Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*)

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*)

Mourning Warbler (*Oporornis philadelphia*)

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*)

Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*)

Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*)

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

Sparrows

American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*)

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerine*) *

The Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerine*) is a common summer resident in the Camrose area, preferring deciduous forests and forest edges^{3,4}. Smaller than the House Sparrow (which is not closely related) at around 13-15 cm, the Chipping Sparrow occasionally visits feeders. It has a rusty-brown head cap, dark beak with a black eye line. The underparts are light grey with a white throat. The back is mottled brown³.

Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) *

Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*) *

Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)

Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*)

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) *

Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*)

Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*)

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (*Ammodramus nelsoni*)

Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*)

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) *

Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) *

Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*) *

White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*)

White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) *

Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) primarily the "slate-colored" variety

Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lappinicus*)

Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)

Finches

Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*)

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)

Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) *

White Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*)

Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)

Hoary Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni*)



American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) *

The American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) is a common summer resident throughout Alberta and Camrose, commonly seen at feeders^{3,4}. The breeding plumage of the male is bright yellow over most of the body, with a black forehead, wings, and tail. Wing bars and tail base are white. Females are yellow-green, lacking black forehead³.

*American Goldfinch (Carduelis tristis) **



Pine Siskin (*Carduelis pinus*)

Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*)

Featured on the old Canadian \$1000 bill.

Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*)

Blackbirds

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)

Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*)

Brewer's blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) *

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) *

The Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) is a very common bird in Camrose and surrounding area, seen throughout the summer along the creek and Mirror Lake. It has been common for quite some time⁴. This bird prefers wetlands with cattails and bulrushes⁴.

The name for the bird comes from the male's coloration, which is primarily black with red shoulders and a yellow band beneath the red. The females are heavily streaked with mottled brown. This enables the female to hide in the cattails while on the nest⁴.

Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) *

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) *

Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) *

Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) *

Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*)

Songbirds

Other Birds (Non-passerines)

Seasonal

(S=summer, W=winter, M=migratory occurrence)

| | |
|--|---|
| Pine Siskin (<i>Carduelis pinus</i>) | S |
| Pine Grosbeak (<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>) | W |
| Evening Grosbeak (<i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i>) | W |
| American Goldfinch (<i>Carduelis tristis</i>) | S |
| Bobolink (<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>) | S |
| Western Meadowlark (<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>) | S |
| Rusty Blackbird (<i>Euphagus carolinus</i>) | M |
| Brewer's blackbird (<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>) | S |
| Red-winged Blackbird (<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>) | S |
| Yellow-headed Blackbird (<i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>) | S |
| S | |
| Common Grackle (<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>) | S |
| Brown-headed Cowbird (<i>Molothrus ater</i>) | S |
| Baltimore Oriole (<i>Icterus galbula</i>) | S |
| Bullock's Oriole (<i>Icterus bullockii</i>) | S |



Woodpeckers

Hairy woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*) *

Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) *

The Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) is a common sight at suet feeders year-round. It is the most common woodpecker in Alberta (Farley, 1932; Fisher & Acorn, 1998; Olsen, 2004). The soft tapping of this woodpecker can be heard in most aspen forest. The Downy has black and white wings, with a white back and belly. The white head has a black crown and eye line. The male Downy has a red patch on the back of the head (Fisher & Acorn, 1998). Like other woodpeckers, the Downy pecks for insects in various life-stages. It also eats seed and nuts. Have you ever wondered if a woodpecker gets a sore head? Their skulls are flexible and reinforced, and their brain is tightly packed it so little movement can occur. The Large bills along with large neck and skull muscles help to cushion the head as well. To prevent sawdust from entering their nose, they have feathers over the nostrils (Fisher & Acorn, 1998).



*Downy Woodpecker (Picoides pubescens) **

Seasonal

(S=summer, W-winter, M=migratory occurrence)

| | | | |
|--|---|---|-----|
| Yellow Warbler (<i>Dendroica petechia</i>) | S | Baird's Sparrow (<i>Ammodramus bairdii</i>) | S |
| Magnolia Warbler (<i>Dendroica magnolia</i>) | M | Le Conte's Sparrow (<i>Ammodramus leconteii</i>) | S |
| Cape May Warbler (<i>Dendroica tigrina</i>) | M | Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (<i>Ammodramus nelsoni</i>) | S |
| Yellow-rumped Warbler (<i>Dendroica coronata</i>) | M | Fox Sparrow (<i>Passerella iliaca</i>) | M |
| Townsend's Warbler (<i>Dendroica townsendi</i>) | M | Song Sparrow (<i>Melospiza melodia</i>) | S |
| Black-throated Green Warbler (<i>Dendroica virens</i>) | M | Lincoln's Sparrow (<i>Melospiza lincolni</i>) | S |
| Palm Warbler (<i>Dendroica palmarum</i>) | M | Swamp Sparrow (<i>Melospiza georgiana</i>) | M |
| Bay-breasted Warbler (<i>Dendroica castanea</i>) | M | White-throated Sparrow (<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>) | S |
| Blackpoll Warbler (<i>Dendroica striata</i>) | M | Harris's Sparrow (<i>Zonotrichia querula</i>) | M |
| Black-and-white Warbler (<i>Mniotilta varia</i>) | M | White-crowned Sparrow (<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>) | M |
| American Redstart (<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>) | M | Dark-eyed Junco (<i>Junco hyemalis</i>) | M/S |
| Ovenbird (<i>Seiurus aurocapillus</i>) | M | Lapland Longspur (<i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>) | M |
| Northern Waterthrush (<i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i>) | M | Snow Bunting (<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>) | W |
| Mourning Warbler (<i>Oporornis philadelphia</i>) | M | Rose-breasted Grosbeak (<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>) | S |
| Common Yellowthroat (<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>) | S | Common Redpoll (<i>Carduelis flammea</i>) | W |
| Wilson's Warbler (<i>Wilsonia pusilla</i>) | M | Hoary Redpoll (<i>Carduelis hornemanni</i>) | W |
| Canada Warbler (<i>Wilsonia canadensis</i>) | M | Purple Finch (<i>Carpodacus purpureus</i>) | S/W |
| Western Tanager (<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>) | M | House Finch (<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>) | W |
| American Tree Sparrow (<i>Spizella arborea</i>) | M | Red Crossbill (<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>) | W |
| Chipping Sparrow (<i>Spizella passerine</i>) | S | White Crossbill (<i>Loxia leucoptera</i>) | W |
| Clay-colored Sparrow (<i>Spizella pallida</i>) | S | | |
| Vesper Sparrow (<i>Pooecetes gramineus</i>) | S | | |
| Lark Sparrow (<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>) | S | | |
| Lark Bunting (<i>Calamospiza melanocorys</i>) | S | | |
| Savannah Sparrow (<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>) | S | | |

Seasonal

(S=summer, W-winter, M=migratory occurrence)

| | |
|--|---|
| Pine Siskin (<i>Carduelis pinus</i>) | S |
| Pine Grosbeak (<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>) | W |
| Evening Grosbeak (<i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i>) | W |
| American Goldfinch (<i>Carduelis tristis</i>) | S |
| Bobolink (<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>) | S |
| Western Meadowlark (<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>) | S |
| Rusty Blackbird (<i>Euphagus carolinus</i>) | M |
| Brewer's blackbird (<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>) | S |
| Red-winged Blackbird (<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>) | S |
| Yellow-headed Blackbird (<i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>) | S |
| Common Grackle (<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>) | S |
| Brown-headed Cowbird (<i>Molothrus ater</i>) | S |
| Baltimore Oriole (<i>Icterus galbula</i>) | S |
| Bullock's Oriole (<i>Icterus bullockii</i>) | S |

Hummingbirds

Ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) *

This hummingbird is the only species in Alberta that is regularly seen outside the mountains. It is also the largest of the Alberta hummingbirds³. The Ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) is a common summer breeder of the open aspen parkland in and around Camrose^{3,4}.

Though it is the largest hummingbird in Alberta, it is still only 9-9.5 cm long, and weighs about as much as a quarter. Their wings beat 75 times per second, and can reach speeds up to 100km/h. For its size, the Ruby-throated hummingbird has one of the longest migrations of any bird, traveling to the Gulf of Mexico, which is a 1030 km trip³! Hummingbirds are master fliers, capable of hovering and going backwards. No other bird is capable of flying backwards.

The Ruby-throated hummingbird is named for the reddish-pink colouration of the male's throat. Both sexes have iridescent green upperparts with white underparts, and a white tipped tail. Like all hummingbirds, they feed on nectar from flowers or hummingbird feeders using a long beak and tongue to suck up the nectar^{3,4}.

Calliope hummingbird (*Stellula calliope*)



Ruby-throated hummingbird

Doves & Pigeons

Rock Dove (*Columba livia*) *

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) *

Grouse & Pheasants

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*) *

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) *

Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) *

Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)

Nightjars

Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)



Kingfisher

Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*)

The Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) is an uncommon to rare summer resident of Alberta and Camrose⁴. As they dive for small fish and small aquatic invertebrates, these birds are always near lakes or rivers. Their long bills are not only used in fishing, but to dig their burrow when they nest. They are an interesting bird, as they superficially resemble a Blue Jay. Kingfishers have blueish upperparts and head with a large, “shaggy” crest³. They have a white collar and underparts. Unlike most birds, the female has the extra coloration, with a rusty-coloured “belt”⁴.

The Belted Kingfisher was the star of the old Canadian \$5 bill.

Other Birds

The Swan Program of Camrose

The Camrose swan program is a unique contribution to our parks and waterways. The Parks Section of Camrose Leisure Services, headed by Chris Clarkson, Parks Director, work year-round to keep our swans healthy, happy, and safe.

The program began with a gift of two Polish mute swans (*Cygnus olor*), Hally and Faxy, from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Around the mid 1980s, trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) were brought to Camrose. The city was involved in a program with Elk Island National Park to increase the breeding range of the trumpeter swan in Alberta. Under the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in that time, the trumpeter swan was labeled (nationally) as “Special Concern” until 1996 (COSEWIC, 2007) and provincially considered “Threatened” since 1987. The swans and some eggs were brought from Elk Island National Park. Some of the eggs were placed in the nest of the mute swans to increase numbers.

Currently, there are four trumpeter swans and 3 mute swans. Unlike the trumpeter, the mute swan is not native to North America. It originated in Europe. Originally there was an equal number of mute to trumpeter swans, but one mute male was taken by a predator around 2004-5. Special permits are required to keep the swans, which are granted by Alberta Agriculture.

The swans are prevented from flying away by a process of pinioning. This is where a bone is taken out of the wing when the bird is young. This makes the bird off-centre, preventing it from taking off. The process of clipping wings was previously used, but posed a problem as the clipped portions grew back. The bird would have to be caught repeatedly to clip the wings again. This process is stressful on the bird and is also dangerous for the workers.

Swans are brought out onto the water as soon as there is a ring of open water around the waterway. The trumpeter swans are located on Mirror Lake. Mute swans are located by the golf course, and on the Duggan Park pond.



The mute swans have had several successful reproductive years. Their young (when they were grown) were sold to the Saskatoon Zoo. However, the trumpeter swans have not been successful in recent years. This may be a result of a couple factors. One may be increased disturbances and activity in close proximity to the lake and nesting habitat. In the wild, swans prefer a more secluded place to make a nest. A second factor may be predation, both on young cygnets and eggs. Such predators include foxes, domestic dogs, and potentially other species of birds. If a mother sitting on a nest is disturbed, she might leave the nest, leaving it open to predators.

Few wild swans migrating through stop on the waterways already populated by our resident swans. This is primarily because the swans, especially the male trumpeters, are territorial. Fights usually occur more frequently in the mating season, and more often between males. However, they can occur throughout the summer.

In the fall, the swans are rounded up just before the ice forms on the water. Boats are used to corral the birds onto land, where they tire more easily when chased. The birds are then transported to the winter holding facility behind the Max McLean arena. Here, there are eight pens, each with a small pool containing around 200 gallons. Pairs are kept together. They are fed food pellets containing a variety of nutritious ingredients. During the summer months, this food is also provided for them to keep them accustomed to the food. However, the swans primarily eat their natural food in the summer.

As expected with most wild animals living in an urban environment, conflicts can arise. In these situations, one or both parties are disturbed and react negatively. With the swans, a few incidents happen each year. Sometimes, the swans at the golf course are accidentally hit with stray balls. The trumpeter swans are the more wild of the two species, and can be more aggressive, especially during mating season. If people intentionally harass the swans, get too close to them or their nesting area, they may attack. The birds are merely acting out of instinct and protection of young and mates. They use their wings to protect themselves, and use aggressive moves such as hissing, biting, and chasing. Some people have been run down by them and badly bruised, but such extreme instances are rare. Increased use of areas used both by the swans and humans can lead to conflicts. If people just leave the swans alone and respect their space, such incidents can be minimized.

The winter facilities for the swans have been used to house a variety of birds over the years. A few years back, there were some African geese (*Anser cygnoides*) (which actually originated from China) in the lake with the fountain. However, there were troubles with them wandering onto the road eating pebbles, causing near-collisions. They were transferred to the golf course, but there were problems with their droppings on the greens. They were given away. Other more local birds have been brought to the Camrose facilities from Elk Island National Park and the Strathcona Raptor Centre. Any wounded or weather-trapped birds needing a place to stay for the winter or to be rehabilitated are often able to find a temporary home in Camrose, including pelicans and other water-related birds.