

NOTES

AMERICAN AVOCETS BREEDING AT BECHERS PRAIRIE NEAR RISKE CREEK, BRITISH COLUMBIA IN 2005 AND 2006

Phil Ranson

1125 – 11th Avenue, Williams Lake, BC. V2G 2M7

The American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) was first recorded in British Columbia, at Okanagan Landing, on 28 April 1908 (Brooks 1909). Over the next 60 years the species was increasingly reported from widely scattered locations across southern portions of the province, including Vancouver Island (Campbell et al. 1990). It was first discovered breeding, at Duck Lake in the Creston valley, in 1968 (Campbell 1972). Nineteen years later, in 1987, the species was found breeding at Beresford Lake (Kelowna) and Alki Lake (Kelowna) and the following year on the southwest mainland coast at Serpentine Fen (Surrey). Since that time the American Avocet has slowly expanded its breeding range northward in the southern interior of British Columbia to include Rush Lake (4.5 km east of Chapperon Lake), White Lake (16.7 km west of Douglas Lake), Beaver Ranch Flats (Guichon Creek), and now Roundup Lake (Riske Creek; Figure 1).

The purpose of this note, originally submitted in brief form to the Williams Lake Field Naturalists newsletter *Muskrat Express* (Ranson 2005), is to formally describe two successful, and one unsuccessful, nesting attempt(s) for the American Avocet in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region in 2005 and two nesting attempts in 2006.

On 1 May 2005 a pair of American Avocets (Figure 2) was seen defending territory against a Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) on a small island in Roundup Lake on the Military Reserve 8 km north of Riske Creek. Once the intruder was driven off one of the pair settled on what appeared to be a nest on the edge of the stony beach on the island. On 10 May Sandy Proulx discovered a nest containing two eggs in a shallow bay about 200 m south of the original nesting island. On 23 May the nest contained three eggs and by 20 June three precocial young were



Figure 1. Since 2004, one or two pairs of American Avocets have nested successfully at Roundup Lake (farthest lake in picture), extending the species' breeding range into the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of the province. Roundup Lake, BC. 19 June 2005 (Phil Ranson).



Figure 2. Adult American Avocets at Roundup Lake, BC, 20 May 2005 (Ordell Steen). BC Photo 3268.

roaming the water's edge while the parents kept vigil and descended on any intruders that came within 100 m.

On 23 May a second pair of avocets was establishing a territory on the island in Roundup Lake and on 20 June eggs were being incubated. By 10 July avocet numbers had increased to seven adults but only two of the original chicks, almost full grown, seemed to have survived. The island nest had now produced four young who had vacated the nest and turned the island over to a third pair who now

attempted to nest. During this time there was much squabbling among the group who all wanted to claim the island and the new nesting birds were often off the nest and involved in the chase.

One week later, on 17 July, the last nesting attempt had failed. The two young birds from the original nest had left with the other adults and the colony was down to the four young from the second nest and their parents. By 21 August the four young avocets were full-grown and almost indistinguishable from the parents who now seemed unconcerned by our presence. On 30 August all avocets were gone.

In 2006, a single American avocet was seen at Lye Lake about 1 km south of Roundup Lake. On 30 April three pairs of avocets were seen at Roundup Lake and on 14 May one pair was nesting, and on 17 June two young were seen on the beach. On 25 May a second pair was seen nesting and on 17 June eggs were still being incubated (Figure 3).

This is the third consecutive year that the American Avocet has nested at Roundup Lake. Andre Breault (pers. comm.), a biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service, mentioned that a pair successfully nested in 2004. In 2005, he observed a pair in suitable breeding habitat near Hanceville, 40 km west of Roundup Lake, but nesting was not confirmed.

Roundup Lake appears to be the most northerly breeding site for the American Avocet in the southern interior of British Columbia west of the Rocky Mountains.



Figure 3. Nest and eggs of the American Avocet at Roundup Lake, BC. 17 June 2006 (Phil Ranson). BC Photo 3289.

Literature Cited

Brooks, A. 1909. Some notes on the birds of Okanagan, British Columbia. *Auk* 26:60-63.

Campbell, R.W. 1972. The American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) in British Columbia. *Syesis* 5:173-178.

Campbell, R.W., N.K. Dawe, I. McTaggart-Cowan, J.M. Cooper, G.W. Kaiser, and M.C.E. McNall. 1990. The birds of British Columbia: Volume 2 – nonpasserines (diurnal birds of prey through woodpeckers). Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, BC. 636 pp.

Ranson, P. 2005. Breeding avocets at Riske Creek. *Muskrat Express* September 2005:5-6.

About the Author

Phil has been a casual birder since his childhood in England. He attended a birding course given by Jim Grant in Vernon in the early 1980s and has been a committed birder ever since. Phil is a forest protection officer and lives with his wife and two teenage daughters in Williams Lake.