

UPLAND SANDPIPER BREEDING NEAR CHETWYND, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*) has always been a challenging species to find in British Columbia. At the time of Munro and Cowan (1947) it was known from only nine localities, all but one from the interior of the province. Over the next 43 years the number of localities increased to 47 with many showing up along the coast including Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands (Campbell et al. 1990). Breeding was suspected but not confirmed. Currently, the Upland Sandpiper is known to breed in three isolated and widely separated locales in the province.

The earliest confirmed breeding for this rare species in British Columbia was provided by James Mack (British Columbia Nest Record Scheme files). On 20 June 1968 he



Figure 1. The habitat of an Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*) nest site, north of Chetwynd, Peace River, BC. 3 June 2003 (R. Wayne Campbell).

watched a pair of agitated adults with two chicks, only a few days old, at Pinto Lake near Kleena Kleene. The family group was moving about in a small cleared farmland opening surrounded by a mixed woodland of trembling aspen and scattered spruce trees. Although subsequent searches were made, the sandpipers were not seen again.

Three decades later, on 7 June 1998, Tracey D. Hooper (pers. comm.) located a nest with four predated eggs in the grasslands of the Junction Sheep Range Park south of Riske Creek. Although displaying adults, pairs, and single Upland Sandpipers were reported from the general area in subsequent years, no evidence of breeding was discovered.

On 3 June 2003, while stopping for lunch northeast of Chetwynd, I watched an adult male Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) hunting over recently cleared agricultural land. The bird flew over my head to a nearby clearing (Figure 1) when suddenly an Upland Sandpiper flew up from the ground about 25 m away. Its mate, who called constantly from the top of a nearby small spruce tree, soon joined the agitated sandpiper. The harrier continued hunting and the sandpipers soon calmed down and flew to the ground within 5 m of where the first adult was flushed. I searched the immediate area and soon discovered a nest containing four eggs. The nest itself was a mere scrape in the ground with a few sprigs of dry grasses and chips of dry cow manure. Incubation had just commenced.

The habitat in the vicinity of the nest site had been heavily grazed by cattle and horses and consisted of small openings of short grasses and forbs surrounded by low shrubs, scattered regenerating spruce trees, and woody debris (Figure 1). An adult was still incubating on 22 June despite cattle and horses foraging in the immediate area. On 1 July, agitated adults were seen about 50 m from the nest site, presumably with chicks, although none could be found after searching the area for about 10 minutes.

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