

Oops Award 2013

I scanned the bald, the far too bald, the there-really-should-be-something-there-that-is-not-there bald prairie for the fiftieth time with my binoculars. Ioanna Salvarina, a lovely young lady from Greece, working on her Phd in Germany and on a scholarship to study for a few months at the University of Regina, was accompanying me. This was her first time to Saskatchewan, and I wanted to show her as much of the province as I could in the few days she was with me. We had been in the West Block of Grasslands National Park yesterday, and today we were going to the East Block. We drove to the edge of a large ridge, parked the SUV, and began hiking due west. I briefly considered marking the vehicle's point with my GPS, but decided not to bother. After all, why spend a few seconds ensuring you can find your way back when you know you know the way. We hiked for a couple of hours and saw some fabulous birds. There were Mountain Bluebirds on the way down the ridge, a young Rock Wren exploring the base of a butte, a family of Prairie Falcons affording wonderful views, and one of the few park records for Violet-green Swallows. Eventually, we began the hike back. I decided to walk a little southeast until we reached the ridge, then walk north along the ridge to be certain we reached the truck. We walked for quite a long time along this ridge; in fact, an inordinately long time.

Ioanna finally asked me, "Gabriel, where is the truck?" to which I was forced to answer, "Umm, just up here?" I was less than certain, and she quickly figured this out. We walked a little farther along the ridge and I noticed something up ahead. I checked it out through my binoculars and excitedly fist-pumped the air!

"You found the truck!" Ioanna said excitedly.

"Uh, no," I replied, "but I did find a Loggerhead Shrike!"

The silence that followed was slightly unsettling. To my credit, I decided that for now, birding should be put on hold until the truck was found. We kept walking, the sky grew darker, and menacing clouds began to gather. We finally came over a hill and *voilà!* there was...the park campsite? We had hiked eight miles along the ridge back to the campsite! Sheepishly, I had to ask a very kind gentleman for a lift back to my vehicle which I had somehow...lost. Oops!

To say the very least, Ioanna was a trooper and I was lucky to have someone so patient with me. She has also now seen more of Canada than I think she ever cared to!