

BIRD NOTES

Best bird record for 1944 was probably made by C. Stuart Francis, Torch River, who had the good fortune to discover a Solitary Sandpiper sitting on four eggs in an old Cedar Waxwing's nest. The Solitary Sandpiper is a spring and fall migrant across the prairies and for years its nesting habits were a complete mystery. Finally one of these birds was found nesting in an old robin's nest in northern Alberta and it was learned that the Solitary Sandpiper lays its eggs in the deserted tree-nests of other birds instead of on the ground which is the normal rule among shore birds! Very few nesting records have, however, been obtained, as the Solitary Sandpiper favors secluded ponds and streams in the northern woods, so Mr. Francis made quite an ornithological find.

Wm. Niven, Sheho, writes that Starlings appeared in the district early last spring and that several pairs nested in trees on his farm, appropriating old nesting holes formerly used by Purple Martins. "The Martins," he writes, "coming later in the season had to seek other places to nest. Unfortunately the starlings seem here to stay as I have seen flocks of as many as two dozen birds this Fall."

Mr. Niven's note illustrates one of the worst aspects of the advent of the Starling in the West - namely their habit of ousting desirable native birds, particularly bluebirds, tree swallows and purple martins, all of which nest in holes and cavities. M.G. Street, Nipawin, also reports that Starlings are becoming increasingly abundant in that area during the summer months, but that the majority (about 99%) migrate in the Fall. (Usually Starlings are year-round residents wherever they occur. Are the birds which reach more northerly points adopting the migratory habit? - Editor).

Crossbills are among the less common winter bird visitors, so it was of interest to hear of quite a large flock being seen in Regina this Fall. One of the first to observe them was Charles I. Thacker of the Industrial School for Boys, who writes: "I thought you would like to know that yesterday (Nov. 1) Mrs. Thacker and I saw about twenty Red Crossbills. They were in the spruce trees in front of the house and it was indeed interesting to see them manipulating their twisted bills into the cones to get at the seeds. They were absolutely fearless and paid no attention to us. We stood within three or four feet of them and then called some of the boys to come and look at them. One little chap could not resist the temptation to try and pick one up when it came near him, and, believe it or not, he succeeded!" (Note: There are two species of Crossbills, the Red Crossbill and the White-winged Crossbill. The latter is more rosy in color and has well-defined white bars on the wings. Female birds of both species are dull olive-gray birds with a suggestion of yellow.)

Apparently Hairy Woodpeckers in this province appreciate the food value of Saskatchewan wheat! Mrs. J. Hubbard, Jr. tells us that the "Grenfell Sun" carried a letter in the summer complaining of a woodpecker making holes in a granary and she suspects it may have been their old pal of last winter, the Hairy which was so destructive to a granary on the Hubbard farm! She states that she saw another granary "where a Hairy had gone along the edge of a board opening up a crack six or more inches long." Mrs. W. Roach also reports a similar occurrence at Okla where a Hairy drilled quite a long opening at the joint of two boards in several places so that chop began to run out." These reports are of interest as none of the standard bird books seem to list grain among the common foods of the Hairy Woodpecker. The Hairy Woodpecker was actually observed eating grain on the Hubbard farm last winter.