

INFORMATION PLEASE

Some interesting notes appeared last October in the bird columns of the Winnipeg Free Press and the Winnipeg Tribune, on the marked increase in numbers of the Magpie in Manitoba and also its steady extension both east and ^{west} during the last few years. One of these handsome birds was even reported from Churchill this past summer. Within recent years the Magpie has certainly shown an increase in the Yorkton area and to many of the old-timers it is a newcomer in the district. M.G. Street also reported its appearance at Nipawin for the first time in 1935. However, according to the Winnipeg bird editors, it seems pretty well established that the magpie goes through rather widely separated cycles of abundance and scarcity coupled with alternating extension and retreat in range:- old Hudson Bay Company records show that the Magpie was noted at Fort York on Hudson Bay away back in the 1700's. We should like any other comment on this matter.

An unusually large number of Mountain Bluebirds were seen in migration all through the country west of Yorkton this fall. J.R. Foreman reports seeing flock after flock of these lovely birds the first week in October, east of Watson and north to Tisdale. One thing which has long puzzled us is, where do the Bluebirds which we see in migration nest? We get so few summer records of this species. Is there some favoured area in the wooded country north and east of us? Or are they dispersed over the whole country and, being as Mrs. Hubbard said of the Eastern Bluebirds which she had nesting in her yard this summer, "such unobtrusive birds" that they escape notice?

How common is the Porcupine in the southern part of the province? A porcupine was seen on the beach at Devil's Lake early last spring. Yorkton fishermen noted one at Round Lake in June and members of the Regina Natural History Society came across evidence of a porcupine in the form of quills, in a coulee much further west along the Qu'Appelle valley. The variety of the Canadian Porcupine common to Saskatchewan seems to be the Eastern or Black-haired Porcupine although the Yellow-haired Porcupine probably occurs in the southern and western sections of the province. More information is needed regarding the distribution of porcupines in the southern part of the prairie provinces and the National Museum at Ottawa would like to get skins and skulls from this area. We note however, that Dr. R.M. Anderson of the National Museum admits that "porcupines are awkward things to handle and this has retarded building up a series of specimens and their study!"

To most sportsmen and farmers the Great Horned Owl is "Tiger of the Air" of which no good can be said, so it was interesting to read the following remarks in Marion Nixon's column "Nature" in the Saskatchewan Farmer -

"Before you are guilty of slaughtering Great Horned Owls which have nested in your neighborhood consider whether to your knowledge they merit such destruction. Would not the rats, mice and rabbits which form such a large part of their diet far outweigh any loss in game birds? As far as the loss of domestic poultry is concerned I am sure we have lost far more to rats than we ever have to owls."

Horned Owls undoubtedly destroy many game birds and are a real menace to poultry allowed to run at night or roost in trees, but on the other hand it is one of the few birds which prey on skunks and is one of the worst enemies of the crow. We should like some comment. As we have reiterated many times in the "Blue Jay", predation is so often not what it seems on the surface or at first glance and is a subject needing a far more unbiased approach than it has received from the general public in the past.

Will members please let us have any records of the Burrowing Owl noted north of the C.P.R. main line.