

BIRD NOTES

Magpie: Magpies still seem to be increasing in numbers all over the province. E.W. Van Blaricom, K.C., reports from Tisdale - "I saw my first live Magpie south of Tisdale in the fall of 1930, although a trapper from Mistatim had brought me a magpie for identification, which had been caught in one of his traps, in December 1923. Now these birds are quite common, in fact one might say abundant, in this district and the Rural Municipality of Tisdale has been offering a bounty for them." The present abundance of the magpie is apparently a case of "history repeating itself". Old records indicate that from time to time the magpie has become extremely plentiful and extended its range north and east across the prairie provinces. (It is, by the way, a western bird.) Then having reached a peak it declined in numbers until it became almost a rarity in Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan. In this connection it is interesting to note that away back in January, 1820, members of the first Franklin Overland Arctic Expedition who wintered at Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan, mentioned the magpie as one of the birds which remained around the post all winter.

Northern Shrike Butcher-Bird. We have received more reports than usual of this rather uncommon winter visitor. W. Yanchinski, Naicam, wrote "On December 7 I had a rare experience when standing outside the house. A black and white bird, about the size of a robin, suddenly pounced on an English sparrow only a few feet from me. The sparrow got away once but was recaptured and carried off to the woods. The scene created quite a commotion among the chickadees in the vicinity. This was my first sight of what I feel sure must have been a Northern Shrike. It handled its prey in a bungling sort of way."

J.D. Ritchie, Wallwort, had a Northern Shrike around his yard for three days in November. A flock of juncos seemed to be the attraction but Mr. Ritchie found the juncos were "well able to take care of themselves." And more recently, in connection with the Christmas Bird Count, Stuart Francis, Torch River, wrote - "I had 50 or 60 English Sparrows in the yard at freeze-up, but two shrikes which have been staying pretty close have reduced their number to seven. The procedure is for one of the shrikes to start a sparrow into the air, then one of them will keep below the sparrow and other follow up until they all disappear out of sight. I am not sorry to have the number of English sparrows reduced as they are only a nuisance around the barn yard."

Note Shrikes are a sort of curiosity of the bird world, having the bill and instincts of a predator and the feet of a typical song bird. They kill their victim with a blow from their bill. Then, since they are unable to hold their prey firmly with their comparatively weak feet, they impale it on a thorn or barb of wire fence in order to tear it apart.

Snowbirds Oliver English, Peebles, asks "Where are the Snow Buntings this winter?" Perhaps they are mostly down in the southwest part of the province. Steve A. Mann, Skull Creek, tells us that on his ranch one flock of snowbirds was seen, which, "when settled on a hillside must have covered an acre" and that its number could only be estimated in tens of thousands".

BIRD NOTES (continued)

Feeding Birds Mr. & Mrs. J.R. Foreman, Yorkton, have followed their usual custom of putting the Christmas tree outside in the garden at New Year and "decorating" it with bits of meat and fat. This year in addition to the usual chickadees, hairy and downy woodpeckers and blue jays, they have had visits from a Canada Jay - the "Whiskey Jack" is very rarely seen in the Yorkton area.

Albino Robin Moosomin's rare albino robin reappeared in September after the fall molt, so it will be interesting to know if he returns next spring. Possibly this bird, due to its colouring (or rather, its lack of colouring) was handicapped in its choice of a mate, for according to H. Downing he got a very poor home-maker for a wife. Their first nest was destroyed, and the second next was "such a shallow structure that the three little robins of the second brood were blown out of it one stormy day. However, with a little help from the lady of the house they were replaced and reared alright." This bird was a complete albino without a single coloured feather.

Robin and Dove As might be expected, Dick Bird comes across many interesting occurrences when out with his camera. On June 15 he found a mourning dove and a robin nesting within five feet of each other, the dove's nest being slightly higher up. What was more unusual, though, was the fact that while the dove was sitting on her normal complement of two eggs, the robin's nest contained three robin's eggs and one dove's! Some of us may see a picture of this, as Mr. Bird states "it made a nice kodachrome with the contrast in the colour of the eggs."

Additional 1945 Bird Records of Interest in Brief

Osprey One seen flying overhead by David Wright at Greenwater Lake in July, "with a nicely-sized Walleye gripped in its talons".

Stilt Sandpiper Seen at York Lake May 24 by Arnold McPherson of Saskatoon.

Screech Owl One captured in the garden of W. Hatch, Yorkton, Nov. 15. Banded. This is our first definite record, although several have been reported the past few years. Probably nests here.

Brown Thrasher A bird which is extending its range northward. Reported as seen for the first time at Torch River last summer by S. Francis. Also noted at Sandwith by Gus Yaki.

Connecticut Warbler One picked up dead at Hawarden by H. Kvinge during the cold spell of mid-September. This is our third record for 1945 of this rare warbler.

Spotted Towhee Noted Sept. 12 in the Pike Lake district about four miles south of Saskatoon by D.R. Robinson. Rarely reported from north of the Qu'Appelle Valley.

Lark Sparrow Observed at Lumsden Beach in June by Dick Bird. This would be about as far north as the colony reported from Fort San.