

REVIEW OF INTEREST

Houston's "Birds of Yorkton District" By Maurice G. Street

It is with particular pleasure that we draw our readers' attention to a recent publication appearing in the Canadian Field Naturalist, Vol. 63, Nov.-Dec., 1949, No. 6, entitled, "The Birds of the Yorkton District, Saskatchewan" by C. Stuart Houston.

The area covered by this list extends from Yorkton roughly forty miles in each direction, though the borders are varied slightly to conform with the topographical and faunal limits. They are shortened to the north, to avoid southward projections of coniferous areas, and to the south to avoid the distinctive features of the Qu'Appelle Valley.

The district lies at the north edge of, but wholly within the Transition Life Zone, in the "aspen-prairie belt." Southward projections of the Canadian Life Zone come in close proximity to the northern edge of the district. The district is dotted with many sloughs, shallow lakes and some marsh land. The uplands are semi-prairie, undulating in nature. Elevation varies from 1445 feet to 2200 feet above sea level.

The list records the occurrence of 231 species definitely identified, plus 8 listed as hypothetical. This compares with the provincial list of some 294 species, with an additional 14 hypothetical species.

Our heartiest congratulations are extended to this enthusiastic young ornithologist, who, despite the vast amount of study in connection with his medical course at Winnipeg, where he has attained high honors, has been able to collect and compile such a large amount of valuable information. All of which is a notable achievement and will be recognized by other ornithologists as an accurate piece of scientific work.

Houston, in his acknowledgement, states: "My greatest debt is to the late Mrs. Isabel M. Priestly. It was she who initiated me into the fellowship of the Great Outdoors. From the early hikes of childhood to later collaboration on the BLUE JAY, she it was who guided my way, directed my energies, corrected my mistakes, and encouraged any small successes ..... without her inspiration I would never have essayed so large a task. To her must go a large share of credit for the list hereby submitted."

A number of records are worthy of special comment. For instance, the occurrence and nesting of the Black-crowned Night Heron is very well covered, "Early nests with 3 eggs; 2 eggs; and 1 egg on May 26, 1946, had 4 young birds, 3 young birds; and 1 young bird and 3 eggs, respectively, on June 19, 1946, indicating an incubation period of 22-24 days."

The Cinnamon Teal is listed as a rare straggler; "Sight record within the town limits of Melville, May 25, 1941, by Louis T. McKim. Male bird trapped and banded at Leach Lake by J. H. Wilson, June 16, 1944, was shot at Huntington Beach, California, Dec. 9, 1944. Sight record of an adult male by Frank Baines, one spring in the early 1920's."

The Hawk Owl was recorded when two were found dead near St. Joseph's College, winter of 1938. One shot by Frank Baines about 1902.

Steller's Jay is also listed as a straggler - "A close-up view of this midnight blue visitor was obtained at the sandpit, Yorkton, by Miss Pauline Summers, in the spring of 1944."

Townsend's Solitaire was noted at Yorkton, October 24, 1940.

A Connecticut Warbler found beating against a down-town window in Yorkton, June 2, 1945, was banded and released by the author. Another was seen June 6, 1945, by A. McPherson, at the "Muskeg" near the western limits of the city.

Of rare occurrence was the Dickcissel noted at Melville by L. T. (Judge) McKim, September 4, 1942.

Houston's coverage of certain species that were abundant in the early days of the district, or at one time were a common breeding species, such as the Prairie Chicken, Whooping Crane, Sandhill Crane and others is excellent. The material recorded is of much interest and great importance to the faunal records of the Province.

Congratulations, Stuart, for the compiling and publishing of this splendid list which has greatly added to our knowledge of Saskatchewan Wildlife.

This model publication brings to mind the need for an up-to-date list for the entire Province of Saskatchewan. It is this reviewer's hope that in the not too distant future we will hear further from this gifted young ornithologist.

(Copies of "The Birds of the Yorkton District" are available at 25¢ from C. C. Shaw, 3 Rotstein Apts., Yorkton, Saskatchewan.)

### SUMMARY OF 8th ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - 1949

Compiled by Stuart Houston

The eighth annual Saskatchewan Christmas Bird Count encountered the coldest weather in its history. However, in spite of twenty below zero temperatures and penetrating winds, counts were taken at fifteen localities and disclosed a total of 24 species and over 3350 individuals. Fewer species were recorded at most points, probably because the extreme cold made the birds less active than usual. For the first time, no new species were definitely identified, so the official total for the eight counts remains at 60 species.

Snow Buntings and English Sparrows were most often recorded, followed by the Magpie, whose numbers appear to be on the increase. Sharp-tailed Grouse, Hungarian Partridge and Ruffed Grouse appear to be plentiful, and are probably at the top of their cycle. Snowy Owls have been seen during the holidays in five of the fifteen localities reporting, but there is no evidence of a mass migration such as has been witnessed in the eastern provinces and states.

Following are the individual reports:

BLADWORTH: Dec. 26, 1949: 8.40 a.m. to 12 noon. Clear with a few scattered clouds; temp.  $-12^{\circ}$  to  $-8^{\circ}$ ; wind N.W. to W. at 8 m.p.h.; an average of three inches of snow. Covered five miles of rolling cultivated land with many poplar bluffs and willow-rimmed slough bottoms. Sharp-tailed Grouse, 13; Hungarian Partridge, 30; Horned Lark, 1; Magpie, 3; English Sparrow, 50 (est.)  
-- P. LAWRENCE BECKIE

GRENFELL: January 4, 1950: 9 a.m. 5 1/2 miles by car on Highway 47. Clear; temp.  $-30^{\circ}$ . Sharp-tailed Grouse, 65; Hungarian Partridge, 37; English Sparrow, numerous; Snow Bunting, 24.  
-- MRS. JOHN HUBBARD, JR.

HAWARDEN: December 24, 1949: Prairie with no trees except for groves around farms. Observations made around farm from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; temp.  $-3^{\circ}$ ; depth of snow 6 inches. Golden Eagle, 1; Hungarian Partridge, 14; English Sparrow, 125 (est.); Snow Bunting, 2.  
-- HAROLD KVINGE

HIGH HILL: December 27, 1949; 1.30 to 3.15 p.m. Clear and cold, with strong wind. 6 miles through spruce swamps, poplar bush and small fields. Ruffed Grouse, 6; Sharp-tailed Grouse, 4; Great Horned Owl, 1; Hairy Woodpecker, 1; Downy Woodpecker, 1; Canada Jay, 2; Magpie, 3; Raven, 3; Black-capped Chickadee, 4; White-breasted Nuthatch, 1; Snow Bunting, 40 (est.).  
-- ANTON WAYCHESHEN

LANG: Dec. 26, 1949. Birds noted around farmyard. Hungarian Partridge, 17; Snowy Owl, 1; Horned Lark, 3; English Sparrow, 14. Snow Buntings were heard the same day.  
-- LEN DREGER