

# Martins, Swallows and Sparrows

Cecilia L. Hill, Nanaimo, Vancouver Island

IN the January to March edition of "The Blue Jay," Mr. J. Isinger asks if anyone can substantiate the story that Martins will plaster intruding Sparrows in their nests.

I well remember my grandfather in the old country knocking down Martins' nests which had been taken over by Sparrows. He told me the Martins plastered up any nests taken over by the Sparrows with the Sparrows in them. Year after year the House Martins returned to nest under the overhanging eaves on his two-story home on the north side, and each year grandfather with his long pole removed nests with intruding Sparrows.

I looked up House Martins in J. Lewis Bonhote's "*Birds of Britain*" and found their Latin name was *Chelidon urbica*, (*Lunnaeus*) whereas the Purple Martin in Travener's "*Birds of Western Canada*" is *Progne*

*subis*. Both books mention that Sparrows will take over the nests of either species but neither mention that Martins will plaster them in. Would it be possible to plaster up the entrance to a bird house as easily as the one to a mud nest?

We had an interesting experience with Barn Swallows in Manitoba some years ago. Each year a pair built a nest in the cow barn but one summer morning my husband found the nest and tiny birds had fallen on the floor and the parents were flying around in great distress. He nailed a small strawberry basket on the beam where the nest had been and put the little fellows into it and hoped for the best. To our great joy the parents continued caring for them and shortly after the wee fellows clambered on to the edge of the basket, and remained monarchs of all they surveyed till they were ready to fly.

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## Bird Migrants and Visitors in April

Cecilia L. Hill, Nanaimo, Vancouver Island

UNFORTUNATELY I did not make a note of the date we heard the first geese going north but during April I have noted a few migrants and their date of arrival. We are later here than in Victoria also though we saw Swallows first on April 2nd. They were reported in the south end of the district nearly a week earlier.

The first Rufus Hummingbird was noticed April 4th working on the peach blossom and since they have been very busy on the wild currant. The female was a few days later in arriving.

The next migrant noted was the White Crowned Sparrow on April 10, then on the 11th an Audubon's Warbler both male and female were seen. The male stayed over for a bath and one has been here again this week making a nice splash of colour amongst the early green leaves. It is the first time I have seen this species here.

Several Goldfinches stopped a short time on April 22nd but they must have been on their way further north

as I have not seen them since. Usually they are about our last migrants to stay, it has always appeared to me.

The Robins were collecting nesting material on March 7th but I have not observed them carrying worms so far though they have been collecting nesting material again as though their first efforts have not been crowned with success. Pine Siskins have been gathering nesting materials at two different times. They come quite frequently to drink and pull off the plum blossoms, it seems. A Chickadee came for nesting material on April 5th, some fluff swept out of the house and it seemed most particular in the way it combed it this way and that before flying away.

Purple Finches came occasionally right through the year. We have had a few other migrants who have not stayed long enough for certain identification. More birds are coming now that our trees are growing up and with water always available they are finding it more attractive, we hope.

(Continued on Page 16)

## Botanical Articles Interesting

*Marianne E. Clark, Terrace, B.C.*

There are one or two articles in last year's "Blue Jay" that I would like to comment on. In one you mentioned the finding of a yellow choke-cherry and invited comments as to its prevalence.

A clump of yellow choke-cherry was found on a farm on the Wilson River in the Dauphin district in 1935. I was given a plant of it by Mr. W. Boughen, of Valley River. It is a fine tree here now and bears clear, light yellow fruit, sweeter and not so choky as the usual dark species. The robins are very fond of them and so are the squirrels. As we have a lot of fruit we seldom use it, but it is an oddity and a handsome ornamental shrub, whether in fruit or flower.

Your botanical articles have interested me greatly and I marvel at the number of legumes listed for Saskatchewan. We have some here, but I cannot think of more than the Purple Vetch, a white Lathyrus, Lupines (mostly blue, though one sees an odd white or pink), a small Trefoil, and a yellow "Bajitimia" that grows in our meadows in thick matted clumps. The roots are black and matted, about like bale wire in size. Where it takes over, nothing else grows. It is about two feet high with fine leaves and yellow blossoms. The seeds are speckled like tiny beans and are hard to germinate.

We lived on Queen Charlotte Islands for several years and there I found a native Yellow Alfalfa growing wild. It thrives on the upper gravelly places, old beaches and hard meadows. Under those conditions it is a small prostrate plant. They flower at every joint and spread out over the ground. The nearest relative seems to be the Siberian "prostata," but I believe that in that the seed pods are hairy; in this they are almost smooth and shiny. When a plant gets in a fertilized garden it grows over two feet high but since its stems are fine and weak the cattle eat it greedily. There it is called Yellow Clover, but the coiled seed pod indicates that it is a true alfalfa.

Our mosses sadly need revision. I wish someone would illustrate them in an enlarged manner, giving par-

ticulars of leaf, plant and fruit. We have many kinds here.

### Purple Moss Phlox

**M**OST Saskatchewan folk are familiar with the Moss Phlox, that harbinger of spring, with its moss-like cushion of stems and leaves and profusion of white flowers. It dots the dry hillsides in snow-like patches, even earlier than the Crocus and Tufted Milk Vetch and long before the Robin makes its first appearance. This spring the phlox was at its best during the last two weeks of April.

On April 27, Mrs. Harry Flock, of Regina, came across a patch of phlox, growing in the Qu'Appelle Valley, with distinct purple blossoms. It was the first that she had seen. Have other readers seen the purple variety? Mr. O. A. Stevens, in his "Wild Flowers of North Dakota," writes: "North Dakota leaves behind the tall pink and blue flowered phloxes of the eastern prairies and woods and enters the territory of the tufted mountain species of the west." It seems quite unlikely that those found were the eastern species, but rather a variety or sub-species of our own Phlox hoodii.

### BIRD MIGRANTS

(Continued from Page 10)

We certainly do not get anything like the number of birds here that we did on the prairies; whether because we are on an island, it is hard to know. Other prairie folks have said the same thing.

Our early spring flowers have been over for some time and now the Dogwood is coming along fast. Soon the white bracts will make a wonderful show in amongst the dark green of the evergreen trees and the pale green of the deciduous ones which are now donning their new spring gowns. The cherry blossom is past its best but other blossoms are taking its place. The Magnolia is at its best and so the procession goes on. It is April 26th, the peas and beans are up in many gardens though there is still snow on the mountains.