

The Storm

REGINA

Horace and Francis Croome

The vagaries of our 1954 spring has surprised even the birds. Their instincts brought them back from their southern sojourn soon after April 1, but winter descended again.

The ducks and geese could be seen wending their way back south, probably into South Dakota, but the smaller birds arrived by easy steps each day, so they have been trapped here with very little food available, owing to the depth of snow.

Robins have hopped around our garden looking very disconsolate with their feathers puffed out to insulate them against the cold. We put out soaked bread with bacon or other fat spread on it, and they have filled up on that. The usual crumbs, put out for the sparrows all winter, are too hard for robins' beaks — also their natural food is not entirely cereal, hence the fat. We have also tied suet and fat meat in a tree near our dining room window, and there has been a continuous procession to this source.

Other small birds feeding on that food were White-crowned Sparrows, Tree Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Juncos and one Myrtle Warbler with its yellow cap and sides. The smaller birds seemed to find food among the roots of perennials under the shrubs where they scratched the leaves away, something a house sparrow never does.

We can only hope that the cold spell has not depleted the breeding stock too much but no doubt there have been many fatalities. A friend of ours reported seeing two dead birds on a window sill, high up on the Legislative Buildings. From her description they were probably Western Bluebirds.

SHEHO

William Niven

The last week in April was exceptional for this time of year — cold and snow showers every day. There

were about four inches of snow here. Naturally all migration halted for the time being and many birds were hard pressed for food.

Large flocks, mainly Slate-coloured Juncos came around the buildings to pick up what they could. They became almost tame, like the Chickadees in winter. They even flew into empty buildings to roost at night. I don't think I ever saw so many Juncos before. Several were caught by cats around the yard — they were so unsuspecting and busy scratching all the time. Also several Sparrow Hawks followed them around, picking off a few. I have seen them dive right into a flock and seize a junco on the wing.

There were a fair number of Tree Sparrows, also Song Sparrows which sang all through the storms. Several Fox Sparrows were also seen among them, but they were more shy and kept back among the thicker bush. Others, seen around the yard were Robins, Flickers, Purple Finches, some Brewers Blackbirds and one Mourning Dove. They were all feeding on a pile of weed seeds and scattered grain which was left when threshing last fall. The Prairie Chicken (Sharp-tails) have been coming to it all winter and still do. One day, while they were there, a single Canada Goose landed among them, but it didn't stay long — he was too wary.

Several Myrtle Warblers were here before the storms. They seem to have survived although they didn't get much to eat. Some tried to drink the sweet sap that oozed from the bark of Manitoba Maples. Some Juncos were doing the same thing. There were also two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers on the maples, but the weather was too cold and not much sap running. There were also a few thrushes hopping forlornly around. I believe they were Hermit Thrushes —having reddish-brown tails.

One unusual bird at this time was a Snowy Owl, seen April 26. At this time they should be much further north, but it just goes to show how unseasonable weather affects them too.