

## Further Observations of Starlings in Western Canada



Photo by F. W. Lahrman.

In the March 1957 BLUE JAY Dr. Stuart Houston reviewed his records of the European Starling for the Yorkton area, and the Editor asked for records from other members of the society. The response to this request has been good, and information is now being sent to M. T. Myres of the University of British Columbia who is making a special study of the Starling in Western Canada.

Many people in Western Canada have not yet seen Starlings in their district, and there are still people, as one of our members said in writing, "who won't believe Starlings are anything but Blackbirds!" The Starling does superficially resemble the Red-wing or Brewer's Blackbird, because it is a **black** bird, however, it is easily distinguished from them by its short tail. Ed Brooman tells of someone having referred jokingly to the Starling as a "bob-tailed blackbird," and anyone can recognize it by remembering that description. The flight of Starlings is also characteristic. Ed Brooman says their flight reminds him of Bohemian Waxwings. The silhouette of the wing is similar and both birds are fast and manoeuvre with ease.

The extension of range of the Starling in Western Canada is regretted

by many bird-lovers. The Starling is objected to, principally because it takes over nesting holes and bird houses used by native birds, such as Flickers and Bluebirds. Lloyd Lohr points out that it is because they nest earlier that Starlings crowd out species using similar nesting sites. Mrs. Wolters proposes a novel solution to this problem. To have Bluebirds and other desirable birds around the grounds, she suggests putting up nests farther away from Starlings. "Not that I want to encourage them to increase," she explains, "but just to have more peace in the bird world in my yard."

Another member, Mr. S. O. Jordheim of White Bear, comes to the defence of the Starling. "From my own observations," he writes, "I find the Starling rather interesting, although he has a bad name. The birds that have been here have never interfered with other birds. The male is the best imitator I have ever heard. He can do calls such as a cackling hen, Magpie, Robin, Curlew, Killdeer, Gull, Blackbird, cat, and Swainson's Hawk to perfection, and will often run through all these calls, giving a few of each. While the Starling is not a handsome bird, it is a swift, skilful flyer and a very in-

dustrious insect hunter. I can well understand the dislike for this bird in cities and towns, but in the open country and on farms it should prove beneficial, provided it does not become too plentiful." W. J. Neil also reports that Starlings observed at Scott, live chiefly on grain and insects and don't seem to do any harm.

The possibility that, after the initial influx, Starlings in country areas may not increase to an undesirable extent is suggested by observations made by Dr. G. F. Ledingham since 1940 of the Starling population on the farm six miles west of Moose Jaw. In 1940 Dr. Ledingham first suspected that Starlings were nesting at the farm, and in 1941 he located the first nest in an old willow in a hole previously used by a Flicker. The number of Starlings at the farm increased startlingly, and by the fall of 1942 a flock of 50-60 was coming in to roost each evening. Since 1942, however, Dr. Ledingham has not seen evening roostings there, and although Starlings still nest on the farm the number has not increased to more than three pair nesting each year.

The following observations of members who have offered information helps to define the range of the Starling in Western Canada and to describe its habits within this range.

**ROCANVILLE** — Mrs. D. Sutton has no personal records, but has had a number of reports of Starlings. One was reported wintering with House Sparrows (1956-57).

**GERALD**—Lad. Martinovsky saw his first Starlings about three years ago at the farm of Pete Arnason, three miles east of **TANTALLON**. They were nesting in the ventilator of a big barn. Mr. Arnason believes Starlings came to his farm about ten years ago, and have nested each year, some of them in old woodpecker holes in trees. At times there have been from 15-20, and this year some have remained during the winter, although they do not always stay. At **GERALD** this winter, Mr. Martinovsky reports five Starlings.

**HAZELCLIFFE**—On April 2, 1957, J. M. Proviok had three Starlings light on his tall maples, the first he has seen to recognize. One was shot by his brother in the spring, 1952.

**YORKTON**—Dr. Stuart Houston

asks, "Are Starlings migratory?" No Starlings were seen at Yorkton a winter. A flock of 36 was seen on March 25, and they have been seen regularly since. Do some of them go elsewhere for the winter?

**ITUNA**—H. M. Rayner saw his first Starlings at Ituna in 1951 (BLUE JAY, Vol. IX, No. 3, Sep 1951) but has not seen one there since.

**PUNNICHY**—Five (3 ♂, 2 ♀) seen by James Luthi in April, 1956, the home of a neighbour who reported the birds wintering with Sparrows.

**TISDALE**—K. E. Baines has observed Starlings in the area for seven or eight years. A flock of 8-15 has been seen consistently through early spring and summer at deserted farm buildings two miles N.W. of Tisdale. Since they remain through the breeding season, Mr. Baines assumes they raise young, although he has no record of nests or immature birds. In the fall of 1955 a flock of several thousand Starlings was seen at the Dog Hide Creek one mile north of Tisdale. Mr. Baines has also seen Starlings in the marshes north and south of **NAISBERRY** and occasional birds far out over the marsh of **LEALAKE**. On a recent trip from Saskatoon to Tisdale (April 7, 1957) saw Starlings twice, two perching on fence posts near **SASKATOON**, and a flock of 15 or so flying up from the gravel on the roadside near **MEALFORD**.

Ed Brooman of Prince Albert saw his first Starlings May, 1940 at **DOLE**, three adults and two nests (one in an old fence post). Fred Bard, whom Mr. Brooman reported to have no record, considered it to be the most northerly record for Saskatchewan at the time. On May 26, 1941, Brooman saw a nest of Starlings at **LESTOCK**; On May 22, 1942, he saw Starlings at **DUCK LAKE**. Since then Mr. Brooman has seen them in **PRINCE ALBERT**, the largest group seen being a flock of about 30 observed about four years ago. However, Starlings are still uncommon in the area, to be found chiefly around elevators or stock yards. Mr. Brooman does not recall seeing any in winter.

**SCOTT**—First seen by W. J. Neil in 1944 when a pair nested in the loft of a barn. One was shot for positive

ntification. Since then, Starlings  
ve been quite numerous in the  
ring and summer, but not noticed  
er than December. Flocks arrive  
ch Spring, and they nest in the  
ain elevators or barns at the Ex-  
perimental Farm. These records are  
pfully supplemented by the winter  
ords of **Frank Rouse** kept until  
50 when he left the Experimental  
ation at Scott. Mr. Rouse gives  
ese dates: March 21, Nov. 4, 14, 28,  
47; Jan. 2, 8, 12, Feb. 2, 5, 14, April  
4, 5, Oct. 12, Nov. 7, 14, 21, Dec.  
1948; March 10, 15, Oct. 9, 12, 13,  
49; Jan. 17, March 22, April 9, 16,  
50.

**STRUAN**—**Wm. E. Jasper** reports  
at the first pair of Starlings ap-  
ared April 20, 1942, staying to nest  
one of the barn windows. Since  
en, he has seen them every year,  
th up to fifty or more in a flock.  
any have nested. They were first  
en in following years on these  
tes: April 2, 1943; April 1, 1944;  
arch 12, 1945; Jan. 12, 1946; Jan.  
1947; Jan. 2, 1948; March 14, 1949;  
ril 3, 1950; March 25, 1951; March  
1952; Jan. 1, 1953; March 11, 1954;  
n. 19, 1955; March 18, 1956; March  
1957. Interesting nesting dates are  
o given: Starlings building nest  
ril 24, 1951; building nest in barn  
t April 11, 1952; building nest  
ril 2, 1953 (young hatched June

**BLADWORTH**—**P. Lawrence Beckie**  
e's first record 1947: Starling nest-  
g in an old woodpecker hole in  
e side of the boxed-in eaves of the  
hool. A pair nested in 1954 in the  
ntilator of the Beckie barn, and in  
55 in a Flicker hole in a telephone  
ole. Starlings now nest every year  
the grain elevators at Bladworth.  
r. Beckie does not believe that they  
nter; he gives the folowing early  
ring arrival dates—April 13, 1947,  
ril 9, 1948. April 6, 1950, March  
1951, April 14, 1952, March 25,  
53, April 8, 1954, March 30, 1956.

**BRORA**—**Doug Gilroy** first noted  
arlings on his farm in the fall of  
42. His first nesting record is for  
une, 1943, when Starlings nested  
a flicker hole in an elm tree. See  
cture taken June 23, 1943. Since  
at time, Starlings have been at  
e farm permanently, a few individ-  
als usually being seen during the  
inter. In Jan., 1951, several dead  
rds were picked up in the hay loft.



Photo by *Doug Gilroy*  
Young Starlings, June 23, 1943

**SWIFT CURRENT** — **Genevieve Begg** tells of 12 Starlings she watch-  
ed this winter disputing with a large  
flock of Bohemian Waxwings, that  
visited her garden for several days,  
the fruit of the Russian Olives and  
Mountain Ash.

**WHITE BEAR**—**S. O. Jordheim**  
first noted Starlings at the Shaw's  
ranch on the north bank of the South  
Saskatchewan River, about five win-  
ters ago. The last two summers a pair  
have nested in a bird house on his  
farm two miles north of Shaw's  
ranch. In the fall of 1955, a flock of  
about 200 birds fed there and farther  
north, roosting at the river or in the  
river breaks.

**BRACKEN**—**Mrs. Laura Wright's**  
first record April 2, 1957; but she had  
had previous reports from a neigh-  
bour, of Starlings at his place in 1956.

The BLUE JAY files also have rec-  
ords of Starlings first seen by **Arthur**  
**Ward** at **BURNHAM** in 1947 (BLUE  
Jay, Vol. V, No. 2, March, 1947), by  
**M. G. Street** at **NIPAWIN** in 1943  
(BLUE JAY, Vol. I, No. 3, June,  
1943), and by **C. St. A. Nixon** at  
**LINTLAW** in 1952 (BLUE JAY, Vol.  
X, No. 2, June, 1952.)

**TOLLAND, ALTA.**—First seen by  
**Mrs. O. L. Wolters** four or five years  
ago, quite common now in the area,  
where every farmstead has from  
seven to 20, "most noticeable early in  
spring before other birds are back,  
and in fall when there are huge  
flocks." Mrs. Wolters believes they do  
not winter. Early spring arrival  
March 19, 1957 (five days before the  
first Crow).

**PENHOLD, ALTA.**—**Mrs. R. A. Scoular** reports Starlings first  
noted in 1948 or 1949, very plentiful  
in 1956. They leave the area in late  
October or early November. Mr.  
Scoular saw a very large flock March

12, 1957, north of Calgary; Mrs. Scouler one bird March 17, 1957 five miles south of Red Deer.

**ERSKINE, ALTA.**—**Lloyd M. Lohr** has records dating from 1954, as follows: March 2, 1954 (2), March 22 (12), June 12 (young first seen), June 16 (large flock at barn); March 27, 1955 (first arrival date), March 19, 1956 (first arrival), May 13 (young heard in old woodpecker hole), June 5 (young flying); March 2, 1957 (first arrival). These records

show that Starlings do not winter in the locality. "They move in during March and feed around the buildings mostly on offal from butchering kitchen scraps, or suet at the feed tray. By April's end they are nesting in the surrounding poplar grove in old woodpecker holes. The young are very noisy and are easily located. In June finds the young flying, and in July they flock up and are seen along roadsides and are gone by August."

**SPECIMEN RECORDS:** Department of Biology, University of Sask., Saskatoon. No. 384. 1947. ♀ Scott, Sask. coll. by F. Rouse; No. 389. Nov. 28, 1947. ♀ Fairy Hill, Sask. coll. by Mrs. C A Stewart; No. 390 April 5, 1949. ♂ Lake Lenore, Sask. coll. by R. N. Lemms; No. 392. March 17, 1950. ♂ Hodgeville, Sask. coll. by M. Atherton.

## The New York State Standards of Abundance, Frequency and Occurrence

(A committee from the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs has, after much consideration and study, formulated a set of standards so that bird abundance and occurrence can be uniformly reported. It is hoped that these will be adopted across the continent. They have given permission to reproduce these in the BLUE JAY—C.S.H.)

### 1. ABUNDANCE SCALE, NON-BREEDING

**Abundant:** Occurring in such numbers that a competent observer at the appropriate time and place might see or hear more than 500 individuals in a single day.

**Very common:** 101-500 in a single day.

**Common:** 26-100 in a single day.

**Fairly common:** 6-25 in a single day.

**Uncommon:** 1-5 in a single day (no more than 25 per season).

**Rare:** 1-5 in a single day (no more than 5 per season).

**Very rare:** No more than 1 per day (and 1 per season).

### 2. ABUNDANCE SCALE, BREEDING

	<i>Breeding density (flicker size or smaller)</i>	<i>Breeding density (larger than flicker)</i>
ABUNDANT	1 pair per 1-5 acres.	1 pair per 1-25 acres.
VERY COMMON	1 pair per 6-25 acres.	1 pair per 26-125 acres.
COMMON	1 pair per 26-125 acres.	1 pair per 125-640 acres.
FAIRLY COMMON	1 pair per 125-640 acres.	1 pair per 1-5 sq. miles.
UNCOMMON	1 pair per 1-5 sq. miles.	1 pair per 6-25 sq. miles.
RARE	1 pair per 6-25 sq. miles.	1 pair per 26-125 sq. miles.
VERY RARE	1 pair per 26 or more sq. miles.	1 pair per 126 or more sq. miles.

### 3. FREQUENCY STANDARD

**Regular:** Recorded every year.

**Irregular:** Recorded less than once every year, but no less than once in five years, on the average.

**Occasional:** Recorded less than once in five years, but no less than once in ten years on the average.

**Sporadic:** Recorded less than once in ten years, but no less than once in twenty years, on the average.

**Casual:** Recorded less than once in twenty years, on the average.

**Exotic (or Accidental):** Recorded but, because of its normal range, not expected to occur again.

### 4. SEASONAL OCCURRENCE

**Residents:** Breeding species; may occur as summer residents or permanent residents.

**Transients:** Birds of passage which occur in spring and/or fall but do not breed; may occur as spring transients or fall transients.

**Visitants:** Non-breeding birds which occur as temporary visitors; may occur as summer visitants, winter visitants or vagrant visitants (irregular occurrence by season).