

a couple of hundred yards away, and soon came back into the shelterbelt. A later shot triggered the same tactics on its part, but that time I saw the bird drop . . . down to almost ground level, where it suddenly veered at right angles and slid away between a corridor of trees.

We always try to discourage them from nesting nearby, for they are death to fledgling birds, and destructive of eggs of our nesting songbirds. In the Old Country magpies are said to attack sheep, sitting on their backs and pecking at any open sore; they are even accused of opening new wounds that allow them to pierce the sheep's kidneys and thus cause loss in farm flocks. We have no proof of that here.

We do know that a pair of magpies came, turn about, for just on one mile, to carry off baby chicks for their young to feast on. They were the most silent pair of magpies imaginable, while on their nefarious errand, but what a squalling pair after the nest was located and destroyed!

We often wonder if the drop in nighthawk population is directly due to the increase in magpies. The nighthawk eggs, laid in such exposed locations as they are, must have been easy prey. I have seen more nighthawks, of late years, inside cities or in towns than out in rural areas.

I sometimes think that magpies get a lot of sport from their eluding of a pursuer, in any way they can make a fool of him. It would almost seem they have a sense of humour. I remember one winter morning watching a magpie lead our half-grown pup a merry chase.

There were three bits of offal in

the yard, that the pup had hauled to worry and feed upon. The magpie would light on one, to get his share of the meal. The pup would charge and the magpie would flip over to the second piece of meat, whereupon the pup would charge again. Then the magpie flew to the third piece and so it continued round and round the triangle.

The poor puppy would stalk his tormenter, creeping up till he was within easy leap of the bird stealing his tid-bit. But when he leaped the darn thing was already sitting on the next one. The pup would sit down on his tail and study the situation . . . the magpie meanwhile with a beady eye cocked his way. His frustrated yippings had no effect at all on the bird . . . so the pup would not be able to resist just one more attempt to beat that miserable bird. He never did.

Until the poplar bluffs grew across our landscape, we never saw a magpie. Apparently they have gradually spread eastward from the Rockies, though their population has fluctuated over a long period of time.

Naturalists who travelled the prairie provinces around the turn of the century found it only west of the Great Lakes, and only rarely in Manitoba. Taverner describes it occurring from Middle Yukon to New Mexico; in Canada, common on the southern prairie, in the bluffy country adjacent, and in the southern B.C. except the coast district; and ratically north and eastward.

The magpie is common all over Europe, and northern Asia, but the Old Country bird has a different manner of calling to our American sub-species, although their plumage pattern is almost the same.

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## Seen By a Seer

By BOSWELL BELCHER, Dilke

Here I am again — this time to report the "seeing" of a bird rarely seen in Saskatchewan. We were going for one of the Sunday drives we frequently take. My mother and dad enjoy these outings for the drive, my sister Margaret is an enthusiastic bird watcher and observer of wild

flowers so enjoys them also, and find myself going along to drive the car and see how the neighbors near and far are getting along with their farming.

It was mid-afternoon, June 2, 1919, and we had just started down the road leaving the farm I noticed a b

with the general appearance and actions of a thrasher fly down to the ground and back up on the fence along the pasture. As we got closer we saw that it had color markings somewhat similar to a shrike and called back to the bird watcher, "What have we here?" "A shrike", he said seeing the color, but on noticing the thrasher-like form and flight her interest was aroused as only that of a bird watcher can be. The bird flew into a clump of willows along the fence. We got out and went over, but it appeared to be a very bird and quickly flew over to a nearby bluff. We went into the pasture and drove toward the bluff, but before we could get out of the car the bird had moved to another bluff. Margaret suspected it might be a Mockingbird (and hoped it would be) but also thought it could be a Townsend's Solitaire. Out came the bird book for a study of fieldmarks before we continued the chase. But as we lost the bird at the next bluff and had to be content to continue our drive ending with a picnic supper along a prairie trail near the Arm valley. Before we left the pasture we saw a Great Horned Owl and found its downy young in a nest in which I had banded Swainson's Hawks for Stuart Houston one year.

As we returned home to do the evening chores we were quite surprised to spot the same bird we had followed earlier and along the same

fence. This time it proved much more co-operative, and as Margaret and I got out to get a better view it moved up and down the fence and finally into the willow clump where it stayed while we approached — one on each side. Here it stayed and tried to hide among the branches and leaves while we fought off great hordes of mosquitoes and observed it at a distance of not over ten feet for some fifteen minutes. Those minutes seemed like hours as at times the mosquitoes almost make you yell, but there was no way to get out of it — a bird watcher will go through anything to establish beyond the shadow of a doubt the definite and accurate identity of a new species, and I had to go along! We established to our satisfaction that this grey and white thrasher-like bird with the white on wings and tail (but no black mask like the shrike's) was a Mockingbird.

No "seers", I haven't become a "watcher" even though I did get up early and tag along with the watchers at Cypress Hills. I had no luck there even of "seeing" some of the new species of small birds the watchers were finding. However, when looking over the countryside on the way out to Cypress Lake I did see some Sage Grouse which I think escaped many of the watchers. We also saw some fine scenery, and it will be some time before I forget the view from Bald Butte.

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#### REMINISCENCES OF NIPAWIN'S NOTED ORNITHOLOGIST

## Strictly for the Birds

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Last summer Mr. Wright interviewed Maurice Street, a friend of his of long standing who took an interest in him when he was going to high school in Nipawin, and encouraged him to become a bird watcher and bander. We are pleased to publish Mr. Wright's report of the interview because of the encouragement it will give all aspiring birdmen.

"STRICTLY FOR THE BIRDS" is an expression that usually carries certain insulting implications. But it has a very different and appropriate meaning for Maurice Street of Nipawin. Mr. Street is a slim, balding man with warm eyes and a contagious laugh who obviously enjoys life and is accepted as one of Saskatchewan's top ornithologists. He's "strictly for the birds" and the birds are strictly for him!

How did this remarkable bird watcher and bander get his start? Here are his own words. "Well, in 1922 I got my first bird book. It was Chapman's **Land Birds East of the Rockies**. And at that time Mr. Lawrence of Winnipeg had started his **Chickadee Notes** (Winnipeg - Free Press), and I began reading. I was twelve years old. I was on the farm at that time and then I moved into town (Tisdale) and I got acquainted