

reaction when he discovered how the Japanese grew the extra large strawberries he had so enjoyed on a visit to Japan.

Mr. Davids' home is in Minnesota, and he has also lived on the eastern seaboard of the United States. The book naturally deals with the wildlife of those areas, so that many of the animals and birds that he mentions will not likely be seen here. However, his chapter on bird identification for beginning bird watchers is valuable wherever one may live, and his concern for the preservation of natural habitat, especially swamps and wetlands, is one that should be shared by prairie people at the present time.

Some people may feel a twinge of suspicion when they come across a report of the sighting of a flock of Canada Geese within easy shotgun

distance of the train in which he was travelling. Mr. Davids grew up on a farm where hunting rounded out the food supply, and he acknowledges the necessity of harvesting game animals. But apart from that, he draws an interesting distinction between hunting game and shooting it, and while he feels that the hunt is probably an instinctive thing with man, the urge to shoot may in most cases eventually be satisfied by the use of a camera.

The author's style becomes a little monotonous if the book is read from cover to cover in a short period, for not everyone will respond favourably to being constantly cajoled and exhorted to do this or that, but most will find something of interest or something to marvel at, no matter where they may dip into its pages.
—*Lucy Eley, Regina.*

Letters and Notes

LONGEVITY IN A CAPTIVE SPARROW HAWK

On April 18, 1971 a banded Sparrow Hawk (*Falco sparverius*) died in the home of A. R. Campaner in Surrey, B.C. The bird had been taken in captivity as an adult on or about July 1, 1960 at Yellowknife, near the species' northern limit of its breeding range (Godfrey, *Birds of Canada*, 1966). The bird carried band No. 633-03903 at time of capture and had been banded by W. L. McDonald of Yellowknife, N.W.T. The date of banding of this bird and of its three almost fully feathered clutch mates, was reported by the Banding Data Processing Unit, Migratory Bird Populations Station in Laurel, Md., to be July 24, 1960. This date and that of the day the bird came into the possession of Mr. Campaner appear to conflict. Unfortunately, I have been unable to confirm the date of banding partly because of Mr. McDonald's death on October 30, 1971.

The captive Sparrow Hawk was mostly fed a diet of calves' liver but

sometimes ate cooked chicken, pork or beef. The bird liked fresh peas as well as an occasional string of cooked spaghetti and would nibble at a section of orange. When exercising in the garden, it would eat insects, especially grasshoppers, an important part of the diet of many wild Sparrow Hawks. For a week prior to its sudden death, the bird had been fed a solid diet of raw beef.

Band recovery listings for this species received from the Canadian Wildlife Service Banding Office in Ottawa reflect a paucity of records. Only 22 recoveries were listed for Sparrow Hawks banded or recovered in western Canada. The longest known life span of any of the recovered birds was that of one recovered four years after having been banded as an adult in B.C.

At the time of its death, the captive bird discussed here was almost 12 years old. Data on longevity of raptorial birds, even in captivity, are sufficiently rare to be of interest.—*E. Kuyt, Canadian Wildlife Service, Fort Smith, N.W.T.*

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN SIGHTED AGAIN

In the March 1972 *Blue Jay* I reported a probable sighting of a Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*) near Mortlach on December 19, 1971. Although the bird was flying and it was glimpsed only briefly, I believed I had seen enough of the critical characteristics of that species to justify alerting interested persons in the area.

So far as I know the species was not seen again in the area until shortly after 4 p.m., April 16, 1972. At that time my wife and I were driving east on Alternate Highway No. 1 when just about a mile from the Caron corner I noticed a grouse perched on the power line which runs on high poles south of, and parallel with, the road about 50 yards away. Some years ago in the same general area I had seen a grouse similarly perched, but this one was sufficiently unusual to warrant closer examination, which I effected with a new pair of 8 x 40 power binoculars. It was a cloudy day, but reasonably bright.

My bird was most co-operative. Because it faced me on its perch and looked this way and that, I was able to note that its underparts were covered with narrow bars (the Sharptail is mottled), the tail was short and squarecut and black, the head was peaked, and the distinctive face-pattern shown in some texts was well-defined. My bird had a black line running from the bill to the eye and this line appeared to continue at right angles down the neck, and actually would be the black pinnae which I could not distinguish as such at the distance. Light patches on either side of the neck could be seen and presumably were the sites of the air sacs, stated to be orange in colour, now deflated. After I had thoroughly examined its front, the grouse obligingly reversed itself on the wire and I got a better view of its dark square tail and the distinctively barred back. I could see no barring on the tail and that fact, along with the prominent head

peak—the comb—and the air-sac patches—led me to believe my bird was a cock Greater Prairie Chicken (or Pinnated Grouse as it used to be known).

Because of the prevalence of Sharptailed Grouse (*Pedioecetes phasianellus*) in the area I was concerned lest we lose the Greater Prairie Chicken population there by hybridization so I made some inquiries. (Such a hybrid was listed without comment in the Christmas Bird Count for Raymore, Wayne C. Harris, compiler, appearing in the March 1972 *Blue Jay*.) I received an illuminating reply from Mr. G. Wayne Pepper, Fish and Wildlife Ecologist, of the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources, stationed in Saskatoon, who commented, in part, as follows:

“ . . . I've been conducting a research study on Sharptail ecology over the past four years at Asquith, west of Saskatoon, and in the duration have collected much of the available literature on prairie grouse . . . Firstly, it is well documented that Sharptails and Pinnated Grouse do hybridize often at the disadvantage of the Pinnated Grouse. Sharptails apparently tolerate Pinnated Grouse on a dancing ground but tend to dominate them on the ground. Because most of the mating on a dancing ground is carried out by one or two dominant males at the centre of the ground it seems that the Pinnated Grouse males get little chance to mate with females of the same species. Perhaps some Pinnated Grouse do become dominant on the dancing ground because from my experience no two dancing grounds are alike in terms of behaviour of the birds using it.

“I would suspect that the ability of Pinnated Grouse to exist in a given area despite Sharptails would depend on the habitat within approximately one mile radius of the breeding ground. Sharptails are better adapted to the short grass, shrubby situations commonly found throughout Saskatchewan because of our climate and grazing practices. Pinnated Grouse apparently have to have large quantities of rank

growing tall grass for nesting and brooding.

"Sharptails will eat considerable amounts of grain but can get by in winter on buds and berries of shrubs and trees. Pinnated Grouse apparently must have grain in the winter in Saskatchewan. Consequently, I would think the major limiting factor here was insufficient acreage of ungrazed tall grasses and forbs."

Mr. Pepper went on to note that if a remnant population of Pinnated Grouse (Greater Prairie Chicken) could be positively established, a rescue program could well be considered. Thus encouraged, I spoke to one D.N.R. official who agreed that the first step would be discovery of a population and, at this time of the year (early May) the simplest method would be the location of the dancing grounds frequented by this species. I was allowed to hope that a team of professionals would get on the program right away.—*Frank Brazier, 2657 Cameron Street, Regina.*

DICKCISSEL SIGHTED NEAR BROOKS, ALBERTA

While working in the field on April 20, 1972 I made two unusual observations. At about 11:00 a.m. I noticed two Crows attacking a Snowy Owl, a late migrant for this date. Eventually the Crows forced the owl to land in the bottom of a drainage ditch. Since I was working up and down the field, I stopped at the house and picked up my binoculars, hoping that the birds would still be there when I got back.

Although I was gone for about 30 minutes, the birds were still in much the same place so I stopped the tractor to look at them. At this time I saw a beautiful sparrow-sized bird on a fence post about 25 feet away. The bird seemed unusual and each time it flew from the ground to the top of the post I took a better look at it. It had the brightest yellow breast of any bird of this size that I had ever seen, a V-shaped neck stripe similar to that of the Western Meadowlark, and it lacked the horns of the Horned Lark;

without the horns the head looked smoother and more streamlined than that of a lark, and it was a dull, faint bluish color. It also had a faint yellow eye stripe. (A small sparrow-like bird on the ground may have been the female.) I watched it for about 10 minutes, then walked down the ditch until the Crows took off. The owl flushed later than the Crows and when it flew, it seemed slightly crippled in one wing.

About three weeks later while looking up the Lapland Longspur in Peterson's *Field guide to western birds* I realized the small bird I had been watching was pictured at the top of the page with the longspur. After reading the description I was convinced the bird I observed was a Dickcissel. Salt and Wilk's *Birds of Alberta* and Sealy's article in the *Blue Jay* (March, 1971) give but one record of this species in Alberta, a male collected near the town of Walsh on June 14, 1940.

I have been back to the site and will continue to look in the hope that I may be able to see these birds again. If I do find them, I will try to get some slides as I have the proper camera equipment. I would in no case even think of killing the bird to prove the identification nor would I point it out to anyone who had this idea in mind.—*Sam Alberts, Box 729, Brooks, Alberta.*

NOBODY TOLD THE ROBIN

Recently my wife and I spent the night at a Bungalow camp at Sunwapta on the way to Jasper. The lady in charge noticed my camera and remarked that I might get some interesting sunset shots from a little lake up the road called Honeymoon Lake. We walked in the short distance from the highway and found a peaceful, beautiful little lake with only three people ahead of us, two young fellows trying their luck with rod and fly and a young lady who was cleaning the one fish they had caught so far.

While strolling around looking for a spot to take some pictures, my wife noticed a robin about fifteen feet up

an evergreen making quite a commotion and on a second look we could see that the bird was tangled up in something and could neither get in the nest or fly away. I brought the poor bird's plight to the attention of the fishermen and in less time than it takes to tell the one cupped his hands and gave the other chap a leg up the evergreen to where the branches started. He crawled out on the branch, but it looked as though it would not take his weight so he had to hold on to another branch while he tried to disentangle the robin from a ball of fishing line that she had evidently picked up to help in building her nest. As the chap wasn't having much luck clearing the bird, he called on his pal for a knife and soon got the bird free. Off she went leaving three little ones in the nest one of which had some of the fishing line down its throat. The athletic young fellow pulled this out and returned to earth. We saw the two at the restaurant the next morning and they were able to tell us that they had seen the mother bird return to the nest later. So this story has a happy ending but it made me realize that some frustrated fisherman hadn't thought what he was doing by leaving a mess of tangled line lying around.—*Ed. Reed, Kindersley, Saskatchewan.*

KIT FOX IN SASKATCHEWAN

In reference to your article on the Kit Fox, I mentioned to several people last year that I had seen what I thought to be a Kit Fox in June of 1971, about 12 miles south of Mankota, Saskatchewan. Everyone seemed rather skeptical at the time, so I didn't get too excited over it.—*Larry Kerwin, Calgary, Alberta.*

In late April or early May of this year, I saw a fox with unusual coloration. The location was about three miles east and eight miles south of Eastend, Saskatchewan. It was shortly after that that *The Readers Digest* contained paintings of threatened species. To the best of my recollection the painting of the Kit Fox matched the animal which I saw.—*Jack Wilkinson, Saskatoon.*

Early on the morning of May 30, 1972, five miles south of the village of Woodrow, a cat-sized animal that may have been a Kit Fox jumped out of a ditch about 200 yards from a farmstead and ran into the field parallel to the road and about 50 yards in front of me before disappearing into some trees. It looked like a third-grown ordinary Red Fox but the color appeared a little duller and it had quite a bush tail for a small animal.—*C. H. Shulver, LaFleche, Saskatchewan.*

JOHN WALKER

We have learned with regret of the death of Mr. John Walker of Moose Jaw on July 6 at the age of 55. When Mrs. F. B. Taylor called a meeting in March 1957 to organize a Natural History Society in Moose Jaw, Mr. Walker was elected president; he was instrumental in getting the new society going, and we all know what a successful group it has been.

John Walker was a director of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society from 1958 to 1960. Many of us have happy memories of hospitality enjoyed at John and Muriel's lovely home, 852 Valley View Drive, overlooking the Moose Jaw River.

Mr. Walker, a keen bird watcher from boyhood, kept many records which were invaluable to the Moose Jaw Natural History Society when Leith Knight compiled *Birds of the Moose Jaw area*. He continued to observe and to record sightings of birds for the society until his death.

John will be missed by many in our society particularly by his friends and associates in Moose Jaw. We extend our sincere sympathy to his wife Muriel and to his sisters.

ANNUAL MEETING

The SNHS will hold its annual meeting in the Museum of Natural History, Regina, October 14, 1972. It is hoped that many members will participate. Please see the next Newsletter or write to the Secretary for program details.