

A WINTERING CHIPPING SPARROW AT PINAWA, MANITOBA

PETER TAYLOR, Box 597, Pinawa, Manitoba. R0E 1L0

On 16 January 1983, Reto and Marg Zach observed a small sparrow at their bird feeder in Pinawa. All three of us studied the bird at length later that afternoon, and concluded that it was an immature Chipping Sparrow. Since this is apparently the first documented winter record of the species in Manitoba, and since the somewhat hardier Tree Sparrow is frequently misidentified as the Chipping Sparrow, a summary of my field notes is given here.

The bird was a plump, chickadee-sized sparrow, which usually foraged in a horizontal posture. It closely resembled the illustration of an immature Chipping Sparrow (Plate 67: 7b) in Godfrey.³ The head was brown (not reddish), with a fairly broad buffy stripe over the eye, and a less prominent median stripe on the crown. There was some broken streaking on the remainder of the crown. The bill was pinkish, except the tips of both mandibles and the dorsal surface of the upper mandible, which were dark. There were two narrow, whitish bars on each wing. The breast, belly, rump and sides of the neck were all unmarked gray (the gray rump is diagnostic for this species). The throat was whitish, with indistinct, dusky moustachial stripes. Leg colour was not recorded. The call note, a fairly sharp "chip", was uttered frequently. It lacked the bell-like quality of a Tree Sparrow call, but was not as "dry" as a Clay-colored Sparrow call.

This Chipping Sparrow remained in Pinawa throughout the winter, irregularly visiting several feeders. Undoubt-

edly, it benefitted greatly from an abundant supply of artificial food, and from the unusually mild winter. I last saw it, apparently in good health, on 22 March. Unfortunately, no satisfactory photographs were obtained, because of its irregular habits. Rudolf Koes and Norman Cleveland saw it briefly on 26 February, confirming that it was a small *Spizella* sparrow, but could not approach it closely enough for full identification.

Chipping Sparrows are normally present in southeastern Manitoba from May to September.^{1 6} There is one late fall record, an individual seen at Patricia Beach, Lake Winnipeg, on 4 November 1980 by Martin G. Siepmann (pers. comm.). The normal winter range includes much of the southern United States, extending north along the east coast to extreme southern New England.^{3 5} Godfrey describes this species as "occasional in winter in Nova Scotia and southern Ontario".³ So far as I am aware, the nearest winter record to Manitoba is of a bird which spent the 1980-81 season at Crosby, Minnesota, about 400 km south-southeast of Pinawa.² A report of 15 Chipping Sparrows in the 1969 Pinawa Christmas Count is undoubtedly erroneous.⁴ These birds were most likely House Sparrows or redpolls, since so large a number, even of the hardier Tree Sparrow, is highly unlikely.

I am grateful to Rudolf F. Koes and Reto Zach for encouragement and helpful comments on this note.

¹CLEVELAND, N.J., C.W. CUTHBERT, G.D. GRIEF, G.E. HOLLAND, P.A.

HORCH, R.W. KNAPTON, R.F. KOES, N.F. MURDOCH, W.P. NEILY and I.A. WARD. 1980. Birder's guide to south-eastern Manitoba. Eco Series No. 1, Manitoba Naturalists Society, Winnipeg. 58 pp.

²ECKERT, K.E. 1981. The winter season: Western Great Lakes Region. *Am. Birds* 35:303.

³GODFREY, W.E. 1966. The birds of Canada. *Natl. Mus. Can. Bull. No. 203*, Biol. Series No. 73. Ottawa. 428 pp.

⁴HOLLIES, R. 1970. Seventieth Christmas Bird Count. 62. Pinawa, Man. *Audubon Field Notes* 24:121.

⁵PETERSON, R.T. 1980. A field guide to the birds of Eastern and Central North America. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 384 pp.

⁶TAYLOR, P. 1983. Wings along the Winnipeg: the birds of the Pinawa-Lac du Bonnet region, Manitoba. Eco Series No. 2, Manitoba Naturalists Society, Winnipeg. 218 pp.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A single Chipping Sparrow was reported at a feeder in Indian Head, Saskatchewan during December, 1981 by Mary Skinner. (See *Am. Birds* 36:305 and *Blue Jay* 40:29).

WILLOW PTARMIGAN — 1982 CBC

An additional species should have appeared in the table for species reported from fewer than three localities in the 1982 - 1983 CBC report last March. The Squaw Rapids count on 24 December 1982 recorded 7 Willow Ptarmigan.

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KAMSACK CBC — 1983

DATE: December 21

WEATHER: Temperature -40° to -45°; wind 25-30. Snow depth 18 cm. Clear.

COVERAGE: Observations at feeders.

SPECIES: Gray Partridge, 23; Black-billed Magpie, 9; Common Raven, 7; Black-capped Chickadee, 16; Dark-eyed Junco, 7; Snow Bunting, 40; Pine Grosbeak, 12; Evening Grosbeak, 50; House Sparrow, 100.

TOTALS: 9 species; 264 individuals.

OBSERVER: Isabel Ritchie

EDITOR'S NOTE: This count arrived too late to be included in the tables.

SNOW BATHING IN JANUARY.

DONALD F. HOOPER, Box 40, Somme, Saskatchewan. S0E 1N0

While in Porcupine Plain on 2 January, I was looking around town for additional species for the "Christmas Bird Count". It was the mildest day in over four weeks. At noon the temperature was -4° celsius, a real relief from the unusually cold December that we had experienced.

Across from the grain elevators I noticed that House Sparrows were flocking together, and funnelling down into a vacant lot (like ducks coming into a grain field). I drove up closer, my curiosity much aroused. When I got a look at the situation with my binoculars, I could see that they were not coming in to feed, but to bath in the snow.

There were two forty-five gallon drums turned upside down with about four inches of fluffy snow on top. Ten to twelve birds were on each barrel, enthusiastically dusting themselves with the powdery snow. Their wings were all fluttering at once, and the snow was really flying into the air. As each bird finished its bath, it had worked its way down into the snow, until only its head was sticking out. The whole bath lasted only about a minute. As each bird flew away, it was replaced by a new arrival. There were flocks of House Sparrows coming from every direction. The call of the bathing birds must have been, "come on in, the snow is fine!"

One wonders why they were snow-bathing with such fervor. Perhaps the birds were lousy, and December was much too cold for bathing. The nights were long, and the lice would greatly increase, as many hours were spent

perching together under the eaves of buildings, in old sheds, or in the elevators. Or maybe they were glad to get rid of some of the elevator dust. A good cleaning would not doubt improve their health. (Could it be that these birds, like the elevator agents, even contact such dust problems as the type of Emphysema called "Farmer's Lung").

Whatever the reason, the weather was warm enough for the birds to get into the mood to snow bathe. If the snow was melting it would be too wet. Also the snow was just the right depth, on top of the barrels, as undisturbed snow on the ground was about ten inches deep.

It is also interesting to note that about the same time that day, a Boreal Chickadee near Somme, was seen to leave the feeder, and flop into the snow, to dust itself.

PRAIRIE NEST RECORD CARD SCHEME

An increase of participants interested in locating and recording information on the progress of nesting birds from many more areas of Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories are needed.

Information obtained is of benefit to graduate students, government biologists, and other researchers in their studies of birds. For example: at present, nest record cards for Saskatchewan from the Prairie Nest Record Card Scheme files are being checked by a group of people in Saskatchewan who are compiling information on distribution and breeding of Saskatchewan bird species. Therefore during the next two years it would be very helpful to have many more people contributing information on the nesting birds from all areas of Saskatchewan.

Blank nest record cards, instructions and a copy of the 1983 nesting season report can be obtained by writing:

H.W.R. Copland
Prairie Nest Record Card Scheme
Manitoba Museum of Man & Nature
190 Rupert Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 0N2.