
LETTERS

PARTRIDGES

Did you ever try to do bird calls? I did, and it was fun, before I got my false teeth.

My favourite one was that of the partridge. I still recall the years when we lived in a cottage seven miles west of Yorkton.

For no particular reason one fall, I gave the call of the partridge, while standing outside in the sheltered corner of an L-shaped house. Almost immediately, two of them came to within four inches of my face and stared into my eyes. I just stood there petrified. The poor birds, perhaps thinking I was the blamest-looking bird they ever saw (or had I swallowed a friend of theirs?), reversed and flew away.

Years later, when we lived on another farm near Hyas, I just loved to go all alone into the woods. Once, when I stood listening in silence, I noticed a length of old rotten log on the ground. On it were four partridges breast-down, and their heads over each other very close together. Then one and then another flapped the log with their wings, [the two] beginning to drum in rhythm together. Everyone in Saskatchewan has heard the partridge drumming, but how many have seen the drum band at work?

Partridges are my favourite bird. I liked to have them close by in the trees, and I never thought of shooting any. But, for a change from the salt pork in the early days, I would go out and shoot enough sharp-tailed grouse to make a stew.

I am the mother of Lindsay and Bill Wotherspoon, who banded birds at Hyas in the 1930's. I am 95 years of age and no longer able to see one word I write, so I hope you can make it out. — *Mrs. Florence Wotherspoon*, 13 Kusch Crescent, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7L 3T4.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mrs. Wotherspoon's partridge is the Ruffed Grouse.

JUNE GEESE

The following event witnessed by myself may be of some interest.

While at Piprell Lake about noon of 20 June 1982, I heard the sound of a flight of geese. The fact that there were at least 300 in the flock, in lop-sided V formation, at about 1000' above ground level, and flying almost due north, seemed a bit odd to me, at this time of year. — *W. Earl Dodds*, R.R. 5, Site 17, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. S6V 5R3

EDITOR'S NOTE: Canada Geese are known to migrate north in June presumably to moulting areas in the Arctic. — *W. Harris*.

FEARLESS COWBIRD

We were interested to read the contribution by Bradley Muir, entitled "Tuned In and Tuned On," in your June 1982 issue, regarding the friendly, fearless behaviour of a Brown-headed Cowbird in Prince Albert National Park.

The previous week, on 29 June, my



Brown-headed Cowbird beside human

Peter B. Watkins

wife and I were working in our vegetable garden near Sundre, Alberta. Our property is located adjacent to the Red Deer River, and is mostly covered with spruce and aspen, except for about half an acre we have cleared for our garden. It is a naturalist's delight, for we have a family of Eastern Phoebes that has returned to us for eight consecutive years; Common Mergansers nest beside our stream; a Pileated Woodpecker can be seen from time to time; we can watch a Ruffed Grouse "drumming" on his log, fifty yards from our cabin, and can get within fifteen feet of him; Blue Jays, Canada Jays and robins abound, and hummingbirds hover in front of our cabin during July and August. And, of course, the wild flowers abound, moose, deer, coyotes, and the occasional bear visit us throughout the year. But 29 June 1982 was a first for us.

While we were hoeing weeds, and trying to spare our rows of vegetables, a little thrush-like bird joined us, and like Mr. Muir's cowbird, showed no fear. It hopped around our feet, grubbing amongst the vegetation and seemed to want to be near us. I had our enormous German Shepherd with me, under control, and he was fascinated by this strange visitor. The real test of the dog's will power came when the bird hopped onto his tail!

We too thought this bird might be injured, but after a while he flew strongly to a nearby spruce tree.

Later in the afternoon, four young robins were searching for worms in an open space beside our garden. The little cowbird soon joined them, for company, and although the baby robins gave him a dirty look or two he was quite happy hopping along beside them. Then Mother and Father robin arrived on the scene, took one look at this intruder from the wrong side of the tracks, decided a cowbird was not proper company for cultured robins, and shooed it away using the most disgraceful language!

The little cowbird flew away with feelings and feathers somewhat ruffled, for after all it was only trying to be friendly. Then it spotted us in the garden, decided that we were more sociable, and joined us in our minor agricultural exercise. The enclosed photos show how brave it was, and perhaps help you to confirm our preliminary identification — is it a young, Brown-headed Cowbird?

Whatever it is, we hope it enjoyed our company as much as we enjoyed its, and also hope it will continue to visit us, and not fall a victim to its own curiosity and friendliness — *Peter B. Watkins*, 3406 - 11 Street S.W., Calgary, Alberta T2T 3M1