
LETTERS

GRASSHOPPERS

9:30 am Friday 9 August on the McKague Farm, Tribune. It is cloudy with misting rain, temperature 52°F. The grasshoppers are thick on the stems of shrubs and trees where they climbed the night before to escape the cold.

This morning being extra cold, they are still there, slow to move, making them easy prey for the birds.

Robins stuff as many as four in their beak before flying off to the nest of young. Small birds have a more difficult time. Wrens segment the insects before devouring all but the wings.

One female Northern Oriole has perfected a much better way of dining on the large insects. We watched from the window as the oriole flew to a Spiraea shrub. The bush, about three feet in height, was only sticks and stems with the odd leaf on top. The bird advanced through the shrub about 10 in. above ground. After catching the insect in its beak the bird placed it under one foot on the branch and proceeded to pull off and eat legs, abdomen and head, leaving the wings. This was done three times and on the fourth time the bird dropped the grasshopper on the ground. Flying down to retrieve its prey the bird pecked at the insect a few times, unable to dislodge any part. The bird then gathered the insect in its beak and flew to the nearest branch, again placing it under one foot to hold it in place, and began to eat its prize as before piece by piece.

Grasshopper, grasshoppers and more grasshoppers, one hundred or more to the square metre. They have eaten my

vegetable garden, my peonies, roses, petunias, marigolds, cotoneaster, lilacs, spiraea, caragana, the grass and last but not least the grain. There are few leaves on the maple, elm, ash and poplar. The insects don't seem to like the juniper or cedar but chew needles and bark on the spruce and can easily kill one under three feet in height. I lost five last year and will probably lose more this year.

What do you do with the pesky insects? 'Spray them!' someone says. There is a whole host of insecticides including Furadan, Lorsban, Desis, Cygon, Sevin and Malathion, to choose from. Some are contact and some residual lasting up to fourteen days. These insecticides are very toxic to man, especially Furadan and Lorsban. You must cover up with plastic rain coat and hat and wear plastic gloves and a mask before spraying and then dispose of all garments very carefully afterward. For edible plants the waiting time is 7 to 60 days (grain) for different brands.

Dogs have dropped in thirty feet when following a sprayer and birds have dropped dead after sitting on the boom of the sprayer for one minute. There are no bees, but then there are no flowers either. But what of the beneficial insects, have we eliminated them as well? And what about the birds? How many have we killed? Will there be any after-effects from birds eating insects that have eaten residual insecticides? Does anyone have the answer? — *Ruth McKague*, Box 85, Tribune, Saskatchewan S0C 2M0.

PESTICIDE SPRAYING

At our farm near Bromhead, Saskatchewan, birds had a difficult summer. Many nests failed around the third week in June (robins, shrike, thrashers, kingbirds, orioles, etc.) and all the birds displayed unusual behaviour around that time. Adult pairs attacked one another, thrashers attacked robins, robins kingbirds, orioles anything and vice versa -- all over the yard all kinds of birds attacked all other kinds of birds; tiny birds attacked big birds. All of this coincided with the time when very heavy aerial spraying for grasshoppers was taking place all around our farm. Although we did not spray the effects of the spraying drifted to our farm as I had to undergo treatment for the effects of chemical poisoning. I think the birds may have been poisoned too!

All bird populations in our yard were down this year, some diastrously so. Hardly any warblers: yellow, yellowthroat, no ovenbirds or any others at all. No flickers, Song Sparrows, and so many failed nests in June.

Still, we have a huge bird population compared to other farm yards or

Bromhead. We definitely attribute it to the heavy and continuous summer-long grasshopper spraying this year and last year. People have sprayed their very house yards several times, with lethal poisons such as Sevin, Furadan and worse! Crop spraying has been carried on every day and only ceased in our neighbourhood in the third week of July, when the spray pilot crashed his plane. People have been made ill and some, one a young boy, have been killed. The local plane sprayers were "careful" as far as spraying can be, but the whole countryside has been polluted all summer long. People are reporting to me now that they don't even have common birds, such as wrens, any more. We drive school bus and we could tell by June that other yards did not have any birds left. I used to know what birds lived in all the yards on my route, but this year there was nothing much to see. We don't spray and we have birds even though their behavior is suspect.

This is our seventh summer of drought and the birds had survived it fairly well, but with the grasshopper poisoning they have suddenly disappeared. We think it is quite clear why the disaster has occurred. — *Carol Bjorklund, Box 32, Bromhead, Saskatchewan S0C 0N0.*

MOULTING OF EARED GREBES AND WILSON'S PHALAROPES ON SALINE LAKES

Dr. Joseph R. Jehl is studying the incredible concentrations of moulting Wilson's Phalaropes (from 20 June to end of July; peak at 100,000 individuals) and Eared Grebes (from end of July through September; peaking at 800,000 individuals) at Mono Lake, California. Although they rest far out in the lake, grebe primaries and sometimes phalarope feathers may be encountered along the shoreline.

Jehl postulates that similar, though perhaps smaller concentrations must occur on other saline lakes. Old Wives Lake and Chaplin Lake would be good possibilities; Joe would like to visit Saskatchewan in 1986 if anyone can provide good leads as to time and place. Write Dr. Jehl at **Hubbs - Sea World Research Institute, 1700 South Shores Road, Mission Bay, San Diego, California 92109** or phone Stuart or Mary Houston in Saskatoon (306-244-0742).