

BIRD NOTES

Two birds which have greatly increased in numbers around Yorkton the last few years are the Burrowing Owl and the Arkansas Kingbird. In the city the latter has become a familiar nesting species in the boulevard maples but this summer one pair built their nest on the lowest branch of a spruce just outside the front door of Mr. and Mrs. W. Pickering's home. The birds were extremely nervous throughout the nesting period but became slightly tamer after the young were hatched. In an effort to tame them Mr. and Mrs. Pickering placed tiny strips of raw meat along the branch near the nest and these were quickly fed to the young birds. Incidentally, the rate at which those young Arkansas Kingbirds grew was amazing, maybe the meat had something to do with it.

In July, J. Gunn heard a Whip-poor-will calling at Devil's Lake near Yorkton. From what we can gather from the old-timers, the Whip-poor-will was not uncommon in the Yorkton area years ago.

We made a mistake in the July issue when we stated that Mr. McKim only had two records of the Chestnut-collared Longspur for Melville. The "two records" refer to McCown's Longspur - a bird of the dry prairies. The Chestnut-collared Longspur is quite common around Melville. At Yorkton we came across a colony of these attractive little songsters this spring near Rousay's Lake and W. Niven, Sheho, reports that the colony he noted there for the first time in 1942, returned to the same locality again this summer.

We wonder how many members have ever seen the "pendulum" flight of the hummingbird during the mating season? With the female somewhere in the vicinity, and his crimson gorget flashing in the sun, the male bird suddenly makes a sharply-inclined dive and is then carried upwards again, by his own momentum, to complete a half circle. When he has reached the same level as that from which he started his dive, he turns quickly and zooms down again, repeating over and over again, with such rapidity that it sometimes looks as if he were being swung, back and forth, on a length of string.

This summer, J. Whyte, Fort San, noted this rarely-witnessed performance of the Hummingbird for the first time, the flight taking place just outside the kitchen window of their farm. And last year, H.M. Rayner also saw the same thing in his garden at Ituna. He says, "the male hummingbird would climb to a height of about fifty feet and then dive steeply until within a few feet of the ground, when he would climb again, turn and repeat the performance. I have not seen a "hummer" perform in this way at any time before or since, though they are steady visitors in my garden throughout the summer."

The nest of a hummingbird was located this summer by Peter Bodiuk, Grade 3, Mamornitz School, Buchanan. He and his sister and two brothers visited the nest daily from the time two tiny eggs were laid. Incubation apparently was well under two weeks and the rate at which the baby birds developed was something to marvel at. Within four days they were fully feathered- "green on the back and grey on the breast" and in another day or so they were taking their first flight. Peter and other members of the school made some excellent drawings for us of this nest which is now in the school collection. It was "a flimsy nest riding saddle-fashion on the branch and was constructed of poplar bark on the outside and lined with white down just like cotton-batting." We thank Alex Bartko, School president, for sending us this account.

BIRD NOTES (continued)

We were more than pleased to get in touch with Pilot Officer Keith Mitchell of the R.A.F. who, last spring, was training, first at Davidson and later at Swift Current. P.O. Mitchell has been a keen bird student in England and up to July 18 had got a list of 85 different species of Canadian birds, "...mostly noted from trains or on odd evening walks."

He sent us one very interesting observation from Swift Current - "Birds," he wrote, "are rather a menace when flying. When doing low flying here we have to be careful of them, especially of the Marsh Hawk, which has an awkward habit of rearing up in its normal quartering over the fields when an aircraft approaches. Fortunately none have, so far, hit any aircraft that I have been flying." He also told us that "...once while indulging in some very low flying with an instructor over Rush Lake, we saw a heron which puzzled us. However, by doing a steep turn we found it again and noted its broad ash-grey wings and dark green or black body. Both of us being English knew we had not seen that type of heron before. I imagine it was a Black-crowned Night Heron and, if it was breeding there, the nest would certainly have to be on the ground. That particular trip was fun, for though bird watching at 100 m.p.h. is not easy, we recognised various species we had seen on other occasions, including Blue-winged Teal, Pintail, Baldpate, Red-winged Blackbird, Black Tern, Franklin Gull and others."

P.O. Mitchell considers the Lark Bunting "...is easily the finest prairie songster." (How many of our members would be of the same opinion?). He is now taking a navigator's course in Prince Edward Island and flying far out over the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We send him our best wishes for good flying and good birding wherever he may be posted.

Mr. McKim reports that the purple finch, which he has had since April 1942 and which retained its rich plumage all through last winter, has, this Fall, undergone a complete moult and is now changed to dull yellow. For some unknown reason Purple Finches lose their lovely magenta color in captivity. While, last summer, Mr. McKim's bird would only eat chickweed from the garden, "...this year," he says, "it ate lettuce and dandelions at a great rate", so apparently it got its daily vitamins!

From the south-west section of the province, Mr. Laurence B. Potter writes that the Lark Sparrow has become quite a familiar bird around Eastend the last ten years.

On Sept. 12, some Yorkton members made an unusual capture when they caught a young bittern as it was hiding in the grass at Rousay's Lake. This bird was promptly banded by Stuart Houston. Capture of a young bittern, still unable to fly, at such a late date, raises the question whether bitterns have two broods in one season.

Ducks Unlimited report the greatest increase in crows and magpies in six years. Letters from our members also bear this out and many readers will agree with W. Niven, Sheho, who writes "There is a family of crows around the yard and they seem to know that I have nothing to shoot them with. I think the more crows one can shoot the better. It would be impossible to destroy them all anyway, they are too cunning.--- and since they have so few natural enemies it is up to man to keep them under control, the same as he does weeds and other pests."

Buff-breasted Sandpipers - rarely-observed migrants across the prairies - were noted on May 22 by Francis Roy, Tullis.