

BIRD NOTES

Bluebirds We have had several reports of Bluebirds this summer, among which was the following interesting note from Mrs. J. Hubbard, Grenfell. "You may remember," she writes, "that we had an Eastern Bluebird nesting in a cardboard box, which my husband nailed up inside our granary in 1944, over a hole made by a woodpecker. This year a pair of Mountain Bluebirds nested in the same box and today (June 20) the young ones were out in the rain. Unlike their Eastern cousins, who were very unobtrusive, these Mountain Bluebirds were quite friendly and always around." Another member pointed out that Bluebirds seem to stay in family groups, the male birds caring for the first brood of young when they leave the nest, while the female sits on another clutch of eggs - then all move away together.

Cliff Swallows Cliff Swallows are rarely noted in the Yorkton-Melville area and their curious mud nests are even more rarely seen. This season, however, L.T. McKin, K.C. was told of a colony of some twenty nests built under the eaves of a new, unpainted barn 10 miles north of Melville. Mr. McKin also reported that three pairs of Cliff Swallows had nested against the walls of a stucco house in Melville. This last report is of special interest as two years ago, in the spring of 1943, a flock of about thirty Cliff Swallows visited Melville and "daubed mud in fifteen or twenty places on the wall of this particular house and even partly built two or three nests and then as suddenly vanished." In Yorkton this summer we discovered Cliff Swallows at the farm of Stanley Wood. On July 20, one nest built against Wood's house contained young, but, of some half-dozen nests on the barn, three had been taken over by English Sparrows--a clear demonstration of one of the main causes of the decrease of the Cliff Swallow in the West.

Bobolinks In her nature column in the "Saskatchewan Farmer" for July 15, Mrs. Marion Nixon states "the most remarkable increase in bird population that I have noted this year is in the Bobolinks. Before the dry years we used to see the odd Bobolink each spring, but for some years I did not see one....then this year, to our great surprise and delight, we found not one pair, but five, nesting on a portion of a hay pasture just across the road from our house. The Bobolinks kept fairly close together and often two would be seen singing on the same clump of willow shrub. Their song is infinitely more beautiful than the "Bobolink, bobolink, spink, spank, spink" of a familiar poem.

Birds and Colour Mrs. M. Heron, Yorkton, had a curious experience with birds apparently showing a reaction to colour. In her garden she had a bird bath which attracted the usual gathering of summer visitors, such as robins, yellow warblers, wrens, etc. Early in June she decided to paint the bird bath a bright blue. And the result? Not a single bird came near it except finally a few odd English Sparrows. So, missing the companionship of her former friends, she repainted the bath white, and immediately all her guests came back and everything was happy in the garden once again!

Nighthawks Birds find strange spots to their liking as nesting sites. The Nighthawk builds no nest, but lays its eggs on the bare ground or on the gravelled roofs of city buildings. In Yorkton this year one of these birds found that the covering of stone chips on a grave in the cemetery was just to her choice. This particular grave lies parallel to one of the main paths but the Nighthawk was such a close sitter that numbers of people must have passed by the grave and never noticed the crouching bird.

Sparrows Nest in Hawk's Nest In the last issue of the "Blue Jay" we reported finding a nest of the English Sparrow built in the underside of a Swainson's Hawk's nest at Rousay Lake, Yorkton, and remarked that "as far as we knew Swainson's Hawk's was the only nest utilized in this way." What we should have said was, "the only nest so utilized while the original occupants are still in possession." As several of our members were quick to point out, many birds make use of the abandoned nests of other species. In any case, we were wrong on all counts!

This spring Bill Garrick told us of seeing what he believed was the nest of a Red-tailed Hawk, at Leech Lake, with the nest of an English Sparrow in the underside. This hawk's nest was in a bluff on the west side of the lake. J. H. Wilson, fieldman for Ducks Unlimited, and his son, Bill, visited it late in June and confirmed that it was that of a Red-Tail. On July 14 three members of the Yorkton group also visited the nest. By this time the young hawks (two) were out of the nest, but were apparently still somewhere near, as all the time the visitors were present one of the adult hawks flew round in wide circles overhead, screaming shrilly. Bill Wilson and Michael Priestly climbed the tree and discovered the nest contained four freshly-killed young "gophers" (Richardson's Ground Squirrel) and the remains of one Sharp-tailed Grouse and many bones. The most interesting thing, however, was the fact that in the sparrow's nest, built into the foundation of the hawk's nest, was a dead, almost fully fledged young sparrow badly mutilated about the head. This was a most puzzling occurrence. Why had the presence of the sparrows been tolerated up to this point? Had the young hawks been trying their skill by attacking the young sparrows? The whole thing remains a mystery.

With regard to the sparrow's nest in the Swainson's Hawk's nest noted in 1944, the latter was situated in a dead poplar tree and had been occupied for several seasons. This spring we discovered that the Hawks (if it was the same pair) had apparently decided that the tree was no longer safe and a new nest had been constructed a few yards away in a living tree and at a lower level. The new nest also harboured the nest of a pair of English Sparrows!

Pintail and Hungarian Share Nest From E. W. Arnold, Valparaiso, comes this interesting note - "An odd incident took place here last spring. A Pintail Duck and a Hungarian Partridge were laying eggs in the same nest. I think that the duck was the intruder as there were eighteen partridge eggs and six duck eggs. The two birds seemed to take shifts in being on the nest, at least they did that for three days. I took a look at it about a week later, but only eggshells were left. I do not know what had happened to them."

Whooping Crane No nest of the Whooping Crane was located this year. This is hardly to be wondered at, considering the extent of the territory where they might nest and the fact that some birdmen believe that there are now less than fifty of these magnificent birds still in existence. Sight records were reported to the Provincial Museum from settled areas during the spring migration and it seems possible that one pair started to nest on a marsh at Fort a La Corne Forest Reserve in May. This marsh was afterwards badly flooded out and no sign of the birds was seen there later in June. Anyone having any information regarding the Whooping Crane is asked to communicate with Fred Bard, Curator, Provincial Museum, Regina.

1945 BIRD RECORDS OF INTEREST IN BRIEF

Black Duck A male bird showing no sign of molting, banded July 21 by J. H. Wilson at Leech Lake, Yorkton. An adult female banded by Stuart Houston at Rousay Lake, Yorkton, August 10, and a second female, molting and unable to fly, August 22. This is the game duck which largely replaces the mallard in Eastern Canada, not often reported for Saskatchewan. Plumages of both sexes the same. May be recognized as a very dark duck with light wing lining. Deep purple wing patch, no white bars.

Hooded Merganser Female banded at Leech Lake July 12. The smallest species of the "fish-eating" ducks with narrow, saw-like bills. Plumage of female greyish-brown, not in any way spectacular.

Turkey Vulture Many visitors to Madge Lake this year reported seeing large numbers of these huge birds sailing round high up in the sky.

Cooper's Hawk Five nesting records reported this summer in the south part of the province. Several sight records. A young bird discovered in a Yorkton duck trap and banded. Cooper's Hawk is the "chicken hawk" of Eastern Canada and is not common on the prairies, but at long intervals appears in large numbers. 1945 is apparently such a year.

Avocet Three seen on sandbar in Saskatchewan River above Saskatoon by F. Roy, May 13. "Is this not quite a distance north to find these birds?" asked Mr. Roy. W. Niven, Sheho, reports a flock of 20 present on a small alkali slough all summer. The eggs of the colony reported from Leech Lake, Yorkton, last spring, were completely destroyed by crows and only one Avocet was seen around the lake later in the summer.

Kingfisher F. Roy, Tullis, got his first nesting record of the Kingfisher for that district this summer. Nest was situated in a steep clay bank in a coulee near the Saskatchewan River.

Crested Flycatchers J. D. Richie, Wallwort, Tells us he has known this bird as a nesting species for several years.

Tanagers Western Tanager. Nest with four eggs found at Nipawin by M. G. Street. Placed at end of spruce bough about 20 feet from the ground.