

BIRD NOTES

by

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WAXWINGS (Bohemian and Cedar). One of each specie collected from a mixed flock, for scientific purposes, by Dr. Olin Pettingill of Northfield, Minn. on June 2, 1946, near Nipawin. Dr. Pettingill remarked on the rarity of seeing the two species together.

EASTERN KINGBIRD. In July, Walter Mathews, of Nipawin was puzzled as to where a certain pair of kingbirds, constantly seen about his farm buildings, were nesting. Despite a search, no nest could be found; until one day he noticed one of the pair fly from the open door of a tool-shed. Imagine his surprise when he discovered the nest; situated on a narrow ledge above the door and containing three eggs! His surprise increased when he realized that a pair of Robins had originally built the nest about a week before. The Kingbirds had added very little new material to the nest. Eastern Kingbirds sometimes have been known to use an old nest as a base for a new structure, but this is the first time we have heard of Kingbirds nesting within a building.

LARK BUNTINGS. Miss Evelyn J. Binnie, Tullis, Sask., writes: "Lark Buntings are one of our most common, and most enjoyable summer birds here. Their lark-like songs delight us all summer long. The males, in their conspicuous black and white plumage are to be seen on nearly every fence-post, or soaring gracefully down. They usually nest in the hayfields, but once we found a nest on the railroad track, underneath the rails between the ties. The female hatched and raised her brood there, too, but then we only had two trains a week, so they were not disturbed a great deal". Miss Binnie reports the earliest first-seen date at Tullis is April 26. They depart in September.

SMITH'S LONGSPUR. Wm. Niven again reports this specie at Sheho. Mr. Niven has regularly recorded this transient each spring and fall since October 14, 1944, when he saw them for the first time. Smith's Longspurs are the largest of the longspurs, and nest from Hudson Bay to the McKenzie River. The spring male is distinctively colored with its buff throat, breast and belly; its crown and cheeks black, and with a white line above the eye, white ear coverts and white wing-patch is unmistakable. The females lack the black head markings. The autumn male and juveniles resemble the female, but with less white on the wings. Very seldom are these beautiful birds reported, but observers should pay particular attention to any flock of longspurs that they should happen to see, as they may prove to be this rather rarely recorded specie.

SNOWY OWL. Numerous reports indicate a fairly heavy invasion of Snowy owls occurred during October and November. Numbers being seen throughout the province, also reported south into North Dakota by October 21st. At Nipawin, absence of snow during these months caused these birds to be very conspicuous, 4 or 5 not an uncommon number to be seen at one time, resting on bare fields. C.P. Jordan, reporting from Remount school, some 12 miles from Parkbeg, 35 miles west of Moose Jaw writes: "There are numerous Snowy owls in this district, first seen November 1, and are being reported by my pupils every day. There is also a bountiful supply of rabbits and mice in this area, certainly then, these "white phantoms" will not go hungry".

Steve A. Mann, Skull Creek, Sask., writes: "Reading the article about the nesting of the Marsh hawks in the last issue of the "Blue Jay", caused me to remember I had intended writing you of an unusual nesting-site I found this summer". Mr. Mann states, "My son and I were fencing along our creek when we noticed a nest some 20 feet above the ground in an almond willow, that had been used by a pair of Swainson's hawks for the past 3 years. But, as only Marsh hawks were seen about there at this time, and knowing marsh hawks usually nest on the ground, I did not think it possible that they could be using this nest. However, curiosity got the better of me, so I climbed up to it, to find it contained 3 young marsh hawks, varying in size from a robin to a bantam hen, and one unhatched egg, that was probably infertile." This is certainly an unusual nesting site for this specie. Marsh hawks, however, are quite versatile in their choice of nesting sites, it seems. We had previously known of one nest being placed on a hummock, some 3 feet above the surrounding land, in the midst of a heavy clump of willows. This summer, R.E. Lawrence, Nipawin, found one in the centre of a burnt-out brush pile, leaving a wreath of unburned branches about it to a height of some two feet. Only a scanty amount of nest material kept the 3 eggs above the several inches of ashes.

WHITE PELICAN At 10:30 p.m. on the warm, bright moonlit evening of September 12, Roy and Ernie Stewart were combining on their farm some six miles North-east of Nipawin, when suddenly two huge white birds appeared directly in front of the powerful lights of their tractor. Quickly stopping their machine to avoid running over the birds, which proved to be pelicans, the men tried to catch them, and did succeed in catching one when it made no effort to fly. The other pelican flew readily, but quickly alighted a few hundred feet away, only to again take wing, and then disappear. The captured bird was kept overnight, and when released in the farm-yard the next morning, would still make no effort to fly. Later, it was released at the waters' edge of the Saskatchewan River, where it promptly swam to the center, took a drink and preened its feathers. When last seen it was drifting easily down-stream around a bend. It is difficult to find a reasonable answer as to why these birds landed in a "swathed" barley field, when on their Southward journey, as likely was the case, when they had probably crossed the broad expanse of the river, little over a mile to the North, and the bright moonlight made for fair visibility up to two hundred yards. The bird appeared healthy, and in good plumage. When examined no physical defects or trace of injury could be found. White Pelicans are only rarely observed in the Nipawin district.

AMERICAN BITTERN and RICHARDSON'S OWL As Pote Robinson, of Nipawin, was leaving for work in the early morning of September 26, 1946 he noticed a large bird perched in the top of a Jackpine tree. Using a length of wire as a snare, he captured the bird, identified as an immature American Bittern. Rather a strange place to find this haunter of the marshes, so far from water, and of all places, in a tree!

Not so strange or unusual was the owl, found being mobbed by a band of Blue Jays in broad daylight Nov 23 by 12 year-old Kenneth Lawrence, also of Nipawin, who succeeded in catching the bird, an adult Richardson's Owl, with his bare hands, after a thrilling chase. As Kenneth tells it, "I climbed half a dozen trees, with the owl just one tree ahead of me, until I eventually caught up with it and tucked it under my coat, until I reached the ground". This small, hornless owl, only slightly larger than the better known Saw-whet, and smaller than the Screech Owl, is a winter visitor to the settled regions, usually only when their main fare of mice fails in the far north. Their call notes differ greatly from the well known "hoot" of most of the larger owls, likened, quite aptly, to the sound of water "dripping from heights". This owl called intermittently while held captive for the several hours until night-fall, when it became very wide awake, vastly different from the passive unresisting owl it had appeared during daylight.

Both birds were banded and released by M.G. Street.

BALD EAGLE It is not often we hear of a Saskatchewan nesting record of this large bird of prey. R. Lanz and M. Blume, of Codette, Sask., found a nest with a single half-grown young, in July, at Little Bear Lake, some sixty miles due north of Choiceland. The nest was built in the extreme top of a dying white poplar and was estimated to contain enough sticks, and other material to have filled an ordinary wagon box.

A marked southward movement of Canada Jays (commonly called "Whiskey-jacks") was noted this fall in the more northern areas. This movement or migration is of only rare occurrence, the last notable taking place during October and early November 1937. A similar movement, but to a lesser degree, of Blue Jays was also noted. Evelyn J. Binnie reports a Blue jay at Tullis, while farther south at Wauchope, Betty Nixon tells of one, apparently the first one to be seen at that point.

No recent nesting of Sandhill cranes, on the prairies, have been reported in answer to the question raised in Mr. B.W. Cartwright's article, as carried in the last issue of the "Blue Jay". However, it is very interesting to hear of "cranes" being "very numerous", at Tullis this fall, by Evelyn J. Binnie; while Steve A. Mann, Skull Creek, reports that a greater concentration of cranes occurred in his district this fall than for many years, but that they only stayed a few days. Mr. Mann also states: "I collected a specimen of the Little Brown Crane on May 10, 1930. (The study-skin is still in the Provincial Museum.) and at that time was given credit for taking the first specimen of this specie in Saskatchewan".