

A STARLING AT LANGBANK

Mrs. G. M. Hewson writes that she is very well pleased with the issues of the BLUE JAY and adds that her family are all interested in natural history and enjoy anything that will give them more accurate information of our birds, plants and animals.

She describes in detail the appearance of a bird about the size of a blackbird which took refuge in the stable during the evening of the first day of snow.

Mrs. Elizabeth B. Flock, a Regina authority of prairie birds, feels quite sure that the bird described is a Starling. The crest shown in the picture in "Birds of Western Canada" is not always apparent. The white outer tail feathers are conspicuous in spring plumage, but may not be present later in the year. Mrs. Flock thinks that this bird only fits the description given, which she describes briefly as a stubby-tailed blackbird with a long, yellowish bill.

BIRDING IN THE GARDEN

Elizabeth B. Flock

Birding in even a small city garden can prove a surprisingly rewarding pastime. Strange visitors from marshland or northern forests may stop for a brief rest. It will prove interesting to keep a House List of all species seen together with the date to refresh the memory.

A few of our own experiences include a sora rail that found its way into the front yard last spring where it was concealed so effectually that I almost stepped on the bird before it took off in a gangling flight across the street. Another dweller in the wet places, a water-thrush, spent some time bobbing away among the shrubs looking for food. An ovenbird with its amusingly sedate walk was seen up and down the garden paths for a few days. Upon one occasion I was astonished to look up into our cottonwood and meet the intent stare of a long-eared owl.

Shortly before frost a ruby-throated hummingbird darted straight for a few late flowers of scarlet lychnis, ignoring all the other blossoms and thus showing its preference for red ones. It did deviate for a moment over some blue Chinesedelphiniums before flying straight across the garden to another small patch of lychnis. The same procedure was repeated at about the same time two days later which seemed to indicate that both visits were made by one bird.

Two thrushes in the garden late in the season suggested they were hermits, when one bird stopped obligingly with its back in a patch of sunlight where the reddish tail showed clearly. Turning, the dark breast spots were conspicuous. About the same time a white-throated sparrow scurried through the asparagus, stopping now and then to scratch diligently. Although I was sitting quietly only a few feet away, the bird seemed indifferent to my presence.

More chickadees come to town in the autumn and winter some years than others. This seems to be a chickadee year for us. The first one was alone on a lilac bush. When it caught sight of the bird bath it flew at once to perch on the side for repeated sips of water. Next, two spent as many days going over the cottonwood with minute care while they kept up a constant chatter with an occasional change to the clear "phoebe" whistle of spring. A fourth chickadee made a quick survey of the premises and was gone.

Another visitor to the cottonwood was a golden-crowned kinglet too high up to recognize until it dropped into a lilac bush close by where the sun

caught the yellow and black on the head. We have seen these little fellows in January and marvel at their vitality.

Of course, juncos were all over the place during their long period of migration. Fine bits of sand in the driveway seemed to appeal to many of them as they hurried about over the ground.

When I happened to see a downy woodpecker dart around the corner of the porch, stop to look over a lilac bush and then go on to an ash tree before hurrying across the street, I wondered how many other such short visits went unnoticed. Always luck plays an important part in seeing birds.

BIRDS OF INTEREST

Arthur Ward

THE PIGEON HAWK--

Commencing early in August there were lulls in the presence of birds around the traps which soon was explained by the sudden flashing by of this small falcon flying swiftly about four feet from the ground. It would dart through the trees, seldom exposing itself when it lit. It was well inside the trees, and did not fly on the outside except when crossing to another part of the grove. Those birds, not already conscious of its presence, would scurry lowly to the nearest protective bush and remain there.

Although I did not see it catch anything, it would seem that no bird, having been spotted by this horror, could possibly escape. After a swift going over of the whole grove, the hawk would disappear, but never failed to pay a periodical visit, extending to the last week in September.

THE DOWNY WOODPECKER

On October 27th, after all the other birds had seemingly left the area, I heard a tapping sound and found it came from a wren nesting box. A Downy Woodpecker was busily engaged in enlarging the small entrance. This was soon accomplished and the box occupied. I waited until dusk, then caught and banded it. This bird takes a 1^B band, being much smaller than the Hairy Woodpecker which strongly resembles the Downy. It takes a number 2 band. The larger size of the Hairy with larger bill, easily distinguishes it from the Downy.

THE VARIED THRUSH

With an extra amount of trees around a farmstead on the Prairie, one never know what rare bird may call to rest on the journey during migration.

On the 27th of September I noticed a bird feeding in front of the traps - a robin-like bird - but there was no mistaking this beautiful one in contrast to the Robin, with its black breast bar, red eyebrow line and wings with bars and spots. It was easily identified as the Varied Thrush. It flew away, but after a short time returned and went straight into a trap. I don't know whether the bird has been seen in Saskatchewan before, but no one would have reason to be in doubt of its identity after seeing and banding it. Later in the day it repeated in another trap a short distance away. Once again I released it, then saw it no more.