

INFORMATION PLEASE.

F. Baines, Saltcoats, asks "What has become of the real Prairie Chicken or Pinnated Grouse? Some years ago they were plentiful and their "booming" could be heard in spring where ever there were low flats. Now they seem to have disappeared completely." W. Niven, Sheho, writes that Pinnated Grouse have not been present in that area since 1929. Before that they were fairly common and had one of their "dancing grounds" on his farm. On our Yorkton Bird List we have only two records of this bird for the past five years. In contrast to these reports however, it is interesting to learn that the Greater Prairie Chicken (to give this species the name now accepted by the authorities) is becoming established as far north as Prince Albert National Park. The Greater Prairie Chicken was not an original inhabitant of the West but came into Manitoba and Saskatchewan from the States to the south, and followed settlement westward and northwestward. This bird is also sometimes called the "Prairie Hen."

We received several reports of the Great Blue Heron. After the close community life of the breeding season the Blue Heron adopts a completely solitary existence and wanders far and wide, and it is as a lone individual along some creek or quiet lakeside that most correspondents know this picturesque bird. Two letters mention the fact that anglers regard the Blue Heron with disfavor and consider it a menace to game fish. This prejudice is open to question (see Taverner's comments in "Birds of Canada"). E.P. Coe, Wawota, states that at one time herons did considerable damage to brown trout and brook trout in Cypress Hills Park, but now that the waters there are well stocked, these birds make little noticeable inroads on game fish.

The breeding range of the Blue Heron extends all over the province. Several colonies are located in stands of White Spruce in Prince Albert National Park. L.T. McKim knows a heronry on the south shore of Crooked Lake in the Qu'Appelle Valley. There are about twenty nests in this colony, all in dead poplars, and when Mr. McKim visited it early in August last year, about six of the nests still had almost full-grown young in them. He also knows of a second heronry on an island in a lake about 14 miles north of Punnichy, and has been told of another on the shores of Round Lake in the Qu'Appelle valley. And R.M. Ferrie of North Battleford wrote to tell us of a heronry in an island in the South Saskatchewan River, fifteen miles north-west of North Battleford which he has been acquainted with for several years and which he believes is quite an old colony. We should be interested to hear of other nesting places of the Great Blue Heron.

Magpies are evidently increasing in numbers all over Saskatchewan and also extending their range northward, as they are now reported from Nipawin. In the south they constitute a pest. Steve Mann, of Skull Creek (S. of Piapot) writes: "Magpies are becoming more numerous yearly in spite of persecution. Last fall I counted as many as eighty in one flock. In the Fall they are beneficial as insect-eaters, particularly grasshoppers, but they destroy untold numbers of young birds, both wild and domesticated, earlier in the year and are a menace to grouse. They will even go right into the hen house for eggs, and will pick up small chicks from the yard the minute one's back is turned. They have also been known to attack the brands on cattle, picking them raw. I feel that the Magpie should be hunted down relentlessly, only unfortunately they so often nest in wild bush country such as that up towards the headwaters of our creek where they are almost unmolested."

And, from the south-east corner of the province, Mrs. Nixon, of Wauchope, says that, although as a naturalist she enjoys watching the magpie collect sticks for their bulky nests, "one can't let them stay with young chicks about. Last year they came over a mile, one after the other, and played havoc with our hatch.

INFORMATION PLEASE (continued)

A report of Starlings near Yorkton appears in this issue. To what extent have these birds succeeded in establishing themselves in Saskatchewan? A few years ago, when the Starling first appeared in the West, there was a mild flutter of excitement in the newspapers and so on but of late we have read little concerning this probably undesirable migrant. (Just as we "go to press" we have received a letter from M.G. Street saying he has seen his first Starlings at Nipawin. We think this must be the most northerly record to date for Starlings in Saskatchewan.

We have now collected quite a lot of information about bats. First of all, thanks to Dr. D.S. Rawson, Professor of Biology at the University of Saskatchewan, we have found out that there are five species of bats listed for the province. Most common is the Little Brown Bat with province-wide distribution. The Red Bat is also abundant over the southern half of the province and the Silver-haired Bat is likewise common, particularly where there are trees. Rarer are two large bats, the Big Brown and the Hoary. The latter being almost entirely confined to the northern woods.

Francis Roy, of Tullis, tells us that bats are fairly common in that district and he believes the majority are Red Bats, although he has seen several dark ones which are probably Silver-haired. A few years ago a colony of bats summered in an abandoned log house, on the banks of the Saskatchewan river, about ten miles from Tullis. "Bats", he says, "are sometimes found roosting around the elevators and it is believed, locally, that these bats may have come in box cars from points east, but this is mere guesswork and has never been substantiated."

Further north, at Nipawin, M.G. Street once found a small light brown bat asleep in a gunny sack thrown over the side of a wagon and he has seen others under the eaves of a granary. However, when birding with his brother near Tisdale a few years ago, noticed an old flicker hole, apparently well used, in a poplar stub. Upon giving the stub a sharp slap, to their surprise out poured seven bats en masse in a most startling manner. One of these bats alighted on his brother's trouser leg. These bats had long dark fur with the long guard hairs tipped with silver.

And nearer Yorkton, F. Baines, of Crescent Lake, writes that they used to see more bats, years ago, when mosquitoes were more plentiful. Mr. Baines has come across bats in day-time under the bark of dead poplars but he has never heard of them being found hibernating in winter.

In her column "Nature", Mrs. Nixon has described an experience with a Silver-haired Bat, which was found, almost drowned, in the water tank under the eaves of their house. The Nixon family placed the forlorn but defiant little creature in a box with a glass front and watched it proceed to dry itself off. "With flickering pink tongue it licked its fur just as a cat would, combing out the tangles with the hooked claws of the back feet, finally "mouthing" all over the extensive webbing of the wings with meticulous care." Dead flies were dropped into the box and after a while, one or two of these were eaten. Then, with the approach of dusk, Mrs. Nixon placed the box in the crotch of a tree and next morning the bat was gone.

Bats are extremely beneficial as insect destroyers, particularly in forest areas, but very little is known about the details of their life histories. Apparently no hibernating bat has ever been found on the Prairies, but Mrs. Nixon wonders if there is a possibility of any bats spending the winter in the Bienfait mines. We should like to get some reports when bats are first noted in spring; do they return with the swallows as soon as the small flying insects become plentiful? Somehow one only connects seeing bats with hot summer nights.

Do pelicans nest any place in the Qu'Appelle Valley? Dick Bird was telling us recently that he believes all the Pelicans seen in summer on the Qu'Appelle Lakes are non-breeding birds.