

MAN, THE NATURE WASTER

The following extract from a letter written by J.D. Ritchie, Wallwort, needs no comment - "You cannot print too many articles on conservation in the "Blue Jay", for there is still far too great a wastage of wildlife. One day, a few years ago, I heard a shot just around the bend in the road from my garden. A few minutes later along came a fellow with a dead Pileated Woodpecker dangling from one hand and a .22 rifle in the other - you know, one of those big red-crested woodpeckers about the size of a crow which stay in the tall timber. Right away I was up in the air. "What did you shoot that bird for?" I asked. He hummed and hawed and finally said, "W-wh-why it was right close there on the tree trunk and a good mark so I shot him." Now what can be done about a thing like that? He didn't want it, he went away and left it lying, didn't even take a feather from it. What is the matter with such people? They are carrying a .22 rifle; they see some beautiful creature enjoying life and up goes the cursed shooting iron and down falls one of God's most wonderful creations. And then what have they got, nothing but a piece of blood-soaked carrion. There can be no enjoyment in this.

"I knew this particular woodpecker; he had a nest in a dead poplar stub and for days the female bird called and called for him and he didn't come. So she had to do the work of supplying food for a brood of hungry nestlings entirely alone, and all because her mate was "a good mark" for a dirty killer."

DO YOU KNOW?

No. 4. The Starling. The Starling, a newcomer in western Canada, was introduced into New York from Europe some 50 years ago, in the hope that it would prove a valuable check on insect pests. But whatever its value along this line, the Starling soon demonstrated the danger of introducing an alien species into a new environment. It multiplied and spread and has proved a very doubtful blessing to farmer and city dweller alike. It reached Manitoba in 1930, coming up from Minnesota and since then has spread west across the prairies to Alberta.

It is rather a puzzling bird to identify since it has two plumage phases in the year. In spring and early summer it may be described as a glossy, short-tailed black bird with a bright yellow bill. But after the Fall molt it appears as a heavily spotted or speckled bird with a dark bill. This speckling is due to light tips on the body feathers. With the coming of spring, most of these light tips wear off to expose fully the shining iridescent plumage underneath.

The Starling has a cheerful whistle and a wide variety of notes and calls. It is a great mimic of other birds. When on the ground in search of grubs and insects it walks rather rapidly, zigzag fashion. In flight it often sails for a considerable distance on set wings.

One can hardly welcome the starling to any locality. In spite of certain engaging ways, they are dirty, untidy birds and a serious complaint against them is that they usurp the nesting holes of more desirable native birds such as the bluebirds and purple martins. In winter too, they gather into flocks, and if such flocks are of any size, they can quickly destroy any grove of trees which they adopt as a roosting place. All in all we could have done quite well without the starling.

BOOKS.

Native Trees of Canada. A bulletin first published by the Forestry Service in 1917, reprinted several times since and revised in 1933.

209 pages, well illustrated, and gives distribution maps for each species. Price, 50 cents. Write King's Printer, Ottawa.

Birds of Canada, by F.A. Taverner. Musson & Co. \$3.50. May be obtained through any book store. We would once again like to remind members that this is the one book that everyone interested in birds should possess.