

BIRD NOTES

Ruffed Grouse Somehow in our Christmas Bird Census the Ruffed Grouse picked up an "l" and became "ruffled" - we don't wonder! The adjective refers, of course, to the soft black neck feathers which can be raised in display to form a wide ruff. The Ruffed Grouse is more commonly known as the "partridge" and its drumming is one of the most characteristic woodland sounds in early spring. Usually a log in some secluded spot is chosen as a drumming site, but a few years ago at Pelly, one of these birds selected the peak of a garden shed as its drumming place and went through the entire performance several times daily in full view of a delighted audience. In drumming, the bird suddenly throws its body erect, and with tail down beats rapidly with its wings so that a series of reverberating throbs is produced. The movement of the wings is so rapid at the height of the performance that they show only as a hazy blur about the body. A curious thing about the sound is, that it always appears to be coming from a distance; it is also surprising how many people have never been conscious of hearing it.

Pheasant Pheasants in Saskatchewan apparently did not show the severe drop in numbers reported from the Dakotas last fall, and still seem on the increase. At Christmas they were reported as plentiful at Eastend, and the first week of March, Dick Bird wrote of seeing more pheasants when driving from Regina to Estevan than prairie chicken and partridge put together. An extreme northerly record also came from Mrs. W. Roach, Okla., where a cock bird was around the farm for several days in November. The introduction of the pheasant has not met with universal approval, and Mrs. Roach adds yet another black mark. Cock pheasants have been accused of coming into farmyards and engaging the domestic rooster in deadly combat, but on the Roach farm the handsome stranger was guilty of enticing the yearling turkey hens away!

Bohemian Waxwings Although scarce at Christmas, Bohemian Waxwings have appeared since in large numbers at many points. In recent years these lovely wanderers have become far more common on the prairies following the planting of ornamental berry-bearing shrubs in home gardens. At Yorkton there is a particularly fine clump of Siberian Crabs in the C.P.R. station garden, and every year this is one of the first spots visited by the Waxwings. Here, quite unperturbed by the shunting of frequent trains, they systematically proceed to strip every tiny frozen apple from the trees. By Spring these birds seem to feel the need of protein in their diet and individuals of late lingering flocks may sometimes be seen darting up into the air after early midges and flies. It is a fascinating sight. Bohemian Waxwings are also said to be fond of tree-sap. Has anyone in the west ever seen them feeding on sap oozing from Manitoba maples?

Northern Shrike Steve A. Mann, Skull Creek, writes - "With regard to your interesting notes on the Northern Shrike, I have often seen these birds in action and it always looked to me as though they "hypnotized" one sparrow in a flock. I use this word because when a shrike starts after a flock of sparrows, one will separate from the main flock and keep flying away from the rest, and the safety of the barn, while the others all make haste to get into safe quarters. The Shrike meanwhile disregards them and flies rather leisurely after the single bird until it overtakes it and makes a kill."