

INFORMATION PLEASE

What headway is the Starling making in Saskatchewan? Have any large winter flocks been noted? The starling is not a migratory bird in the usual sense of the word, but several members mentioned that the starlings which they had observed last summer disappeared in the fall. It is quite probable that these birds moved with others to a locality where food was abundant, such as a city nuisance ground.

The Christmas Bird Censuses and other reports show that every year quite a number of summer birds try to brave the winter out. We should like to have records of summer birds which have been known to survive right through until spring - apparently a large percentage perish in February and March. We have never heard of a Meadowlark coming through, although robins sometimes manage to survive, and a few years ago there was a Red-winged Blackbird in Yorkton which towards the end of March could be heard calling continuously from the top of a tall Cottonwood, apparently urging the rest of his clan to hurry back from the south - or maybe it was just a little bragging!

Fred Bard, Curator of the Provincial Museum, would be glad to hear from anyone who has **records** of the rare Black-footed Ferret; a museum in eastern Canada is most anxious to procure a good specimen. The Black-footed Ferret is the largest and most bloodthirsty of the weasels and is a deadly enemy of the prairie dog. It is an animal of the dry plains of the western States, and in Saskatchewan is found only in the southwestern corner of the province.

We have had some correspondence lately with W.A. (Bill) Fuller who is doing post-graduate work at the University of Saskatchewan. Mr. Fuller is collecting data as to the distribution of Saskatchewan mammals. He points out that although a fair amount is known about the fur-bearers and the big game animals on account of their commercial value, there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done in respect to the smaller mammals. Groups on which information is particularly needed are:- Shrews and Bats (actual specimens sent in is the surest way of identification); Flying Squirrels; Beaver (notes on distribution and abundance); Raccoon; Rabbits (records of the Cottontail in the southern part of the province); Otter and Cougar (any records of past years). Information with regard to the Raccoon will be specially welcome. One of these animals was killed near Saltcoats in the fall of 1942 but it seems possible it was an escapee from captivity and not a lone survivor of a wild population of bygone days.

Cliff Shaw, of our Yorkton group, would be glad to get specimens of beetles or other insects this coming summer, and will undertake to supply or obtain information, about any material sent to him. Address, C.C. Shaw, 1-A Third Ave. Yorkton.

INFORMATION PLEASE (continued)

In the Blue Jay for January 1945, (Vol. 3, No. 2) we reported the finding of a nesting Solitary Sandpiper the previous June by C. Stuart Francis, Torch River. Mr. Stuart's rare find has recently been reported very fully in "Chickadee Notes", the weekly bird column of the Winnipeg Free Press, conducted for the past twenty-five years by A.G. Lawrence.

The Solitary Sandpiper is quite commonly seen in migration feeding along wayside ditches and ponds - usually alone. It is a small, plainly garbed shorebird, dark grey above and white below, and in flight shows dark wings and white barring on the tail. The interesting point about the Solitary Sandpiper, however, is the fact that until comparatively recently its nesting habits were one of the unsolved mysteries of American bird life. Sandpipers, as a class, are ground-nesters, laying their eggs in a shallow depression scraped in the ground. The Solitary Sandpiper, however, is the exception, and deposits its handsome, heavily spotted eggs in old nests of tree-nesting birds such as the robin, cedar waxwing and blackbird - a habit never suspected by the early birdmen on this continent. The first known set of eggs were discovered by a homesteader in northern Alberta in 1903, but it was not until the 1920s that the fact became generally known, and even since then very few nests have ever been found.

Most modern bird books suggest that the nests should be looked for in bushes and trees near small lakes and muskegs of the northern woodlands; however, the nest discovered by Mr. Stuart was located only a few rods from his house - and then was only found by chance. For several days in June, 1944, he had noted a pair of Solitary Sandpipers around his barn yards, but did not suspect the presence of a nest. Then early one morning when he was hurrying down his spruce-lined driveway after some straying cattle he was surprised to see a Solitary Sandpiper dart out from one of the spruce trees, and reaching up he found four eggs in an old nest six feet up from the ground.

Mr. Lawrence is of the opinion that the Solitary Sandpiper may at times breed quite far south, even around Yorkton and Winnipeg, and thinks that some folk may have come across this tree-nesting sandpiper and never realized that it was anything out of the ordinary. He is anxious to get further records for an eastern ornithologist.

Snowy Owl Questionnaire We were very pleased to hear from Mr. Dewey Soper that he had received a good response to this questionnaire, and since it would have been quite a task to write to everybody individually he has asked us to insert the following note of appreciation - "I gratefully acknowledge the co-operation of the Yorkton Natural History Society with respect to the Snowy Owl Questionnaire in the last issue of the "Blue Jay". The response to this has been excellent and deeply appreciated. I now wish to thank one and all for the kindness shown in sending me detailed information of the late incursion of these birds into the Prairie Provinces."

(Signed) J. Dewey Soper,
Federal Bird Officer, Winnipeg.