

REMINISCING

C. St. A. Nixon, Lintlaw.

Mrs. Henry Byhoffer, of this district, loaned me some copies of the BLUE JAY and after reading them I decided to subscribe because I have been interested in bird life since I homesteaded here over forty years ago.

In your April-June issue of 1949, there is a reference to Rats. They first appeared here about 20 years ago, I think, when one was seen running out of a stook. After that they were everywhere around the farm buildings, and caused me to give up an outdoor root cellar by burying the turnips in a filthy mess of chewed-up particles. One spring my wife had a coop and outdoor run of young turkey poults in front of her kitchen window, in order that she might keep an eye on the crows who were partial to them. One day she saw a rat jump out and run under the house. On investigation she found about 15 poults had been killed, their brains sucked, and the carcasses neatly stacked in a corner of the run. Apparently rats can be neat and tidy as well as dirty and messy. The rats disappeared by a lucky chance. A tin of poisoned grain which had been used for gophers was put away in the cellar out of reach of the children. In the spring I noticed the tin which I had forgotten all about, and found four or five dead mice in it. We never saw another rat around the place after that. They were very partial to cranberry jelly, and rolled the jars off the shelf in the cellar at every opportunity, and cleaned up on the contents.

Forty years ago bobolinks were common. They used to rise hovering a few feet above the bushes beside the trail. They have completely disappeared hereabouts for many years.

At that time the country was decidedly wet. "Three-day rains" were frequent. Now we only get pale imitations, and that rarely. Shallow sloughs of all sizes were everywhere. At first the population of the one on the farm was mainly grebes, coots and blue bills. These later became fewer as more of the larger ducks moved in. Now, nearly all the sloughs have dried up except in the spring and are growing hay and grain. Farmers say they will never fill up again. But when the waters started to recede, old bulrush stumps could be seen far out from the shore line, no doubt witness to an earlier drought before I arrived.

I was long puzzled by hundreds of crows that used to congregate every night in a bluff by the house. As nesting and brood raising was in full swing, I was at a loss to account for their presence. Dr. Speechly, to whom I put the question, thought they were unattached young males. I bowed to his authority though I could never see how there could have been so many of them in the crow population in the vicinity.

EVENING GROSBEAKS

Cliff Shaw

The Evening Grosbeaks have been abundant this spring, appearing in greater numbers than I have ever seen in other years. Companies of from 10 to 30 could be seen on any day since March 9 and today (April 8) a chap phoned to enquire what they were. He saw upwards of 200 behind the city hall.