

Familiar Birds of the Alaska Highway Country

By Eva Mudiman, Whitehorse, Y.T.

THE GENTLE CHINOOK had breathed softly over the land and though it was but mid-March, a deceivingly spring-like atmosphere permeated the Peace country. Walking down the highway, the silence was so intense you could hear it. On either side stretched miles of gloomy spruce and jackpine stands, occasionally broken by burned over areas, strewn with masses of dead-fall, now appearing darkly through the melting winter snows. A couple of Northern Ravens, flying low, broke the stillness with their raucous cries; watching them disappear into the woods, I suddenly became aware of many clear chirping birdcalls coming from a grove across the way.

On investigation, I saw what looked like flashes of scarlet in motion against the green boughs. So many beautiful little red birds, either hanging from the boughs or darting about, and so busy were they digging out the cone seeds with their scissor-like little bills that they didn't know I existed. I had seen my first flock of American Cross-bills; there must have been at least thirty but they were too hungry and active to be counted. Every year their relatives, the White-winged Cross-bills, visited the Peace country and also the Yukon. However, the Red American Cross-bills had been rarely seen here in the vicinity of Dawson Creek, B.C.

Some Birds Found on the Northern Canadian End of the Alaska Highway

WINTER BIRDS

IN LATE NOVEMBER the Snow Buntings arrive, and it is often mid-April before they proceed to their Arctic nesting regions. The Canada Jay or "Whiskey Jack", as he is called here, is a saucy camp pet. Other winter favorites are the Black-capped and Brown-capped Chickadees, also the little Slate-colored Juncoes. One winter when the temperature dropped to 81 degrees below zero many of these little birds were found to have succumbed to the cold. The Raven and Magpie, in search of food, are also familiar winter sights at camp, while from the woods resound the clear whistling notes of the cruel Northern Shrike.

On their daily trips to clear the highway and wage their constant battle against the encroaching glaciers, the maintenance men of camp Mile 1156 saw many birds, such as the Snow-white Ptarmigans, several Hawks, large Grey Eagles and the Little Downy and the Northern Hairy Woodpeckers. The Bald-headed Eagle grows so huge there and gets very bold. A small husky puppy, which always followed its master on the underblade, was pick-

ed up by one of these eagles, one day. The man, hearing pitiful cries, rushed out in time to see the bird drop the dog, but its back was injured. Flocks of little Red-polls are seen here in March and November. In late December and in January the Alaskan Grosbeaks arrive.

SPRING AND SUMMER BIRDS

THIS YEAR (1951), Spring came late to the Yukon. The first mountain Bluebird was seen about April 14 and it was May 1 before we heard the Robin's cheery carol again. The ice on the Yukon River went out on April 29, but the ice on the lakes will remain for about a month later. Thus it is that the Gulls are now flying above the rushing, green river waters. How beautiful they look as they circle and wheel in the air with the sun glacing off their snowy wings. Some Gulls noted here are the Arctic Tern, Bonaparte's Gull and the Herring Gull. Sandpipers, Plovers and Killdeers are also seen along the beaches.

In Spring and Fall flocks of Canadian Geese, Snow Geese and Whistling Swans fly over in their graceful formations. Some Ducks seen were

Black and also Green-headed Mallards; Green and Blue-winged Teal, Canvas Backs, Wood Ducks, Pintails and Shovellers, and it seems most of the ducks are represented here on our many lakes and streams.

In June you may be awakened in the middle of the night by strange weird cries, like insane laughter coming from some moonlit lake; it is only the Loon with his long neck and breast of many colors declaring that he is lord of the lake. The maintenance men used to put out a small net and usually caught enough white-fish and grayling for the six camp families. One night, however, when they lifted the net, all they found was the Loon in the middle of it. It was all tangled up and had scared the fish out. It screamed and flopped helplessly while the men untangled it.

The Rusty and Red-winged Blackbirds are here and many members of the Sparrow families, such as the Pine Siskine, Fox Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows, Chipping Sparrows and the Purple Finch.

Several Thrushes, such as Olive-backed, Varied and Russet, also Flickers and Warblers such as the Myrtle Warbler, Black-poll and Orange-crowned Warblers, are here in summer. Tree Swallows, Barn Swallows and Bank Swallows are also seen here. The Bohemian Waxwing is found deep in the woods and in July the tiny Ruby-throated Humming Bird hovers over the flowers. All these birds are similar to those found in the Peace Country, excepting the gulls.

Two ornithologists from Harvard, who visited the Yukon Experimental Farm at Mile 1019, reported seeing some seventy-nine species of birds within a radius of about sixty miles. This was in June 1948. Thus it is evident that many more birds can be discovered here.

*"Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies.
I hold you here, root and all, in my
hand.
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all
in all,
I should know what God and man
is."*

Welcome Spring Visitors

By Anne Olson, Big River

LAST FEBRUARY an unusual visitor was observed here—a Saw Whet Owl. He stayed at the hay yard an entire day and then disappeared, returning two weeks later. He was not timid and permitted me to walk to within a couple of feet of his fence and post perch.

Two Hawk Owls were seen during the winter and the usual number of Snowy and Grey Owls.

With spring definitely here again—it seems chilly to regard the weather as summerlike—the birds are back again for another season. The Crows and Slate-Colored Juncos returned April 2; one Song Sparrow appeared on the 4th; Tree Sparrows the 6th; Eastern Phoebe on the 28th. A flock of Sand-hill Cranes went north on the 28th also, and from May 2 to 6th, approximately four hundred geese were noted.

There are many bird visitors this year. An Evening Grosbeak visited our bird bath and Red-breasted Grosbeaks are quite common. There are several Baltimore Orioles here, it being the first time they have been seen. I believe they will nest here as they spend a great deal of time in the trees close by.

For several days a large flock of warblers have been feeding on the poplar seeds. Included were the Black and White, Yellow, Black-poll and Blackburnian Warblers.

Bluebirds For Happiness

By E. K. Jones, Raymore



THIS SPRING I made a bird-house out of an old hollow stump and nailed it up on a tree by the house. The next day a pair of Bluebirds came and inspected it. They looked it over for about a week and then began making a nest. Now they are the proud owners and are getting quite tame. They will sit in the hole or on the ledge outside it when anyone passes by.