

THE LUCK OF A NATURALIST - by L.T. McKim, K.C.

For over 20 years I have kept a bird list, but with May 1943 nearly gone the number of species recorded was much lower than usual. Owing to the cold spring, I had done little driving, and had seen very few wading birds.

On May 23rd I visited a chain of sloughs lying east of the C.N.R. roundhouse where Canvasbacks, Redheads, Ruddy, and many other ducks usually abound. I hoped also to find some of the waders. My luck was in, for, on a shallow, muddy pond, I found scores of them. I have in my nature library 100 colored plates of the birds of New York State, one of which depicts several sandpipers - the White-rumped, Pectoral, Baird's, Semipalmated and Least. There they were - all of them - not fifty feet from me, just as though they had stepped out of the picture! The white-rumped sandpipers were particularly numerous. What caught my eye most, however, was about a dozen Knots, which I did not remember ever having seen before. The breasts of these fine fellows were brick red and some had a decidedly dark, almost black streak on their crowns. I wondered if they had come from South Africa, Patagonia or New Zealand to which distant lands these great travellers sometimes go for the winter.

Among the waders I spotted a single semipalmated plover and a beautiful female Wilson's Phalarope. Just before I had reached the slough a pair of Upland Plovers attracted my attention with their very characteristic call, as they dropped down near one of the pot-holes, and a moment afterward a Purple Martin winged its way over the rushes. I had not seen either species this year and often fail to record them at all. Upland Plovers, very plentiful when I was a boy, are rare now. The sight of them takes me back to the early days in Manitoba when I found dozens of their nests every year.

In that one spot I added 9 birds to my list. I had seen the phalarope before this spring and in fact, they are always to be found at those sloughs, and nest there every year. The next day I went back for another look. There wasn't a single wader there.

Now a word about the identification of some of the birds I saw. Least and Semipalmated sandpipers are the smallest of our wading birds and hard to tell apart at a distance. However, they will generally let you approach very close to them. The Semipalmated is usually a lighter colored bird than the Least, and the former has black legs while those of the latter are olive green. A Baird's Sandpiper is like a large Least Sandpiper and has a greyish bib. It is frequently seen with its more diminutive cousins and the difference in size is quite noticeable.

A week before I had seen eight Dowitchers at the slough mentioned. The Dowitcher's coloration is very like the Knot's but it has a bill like the Wilson's Snipe, about three inches long, while the Knot's bill is slightly less than 2 inches. The remaining birds I have mentioned can hardly be mistaken for any others. For those who have not seen it, let me advise keeping an eye open for the dainty semipalmated plover. He is a smaller edition of the Killdeer plover but has only one ring around his neck.

---

YORKTON NOTE: On June 6 we found a Wilson's Phalarope's nest with four eggs at Rousay Lake. When flushed from the nest the male bird simulated a broken wing, just as the Killdeer does, to divert attention. Phalaropes are unique, in that the usual order of things is reversed; the larger and more brightly colored bird is the female, and further still, it is the male Phalarope which takes on the task of incubating the eggs.