

BIRD NOTES

The unseasonable weather this past spring had, as might be expected, a marked effect on bird migration. As noted in the last issue of the "Blue Jay", abnormally mild temperatures in March brought many of the early migrants back some weeks ahead of their usual time schedule. Then came cold weather in April and our bird list for that month was far shorter than usual. The larger bodies of water remained ice-locked and returning diving ducks were forced to resort to the smaller ponds and sloughs. L.T. McKim, K.C., reported that on April 29 he estimated that he saw 1000 Scaup, 250 Redheads, 25 Buffleheads and 30 or 40 American Mergansers at the C.N.R. Dam at Melville. "Never before," he wrote, "have I seen anything like the number of diving ducks at one spot, as I saw this Sunday."

Continued cold weather all through May caused a heavy mortality among small birds. The heavy snow storm around "V-E Day" took a terrific toll of Myrtle Warblers in the Yorkton district. Transient birds that ordinarily stay for a few days and then move on north to nest "stopped off" much longer than usual - Juncos and Tree Sparrows, the earliest sparrows to come back, were still around when the Harris and Clay-colored Sparrows arrived in the middle of May and the Harris Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow lingered in the underbrush until the very end of the month.

We noted too an unusual number of Warblers the last week of May and first week of June. So many were picked up dead, however, that we concluded these tiny mites perished from the dearth of insects and that the others lacked the energy to move on northward. (In normal years Yorkton is not a good place to see warblers). The Swallows, too, due to cold weather, suffered badly from lack of insect food; at Leech Lake both Barn and Cliff Swallows sat in misery in low bushes around the Ducks Unlimited cabin, and when J.H. Wilson and Bill Carrick walked through, the birds would follow close behind them apparently hoping that some insects might be stirred up. All in all, the spring of 1945 was not a happy one for the birds.

The Screech Owl, which was listed as a "hypothetical species" in Mitchell's 1928 bird list for Saskatchewan, seems slowly becoming more common in wooded areas in the eastern part of the province. On Feb. 28 E.M. Callin, Fort San, noted a Screech Owl sitting in a choke-cherry tree just a few feet off the Sanatorium road as he went to work. "Returning in the evening", he writes, "I stopped so I could look the bird over and it never moved although I advanced to within a few feet. Here I examined it at leisure, noting the "ears" and its grey plumage phase. It did not move when I threw bits of snow at it and I am sure had it been within my reach I could have taken it off the perch in my hands." (Note. - The Screech Owl occurs in two colour phases grey and reddish-brown. This "day-long" sitting in one spot is characteristic. Those who do not know this bird are reminded that its call is an eerie quaver, not in any way a "screech.")

Some time ago we reported two instances of small birds (wrens) nesting in the lower portion of a Swainson's Hawk's nest. This occurrence may be more common than is usually supposed. Last summer we discovered that a pair of English Sparrows had built their untidy nest in the side of a large Swainson's Hawk's nest which we had known for several seasons. Dick Bird also told us of finding an English Sparrow's nest in a similar situation last summer. This is something for which members might be on the lookout. As far as we know it is only the nest of Swainson's Hawk which is utilized in this manner.

In this connection, however, Mrs. Elizabeth B. Flock told us that in the coulees of the Badlands, in the southern part of the province, she has seen the Mountain Bluebird nesting in cracks in the cliffs immediately below one of the huge nests of the Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawk.

BIRD NOTES (continued)

The Nipawin Advertiser-Journal carried an interesting story this spring of a savage and unprovoked attack on a man by a Great Horned Owl. According to the paper Joe Wall was changing a tire one evening with the aid of a flashlight held by his brother. Suddenly an owl pounced on his back. Its cruel claws penetrated his leather jacket and all his clothes beneath. As soon as his brother realized what had happened he killed the owl, but even then it failed to free its surprised victim." This is a puzzling occurrence; it has been stated that the Great Horned Owl will attack anyone walking near its hunting grounds and wearing a cloth or fur cap which the bird may mistake for a rabbit ! but surely a man's leather-clad back can hardly have suggested any legitimate prey.

The Starling is evidently not having everything its own way. Mrs. Marion Nixon, Wauchope, reports that at their farm when the Grackles came back this spring and found the Starlings in possession around the barn and the trees in its vicinity, a serious altercation took place and the starlings had to retire to the shelter belt. Dick Bird also witnessed a battle royal between starlings and flickers for the possession of a nesting hole in a telephone pole. - More power to our native birds!

Ring-necked Duck. About 20 seen by E.M. Callin at Fort Qu'Appelle on April 29 and a single bird May 1. Mr. Callin states that he found he could "separate them from the Lesser Scaup at a considerable distance."

Hudsonian Curlew. Noted at Melville by L.T. McKim, K.C., May 20. An arctic nesting curlew rarely seen in migration on the prairies.

Red-backed Sandpiper. One or two seen during a space of two weeks from May 24 to June 7 by Bill Carrick at Leech Lake. Reddish back and black belly patch.

Hudsonian Godwit. Seen at Leech Lake May 25 by J.H. Wilson. Recognized by white rump. A darker bird than the Marbled Godwit.

American Avocet. A single bird seen at east end of Qu'Appelle Lake May 6 by E.M. Callin. Eight pairs nesting on gravelly island at Leech Lake in company with Ring-billed Gulls, reported by Bill Carrick.

Robin. An albino Robin present at Moosomin in April. According to Mrs. H. Downing, "the bird did not possess a single colored feather, and was a dazzling white."

Philadelphia Vireo. One picked up dead at Yorkton June 5. Closely resembles the Warbling Vireo but underparts clear yellow.

Magnolia Warbler. Many noted in migration at Yorkton this year. One picked up dead June 5.

Connecticut Warbler. Captured beating against a downtown store window in Yorkton. Banded by Stuart Houston.

Purple Finch. Noted at Yorkton June 3 by Stuart Houston. Normally they would have gone through before May 15. First seen date for this year April 24.

Lincoln Sparrow. A large number of these unobtrusive little sparrows noted in migration at Yorkton and at Sheho (W. Niven).