

Prairie Horned Lark (*Otocoris alpestris praticola*) Nesting at Newbury, Mass.— On August 4, 1908, I discovered this species in a low brood tract, a short distance outside the city limits, locally known as 'Common Pasture.' This is nearly level, clayey, open pasture land extending from the rolling coastal hills on the west, down to the border of the salt-marshes, with an area of about two square miles, a region which I should think was well suited to the tastes and habits of this bird.

On this date I saw a single lark, in company with Vesper Sparrows, along the roadside, and for several days following noted the same bird in about the same locality, mingling freely with the sparrows, or alone.

Each season since 1908 I have found this species in about the same place. During the earlier years I saw rarely more than two or three birds but of late they have increased in numbers. In June, 1915, I found, and frequently saw throughout the remainder of the month and during early July two adults and five immature birds, which would seem to indicate their breeding here.

During the season of 1916, necessary attention to business precluded my searching for more substantial evidence of their breeding. The birds were present however throughout the greater part of the summer and I saw what were probably individuals from this family on one or two occasions in one of the neighboring towns. Apparently they have become regular summer residents.— S. W. BAILEY, *Pittsfield, Mass.*

Starlings Nesting near Washington, D. C.— A pair of Starlings have taken up their abode in a locust tree on my place, eight miles north of Washington, D. C., and at the present date (25th of April, 1917) have young in the nest. I should be very glad to learn if others have noted Starlings nesting this year south of Pennsylvania. In this connection I would add that the male bird utters the notes that sound like a coarser and lower rendering of the Wood Pewee's usual three-note phrase, concerning which there was some comment in 'Bird-Lore' for March-April, 1911. This is the first time I have heard this utterance of the Starling, but from the pitch and quality of the notes I feel no hesitation in venturing the opinion that the phrase is normal with the bird and not an imitation of the Wood Pewee.— HENRY OLDYS, *Silver Spring, Maryland.*

A Pennsylvania Starling Roost.— For some years past an enormous flock of English Starlings has roosted in the evergreens at 'Aldie,' the estate of Mr. William R. Mercer, on the outskirts of Doylestown and during the winter of 1915-16 a number of Purple Grackles associated with them, being 'resident' for the first time within my experience.

The flock of Starlings presents the most interesting bird phenomenon I imagine, since the disappearance of the Passenger Pigeon. My attention was first called to the birds by the late Arthur Chapman, member of the Board of Game Commissioners of Pennsylvania, whose residence farm adjoined 'Aldie.' He estimated that there were a million birds in the

flock, but, while it was impossible to make an accurate estimate of the number, my impression is that Mr. Chapman's figure was far too low. The birds first began to assemble late in December, reached the largest number in January and early February, and from that time began to decrease until about the first of March, when all but a limited number disappeared.

I walked out to 'Aldie' to see this curious sight several times. On January 17, when the flock was as large as it was at any time, I stationed myself at the top of a gentle elevation in the Dublin Pike, about 500 yards from the evergreen roosting place,—a good point for observation. A few minutes after 5 o'clock in the afternoon the birds began to congregate from all directions, most of them coming from the north and west. In small flocks of from 50 to probably 500 they flew past me in rapid succession—flying low until they came to a tree in the open upon which they would alight. I could see the birds alighting upon other trees a quarter of a mile away, in flocks of varying sizes, while Chapman's woods, a large tract of timber, possibly thirty acres in extent, was black with the birds. The notes of many Purple Grackles were heard mingled with those of the Starlings. By 5.20 o'clock the birds grouped themselves in larger flocks and settled on trees nearer their roosting ground. Then, a few minutes later, as the twilight began to deepen, the birds arose, not by any concerted movement, but always in one flock from a tree, and gradually centred in one great flock directly over 'Aldie'—the flock soon becoming compact and deep and stretching out over an area of several acres. The writhing, twisting mass performed many curious evolutions and gyrations. At first the bird mass resembled very much a vast rolling black cloud, driven before a thunder-gust, the edges curling and overlapping and then broadening out. The individual birds on the outer edges of the flock could be distinguished, but it was the mass effect that was impressive. The whir of the countless wings was like the sound of distant wind or the roar of a waterfall. It was such an unusual sound that the horse driven by a farmer, who halted his team to talk with me, became frightened and so nervous that he was obliged to drive away. Gradually the cloud-like formation changed to funnel-shape, resembling nothing so much as a cyclone cloud and the change was made with a sound resembling that produced by a cyclone's sweep. Then the cloud-like mass changed again and lined up in plane formation, with a straight front like an army in battle array for a final charge. This line moved directly towards me overhead. Strangely enough, a line of Purple Grackles was in the forefront of the army, their larger size and darker color making them conspicuous. In fact the Grackles seemed to endeavor to keep on the outer edge of the mass as much as possible, and they were noticeable because they had difficulty in falling in with the rolling and more graceful flight-gyrations of their more numerous companions, the Starlings.

Frequently the whole vast flock made sharp turns, and as they did so it was with a sound that was audible for a long distance, somewhat like

the crack of a gigantic whip, only deeper, mellower and more voluminous. These evolutions were continued for fully ten minutes, when the vast flock began to settle into the evergreens for the night somewhat after the manner of Chimney Swifts dropping into a chimney. Then something, perhaps a hawk or a squirrel, would disturb them after nearly all the birds had secured a perch, and with a roar that was really awe-inspiring the whole flock would again take flight, circle over the trees for a few moments and again alight. This performance was repeated perhaps half a dozen times by all or a part of the flock until, just at dusk, they settled into the trees to rise no more that night. But they kept up an incessant chatter resembling the sound made by a locomotive in the distance blowing off steam, and it was long after dark, before this sound wholly died out. People interested in bird study came long distances to witness this sight.

It is possible this flock of Starlings may have been the cause of the Purple Grackle remaining here all winter. The weather was mild down to February 1. They did not seem to suffer for food until then. They associated with the Starlings until well into February, when they seemed inclined to flock by themselves. February, with its snow and low temperatures, alternating with warmer conditions, was rather hard on them, but a great deal of food was put out for them by people of the town, and they weathered the month out pretty well. Indeed, they seemed to suffer more from the bad weather which prevailed after the usual date of their arrival here from the south than they did prior to that time.

William R. Mercer, Jr., who resides at 'Aldie,' informed me that in the middle of January, following a snowstorm, he found thirty dead Purple Grackles and two or three dead Starlings at the roosting place. He estimated the total dead Purple Grackles there for the entire winter at about 40. The excrement from the roosting flock was in such quantity that it was hauled away in carts and was sufficient to fertilize a considerable area of ground.—GEO. MACREYNOLDS, *Doylestown, Pa.*

Evening Grosbeak at Birdsboro, Pa.—I would like to report the presence of a male Evening Grosbeak on the Brooke Estate, Birdsboro, Berks Co., Pa., on April 15, 1917. On April 22, accompanied by a party of students, I again saw what was apparently the same bird at the same place.—G. HENRY MENGEL, *Reading, Pa.*

The San Lucas Sparrow (*Passerculus rostratus guttatus*) in California.

—Among some sparrows collected by the writer and sent to the U. S. National Museum are nineteen skins of this subspecies, a form not hitherto recorded from California. One male was obtained at Anaheim Landing, Orange County, Oct. 5, 1916, and eighteen skins, of both sexes, were collected at Sunset Beach, Orange County, between November 13, 1916, and January 31, 1917. A few examples of true *P. r. rostratus* were collected with them. The birds were identified by Mr. H. C. Oberholser.—EDWARD J. BROWN, *Los Angeles, Cal.*