

ONTARIO BIRD NOTES.

BY J. H. FLEMING.

THE following notes refer chiefly to the unpublished Ontario bird records of the eight years, 1921-1928, particularly in Toronto where I have been able to watch the changing conditions. The English Sparrow has finally adjusted itself to the disappearance of horse-drawn vehicles from our streets; the coming of the European Starling is too recent for the full effect of the disaster to be felt, but already feeding stations are being monopolized by it, and it may in the future be a decisive factor in preventing the spread of the introduced Ring-necked Pheasant by clearing up the winter food supply.

The period covered by this paper has been marked by Owl migrations of unusual interest, and by the spread into new territory of the Cardinal and the Mockingbird. Winter migrations of Hawks and Owls have become difficult to record; new roads have been built and the hunter brings his birds by motor to the taxidermist when formerly he sent them by post or express and thus provided a clue to their place of origin.

Members of the staff of the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology have added much to our knowledge of Ontario birds and should, within the next two or three years, be in a position to publish a distributional list.

Gavia immer. LOON.—One taken off Toronto Island, December 17, 1918, in immature plumage; an adult taken at Inwood, Lambton County, January 6, 1920, was very thin and there were a few white feathers showing on the head; a male taken at the mouth of the Humber River, Toronto, on November 19, 1923, by Mr. Stuart L. Thompson, is in the R. O. M. Z.

The Loon recorded by me as *Gavia arctica* (Auk, XVII, 1900, p. 176) and afterwards as *Gavia immer* (Auk, XXIII, 1906, p. 452 (= p. 542)), a female in immature plumage taken on May 22, 1899 off Mimico, a suburb of Toronto, in Lake Ontario, has been returned to me from the National Museum of Canada where it has been for some years in the mounted collection. A careful comparison of this specimen proves that it belongs to the subspecies proposed by Dr. L. B. Bishop (Auk, XXXVIII, 1921, p. 367) as *Gavia immer elasson*, a small race from the interior of North America to which he gave the English name of Lesser Black-billed Loon. The measurements of the bird when fresh, length 724 mm., wing 324 mm.

are small even for this subspecies. Dr. Bishop includes northern Ontario in its probable summer range so it is not surprising that a non-breeding bird should occur on Lake Ontario in May. This bird in number 21659 in my collection.

Cepphus mandtii. MANDT'S GUILLEMOT.—A male in winter plumage taken at Toronto, December 11, 1920 is in my collection. The identification of this bird is important as the only previous Toronto record, a female taken December 10, 1895, was doubtfully recorded by me as *Cepphus grylle* (Auk, XXIII, 1906, p. 441). I said, "It is possible this bird is *C. mandtii*, as its beak is small, and the plumage very white." The bird was in a sealed case and is believed to have since been destroyed.

Alle alle. DOVEKIE.—One taken during the last week of October, 1924, on Lake Mississippi, near Carleton Place, Lanark County, Ontario, was examined by Mr. Edward F. G. White of Ottawa and Mr. P. A. Taverner.

Larus argentatus. HERRING GULL.—Beginning possibly twenty years ago, certainly since 1911, this Gull has increased in numbers, and is now abundant at all seasons about Toronto. The creation of garbage dumps on the lake front provided added food, and the Gulls have since followed the changing position of these dumps inland from the water. The building of sea-walls has given added protection in all weathers, while the creation of new sand beaches, and the gradual clearing of the waters of Toronto Bay have also been factors in the increase of Gulls about Toronto. The increase has been general on the Great Lakes, where some breeding colonies were given protection by the Audubon Society. In 1910 New York State passed a bill protecting Gulls and they had long been protected in Ontario, though not effectually on the breeding grounds. The Migratory Birds Convention Act of 1916, however, has given general security to these birds.

Both Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls were formerly scarce about Toronto Bay during the breeding season; now they may be counted by the hundred along the breakwaters leading into the harbor. Nearly all are non-breeding birds, but that some would breed if undisturbed is evident, the late Mr. C. W. Nash having picked up eggs of the Herring Gull that had been washed up on the shore, evidently laid by birds that frequented the eastern sand bar.

Larus delawarensis. RING-BILLED GULL.—A much less abundant species at Toronto than the Herring Gull, though the proportionate increase has been as great, and from the same causes. In summer the number is hardly a third of that of the Herring Gull, and this proportion decreases in winter.

Larus franklini. FRANKLIN'S GULL.—A female taken at Toronto, June 1, 1898, and recorded by me as *Larus atricilla*,¹ has been identified as *Larus franklini* by the late Dr. Jonathan Dwight. This bird is in first

¹ Auk, 1906, p. 442.

nuptial plumage, but the primary tips are worn, and the hood is only partially dark.

This leaves one Toronto record of *Larus atricilla*.¹ This bird I saw in 1917 when it was out of its case, and I have no reason to think it was wrongly identified; it is a fully adult bird with a hood, but I have not re-examined it.

Larus philadelphia. BONAPARTE'S GULL.—I have observed this Gull in increasing numbers at Toronto, and at the mouth of the Niagara River. Formerly fairly common in spring and fall, now a non-breeding resident, often in flocks of one hundred or more. The increase began about 1910, and flocks of three hundred or more are now not uncommon in May on the Niagara River.

Sterna paradisæa. ARCTIC TERN.—Mr. J. L. Baillie, Jr., has called my attention to an old specimen now in the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology, taken at Toronto in May, 1891, and formerly in the collection of the Biological Society of Ontario. The label is in the handwriting of the late Mr. J. B. Williams.

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos. WHITE PELICAN.—A male No. 29825 in my collection was taken May 25, 1921, on Lake Ontario off Whitby, twenty-nine miles east of Toronto.

Charitonetta albeola. BUFFLE-HEAD.—Saw two on February 17, 1925, at Sunnyside, Toronto. One was a male in full plumage. A few other Toronto winter records are on file at the R. O. M. Z.

Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus. EASTERN HARLEQUIN DUCK.—Two immature males were taken at Eastend, a few miles east of Toronto, on Lake Ontario, December 4, 1920. These were presented to me by the late Mr. John Maughan, and are now in my collection.

Branta bernicla glaucogastra. BRANT.—One alighted among Canada Geese in Jack Miner's ponds at Kingsville, Ontario, on October 27, 1918. It was seen by Mr. W. E. Saunders on November 4, and I saw it a year later at Mr. Miner's.

Olor columbianus. WHISTLING SWAN.—On December 6, 1922, I examined one that had been taken a day or two before on Lake Ontario between Brighton and Toronto. An immature male, now in the collection of the R. O. M. Z., was picked up with a broken wing in the lake off Fisherman's Island, Toronto, on December 4, 1922. Another remained on Toronto Bay for several days after April 1, 1928; a photograph of this bird, taken by the 'Toronto Globe' photographer, was reproduced in that paper on April 6.

Mr. W. E. Saunders has recorded the increase of Whistling Swans near Kingsville, Ontario² only a few miles from the western end of Lake Erie. This increase began during the spring migration of 1921, and two years later Mr. Jack Miner estimated that on April 10 (1923), there were nearly one thousand Swans resting on the sand bars near Kingsville. At Niagara

¹ Trans. Can. Inst. III, 1891-92. Ornithological Report p. 41.

² Can. Field Nat. XXXVIII, 1924, pp. 26-27.

a flock went over the Falls on March 31, and another on April 8, (1923). The newspaper reports were exaggerated, but Mr. Hoyes Lloyd has published a careful account from eye-witnesses.¹ Six of the Swans that survived the April disaster were sent to Mr. Jack Miner and placed in his sanctuary.

The Kingsville flock received additional police protection in 1924 and Mr. W. E. Saunders, in a letter to a Toronto paper,² estimated that on April 5 there were one thousand birds in the flock. When protected the Swans soon became tame.

The first Swans arrived at Niagara Falls on March 4 (1924), but did not alight, and in April it was believed that only two had gone over the Falls. On April 9, a flock was reported near Bronte, twenty-five miles west of Toronto on Lake Ontario; a single bird was observed in Ashbridges Bay, Toronto, on April 12, and one was reported to have been taken at Schomberg, in York County, on April 22.

I am indebted to Mr. Hoyes Lloyd for the following notes, based on reports made to him by officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to whom the protection of the Swans at Kingsville and Niagara is entrusted.

1925. Kingsville—March 23, four to five hundred Swans seen on the lake; March 25–April 5, the Swans numbered approximately two thousand up to March 29 and gradually decreased until April 5, when all migrated north.

1926. Kingsville—first reported on March 22. Niagara Falls—April 6, a lone Swan noticed near the Maid of the Mist landing on the Canadian side, the only one reported in the Niagara Falls district that year.

1927. Kingsville—March 11, it was reported that several hundred Swans had arrived and that every protection was being afforded them; March 27, a report indicates that there had been about three thousand Swans at the most, along the lake shore, about the same as other years. The flight lasts about three weeks, during the first week the number gradually increases, the second week the flock is at its peak, and during the third week the numbers decrease. The Swans go up and down the lake shore for ten miles each way, and make Kingsville their headquarters, roosting along the sand bar each night. Ten or fifteen dead Swans drifted ashore during this spring; some of these were sent to Ottawa for post-mortem examination, and it was found that they had died from heavy intestinal infestation with a liver fluke. Considerable fighting among the Swans was reported on April 1, and it was thought this might have caused some deaths.

1928. Kingsville—one found dead during the spring was infested with a liver fluke.

Rallus elegans. KING RAIL.—One taken December 25, 1919, at Frenchman's Bay on Lake Ontario; the bird showed no signs of wounds or disease.

¹ Can. Field Nat. XXXVII, 1923, p. 138.

² Toronto Globe, May 2, 1924.

Coturnicops noveboracensis. YELLOW RAIL.—A young bird taken in Ashbridge's Marsh, Toronto, by Mr. H. M. Sheppard, October 2, 1920.

Falco islandus. WHITE GYRFALCON.—An adult male taken at Oshawa harbor on Lake Ontario, November 15, 1927, by one of a group of hunters who were shooting Snowy Owls for sport. Mr. W. J. Stevenson recognized the bird and preserved it and it is now number 31776 in my collection.

This is an extreme example of the white phase of *candicans*, there are a few spots of black on the back and shoulders and the usual dusky wing tips.

Falco sparverius sparverius. SPARROW HAWK.—Winter records are unusual, one bird seen by Mr. Stuart L. Thompson at Toronto, January 22, 1922;¹ one seen December 23, 1925 at Lambton, west of Toronto by Dr. Paul Harrington;² one taken at Islington, a few miles west of Toronto, January 26, 1927, is now in the R. O. M. Z. I saw one at Toronto on November 29, 1927.

Tyto alba pratincola. AMERICAN BARN OWL.—I examined one on September 3, 1919, probably taken on the 1st near Kingsville, Essex County. One was taken alive oat Norval, Halton County, June 13, 1923, by Mr. C. E. Cantelon. Mr. L. L. Snyder has given me the following records for publication: A mounted bird now in the R. O. M. Z., taken at Tobermory, Bruce County, about 1890, and formerly in the Owen Sound Collegiate Institute; one taken December 21, 1927, at Bow Park Farm, Brant County, which is now in the collection of Mr. W. G. Neff of Brantford; one taken in Tuscarora township, Brant County, prior to December 15, 1927, now in the collection of Mr. Stuart L. Thompson; one taken alive at St. Catharines, Lincoln County, about February 17, 1928, and sent to the Toronto Zoo.

Scotiaptex nebulosa nebulosa. GREAT GRAY OWL.—This Owl appeared in numbers in the country north of North Bay during November, 1922, and extended into southern Ontario in diminishing numbers till the end of February, 1923, coincident with a great flight of Richardson's Owls. A specimen shot at Woodville, Victoria County, about February 9, 1928, was sent to the R. O. M. Z. by Dr. Fred Starr.

Cryptoglaux funerea richardsoni. RICHARDSON'S OWL.—A flight of these Owls occurred during the winter of 1922-23 through Ontario. The first were taken at Cobalt and Elk lake in Northern Ontario, between October 20 and November 7; in Muskoka the first record was at Craigie Lea on November 17. The first Toronto bird was taken December 22, and they continued to be taken in the immediate vicinity of the city till January 25.

In all I examined twenty of these Owls, and this could have been only a small part of the number taken that winter. Single records in Southern

¹ Can. Field Nat. XXXVI, 1922, p. 14.

² Can. Field Nat. XL, 1926, p. 9.

Ontario are not unusual in winter but this is the first flight of Richardson's Owl I have any record of in the province.

Bubo virginianus subarcticus. ARCTIC HORNED OWL.—I examined one January 21, 1920, taken on Pelee Island, Lake Erie, a few days before. One was killed at Toronto, January 25 of the same year.

Nyctea nyctea. SNOWY OWL.—The greatest flight I have any record of in Ontario took place in the winter of 1926-27. The first record was at Toronto on November 13. A female shot at Acton, Halton County, on November 14, is in the R. O. M. Z. On November 16, they were noted in Algonquin Park by Mr. Mark Robinson. To November 18, thirty specimens had been received by one taxidermist in Toronto. Up to December 31, when the flight eased up, I examined over sixty birds which must have been only a small part of those taken in Ontario. The last record which I had was an almost spotless male taken at Arthur, Wellington County, March 10, 1927, although the R. O. M. Z. has records of odd birds seen during March, April and May. The last record was a bird seen until June 12, at Long Point, Norfolk County.¹

Surnia ulula caparoch. HAWK OWL.—A small migration reached Southern Ontario in November 1914 and another in January 1920. At Toronto one was taken October 27, 1922, and another October 18, 1924. There has been a decided increase of records in southern Ontario in the last fifteen years.

Nuttallornis borealis. OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER.—As a migrant this species has increased at Toronto. Between August 9 and 26, 1921, I saw five in my garden, and four between August 18 and September 12, 1926.

Perisoreus canadensis canadensis. CANADA JAY.—Several were seen by Mr. J. Townson at Fisherman's Island, Toronto, on October 8, 1911. One was seen on October 31, 1921 by Mr. J. H. Ames, two miles south of Woodbridge, a few miles north of Toronto.

Sturnus vulgaris. STARLING.—First noticed in 1919, the Starling has increased with surprising rapidity and flocks of considerable size are now not uncommon in winter in southern Ontario. The Toronto records to 1925 have been given by Snyder and Baillie.² Mr. Harrison F. Lewis has published an excellent review of the bird's economic status in his 'A Distributional and Economic Study of the European Starling in Ontario.'³

Quiscalus quiscula æneus. BRONZED GRACKLE.—A sudden increase in nesting Grackles occurred in the spring of 1919, in the vicinity of my garden in Toronto. For many years there had been but one nesting place, and usually only one nest and that some distance away, but that spring a pair chose a deserted and roofless bird-box that was fixed to the top of a

¹ Auk XLV, 1928, pp. 99-100.

² Can. Field Nat. XXXIX, 1925, pp. 149-150.

³ University of Toronto Studies, Biological Series No. 30. Toronto, 1927.

slender twenty-foot pole in my garden. The birds, on being driven out, built a second nest in the eaves-trough of the next house. Altogether four or five pairs raised young in various situations on nearby houses. Young Grackles outnumbered young Robins in the garden that summer and this situation was common to other places in Toronto. Since then the Grackles have been everywhere about the city, though possibly not so abundant as in 1919.

Pinicola enucleator eschatosus. NEWFOUNDLAND PINE GROSBEEK.—That there are two forms of Pine Grosbeaks in Ontario in winter has already been pointed out by Major Allan Brooks.¹ The common form is *leucura*, and it has remained for Mr. W. E. Clyde Todd to fix the identity of the other as *eschatosus* of Oberholser.² Mr. Todd has selected a male taken January 15, 1895, at Toronto (No. 5467, Coll. J. H. F.) as representing this race.

Loxia curvirostra percna. NEWFOUNDLAND CROSSBILL.—A red male taken at Toronto, April 9, 1896 (No. 1887, Coll. J. H. F.) agrees with *percna*³ of Bent.

Passer domesticus. HOUSE SPARROW.—A decrease in numbers was noted at Toronto in 1924, and a marked decrease in both city and country in 1925, owing possibly to a cold spring. In 1927 a slight increase began, which has continued through 1928, but the present number in Toronto is considerably less than ten years earlier.

Cardinalis cardinalis cardinalis. CARDINAL.—Recent records indicate a permanent extension of range in southern Ontario.

A male was seen by Mr. J. H. Ames at Toronto, May 15, 1921; another was seen not far from my garden May 19, 1922. A pair remained during the winter of 1923-24, at Georgetown, Halton County. Several Toronto records have been made by members of the Brodie Club and are on file at the R. O. M. Z.

The Cardinal is now a rare permanent resident at Toronto.

Bombycilla garrula. BOHEMIAN WAXWING.—On January 6, 1920, Mr. J. H. Ames saw a flock of between twenty and thirty of these Waxwings feeding on mountain ash berries on Charles Street, Toronto. Four days later the flock had increased to nearly one hundred and there were a few remaining at the end of the month. On December 7, 1925, Mr. J. Townson observed a flock of eight of these birds in a mountain ash tree on Leuty Avenue, East Toronto.

Protonotaria citrea. PROTHONOTARY WARBLER.—Mr. Robert V. Lindsay took a female near Pottageville, York County, on May 20, 1928. The late J. Hughes Samuel saw two at Toronto Island, May 13, 1900, and his diary gives a clear description of them. The record was not used, at his request, but left for a confirmatory record.

¹ Condor, XXIV, 1922, p. 87.

² Proc. Biol. Soc. Washington, XXVII, 1914, p. 51.

³ Smithsonian Miscell. Coll., 60, No. 15, 1912.

Vermivora chrysoptera. GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER.—A female taken in my garden, May 21, 1928, is the first definite Toronto record.

Mimus polyglottos polyglottos. MOCKINGBIRD.—Like the Cardinal the Mockingbird has extended its range in southern Ontario. A female was taken by Mr. A. A. Wood at Duncrief, about fifteen miles north-west of London, January 6, 1921, and one was recorded at London during the winter of 1922-23 by Mr. W. E. Saunders, who also reviews the previous Ontario records.¹ Two were reported at Hamilton during the winter of 1927-28, one of which has been recorded,² and I saw one at McNab, in Lincoln County, May 12, 1928.

Penthestes hudsonicus nigricans. LABRADOR CHICKADEE.—A pair taken by Mr. A. A. Wood at Coldstream, Middlesex County, the male October 31, the female November 28, 1919, and recorded by him as *P. h. hudsonicus*.³ These are now in my collection and the male has been compared by Mr. Outram Bangs with the type of *nigricans*, of Townsend.⁴

Poliophtila cærulea cærulea. BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER.—One taken at Toronto on May 6, 1928, by Mr. Stuart Thompson is the fourth Toronto record. One was positively identified in a ravine at East Toronto on the same day by Mr. R. J. Rutter.

267 Rusholme Rd. Toronto, 4, Ontario.

¹ Can. Field Nat. XXXVII, 1923, pp. 116-17.

² Can. Field Nat. XLIII, 1929, p. 41.

³ Can. Field Nat. XXXV, 1921, p. 100.

⁴ Auk, XXXIII, 1916, p. 74.