

Prairie Horned Larks Perching in Trees.—In Mr. Gale B. Pickwell's study, 'The Prairie Horned Lark' (Trans. St. Louis Acad. Sci., XXVII, 1931), although he has quoted generously from my paper (Auk, XXXIII, pp. 281-286) he has omitted my probable unique experience in having watched a pair of these Larks when bringing food to their young, and always first perching in a tree. I have yet to find a reference to these Larks perching in trees at all, and all the text books state definitely, that they never perch in trees. Mr. Pickwell says (p. 69) that I have not made it clear just how I located a certain nest at its very beginning. On reference to my paper, I find that in order to discover just when the "paving" to these nests is added, I "lifted" a recently laid set of eggs from a nest about 240 yards from my bungalow, on April 14, 1915. At the back of this nest the ground rose somewhat abruptly into a ridge, behind which, it was easy for me on the following day to lie concealed and watch the female commence the scrape for the second nest, which was finished at 4.30 p. m., as stated in the table of events recording the times at which the paving to this nest was put in place, also, the laying of the eggs.—HENRY MOUSLEY, 4073 Tupper Street, Montreal.

The "Phoebe" Call of the Chickadee.—From childhood I have imitated the "phoebe" call of the Oregon Chickadee. I never took notes on the call, but mentally associated it with spring and summer and cannot recall ever hearing it in the winter.

After reading in 'Bird Song' by Aretas A. Saunders that the Chickadee uses this call at all seasons, I began to make a careful check on the Black-capped Chickadees (*Penthestes a. septentrionalis*) of Montana. For two winters, 1931-32, 1932-33, I carefully listened for the birds to voluntarily give this call and then attempted to coax it from them by whistling the notes. They have usually showed signs of interest and possibly a little excitement when I have whistled, but have never answered. On November 12, 1933, I at last inveigled one bird to whistle "phoebe" a few times. This was my only winter record. During the spring and summer, the poorest imitation of "phoebe" will excite the entire flock to a concerted "phoebe" chorus. From these observations I had concluded that in the West the notes are used almost exclusively in the spring and summer.

The winter of 1933-34, however, presented unusual conditions and during January until time of writing (February 14) the Missouri River has been free from ice, butterflies are flying, gophers are running over the prairie and the Chickadees are whistling "phoebe"! I can only account for this by the spring-like weather.

I have never heard the Chestnut-backed Chickadee (*P. r. rufescens*) sing the "phoebe" call or give any notes resembling it. During the summer of 1933 I was in daily contact with this species in the San Juan Islands, yet never was able to attract the slightest attention by whistling this call. While the birds sing the common "chickadee-dee-dee" and give other undecipherable twitterings, I failed to hear anything that could be interpreted as "phoebe."

The Mountain Chickadee (*P. g. gambeli*) has a variation to the call. During the spring of 1933 I spent two days in the Dearborn Mountains, Montana, and had the opportunity of hearing and recording its songs. In the cottonwoods and low bushes growing along the river bottom of the Dearborn River several flocks of Black-capped Chickadees were observed. I recorded their "phoebe" song with the stop watch and pitch pipe and found it identical with the calls heard elsewhere. High up on the hills in a scattering growth of pine, I found the Mountain Chickadees. All seemed to be whistling their peculiar variation of "phoebe." Both the pitch of the song and the quality of the voice are different from those of the Black-cap. It had been comparatively easy to whistle the notes of the Black-cap, but I found the Mountain Chickadee was three full steps higher, making it necessary to use a tooth whistle in imitating. The voice has a harsh rasping quality unlike the clear whistle of other Chickadees. The notes are all given on the same pitch, the first note so short it appears as a grace note, followed by the two longer notes. The birds answered my calling, but I noticed a lack of the inquisitiveness characteristic of the Black-caps.

While descending from the hills, I found a flock of Black-caps about half way up the hill side in the bushes of a small canyon. A member of this flock confirmed Saunders' findings that birds learn new songs by imitation,¹ for this bird was adding part of the Mountain Chickadee's notes to his own. The pitch and voice were those of the Black-cap but the first part of the call was identical to the Mountain Chickadee. Without a doubt this flock of birds often associated with the Mountain Chickadees and in so doing this bird imitated their call, adding his own notes to the end.—
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A Melanistic Black-capped Chickadee.—While walking near Ithaca, New York, on October 29, 1933, I noted that one individual of a fair-sized flock of Chickadees (*Parus a. atricapillus*), had a totally black head. The following day I returned and collected the bird, which proved to be a male in good condition. The specimen was made into a skin (Cornell University Museum No. 4955).

Description: Entire head, including the cheeks, black, less glossy apparently than on the crown of normally colored individuals, this black extending onto the upper back and breast considerably farther than in normal specimens, invading even the median region of the belly; rest of plumage dark throughout: the back a little darker than normal, the belly and flanks much darker and washed with brown, the wing-coverts, primaries, secondaries, and rectrices edged with gray rather than whitish. The measurements are those of an average adult male.

So far as I could determine the behavior and call notes of the melanistic individual were normal, and all other birds of the flock appeared to be normal in coloration. I have found but one other record for melanism in the Paridae; two melanistic individuals of the Coal-titmouse, *Parus ater*, were observed in a flock in England (British Birds, I, p. 384).—JAMES T. TANNER, *Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.*

¹ But cf. Allen *antea* bottom of p. 184, and others. [Ed.]