

SONGS OF THE BAIRD SPARROW

By A. DAWES DU BOIS

One morning I awoke with a new bird song in my ears. *Ippsy-tipsy-tee-e-e* sang the stranger in a charmingly musical voice. His song ran down the scale to the old familiar tune of "Three Blind Mice"; but the *ippsy* and *tipsy* were each rendered with rising inflection. The syllables were clearly enunciated, though the *tee-e-e* ran into somewhat of a trill. During most of the day my *Ippsy-tipsy-tee* sang his delightful little song in the meadow near my cabin; and several of his kind were present for the next two or three days.

The date of this musical innovation was June 25, 1916; and the place was on the prairie of Teton County, Montana. I could catch only glimpses of the singer. He was obviously a sparrow; showed no white in the tail; seemed streaked with blackish above; and was also streaked below.

By July 5 the song had changed. The musical *ippsy-tipsy* was no longer heard; it had been replaced by a couple of monotones not suggestive of the above description. At first I thought that my *Ippsy-tipsy-tee* had gone, and that another species had arrived.

On the tenth of the month the new song was noted as: *s-stick-y—stee-e-e*, with the *stee-e-e* (or *tee-e-e*) a tone or so lower than the *sticky*. Another attempt at phonetic rendering made it *s-spick-y—spee-e-e*. A male bird was taken while singing this song and was identified as a Baird Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdi*). The sparrows afterward changed their tune several times, proving themselves quite versatile singers. The following records were made while the birds were singing.

July 13: *t'zip-zip-zip-zip-zip-ee-e-e*. This is uttered at the rate of four "zips" per second; all the "zips" on the same note. The *ee-e-e*, which terminates in a trill, is three tones higher.

On the same date another song ran: *zip-zip-zip-zip-zé-dee-e-e*. This whole song is delivered as rapidly as one can pronounce the syllables. It is complete in much less than a second. The *ze*, which is accented, is a half tone lower than the "zips", and the *dee-e-e*, at the end of the song, is about three tones lower than the *ze*.

July 17: A bird in the drier part of the meadow sang five "zips" before the *ze-dee*, in the form described above. One bird sang: *s'stick'-y—steé-e-e-e* (descending). Another: *s'stick'-y—ster-ree-e-e-e-e*, ascending on the terminal *ree-e*. And yet another song was: *zip-ziper-cher-cher-cher-ee e e e* in which the *cher-ee e e e* is ascending.

A certain individual sang at regular, brief intervals: *ste-stick-turdle-éé-e-e-e*, the *ee-e-e-e* having rising inflection, with the last portion trilled. And that interrogation was invariably answered, with tireless regularity, by a bird in a different part of the meadow: *s'ticky—stee-e-e-e*, slowly uttered, with falling inflection on the *stee-e-e-e*, and the end running into a trill.

July 19: *stick-sti-stipper-ster-ree-e-e-e*. In this the *stipper* is lower and the terminal trill is higher.

July 24: *ip-si-sticker-sticker-ree-e-e-e*, wherein the *ip-si* and the last of the *ree* are on the same note. The first *sticker* is lower; and the second *sticker* and beginning of the *ree* have rising inflection.

Another song of the same date was recorded thus: *iss-sticky-stee-e-e-e*, in which the *iss* is more pronounced than usual, and the *stee-e-e-e* has falling inflection.

July 26: *zip-si-stiddle-stiddle-ee-e-e-e*. This is not loud; it is musical, and the terminating trill has an unusual warbling quality. The two "stiddles" are lower than the rest of the song.

These sparrows were nesting at the edge of the meadow. A nest containing six eggs was found on July 16; and another with four eggs on July 21.

The next year, Baird Sparrows visited this meadow on May 26; and they were present on May 29, June 3, and June 16. My earliest record for the song was May 24, at another and much larger flooded meadow about a mile and a half away. The song on that occasion was one of the *stee-stick-turdle-turdle-e-e* variations. When I chanced to pass that way on the 16th and again on the 21st of June, several birds were singing. Probably they were nesting there.

In the third summer the Baird Sparrows were casual visitors at my station. I heard them on three occasions: June 30, and July 5 and 18. The songs they brought me were always interesting and pleasing. But I never heard again the dainty, blithe-some roundelay of my *Ippsy-tipsy-tee*.

Excelsior, Minnesota, June 30, 1931.