

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Changing Status of the Starling in Utah.—In their recent article on Starlings as winter residents in the Uinta Basin, Utah, Killpack and Crittenden (Condor, 54, 1952:343) state that "as far as could be determined the Starling has not yet become established as a breeding species in the state of Utah; however, it is possible that it nests in outlying parts of northern Utah." Actually the species was found to be nesting at Salt Lake City as early as 1949. Reference to this was recently made by Kessel (Condor, 55, 1953:49). Although she reported Starlings breeding at Salt Lake City, no details were given and the reference cited (Lockerbie, Utah Audubon News, 1(6), June, 1949:1) is a mimeographed series not generally available. It seems desirable, therefore, to summarize at this time the history of the species in Utah and to note its changing status in the state. As this bird has become established in Utah, a pattern has been followed of first appearing in small flocks during the winter, of then becoming increasingly abundant and firmly established as a winter visitant, and finally of nesting on the part of a few individuals.

The first record of the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in Utah was the discovery by Thayer Evans of 13 individuals feeding with Brewer Blackbirds at the Jeremy ranch on the northwestern outskirts of Salt Lake City on February 26, 1939. A specimen was obtained, which is now in the University of Utah Museum of Zoology. Intensive and continuous observation in the region over many years by C. W. Lockerbie and the Audubon group had failed to reveal the presence of the species in Salt Lake Valley heretofore. Subsequently, Mr. Lockerbie, the writer and others saw these few birds (Lockerbie, Condor, 41, 1939:170). A few years later, Grater (Condor, 44, 1942:41) reported the species as a migrant in southern Utah, 200 having been seen at Mt. Carmel, Kane County, on January 2, 1941.

Observations were continued by Lockerbie each winter after this in the course of his regular weekly field trips, although no special attention was given the species. A resume of his data follows: In 1940 he saw them on three occasions. On February 18 a few were mixed with a flock of Brewer Blackbirds at Haynes ranch west of Salt Lake City; on February 25 one was seen at Lehi, Utah County; on February 27, 17 were counted at the Jeremy ranch. Thus they seemed to be spreading through the region. Two observations were made in 1941 at or near the original place of occurrence. These were on February 2 and November 10. Only one observation was made in 1942 when on December 27 three were found at the Jensen Packing Plant on Second West and 30th South in Salt Lake City. The species was seen twice in 1943, when three were seen on January 3 at Jeremy's and one on December 19 at Jensen's. In 1944 four recordings were made of small groups from the various ranches and feed lots where they had been previously noted. The only observation for 1945 pertained to 19 birds seen on January 28 near Jeremy's. In 1946 they were evidently much more numerous, for Lockerbie saw them seven times, his observations being scattered through January, February, October and December. Furthermore his counts were now running into the hundreds. For instance on January 20 a flock of 250 was seen at Decker's Lake and about 200 at the new Jensen Feed Yard at 23rd South and 30th West. In 1947 he had 13 recordings with several new points of occurrence in Salt Lake Valley. This suggests that the Starlings were no longer confining themselves to the various stock yards but were roaming about the valley. He noted them feeding on Russian olives for the first time this winter, thus possibly indicating changing food habits. In 1948 there was only one listing, but this is noteworthy since the flock, seen in Davis County, numbered about a thousand birds. Starlings were noted nine times in 1949 between January 1 and March 13. In addition there were two records in October and December. This year they were seen at points within the city, as at the Capitol grounds, as well as at the feed yards and ranches west of the city. While he had only nine recordings for 1950 an increase in numbers was again indicated as well as a wider east-west spread. The flocks hanging around the feed yards still numbered in the thousands. In addition a flock of a thousand Starlings was seen on February 4 near Garfield and a flock of about a hundred was observed still farther west at Mill Pond, Tooele County. On March 5 this year Lockerbie found ten Starlings at the headquarters of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Boxelder County. The earliest fall record this year was of two seen at Magna on October 8. In 1951 there were only nine records with no impressive numbers, but the data indicate continual expansion and more general winter occupancy. The westernmost record was at Timpie Springs, northwest of Grantsville, at the northern end of the Stansbury Mountains, Tooele County. The latest date that they were seen in spring was March 11 and the earliest fall date

was September 22. In 1952 he had recordings ranging from Brigham City south through Salt Lake Valley, indicating a still wider and more general range. On April 10 a pair was observed in courting antics about his home.

The increase in the population in Salt Lake Valley through the years is nicely illustrated by the figures for the annual Audubon Christmas bird counts: 1940, 1; 1941, 5; 1942, 82; 1943, 1; 1944, 0; 1945, 5; 1946, 243; 1947, 1,143; 1948, 3,025; 1949, 4,294; 1950, 2,950; 1951, 17,542; 1952, 8,874. The discrepancy between the counts of 1951 and 1952 is probably attributable to weather conditions. In 1951 the snow was deep which caused a concentration of Starlings within the area of the count. An open winter characterized 1952 and the birds were widespread. From these data it would seem that after a few years of sporadic occurrence the population started to increase, the change being rather abrupt from 1946 on.

The first evidence of the Starling nesting in Utah came when a nest was discovered in a tree on the west side of Salt Lake City on May 25, 1949. The nest was located in an old woodpecker or flicker hole. The nesting pair was feeding young at this time. Three young were seen. The identity of the birds was determined by Thayer Evans and reported to C. W. Lockerbie who in turn made the facts known in the Utah Audubon News (*loc. cit.*). It was this note that was cited by Kessel (*loc. cit.*). As corroboration of nesting in 1949, Boyd Shaffer reported seeing young Starlings near Farmington Bay in Davis County on August 29, 1949.

There is also evidence that Starlings nested at Randolph, Rich County, in northeastern Utah in the seasons of 1950 and 1951. On May 25, 1951, some students brought to Ray Jorgensen, the school teacher at Randolph, two eggs of the Starling. They reported that Starlings had been seen to enter a shed for several successive evenings. Here a nest with four eggs was found. Two eggs were taken, which Mr. Jorgensen brought to the University of Utah. The students also stated that Starlings had nested in the same shed the previous spring.

The following miscellaneous notes have a bearing on the further spread of the Starlings in Utah. In the fall of 1948 one was reported at Kanab, Kane County, in central southern Utah by Mrs. Clara M. Shields. The bird was alive but sick when found on September 18, 1948, by children near the school where she taught. In the fall of 1949 a flock of fifty or more was noted at Richfield in central Utah. The exact date is unknown. The record comes from Miss Jennie Reynolds of nearby Monroe who received a Starling from a Mrs. Young of Richfield. Also during the fall of 1949 numerous flocks of Starlings were reported from various areas in and about Salt Lake City by Reed Ferris, Kenneth Tanner and G. A. Gump. The latter was troubled by a flock of 50 Starlings that repeatedly took grain at his home in Holladay which he had put out for pheasants. He constructed a dummy owl to frighten away the Starlings. This apparently was successful. Starlings were reported at Coalville on October 1, 1949, and near Henefer on December 6. Thayer Evans reported hordes of Starlings at Ogden Bay between October 14 and November 28, 1949.

Evidently the species is becoming ever more common in Utah Valley as suggested by the observations of Richard Hansen. During the winter of 1951-52 he found Starlings in several communities bordering Utah Lake. For instance on January 20, 1952, he saw a flock of about 150 at Payson, 200 at Santaquin, 30 at Salem, and 50 near the Geneva Steel Plant. They were frequenting apple orchards and eating dried fruit, Russian olive trees and they also visited livestock feed yards. They tended to remain in separate flocks, but on one occasion they were seen in a mixed flock with Bohemian Waxwings. In previous winters he had not seen them in the vicinity of Santaquin, his home. Robert Selander observed Starlings intermittently in the winter of 1948-49 on the western outskirts of Salt Lake City and reported that they had all left the region by March 28.—WILLIAM H. BEHLE, *University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 15, 1953.*

Purple Gallinule in Chavez County, New Mexico.—On June 12, 1953, an adult Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*) was collected thirty miles east of Roswell, New Mexico, on the Graham ranch, twenty miles from the nearest marsh or body of water. The bird was in a severe state of starvation and expired soon after capture. To my knowledge this species has never been recorded in the state and is not listed by any distributional works on this area. This specimen was identified with the assistance of Vester Montgomery of the New Mexico Military Institute. The skin has been sent to the United States National Museum.—SAM E. TANNER, *Roswell, New Mexico, June 22, 1953.*