

THE GREAT BLUE HERON.

Ardea Herodias.

BY F. W. CURTIS, WAUWATOSA, WIS.

The Great Blue Heron breeds in suitable localities throughout this state. A heronry of this species that I have in mind is about twelve miles from this place. This heronry is in the heart of an almost impassable tamarack swamp, and covers over about ten acres of swamp. There are, I should judge, about one hundred and fifty nests, sometimes two and three in a tree, ranging from 45 to 75 feet from the ground. Where the nests are at the extreme height given, the trees are often only three inches in diameter, and it is a trial of one's nerves to be up in the air on so small a support.

The nests are very bulky, 3 to 5 feet across, composed of sticks. The hollow in which the eggs are deposited is lined in some instances with straw, but the majority have no lining whatever. The branches of the trees afford little or no support on account of their small size, and so the nests are built entirely around the tree, thus adding greater security to the whole structure. On one side is a larger shelf, as it were, on which the eggs are deposited; this is the nest proper.

The number of eggs in a clutch varies from three to five, four being the usual number found. Incubation extends from about the 20th of April to the 15th of May and even later.

Three sets of four eggs each, total 12 eggs, in my collection, average respectively: Set I, 2.68x1.82; Set II, 2.56x1.81; Set III, 2.54x1.82. Total average, three sets, 2.59x1.81. Ridgeway, in his manual of N. A. Birds, gives 2.50x1.50, subject to variations, as the measurements. It will be noticed, especially in the first set, that this is true. Like all the eggs of the Herons, the eggs of this species are unspotted, of both light and dark shades of bluish-green, more or less soiled by contact with the nests and marked somewhat with calcareous material.

In the Great Blue Heron, the crown of the head is pure white, with two or three black feathers dependent from the back of the head; neck grayish-brown, back and wings slate-blue, changing upon lower parts of wings and tail to black; under parts, black and white; legs and feet black.

It is a beautiful sight to watch the Herons, some setting in the nests, some flying and some standing tall and majestic upon the dead snags, and it makes a picture long to be remembered with pleasure.

THE LARK FINCH.

Chondestes Grammica.

BY J. A. SINGLEY, GIDDINGS, TEXAS.

The Lark Sparrow is a common summer resident here, arriving from the 1st to the 10th of April, and departing early in November. It can be found anywhere in the uplands and prairies during its stay with us; but it does not frequent the bottoms. It is one of our best singers and occupies the same position here that the Grass Finch does in the northern states. The birds mate shortly after their arrival, and by May 1st nest building is in order, and eggs can be taken from the 10th of May until the last of July. The first nests are usually placed on the ground, but with the advance of the season as many or more nests will be found in trees and bushes than on the ground.

The nest varies considerably, sometimes being of grass throughout (this is the case when built on the ground) and again, of a mixture of grass and weeds lined with horse-hair. Very often an old Mockingbird nest is appropriated and reduced to smaller dimensions by filling up with grass and lining with hair. On one occasion I found where the Lark Finch had fitted up a nest of the Orchard Oriole, enlarging it to suit and depositing its eggs in the swinging nest.

Like most of the Sparrows, this species is sober colored. The upper parts grayish-brown, the middle of the back streaked with black: under parts white, tinged with brownish, a black blotch on the breast, top of head chestnut, with a median stripe of whitish. The lateral tail feathers are black, tipped with white. When flying, the tail is spread and the white tips show plainly, making it one of the easiest of the Sparrows to identify. The usual number of eggs in a set is four or five, but I have found as many as eight eggs in a set. Color, grayish-white, spotted and marked with dark, almost black lines and scrawls. The eggs resemble those of the Baltimore Oriole. Average, .85x.65.