

AUGUST NOTES FROM A WATERING PLACE.

BY ALTHEA R. SHERMAN.

Having a blind about three hundred feet from our house, I have spent many hours in it, watching the passing show. It faces a spot in a very wet meadow—which possibly may be considered a swamplet—where a row of willows crosses the water-course at a distance of thirty feet from the blind.

Here the rails come to preen and sun themselves; the first Sora of this summer having been seen on July 19, and the first Virginia on August 1. Accessions to their numbers may be found almost any morning after a foggy or rainy night. At first they may be a little more timid than later in the season, but in autumn months before the blind was built I have sat in full view of them without apparent check upon their movements, and they have not stirred when a friend has walked along and stopped to talk about them. On the farther side of the willows is a rank growth of saw-grass, so dense that in the summer months the rails are never seen to penetrate it, but they pass up and down the watery paths picking their food from the shallow water or along its banks. Easily seen is the fact that the adult Sora is the master rail, driving the Virginia before him as he darts in hot pursuit into the rank growth of weeds and grasses. From æons of living in fens and boggy places with his domineering cousin the Virginia Rail may have acquired the startled, grotesque gait that he takes when after standing in dignified attitudes for several minutes he suddenly rushes off, as if he had seen a frightful apparition. Among themselves the young Soras are quite playful, but still more sportive are the Virginia Rails. With a cry two or three of them will bound into the open space under the willow trees, suggesting the advent of clowns upon the stage, and will chase each other about, shaking their wings and flying from the ground for a foot or two in a very amusing manner. They are something of acrobats, too, as one is sometimes seen to mount to the top of a fence-post or to the branch of a willow until five feet or more from the ground. Among these the

King Rail is an infrequent visitor, and a hope is cherished that some day there may be seen the Yellow and the Little Black Rail.

So far as known the nesting data of the Red-winged Black-bird for August were nearly the same for last year as for this. On the first day of the month in each year there remained two occupied nests, in one of which the birds were just ready to leave. In the former year the nestlings were deserted, either because the mother was killed or she was seized with the wanderlust and left them to follow the rest of her tribe, all of which had departed except the owners of the other occupied nests. This year there was a flocking of Redwings in the meadow. So unobtrusive was their coming that one scarcely realized that a hundred or more of them were present, except when the arrival of a Marsh Hawk or some other disturbing element brought them up into the air. The flock did not remain for the night, but a little before and after sundown the birds in companies of twenty to forty would fly eastward, perhaps to some island in the Mississippi River. In the morning they came drifting in, a few at a time.

The month has not been without its bird music. Of fifteen species observed in a half hour early on August 5, eleven were heard singing or giving their call notes. Famous singers have given a series of farewell concerts. Almost every day, with surprising regularity, an hour or two before noon, from a dozen to a score and a half of Bobolinks have gathered in the willow trees and have sung together. There is little suggestion of the rapturous solos of June in their twittering music. It, like their plumage, has undergone a great change. This year a decided decrease in many of the species has been observed, but the greatest has been among the Bobolinks that in the spring were no more than a third as numerous as in recent years.

When the House Wren has a brooding mate near he may rival the Song Sparrow in the number of songs delivered each day, but the most tireless singers of them all is the Short-billed Marsh Wren, whose rattling little ditty may be heard every hour of the day and night. Upon him and the Screech

Owl we must depend for all our August nocturnes. This Marsh Wren sings from any foothold, be it grass-stem, bush, or portions of a fence. He often is seen sitting upon the top of a fence post for many minutes rendering his little songs, and it has been possible to approach within seven feet of him without his omitting a single number. Once when his meadow was being mown he was seen clinging to the last upright grass-stems, keeping just in advance of the moving horses, and all the time he sang. One day early in the month he was caught building one of his dummy nests. As he came up from his nest he sang, flew fifteen feet to his supply-place for material and sang again: thus he passed back and forth, working and singing with unabated energy.

A watering-place, as a favorite resort, does not meet the popular standard unless it has a summer flirtation. This was furnished by a frivolous Flicker that kept two males, sometimes four drumming and bowing and dancing before her all through July, and into August, although these birds were well along in their moult. Two of the courting males are believed to be the same that roost in our barn, and it is one of the evening tasks to see if these lodgers have come in punctually.

Here, in northeastern Iowa, it is not until August that many of the species settle upon some place for their regular roosts for the remainder of their stay in the north. The Cat-bird and Brown Thrasher every season come into the lilac and snow-ball bushes to spend the night. The Kingbird, with his family, returns to a spruce tree that has been their nesting site for many years. Phoebe finds shelter in the maples along with the most brilliant lodgers of all, four merry Orioles, which, sometimes accompanied by two young birds of the year, come in at night whistling gayly, and depart in the morning in the same tuneful fashion: but no Lady Baltimore is to be seen with them. The birds that retire the earliest and are the last to go out in the morning are the Flickers, three of which roost in the barn. They usually come in about a half-hour before sunset and start out a little after sunrise, but occasionally their hours are much earlier and later. For several apparently good reasons it is believed that the Flicker that oc-

cupies a handsome apartment in the "West End" is the same bird that has roosted there for three summers: that returned to roost in the barn last April: that was ardently courted by two females in the latter part of that month: that in an elegant home on the "South Side" helped to rear a family of six with a devotion worthy of any father, be he bird or human. It is likely that he and the other Flicker lodgers are some of this species that have been raised in the barn in the years that have passed. The maintenance of their rights to their own quarters was exemplified by an unusual performance in the second week of the month, when one evening the flirtatious female, followed by three or four male Flickers, arrived and began calling. Soon the owner of the hole in the west end of the barn retired to it. The female, standing on the projecting edge of the roof, seemed to call to him repeatedly before she flew away. There were signs of an approaching rain the next evening when the female arrived first of all. From the roof's edge she inspected the hole then flew to it, went in and comfortably settled herself before the owner arrived. He flew straight to the hole, and without parleying, entered, and in about three seconds the shrieking female flew out and sought a roost in a neighboring tree.

Last year ninety-seven species of birds were identified about our house, and the blind scarcely one hundred yards away. Of these forty-seven species were observed from the blind during August. Although the smallest number recorded as present on any day was sixteen, and the highest thirty-one, the daily average for the month has been twenty-two species. Among these an unusually early migrant was a Purple Finch, first seen August 23; also seen on two days following.

A very rare visitor was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher which came on the last morning of the month. In fact it was the first of the species ever identified on our grounds, and is rarely met with in the woods in this locality. Of the warbler family the first to arrive from the north was the Grinnell Water-Thrush, on August 14, and its departure will be the last of September, just as the Swamp Sparrows begin to come. A peculiarity in its spring and fall movements has been remarked for several

seasons. In the spring it keeps closely to the low ground never but once having been noted in the orchard on the hill, while in the fall migration it is to be found frequently in the trees and shrubbery near the house as well as among the willows at our watering-place.

NOTES ON THE HENSLOW'S SPARROWS (*Ammodramno henslowii*) IN MAHONING COUNTY, OHIO.

BY EARNEST W. VICKERS.

In July, 1907, I discovered that we had suffered an invasion of Henslow's Sparrows at Ellsworth Station, Mahoning County, Ohio, where for almost ten years I have carried on bird observations.

On July 14, while haying in a 14-acre meadow of very heavy upland grass, the fact suddenly dawned on me that a new sparrow voice was all about, and to be heard above the rattle of the hay wagons, and clatter of loader, tedder and other noisy hay-making machinery.

It occurred that I had heard the strange voices for several days, but I was unable to say how long. The shrill, quaint cry sounded like "tis-zeek, tis-zeek," accented on the last syllable, sometimes changed to "tip-see, tis-zeek."

There was a ventriloquial quality about it, for it seemed to be equally remote and near, like the thinner strain of the Grasshopper Sparrow, which I had first observed for Ellsworth in 1895.

When one of these newcomers at length revealed himself, he proved one of the most nervous, excitable of birds and would crouch down and rise up as if about to take wing after the manner of the Meadowlark, turn round and round, all nervous and fussy at being approached, giving utterance to his sharp and characteristic call. I spent several evenings with them after work and secured three males highly developed sexually. There were from nine to twelve males in this single meadow, and examination of neighboring fields revealed no more.

The calling birds probably represented so many pairs.