

FIELD NOTES

NOTES ON THE MIGRANT SHRIKE

During the spring months I was very much interested in the queer flight maneuvers of a migrant Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus migrans*), which spent a large part of every day about a certain field on which I was usually working.

This Shrike (perhaps I should say Shrikes, for this species is common here) had a very regular habit of flying up into the air about twenty feet and, with rapidly fluttering wings, hanging there in one spot for some time. The bird would beat its wings very rapidly for twenty seconds or longer, but it always remained at exactly the same place, its wings being used only to maintain its position in the air. It made me think of a mechanical bird suspended from the sky by a cord. After this performance, the purpose of which was not clear to me, the Shrike flew away to some post or other alighting place. It always faced the wind, if there were any at all, on the occasion of these peculiar flight antics. Day after day, all through the spring, I saw it thus fluttering aimlessly in the air. It did it dozens or hundreds of times in a day, or perhaps even in an hour, as it felt inclined. It was always a very common practice.

A pair of these birds had a nest of young in a grapevine-covered crab apple tree, at the edge of the field. One day, while plowing corn here, I saw one of the Shrikes capture a mouse behind me in a row I had just plowed. The Shrike was shaking the mouse (I thought it was a young one from its rather small size) very vigorously, and maybe beating it upon the ground. It handled it in much the same way that a domestic chicken kills a mouse. When the mouse was lifeless, or nearly so, the Shrike lost no time in flying toward the nest, the mouse clutched firmly in its bill.

Being a large gray bird, the migrant Shrike is in a class by itself, and since it is a common summer resident here, it is particularly noticeable along the roadsides and in the fields. Though the Shrike may wear the black mark of the bandit, I am disposed to regard him as a peaceful as well as useful neighbor.

The migrant Shrike's efforts in the musical line have always interested me. Sometimes the notes are so rasping and insect-like that it is hard to imagine their coming from a bird. Often the Shrike *news* somewhat like the Catbird. I have also heard it repeat what sounded to me like "*Free dirt, free dirt,*" over and over for a long time, evidently never stopping for breath.

FRED J. PIERCE.

Winthrop, Iowa, July 5, 1923.

A WORD FOR THE ENGLISH SPARROW

Instead of driving away sparrows I try to attract them about my yard, as their presence reassures the hordes of smaller migratory birds which stream overhead here twice a year.

From behind the screens of my porches I can make prolonged ob-

servations of practically every passerine bird which passes this way, on its flight to and from Mexico.

When I throw out scraps of grain, a flock of sparrows and red-winged blackbirds is right down after them; and with these birds come the migrants passing through or entering here.

Today, April 18th, there are two Louisiana tanagers fitting about the shrubbery—males, both of them.

Yesterday a pair stopped by here for about three hours.

A male redstart and a pair of yellow-breasted chats, as well as three blackburnian warblers, have been here for four days today; so it is likely they will go on late this afternoon.

The other warblers keep fairly close to the shelter of the bushes, but the redstart has found my sunny back steps his best morning hunting grounds; and the tanagers have lit several times on a fence close to the section of my porch, where they can almost touch our own birds through the screen wire.

Another valuable function of the sparrows is their police work.

When I hear them begin to chatter I know there is something about which does not belong in the yard.

It may be one of the numerous cats of the neighborhood, a rat, one of the sparrow hawks that winter here, the big red rooster that is always flying over my fence, or only just a strange person.

Shrikes or the big grackles cause no more alarm than do my own familiar few chickens, or the flocks of redwings, with an occasional cowbird and Florida or bronzed grackles with which they are used to feeding.

Sunday morning their timely warning came just in time to save a painted warbler, the only one of its kind I have ever seen this far east, from a prowling cat.

Although they protest, until definitely whipped, against having to give way to the returning martins, the sparrows soon resign themselves to other quarters than the boxes of which they take possession as soon as the martins leave.

ZOE REID.

Gulf Refinery, Port Arthur, Texas.

WATERFOWL NEAR MADISON, WISCONSIN

The area surrounding Madison, because of the wide areas of open water and swamp land, serves as a great feeding-ground and resting-place for migrating waterfowl. In spite of the backward season, these birds were very numerous here this spring, and they were more favorably located for observation than usual, because they were restricted to small areas of open water, and could be, therefore, closely approached. All the birds mentioned in this article, with the possible exception of the Red-breasted Merganser, were seen no farther from Madison than ten miles, while many of them were seen within the city limits. Another interesting fact is that nearly all these birds were seen in April.

AMERICAN MERGANSER—*Mergus americanus*.