

NOTES ON SOME NORTHERN BIRDS.

BY REV. C. W. G. EIFRIG.

KNOWING that bird notes from the eastern coast of Hudson Bay are very scarce, I asked Mr. A. P. Low, who has made many trips to that and adjacent Territories in the employ of private corporations or the Dominion Geological Survey, for his bird notes entered in his diaries and journals during the several trips. Unfortunately these had either been mislaid, lost, or given over to the companies to whom the collections had been turned over, with the exception of the few which, through the kindness of Mr. Low, I am here able to present. I add some of my own notes, which may prove of some interest. Mr. Low's notes are in the form as given to me, with the addition of a few explanatory words.

Notes on Birds taken at Great Whale River, East Coast of Hudson Bay, Lat. 55° 30', Winter 1898-99.

"Nov. 4, 1898. Harold killed two Sharp-tailed Grouse and saw three others. Mr. Gillies says that the birds are rare, but have been taken as far north as Little Whale River."—This is, of course, *Pediæcetes phasianellus*. Macoun, 'Catalogue of Canadian Birds': "Mr. A. P. Low puts its northern limit in Labrador at Lat. 57°."—This would seem to extend the range of this species further east than given by most authors.

"1899. The following birds winter about Great Whale River: Labrador Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis nigricapillus*), Raven (*Corvus corax principalis*), Redpoll (*Acanthis linaria?*), Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*, probably *hudsonicus*), American Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostrata minor*), Shrike (*Lanius borealis*), Canada Grouse (*Dendragopus canadensis*), Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Pediæcetes phasianellus*), Willow Ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*), Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus rupestris*)."—This seems quite a list for this latitude.

"April 17. First Snowflake (*Plectrophenax nivalis*).

"March 26. Kittiwake killed at the mouth of the river; no open water; must have come in from beyond the Belcher Islands. Brünnich's Murre and the Dovekie were found frozen along the ice during the winter.

"May 1. Rough-legged Hawk (*Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis*).

"May 2. Large flocks of Snowflakes, Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*), Shore Larks (*Otocoris alpestris*), two eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), two hawks, and two Robins (*Merula migratoria*).

"May 11. First nest of Redpoll eggs.

"May 13. Long-tailed Duck (*Harelda hyemalis*).

"May 19. Sea Coot (*Oidemia perspicillata*).

"May 20. Red-throated Loon (*Gavia lumme*).

"May 24. Loons and Snow Geese.

"June 2-3. Many White and Blue Snow Geese passing north (*Chen hyperborea* or *C. h. nivalis* and *C. caerulescens*).

"June 12. Eggs of Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) and Eider (*Somateria dresseri*).

"May 11-24. Thirty-three nests of Redpoll.

"May 20. Nest of Goshawk (*Accipiter atricapillus*) in top of large tamarack, containing three eggs. Nest nearly two feet in diameter, made of small branches of larch, lined with small green spruce boughs and ptarmigan feathers.

"May 24. Nest of Robin.

"May 29. Nest and eggs of White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)."

Notes on Birds of Ottawa, Ontario, and Vicinity.

HOLBELL'S GREBE (*Colymbus holbælli*).—Oct. 16 a local gunner took a male on the Ottawa River of this rather rare species. What interested me was its stomach contents, which consisted of a bunch of feathers. As it is not known to feed on anything having feathers, it is somewhat surprising. I looked up the matter in books at my command, but found little in explanation. Warren in his 'Birds of Pennsylvania' states that he found feathers in the stomachs of two of these grebes. In the ancient 'Knight's Pictorial

Museum of Animated Nature,' I found it stated that this grebe plucks out some of its own feathers either purposely to "aid in digestion" or inadvertently while preening. I cleaned the feathers therefore, and on close inspection and comparison it is seen that they undoubtedly are some of its own feathers. But why these birds should swallow so many of their feathers while preening, whereas none are found in the gizzards of other birds that preen just as much, would, I think, be hard to say. Or do they really eat them purposely to 'aid digestion'?

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus glaucus*). On December 2, 1905, the watchman at the Dominion rifle range here, which is on the south bank of the Ottawa River, took a specimen of this gull in one of the several immature plumages. This is the first record for this vicinity.

HYBRID BLACK DUCK (*Anas obscura rubripes?*).—The status of the Black Duck here is quite interesting. According to local ornithologists of long standing and of ability, the facts do not agree with Brewster's position as stated in Vol. XIX of 'The Auk.' We may revert to this sometime in the future. What is to be recorded here is an apparently new and curious hybrid. On last Nov. 20, I saw in the Ottawa market a number of Black Ducks that were strikingly dissimilar to the common form. The head was larger, the neck thicker and shorter, the color blacker, especially also about the head and neck, and the bill and tarsus shorter and stouter. The dealer said they had been shot on the St. Lawrence River, near Montreal. Two ornithological friends of mine, who besides being highly competent ornithologists, are also sportsmen of long experience, say that this form is a hybrid between Black Ducks used on the St. Lawrence as decoys and some domestic ducks. Are similar hybrids noticed elsewhere?—The more common hybrid form, Black Duck + Mallard also occurs here.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*).—There is a flock of semi-domesticated Canada Geese kept here in the residential part of Ottawa by a Mr. Latour. I know there are such semi-domesticated flocks elsewhere, *e. g.*, on Chincoteague Island, Virginia, but I would like to record this flock because it throws some light on the age question. Mr. Latour has one pair since

nineteen years, and they were three years old when he got them from another person; one is nineteen years old, another seventeen. The one he valued most, had died a short time previously, at the ripe old age of 33 years. He feeds them finely cut up hay, much oatmeal, and some sand and lime.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Helodromas solitarius*).—What seems to be the first clear breeding record of this species for Ottawa and its immediate vicinity was made by Mr. Edward White, who last July saw the tiny and downy young of this species two or three days from the egg, together with their agitated parents. This was about ten miles from Ottawa, on the Ontario side of the river.

GREAT GRAY OWL (*Scotiaptex nebulosa*). A specimen of this rather rare casual visitant was shot last Nov. 20, by Mr. W. Kelley, a farmer of South March, fourteen miles west of Ottawa.

SCREECH OWL (*Megascops asio*).—This species has now been definitely established as breeding here. Last July and August Mr. George White found at various times 4-5 Screech Owls in a rarely used outbuilding, to which they had found an entrance, but could not find the exit. Two were starved to death when found, the others were yet alive and were released.

ARCTIC THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides arcticus*).—June 14, 1905, while walking through a partially cleared spruce swamp at Inlet, Quebec, fifty miles northeast of Ottawa, I was attracted by a queer sound emanating from a bush. The sound was as if produced by pulling out the end of a clock spring and suddenly releasing it, producing a wiry, humming sound. The author of it proved to be a male of this woodpecker. In the course of the half hour that I watched him he showed himself master of quite a repertoire of notes and would-be songs. When flying he would say: *chut chut* and then rattle like a Kingfisher. When hammering on a tree and preening himself, he would intersperse those actions by a chuckling: *duck duck duck*. At last a Robin chased him away.—The quaint call of the Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Nuttallornis borealis*): *put take care*, one adding: *putt low*, could be heard at the same time.

CANADA JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*).—While this bird was abundant here during the winter 1904-5, it is entirely absent this winter. Last Sept. 28, I saw a pair at Inlet, Quebec, where they

seem to breed—the Ottawa River may be put down as the southern boundary of their breeding range in this section. One of that pair looked strange, even comical, because he was entirely without tail. Nor was it because it was moulting, for it was fully feathered otherwise as was also its mate. Neither did the absence of its caudal appendage dampen its spirit of bravado, for it sailed into a wasp nest with a great deal of vim, not minding the wasps in the least. Wasps seem to be a staple article of food with them, when to be had, as Mr. Kingston, a local ornithologist, tells me that he has found wasps in their stomachs repeatedly.

RUSTY BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus carolinus*).—The southern boundary of the breeding range of this species seems to approximately coincide with that of the preceding species, at least in this region. July 12 I saw at a small lake in the Laurentian Hills, near Inlet, Quebec, a family of this species. I took one of the young to make sure. They had not come there on their migration, for they always stayed together, there were no migrants about, and in every way acted as if at home.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella socialis*).—Last Oct. 12, a large sparrow wave passed through the country near Eganville, Renfrew Co., Ont. There were Tree Sparrows, Juncos, White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, and the present species. Among these last were a great number having one or several pink excrescences on feet or wings, which seemed to be of a somewhat horny texture. One, on the wing of a specimen I took, was as large as a pea. I never before noticed such growths to be so common as on that day.

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*).—In the large flight of migrants noted under the preceding species, were also quite a number of Field Sparrows. This is certainly a very northerly record for them, the place where they were observed being about eighty miles northwest from Ottawa. A few days previously Mr. E. White had seen one or several near this city. Despite two seasons' diligent searching for them here in summer, I have never been able to find one. How then can they turn up in migration, apparently in the company of birds having come from further north, seems hard to explain.

TOWHEE (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*).—This handsome bird,

an old acquaintance of mine from Maryland, seems to be extending its breeding range to this latitude. While I never saw it here, I was surprised to see a mounted specimen, a male, in the small collection of the keeper at the rifle range, just without the city limits. Upon inquiry he stated to me, that he had seen three or four of these birds near the range during the summer of 1904, of which he shot and mounted the one in question. In the summer of 1906 he saw about ten of them frequenting the same place. It is to be hoped that they return in greater numbers and stay.

UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
AND SPENCER F. BAIRD.

BY RUTHVEN DEANE.¹

II.

BAIRD TO AUDUBON.

Carlisle, June 20th, 1840.

Dear Sir

I was not less surprised than delighted at receiving your kind answer to my letter, for I felt like one who has done an act for which he does not know whether he is to be praised or blamed. I am very glad to hear that you purpose publishing a work on the Quadrupeds of our country, which no one is more capable of doing than yourself. Dr. Godman's work though very good as far as it goes yet is inferior in respect to minute and accurate distinction of species, as well as in being complete. May I take the liberty of asking the plan of your work, the size, expense &c. If you could

¹ Since the publication of the first series of these letters (Auk, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, April, 1906) I have received a number of additional ones. For the privilege of making copies and publishing them I am under many obligations to Miss M. E. Audubon.