

CAROLINIAN AVIFAUNA IN NORTHEASTERN IOWA.

BY ALTHEA R. SHERMAN.

THE map of the life zones of North America shows that a northward projection of the Upper Austral Zone extends up the Mississippi River to latitude 44 degrees. The northern boundary of this narrow strip very nearly coincides with that of the so called "driftless area," embracing a territory of 10,000 square miles, which geologists tell us was an island in the sea of ice during the glacial epoch; that through it the Mississippi River flows in the old channel cut by its waters ages before the glaciers came. Here and there, cut out by erosion of wind and water, still stand vast piles of rocks, often of picturesque forms with their ancient pinnacles and bartizans, saved by their insular situation from the grinding forces of the ice. Thus near the river was left a rugged country over which travel is laborious; portions of the woodlands remain in their original wildness in which some of the solitude seeking species of birds still find a home. It is a territory in which ornithological research has been very slight, the workers being too few to make a general survey, yet for future reference notes on the occurrence of southern forms of bird life in this region may be of some value, and it is the purpose of this article to give my note-book records for ten years in this field. For the most part the field of observation lies a few miles on either side of the forty-third parallel of latitude, and extends back a dozen miles or more from the Mississippi River. As stated before the land nearest the river is bluff; the belt of hardwood forest that originally covered it varied in width from five to ten miles, beyond which the country is rolling prairie.

In addition to those species, which in the strictest classification are termed Carolinian, a few words may be in place concerning the abundance of four species that in the Mississippi valley range a hundred miles or more beyond the northern boundary of the Upper Austral Zone. Of these the King Rail, *Rallus elegans*, and the Florida Gallinule, *Gallinula galeata*, are occasionally met. In some years the Grasshopper Sparrow, *Ammodramus savannarum australis*, may be estimated as a tolerably common summer resident,

while in others it is not found at all. Equally variable are the numbers of the Dickcissel, *Spiza americana*, except that this species varies from tolerably common in some years to abundant in others. Misfortune falls heavily upon it; arriving late, incubation is still in progress when the mowing machines begin their work. The first nests having been destroyed the birds leave, there apparently being no attempt made to build second nests.

The summer records for the Red-bellied Woodpecker, *Centurus carolinus*, show that it has been found in every woodland ravine visited, also found on one out of every three visits to its habitat, indicating that it is not a rare summer resident. In April, 1909, I saw one that had wintered on a farm near Steuben, Wisconsin, and the following winter two were boarders at that place. During the past winter in McGregor, Iowa, two Red-bellied Woodpeckers came daily for food to the adjoining yards of Mrs. M. E. Hatch and Mrs. M. A. Jordan.

For the past two seasons the Orchard Oriole, *Icterus spurius*, has not been seen on our place. In 1910 an old male was here on three consecutive days, and the same thing was true for three days in May, 1907. None was seen in 1905, nor in 1906. A female was here one day in May, 1908, and on the 17th of that month a male, wearing the plumage of the second year; appearing again on June 1 was a bird of this description, which remained until the 3rd of July. Very similar were the records for six weeks or more of the presence of a second year male in the spring of 1903, also in that of 1904. Late one summer previous to the decade under consideration a nest was found evidently built by an Orchard Oriole. It was beautifully woven of green grass, which was still quite fresh, but as no eggs were laid in it, nor the owner ever seen near by it was adjudged the "busy work" of an isolate female.

In the past ten years there have been numerous accounts from the Atlantic sea-board and westward of the northern advance of the Cardinal, *Cardinalis cardinalis cardinalis*. Judging from these reports it appears that this northward movement has been all along the line of its range from northern Massachusetts to the Mississippi River. Unfortunately the number of observers in this region is small; if there were more this report of the Cardinal might show that it is of more frequent occurrence.

On April 17, 1908, I saw a pair of Cardinals at the mouth of Sny Magill Creek, both male and female were singing. This creek is a small tributary of the Mississippi River, emptying into that stream six miles below McGregor. Until very recently, I had believed this to have been the first identification of the species in Clayton County. This credit, however, belongs to Mrs. Hatch, who caught a fleeting view of one in McGregor some time prior to this date. In the last week of December, 1908, a male Cardinal appeared at the food table spread for birds in the yard of Mrs. M. A. Jordan of McGregor. It remained as a regular boarder for upward of three months. Barring the brief glimpse of the Cardinal previously mentioned, this bird was of a species never before seen in that place as is established by the testimony of Mrs. Jordan, who had resided there for fifty years, and by that of several other old time residents. Similar testimony came from Blue River, and Boscobel, Wisconsin, villages situated on the banks of the Wisconsin River nearly due east from McGregor; in them for the first time it is said that Cardinals appeared that winter, two spending the cold months in the former place, and in Boscobel one was seen in March of 1909.

In the following winter the species again appeared in new fields. On November 26, 1909, a female Cardinal spent several hours in our yard in National, Iowa. This place has a prairie location, and is on the water shed between the Mississippi and Turkey Rivers; it is the only place outside of bottom lands or near streams from which the species has been reported. Sixteen days later a male came to its former boarding place in McGregor, spending one day there. On February 10, 1910, feeding with the chickens in the yard of Mr. Harry Barnum of St. Olaf, Iowa, was discovered a female Cardinal, the next day a male joined her, the pair remaining until spring weather came; four weeks or more. St. Olaf on a tributary of the Turkey River lies directly west of the mouth of Sny Magill Creek, distant ten miles in an air line. It is the most westerly point in this region from which this species has been reported.

All records for the succeeding two winters were made in McGregor so far as has been learned. In November, 1910 a pair appeared and were seen at intervals during the winter. Late the following

November one Cardinal returned to his old winter quarters, and before many weeks was joined by two females, the trio spending the long cold winter there. Possibly the amount of cold these birds survived was greater than that endured by Cardinals elsewhere. They experienced on twenty-six mornings in the first six weeks of 1912 zero weather or much colder than that, the mercury falling to 38 degrees below zero on two mornings, while 30, 24 and 25 degrees below were marks reached on other mornings, the averages for the twenty-six mornings being 13 degrees below zero. The summer of 1912 is the first summer in which a pair has been in evidence. "We have not missed seeing them for more than two weeks at a time": is the statement of Miss Eva R. Jordan. That the Cardinal is increasing in numbers, and has become a permanent resident seems to have been established beyond question. No nests of the species have been identified. The finding of them, probably, will be by accident, since hereabout the Mississippi is crowded with many islands, offering ideal summer habitats for these birds: places rarely visited by mankind in which search for a nest would make that for the proverbial haystack needle too simple a matter for comparison.

In the wooded ravines in which occur the Red-bellied Woodpeckers is to be found the Louisiana Water Thrush, *Seiurus motacilla*. Wheresoever the swift waters of a brook wash for some distance the base of a well shaded bluff, there in masses of drift-wood may be found nesting a pair or two of this species. Where the forest has been cut away, and thickets of underbrush have sprung up on several occasions I have thought I saw the Yellow-breasted Chat, *Icteria virens virens*, yet always so far away that identification was not positive. It remained for May 7 and 8, 1912, to become red-letter days for the Chat. On those days one was seen in our yard, was viewed through binoculars and without them as it appeared at various times from twelve to twenty feet away. As a species it must be counted quite rare.

Perhaps the northern invasion of the Carolina Wren, *Thryothorus ludovicianus ludovicianus*, has been as great as that of the Cardinal, if so it has not been noted. There is but one positive record for this species. It was on December 2, 1911, in the same yard in McGregor in which the Cardinal appeared, that the Carolina Wren

was first seen by Miss Jordan, and it was viewed for several minutes at very close range by herself and Mrs. Hatch.

Another rare species is the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, *Poliophtila cærulea cærulea*. An individual of this species was here on August 31, 1908, and for some time was watched through powerful binoculars when no farther distant than twenty to fifty feet.

The last case may possibly be considered by some people as a hypothetical one. It was outside this decade and before the days of the binoculars; but the strange, little, gray bird that through long, hot, August days so constantly sang the unfamiliar notes of 'peto, peto' will always be thought by me to have been a Tufted Titmouse that had wandered north of its customary range.

A DIFFERENT ASPECT OF THE CASE OF ROOSEVELT VS. THAYER.

BY THOMAS BARBOUR.¹

MR. Francis H. Allen, in 'The Auk' of last October, has published some comments on the 'case of Roosevelt vs. Thayer, with a few independent suggestions on the concealing coloration question.' Mr. Allen's remarks are very unfair to all those who are unable to agree with Mr. Thayer's conclusions. His independent suggestions are, for the most part, unimportant, and add little to the arguments for either side.

In the beginning of Mr. Allen's recent paper, we find ourselves compelled to take issue with him on the question of what is 'common sense.' He says, "In Columbus's day common sense declared the world was flat." This was a dictate of science, and was as worthy of being believed at that time and in that state of knowledge

¹This would probably have been a paper written jointly with Dr. J. C. Phillips had he not left a short time ago for the Sudan. I assume sole responsibility for it, as it stands. A large part is written from notes which we made together some time ago, and for the permission to make free use of these I thank Dr. Phillips very heartily.