

NOTES ON BIRDS OF THE LABRADOR PENINSULA IN
1925 AND 1926.

BY HARRISON F. LEWIS.

IN 1925 I was on the southern coast of the Labrador Peninsula and there made daily observations and notes concerning the bird life from May 4 to September 6. During that time many persons mentioned to me that they saw that the sea-birds of the region in general were increasing in numbers from year to year, and with these statements my own observations coincided. There is reason to look for an even more rapid augmentation of their numbers in future, as the Department of the Interior of the Dominion of Canada established, in the course of the year, ten bird sanctuaries along this coast, including the islands most used by the birds for nesting purposes. These sanctuaries are situated at Mingan, Betchewun, Watshishu, Fog Island, Wolf Bay, Cape Whittle, St. Mary Islands, Cape Mecattina, St. Augustine, and Bradore Bay.

The following notes, which Dr. Charles W. Townsend has very kindly reviewed in manuscript, contain the most interesting of the observations made during 1925.

In 1926 I spent the time from June 2 to September 16 in the in the same region, and my notes for this season have been added to those for 1925.

Gavia stellata. RED-THROATED LOON.—The spring migration of this species was still in progress in this region on June 12 and 13, 1926. Between the Bluff Harbour and Wolf Bay on June 12 we were overtaken and passed by four flocks of Red-throated Loons, flying eastward at a moderate height, and containing, respectively 28, 21, 11, and 18 individuals. On June 13, between Point au Maurier and Harrington Harbour, a flock of 12 of these birds passed us in a similar manner.

Fratercula arctica arctica. PUFFIN.—On July 8 and 9, 1925, Mr. C. K. McLeod and I counted with great care the occupied burrows of Puffins on Perroquet Island, in Bradore Bay. Small stakes were used to divide the surface of the island into strips of convenient size, and the burrows in each such strip were counted separately. Each occupied burrow was taken to represent at least one pair of Puffins. Old residents, who in their time had excavated hundreds of burrows on this island, assured me that each occupied burrow was the home of at least one pair of Puffins, and

that occasionally a burrow divided underground into two or three branches, with a pair of Puffins nesting at the end of each branch. A Puffin incubating an egg was found in each of six burrows which were opened at random for scientific purposes in my presence on this island on the afternoon of June 30, 1925. The total number of occupied burrows on Perroquet Island on July 8 and 9, 1925, was found by Mr. McLeod and me to be 22,102; representing 44,204 Puffins. Taking into account the Puffins which nest on the island under loose rocks, and whose homes could not be included in the above count of burrows, Perroquet Island must have been the nesting place of at least 45,000 Puffins in 1925.

Bissa tridactyla tridactyla. KITTIWAKE.—On May 8, 1925 I was shown a nesting colony of this species on Carosel Island, at the entrance of the Bay of Seven Islands. About 1000 Kittiwakes were then present, apparently preparing to nest on little ledges on the face of cliffs 30 to 75 feet high on the western side of the island. Many of the birds were standing or sitting on their little nests, but those nests into which I was able to look contained no eggs. My boatman said that this was a long-established colony, and that in the height of the breeding season the number of adult Kittiwakes was about twice as great as it was at the time of our visit.

I, and other ornithologists as well, had often passed close to this island on the mail-steamer, but I had not suspected the presence of this thriving Kittiwake colony, and I have not seen it reported by others. A thorough acquaintance with the bird-life of such a long and intricate coast can hardly be hoped for in less than a lifetime of careful study.

At Bald Island, near Betchewun, where 23 nests of the Kittiwake were found in 1924,¹ about 70 Kittiwakes returned in the spring of 1925 and were present, on and about their nests, when I visited the island on June 4. They appeared to intend to breed there, but I looked into all the nests from the top of the cliff without seeing any eggs. Messrs. L. M. Terrill and Napier Smith visited this island on June 27, and found similar conditions—Kittiwakes on and about their nests, but no eggs in sight. Mr. F. W. Salsman, whose home was only two miles distant, told me on September 3 that the Kittiwakes stayed at the island for some time after the visit of Messrs. Terrill and Smith, but finally went away without having laid any eggs. The cause of this failure to lay eggs and rear young is unknown to me. The birds were not disturbed by being robbed, for many other species of sea-fowl, with larger and more tempting eggs, in more readily accessible nests, nested in undisturbed tranquility on this island and brought off numerous young successfully in 1925.

Kittiwakes were unusually numerous about the western end of the Straits of Belle Isle in 1925. One thousand of them were observed near Bradore on June 30 and six hundred at Bonne Esperance on July 3.

Larus leucopterus. ICELAND GULL.—About noon on May 4, 1925, a fine, sunny day, I stood on the end of Clarke City pier, in the Bay of Seven

¹ 'Auk,' Vol. XLII, No. 2, p. 279.

Islands, and, with x6 binoculars, studied carefully an adult, pearly-mantled, white-winged Gull, which was only a few yards distant from me, and below the level of my eye. I had sufficient time to study it well, and by turns I saw it flying, swimming, and standing at rest on a floating ice-cake. I could see no dark mark of any kind on its wings. Finally, as if intentionally to provide me with a direct comparison, an adult Herring Gull alighted on the ice cake and stood there about a foot distant from the White-winged Gull. I was unable to distinguish any difference in the sizes of the two birds. As a result of these observations, made under extraordinary and almost perfect conditions, I feel justified as recording this white-winged Gull as an Iceland Gull—in fact, I cannot do otherwise, unless I deny the deliberate and considered evidence of my sight. White-winged Gulls were observed on many other occasions, but were not named more definitely except in this instance because the other observations were not so unusually satisfactory. Townsend and Allen include this species in their "Birds of Labrador" ¹ as a "Rare transient or winter visitor," but state that, "No definite record of the presence of this species in Labrador has been found, but it is doubtless of general occurrence coastwise in the colder months of the year."

Larus marinus. GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL.—In 1925 this species was first observed at Betchewun by Mr. F. W. Salsman on March 20. On May 19 I found at Betchewun a nest of this species containing three eggs and another containing one egg. On June 8, at Wolf Bay, I found a Great Black-backed Gull's nest containing three eggs, two of which were hatching. These were the first hatching eggs of any kind seen by me in 1925. Although the nest containing them was in a very exposed position, they must have been incubated all through a severe snowstorm, with a high north-west gale and freezing temperatures, which occurred on May 22 and 23. This Gull nested commonly, as usual, in this region in 1925, and the above statements are given simply as records of migration, laying, and hatching.

Larus delawarensis. RING-BILLED GULL.—The colonies of this species on this coast which were visited by me in 1925, with the approximate numbers of breeding adults in each are as follows: Kegashka River (600), Fog Island Sanctuary (210), Pointe au Maurier (250), Aylmer Sound (70), Mecattina Sanctuary (60). I did not hear of any others, although there may have been some.

The colony at Pointe au Maurier is slowly recovering from the great decrease in numbers which it suffered in 1921.²

In 1924 some 600 to 800 of this species nested on Fog Island itself in a dense colony occupying only a small part of the island. They lost a great many young, apparently killed as trespassers by neighboring adults. In 1925 only about 50 Ring-bills nested on Fog Island, while about 160 others nested on two other islands in the same sanctuary. Where the other

¹ Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist., Vol. XXXIII, p. 314.

² 'Auk,' Vol. XXXIX, No. 4, pp. 510-511.

adults of the 1924 colony went I do not know. The birds in the Fog Island area were carefully protected by a resident officer in both 1924 and 1925 and reared their young without human interference, and I know of no cause for the dispersion of the colony unless it be the unusually heavy loss of young in 1924, which probably took place on account of overcrowding. This species appears to be more disposed than are many others to change from one breeding-place to another.

Phalacrocorax carbo. CORMORANT.—I visited the nesting colony of this species on the cliffs of Lake Island, near Cape Whittle, on June 12 and July 21, 1925. The visit of June 12 was brief, on account of bad weather, but recently-hatched young were seen in two nests and it was observed that the white flank-patches still showed plainly on some of the adult birds.

On July 21 none of the nests in this colony contained eggs. The young birds, of which there were generally three, sometimes four, in a nest, were all of large size and well feathered, apparently nearly old enough to fly. Several of them regurgitated their last previous meal, which was generally unidentifiable, but which consisted in one instance of a rock cod. I counted 21 occupied nests of this species on the cliff, and there may possibly have been 22 in all, for one nest was so hidden under a bulge of rock that I could not determine whether it belonged to this species or to the Double-crested Cormorant. In 1924 I counted 22 occupied nests of *P. carbo* on this cliff.¹

In 1926, I observed 33 occupied nests of this species in this same colony. This is an increase of about 50 per cent over the number of such nests observed here in 1924 and 1925. About 36 pairs of Double-crested Cormorants nest on the same cliff.

Nettion carolinense. GREEN-WINGED TEAL.—On July 31, 1925, I saw an adult female Green-winged Teal with four well-feathered young in a small pond on Fog Island. The young were not yet able to fly and the old bird did not desert them. Thus I was able to observe them at leisure, both with the naked eye and with x 6 binoculars, at a distance of not more than two or three rods. This would appear to fix definitely the status of this species as a breeding bird in this region, where I have been reliably informed by residents that it is fairly common in some areas.

Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus. HARLEQUIN DUCK.—Near one of the outer rocks in Cape Whittle Sanctuary, known as Nest Rock, I saw on July 21, 1925, a group of seven of this species, of which one was in the plumage of the adult male.

Somateria mollissima dresseri. EIDER.—In 1925 this species had a successful breeding season in this region, although it is my opinion that the proportion of successes was not as great as in the unusually favorable seasons of 1923 and 1924.

An exceptionally large number of year-old drakes was present on the coast during June, as was witnessed both by the comments of residents of the coast and by my own observations.

¹ Auk, Vol. XLII, No. 2, p. 270.

The first evidence of the separate flocking of adult drakes after mating was noticed in 1925 on June 13, when a flock of 16 drakes were seen flying eastward past the St. Mary Islands. This species was common on the southern coast of the Labrador Peninsula in 1926, but had a breeding season that was only fairly successful, as the number of young that it hatched and reared was distinctly smaller than usual.

I did not see any young Eiders in 1926 until July 4, when several broods were observed between Romaine and Washicoutai. On the very late date of August 6, much to my surprise, I flushed an Eider from a nest containing four eggs, in the Boat Islands. The reason why the breeding of this species in this region was not as successful in this year as usual is uncertain, but I incline to attribute the partial failure to the cold, late spring, which may have destroyed the vitality of many eggs before incubation began. In the eastern part of the region in question, near the Straits of Belle Isle, heavy drift ice was present in large quantities in 1926 until about the first of July.

Branta canadensis canadensis. CANADA GOOSE.—At Betchewun, the first Canada Geese in the spring of 1925 were seen by Mr. F. W. Salsman on April 7.

Branta bernicla glaucogastra. BRANT.—Although I arrived at the Bay of Seven Islands on May 4 and searched for Brant in both outer and inner parts of the bay, I did not see any until May 14. Even as late as May 10, when I made a patrol to the flats in the inner part of the bay and looked carefully for Brant, I could not find one. Other matters prevented my visiting this part of the bay again until May 14, when I found a flock of about 1100 Brant on the flats. By May 27 their numbers had increased to about 1500. On May 30 about 2000 Brant were in the inner bay and 4 flocks of 75, 18, 38, and 15 birds, respectively, were seen to pass in through the outer bay during the day. The chief migration of this species, however, passed Seven Islands after my departure on June 2. The part of the Bay of Seven Islands where I found the Brant feeding and resting is about two miles from the steamship route across the outer bay and is partly hidden from it by a bend in the eastern shore of the bay, which probably accounts for the fact that Townsend and Bent saw no Brant when they crossed the bay on the mail-steamer on May 23, 1909.¹

Totanus melanoleucus. GREATER YELLOW-LEGS.—Three types of the rolling yodle of this species have been recorded by me in this region. They are as follows:

whiddler, whiddler, whiddler, whiddler, etc.

ùëwar, ùëwar, ùëwar, ùëwar, etc.

rytëer, rytëer, rytëer, rytëer, etc.

The third form is not as common as either of the others. These yodles are heard so frequently in May and June and so rarely later in the summer that they appear to be connected with the season of mating and nesting and to be entitled to be termed songs.

¹ Auk, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, p. 12.

Oxyechus vociferus. KILLDEER.—Beside Patterson Brook, where it spreads out on the beach, about three miles west of Mingan, I flushed a Killdeer from the edge of the fresh water early on the morning of May 24, 1925. As it flushed I noted its large size and the characteristic Killdeer cries of alarm. It soon alighted again and I followed it and studied it at leisure, as it stood and as it flew, flushing it occasionally when I wished to do so. I used x 6 binoculars at a distance of about 15 yards, and was able to see clearly and distinctly the large size, the Plover bill, the brownish-gray wings and upper back, the wings with a white line along each, displayed in flight, the rufous rump and upper tail-coverts, and the two black bands across the white breast. This is the second record of the Killdeer in the Labrador Peninsula.

Lagopus lagopus lagopus. WILLOW PTARMIGAN.—On an island at The Bluff Harbour, about eight miles east of Romaine, I was shown on June 8, 1925, a cock Willow Ptarmigan crouched on a hilltop about 100 yards from the only house in this vicinity. I worked around to have the sun at my back and obtained a good view of the bird. The rich chestnut "cape" extending down to his shoulders was very conspicuous. Then he flew to a larger island nearby and, as he alighted, he crowed or cackled. The residents at this place said at the time that a pair of these birds were living about their house and that the cock awakened them by crowing at daybreak (between two and three o'clock) each morning. It appears that at least two pairs of these birds nested on the larger island above referred to, for in July one of the residents at this place found about 25 young Ptarmigans in a group on that island. They were about as large as Robins, but flew well.

During 1926 this species was again present, and probably nested, on the same island at The Bluff Harbour on which it is supposed to have nested in 1925. Four individuals were observed there by me on August 15, 1926, and larger numbers were observed from time to time during the summer by residents of the vicinity.

Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis. ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK.—This species nested very commonly in the southeastern part of the Labrador Peninsula in 1925. During an afternoon spent on July 5 in the very rough country north of Bradore Bay, where suitable cliffs, 50 to 100 feet high abound, I saw at least six pairs of these Hawks, and was almost never without at least one or two of them following me about and uttering loud protests. Some of them were dark and some were light, but all seemed very anxious and screeched loudly at me while I remained in their chosen nesting territory. I examined one nest containing four young, no two of which were of the same size. Their eyes were open, they had yellow beaks, and were clad in gray down. Pin-feathers were visible in the wings and tail of three of them and were conspicuous in the two largest.

On July 7 I examined another nest of this species on a low sandstone cliff southeast of Bradore. This contained four very small downy young.

Tyrannus tyrannus. KINGBIRD.—On June 3, 1925, I saw on Big

Birch Island, near Mingan, a Kingbird which flitted along the beach a few yards ahead of me, alighting on stumps and boulders and occasionally snapping up a flying insect. The bird was repeatedly observed with x 6 binoculars at a distance of a few yards, and the characteristic size and markings were easily and clearly noted. The day was cloudy and chilly and the bird was entirely silent.

A Kingbird was seen at close range by me between Natashquan village and the mouth of the Natashquan River on June 9, 1926. It was observed through x 6 binoculars as it perched on the top of an alder bush, and was easily identified. It was heard twice to utter its harsh cry.

Perisoreus canadensis subsp. CANADA JAY.—These birds appeared on the coast in wandering flocks about the end of August, 1925. On August 29 I saw 37 in one flock in woods near Kegashka and on September 4 I saw 18 in one flock in the midst of the village of Havre St. Pierre (formerly Esquimaux Point). Local hunters claimed that this indicated a marked decrease of the hare population in the interior of the peninsula.

Quiscalus quiscula aeneus. BRONZED GRACKLE.—At Seven Islands three were seen on May 8 and one on May 10, 1925.

On June 11, 1926, I clearly saw and identified, with the aid of x 6 binoculars, Bronzed Grackle that was walking about on the ground near the one house at The Bluff Harbour. Mrs. Dan Stubbert, who lives in that house, told me that three such birds had been in that vicinity "all the spring." This is the easternmost record of the Bronzed Grackle on this coast.

Carpodacus purpureus purpureus. PURPLE FINCH.—A beautiful rosy male was seen at Clarke City pier when I arrived there on May 4, 1925. From that time until June 1 the species was recorded on thirteen different dates, most of these observations being made at Seven Islands, but some at Mingan and at Betchewun. Not more than one individual was recorded in any one day, except that three were observed at Mingan on May 23. From these and previous observations it may be concluded that the Purple Finch is of uncommon but regular occurrence on the southern shore of the Labrador Peninsula as far east as Betchewun. One individual was observed at Natashquan on June 9, 1926.

Calcarius lapponicus lapponicus. LAPLAND LONG-SPUR.—This species was recorded in 1925 as follows: Seven Islands, May 5 (1) and May 7 (1); Betchewun, May 18 (2); Havre St. Pierre, May 20 (2); Long Point, May 21 (2); Seven Islands, May 26 (2). These were presumably migrants, for there is no evidence of the breeding of this species in this region.

Spizella passerina passerina. CHIPPING SPARROW.—This species was observed at Seven Islands from May 27 to June 1, 1925, after which latter date I was no longer present there. One individual was seen each day until June 1, when three were observed.

Melospiza melodia melodia. SONG SPARROW.—On June 14, 1926, I clearly observed a Song Sparrow at short range for some time with x 6

binoculars and also heard it sing several times, in a small bushy area near the United Church of Canada building at Harrington Harbour. This species was also observed on June 8 and 9, July 12, and September 12 at Natashquan, which is one of its regular stations on this coast.

Seiurus aurocapillus. OVENBIRD.—A silent Ovenbird was seen very plainly through x 6 binoculars by me, at a distance of about 20 feet, as it walked about on the forest floor on Ste. Genevieve Island on June 4, 1926. Ste. Genevieve Island is the abrupt eastern termination of the Mingan Islands limestone, with its comparatively dense forest growth, and is probably the eastern limit of the range of the Oven-bird in this region, as no record of this species beyond this point is known. It is interesting to observe that, in the comparatively late spring of 1926, the Oven-bird had reached by June 4 the probable limit of its range in this part of North America.

Setophaga ruticilla. REDSTART.—Near the United Church of Canada building at Harrington Harbour I saw a Redstart in shrubbery on the morning of June 14, 1925. It was singing frequently. I saw it clearly at close range, and, as the leaves on the bushes were not yet spread, I had no difficulty in noting the details of its plumage, which was that of a male of the previous year. This is the easternmost point at which this species has been recorded on the southern coast of the Labrador Peninsula, the nearest record being at Natashquan, more than one hundred miles away.

Certhia familiaris americana. BROWN CREEPER.—One was seen in woods near Clarke City pier on May 4, 1925 and one in a group of small trees in the center of Seven Islands village on May 7. Both of these birds were observed with great clearness and their characteristic size, shape, and coloration were noted. Both of them were engaged in climbing the trunks of trees in search of food in characteristic Creeper fashion.

I have been unable to find any previous record of this species in the Labrador Peninsula.

Penthestes atricapillus atricapillus. CHICKADEE.—As I sat in front of the Post Office at Seven Islands on May 14, 1925, waiting for the mail to be sorted, a solitary Black-capped Chickadee alighted on a fence in the open a few yards away from me. It remained there for several minutes, uttering frequently both the "chick-a-dee" note of its species and the clear "phee-bee" whistle, while I watched it through x 6 binoculars, for this was my first meeting with this species in the Labrador Peninsula, where however, others have recorded it.

Near the south end of Seven Islands village on May 31 I twice heard the brisk "chick-a-dee" note of the Black-capped Chickadee, but this time I failed to see the bird.

Regulus satrapa satrapa. GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET.—Four of this species were observed as a scattered flock in woods near Clarke City pier on May 4, 1925.

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