

NOTES ON BIRDS OF SANDWICH BAY AND VICINITY,
NEWFOUNDLAND LABRADOR

BY VIRGINIA ORR

ALTHOUGH there seems to be an abundance of annotated lists of Labrador birds, for the most part they represent, for reasons of inaccessibility, a transient sort of birding which can not present a clear picture of the avifauna. In time these lists will accumulate and be consolidated into a comprehensive work which will cover more than occurrence and a few fleetingly noted facts.

In two trips, made in 1938 and 1946, the author covered an area touched lightly by Grayce (1947), Loomis (1945), and Gross (1937) and more completely by Austin (1932), namely, Sandwich Bay, with brief excursions to nearby Gannet Clusters and Mason's Island in Hamilton Inlet. Observations were confined to the first three weeks in July both years, and only those data are included in the list which appeared to augment information already at hand.

In order to understand the multitude of discrepancies incurred by competent ornithologists while covering the same territory, one must realize that ecologically the north and south sides of a small hill in Labrador may be as far apart as the Carolinas and Maine.

For instance, a pocket of spruce hidden in a wide slope of boulder-strewn tundra changes the bird population from Arctic-nesting Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta rubescens*) to forest-loving Ruby-crowned Kinglets (*Regulus calendula calendula*).

For this reason a brief geography of each locality mentioned is included:

Cartwright, which was the author's headquarters, is a small town of thirty-odd families on the south shore of Sandwich Bay, seven miles from the inlet. Most of the land is boggy and covered with an impenetrable spruce forest ten to fifteen feet high. There are several grassy swamps and barren hills.

Main Tickle Point juts toward an island from the north shore of the bay five miles from the sea. At most tides the water runs in rapids and, at this season, is filled with sea-run brook trout. The point itself is narrow, covered with characteristic tundra plants and scattered boulders and punctuated by numerous stagnant pools. It is backed by a sizable spruce forest.

Eagle River, with two other large rivers, the Paradise and Great Bear, forms the head of Sandwich Bay. Most observations were made five to six miles upstream in fresh water, approximately twenty-eight miles from the sea and the influence of the Labrador Current. The

boggy land is covered by extensive spruce forests which have been lightly logged in some places. Small birches, alders and willows line the river bank. The river, within a mile, resolves itself from a wild rapid that falls ten feet in the course of a few yards to a swift but quiet stretch extending to another torrent that thunders on to huge rocks.

Gannet Clusters are small islands rising in sheer cliffs from the sea about ten miles off the mainland. They vary in size from a few to thirty or forty acres and their peaty tops are covered with tundra plants. A few boast fresh-water pools.

Mason's Island, two acres in extent, is low-lying tundra and swamp-covered. There is one salt pond surrounded by a sedge marsh and a coarse sand and pebble beach. It is situated about three miles inside the wide-mouthed inlet near the south shore.

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS

EUROPEAN CORMORANT, *Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*.—A cormorant which I feel quite sure was this and not the Double-crested species was seen in the vicinity of the Gannet Clusters, July 18, 1946. I could not, however, find any on the cliffs.

BLACK DUCK, *Anas rubripes*.—Found on most of the large rivers and sheltered bays. Fishermen informed me that this was the "best eating" duck on the coast.

BALDPATE, *Mareca americana*.—A fisherman told me that this bird was frequently found in the marshes back of Cartwright in migration. I found none in July.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL, *Anas carolinensis*.—Residents of Cartwright have found this bird in spring and fall on the marshes back of town. They said that it was "uncommon."

AMERICAN GOLDEN-EYE, *Glaucionetta clangula americana*.—Found singly or in pairs about the outer ledges of Sandwich Bay. Although I surveyed all birds for prospective Barrow's Golden-eyes (*Glaucionetta islandica*) they were all the present species.

EIDER, *Somateria mollissima*.—I made no attempt to differentiate between the Northern and American Eiders as they were seen briefly in large flocks or under difficult conditions. A flock of forty adult males and three brown birds (females or immatures) were seen near Cartwright on July 6, 1946, and scattered birds were seen almost every day. Two female eiders which I felt to be this species were flushed from nests, one on the Gannet Clusters and the other on Mason's Island. The former nest contained three eggs on July 18, 1946, and the latter one pipped egg on July 19, 1938. There were ten female or immature birds swimming off the ledges at the Gannets July 18, 1946.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER, *Melanitta fusca deglandi*.—A flock of over two hundred, largely males, was seen in Hamilton Inlet on July 20, 1938. There were scattered individuals on Sandwich Bay.

SURF SCOTER, *Melanitta perspicillata*.—Several birds were seen frequently on Sandwich Bay, particularly around the inner islands and Main Tickle.

AMERICAN SCOTER, *Oidemia nigra americana*.—A few were seen with Surf Scoters in the tide rips near Cartwright and Main Tickle.

AMERICAN MERGANSER, *Mergus merganser americanus*.—Although the Red-breasted (*Mergus serrator*) is the common Labrador merganser, a male and two females of this species were found on a quiet stretch of Eagle River, July 13, 1946.

AMERICAN ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK, *Buteo lagopus s.johannis*.—A dark individual was seen frequently at Cartwright in 1938 and a pair showed great interest in a crag across the Eagle River from the Hudson Bay Company camp.

OSPREY, *Pandion haliaetus carolinensis*.—Seen at Cartwright in 1946.

SPRUCE GROUSE, *Canachites canadensis*.—Fairly common in the forest behind Cartwright where it is hunted extensively. A female and at least eight half-fledged chicks were found in fairly open woods near the hospital at Cartwright on July 7, 1938. The bird was scarcer in 1946 according to the townspeople.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER, *Charadrius hiaticula semipalmatus*.—Abundant on Mason's Island where a nest and three eggs were found July 19, 1938.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER, *Actitis macularia*.—The gravel beaches of Sandwich Bay are seldom without the Spotted Sandpiper during July. Downy young were found on Mason's Island, July 19, 1938, and five newly hatched birds were discovered in a marshy bit of tundra at Main Tickle Point, July 8, 1946.

RED PHALAROPE, *Phalaropus fulicarius*.—Two females in full breeding plumage were observed swimming well off a rocky islet near the mouth of Sandwich Bay during a northeast storm, July 19, 1946.

NORTHERN PHALAROPE, *Lobipes lobatus*.—A pair was seen feeding in the salt pond on Mason's Island July 20, 1938. The male disappeared into the thick growth of sedges at one end, but a careful search did not reveal him or a nest. The birds were not shy while feeding and I felt that one would have had to approach the male very closely to flush him from such good cover.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL, *Larus marinus*.—A visit to one of the smaller Gannets, July 18, 1938, revealed the surprising concentration

of Black-back nests noted by Gross. A search covering a little more than a quarter of an acre disclosed five nests containing three and two eggs each, and three flightless, half-grown young that were extremely difficult to see as they crouched among the lichen-splashed boulders.

A trip to one of the larger islands of the group on the same date in 1946 resulted in the finding of only two deserted nests, and although there were several adults diving at us, we could find no young. Perhaps the presence of Snowy Owls had something to do with their scarcity on this particular island.

ARCTIC TERN, *Sterna paradisaea*.—The only terns in Sandwich Bay seen closely enough to be positively identified were of this species. They frequented the tide rips at Main Tickle and Cartwright and seemed to be concentrated on a dry reef near Cartwright.

GREAT HORNED OWL, *Bubo virginianus*.—One was seen perched on a flag-pole at the Grenfell Mission at Cartwright July 5, 1946. It was, supposedly, a frequent visitor there.

SNOWY OWL, *Nyctea scandiaca*.—There were at least three of this species on one of the larger of the Gannet Islands and though we flushed them several times in attempting to photograph them, they never left the island. From wing-quills, bits of vermilion skin and bone-fragments in two pellets, I surmised that the owls had fed upon a Puffin and a Horned Lark both of which were abundant.

It would be of interest to know how many owls were on the Clusters; also whether the bird recorded by Grayce was in addition to my three, for his record was made July 9 and mine July 18, 1946.

AMERICAN HAWK OWL, *Surnia ulula caparoch*.—Seen frequently in the evenings flying across the open marsh and hillside near Cartwright, much to the dismay of the Gray-cheeked Thrushes and Canada Jays that scolded them sharply. They (the owls) often rested near the tops of clumpy spruces and when they hunted they seemed to work as a team. They uttered a hoarse, cat-like *kee-er* in flight or when perched.

EASTERN BELTED KINGFISHER, *Megaceryle alcyon alcyon*.—A pair was seen on the Eagle River July 13, 1946.

ARCTIC THREE-TOED WOODPECKER, *Picoides arcticus*.—A pair of these birds was found on a lightly lumbered hillside above the Eagle River. They were quite fearless and were observed from close range for several minutes, July 13, 1946.

CANADA JAY, *Perisoreus canadensis*.—Many slate-colored young birds were seen about Cartwright and Main Tickle Point in 1946 although few adults were in evidence. In 1938, however, it was the adult birds that seemed the commoner. A fisherman showed me a nest and eggs he had taken in the early spring (there was considerable

snow on the ground) from a six-foot-high crotch in a black spruce near Cartwright.

ACADIAN CHICKADEE, *Parus hudsonicus*.—A small flock (possibly a family) was seen on the hillsides above the Eagle River, July 13, 1946.

HERMIT THRUSH, *Hylocichla guttata faxoni*.—One bird was seen under favorable conditions on the Eagle River, July 13, 1946. Perhaps this thrush is not as scarce as records would indicate; birding in these inland localities is difficult due to the impenetrable nature of the forests.

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH, *Hylocichla minima*.—The common thrush around Cartwright resides in spruce clumps at the edges of fields, clearings, etc. where it is one of the first birds to rise to the top of a tree and roundly scold any intruder.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET, *Regulus calendula calendula*.—Found in the thick spruce forests behind Cartwright and on the Eagle River.

PIPET, *Anthus spinoletta rubescens*.—Abundant on every patch of tundra from the Gannet Clusters to Main Tickle Point and the hills above Cartwright. A nest with four young about two days old was found on Mason's Island, July 19, 1938.

YELLOW WARBLER, *Dendroica petechia*.—Common among the small willows and alders around Cartwright and on the banks of the Eagle River.

BLACK-POLL WARBLER, *Dendroica striata*.—One of the commonest birds around Cartwright and Eagle River. A nest and five eggs were found in a low, thick clump of black spruce, Cartwright, July 5, 1946.

WATER-THRUSH, *Seiurus noveboracensis*.—Found commonly along the alder-lined banks of the Eagle River.

WILSON'S WARBLER, *Wilsonia pusilla pusilla*.—Several were seen around the reservoir behind Cartwright, 1938.

PURPLE FINCH, *Carpodacus purpureus purpureus*.—A pair of these birds was resident about the reservoir behind Cartwright in 1938 where I had several good looks at them, particularly the male which sang, frequently, from the top of a low spruce. I could not locate any nest.

PINE GROSBEAK, *Pinicola enucleator*.—Found in the lightly lumbered portion of the forest near Cartwright.

REDPOLL, *Acanthis flammea*.—Most abundant in the more open portions of the country where scrubby spruce bordered open tundra, swamps or shore-line.

SAVANNAH SPARROW, *Passerculus sandwichensis*.—Found commonly on the open tundra or artificially formed fields (cleared land) at Cartwright, Main Tickle Point, Gannet Clusters and Mason's Island. A nest with four well-grown young was found at Cartwright, July 11, 1946.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW, *Melospiza lincolni lincolni*.—Less seems to be written about this than about any other Labrador sparrow even though it be one of the most common in transition lands between deep forest and barren tundra. At Cartwright any thicket held at least one pair of these birds which scolded all intruders with a metallic *chink*.

A nest containing three newly hatched young was discovered on the ground at the base of a small, dead spruce, well hidden by exposed rootlets and deciduous growth, July 5, 1946. The parent allowed me to approach within two feet before slipping off the nest and running back into denser growth. Subsequent visits proved that no matter how frightened, the bird never flew away directly, but ran along the partially covered tunnel for several feet before taking wing. It used the same route when bringing food to the young.

The fledglings left the nest in a flightless condition on the twelfth day after discovery.

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North Valley Road

Paoli

Pennsylvania

LIFE HISTORY OF THE GOLDEN-NAPED WOODPECKER¹

BY ALEXANDER F. SKUTCH

THE Golden-naped Woodpecker (*Tripsurus chrysauchen*) is one of the many noteworthy birds endemic to the region of heavier rainfall and dense, lofty rain-forests which in southwestern Costa Rica and extreme western Panamá interrupts the savannas, thorny scrub and low, open woodland typical of the Pacific Coast of the North American continent, except at high latitudes. It is a small woodpecker of about the size and much the appearance of one of the smaller species of the genus *Centurus*, with which this and related forms are sometimes

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