

NOTES ON BIRDS IN SOUTHWEST SASKATCHEWAN

By L. B. POTTER

THE following notes were all taken at or in the near vicinity of my ranch in the valley of the Frenchman River five miles west of Eastend.

During the winter of 1921-22 a considerable number of rosy finches (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) were seen on this ranch and at other points in the valley. I saw the first, a male, on November 27; it was taken and sent to the Provincial Museum at Regina. On December 1 I saw another male bird feeding in the stackyard in company with a flock of redpolls. On January 18 two more were taken out of a flock of about thirty. On March 18 we secured a nice pair in our stackyard which we also sent to Regina. All the specimens were *tephrocotis* and are probably the first to be actually taken in Saskatchewan.

On June 6, 1922, my brother shot a Western Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus strigatus*) close by the buildings. It first attracted our attention by its singing and was in full breeding condition, so that presumably there was a nest not far away. A few days later I heard another lark sparrow singing across the river. On June 16, while mending a fence about a mile from the river in the side hills I saw yet another of these birds amongst the sagebrush. I was unable to search for a possible nest at the moment, and next day there was no sign of the bird. I have noticed the lark sparrow in previous years, nearly always around the ranch buildings, and only for a few days from about the middle of May. This is the first year that I have seen the bird so late on in the season and evidently breeding here. There appears to be no record of its nesting farther north, and I believe our specimen of June 6 is the first secured in this province.

On July 7 of the same year I discovered a pair of Yellow-breasted Chats (*Icteria virens*) in a willow thicket close by the river. The peculiar squeaks and whistles were quite strange to me, and it was only by taking my seat on the ground and waiting patiently for nearly an hour that I was enabled to get a view of the two birds. The male was the shy and appeared only for a moment. The female was bolder and came several times almost within arm's length. July is a busy time of year, and I had to leave, but next day I came again to the same spot and soon had the hen bird round me again. A heavy thunderstorm was threatening, and I fled to escape a drenching, nor did I have the opportunity to make another visit to the place, which was over a mile from home. But doubtless there was a nest with young concealed there.

On July 16, 1922, I had another surprise, finding a family of Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*). My attention was first attracted by the male parent seated on the telegraph wire over the railway which passes up this valley. A moment later I watched it fly down to the fence to feed a young bird. Farther on I saw five others. The bluebirds must have raised their brood in a flicker hole in one of the telegraph posts. Mr. C. W. Nash of Toronto tells me he remembers the bluebird appearing in Manitoba for the first time about 1883; now I believe it is not uncommon in the eastern part of this province. But this is my first acquaintance during twenty years in the valley. We have the Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) in abundance, though I can recollect

the time when it was quite scarce, the increase having taken place during the last twelve years or so. It is quite possible that the Eastern Bluebird will be a regular summer visitor in the near future. This particular family frequented the ranch buildings during the fall and were seen last on October 12.

It is gratifying to be able to record a slight increase in numbers of the Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) which not so long ago seemed to be just about extinct. In 1914, when this railway was first built, the grouse disappeared, and I saw no more till 1920, though an odd bird or two was reported from time to time. During the winter of 1921-22 a band of eight or nine appeared in our pasture, and last December I saw twenty-three together. On this last occasion they were all bunched close together on a corner of my summer fallow, and all one could see at a distance of 200 yards was a number of black patches; these patches were the breast feathers of the Sage Grouse, the rest of their plumage matching exactly with the soil on which they were crouching.

Gower Ranch, Eastend, Saskatchewan, March 5, 1923.

THE MIGRATION OF THE KING EIDER AT SYNUK, ALASKA

(WITH TWO PHOTOS)

By GRACE A. HILL

I N April 10, 1915, the King Eider Ducks (*Somateria spectabilis*) began to pass Synuk, an Eskimo village some thirty miles up the coast from Nome, Alaska. Their flight was the most spectacular event in the migration of the birds that I witnessed. It was impressive not only because of the vast numbers (one flock, consisting of several long 'ropes,' following another so closely as to make an almost constant procession, for hours at a time, during the first week or ten days of their flight), but also because at that time there had been no real break in the winter, and it seemed the birds must starve in the snow-covered, ice-locked land into which they were so eagerly pressing. By the first of May the migration had practically ceased. On May 5, however, a native came in with a killing, which was the last I saw of the King Eider, that season.

These birds followed the same course as closely as though the first flock had left a beaten trail in the air. This 'highway' was over the ice, parallel with the shore, and so low as to be within easy gunshot. The natives killed them in large numbers for food, both for themselves and their dogs.

I regret that I did not make a careful observation of the King Eiders in their migration the preceding fall. At least there was no spectacular procession. Small flocks drifted by, flying low, but so far out to sea that there would have been no way of knowing them but for the native hunters. The Eskimos returned from their summer fishing camps during the last days of