

## THE CARDINAL IN NORTH-CENTRAL IOWA.

BY HOWARD CLARK BROWN

One of the birds which has been followed with a great deal of interest by bird students of North-Central Iowa is the cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis cardinalis*). Within the past ten years there has been a rather strange Northern advance of this bird within the region with which this article deals. The reason for this advance no one can guess, but the advance is far more than a local phenomenon. As Miss Althea R. Sherman wrote, "In the past ten years there have been numerous accounts from the Atlantic seaboard and westward of the northern advance of the Cardinal." \* And then she continues with the statement that "it appears that this northward movement has been all along the line of its range from northern Massachusetts to the Mississippi River." This report of Miss Sherman's was published in 1913. At that time, so far as I know, the cardinal had not been reported from North-Central Iowa at all. Three years later the first report for that region reached the Bird Bureau at Charles City, Iowa. And from 1916 up to the present date we have had a number of interesting records of the cardinal's appearance within our area.

When the Califer Naturalist Club of Charles City, Iowa, first began keeping definite bird records, in the summer of 1914, not a single cardinal was reported from any member. We did not think it at all strange that the cardinal was not on our list. Why should we have expected him? We associated the Red Bird with that group which belonged to regions considerably south of our region. We knew that Southern Iowa claimed the cardinal as a resident. We knew that he came up both of the great rivers which bound our state, reaching far north of the boundary

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\* Sherman—Carolinian Avifauna in Northeastern Iowa—In The Auk, Vol. XXX, No. 1, P. 78.

which was his limit in the central portion of the state. Old settlers had never known the Red Bird. None of the bird students of the region had ever seen him at that time.

Carlen Rudy, in telling of the birds seen in the winter of 1918-19 at Ft. Madison, in Lee county, says, "On the morning of December 26, 1918, I observed several male cardinals and one female near Ft. Madison. On December 27, as I was on my way to Hillsbow, by train, I saw many cardinals in association with chickadees, juncoes, and titmice. The snow was quite deep and the temperature below zero. Four miles from Hillsbow, on a farm, I observed the cardinals daily until I left the place, on January 5, 1919. I also observed them near Salem in Henry county, during that same period. They were abundant during the entire time that I was there. The temperature ranged from zero to twenty below." The same record which is taken from the bird journal kept by Mr. Rudy states that the farmers of the region told him that the Red Birds came in the fall and remained throughout the winter. However, another observer of the same region told him that they were present in the summer also, though not so numerous.

The reason for the greater numbers in the winter might be that some which had summered further north came a little south for the winter, or simply that those which had nested in obscured places were not observed during the summer, whereas the openness of winter made them conspicuous. The first records of our north-central region have been such as to lead me to the belief that the cardinal, though a resident in most of his range, may be migratory to a slight extent in the very edge of it. The Ft. Madison region is far from the edge of the present range of this bird. But I think that the large numbers of individuals observed in that region in the dead of winter may be accounted for in the fact that there were some which were following migratory habits, though of very slight extent.

If data were available regarding the cardinal along all points of the Mississippi valley from the Ft. Madison region

to the region of New Albion, in North-eastern Iowa, a stimulating study might be made of the cardinal's habits. Since I have not been able to find such, however, I have merely picked up here and there notes which observers have sent to me. The notes are very fragmentary, and are too scattered to be of much scientific value. But such as I have been able to secure, I shall here present.

In Allamakee county, Miss Althea Sherman has made notable contributions to our knowledge of the cardinal. In a second article which she published regarding the cardinal in that region she says that the first one seen in that locality so far as she was able to find any records, was in November, 1906, when the late Senator Robert Glenn of Wyalusing, Wis., and his friend, Mr. H. W. Brown, of Lancaster, Wis., saw a male cardinal just north of the village of Wyalusing.\* On December 11, 1906, Mrs. Mary E. Hatch saw one of the species in McGregor, Iowa. And in February, 1907, Senator Glenn again saw one. The next record from the McGregor region is the one which Miss Sherman can claim as her own. On April 17, 1908, two cardinals were seen by her on the banks of the Mississippi River, directly across from Wyalusing and six miles from her home. The slow advance of these birds up Sny Magill creek is a characteristic and interesting chapter in the story of the cardinal. In April, 1913, Miss Sherman said that she was told that nearly a dozen cardinals were seen by a farmer on a bluff near this creek. They had become resident on this farm at about this time. The first record which Miss Sherman gives of the cardinals as winter boarders, is that of Mrs. M. A. Jordan of McGregor, who had a cardinal at her bird table during the last week of December, 1908. This bird remained upwards of three months. After that winter the species came regularly. Mrs. M. A. Jordan is also quoted as having had the first nesting record of these birds, when two broods came from

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\* Sherman — Article on the cardinal in *Wilson Bulletin* — Sept., 1913, P. 150.

their nests in her yard, in the summer of 1913. Eight nesting pairs were located about McGregor that same season. Miss Sherman continues in a recent letter, as follows: "They are much more abundant now, nearly every yard with suitable shrubbery boasting a nesting pair of cardinals."

The same author says, "Its first appearance at Lansing, Iowa, was early in November, 1913, as reported to me by Miss Martha H. Hemenway (See Wilson Bulletin for Dec., 1913,— page 205). Several birds were seen by her. It took seven years for the cardinal to advance from the mouth of the Wisconsin River near Wyalusing up to Lansing, a distance of about thirty miles as the river flows."

Concerning the progress of the same species in Wisconsin, Miss Sherman says, "It was first reported from Wyalusing in November, 1906. Next reported from Blue River and Boscobel, Wis., in March, 1909. Following the course of the Kickapoo River to the farm of Lee Wanamaker a half mile north of Steuben, where they were fed in winter and seen almost daily throughout the year, dating from 1911. Farther up the Kickapoo at Gays Mills the first cardinal was seen in December, 1908, by Miss Ellen Hammond. A year later she saw a pair of these birds six miles north of Gays Mills. This carries the advance up the Kickapoo about thirty-two miles or to about the same latitude as Lansing has."

"It is said to be a habit of the cardinal to follow the course of rivers and smaller streams. This has been true in northeastern Iowa. Its progress along the lowlands of streams has been more rapid than westward of the Mississippi to the bleak prairie lands where it now is well established."\* This record is certainly one which is a good basis for further study. And now let us turn to the reports of Mr. Charles A. Russell, formerly of Harpers Ferry, Iowa.

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\* Sherman — Wilson Bulletin — Sept., 1913.

On January 16, 1916, Mr. Russell wrote, "The bird visitors at our 'Free Lunch Counter' today included a pair of hairy woodpeckers, a pair of downy woodpeckers, a pair of white breasted nuthatches, a pair of jays, a dozen juncoes, a dozen chickadees, the usual number of sparrows, and a pair of cardinals." He continues, "I was at New Albin yesterday afternoon and a man told me that he had recently seen a pair there." Harper's Ferry is more than a dozen miles north of McGregor, and New Albin is fully twenty-five miles north of Harpers Ferry, by river route. On March 5, 1916, Mr. Russell writes, "Our usual number of boarders stay with us. Our cardinal is beginning to sing now."

In a letter of March 11, 1917, the same observer says, "We have kept a lunch counter all winter and had a large number of regular boarders." In listing the regulars for that winter he includes one pair of cardinals. He continues, "The cardinals are pretty shy and keep at a safe distance. I saw two pair of them at Waukon Junction this winter. They have been reported from New Albion." In the same report Mr. Russell tells of red winged blackbirds which he had seen that week and which he thought had spent the winter on the islands of the Mississippi. The river at that time was frozen. The red wings, I believe, were far north of their usual winter range if they had actually spent the winter there. He also mentions the red headed woodpecker as sometimes remaining with them. The red head was not discovered as a winter resident in our north-central region until the winter of 1917. But since that year, we have had no record at all, during the winter season.

One would expect that the birds would follow the river valleys, going much farther north for winter ranges in the valleys than on the plains, for the valleys furnish plenty of seed for the seed eaters, and considerable protection from drifts, from cold winds, and from freezing temperatures. As the southern plants make their ways up the

river valleys, so it may be that the birds also follow. On December 25, 1917, Mr. Russell wrote from Harpers Ferry, "Our cardinals are again with us this winter but other birds seen very scarce." It appears from this, that once established in a given area, the cardinal tends to maintain itself. The last report from Mr. Russell as regards cardinals, was in a letter of March 23, 1918, in which he says, "On a walk to Waukon Junction, yesterday, I saw six pairs of cardinals." As one reads such records as these he can not help but wonder how much farther north the Red Bird will go. He has apparently reached the very northern limit of our state along its eastern border. And now for the record of the inland.

Quoting from a letter from Miss Sherman, again, "Mrs. Ida Hobson Pike, a daughter of Judge H. N. Hobson, has written me of the coming of the cardinal to West Union. The first one was seen in the woods near West Union in November, 1915. In a few days one appeared at the feeding table of Mrs. Pike. He came every day until spring. In November, 1916, he reappeared. Soon his dead body was found on the snow in a nearby wood, apparently the victim of a bird of prey. Others came. Two years later she was feeding four pairs at one time."

The cardinals in reaching West Union probably followed the Turkey River to Elgin, then gradually worked westward, following that branch of the Turkey which goes through West Union. And at the same time that they were working north and west along those streams, they were apparently working north along the Cedar river, and west along the Upper Iowa. They probably worked westward from some such place as New Albin, following the Upper Iowa, for it was not until 1917 that it was seen at Decorah, Iowa. Mr. A. F. Porter writes of the species, "It appeared here (Decorah) about three years ago, and has since become more and more plentiful in this locality each year but it is not a common species. It winters here and I have seen it here this winter (1919-20), and every

winter for the past three years. The male is certainly a beauty and I hope it will continue to make its home with us."

Osage, Iowa, in Mitchell county, and almost the exact latitude of Decorah, did not report cardinals until July, 1918. It was on a far more direct route, being on the Cedar River which flows quite directly north in that region, but the fact that Decorah is nearer the great stream from which the cardinal wave seems to first have spread, seems to have caused the later arrival in the interior. However, the directness of the route did have some influence, for Charles City, in Floyd county, and only twenty miles by road, almost directly south of Osage, had some reports of cardinals which antedated the Osage reports by a couple of years. The river way would add considerable in mileage to the distance between these two places. But it would not seem that it could possibly add enough to account for the difference in dates, especially when one considers other problems regarding the bird's appearance here.

When Master Harold Fredrickson, President of the Toksali Nature Study Club, of Charles City, first reported that he had seen a cardinal, on Burroughs Day, April 3, 1916, the naturalists of Charles City were tempted to doubt his vision. The report was given by the two boys, Harold Fredrickson, and Leslie Kober. The bird had been seen in Wildwood Park. That is a tract of woodland just at the edge of Charles City, and would have been one of the most likely places for such birds that we knew. But cardinals had never been seen in our region and we wondered if we dared credit it on our club list. We experienced that strange uneasiness which naturalists always feel when things "'aint just as they ough'to be."

A year went by and we did not report the birds on our year's list. In 1917, however, early in the summer, reports came from some boys on the south side of the river, that they had seen a cardinal in the trees of their yard. The description was asked for and was given with consid-

erable definiteness. An all-red bird with black chin and a red crest. Then, on July 4, 1917, Mr. C. L. Fenton, who was then president of the Califor Naturalist Club, reached my home much out of breath. "Get ready at once and come along with me!" was his command. Naturally, I wondered the reason for the excitement. When I questioned him, he only said, "Don't stop to argue. Come on!" When well on our way toward Wildwood Park he said, "I just left here this morning, just before coming to your place. I saw a cardinal."

It was very amusing to me, for Mr. Fenton had been one of the strongest opponents to the record of the year previous. I tried to convince him that he had seen "crooked," but he would not be convinced and the cardinal went down on his annual list that year. It was the second definite record for our region; this is, the second record given by trained observers.

I did not see the cardinal that year, as it had apparently left the region in which Mr. Fenton had seen it soon after his departure. At any rate, it was not to be seen in that wood when we arrived.

The latest report of the cardinal for Charles City, was on January 3, of this year, (1920), when a pair was observed near the home of Mr. Clement L. Webster. Mr. Webster's home is only a few rods from the edge of the Cedar River; and it was there, in an orchard that Mr. Webster first discovered the pair. Regarding the discovery of this pair, Mrs. Mary A. Dutton, Bird Bureau Recorder of the local Naturalist Club, wrote, "I had the joy of my life Saturday morning. What was it? Oh, it was a genuine thriller! Only nature lovers can imagine what it means. We were very busy when a phone call interrupted our work. Mr. Webster announced that there was a pair of cardinals in his apple trees. It was bitter cold, snow deep, and walks icy, but I started with another club member, Master John Burns, for the orchard, which had been mentioned. Work or no work, I speedily made my



escape, field glasses in hand. When we reached Mr. Webster's place we were told that the birds had gone on down to the river. And so we went after them. And there on the river bank, there, to my joy and delight sat Mr. Cardinal on a three foot weed stem, eating seed. His crest was very erect, and his constant peep reminded me of a chickadee when hunting on the bark of a tree, save that it was louder and more penetrating. Mrs. Cardinal was cold, apparently, for she was fluffed out, perched in the fork of a tree."

Concerning the coming of the cardinal to Osage, Iowa, in Mitchell county, and about twenty miles north of Charles City, Mrs. Flora May Tuttle says. "The cardinal has been seen in July of 1918, and quite often after that, throughout the year of 1918-1919, in the north-east, south-east, and south-west corners of Osage." I can not believe that the cardinal was very common, however, for this naturalist would not have missed it for so long a period. She says concerning her own observation of the bird, "I was coming home from a meeting of the Naturalist Club (Osage Naturalist Club), March 20, 1919, where I had told the members that the cardinal had been seen several times since January 4, at the Nursery; when just as I got within twenty feet of the house I heard a strange bird note. And looking up, not more than eight feet above my head, on a branch of a hard maple sat my first cardinal for Mitchell county."

From Elma, which is between Osage and Charles City in latitude, but some twenty miles or more west of Osage. in Howard county, Mrs. H. L. Spaulding reported cardinals to the Bird Bureau of the Charles City Club. Her report follows: "The cardinal was seen in a thicket near the creek, in town (Elma) during May, 1919, by Miss Lois Pickering. It remained all summer. I saw it several times during the summer, in the door-yard of one of my neighbors. The mate was always along, and they flew only when I approached nearer than ten or fifteen feet. The birds were seen Christmas Day and frequently since by

Professor and Mrs. Plover, in the same locality." The route by which the cardinal reached Elma was probably by way of the Wapsipinicon River. The fact that he reached there at the same time as he reached Charles City, as a winter resident, is rather interesting. Of course birds had been reported before in both these places, in the summer. But the first report of their being found as winter residents was during the same winter. I imagine that the cardinal will eventually become a resident with us in much the same manner in which it has become so in the north-eastern part of our state, or in the north-western. How long it will take for them to become other than a rarity in our bird reports, we can hardly estimate. Perhaps a couple of years will do that. I am tempted to think that some of the Osage reports are not as reliable as they should be. The Osage plant woman, Mrs. Tuttle, knows her business, but some of the other reports may possibly have held errors. Otherwise, I can not understand why the cardinal should have appeared there in greater numbers, earlier than he appeared at Charles City. Of course it is conceivable that they, for some reason, have skipped the territory about Charles City. However, the weed seed possibilities are the same at Charles City as at Osage, and there is quite as much in the way of protective forests, brush-lots, etc. One thing we do not have at Charles City which is notable at Osage, and that is the high limestone cliffs which line the one side of the Cedar near Osage vicinity. Of course such cliffs furnish a great windbreak against the cold winter gales. It may be that the shelter of such has led the cardinal to continue with greater numbers in that region, whereas he has passed by our territory, or remained in very scattered detachments.

The future of the cardinal in the middle-northern portion of our state is most interesting. I am on the Red Bird's trail and shall welcome with great fervor the establishment of our locality as a home within the limit of the cardinal's northern range.