

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

CHICKADEES AT KINGSVILLE.—Of interest to bird lovers is a most unusual visitation at the Kingsville Bird Sanctuary in the fall of 1927. Early one morning in the latter part of October I saw from a distance a flock of small birds in our red cedar grove. The diminutive size of the visitors and the fact of their being in a flock attracted my attention immediately, and my surprise was boundless when on closer inspection I found them to be Chickadees. By actual count there were thirty-eight birds in the flock—a most unusual occurrence and one I had never before observed. Indeed, throughout the two previous winters I had not seen a single Chickadee. Within the sanctuary is a reforested area of about 35 acres containing Scotch and white pine, red cedars, Norway spruce, maple, sumach, and elderberry, and at every few rods among these groves a Chickadee could be seen as well as several Juncos. The little birds seemed quite plentiful in the groves until early December, but around January 1st there were only a dozen or so to be seen feeding at our serve-self feed rocks which are well supplied with broken-up walnuts.

There is little doubt that it was the evergreen grove which attracted the Chickadees at that season of the year. As everyone knows, Essex County is very level and the only other evergreen grove to be found in the county is at Point Pelee fifteen miles distant.

I should like to hear from other members of Canadian Field-Naturalists' Clubs and to know if they noticed any marked increase in the Chickadee population last fall.—MANLY F. MINER.

ON THE BRONZED GRACKLE.—I have often watched the Bronzed Grackle hunting for food at the water's edge of streams and lakes and I have supposed, probably correctly so, that they were searching out almost any particle of food whether it be animal or vegetable. It is well known that they act as scavengers about city parks and lawns, but when a Grackle is seen near water it may have other items on its bill-of-fare.

I have in my back garden a concrete bird bath placed on a slight mound and made to appear like a small natural pool. A few aquatic plants, such as Bulrushes and Marsh Marigolds are transplanted in the pool each spring, and a permanent border of Red Osier Dogwood gives summer shade as well as adding to the illusion of a natural pool. A few creek minnows are also secured and placed in the bath, partly to prevent mosquitoes from maturing there, and partly to

give an additional interest to this small bit of city marsh. One edge of the bowl is sunk about one foot in depth, so that it holds sufficient water to remain reasonably cool in summer, while the broad exposed surface of the water allows it to be constantly aerated.

About two hundred yards from my dwelling a small colony of Bronzed Grackles yearly rear their young in the lofty tops of a cluster of white pines. The parent birds make frequent pilgrimages from the nests to the surrounding lawns and gardens. They seemed particularly partial to my garden and I was frankly pleased since few birds could be enticed to visit my grounds, situated as they are in a new section of the city where there is not sufficient vegetation to make it inviting.

One morning I watched a Grackle alight on the stone in the centre of the bird bath. I saw it spear into the water and secure what I thought was a minnow. It walked to the edge of the bath and layed the object on the grass at the border. Returning to the centre stone, it again speared into the water and secured what I was certain was a minnow. This one was taken and placed beside the first. A third minnow was captured before the bird finally picked up all three and flew away. Being away from home all day, I had no opportunity of observing the bird further, but Mrs. Snyder assured me that it had returned several times to fish that day. Upon examining the bath, I found there was not a single minnow left out of the two dozen or more placed there.

I waited several days before re-stocking the bath with fish, thinking the bird would forget its source of fish food, but after again placing minnows there, they, too, disappeared.

This is the only case I have known where a Grackle was a fisher of live fish. Of course in this case, the minnows were confined and had little chance to escape. It is interesting to consider also that this bird, presuming that only one individual was concerned, laid aside its prey until a full load had been collected, and that it placed the fish conveniently together away from the water.—(As read before the Brodie Club).—L. L. SNYDER, *Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology.*

I have had a similar experience with Grackles and gold fish in the pool in my garden in Ottawa. In this case the pool is some fifteen by twenty feet in size, and was well grown with water lily stems and pads but, in spite of this considerable extent and good cover, the Grackles nesting in the vines of a house backing ours succeeded in

considerably more than decimating the pool. In summers previous to 1926 Grackles were frequent visitors to the pool but did not seem to turn their attentions to fishing. That summer, though I was not at home to see it personally, the family reported that the birds were seen again and again to watch for fish at the margin, snatch up such as came within range, beat them on the concrete margin and carry them away nestward. The young Grackles must have lived high this season for though on other years when emptying the pool in the fall I usually took out some three hundred young gold fish of varying sizes, that fall there were no fish of the year and even the breeding stock was greatly reduced. The past summer being home, as soon as the Grackles began their pernicious activity, I plied a little .22 calibre eliminator with some advantage, and reduced the local Grackle population considerably. The number of victims was surprising—far more than could have nested in the vines at the rear—and it was evident that the Grackles of quite a wide area had learned the fishing habit and were attempting to profit thereby. As a result, I had a fairly good hatch of fish this fall and though I did lose some of them, unfortunately the first hatched and largest, the losses were not serious. Protection often resolves itself into a choice of favourites. If we want flowers, we have to uproot weeds; if we want game we must legislate against poachers. In this case if I wanted fish to keep down mosquitoes, I had to abolish at fish to keep down the mosquitoes, I had to abolish at least some of the Grackles that preyed upon them.—P. A. TAVERNER.

INDIAN HEAD, SASK.,
December 12th, 1927.

MR. B. A. FAUVEL,
Honorary Treasurer,
Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club,
Ottawa, Canada.

DEAR MR. FAUVEL:—

I have been a subscriber to *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* for nearly a year now and so it is coming near the time when I must renew. I feel that this publication should have the support of every Canadian naturalist as it is the only periodical dealing exclusively with Natural History that we have in Canada as far as I am aware. I always recommend it to all my naturalist friends pointing out that it is our own paper and should have our whole-hearted backing, even if it cannot give us as much for our money as some of the American publications. It never can until it gets the circulation and appreciation that it deserves.

In line with this view I am going to have a lot of my gifts in future take the form of subscriptions to this delightful little magazine. I am enclosing my renewal and four others for a start.

(Signed) R. SHORE.

SCREECH OWLS IN MARTIN HOUSES.—Screech Owls are all right in their place but that place is certainly not a Martin house. During last July and August we received between twenty and thirty letters from people living mostly in New York and New England States, each letter describing how Martins had made their homes in houses erected for them but would leave suddenly and return merely to flutter in the air at the entrance to their former homes. We had observed similar happenings at our own home and found that a Screech Owl had taken possession of the compartment. To each person who had written us it was suggested investigations be made and in every case a Screech Owl was found to be occupying the Martin's former home. How to overcome this situation throughout the country is difficult to determine. The best way appears to be the reduction of the entrance to the Martin house, making the opening large enough for the Martins to enter, but not large enough for the Screech Owl. Whether this is practicable I cannot say, and should greatly like to have the opinions of our readers.—MANLY F. MINER.

WOOD DUCKS INCREASING.—Since the Wood Duck has been accorded complete protection, it has been slowly but steadily increasing and a few definite notes may be of interest. In talking with Dr. Robert Cushman Murphy at the meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union he said that Wood Ducks were the most abundant duck in Carolina, where he had just been on a duck hunt. That is, of course, far away from Ontario, but on a visit to Point Pelee on December 21, I was told by a resident who is a conscientious conservationist, that, on the opening day of shooting, these ducks were the most abundant of all and that very many of them were killed. Unfortunately the perpetrators escaped in every instance, and my informant belonged to one of the few parties that refused to kill them. On my return home (London, Ontario) I found awaiting me a memorandum regarding a Wood Duck, and on December 25 I saw the bird itself, which had doubtless been wounded during the shooting season and had lived on my own lake until it froze over. It was flushed by a man on the 22nd and scuttled over the ice towards the open water, but was brought in by a dog, uninjured. But it is doubtful that it



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