

The only other record of this species in the Labrador Peninsula is that of Audubon¹⁵, who says, "In Labrador we saw several individuals of both sexes".

Despite the failure of other ornithologists to find the Blackburnian Warbler in this region there appears to be no good ground for setting aside these records, as the species is distinctly marked and well known, and there is undoubtedly a considerable southern influence manifest in the avifauna and flora of the immediate vicinity of Natashquan. A Blackburnian Warbler was taken on June 9, 1882, by the late N. A. Comeau, near Pointe des Monts, Quebec, about 60 miles southwest of the nearest part of the Labrador Peninsula¹⁶.

AB BLACK-POLL WARBLER. *Dendroica striata*.— Nesting.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, 2:208.

¹⁶ C. H. Merriam, *Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club*, 7:234.

B REDSTART. *Setophaga ruticilla*. — Abundant at Natashquan. The present writer would rank it as "common" there in suitable habitats.

AB PURPLE FINCH. *Carpodacus purpureus*. — Heard singing at Appeetetat Bay.

B PINE FINCH. — Noticed.

B "Two species of Cross-bill". Noticed. There are very few records of *Loxia curvirostra* in the Labrador Peninsula.

A SNOW-BIRD. *Junco hyemalis*. — Observed at Appeetetat Bay.

AB WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW. *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. — Observed at Appeetetat Bay.

B WHITE-THROATED SPARROW. *Zonotrichia albicollis*. — Observed.

AB FOX-COLOURED SPARROW. *Passerella iliaca*.— A nest of this species, containing eggs, and built "in a low fir tree, about three feet from the ground", was found at Natashquan on June 15.

AVIAN MURDER

By P. A. TAVERNER

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FEW SUMMERS ago we were enjoying a sun bath near the top of the Murailles, those perpendicular cliffs that descend some seven hundred feet directly into the Gulf of St. Lawrence adjacent to the village of Percé, Gaspé County, Quebec. We were lazily watching a flock of Herring Gulls circling like white midges over the deep blue water far below, when a small brown hawk like a shadow was seen to dash out from the shore and pass through the idly interweaving gulls. A faint chorus of excited remonstrance rose to our ears and several gulls took after the intruder. One seemed to make momentary contact with it and at the touch the little raptor set its wings and glided down into the water. Immediately the larine excitement waxed fiercer, the whole flock set upon the helpless victim, and their white forms hid it from view. When they separated all that could be seen was a little brown jetsam floating inertly upon the sea. Most of the gulls turned away with loss of interest once their purpose was accomplished but occasionally one would re-

turn, give an extra precautionary dig and pass on. Even with good glasses it was impossible in the fleeting moment before the disaster to see just what species the hawk was but it gave the impression of a Sharpshin. Afterwards the remains were too nondescript to be recognized at the distance. We hurried to the village where we found our old friend Willie Duval and his gas boat and made haste from the south beach, round the great rock, and to the scene of the tragedy. But nearly an hour had elapsed and we discovered nothing. The tide was coming in and though we searched the bouldery talus shore minutely and scanned the smooth sea with care no *corpus delicti* could be found. Whether it was washed away by the tide or the gulls had made off with their prey could not be told. The species of hawk remains hypothetical.

The incident recalled a similar occurrence many years previous when fishermen at Point Pelee, Lake Erie, on returning from their daily occupation gave us the bedraggled remains of a Sharp-shinned Hawk that they told us had been beaten down into the water and killed by the Herring Gulls off the tip of the point.

Another occurrence happened once on Bonaventure Island off the Percé mentioned above. We had dug out a Leach's Petrel from its nest burrow. It refused to leave the excavation, was taken in the hand and carried to the nearby verge of the great Gannet cliffs and tossed into the air. There are always a few Herring Gulls in this neighbourhood and as the little Petrel flew off seaward a number of them gave chase. It dodged here, there, one after another of its assailants, successfully ran the gauntlet, and disappeared to sea. It escaped, but only through its agility and erratic flight. The intent of its attackers was only too evident; one snap of their bills driven home and its fate would have been that of the two little hawks.

A case surprising because of the species involved was witnessed by J. S. Wallace at Point Pelee. He came upon a Red-tailed Hawk and a Raven in a final struggle on the public road. When he arrived on the scene the affair had already been transferred from the air to the ground. He had not seen the beginning of the attack nor which was the aggressor. If it had been started by the Red-tail it showed greater initiative and nerve than we usually associate with the Buteo group. If it was the Raven, its heart had proved greater than its bite. Probably it was the result of a casual feint giving an unexpected accidental advantage that was immediately pressed home. The hawk was shot, the Raven was already in its death throes. Both specimens were preserved; the Raven constituted the only recent record of the species in this part of southern Ontario.

A wanton case of murder occurred in a Ring-bill gullery on a small stony island near the north end of Lake Winnipeg. We had landed for inspection purposes. There were many young gulls in all stages of juvenility hiding between boulders and under weeds. A few of the better grown took to water and paddled off shore. The adults had taken wing and circled in great excitement over the lake near by. One bar-tailed, nearly grown juvenile, was swimming near shore. Whether it was a weakling, such as it seems a law of the jungle for the strong to pick upon, was not noticed, but an adult winging past gave it a seemingly casual peck. The blow struck home with unexpected effectiveness and it was at once evident that the youngster was seriously affected. As if at a signal, at the sight of its disorganized struggles, a considerable proportion of the adults turned upon the unfortunate. On our approach they left their victim only to return as we re-

treated and the last seen was an array of waving wings accompanied by raucously excited voices surrounding a lifeless bunch of white feathers that drifted or was dragged farther and farther out over the lake.

A clear case of murder occurred in another Ring-bill gullery on the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Photographing from a blind every detail was seen at close range. We were observing a couple of nests nearby, separated from each other by a little tongue of lush grass. Both nests had little spotted downy young. As a rule one parent brooded while the other stood about, making casual trips away and back again. The young remained in the shelter of the parental breast or momentarily wandered a few feet away. One from the nearer nest strayed a little farther than usual, around the separating point of grass and into the bailiwick of the neighbour. One of the guardians of the invaded territory unhappily returned at the moment, saw the little stranger chick, and ran to meet it. One stroke of the heavy bill at the base of the head and the deed was done. It worried the remains a moment or so and then left the tangled gray lump of down in the fly-infested sunlight, disregarded it the remainder of the day and tramped it into flat unrecognition during its regular patrolling. Throughout the episode the parent or parents of the innocent victim looked on unheeding and without interference or remonstrance.

A murder mystery story is recalled by the foregoing. It involved a mammal instead of a bird but falls in with the previously mentioned incidents and demonstrates again that nature is normally red in tooth and nail. We were working in towards the base of Point Pelee one spring morning. As we passed a little open glade in the heavy timber, a small body came hurtling down from overhead, landing with a dull thump on the ground. Another and another fell until four or five followed quickly. On investigation we found an equal number of quarter-grown Red Squirrels breathing their last in the short grass and dead leaves under the wide spread of a large walnut tree. Each had a small stream of blood flowing from a small puncture in the side of the neck. It looked like a Dracula vampire bite or the chisel-like incision of a squirrel's tooth. Was pater-squirrel jealous of his wife's attentions to her family? Was mater-squirrel impatient of her responsibilities? Was it a raid by a neighbour? Or was it squirrel's work at all? It was only circumstantial evidence and a process of elimination that

directed suspicion to the species' door. We searched with our eyes from below the branches of the great tree overhead from which the evidence fell but in the leafy screen could discover

nothing. No living thing stirred there nor could we perceive a hollow limb, trunk or other evidence of squirrel habitation. We departed in ignorance and still wondering.

SOME NOTES ON THE HABITS OF THE RUFFED GROUSE, *Bonasa umbellus*

By DAN McDONALD



WHILE DRUMMING, the Ruffed Grouse stands very erect, possibly tilting slightly backwards. While in this position the wings are brought forcibly forward, throwing the air from one wing against that from the other. This makes the booming sound. The wings do not touch the sides nor do they meet in front of the breast. When starting to drum they can stop at one, two, or three beats, but when fast motion starts they seem unable to stop and the writer, by proper timing, has run up and caught the birds in the hands. At this time they must be easy prey for the fox. It is not hard to see a bird drum, only a matter of time and caution. You can get within twenty feet and the bird will still drum although aware of your presence. During the proceeding they drum within a few seconds of regular intervals, usually, in the heat of the season, with about two minutes between.

The writer does not think that Ruffed Grouse suffer by death under the snow crust. They never enter the snow unless conditions are perfect. The snow must be soft and the weather very cold. On other nights they roost in trees in thick places. No snow drifts over them as they are never in a position where snow drifts. When they enter the snow it is always along a river or in an opening in the bush. They dive from a perch in a tree and hit the soft snow with some force. The only chance of getting killed would be to hit a sharp snag buried under the snow. They dive in about dusk or just before and then work their way under the snow about two feet from the opening. If you endeavour to catch them in the snow, as I have done many times, they come out in full flight without struggling, making it impossible so to trap them.

One reason for the difference in the number of eggs in the nest is because they sometimes eject their eggs while in flight. I have, on one occasion, observed a bird flying over camp to drop an egg that fell on a manure pile, un-

broken. I took the egg to a nest and put it along with others. It hatched, showing that it was not disease that caused the dropping. I have also noticed grouse eggs broken on bare rocks and wondered if they were stolen and dropped, but now I am certain that on some occasions they lay flying.

There is no evidence that rain kills the young. In very wet Junes we have as large coveys as in dry Junes. That cause of decline in numbers is not real. In fifty years with the grouse I find that they change in numbers greatly in two months and always in the summer. In 1924 I had 200 men peeling poplar pulp. These men showed me more nests than I have seen in the rest of my life. Grouse or, as we call them, Partridge were everywhere. The eggs hatched but by the time the peeling season closed, July 25th, there were no birds left. This shows plainly that they die in June and July. As this very marked decline in numbers was general from Nova Scotia to western Wisconsin in the United States and to Kenora in Canada, it tells us that disease, not weather, was the cause.

The writer never saw a bird under the snow crust in fifty years in the bush or a dead bird when the snow was leaving. In a country where, at times, there are many birds this should have been noticed if it happened at all frequently. I have never talked with a real bush man who ever found such a condition, so we can eliminate crusting also as a cause for general mortality.

Human beings have had little effect upon their numbers. In seasons when very plentiful many are killed but there are as many next year. The area they cover is so great and human population so few that it has little effect. I would place the bear as their greatest enemy. Bears eat their eggs, catch their very young, and hunt all the time. When their nest is destroyed I have never been able to discover whether they lay again or not; they certainly never do so in the same nest. (Sault Ste. Marie).



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