

THE MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD IN MANITOBA.

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In an interesting paper on "Rare Manitoba birds," read before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, on February 9th, 1904, by Mr. G. E. Atkinson and published in the Manitoba Free Press, mention is made of two Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia arctica*) having been seen in October, 1896, near Brandon, one of which was shot. These are apparently the only records of the bird's appearance in Manitoba, excepting a few notes on their migration sent by me to the United States Biological Survey.

This bird is, however, by no means uncommon in the tract of country lying between this place and Carberry—known locally as the "Sand Hills" or "Spruce Bush"—and it seems probable that, when its favourite haunts are more generally known, it will be found in several of the more hilly parts of the province.

The "Sand Hills" mentioned above consist of low sandy hills, very often with blow-outs on their south sides and underbrush on the north. These hills, which seldom rise more than forty feet above their bases, usually contain on their tops and sides—when protected from fire—clumps of spruce, and between their ranges—that contain an occasional pond—grow aspen, willows and a few stunted oaks, etc.

These oaks which are often hollow, in company with a few old stumps that have been previously used by woodpeckers, make ideal nesting places for the bluebirds, and any person in search of them during the latter half of June, would probably find several nests in a day.

Of the numerous nests examined by me, some were more than nine feet from the ground, the average being just under four. They were built of dead grass and contained, when the birds had finished laying, six eggs, which closely resemble those of *S. sialis*, excepting that they are smaller.

The reason that these birds are not more generally known in Manitoba, seems to be their habit of seldom flying far from their breeding ground. As an instance, I have lived within five miles

of their nesting places for over twenty years without seeing one here.

My migration notes are unsatisfactory. The earliest arrival was noted May 7th, 1900, the last noted being October 14th, 1899, and October 16th, 1900. These dates could probably be extended both ways, as they are taken after only a few hours spent in the "Sand Hills" with long intervals between each visit.

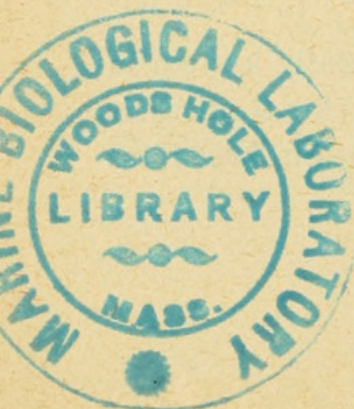
For the benefit of readers that are not acquainted with the different bluebirds of North America, the following distinguishing features of our Canadian species may prove of interest:

BLUEBIRD (*S. sialis*). Male: above azure blue; throat and breast rusty brown; belly whitish. Female: blue of back more grayish brown; breast less rusty. Male in winter much the same as female.

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*S. mexicana occidentalis*). Male distinguished from *S. sialis* by having rusty brown on fore back and the throat blue. Female duller. The range of this species is given in Chapman's Colour Key, as "Pacific coast from Northern Lower California north to British Columbia," etc.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD, (*S. arctica*). Male: above bright blue; throat and breast rather paler; belly whitish. Female: above bluish gray, with very slight brownish tint; rump blue; throat and breast bluish buff; belly white. The specimens observed closely by me seem to be distinctly bluer than the description in Chapman's Colour Key. This species is said to breed from "Sierra Nevada east to the plains, and from New Mexico north to the great Slave Lake region."

There is practically no difference in the length of these three birds.





Criddle, Norman. 1904. "The Mountain Bluebird in Manitoba." *The Ottawa naturalist* 18(4), 85–86.

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