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## POPULAR AND PRACTICAL ORNITHOLOGY.

### III.—THE UPLAND PLOVER.

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When viewed from a short distance, Upland Plovers might be described, briefly, as grayish-brown above; the colour in reality, is made up of gray-brown and black markings. Beneath, they are white with black arrowhead-shaped dashes on the upper breast and along the sides. They average about twelve inches in length.

This plover, so far as Canada is concerned, is a bird of the Middle West and though it is found in migration, casually, from coast to coast, its chief breeding grounds are western Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan, extending, however, southward to Virginia and northwesterly to Alaska. It winters in Mexico and South America.

This bird has previously passed under a variety of names, many of them local. Until recently, it has been known as Bartramians Sandpiper. The popular tongue however, was never able to master such a cumbersome title and so the A.O.U. changed it to one more easily uttered and which was already in common use in various parts of the bird's range. The name, as it is, is also a very appropriate one, applying as it does to a bird that is decidedly upland in habit, preferring the dry prairies which are broken by small bluffs, particularly if the land be sandy. There is reason to suspect, however, that this preference for sandy soil is, after all, due not so much to an actual liking for the soil as for the food found upon it. Such soil, on account of its extra heat and inability to support as dense a vegetation as the richer land, proves much more suitable for the breeding locusts, more particularly those species that lay their eggs in the ground. Here they flourish and if not checked, often become troublesome pests. Now, the chief food of Upland Plovers is these very members of the order Orthoptera—locusts, grasshoppers or any other of the hopper tribe. Hence, the association is more than probable due to food considerations.



In Manitoba—and it is of that Province I write more particularly—this plover reaches us from the south, on an average, about the first or second of May. It comes up in a leisurely manner, often pausing to utter its quaint song, by which means and its oft-uttered call note, its arrival is easily detected and its departure southward recorded by the same means, minus the song.

To begin with then, sandpipers roam the prairies in pairs, picking up most of the soft-bodied animal creation that is unfortunate enough to attract their attention. Grasshoppers, however, unquestionably form the chief article of diet at that time, as there is no mistaking the rapid runs, first one way and then another. They resemble a human being trying to catch a frog, and such actions can only be caused by an insect that hops. In June, these birds begin to seriously consider the rearing of a family and seek out a suitable tuft of grass or some other object near which to build a nest, so that there will be some sort of shelter affording protection both from the weather and enemies, though I do not think the latter precaution is a very necessary one, as the birds, with their mottled coats are admirably adapted for concealment; in fact they harmonize almost perfectly with the herbage in which they are found, and I cannot remember ever having detected a brooding bird before she left the nest, though often fully in view. The nest is found in various situations from the centre of low open bushes to unbroken prairie or the tops of sand dunes where the vegetation is very scanty. The nest is sunk in the ground and is lightly built of grass with occasionally a feather or two for lining. In this the bird lays from four to five eggs of the usual sandpiper type, large and mottled. The eggs for the size of the bird are remarkably large and one wonders how such a small bird lays such large eggs. On account of the size and the long time they take to hatch, the young when they do appear are so well developed that they can run actively and immediately leave the nest. The actual brooding, so far as I am aware, is done by the female alone, but the male is seldom far away and he takes an active part in caring for the young. At this time the female is bold and wise in defence of her offspring, readily resorting to such artifices as feigning death or injury, and I have known them to fairly fly in my face as I stooped to pick up a little one, uttering weird cries meanwhile. They become very noisy as the young grow and their perpetual callings to attract attention get rather monotonous, especially when one is trying to listen for something else.

In the early eighties these birds were everywhere and their cries and songs could be heard at any time of the day while



their graceful movements on the wing and the pretty habit of raising their wings above their backs when alighting was a pleasure to behold. Then, too, they were quite fearless, allowing a very close approach, as if having perfect confidence in the human invader. Alas for such confidence; it was requited indeed! Yes! with a gun. So that to-day even our innocent little plovers have learnt the lesson of experience that others had learnt too late. They are, as we might expect, no longer the trusting innocents of the past, though still far from wild during the breeding season. Their lesson has been a costly one and for the thousands that previously roamed the whole country of their adoption, we now have but a few, restricted to certain districts where as yet mankind has been unable to destroy them all. Of course the rapid settling up of the land has also greatly reduced the breeding area. In the south, naturalists and sportsmen too, are beginning to become seriously alarmed at the yearly decrease of breeding birds and in consequence a permanent close season is advocated. In Manitoba, however, though progressive in most of our game laws, we still have an obnoxious law enabling the killing of Upland Plovers in July, at a time when many of the birds are still nesting and in defence of their young can actually be knocked over with a stick.

It was my good fortune some years ago to discover a nest of one of these plovers in a situation that I was obliged to visit daily. It was close to some bushes and in rather an unusual situation, being on lowland. Here I saw the bird twice or three times a day, and with patience soon taught her to have confidence so that eventually I could touch her without her leaving the nest. She also learnt to pick up the grasshoppers I threw to her. Her male, however, was absent and never showed up during the weeks we kept company, so I suspect he had fallen a prey to one of the numerous snares that are met with in nature. I do not know how long the female had been sitting when I first met her, but it was close upon four weeks from that date before the young emerged from the eggs. I found them all one afternoon, but a few feet away from the nest, perfect little striped balls of fluff on long stilt-like legs. I gathered them into my hands and here they squatted, "peeping" apparently quite contentedly as if their mother had instructed them that here was a mortal to be trusted. No doubt she had omitted to give the signal that would send the young into hiding. She stood but a few feet away quite unconcerned while I had her little ones, and when at last I let them gently down she made no effort to lead them away but stood watching me, and thus I left her to see her to recognize no more. I have often wondered since whether her confidence was extended to others and



if so whether it led, as I fear, to her losing her life as is so often the ultimate fate of wild animals, particularly the small and weak ones that are led to place reliance upon mankind.

As soon as domestic ties are over for the season our plovers pack up, so to speak, and make their way southward. The first matured are ready to depart quite early in July and after that date they may be heard nightly calling to each other as they move rapidly away. By the middle of August nearly all have vanished though a few belated individuals remain into September, occasionally as late as the third week.

There is a strange circumstance in connection with the autumn flights in comparison with their northward movements in spring. In the spring they come up in a leisurely manner, often pausing in their wing beats to utter their peculiar but pleasing song. At this time too their forward movements seem to be largely controlled by the tips of the wings, indeed this is quite a characteristic of the spring flight. But in autumn they have quite another type of flight; then they seem to use the whole wing and fly much more like a snipe and like that bird are remarkably rapid in their movements. The sailing motion has all gone, and instead of the somewhat slow moving bird of the breeding season we have one that for quickness can vie with many of the fastest, and but for the cries, method of alighting, and vesture, would not be recognized as the same species. It is, no doubt, this strange change of habit that has given the bird a different reputation in the south, where it is spoken of as being very shy and difficult to approach. Yet another peculiarity is the fact that in the spring they are almost without exception day fliers, having a preference for the morning, while in autumn they seldom migrate at any other time but night. This curiously enough is just the opposite to the habits of night hawks which in spring move northward in the evening or at night, and south in autumn during the afternoon.

It seems unnecessary to go extensively into the food habits of Upland Plovers. I have observed them time after time picking up locusts and have also actually seen them chase a moving stone that was thrown at them, under the impression that it also belonged to the order Orthoptera.

Some years ago owing to a controversy on the subject of food habits, relating more particularly to the capabilities of plovers being able to devour large grasshoppers, I secured a few specimens of the bird and examined them; my brother did likewise and we found them literally crammed with hoppers both large and small. The number they consume in a day must be enormous, and as they continue this diet throughout the season of their sojourn with us and do no appreciable harm their preser-



vation is surely desirable even if we only look at the question from the standpoint of dollars and cents.

### EXCURSIONS.

The second excursion was made under ideal weather conditions on May 4th. The party assembled at the Wychwood car station about 3.30 p.m., and under the guidance of the leaders for the day proceeded to study the fauna and flora of the area lying between the car station and the river at Blueberry Point. For most of the members the chief object of search was the Mayflower or Trailing Arbutus (*Epigaea repens* L.) which was met with in considerable quantity, few of the searchers being disappointed in obtaining specimens. From the point of view of the genuine field naturalist some members were perhaps too successful in collecting it. Amongst other ericaceous plants noticed were the Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos Uva-ursi* (L.) Spr.) and the common Winter Green (*Gaultheria procumbens* L.). The former of these was in full bloom while the latter was often conspicuous by its scarlet fruit. Hepaticas were in great abundance, and it was noticed that they were all referable to *H. triloba* while specimens gathered at Aylmer Park were those of *H. acutiloba*. The common or White Elm (*Ulmus americana* L.) and the Red Maple (*Acer rubrum* L.) were observed in flower. Amongst the conifers noticed the Red Pine (*Pinus resinosa* Ait.) and a variety (var. *depressa* Pursh) of the common Juniper are worthy of mention. In addition to the flowering plants a number of interesting cryptogams were collected. These included *Lycopodium complanatum* L. var. *flabelliforme* Fernald to which is given the English name of "Ground Pine" in the new edition of Gray's Manual, although many of us have learned to know another species (*L. obscurum*) under this name; the Spiny and the Crested Shield Ferns (*Aspidium spinulosum* and *A. cristatum*); the so-called Reindeer "Moss" (*Cladonia rangiferina* (L.) Web.)—in reality a lichen and one of the most beautiful representatives of the group; and an early ascomycetous fleshy fungus (*Helvella* sp.).

The students of animal life were not perhaps so fortunate as the botanists, but a fair number of birds were seen, including two new arrivals, the Myrtle Warbler and the Pine Warbler, the latter of which is an uncommon spring migrant here.

Short addresses by Mr. Calvert on the birds, Mr. Halkett on the other animals, and Dr. Malte and Mr. Eastham on the plants observed closed an excursion whose only drawback was its brevity.

J.W.E.



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