

THE WESTERN ELEMENT IN THE JAMES BAY AVIFAUNA

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AN ORNITHOLOGICAL EXCURSION to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Labrador coast in 1901 gave me my first experience in the north country and whetted my desire for more. In 1906 and 1907 I worked along the line of the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway, then under construction, and from there cast longing eyes towards James Bay. The following year saw me embarked on a strenuous 350-mile canoe trip, requiring three weeks in each direction, from the Canadian Pacific Railway to Moose Factory. On this trip I had my first glimpse of James Bay itself and skirted its southern shores for a few miles to the eastward of the mouth of the Moose River. Since then it has been my privilege to undertake no less than eight expeditions, one of them by dog-team under winter conditions, to the southern and eastern shores of James Bay. My last expedition was in 1942. On several of these trips the east coast of Hudson Bay proper was also traversed for more or less of its length. The completion of the railway to a terminus near Moose Factory has of course greatly simplified the problem of reaching the Bay and of launching expeditions thereon. Since the region is now easily accessible, it may be well to put on record at least some of the data which have been secured in past years at a great cost of time, effort, and money.

Bird life on this coast is by no means so abundant as one might expect; it is far less so than on the Canadian Labrador, for example. In the fall there are concentrations of certain species at the south end of the Bay, but in recent years these have fallen off materially. Of the sea fowl the Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisæa*) is perhaps the most common and most generally distributed breeding species. The Mandt Guillemot (*Cephus grylle mandti*) follows, with the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) third. These birds, with others that nest on the offshore islands, are shot at all seasons by the natives, and their eggs are taken and used for food. Places where they can breed undisturbed are thus relatively few. Birds of prey, too, are considered fair game and are indiscriminately killed by the native hunters. Shore birds as a breeding population are also disappointingly

few, since most of the species seen in spring and fall go farther north to nest. The Passerine birds, however, are not molested to any serious extent; some of them, like the Robin (*Turdus migratorius migratorius*) and the Savanna Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis oblitus*), can be found almost anywhere, but the greatest variety occurs in the vicinity of settlements. Indeed, I know of no better place in the north country for small birds in general than the island on which the Hudson's Bay Company's post of Moose Factory is situated; it is perhaps my favorite collecting-ground.

In working up the collections brought back from these several expeditions, I was early impressed by the number of birds of supposedly western affinities represented therein. Without going into any speculative explanation at this time, or even attempting to correlate the facts in the case, I should like to call attention thereto in this necessarily brief preliminary paper. Fuller details will be reserved for the final report.

The most common breeding duck on James Bay is the Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*), but the Pintail (*Dafila acuta tzitzihua*) is also numerous, although its main breeding range lies far to the westward. I have also one definite breeding record for the Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*) - - another western bird. The game birds are represented by the Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Pediocetes phasianellus phasianellus*), which may be considered a species of western origin, although its present range extends far to the east and to the south of James Bay. The Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*), which is locally common on the southern and on the eastern shores of the Bay, may perhaps be placed in the same category.

I have summer records for both the Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus occidentalis*) and the Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*) from James Bay, but their breeding has yet to be established. In the case of the Bonaparte Gull (*Larus philadelphia*), however, no question exists, since a female was shot containing an egg ready to be laid. This extends the breeding range of this species

much farther east and south than has been supposed. Coming now to the woodpeckers, we find that the Hairy Woodpecker of the region belongs to the race *Dryobates villosus septentrionalis* (as would be expected), and that the Downy Woodpecker is *Dryobates pubescens nelsoni* - a race that clearly comes in from the west. Among the Passerine birds, there are several species of unquestionable western affinities. I had at one time identified the Black-capped Chickadee of the region as *Penthestes atricapillus septentrionalis*, but it differs from that form slightly but constantly and is probably entitled to recognition as a separate race, *P. a. anamesus*. Among the warblers of western affinities is the typical form of the Orange-crowned Warbler, (*Vermivora celata celata*), the Grinnell Water-Thrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis notabilis*), and the Connecticut Warbler (*Oporornis agilis*), of which last named I have lately secured a breeding specimen. Incidentally, the presence of these birds as summer residents in this region may explain why they occur

frequently as migrants in the eastern United States.

The only certain Meadowlark record for the region is one for the Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*). The Red-winged Blackbird is sparingly distributed along the southern shores of the Bay, and a small series of specimens lately secured has been identified as *Agelaius phoeniceus arctolegus*. Three species of Fringillidæ are clearly of western affinities. These are the Leconte Sparrow (*Passerherbulus caudacutus*), the recently described race of the Nelson Sparrow (*Ammospiza caudacuta altera*)¹, and the Dakota Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia juddi*). All three of these sparrows are common birds in suitable habitat along the southern shores of the Bay.

This completes the list to date, but it does not exhaust the list of possibilities, and doubtless in time other species will be added.

1. —However Peters. (1942, *Ann. Carnegie Mus.*, 29, pp. 201-210) believes *altera* is closer to the Acadian Sharp-tailed Sparrow than to Nelson's Sparrow. —
—Ornith. Ed.

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

CONSERVATION STAMPS FOR THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES.—We have just received a set of these stamps sponsored and produced by the Science Association of the University of Alberta during the past hunting season. The set consists of five stamps, each about one and three-quarter inches by two and one-quarter inches in size, and each depicts a game bird; Canada Goose, Mallard, Ruffed Grouse, Hungarian Partridge, Ring-neck Pheasant and in its natural setting. They were drawn by Professor W. Rowan, and are reproduced in the shades of blue, green or brown most appropriate to the subject. The backs are gummed, and the idea, modified from the American Duck Stamp, was that each hunter would buy one or more to stick on his hunting licence, as a voluntary contribution to conservation. The price for the set of five is \$1.00 or twenty-five cents a stamp.

Revenue from the sale of stamps is to be used for conservation purposes, using the word in its widest sense to include investigation of wildlife problems. One of the projects on hand is investigation of the rabbit cycle that is now at its peak. The Provincial Game Department has co-operated by distributing these stamps to their regular vendors of hunting licences. Though the response of the public has been less than was hoped for, the project is to be continued next year with a new set of stamps, so that ultimately an attractive gallery of game birds, and later game animals will be available in this series. These stamps are available from the Secretary, Dr. H. E. Rawlinson, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

A special discount is offered to Natural History Societies and Game Leagues.

—A. L. RAND



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