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SOME MORE LABRADOR NOTES.

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Plates I-II.

THE following notes on the birds of the Labrador Peninsula are the result of a canoe trip some eighty miles up the Natashquan river and ten or fifteen miles up a subsidiary stream, and of the steamer journey to and from the mouth of the river. Owing to the almost continuous stormy weather during the four weeks of the trip, conditions for bird observation were unsatisfactory. In addition the start was made later than I had intended and the song season was nearly over.

Leaving Quebec on July 20, 1912, I reached Natashquan on July 25 and started up the great river the next day with a companion and two French fishermen. The Natashquan River empties into the Gulf of St. Lawrence about half way between the base of the peninsula and the Straits of Belle Isle. On August 1 a point was reached about eighty miles up the river, some sixty miles from the sea in a direct line. Returning about forty miles, a subsidiary stream on the west side was ascended ten or fifteen miles and three days were spent in exploring the small lakes and surrounding country. Returning to Natashquan, I caught the steamer on August 10 and reached Quebec on August 14.

In the paper by Mr. Bent and myself ² a description of this coastal strip of the Labrador Peninsula is given, as well as our reasons

¹ Read at the meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, Nov. 12, 1912.

² Additional Notes on the Birds of Labrador. Auk, XXVII, 1910, pp. 1-18.

for believing that the high land which we visited where it approached the coast at Mingan was arctic in appearance only, and that it had been deforested by fire.

The valley of the Natashquan river as far as I went was densely forested with black spruce and balsam fir. White spruces and white birches were not uncommon while a few mountain ashes, larches, and aspens were also seen, and alders and low willows occurred in places on the river's edge. The forest trees were from 30 to 60 feet high but rarely attained a diameter of more than a foot. An exceptional white birch was 72 inches in circumference and a balsam fir, 64 inches. Their growth was very slow; for example, a balsam fir, which we cut for bedding, was $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter, 48 feet tall and showed 182 rings.

The river is over a mile wide at its mouth and flows between low sand banks for twelve miles. Above this rapids and falls abound in the granitic rock, and the surrounding hills increase in size as one ascends. Glacial gouges and scratches are everywhere plain; their average direction is south 12° east, in relation to true north. Marine cliffs of sand and clay over one hundred and fifty feet high are cut by the river some seventy-five miles from the sea. The whole region has undergone recent elevation by tilting following a previous submersion. At our farthest point inland many of the hills, 800 feet or more above the river, were wooded, while others were nearly destitute of trees. As at Mingan I found the charred stumps of trees on the high land showing that it was formerly forested.

Very few birds were seen along the coast — pitiful remnants of the great hosts that formerly bred there. Loons were common, Red-throated Loons uncommon. Of Puffins only two were seen off the Perroquets on the journey down and two on the return. One was seen near Piashte-bai. Black Guillemots were fairly common. Of Murres, either *troille* or *lomvia*, I saw four between Natashquan and Esquimaux Point, and fourteen between Mingan and Seven Islands. Of Razor-billed Auks I saw only two off the Perroquets on the trip down and three on the return, as well as two near Piashte-bai. A Dovekie was seen on July 21 above the region of the Labrador Peninsula near Godbout. Mr. Napoleon A. Comeau, the veteran naturalist of this place, told me that

a few Dovekies are generally to be found along the coast in summer. While these birds are called Bull-birds by the English-speaking inhabitants on the eastern coast, the French of the southern coast call them *Bons Hommes*.

Eight Parasitic Jaegers were seen off Long Point; several of these were in the dark phase. Kittiwakes in small numbers were seen along the coast especially in the region of the Perroquets; nearly all were in immature plumage. At the mouth of the Natashquan River four immature Glaucous Gulls consorted with Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls and both of these last named Gulls were common on the coast. Terns were common everywhere but not in large numbers. Those examined carefully with glasses seemed to be all Common Terns except one seen at close range at Natashquan that was an Arctic Tern.

One Petrel, probably a Wilson's Petrel, was seen off the Mingan Islands. No Gannets were to be seen about the Perroquets on our passage east, and but five on the return, three in adult, two in immature plumage. I was told that although a few of these birds visited the place every season, none had bred there for years. This corresponds with the results obtained here by Mr. Bent and myself in 1909. On August 10 the steamer passed near enough to a rocky island off Agwannus for me to see some fifty or sixty Double-crested Cormorants thereon. This was one of the three colonies visited by Mr. Bent and myself in 1909.

Of Ducks, a few Red-breasted Mergansers and one or two Whistlers were seen along the coast. Eiders were fairly common, but not abundant, east of Mingan. All were in the brown plumage, although an occasional male was seen with a few white feathers still remaining. The males are believed by many on the coast to disappear after the middle of July and this they can do effectually by dropping their conspicuous nuptial dress and donning the well named eclipse plumage. All three species of Scoters were seen in small numbers on the coast.

On and near the beach at Natashquan and about the Little Natashquan River, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Sanderlings, Greater Yellow-legs, Spotted Sandpipers, Hudsonian Curlews, Semipalmated and Piping Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones were found in small numbers. Of these the Hudsonian Curlews and Piping Plover

are worthy of note. Of the Hudsonian Curlew I saw 25 on the beach at Natashquan on July 25 and 12 flying about the barren hills near Natashquan village on August 8. They were all very wild. Curlew berries, mountain cranberries and bake-apples (cloud berries) were abundant there and the natives said that the Curlew fed on them. As recorded by Allen and myself in our 'Birds of Labrador' ¹ Audubon stated that the Hudsonian Curlew was 'entirely unknown' on this coast, but Stearns in 1880 and '81, and Frazer in 1884, both found it not a rare migrant in the fall. Mr. Johan Beetz told Mr. Bent and myself in 1909 that *le courlis*,—by which he must have meant this species,—was increasing on the coast. This is interesting in connection with the apparent increase of the Hudsonian Curlew in Essex County, Mass.² in the last 60 years. No Eskimo Curlew were seen.

Mr. Bent and I found two Piping Plover on the beach at Natashquan on May 31, 1909. This was the first record of this species for the Labrador Peninsula. On July 25, 1912, I saw two adults and two fully grown young in a family group on this same beach.

So much for the water birds of this coast; their numbers are steadily diminishing for the eggs, nesting-birds and young are the prey not only of the Indians but of the fishermen all along the coast. It is to be hoped that adequate protection will be given them before it is too late.

In the trip up the Natashquan River the following birds were identified, and are worth recording as so little is known of the interior of Labrador. The small number of species and of individuals is partly to be accounted for by the lateness of the season and the unpropitious weather. A reason for the scarcity of ducks and other water-fowl is the fact that the river is one of the highways of migration of the Montagnais Indians. They descend it in the latter part of May with their packs of furs obtained in the interior. After disposing of the furs to the traders, attending to their religious festivities in the Catholic Mission, and feasting on sea birds' eggs and flesh they return up the river in August.

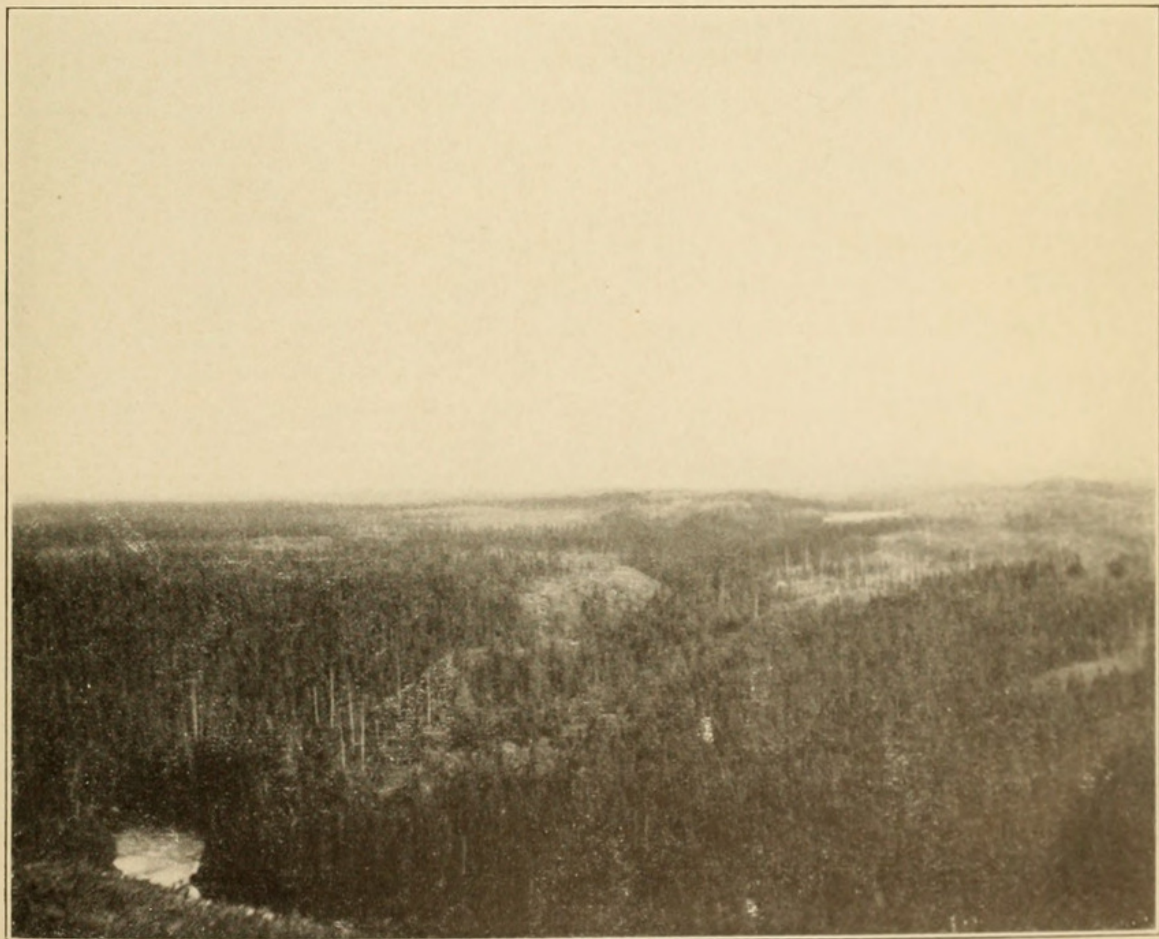
1. **Gavia immer.** LOON.—Two or three seen.
2. **Gavia stellata.** RED-THROATED LOON.—A few near the mouth of the river.

¹ Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist., July, 1907.

² Birds of Essex County, p. 190.



1. THE NATASHQUAN RIVER ABOUT FIFTY MILES FROM THE MOUTH.



2. CHARACTER OF THE COUNTRY ABOUT FORTY MILES INLAND, AS SEEN FROM THE HILL FREQUENTED BY THE RED-TAILED HAWK.

3. **Larus marinus.** GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL.— One was seen on July 26, ten miles from the mouth, and another on August 2, about fifty-five miles from the mouth of the river.

4. **Larus argentatus.** HERRING GULL.— A few of these birds all in adult plumage were seen both along the main river and the branch stream.

5. **Sterna hirundo.** COMMON TERN.— Among the sand bars below the first fall a few Common Terns were seen and five or six from twenty to forty miles up the river.

6. **Mergus serrator.** RED-BREASTED MERGANSER.— A single bird was seen flying over the rapids of the fifth fall, another some seventy-five miles up, and one on the branch river. This one in female plumage flew ahead of the canoe, croaking hoarsely.

7. **Anas rubripes tristis.** BLACK DUCK.— The only Black Ducks I saw were in the branch stream on August 5, about forty miles from the sea. Here I came upon six birds and shot one, an adult female. The others were probably young birds, but all took to their wings after acting at first as if unable to fly. The bird I secured had a pale olive-green bill with a black nail; pale dusky brown or straw-colored tarsi and feet, without any hint of red, a buffy almost immaculate throat and dark crown and nape. The bird was a typical *tristis*. The breast was very dark and beautifully streaked.

8. **Clangula clangula americana.** GOLDEN-EYE.— A young bird unable to fly with a little natal down still about its head was secured in the main river. No others were seen here. In the branch stream on August 3, I came upon a mother and four nearly fully fledged young still unable to fly. The old bird crouched low in the water — her golden eyes showing very prominently,— and uttered hoarse rasping croaks. The young, whose eyes were gray-blue and inconspicuous, at once scattered, diving repeatedly and disappeared in the bushes, while the mother kept prominently in view within twenty yards of the canoe leading us down stream. After repeatedly swimming and flying short distances ahead of the canoe for half a mile or so, croaking all the time, she disappeared around a bend and undoubtedly flew back to the young. Near at hand the young made no sound, but at a distance a loud beseeching peep was uttered.

9. **Branta canadensis canadensis.** CANADA GOOSE.— Seven nearly grown young birds were found in the branch stream. They were able to progress over the water with great speed by use of the legs aided by the partly developed wings. No adults were seen.

10. **Botaurus lentiginosus.** BITTERN.— A single bird of this species was seen and thoroughly identified on August 3 as it jumped into the air within a few yards of the canoe on the branch stream. This is an interesting record as the previous ones are so meagre. Coues found a wing in the possession of a hunter in southern Labrador and Bigelow speaks of seeing two or three at Cape Francis.

11. **Pisobia minutilla.** LEAST SANDPIPER.— One was seen above the fifth falls on July 30.

12. **Actitis macularia.** SPOTTED SANDPIPER.—Common on the borders of the rivers and lakes.

13. **Ægialitis semipalmata.** SEMIPALMATED PLOVER.—One seen flying south over the river on August 6.

14. **Bonasa umbellus togata.** CANADA RUFFED GROUSE.—A family with half grown young was seen at the third falls on July 27, and another on July 31 about 75 miles up the river.

15. **Circus hudsonius.** MARSH HAWK.—A pair of Marsh Hawks were found at the mouth of the Natashquan River, and another inland from the village. This pair probably had young as one of them was very noisy, repeating the whinnying notes and launching itself to within thirty yards of me in a threatening manner whenever I entered a certain bog. This was on August 8 and 9. With the exception of the record by Mr. Bent and myself in 1909, Audubon's and Stearns' records are the only previous ones for this species.

16. **Accipiter cooperi.** COOPER'S HAWK.—One was seen near the fourth falls on August 7 and another, or the same bird, on July 30. Stearns is the only one who has previously recorded this bird.

17. **Buteo borealis borealis.** RED-TAILED HAWK.—A very dark bird of this species was seen for three days near a precipitous hill on the branch river. Only when seen from above could the red tail be distinguished; from below, the tail seemed nearly black. The Labrador form of the Canada Jay is somewhat darker than the same species elsewhere. This tendency to dark plumage is particularly marked in the Labrador form of the Horned Owl. It is possible that the same may be true of the Red-tailed Hawk of Labrador, although the individual that I observed may have been merely an exceptional case of melanism. This same tendency to darker plumage is suggested in the Flicker and Yellow Warbler as referred to later in this paper. Beebe has shown that a damp climate in itself, aside from other environment, tends to darkness in plumage, and the climate of Labrador in summer is damp.

The piercing cry of this Hawk, well described by Chapman as suggestive of escaping steam, was continually emitted whenever we appeared in the neighborhood. No nest could be found although the bird's actions suggested young. The only previous records of the bird are as follows: Audubon says "a tail feather of the Red-tailed Hawk, young, was found [near Cape Whittle]; therefore that species exists here." Palmer records that "two were seen at the Mingan Islands."

18. **Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis.** ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK.—At the fifth falls on July 30 I saw one and another on July 31 near Devil's Mountain. As it flew towards the cliffs it was greeted by a chorus of shrill whistles. No nest, however, could be seen.

19. **Falco columbarius columbarius.** PIGEON HAWK.—One seen on July 26 about ten miles from the mouth of the river.

20. **Pandion haliaëtus carolinensis.** OSPREY.—One or two were

seen at the mouth of the river, one about forty miles up, and one on the branch stream.

21. **Bubo virginianus heterocnemis.** LABRADOR HORNE OWL.—On August 3, a cloudy day, a bird of this species flapped and sailed across the branch river and alighted on a spruce within easy range of the canoe. Here he sat looking straight at us with wide open eyes, and at the same time I twice heard the call of another Owl in the distance. The bird proved to be a male in the sooty plumage characteristic of this race. As far as I know there are no previous identifications of this species so far to the southwest in the Peninsula.

22. **Ceryle alcyon alcyon.** BELTED KINGFISHER.—Common on the main river and the branch stream. The nesting hole of one was seen in a sand bank.

23. **Dryobates pubescens medianus.** DOWNY WOODPECKER.—One was seen near the small river on August 5 and again on August 6.

24. **Colaptes auratus luteus.** NORTHERN FLICKER.—A pair were seen several times near the branch river, and one was heard calling at the fifth falls. I was unable to secure a specimen. One sent me by Dr. Grenfell from Sandwich Bay in 1908 was somewhat darker than the usual New England specimens.

25. **Nuttallornis borealis.** OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER.—A pair were seen on several successive days about some dead trees on the little river. The only previous record for Labrador is the statement of Audubon that he "found this species . . . on the coast of Labrador."

26. **Empidonax flaviventris.** YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER.—The characteristic whistling note of this species was heard several times, and an individual came on board the steamer off the western point of the peninsula on August 12.

27. **Perisoreus canadensis nigricapillus.** LABRADOR JAY.—This bird was more often heard than seen, and was fairly common.

28. **Corvus brachyrhynchos brachyrhynchos.** CROW.—The only Crows seen were four on the shore of the Bay of Seven Islands. No Ravens were seen.

29. **Loxia curvirostra minor.** CROSSBILL.—A flock of about fifty was seen on July 27.

30. **Loxia leucoptera.** WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL.—One seen on July 30, and another came on board the steamer on August 12. This was a young bird with bill still uncrossed.

31. **Passerculus sandwichensis savanna.** SAVANNAH SPARROW.—These birds were common in the sand dune country at the mouth of the Natashquan river but were not found inland.

32. **Zonotrichia albicollis.** WHITE-THROATED SPARROW.—One or two were seen or heard singing nearly every day near the rivers.

33. **Junco hyemalis hyemalis.** SLATE-COLORED JUNCO.—Common; found in the thick spruce woods feeding young.

34. **Melospiza lincolni lincolni.** LINCOLN'S SPARROW.—Several were seen along both rivers. Two pairs acted as if they had young.

35. **Passerella iliaca iliaca.** FOX SPARROW.—Common at the mouth of the river and one was heard singing about 75 miles up stream. As the song season had practically ceased I may have overlooked many of these as of other species.

36. **Iridoprocne bicolor.** TREE SWALLOW.—An occasional individual of this species was seen from time to time flying over the rivers, four in all, and one was seen about the steamer off the Mingan Islands.

37. **Vermivora peregrina.** TENNESSEE WARBLER.—None were seen in the interior but on August 13 two in juvenal plumage came on board the steamer in a fog not far from Godbout.

38. **Dendroica æstiva æstiva.** YELLOW WARBLER.—Two of this species were seen on July 31 and August 1 about seventy-five or eighty miles up the river and the female secured. This specimen as well as an adult male taken at Esquimaux Point by Mr. Bent on June 10, 1909, and a young bird from North West River sent me by Dr. Grenfell, taken September 1, 1905, all appear somewhat darker and to have slightly thicker bills than those taken farther south. The number of specimens, however, is too small to afford any conclusions of value.

39. **Dendroica coronata.** MYRTLE WARBLER.—Only two Myrtle Warblers were seen on the trip.

40. **Dendroica magnolia.** MAGNOLIA WARBLER.—A common warbler along the river courses and still in feeble song up to the end of the first week in August.

41. **Dendroica striata.** BLACK-POLL WARBLER.—Only one bird was identified inland, but at the mouth of the river several were heard singing feebly on August 8 and 9. Either the birds inland had migrated, or had finished rearing their young and were moulting, concealed and silent. The season inland is earlier than on the coast at Natashquan, which is the westernmost point of the Arctic Coastal Strip.

42. **Dendroica virens.** BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER.—This was the commonest warbler inland, and was almost everywhere in evidence owing to the constant chipping of the young calling for food. The adults sang occasionally up to the last of July. Mr. Bent and I found this bird abundant on the southern coast in 1909, but previous to this time there had been but three records for the whole of Labrador, one taken at Esquimaux Point by Frazar, and two seen at the Mingan Islands by Palmer. The breeding of this bird in the same region with such Hudsonian species as the Lincoln's and Fox Sparrows and the Labrador Horned Owl is interesting and surprising. The Check-List states that it is a bird of the 'Lower Canadian and Transition Zones.'

43. **Setophaga ruticilla.** REDSTART.—Several were seen near the landing wharf for Clark City at the Bay of Seven Islands on July 23. They were in song.



Townsend, Charles Wendell. 1913. "Some More Labrador Notes." *The Auk* 30, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4071889>.

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