SOUTH DAKOTA BIRD NOTES

Official Publication

of

SOUTH DAKOTA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

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South Dakota Bird Notes, the Organ of South Dakota Ornithologists' Union, is sent to all members whose dues are paid for the current year. Adults, $3.00; Juniors (12-16) $1.00 per year. Subscription rate (for non-members) $4.00 per year, single copies $1.00. Published Quarterly.

Volume IV, No. 3 **South Dakota Bird Notes** **Whole No. 14**

In This Number . . .

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President's Page

KENNETH KRUMM,
Martin, S. D.

THE unexcelled opportunities for bird study in South Dakota clearly emphasizes the importance of South Dakota Ornithologists' Union and its publication, South Dakota Bird Notes.

The mid-continental location of our state, its great east-west expanse, and the inclusion of several life-zones within its boundaries provide one of the largest bird lists of any of the interior states. Some 380 species were listed by Over & Thoms in **Birds of South Dakota** and additional species observed since publication of the 1946 edition, plus records of stragglers or unusual visitants, may eventually raise this total to one of the largest of all the state bird lists.

A majority of the species of birds ranging throughout eastern North America may be observed in the east-river district. The valleys of the James and Big Sioux Rivers, farm groves, shelter belts, the lake-marsh chain extending across the east end of the state, and the trees and shrubbery found about most of the towns of that region provide a variety of habitat attractive to nearly all types of birds. Here may be witnessed one of the most interesting and spectacular bird migrations of the continent—the great spring movement of the Snow and Blue Geese through the region between Yankton and Aberdeen, culminating in the tremendous convention at Sand Lake Refuge which is worth traveling many miles to see.

The valley of the Missouri forms a great highway for hordes of migrants. The tree-fringed tributaries, extending to the west, are responsible for the dispersal of numerous eastern species over the semi-arid west-river area where we would not ordinarily expect to find these forms. Observers of migration in the Missouri Valley will find representatives of many groups, ranging from geese concentrating in the Platte-Chamberlain District to warblers and vireos frequenting the tree-fringe of the great river valley.

In the rolling prairies of the west-river district we note types of bird-life typical of the arid, short-grass region, including Horned Larks, Longspurs, Pipits, Lark Buntings, Western Meadowlarks and others. In the picturesque Badlands appear such forms as the Rock Wren and the White-throated Swift. Along the southwest-central border of the state lies a sand-hill district, dotted by numerous potholes, small marshes and damp meadows, which, surprising enough in this semi-arid region, attracts large numbers of marsh and water birds, as well as a host of other species. And in the Black Hills, we note numerous species, such as the Western Tanager, and the White-winged Junco, which are considered typical residents of western United States.

Many interesting possibilities and problems of ranges and migrations remain for investigation here. For instance, the range of the Eastern

(Continued on page 45)

Patagonia To Alaska Via South Dakota

"THE extended journeys that are made each year by some shorebirds between their breeding grounds in the northernmost parts of North America and their winter homes in southern South America have been one of the marvels of bird migration in the New World." Such is the opening sentence in "Our Migrant Shorebirds in Southern South Dakota," a Bulletin by Alexander Wetmore, now Secretary of Smithsonian Institution, published in 1927 by the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture. SDOU President Krumm recently filed a copy of this publication in SDOU library.

The Bulletin dealt with the then status of only the snipes, sandpipers, and plovers which are found south of the Equator, in Argentine, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile, even so far south as Patagonia. The list of birds we see, which he found, includes Golden and Black-bellied Plovers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipes, Stilt, Pectoral, Baird's, Semipalmated, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, Sanderlings, and Hudsonian Godwits.

Some of the arrivals in those distant regions were: Lesser Yellowlegs on July 31 and Solitary Sandpiper, August 23. It was not until the close of the last week in November that arrivals from the North had ceased, and then, as Dr. Wetmore puts it, "shorebirds were settled on their resting grounds."

The northward migration begins with slight movement among Golden Plovers late in January; Upland Plovers and Pectoral Sandpipers were moving northward in Uruguay early in February; and the peak of flight occurred in the first week in March.

For those of us who are only fairly conscious of the migrations and who think in terms of the North Temperate Zone, there is food for thought in Dr. Wetmore's summary of the rhythm: "For these wanderers from a northern breeding area the southern summer is a period of rest, and not until February is there pronounced desire among them to return to the North. The cold fall weather of February and March in Patagonia drives them rapidly northward and by April large numbers are passing through the temperate middle regions toward the Equator."

There is reference in the text to a molt. We just were not prepared for that—simply had not given any thought to when or where or how Nature worked that transformation from the dull fall plumages we see here to the brilliant coloration we see in many species as they pass through here in the spring. Sure there is a molt, come to think of it!

Once the migration has passed us, either in waves or by a steady movement which is hardly perceptible, we are apt to give our attention to the local summer residents and let the migrants shift for themselves.

Clifford Fiscus, address Armour, South Dakota, is a member of SDOU. But, according to member C. P. Crutchett, also of Armour, "Cliff" is with the Coast and Geodetic Survey, working east of Point Pitt, on the north coast of Alaska, an expedition which was written up in the Saturday Evening Post for June 14th. Because it tells about birds arriving at the northern end of this "Marvel of Migration" and in view of its interest otherwise, a letter from "Cliff" to "Charles" is here reproduced in full:

"North Coast of Alaska
June 12, 1952

Dear Charles:

"I suppose mother has told you from time to time of the birds I have seen, but I thought I would send you

(Continued on Page 47)

Pioneer Prairie Ornithologists

CRAIG SHARPE THOMS

CRAIG SHARPE THOMS, son of Robert and Jane (Patrick) Thoms was born at Elgin, Ill., Dec. 20, 1860, and died at Vermillion, S. D., Sept. 27, 1945. In 1892 he married Effie Belle Walker.

Craig Thoms was a student at old University of Chicago for 2 years; received his B. A. in 1888 and M. A. in 1891 from Northwestern; in 1891 U. of Chicago conferred the degree of B. D.; and he earned Ph. D. from Shurtleff College in 1901. Ordained in the Baptist ministry in 1891, he served various churches of that faith and finally in Vermillion, S. D., 1900-1914. He was a member of the faculty of the U. of S. D. from 1914 to 1940, when he retired.

While he was the author of a considerable amount of theological literature, written mainly during the period 1912-31, we are probably primarily interested in his contributions in the fields of Nature generally, and Ornithology in particular. That story has been well told by his long-time friend and associate, Dr. W. H. Over:

"In January, 1913, I met Dr. Thoms for the first time. For thirty-three years he was a brother to me, in fact the only brother I ever had. He was not only author and authority on theological subjects, but was a keen observer of Nature, writing many articles on birds and flowers for different magazines. I think his main outdoor hobby was photographing our common birds in their various environments.

"About three years after I came to the University Dr. Thoms suggested that we prepare manuscript with photographs for a book, "Birds of South Dakota." I was familiar with the birds of the state, but I told him I had no experience in writing books. He replied that if I would furnish a list and describe those with which he was not familiar he would do the balance and furnish photographs of birds and nests for forty illustrations. The manuscript was ready in 1918, but the book was not published until 1921 because of financial conditions which followed World War I. This book listed and described 320 species and subspecies. We knew it was not complete, but it did include all the authentic records we had then.

"By 1944 the supply of the original edition was about exhausted. A new publication was necessary, because during the interval of twenty-four years we had increased our list of authentic records by sixty species, to a grand total of 380, which then compared very favorably with the lists of adjoining states.

"In preparing manuscript for the new edition we added articles on Bird Banding and Birds' Nests, and a number of illustrations. The contract for this new edition was made before Dr. Thoms passed away. He knew the Museum was always short of funds, and this may be a secret, but he should be credited with generously offering to supply the funds for the new publication. However, the offer was not accepted, as President Weeks had already arranged for the necessary funds. Fifty of the illustrations in this new book were made from photographs taken by Dr. Thoms.

"More than 100 lantern slides of birds in the Museum files were made from his prints, and all his negatives of birds and plants were donated to

(Continued on Next Page)

Books and Articles About Birds

A MULTITUDE OF LIVING THINGS by Louis J. and Margery J. Milne, 1945 Dodd Meade & Co.

In the foreward the authors say that "inspiration and ideas from our out-of-doors experiences and from reading form the background for this book." The variety of their experiences and the scope of their reading are demonstrated by the fact that the text covers diverse fields of interest: the air, the surface of land and of water, and subterranean and submarine areas and some of the creatures that inhabit them. While birds are treated only incidentally (or so it seems) this little natural history book will surely entertain bird-watchers. The 20 chapters (278 pages) are illustrated by excellent close-up photos of some of the "multitude"—HFC

* * *

Beginning with the December, 1949 issue of Bird Notes, there has been a series of reviews of books and articles about birds. Sometimes we wonder if it a worthwhile activity, as some work is involved and some space is devoted to the project. Here are the titles of those we have discussed: Birds' Nests—Headstrom; A Guide to the Most Familiar Birds—Zim and Gabrielson; Bibliography of South Dakota Ornithology—Stephens; A A Sand County Almanac—Leopold; Trees—Dept. of Ag.; Songs and Other Sounds of Birds—Arlton; A Check-list of the Birds of Ohio—Borrer; Birds of South Dakota—Over and Thoms; Where To Find Birds in Minnesota—Morrison & Herz; Migration of Birds—Lincoln; Where Birds Live—Briggs and Robbins; Handbook of North Dakota Plants—Stevens; Birds and Their Attributes—Allen; Life History of the Blue Goose—Soper; Fall of the Sparrow—Williams; A Guide to Bird Song—Saunders; Audubon Water Bird Guide—Pough; History of American Ornithology—Allen; South Dakota Weeds—S. D. Weed Board; Wyoming Hawks—Withams and Matteson. A number of others have been mentioned in bibliographies accompanying articles, or in brief references in text of one sort or another.

We hope it is recognized by all readers of Bird Notes that the selection of the titles has not been made only with the thought of indicating the books which should be in every well-organized library. While that has been our motive in part, we have been influenced to a considerable extent by the hope we could indicate sources of information and inspiration just a little out of the ordinary. It isn't necessary to tell our readers to buy Peterson's Field Guide to the Birds and his western guide, or that Roberts' Birds of Minnesota and Tavener's Birds of Canada are indispensible!

Pioneer Ornithologists

(Continued from Preceding Page)

the Museum. Shortly before his death Dr. Thoms arranged a loose-leaf compilation of descriptions of seventy-five birds common to this state and their nests, illustrated by many of his own photographs. This manuscript is now in the Museum.

"Dr. Craig Thoms left much for posterity. He endeavored at all times to do God's will here on earth as he thought it was being done in Heaven. His memory will linger long in the minds of many, many of us as long as we live."

Editorial Comment

FOR 52 consecutive years American bird watchers have made a Christmas Bird Count. Afoot and by all sorts of conveyance, men, women and children have gone about the business of making a census of bird species and individuals in their home communities. Two men have been at it for more than 50 years each. The number of participants has steadily risen, particularly so in recent years, from 2200 in 1940 to 5151 in 1951.

The results of this intensive annual study are published in the spring issue of Audubon Field Notes, published by National Audubon Society in collaboration with U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The April, 1952, issue contains 135 pages and 433 counts.

There are 11 reports of studies in 1951 by parties in South Dakota, at points and including species as follows: Armour 14; Canton 16; Hot Springs 12; Huron 25; Jefferson 21; Lacreek Refuge 18; Pierre 21; Sioux Falls 33; Waubay Refuge 12; Wilmot 16; Vermillion 12. The field parties ranged from 1 to 28. It seems to be a general experience that the greater the number of participants, the longer the list, so it does not follow at all that the number of birds listed for any given community is the full total of species or individual birds actually present there. On the other hand, it is almost amazing to any one, especially to non-participants, that so many species are found and identified in mid-winter in an area which is, in the main, treeless prairie and where mid-winter temperatures are definitely low.

It is gratifying that so many communities are represented in the 1951 census reports, because these records can form the basis of some definite statements as to range of various species in South Dakota. However, there are important areas which are not included, such as the north-central prairies on both sides of the Missouri River, the great Valley of the Missouri itself, the Badlands, and the Black Hills. Until these are studied the state-wide picture cannot be known or reported.

Until there is a permanent committee set up to handle this project for SDOU the Editors will gladly furnish information as to census methods and reporting procedures, acting as a clearing house for the reports. We urge all members of SDOU to consider seriously the need for this sort of activity in their respective communities and the possibility of making the survey truly representative on a state-wide basis. It is possible to make many observations from the seat of a heated auto, with only short trips afoot into the more difficult spots. This activity extends bird-watching through a rather dull season. It furnishes a common interest for a group. It develops facts which are not now known. It's FUN ! !

* * *

The list of State Game Wardens who are members of SDOU continues to grow but exceedingly slowly. Members can do much good for the cause by contacting these fieldmen, getting the benefit of their observations, and developing their interest in "birds other than game."

* * *

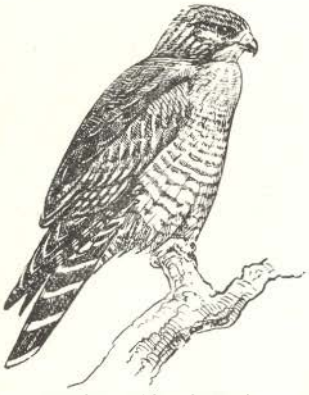
Barn swallows seem to be staying later than usual this year. What is your "last date seen?"

Rough-legged Hawk

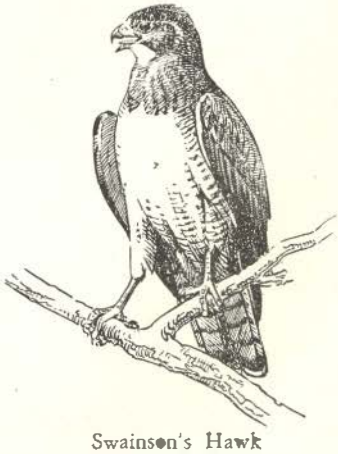
Some Buteos of South Dakota

Red-tailed Hawk

SOUTH DAKOTA has a good representation of hawks. The Marsh Hawk, common and widely-distributed, is the low-flying hawk with long wings and tail that skims low, with wings held above horizontal. One of the large, wide-winged slow-flying and soaring Buteos, the Red-tailed Hawk, is common and easily identified by its copper-colored tail. Young birds do not show this coloration. The Red-shouldered Hawk is similar to the Red-tail, but rather rare in the state except during migrations. Another Buteo, especially abundant in west-river areas, is Swainson's Hawk, identifiable by a dark band high on its breast. In fall and winter we see many Rough-legged Hawks, somewhat resembling Marsh Hawks because of their low flight. White at base of tail is often mistaken for white rump of Marsh Hawk, and, to make it harder for bird watcher, general body colors range from light to nearly black.



Red-shouldered Hawk



Swainson's Hawk

Cooper's Hawk

Two of the Accipiters of South Dakota

Sharp-shinned Hawk

THE Sharp-shinned Hawk and the Cooper's Hawk are our common representatives of the Accipiters. These small fast-flying hawks, often called "blue darters", are characterized by long tails and short, rounded wing, and by flight consisting of several rapid beats and a short sail. The tail of the smaller Sharp-shinned is square across the end, while that of Cooper's is rounded at the corners.

Another group is the Falcons, which have long, narrow pointed wings. These fast-flying birds seldom soar. Ranging from the 24-inch Gyrfalcon, which seldom comes this far south, to the common 10-inch Sparrow Hawk, they include the Duck Hawk, rare in South Dakota, the Pigeon Hawk seen here only in migration, and the Prairie Falcon which is rather common in the West-river.

Prairie Falcon

Two Falcons Common in South Dakota

Sparrow Hawk

General Notes of Special Interest

". . . All Nature is so full that that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined . . ." —Gilbert White, 1768.

KING RAILS BREED IN MOODY COUNTY, East Cent. So. Dak.—On June 29, 1952, an adult and three downy young King Rails were observed as they crossed a grade on U. S. 77 through a marsh area about 14 miles south of Brookings, S. D. Although Rails may be fairly numerous in an area, they are rarely seen since they hold closely to the dense cover of reeds and other marsh vegetation. They are laterally compressed or flattened somewhat from side to side, an excellent adaptation for getting between the stems of standing reeds. This "thinness" is the basis for the old expression, "thin as a rail." This observation should constitute a breeding record as the young birds were sufficiently small that they could not have migrated for any great distance. **—Gerald B. Spawn and family, Brookings, S. D.**

* * *

KING RAILS NEAR FREEMAN, S. D.—About 8 a. m., Aug. 29, 1952, two King Rails were observed near State Highway 81, about midway between Freeman and U. S. 16. The birds were in and around a loose brush pile in the clear water part of a small shallow pot hole. Wary for a time, they finally slowly moved out seperately to cover in the weeds, feeding on the way. One bird was somewhat larger than the other.—**H. F. Chapman, Sioux Falls, S. D.**

* * *

KING RAIL NEAR BRANDT, S. D.—In August, probably 1948, I observed one King Rail at Fox Lake, a shallow prairie slough about 5 miles east of Brandt, S. D.—**Albert Peterson, Brandt, S. D.**

* * *

GREBES IN THE LAKE REGION—Of the five species of grebes found in the lake region of northeastern South Dakota, the Western Grebe is the largest. This graceful bird nests in colonies on many of the rushy waters in Day County. The colonies vary from as few as four or five nests up to one on Rush Lake of approximately 200 nests. On the Waubay Lakes there are a number of colonies, as nearly every rushy bay is a nesting ground.

The courting water dance of the Western Grebe is a very unusual performance. Two mating birds face each other, bow a time or two and then tread water as a marching pair, side by side. The entire body is carried upright as they travel along the surface of the water at a speedy pace for a distance of a hundred feet or so. At the end of this treading they both dive. They repeat this performance over and over again. Movies of this dance, excellent for showing to bird clubs, may be obtained from S. D. Dept. of Game, Fish & Parks, Pierre, S. D., or U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington.

The Western Grebe to me is a "Morse Code" bird. On a sunny day its quick turn of the head and neck, showing white then black, makes one think of someone signalling with a mirror. One needs no binocular to identify the bird under these circumstances.

Another interesting feature is the

(Note: Other observations of King Rails should be reported for publication, even though not made recently. Eds.)

way the adult Westerns carry their young. Often the old birds will have the young under their wings with perhaps only the heads of the chicks showing. If frightened the parent will dive and swim submerged for a goodly distance with the young as underwing passengers. At other times the young can be seen sunning themselves while riding on the parents' backs. On the whole, the Western Grebe appears to be on the increase in the lake region,—more are seen now than ten years or so ago.

Holboell's Grebe, almost as large as the Western, is noisy during the mating season. It is a solitary nesting bird. The nest is built on the surface of the water, usually close to shore, and very poorly anchored. The nesting material is mostly submerged water plants and is always quite damp. When the adult leaves the nest it deftly covers the eggs with damp vegetation, and on warm days will often be off the nest for considerable period. One cannot but wonder whether the sun's rays shining on the damp, decaying vegetation, might be the grebe's home-made incubator. Although never abundant, the Holboell's can be found nesting in many of the larger bodies of water in this lake region where they appear to be holding their own.

The Eared Grebe is commonly a colony-nesting bird. During the past two summers they have not been seen in many of their old haunts. Apparently high water has made them look elsewhere for suitable nesting grounds. I do not doubt they nested somewhere nearby but I haven't located them. Perhaps some other bird observer has noticed a new colony where none nested before.

The Horned Grebe has never been definitely proven as nesting here, to my knowledge. Several were seen in the Buffalo Lake area in June, 1952, when they should have been nesting. However, I did not have time to look for nests. This bird is rather rare here at any time.

The Pied-billed Grebe, although not a colony bird, perhaps outnumbers the other grebes. It may be found in almost every slough in the entire area, and is commonly seen in the deeper ditches along the highways. Its color is so drab, and it is so expert in "freezing" that one rarely pays any attention to this bird. This is the one grebe I am sure all of us have seen each year.—**Arthur R. Lundquist, Webster, S. D.**

* * *

VIRGINIA RAIL AND SORA—Aug. 1-10, 1952, Brandt, S. D.—A long swale, widened at its lowest point into an acre of swamp, with plots of cattails, slough grass, water plantain, smartweed and other plants, provided a nesting site suitable to Virginia Rail and Sora. Road grades run over the north and east borders. A fenced cultivated field on the other side completed a triangle which circumscribed the freedom of movement of the water birds that nested therein.

Earlier, water near the road measured a depth of perhaps 2½ feet. Gradually it has been sinking, so that when, on Aug. 1st, I there found both Virginia Rails and Soras only the roadside drainage and a rather small area further in from the road held any water. And to reach this in search of food the birds came forth from their cattail corridors and ample passage-ways to expose themselves in the open air.

Very cautious they were, ready to dart back into cover, and when in alarm uttering their loud warning. Sora continued with its clear single notes, while Virginia Rail's higher-pitched and creaky sound soon dropped into a low "pit" "pit", then after a few single "pits" subsided altogether until danger again threatened. The Virginia Rail is a bolder bird than the

Sora. By the time several days had passed one of the pair, grey-cheeked and fair to see, came forward to meet me at a respectful distance whenever I approached their station—not behind cover but out in front. Its mate also became less cautious. The Soras came more freely out onto the water near the road, busying themselves feeding, but were not so inclined to stand and watch me on the road or sitting in my car observing them through a 7x35 B & L.

In feeding habits a difference was to be detected. The Virginia Rail probed in shallow water for a good share of its food; Sora picked at the surface. I distinctly saw a juvenile Sora take three small snails from a cluster of yellow water crowfoot and swallow them.

Whether in play or not, Soras often rushed at other members of the company, to their fright apparently. Once the aggressor held its victim to the ground, pummeling it in a great show of fury, the weaker bird meanwhile squealing as for dear life. The strangest act was that of a Sora, submerging in 5 inches of water and plunging forward a yard or so, with strength enough to set up quite a disturbance.

The voice of the Sora is more frequently heard. Its whinny always came from well within the cattail stand. The Virginia's grunt also was heard while the bird was hidden from view. The downy young of Virginia all scurried to cover at this sound. It may be an assembly call.

On my second visit, Aug. 2nd, 8 Soras, of which 4 were adults, and 1 Virginia adult were in view at one time. Seen also was 1 juvenile Virginia, very dark in plumage; the following day, 1 downy Sora and 2 Virginia rails attending 4 downy young.

Aug. 7th. Water much lower. Saw 1 Virginia with 6 downy young and 1 Sora with 4 downy young. Also 1 juvenile Sora. The downy young of Virginia Rail shows a bill of gray base, white tip, a black dab across the middle. Sora's downy young has an orange bill, orange crown and what Coues' Key happily says is "a fringe of orange bristles at the throat."

Probably one pair of Virginia Rails and two pairs of Soras selected this spot last spring. Since juveniles of both species were seen, and not less than 10 downy young being present recently, one may assume that many from the early broods had moved to other grounds.

Now the water has disappeared. The Rails have left. Water they must have, and water they must seek. Goodby my little friends, and thanks for a good time!—**Alfred Peterson, Brandt, S. D.**

* * *

PINE SISKINS AT CANTON, S. D.—Last winter and this spring we had an opportunity to observe closely the Pine Siskin for many weeks. Owing to the difficulty of obtaining a close view of several flocks of birds when we took our 1951 Christmas bird census, we did not list this species but we know now, after seeing them so closely, that we saw at least three large flocks.

Siskins were first identified on our lawn on March 7th, although they had probably been visiting there for many days, but were not recognized. After that date we observed from two to six of them at close range on the lawn, nearly every day for about two weeks. Then on March 22nd and 23rd, the big blizzard came, covering most of the ground with snow, and ground-feeding birds had great difficulty in obtaining food. Our lawn was swept clear of snow and we scattered wheat, sunflower seeds and other food there in liberal quantities. As a result, nearly all of the 23rd the lawn was literally covered with birds, among them being 12 Siskins, 2 Gold-

finches, 6 Tree Sparrows, 12 Juncos and many Starlings and English Sparrows. On the front porch and in the trees many Cardinals, Red and White-breasted Nuthatches, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Flickers, Chickadees and Brown Creepers ate suet and sunflower seeds all day long. The next day 16 Siskins appeared with a few Goldfinches and Tree Sparrows. Thereafter from 1 to 10 Siskins fed on the lawn nearly every day until April 10th. On April 28th, 2 were seen for about 30 minutes. After that we thought they had surely all gone north, but on May 13th, 1 drank at the bird bath and 2 were seen on the 14th. Thus we observed them closely for a period of about 9 weeks.

In watching these birds we observed that many of them showed only faint yellow on wings and tail although a fair number showed this color plainly. We note that this frequent lack of yellow is mentioned in some of the bird books. This characteristic was especially noticeable with those seen on April 28th and on May 13th and 14th. We believe those seen on these later dates were non-breeding birds, although the fact that nests of these birds have been observed at Sioux Falls, Sioux City and other places in this territory leaves that in doubt.—**Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Mallory, Canton, S. D.**

* * *

ORIOLES ACCEPT MAN-MADE NEST—When we lived on a farm north of Howard, S. D. in 1950, a pair of Orchard Orioles nested in a honeysuckle bush near our house. Since they usually came out on the side toward our house so quickly and returned from another direction through other shrubbery and finally from branch to branch in their own bush, it was long before we located the nest. In leaving the bush, they usually flew to a clothesline post to sing, and then on to a grain field.

One morning there was an awful fuss around the bush, with some Brown Thrashers the most disturbed, even aggressive. The grasses of which the nest was built were too weak and the bottom of the deep nest had given way. The 4 little Orioles had fallen to the ground. I made a bag of heavy cloth and fastened it with a strong thread to branches of the bush to include the old nest with the nestlings in it. We were afraid all of this activity would scare the old birds away and that my good intentions would be misunderstood. It was several hours before the adults did come back, and they seemed even more cautious than before.

The young birds grew fast and I had to enlarge the opening at the top of the bag-nest. Soon again when I looked to see whether there was room for them, the little yellow and gray-green birds were frightened and flew out in all directions. I felt like a criminal and hoped they were ready to go out into the world.—**Mrs. Herman Paulson, Hills, Minn.**

President's Message

(Continued from page 35)

Meadowlark is not generally recognized as extending into western South Dakota. Yet we find this bird in some numbers in the sandhill border country of Bennett County, 300 miles to the west of the generally accepted western limit of its range in this state Some member of SDOU may some day see the rare and beautiful Whooping Crane in migration across this state between wintering grounds on the Gulf and nesting grounds in the Arctic. It is known to stop on the Platte river, south of us.

The continued interest and aid of all SDOU members are solicited in expanding the study of our birds, recording data concerning them, and supporting our journal by furnishing notes and articles for publication.

Short Tales

The Barn Owl, according to The Auk, July, 1952, may not be a permanent resident in South Dakota, although some of the other Owls may be. Banding returns show a nestling Barn Owl banded in northern Illinois recovered in southeastern South Dakota; while an adult, banded in southeastern South Dakota, was recovered in southeastern Nebraska. This species was observed in the Chamberlain area by SDOUers in May, 1952. Over and Thoms in **Birds of South Dakota** (1946) record its occurrence in chalk cliffs along the Missouri River in southeastern South Dakota. M. E. Burgi, Springfield, reports he has noted none in that habitat during recent years.

Chas. P. Crutchett, Armour, wrote on August 4: "My martin colony has been flying for ten days and the young have about all stopped coming back for the nights, as they seemed to do after they first left the nest. I had nine nests this year and five sparrow nests. Each room in the house was occupied." CPC also writes about the difficulty he had and the pains he took and the satisfaction he derived in persuading an elderly neighbor lady that the blue bird which carried away a fledgeling Wren was not a Kingbird. He says he "pinned the crime on the old arch-criminal, Blue Jay, where it belonged."

W. B. Mallory, SDOU Secy., Canton, suggests that tying suet on the underside of out-sloping branches protects it, somewhat, from raiding Blue Jays, reporting successful feeding there by two Downy Woodpeckers and their brood of four. He says, too, he saw Wrens "throw their first nestful of young out of the nest at the proper time."

Alfred Peterson, Brandt, reports he shot a Florida Gallinule at Wentworth Slough, Lake County, during the hunting season of 1918. Other observations of this species should be reported, as it seems to be exceedingly rare here. As you study Coots, watch for the telltale white stripe along the side or flank and the red shield above the bill which identify the Gallinule. Scientific investigation of Coots made in Wisconsin recently demonstrate that males and females are so similar in appearance that dissection is necessary to determine sex and age; that average weight of mature birds is approximately 20 ounces, the male being the heavier, and that sex ratio is about equal in both young and old birds.

"The Marsh Hawk roosts in trees only during the nesting period. At other seasons this bird roosts on the ground, preferably in sedge fields." So reads a note in a recent issue of a state commission publication. How does this check with your observation notes?

Drs. Frank and Mary Roberts, formerly of Spirit Lake, Iowa, and briefly at Pine Ridge, S. D., recently, are now located permanently at 925 Wakefield Ave., Corona, Calif. We are sorry these fine ornithologists did not remain in South Dakota; we wish them well in their far-western home.

Dr. Harold Martin Halverson, of Yankton, S. D., passed away last July. In an obituary published in the Yankton Press & Dakotan it was said, "Dr. Halverson was a great lover of nature. He was the first man in South Dakota to band birds for the government. His serial number was very low—320. He was in great demand as a nature hike leader and speaker on nature by Boy and Girl Scouts and other youth groups, as well as the college classes. Each year the newspapers would print his bird census for the county."

M. E. Burgi, Springfield, (SDOU Treas.) writes: "We have observed the Least Tern several times in flight along the Missouri River, but have not been able to get out on the bars to see if they are nesting. Mr. Ruby and I are toying with the idea of taking a boat upriver and drifting down to explore the bars for them and other shore birds. It would be a little difficult, as we have a high bank along this side."

President Krumm, Manager of the LaCreek Federal Refuge reports: "The Lesser Yellowlegs got back July 2, the earliest record I have here."

Art Lundquist, Webster, continues to be helpful. Here are two notes from him: "Mrs. Ury Dahling reports an albino Cowbird first seen near the fish hatchery on July 17 and observed daily for five days. A Yellow Warbler was busily feeding this bird and another Cowbird of normal plumage. These

young Cowbirds were of adult size and flew well the last time she saw them." . . . "Mrs. Lester V. Knott, (the lady who fed the Martins) is at it again. This time she took a baby Blue Jay which had fallen out of the nest and put it in a cage. She fed it with grasshoppers, angleworms and other insects. The bird thrived and was full-grown and flying around the cage by the 7th of August. I went to her house and banded the bird. She then opened the cage door so it could fly or leave as it wished. The bird now (Sept. 22) flies all over the neighborhood and will land on the shoulder of anyone who might wish to feed it. When the Knotts left on a few days vacation the bird adopted the Lundquist birdbath and feedbox. It took bread from my hand Saturday, Sept. 20th, and I could read the band readily so I am certain it is the same bird."

Dr. O. A. Stevens, eminent ornithologist of Fargo, N. D., in writing to Ruth Habeger about her comments in our June, 1952 issue, says: "I see your Note on Horned Larks. I would agree with Peterson. Some of our handers have caught them, but I think you would find it hard to tell white from yellow, especially in winter. The number of subspecies is around 25, one a resident in Colombia, South America."

Patagonia To Alaska

(Continued From Page 36)

my list so far. Most of the birds we don't see in S. Dak.

"In the last ten days the birds have been coming in fast; before that about the only ones I saw were Snow Buntings and Alaskan Longspurs. Have seen quite a few Eiders but none close enough to identify as to species. I picked up parts of a hawk over in the lower Colville Region which I think is a western Pigeon Hawk. Sent the parts to Fairbanks to have them identified, but as yet haven't heard from them. Saw a loon for the first time today, but I didn't get a close enough look at it.

Here is a list of birds I have identified and the date I identified them. Some of them were around a few days or a week before I made the identification.

"Snow Bunting April 21; Raven April 21; Northern Varied Thrush May 26, (Saw 2 of them for a week; then they left); Ruddy Turnstone June 3; Alaska Longspur June 4; Snowy Owl June 5; Pomarine Jaeger June 8; Semipalmated Sandpiper June 8; Red-backed Sandpiper June 8; White-Fronted Goose June 9; Old Squaw Duck June 9; Black Brant June 11; Arctic Tern June 11; Red Phalarope June 12; Black-bellied Plover June 12; Western Tree Sparrow June 12.

"The snow is melting fast now and the tundra is beginning to bare, especially on the higher ground around camp. The two sandpipers are very plentiful and I see them all over wherever there is a little bare ground.

"Saw three Red Phalaropes today and think I got some good pictures of them, also Black-bellied Plovers. Tried to get close enough to the Plovers to take a picture, but they were very wary. I did get one picture, but doubt if it will be any good.

"The Eskimos have brought in some White-fronted Geese and Black Brant and I have seen some small Canadians that may be Lesser Canada Geese.

"The run-off water from camp has made a little lake on the ice in front of camp. There are always some Old Squaws in it and occasionally a goose. Saw a loon in it today. The Snow Buntings are beginning to make nests now. The season is very late here this year. The fellows say that it is 2 or 3 weeks later than last year.

"Am using a book I bought in Seattle for bird identification, "Birds of Canada" by Taverner. It is very good, and it covers this area a lot better than the book used in Southwestern Alaska last year.

Regards, Cliff"

The Sora Rail

DR. LAWRENCE H. WALKINSHAW, Battle Creek, Mich., published in The Auk, April 1940, an article, "Summer Life of the Sora Rail", illustrated by the cuts which "make" our front cover. The Sora on nest was photographed on the Lower Souris, N. D., while the pictured nest was found in Calhoun County, Mich. Author and publisher have consented to our use of these fine pictures, for which we are grateful. A reprint of the article was donated to SDOU Library by Dr. Walkinshaw.

The Sora, sometimes known as "Carolina Rail", is a rather common summer resident of South Dakota. However, it flies so infrequently, is habitually so secretive, and its marshy habitat is visited by so few, it is seldom observed and it is rarely identifed except by the most persistent and somewhat lucky bird-watcher.

The big chicken-like bright yellow bill, black face and throat, brown and grey plumage, greenish legs and "perky" tail well-lined with white may not be too distinct as Sora hurriedly crosses a road graded through some grassy slough. It is inclined to walk about on debris among the rushes, but can swim if necessary. However, one may usually observe that the dark bird is too big and too short-tailed to be a Grackle and too small to be a Coot and, if it is in the air, the flight seems weak and wobbly and the legs dangle loosely. If the bird happens to be "frozen" in a thin fringe of slough grass and weeds along the edge of the wet road ditch a beady black eye may be the only noticeable feature, so perfect is the blending of plumage with cover. However, by continued scrutiny, a beautiful bird may be distinguished eventually. In any event, always look at the bill of any Rail, as that is a characteristic which is quickly noted and facilitates correct identification.

The nest of this bird is usually in the sedges in water 6 to 8 inches deep, and a change of water level may mean the presence or absence of Soras. Wild rice is often attractive to the family group prior to migration to southern United States, which usually occurs in September.

The voice of the Sora is heard most often in the spring in a rapid sort of whinny, "Whee hee hee hee hee hee." Later in the season a disturbance, like a rock thrown into the patch of rushes, may produce a loud "crik creek croo".

Don't be surprised if you find one of them in your backyard some morning. They seem to have some trouble on their migratory flight, which probably occurs at night, and city lights may be a disturbing factor. Better read up on Rails in order to avoid mistake in identification, as all of them may be seen here at one time or another. If SDOUers will send us full details of their observations on the Sora it may be possible to make some authoritative statement as to its present range in this state.

It is suggested that you now reread Alfred Peterson's splendid note on Rails found elsewhere in this issue.—HFC.