

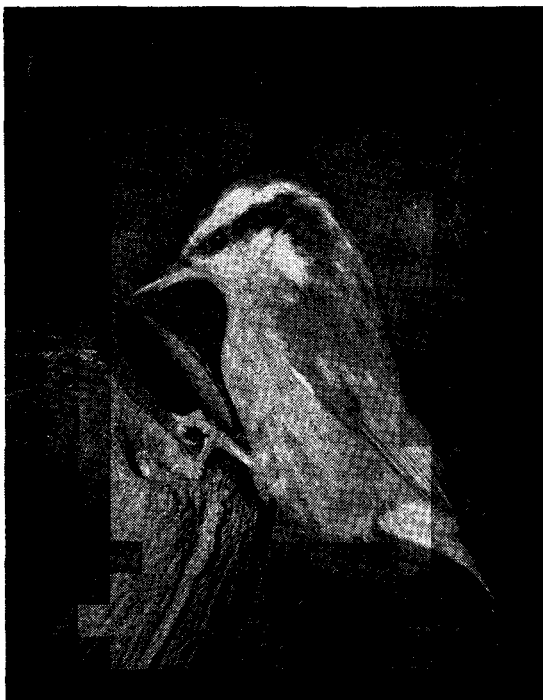
# SOUTH DAKOTA BIRD NOTES

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## President's Page

**T**HE new AOU check - list containing the latest information on breeding ranges of North American birds, is required reading for every one concerned about South Dakota bird life. Our interest naturally lies mainly in nesters in the state, and here the check-list offers real surprises. Thus we find that the Prairie Warbler breeds in the southeast, the Black-and-White Warbler is a summer resident in the Black Hills and Sandhill Cranes still nest in Sanborn county. Available published literature, at least since 1931, the date of the previous AOU check-list, scarcely supports such optimism. Without a doubt the AOU Check-list Committee utilized the most up-to-date and reliable published reports from South Dakota. However, since 1930, Stephens and Youngworth's Missouri River lists (1930-1947), Youngworth's Fort Sisseton area account (1935), the revised Over and Thoms list (1946), South Dakota BIRD NOTES (1949---), Stephens, Youngworth and Felton's Union county list (1954) and the new state check-list (1956) probably sum up the formal literature. Important as they are, they reflect the state's bird life only scatteredly and thus inadequately, since few of the reports are based on such essential data as migration dates, nesting records, populations and ranges based on actual investigations. Yet this material probably represented the to-



tal amount of information available to the AOU Committee. On this it apparently based its findings, and, under the circumstances, rightly so. Otherwise it would have been remiss in its considerations. The blame, if blame there is for the misinformation, rests not on the Committee but on the lack of information available about the birds of the state. The responsibility comes back to South Dakota. It highlights dramatically Vice-president Whitney's unwearied and often-heard plea for an annotated state check-list, a list that tells us what birds are present, where and when; what birds are migrants, when they arrive and depart, and where. Had such a list been in the Committee's hands, the errors in the new AOU volume could scarcely have occurred.

I am glad to report that work is well underway on the collection of material for such an annotated check-list. In the Department of Biology, Augustana College, Dr. S. G. Froiland, Dr. Willard Rosine and I are pushing this project, originally departmental, which will record permanently in a Species File System all information available on South Dakota birds. After some consultation, Dr. Whitney, Chairman of the Check-list Committee, and I believe that this project merits the consideration and sponsorship of SDOU and suggest that, in Whitney's words, "all efforts of the check-list committee be directed toward the completion of the species file as the next step toward the preparation of the check-list revision." In this proposal I feel sure that every member of SDOU will heartily concur.

—Herbert Krause

# The Life Of Our Martins

J. W. Johnson

## Chapter 1—1956

OUR martins, like ourselves, are newcomers into this immediate area. Only a few years ago this ground was a corn field.

When Mrs. Johnson and I walked out here to look for our newly purchased lot that chilly day toward the end of February 1955, only a few houses in the subdivision that was three blocks deep and six blocks wide were even under construction. Possibly a dozen were completed and those within the past year. The rest was flat prairie—merging into farms in two directions.

Nowhere did we see a martin house and now, three summers and many completed dwellings later, there is still none in the subdivision or for several blocks outside.

But the martins were here during the summer of 1955. We saw them regularly as we worked at building our own house. Exactly where they nested we had neither idea nor time to learn. We were sure it was close by and, for lack of any other possibility, we assumed they must have used the tops of the power poles that stand along our back line. There was literally nowhere else.

Years ago I had seen martins too young to fly being fed on top or on the arms of power poles when there was no martin house in the vicinity. That was the way they were when we first saw them, in what would, in time, be our back yard.

We resolved that, by the following summer, we would have a house for them, regardless of the cost in time to our own housing problem.

We were sure they had not been here more than a couple of years longer than we, simply because there would have been nowhere for them to nest except on the ground.

During the winter 1955-56 we acquired an 18 apartment martin house through the kindness of the Bennetts, L. J. and L. A., father and son. They assembled the structure for us from material we supplied.

On April 10 we heard there were martin "scouts" in town. The same day we read a letter published in the Audubon Magazine that said martins preferred houses painted white. Here we were with ours all painted and ready to put up—turquoise, like our own house.

What to do? No time for a repaint job. Still we could get the roof painted and dry and they might be willing to compromise with us on that.

The white roof was dry by the 13th and the post all ready for final assembly and raising. In the late afternoon enough help happened along that we were able to raise the house and have it ready for inspection by interested martins.

The first "scout" was seen here on April 18, a purple male on the wires near the house. On the 19th he was about the house soon after 7 a. m. In the afternoon 7 martins were here—all purple but one—on two occasions. All this time the weather had been cool with frost every night.

Only three martins, two purple, were seen at one time on April 20 and 21. April 22 was cold and raw, with wind that increased as the day wore on. One, and later, two martins, including the light colored one, were taking shelter in the house. They could not but be having trouble finding enough food to live.

That night the temperature fell to 16. Only two martins were seen that day of the 23rd. Frost was expected for the following night as well.

No martins were seen on April 24.

Two, one light, one purple, were sighted on the afternoon of the 26th. These birds appeared no more.

The next martin sighted appeared on the morning of May 3rd, after a week of cold, often snowy, weather. This was a purple male, thoroughly soaked in the rain that had started along with a warming trend sometime late the evening before, and was still falling. Later in the day three birds were seen.

On May 4 seven martins were seen at the house. The same number was present again on May 5, a drizzly morning. Two to five birds appeared at different times during May 6. Only one purple male was seen any time with this flight.

From then until May 13 there was much coming and going of the five to seven martins. By the latter date it appeared that six had settled in this house.

By May 15 nest building was clearly under way by one pair located in the center east apartment. Both took part in the work. May 20 marked the first real friction observed between the martins and the sparrows that were already occupying some of the apartments. It consisted only of a concerted flocking of martins between the sparrow and the nest. The trouble was soon over; the sparrow left. He returned soon, only to be ignored.

I was not equipped to interfere with sparrows nesting in the house and did not do so throughout the summer.

By June 2 two nests were well under way on the west side. An individual fight between a martin and a sparrow ended in a few seconds when the sparrow left. Both had a nest on the same level but we saw no further trouble between them.

On June 5 we counted 7 martins—the most we had seen for a couple of weeks. Only one of them was in the full purple.

The hot dry summer was affecting the martins now. Three of them drank from the bird bath at one time on June 10. Later the same day a fourth came down and drank. This was our first and only observation of the sort.

An outstanding event came June 22: A single martin drove away a western kingbird from the vicinity of the house. The operation was a series of aerial dogfights that soon made the kingbird retire.

The first young birds were heard on June 29. On July 4 three young martins were first seen. They were big enough to sit up before the doorway. Their nest was in the center apartment on the east side—where nest building was first started, on May 5 or before.

Two of these youngsters fell out of the house July 9, probably driven by the heat and mites. The third fell out the next day. In spite (or because) of our best efforts at least two of the three failed to survive.

Eleven martins were present on July 13, apparently some visitors from another colony being included, since there seemed to be some friction.

Three young martins were seen in the center apartment west side on July 19. Two families seemed to be brooding on the east side at this time also.

On July 28 a young martin fell out of an apartment unidentified. When I had time to check he was gone—into the shrubbery, no doubt.

The next day a young bird fell from the lower left east apartment, where I had seen two shortly before—apparently an old bird standing between the youngster and the edge of the platform as though trying to prevent him from falling. This one was also taken in charge by the old birds and retired out of sight into the shrubbery.

This same day, July 29, 13 martins were counted about the house. Several were in full purple, whereas only one of our colony was so dressed this spring.

In the late afternoon of August 3, 1956 visiting martins became numerous. The arrivals slowly built up until the top number was 31. The next day the process was repeated with the total getting up to 52, or slightly above.

August 5 we thought to check the community roost a mile away, air-line. About 200 martins were counted on the wires there as a maximum number. In addition many were coming and going, and probably in the trees also. The following day the number seen was nearly 300. These would be all the martins in the town and vicinity.

For nearly two weeks the pattern was the same. Visiting colonies in the late afternoon, gradual disappearance, and the movement of the colony to the community roost soon after sunset.

From numerous counts we arrived at the following estimate of numbers: Our colony Apr. 19, 1956, 7 (6 purple)

(Probably lost due to weather)

Our colony May 4, 1956 7 (1 purple)  
Our colony Aug. 27, 1956 15 (1 purple)  
Community roost, Minimum 300

The full colony was present Aug. 25 but none were here or at the community roost on Aug. 28—indicating departure on Aug. 26 or 27.

When the house was taken down and cleaned after their departure 4 nests were found on the west side and two on the east. One additional martin nest on the east side had been abandoned and built on by a sparrow.

## Chapter II—1957

Well in advance of their expected arrival our martin house was re-painted and all ready to be installed with its post.

We still found it hard to realize that these little birds have traveled between 5 and 6 thousand miles each way to and from their winter home in Brazil and would soon be back in our yard close on schedule. To any one unfamiliar with the fact of migration it would seem quite improbable.

Doubt about the arrival of individual birds is justified. They grow old, like the rest of us, and do not live forever, any more than we do. Then the hazards of the long trip are considerable. A storm over the Gulf of Mexico during their crossing, for example, could wipe out the martin population from a large area (assuming their migrating flocks are made up geographically.)

Accordingly we were prepared anxiously to count them as they arrived.—hoping that all 15 left last summer would come safely home. Most of all we were interested in the elder statesman of the colony.

He was a deep purple, almost black, all over. He had the presence and dignity of a personage of consequence, one that ignored the minor matters agitating the younger citizens much of the time. When he did speak he got attention.

The necessary help happened to appear on April 15; so the house was raised that afternoon. Actually the martins were not expected for a few days yet.

But the very next forenoon, about eleven, Lucille saw a martin on the house. He acted as though he knew the place and felt at home. The sparrows that had already started building tried to scare him away but he took their charges with indifference.

He was back several times during the next day, the 17th, and I saw that he was all purple—one of the old hands. Most likely our elder statesman, we guessed.

Then, in the late afternoon he came while I was working under the wires by the house. He lit right over me and inquired: "Chuke, chuke, chuke?" I returned his greeting and inquired about his trip. Too bad I could not understand his replies, but, except for that, we had an enjoyable conversation as I worked on right under him. He was not at all afraid of me while I came and went almost in reach of him. He seemed to be trying to figure out just what I was doing.

The next morning, having bought a light ladder, I cleared out the sparrow nests from the house. This was a change from the year before when I had left them undisturbed. The martin came by and observed the operation with indifference.

Two martins were seen about the house on April 20. They were in the house on April 20. They were in the lower NE apartment, unknown to me when I set up the ladder to remove the sparrow nests that had been rebuilt.

A couple of hours later, at eleven, they were back at the house. There were three of them now; the purple one and two light colored ones that might be either females or young males.

Later this same day we noted the arrival of five or six martins. We differ in our counts because they came in so quickly and settled down inside the house. We were also not sure whether they included the three already seen or not. Thus there might have been anywhere from 5 to 9 birds present. All indications were that they spent the night in the house.

For the next month no more martins arrived. Later counts came up with 8 as the number actually about the house. Of these four were in the purple of male maturity. At the time it was assumed the other four were females and that the eight con-

stituted four pairs.

They demonstrated at least the partial truth of this assumption by starting nest building. The exact date of the start was not observed but early in May it was noted that two nests seemed well along, if not complete.

Then the weather turned bad. For some 12 days ending with May 23 cloudy and rainy weather continued without letup. The temperature was chilly with a driving east wind much of the time. On May 20 the last one of our eight martins was seen once and then no more.

The long continued rain and cold had kept the insects down. In addition the birds suffered from the chill of always wet feathers and the low temperature.

In the latter part of this period we began to get reports of distress or death in other martin colonies.

Mrs. O. H. Wright, 708 Colorado St. S. W., who had a large colony found 21 dead birds on the ground on May 22, 2 some days earlier.

Ardwar Bennett, 776 Wisconsin St. SW, found several dead martins in his yard, probably from the colony of Duane L. Stratton, 806 Wisconsin SW, who found 15 dead birds in his own yard.

Mr. Seldon S. Mitchell, 418 N. Broadway, Miller, wrote of finding dead martins as early as May 20.

Edwin Mann, 870 Iowa St. SE, found 20 dead birds at his colony.

Dr. R. A. Stratton, 1352 Wisconsin S. SW found 30 dead martins at his colony on Lake Byron. Six of the birds were found in one nesting compartment about 5 inches square.

Roy L. Collins, Redfield, found 9 dead martins in his yard.

At the end of July, when Mrs. Wright's martin house was being cleaned out she found an additional 11 dead birds in various compartments.

An indirect report of similar mortality came from Brookings.

From the above it seems evident that all flights into the area prior to about May 15 were completely wiped out.

As though to underline the situation in the late afternoon of May 23, we saw one lone martin passing high overhead and a little to the south of us, an all purple male. In our gloom over the death of our own martins we mentioned that some one should be happy for his safe arrival.

In the meantime the sparrows had promptly taken over the compartments used by the martins and had built their nests on top of the martins'.

In the late afternoon of May 24, while we were at work in the yard, martins started coming in to our house. First there were just, two then three, then five, and soon we counted nine. They were all females and young males, with not a single all purple male among them.

They sat on the wires, on the house, and flew about, talking as though they were at home and happy about it. Our first thought was that they were our youngsters, missing from the first flight that had ended so tragically.

The weather was threatening more rain and cold. Would even these birds be able to live? May 26 was a particularly windy day with the martins staying in the house out of it much of the day.

During the afternoon of May 30 I counted 14 martins about the house and was not sure that was all of them. Evidently our birds had picked up some company somewhere. They spent much of their time in argument about the house and were annoyed at my high climbing to put guys on a big tree we had moved into the yard not far from their house. That was odd too, for they had not seemed to mind when I cleared the sparrow nests from the apartments of the house, doing it at about 2 day intervals.

All during the month of June the martins were coming and going in variable numbers, up to 14 and down to less than half as many. Nest building was in progress and seemed to go by fits and starts. Some nests were started and never completed.

The only significant observation I can make with full confidence is that all purple males were absent from the house at all times we happened to be watching.

As to the sex of the birds present I soon came to the conclusion I was not competent to tell with any certainty. The shades of gray and buff varied greatly and so did their location. Close study or consultation with others believing themselves able to tell the sex of birds in that color were no help.

Accordingly I am leaving the question of the bird's sex, other than all purple males, out of consideration—at least for the time being.

On July 7 an eastern kingbird invaded the territory and was engaged in combat by a martin. The martin lost a series of battles but kept returning and eventually won the field by persistence.

On July 8 the western kingbird that regularly claims the territory without friction with the martins was back and lit on the martin house—the first time we had ever seen that done. That item called our attention to the possibility that it might be a different individual. Two martins instantly lit, one on either side of him. They kept the same formation as he moved over to the wire. There they again sat on either side of him for a few moments. The kingbird then went away.

Also on July 8, I noted feces being carried out of the lower SW apartment and assumed young birds had recently hatched there.

On July 12, we had an opportunity to check the community roost for martins. This was in the evening



when birds were coming in to roost. About fifty martins were seen on the wires and in the air. Not one we saw was full purple in color.

Several times during June and July I thought to check activity and color of martins working over Dakota Ave. in Huron. The business district is a favorite summer hunting ground for them. There are wires to perch on and, seemingly, plenty of insects at levels varying with the weather.

In past years there would be from 25 to 50 martins in sight here regularly and about a quarter of them would be in full purple.

During this whole summer I never saw more than half a dozen martins anywhere along the Avenue and not a single purple one was seen there.

By July 14 the beaks of the young martins could be seen in the center upper east apartment.

On July 20 the young in the lower SW apartment, referred to on July 8, were being fed at the door.

On July 22 we saw a young martin in the central upper east apartment.

The first young martin out of the nest (observed) fell out July 28. He was unable to fly and the whole colony made a major operation out of it. Eventually he disappeared into the shrubbery and we have no further knowledge of him. We feel sure he was soon able to fly and take his place in the colony. There are no cats in the vicinity.

All season the sparrows continued to build nests in any unused apartment of the house. Regularly for much of the time I removed their nests at 2 to 10 day intervals, finding complete nests, often with eggs, when I left them alone for the longer periods.

The martins generally took little interest in this operation, watching from nearby wires, if they happened

to be at home, with mild indifference.

Later in the season, when I became concerned about the few nests being completed and when the few young were in the nests, I interfered less with the sparrow nests.

Little conflict goes on between the two species. Yet one item might be of interest:

A martin moved over to the apartment occupied by a sparrow nest. Sparrows here have taken on the same custom the martins have, in one of the pair guarding the opening to the nest at all times. For some reason the sparrow was not on the platform at the moment.

The martin entered the sparrow nest, went far enough in to be completely out of sight, stayed a couple of minutes, then came out head first. He had thus been to the center of the nest and turned around.

When he came out he stood before the opening an instant and a fight exploded in the air right before him. The sparrow had returned and objected to the intrusion. The martin retired under the pressure and the sparrow disappeared into the nest, figuratively slamming the door behind him.

By August 2 all the martins appeared to have joined the community roost. All the young birds were out of the nests—without our seeing them go, other than the one mentioned above. This was checked from the ladder, all nests being found empty.

The number of young was never known. The number of the colony also remained uncertain. Not more than five were seen regularly at the house at one time now. At the most optimistic these could all be the young of the year—and all of them.

On August 10 I saw the first all purple male in the area. I happened to be working on my chimney, on top of the house, at an elevation

(Continued on Page 60)

## Christmas Bird Count 1957

x — Species Reported

	Armour- Lake Andes	Brookings	Canton	Hurley	Huron	LaCreek	Madison	Milbank	Mitchell	Rapid City	Sioux Falls	Springfield	Vermillion	Wall Lake	Waubay	Webster	Winner	Yankton	
Eared Grebe										1									
Canada Goose	1540					120						43				x	x		24
Snow Goose						1													
Mallard	100000	350				17429	3507		802	663	20	40000		700	27				164
Pintail	x					1			6			1							4
Common Goldeneye						16				37									
Common Merganser						18			1	6									1
Red-tailed Hawk							1					3	1						
Rough-legged Hawk						6				2									
Golden Eagle	1					3				1		2							x
Bald Eagle						1				2		1							1
Marsh Hawk						6			1	3	2								2
Prairie Falcon												1							
Peregrine Falcon					1	x													
Sparrow Hawk										2									
Sharp-tailed Grouse										1									
Ring-necked Pheasant		244	20	45	153	41	19	26	7	61	6	6	15	8	x	x	1	13	
Partridge																			
Kildeer						3													
Common Snipe										7		1			1				
Ring-billed Gull																			1
Herring Gull																			x
Mourning Dove				1				1			1	x							
Screech Owl							1												
Great Horned Owl	2		1		x	1	2	2			7			2	1	x			1
Snowy Owl	1					x													
Long-eared Owl																			
Short-eared Owl		1																	
Belted Kingfisher								x		5	2								
Yellow-shafted Flicker			1	1	10		3	1	6		5								3



some 10 feet above the martin house. All the martins were away at the moment.

This one came flying past and circled me several times much less than ten feet away! All the time he was talking as though to me while I watched with no move other than trying to follow him by turning my head like an owl.

Some time before I had noticed one of our martins was quite dark but, on close examination, I could be sure he was not in full purple as this one was. Not knowing the molting time, I wondered if this was not one of our birds and the same one I saw earlier with the dark plumage. Could the change have taken place with one of our birds? That would account for its actions. Our birds are not afraid of us and we work about under them regularly.

August 11 we went to the community roost in the early evening to see the birds come in and what martins were there.

The martins were in a slightly different area than before and by the time I found them it was too dark to be sure of the colors. Altogether there were less than fifty of them!

From August 25 on check was made of the martins at the roost in the evening as regularly as possible with the results as shown in table below.

Accordingly the last of the martins left either Sept. 1 or 2. The question of whether the birds seen on the several dates above were the same individuals or different on each or

some nights is not possible to answer at this time.

#### Discussion

It now seems reasonable to infer, at least tentatively, that:

(1) The loss of martins due to severe weather in the spring of 1957 over that of 1956 can be measured by some factor multiplied by the difference between the maximum of 80 of this fall and the 300 of the corresponding period of last year.

(2) Mature males come with the earliest flights and their loss in this area in 1957 was close to 100%.

(3) The early flights, prior to early May, at least, included some females and their nesting was well under way when the continuous cold weather and rain wiped them out completely.

(4) The early flight of 1956 also had heavy losses soon after arrival. In our colony they included 6 mature males and all that flight must have been dead by April 26. The flights that lived arrived after May 3 and contained relatively fewer purple males.

(5) That younger males come in later flights and have the best chances of survival.

Considerable difference was noted in the behavior of the colony the different years. In fact their whole personality differed.

While the difference was plain enough to the observer its detailed description is not without some difficulties. Much future study will be required before its meaning can be

DATE	BIRDS	PURPLE MALES	REMARKS
8-25	60	1(?)	Poor sight. Could have been merely dark colored
26	50-60	1	
27	30	2	Dark clouds and raining—birds left 30 min. earlier
28	30 about	2	than before
29	60	1	Ditto
30	80	1	Clearing and warmer
31	40	0(?)	Away until too late in evening
9- 1	No check		
9- 2	0	0	

understood. Also there is the question of how much details of behavior are stylized in the species and how much might be determined by the context of the moment. Transmission of more complex behavior patterns could conceivably make a difference to the colony and depend on the survival of older generations beyond the minimum for survival of the species.

The 1956 colony was a closely knit unit. While only one male wore the purple in 1956, none were of that age in the colony of 1957. The 1956 colony spent much of their time in the vicinity of the house. They had the habit of standing in the air, or rather the wind, in close groups of up to half a dozen at one time, with just enough way to hold their position.

Very little of this was seen in the 1957 colony and then only by three birds at most.

The first colony was much more business life in their activities, particularly nesting, which was more successful. In casting about for possible causes to ponder I note that the losses of the earlier colony came a month earlier in the season. That colony also had older members, at least one purple male being present. The later colony may have been largely composed of one sex or the other. Unfortunately, as noted above, I am not at all sure of sex except in the one case.

The 1956 colony seemed to consider the vicinity of the house their leisure time refuge. The entire 15 could be counted in the near area much of the time. It was their home. Even when they hunted and slept away it all was their base of operations.

The great difference was in what, for lack of a better terms at the moment, I must call their social position. Too bad that its evaluation is particularly nullified by the fact that the great loss was general and included visiting colonies as well as our own.

Not only were there not enough birds available for guests to the same extent, but the individuals with the visiting habit firmly fixed most probably were the ones lost. Still the residual difference seems considerable.

For the 1956 colony were great entertainers. After the young were able to fly up to as many as fifty martins could be counted many afternoons as the time approached to go to the roost. Thirty to forty were common and usual. Yet the actual numbers of the colony were only 15, of which 7 or 8 were the young of the year.

The visitors always, when observed, left well ahead of the departure of our colony for the roost.

At the community roost martins would first collect at a certain location on certain wires over a period of an hour. From here small flocks would be going and coming the whole time. Some of them would be busy over the area as though feeding.

By the time twilight was deepening enough to make their marks hard to see they would all have disappeared from the wires.

If the 1957 colony had a pattern of behavior it was complex compared to the other. They were away from the house much more of the time. Yet, when they were about, their numbers were variable from few to 14 . . . almost twice this number I believe survived from the year before.

They seemed to have more trouble among themselves. Indecision seemed to be the keynote of their behavior.

After the young were out of the nest the colony seemed to disintegrate. They were seldom at the house and then only a few and for short periods. No company, as such, ever appeared.

### Conclusion

Observation of this colony for the past two seasons gives a greater ap-

precaution of the difficulties of learning about the behavior of such birds as these.

The very convenience of the study, where the birds can be right before the observer at all times, going about their business as usual is defeating. There are too many data—that later turns out to be merely further complexity.

These birds are ready to discuss their private affairs in a loud voice at any time. They settle their personal differences as they occur, without regard for the audience: us. They turn a critical eye on our own doings always. In other words there isn't a secretive bone in their tiny bodies.

But, as a practical matter, results of study do not arouse confidence. They are generally in movement, few or many, and keeping track of an individual is seldom to be expected.

There is often much visiting between colonies, either friendly or hostile, so that often even the number of residents is something of a chore to determine.

It is not surprising that the published material on martins is far from voluminous. The bibliography in Bent's **Life Histories** gives less than half a dozen titles naming martins out of a list of hundreds. Kendeich's **Parental Care and Its Evolution In Birds** shows little but blanks following martins in the tables. All the material I have been able to discover is in the most general terms.

Only the thought that any information is better than none, together with the possibility of salvaging something useful out of the tragic losses last spring, has led me to undertake the foregoing digest of our two seasons' too superficial observation of our martin colony.

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Over two million "duck hunting stamps" were sold last year at \$2.00 and the money was used to augment funds for wildlife refuges.

## Christmas Bird Count

**EIGHTEEN** counts reported 72 species in South Dakota in the Winter! That does not include the Coturnix Quail that are in Day County but not on the checklist. Rapid City with 41 species had the biggest count, but much credit goes to W. B. Mallory, Canton, who was unable to get out but saw 11 species from his window. There were 2 new locations: Mitchell where L. M. Baylor conducted a count and Brookings where the report came from Mrs. David Holden.

This seemed to be the year for Redpolls, White-winged Crossbills, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Snowy Owls, but equally surprising were the gulls at Yankton, 200 Robins at Springfield, Common Snipe at Springfield, Rapid City and Waubay, (See J. C. Carlsen's note. Page 68), and 3 Brown Thrashers.

Mrs. Enoch Breen, Hurley, thinks an unidentified owl was a Richardson's. It was seen only 28 miles from Freeman where Miss Katherine Kaufman saw one.

Huron reported Pink-sided Juncos which are tabulated with the Slate-colored following Peterson's suggestion, "Call them Juncos". However the Oregon Juncos are separated.

C. P. Crutchett had an interesting comment on the Snowy Owl on the Armour-Lake Andes list. "The Snowy Owl lit on a fence post near the road. He had a pure white head and light markings,—a good-sized one and a beauty."

There were reports of 3 unusual winter sparrows but details were not complete and hence they were omitted. However, the open winter might have influenced a few individuals to loiter in South Dakota.

# Bird Finding

## IN THE CAVE HILLS

N. R. Whitney, Jr., Rapid City

**S**ITUATED in the extreme north-western corner of South Dakota is Harding County, a region of grass and sagebrush plains. The usual topography is broken by many abrupt hills and buttes of various sizes. Outstanding among these are a series of flat-topped elevations near the North Dakota line that are known collectively as the Cave Hills.

The flat top of the Cave Hills are covered with an open forest of ponderosa pine. These are broken, however, by steep-sided hollows, and in the hollows are deciduous thickets and small trees, apparently supported by springs and protected from the desiccating prairie winds by the high rocky cliffs. Thus in the middle of prairie are tiny islets of pine forest and oases of deciduous forest, both supporting bird life different from that of the plains.

Apparently few observations of birds have been made there. The only ornithologist who spent much time in Cave Hills in summer was S. S. Visher, who published a list of the birds of Harding County in the *Auk* (vol. XXVIII, pp. 5-16, 1911). He lists among breeding birds Pinyon Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Mountain Bluebird, Audubon's Warbler, and White-winged Junco, in the pines, and Kingbird, Chat, Black-headed Grosbeak, Spotted Towhee, and Lark Sparrow in the deciduous thickets.

To reach the Cave Hills, drive 25 miles north of Buffalo on U. S. 85, and turn left on a county road. Signs point to the Picnic Spring Camp-ground, which is in the North Cave Hills. From this point, range roads can be followed to other parts of the Hills. This area will repay study by anyone who has the opportunity.

## KRUMM TRANSFERRED

Refuge Manager Kenneth Krumm has left LaCreek National Wildlife Refuge Martin, S. D. for his new location at Squaw Creek Refuge, Mound City, Missouri, with regret at leaving his many South Dakota contacts and his friends in SDOU. He has invited members of SDOU to visit them at Squaw in northwest Missouri whenever they are in the neighborhood.

SDOU will miss Mr. Krumm who has been active in it since its organization. He has been a director for many years and served a term as president. All members who attended the 1957 convention at LaCreek remember it with pleasure in spite of the adverse weather and realize that it went smoothly because of Mr. Krumm's meticulous planning.

The new manager at LaCreek is Charles Hughlett with whom many became acquainted when he was located at the Lake Andes Refuge.

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## REVISION OF WAUBAY LIST

We hope to publish a revision of the Waubay Refuge bird list in time for use by refuge visitors during 1958.

Any student of bird-watching who has a record for any of the less commonly seen birds for the Waubay Refuge proper, is invited to submit it to the manager at Waubay. Unusual or nesting records for even the more common birds would be appreciated. Information should contain the date and name or names of the persons making the observation and any other data such as description of plumage, nest, eggs, location, actions, etc. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

—J. C. Carlsen, Refuge Manager

## THE COVER

The Cover reproduces one of Willis Hall's fine pictures of a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

## HOW MANY

# White-Throats?

William A. Thompkins, Springfield, Mass.

(This article originally appeared in EBBA News, published by the Eastern Bird Banding Association, and is reprinted in Bird Notes through their courtesy and permission and that of the author.)

One of the thrills of banding happened to me in the Spring of 1956 when a very obvious fact was proved to be false through the medium of banding. Had I been merely a bird lover with a winter feeding station, I would have said that a flock of from 25 to 30 White-throats spent a month at my feeder during April and May. However, since my feeder is in reality a trap, my banding records show that there were six separate flocks and a total of 110 individuals.

Here is the break-down:

April 23: Trapped and banded 16 white-throats.

24: Only 1 new bird banded but 9 repeats of birds banded on the 23rd.

25: 1 bird banded, 10 repeats of those banded on the 23rd.

27: 15 new birds banded. 1 repeat from the 23rd. The first flock has moved on.

30: 21 new birds banded. Still 1 holdover from the 23rd. No repeats from birds banded on the 27th. The second flock must have moved on over the week end.

May 1: 14 new birds banded. 10 repeats from April 30. No other repeats. These two days must be the third flock of at least 35 individuals.

2: 13 new birds banded. Only 1 repeat from those banded April 30. Flock No. 3 has moved on. Flock No. 4 is here.

3: 7 new birds banded. 1 repeat from the 30th and 1 from the 1st, but 8 repeats from those banded on the 2nd. Still flock No. 4.

4: 7 new birds banded. 1 holdover from the 30th. 8 repeats from the 2nd and 2 from the 3rd.

7: No new birds. 2 holdovers from the 2nd. Flock No. 4 has gone.

8: 5 new birds banded. Still 12 birds from the 2nd repeating.

9: 1 new bird banded. 4 repeats from those banded on the 8th. This must be flock No. 5.

10: No new birds. 2 repeats from the 8th.

11: No new birds. 3 repeats from the 8th.

14: 5 new birds banded. No repeats at all. The start of flock No. 6.

15: 2 new birds banded. 1 repeat from the 14th.

18: 2 new birds banded. 1 repeat from the 15th.

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## Notes From The Mail . . .

W. R. Felton, Jr. saw a Great Blue Heron at his ranch on the Missouri River in Union County on December 15, 1957,—his entry for a late date. Bald Eagles were seen there numerous times in the fall.

Lowry Elliot writes, "Tufted Titmice are visiting new areas where they have never been seen before. Have been coming to feeders at Glenwood and Montevideo, Minnesota, and to Ortonville just 11 miles from here."

The Cardinals are back with the Riss at Big Stone City. (Bird Notes, IX, 43).

Mrs. Enoch Breen, Hurley, found an unhappy grimy White Pelican on the ice at the end of Lake Madison on December 1, 1957. It probably had been grounded by some trigger-happy goose hunter as it seemed to have an injured wing and was trying to walk and slide on the ice. With the water frozen its food supply was shut off and the lake ice was not safe for people to herd the pelican where it could be captured. It would have made an interesting study in the food demands of pelicans.



## General Notes of Special Interest

**FLYWAY FATALITIES**—Some years ago, while Carl Buchheister (then vice-president of National Audubon Society) was being escorted from Sioux Falls to Huron, we viewed an immature Great Blue Heron, much dessicated, dangling from a telephone wire over a little slough on the edge of the town of Chester.

Two years ago we were in the Platte Valley, near Kearney, Nebraska, getting our first sight of the spring migration of thousands of Sandhill Cranes. Under an electric line across a pasture we found a still-warm crane with a broken neck. (We learned about Sandhills from it!)

Near Sioux Falls, date unrecorded, we found a Sora Rail, quite dead and dry, caught on a barb of the top wire of a fence which crossed the little roadside pothole.

Once when our party scouted the alfalfa around a radio tower we noted a long-dead Blue-winged Teal. (Springer spaniel scorned it.)

One summer morning a Ruby-throated Hummingbird lay on the sill of my 5th floor office window, the bill badly bent. And across the street, where a small section of a stained glass dummy window had fallen out, House Sparrows found a nest entrance. Eventually, one dead sparrow hung on a string leading from the opening, swinging there all that hot, windy summer,—but avian traffic continued in and out of the hole.

SDOU met at Martin last May, and during the night fog blanketed the town.. Next morning, near a small white building where a street light had shown all night, many dead Clay-colored and Chipping Sparrows were found on the street. Among them

was one Lark Bunting, but there were literally hundreds of other Lark Buntings singing along the highway that lovely summer morning!

We are still pained when we remember that not long ago, on a fence opposite a fine farmstead, two immature Red-tailed Hawks hung, side by side, wings spread wide but heads hanging low! . . . Sentiment against such wanton killing is growing among South Dakota farmers, especially the younger ones.—**H. F. and Lois Chapman, Sioux Falls**

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**ORIOLES AMONG OTHERS AT HARROLD**—When Mrs. C. Bohning renewed her membership in SDOU she wrote the following interesting letter that should be enjoyed by others than the editor:

“How we did enjoy the beautiful Baltimore Orioles, both male and female, that seem to come north with the Catbirds late in the Spring. They all stayed and fed together while on our premises, and other people reported seeing them together the three days they were here. They all did enjoy the half-orange pieces we put out on the ground. The orioles seemed to suck the fruit while the catbirds picked it.

What a beautiful sight when about twelve orioles roosted in a nearly leafed out cottonwood by our kitchen window and twelve or more catbirds were in the lower shrubs, honeysuckle and lilac bushes.

In the Spring of 1956 and also 1957, I have seen both Evening and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. They seem slow in their movements and I am sorry to report that cats catch some each Spring.

**RICHARDSON'S OWL IN FREEMEN**—On December 6, 1957, a small, brown, earless owl sat near our house on a tree branch about 10 feet from the ground. It was near the trunk, and the branch had suet on it. The owl seemed very tame and I circled the tree several times and studied the owl's markings with and without binoculars.

The most striking markings were the facial disks which were framed in black. Others were the forehead heavily spotted with white, the yellowish bill, and the rather pale breast striped with brown. The face was grayish white and so were the "eyebrows" and the edges of the mouth. The sides of the neck were mostly white with a little brown. On the wing coverts were both large and small roundish white spots. Even the tail had spots which formed bands across it.

I am confident that this rare visitor which thrilled me was none other than Richardson's Owl.—**Katherine Kaufman, Freeman, S. D.**

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**SNOWY OWLS, CROSSBILLS, RED-POLLS AT WATERTOWN**—We have seen more Common Redpolls, Red-breasted Nuthatches, White-winged Crossbills, Snowy Owls, and Arctic Horned Owls this winter than in any previous year. For instance, Mrs. Moriarty and I spent two hours in a cemetery where there are many spruce trees and estimate there were a thousand Common and Hoary Redpolls. We watched 2 male and 2 female White-winged Crossbills open spruce cones, and saw 3 Crossbills, 20 Redpolls and 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches feeding on cones under one small spruce while there were about the same number in the tree.

One day near the end of the season we were hunting pheasants in shelterbelts and saw 2 Snowy Owls as well as many Redpolls and Nuthatches.

The sequel came on January 8 when we were again at the cemetery. (300 Redpolls, 50 White-winged Crossbills, 25 Pine Siskins, 20 Red-breasted Nuthatches, and 75 Crows.) We sat in our car with a window open watching 4 males and 6 female and juvenile White-winged Crossbills open spruce cones under a tree about 30 feet away. We could see the specialized action of their curious bills so cleverly designed to get the seeds of conifers. A Red-breasted Nuthatch flew through the open window right past Mrs. Moriarty's head, hit the glass on the other side of the car and fell on the seat beside her. We compared it with the pictures in the books, examined the long hind toes, and the sharp curved claws. The bird revived quickly and flew away when we had finished looking at it and opened the window again.

We found we could drive to a group of spruces, turn off the motor and listen for the snipping sound as Crossbills snipped small cones from the trees. They then flew to the ground, held the cone with their feet, opened it and ate the seeds. The larger cones 3 to 5 inches long were left on the tree and they worked on them much like parrots.

We could squeak on the back of our hands and bring in as many as 50 Common and Hoary Redpolls and Pine Siskins that became so curious 2 lit on the car while we were in it.

We came away completely convinced this is the winter for northern birds in our area despite our June-in-January weather.—**L. J. Moriarty, Watertown.**

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**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKERS AT CANTON**—About November 1, 1957, I was standing by a window watching the entertainment a pair of Downy Woodpeckers were providing—the male determined the female should not get any suet and the female showing remarkable agility in dash-

ing in to grab a bite and fly away with it. Suddenly both took hasty flight and a large woodpecker alighted at once on the suet. My first reaction was that it was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker with one of which I had had trouble years ago when it nearly destroyed one of my evergreen trees at Lennox. However, it did not seem to appear just right for that species and on consulting Peterson I learned to my surprise that it was a Red-bellied Woodpecker.

This bird was a male. A few days later there were two males here at one time and finally a female showed up. So there are three of these birds about. We now see one or two of them nearly every day and do not doubt that all three are here every day. We cannot watch for them all the time, although that seems to be my main occupation.

I have always wanted to see the Red-bellied Woodpecker, but as I do not get out to hunt them up I had never expected to see the species. It is an unexpected pleasure to have them come to the house.—**W. B. Malory, Canton, S. D.**

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MAGPIE IN NORTHEASTERN SODAK—On November 28, 1957, I saw a large black and white bird about 20 feet from our cottage at Pickerel Lake. It had to be a Magpie but I did not get a good chance to see it close and magpies are not common in this part of the State. The last one I saw at Pickerel Lake was in the summer of 1954.

However, the following Sunday, December 1, my wife and I were sitting in our living room having coffee and trying to warm up after ice fishing when a Magpie walked across our lawn and spent 2 or 3 minutes feeding on weed seeds and suet. I had never realized before what a long tail they have. It is really a striking study in black and white!—**Herman P. Chilson, Webster, S. D.**

DECEMBER, 1957

ROBIN CONCENTRATIONS IN CHARLES MIX COUNTY—On December 30, 1957, Charles Lacy and I drove to the Fort Randall Reservoir to see the large numbers of Mallards that were wintering there. I was surprised to find a flock of approximately 60 Robins in cedar trees in a ravine near the reservoir, about nine miles west of Lake Andes. The Robins were with a flock of about 75 Starlings.

As we drove southeast, as near the reservoir as possible, we encountered two more flocks of Robins numbering approximately 30 and 40 individuals. About 8 miles west and 2 south of Lake Andes we saw many Robins flying to and from a shelterbelt and feeding in nearby fields. The shelterbelt contained some cedar trees. I estimated that we saw at least 350 Robins in this concentration, and there were probably many more because we did not have time to walk along the shelterbelt and flush out all the birds.

I was surprised to find large numbers of Robins in South Dakota in late December. The Checklist of South Dakota Birds (Bird Notes. Vol. VIII, No. 1) lists Robin only as a summer resident throughout the state. Perhaps the mild weather and lack of snow cover may partially account for their lingering so long.—**Dennis L. Carter, Fairmont, Minnesota.**

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WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS AT WAUBAY REFUGE—White-winged Crossbills are considered a rarity at the Waubay Refuge but twice during recent years a flock has used the spruce trees around the Headquarters site.

The first positive record of the crossbills on the refuge was the first week of November, 1954. Former refuge manager, Carl Pospichal reported that there were 25 to 50 present

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during this period. He was able to walk up to these birds while they were feeding on the seeds of the spruce cones and pick them up in his hand. When released they would continue feeding as though nothing had happened.

No further evidences of crossbills was noted until November 11, 1957 when a flock of about 50 started using the spruce trees again. Even though the species was new to the writer, the distinctive white wing-bars and crossed mandibles immediately identified the bird. Females outnumbered the males 2 to 1 in this flock. Although one could approach to about 4 feet of these birds, they would not allow anyone to pick them up.

A number of people observed these birds including Mr. and Mrs. Herman Chilson and Mrs. Leonard Vander Linden of Webster. The birds made good use of the large crop of spruce cones in the trees. They were still present in mid-December.—**J. C. Carlsen, Refuge Manager**

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**SPRAGUE'S PIPIT IN DOUGLAS COUNTY**—September 22, 1957, was a nice clear morning. A short walk a few blocks west of town brought me to a small pasture of native prairie. A brownish bird flushed from the roadside and lit on the fence wire. It was very nervous but graciously sat there for five minutes at a distance of 20 feet from me. With my binocular I scrutinized it from head to foot, bill to tail, back to belly. I got the color of the breast, side and legs before it flew into the pasture. It was a pipit and the yellowish legs proclaimed it a Sprague's, my first in Douglas County.—**C. P. Crutchett, Armour, S. D.**

**STILT SANDPIPERS**—This fall Fox Lake was so low much of it was of wading depth for shore birds and had Stilt Sandpipers and Dowitchers on it for more than four weeks. Sometimes there were 150 or more Stilt Sandpipers and around 100 Dowitchers. This was exceptional for that sandpiper which is supposed to be uncommon. However, my records show that I saw it on 51 different occasions between May 9 and October 31, 1957, in 15 different locations in the state and in each month except June.—**Alfred Peterson, Brandt, S. D.**

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**COMMON SNIPE AT WAUBAY**—About noon of December 31, 1957, while making Christmas Bird Count I walked to the springs near the east boundary of the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge. 27 Mallards were using the small open water areas. As I approached the edge of the spring a small bird flushed from the bank, flew straight away from me for a short distance and sat down in the grass. At first I thought it was a Sora since it flew with a hovering flight and the legs down. I was extremely curious since it would be highly unusual for a Sora to be present in this below zero weather. I investigated the place where the bird landed and saw a Common Snipe sitting on the snow. It allowed me to approach within 5 feet and then took off in another short flight in the same manner as before. Although the area was checked carefully, the bird was not observed again. Evidently the bird was wounded or injured and unable to migrate.—**J. C. Carlsen, Refuge Manager, Waubay.**