

# SOUTH DAKOTA BIRD NOTES

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Red-Tailed Hawk Feeding Young in Nest

—Willis Hall

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*In This Number . . .*

President's Page, Herman P. Chilson .....	27
Photographing Red-Tailed Hawks, Willis Hall .....	29
Snowy Owl Observations in South Dakota, Winter, 1964-65, D. G. Adolphson ....	34
Christmas Count, 1964 .....	36
Birds' Nests of South Dakota, L. J. Moriarty .....	38
General Notes of Special Interest: Red-Bellied Woodpecker South of Huron, Mature Bald Eagles Over Sioux Falls, Bluebirds Near Mellette, Call for Conservationists, Mergansers and Osprey in Clay County, Shrike Takes a Sparrow Near Belvidere, Huge Wintering Concentration of Robins in Missouri, Belle Fourche Notes, Whooping Cranes Near Pollock, Red-Bellied Woodpecker Near Mellette, Reality in Springfield, Elm Vaccination Gets Federal ● K. ....	39
Book Reviews, J. W. Johnson .....	47

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## President's Page

MINGLED emotions delayed my reply to a letter asking me to serve as presidential nominee. I was naturally pleased, and perhaps a little proud, that the nominating committee had placed this much confidence in me. As I surveyed the quality of timber which had been at the helm since the inception of S. D. O. U., I felt grossly inadequate, and knew there were others better qualified. Being the incumbent president of the South Dakota Horticulture Society I questioned the advisability of taking another office at this time. Ten days later, I resolved my emotions by reasoning that these two organization were fairly similar, and that if the group wanted me I should accept. I knew we had an erudite editor, a splendid group of past presidents to lean on, plus an efficient roster of board members and officers.



For a fledging organization, S. D. O. U. has come far, the growth is commendable, the financial picture sound, but all of us must work harder to increase our membership. My humble prayer is that we can continue the present program, uphold the high standards of our founders, and establish new goals. We must reaffirm our stand against poisonous insecticides and help to preserve our natural resources.

Sunday night, back home in my easy chair, I basked in the memories of a well-planned and most successful convention. It was nice to great old friends, make new acquaintances, enjoy good

fellowship, excellent food, and listen to the experiences of the world's finest ornithologists. The Saturday night banquet was a memorable one for Agnes and me. To hear three outstanding men in one evening was a special treat; our old friend, Herb Krause, and Roger Tory Peterson gave outstanding talks, and it was our privilege to be introduced by toastmaster, O. S. Pettingill, who presided with poise. Most of us easterners, South Dakota, that is, are accustomed to larger birding lists; the natural beauty of the Black Hills (where not obscured by billboards) overshadowed the paucity of birds. One of our eastern speakers commented, "Our billboard jungle is a national disgrace." A warm feeling of friendship permeated the entire convention, blended with a touch of comradeship on the hikes, luncheons and receptions. The writer knows from personal experience that a convention does not "just happen" and that a dedicated group must really pitch in and sweat out the details. The local committee deserve a big vote of thanks.

### Huron, S. Dak Winter Meeting S.D.O.U. October 8, 9 and 10

We accepted the invitation of our genial editor, J. W. to come to Huron. He suggested we plan it to coincide with the appearance of Roger Tory Peterson's screen tour lecture "Wild Europe" on Friday night, October 8th at 8:00 p. m.; then continue through Saturday and Sunday. Program chairman is Mrs. George Jonkel, 1722 Kansas SE, Huron. If you have a paper you would like to present, write to her giving full details.—Herman P. Chilson.

# Photographing Red-Tailed Hawks

Willis Hall

OVER the rim of the nest high above there appeared for an instant the downy head of a young bird—the signal of hope I had watched for day after day, always keeping at a distance. Now I might be able to photograph these young red-tails and their family at close range. But, as I left the small patch of woods, I worried for them and their parents' attempt to raise their young where so many people were always passing.

The grove was small, their nest was near its southeast edge, where it could be seen from the road, paved and heavily traveled, a half mile south. Another road passed a third of a mile to the west. The nest, as later measured, was 72 feet from the ground, near the top of a big cottonwood tree.

Each day I had come to view the nest in fear and left in hope that the little family would be safe for another day.

Now the time for photography was at hand. Until there were surely young birds in the nest, I had not attempted any work at all about the little patch of trees.

The next day, May 11, 1964, I was able to get the first section of a rope ladder (40 feet) over a lower branch of the big tree. Two days later I was up to a branch on a level with the nest, where the camera would have to be mounted for remote operating.

It was indeed a thrill to see three downy young and find them interested but not at all afraid. When I spoke to them, they came to the near edge of the nest. I estimated their age at about

three weeks from the fact that the feather sheaths had appeared in their wings but all the rest of their covering was thick down. They were buff, tawny, and dusky for the most part but had white just back of the cere, white throat and sides, and a large white spot on the back of the head, with a white line going forward to the crown.

Since there were three youngsters, I knew at once I must help the parents feed them if all were to live. I tried to trap mice, with no great success, and picked up dead birds and animals on the road. It was soon evident that these sources were inadequate so I regularly bought meat scraps and liver for them.

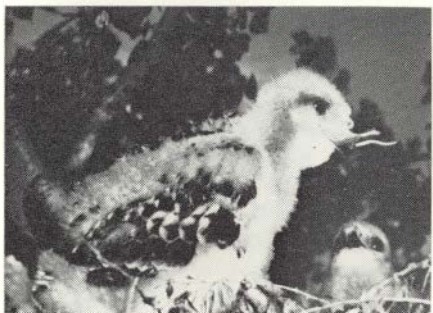
On May 16, I brought them a mouse and, as I talked to them, went to the very edge of the nest and held it out. All three came forward but it was the largest one that reached out and gently took the mouse. It was no easy task for the youngster to swallow it. The bird's head was tossed up and back time after time, until the mouse finally disappeared, to the very tip of the tail. The two smaller birds not taking part in the struggle looked on with mild interest, while their parents flew close to express their disapproval.

The next day I had another mouse and prepared to take some pictures of the ordeal. From the insecure perch of a small and slanting limb I had to lean back to get enough distance to cover the scene. For the first time I needed a wide angle lens.

Again the mouse swallowing took time. With at least 8 seconds necessary



Going . . .



Going . . .



Gone?

between exposures for the speed light to charge, I was still able to take a series of twelve pictures before the mouse had completely disappeared—and all of us could give a sigh of relief.

In the meantime, with the little time I had before going to work each morning, I had been getting equipment placed for the remote-controlled pictures of the old hawks at the nest. By May 19, I was ready. The day was cold and the hawks remained huddled together in the nest, preferring warmth and sleep to food. But, when I was ready to leave they got up, stretched, and walked about the nest. Then the one at the back picked up the carcass of a Franklin's ground squirrel. The furry tail was still intact but all the rest of the skin had been removed from the bright red body. The other two hawks, with their backs to the camera, began pulling at it too.

I had to leave but took a roll of pictures, working the camera as fast as I could—even though the most interesting part of the scene was blocked off. Just as I started down, one hawk picked up the carcass and brought it to



Well, Almost!

“And All of Us Could Give a Sigh of Relief!”

—Willis Hall

the front of the nest, as though waiting to show it to me, while the other two stood, one on each side, facing me, making a perfect arrangement for a picture. I, of course, had already expended all my film.

Now came the failure of my speed light that reduced me to the use of a 75 mm. lens with only natural lighting—and the nest in shadow practically all the time.

Having the day of May 26 free, I spent it in my blind, located 160 feet from the tree that held the nest. Rosamond had gone out with me and left when everything was arranged for my remote-controlled photography.

It was a long day alone and I was nodding at four-thirty in the afternoon when I suddenly realized that the bird on the north edge of the nest was one of the old ones. It lowered its head to the nest, as though to better see the food it had undoubtedly brought in to the young ones. Two young were visible and they also seemed to be looking. Before I could decide to try for a picture, the big bird dropped from the nest and was gone.

An hour later there was a loud call (not so screechy as they screamed at me). One parent, flying low suddenly zoomed up to the edge of the nest while the other parent, following closely, stopped at a branch five feet away. The one at the nest was tearing something and I worked the camera release rapidly—but without knowing whether the camera itself was operating. In a minute the bird on the nest dropped away and the two left together, to return no more that evening. I walked home after dark, carrying my equipment.

Each morning the remains of new carcasses were in the nest but I could not be sure whether they were brought

at night or in the early morning. Some of the meat had been disposed of and I was inclined to believe they had been worked on for quite a time. One morning, when I arrived at the nest before the light was good, I found an old bird there working hard on the carcass of a ground squirrel. The most common remains in the nest were those of the Franklin's ground squirrel. Others were of the plains pocket gopher, mole, rat, cottontail rabbit, and redwinged blackbird.

May 27 was rainy. The three young were wet and appeared strange and wild. When I made by offering of meat at the edge of the nest, they aroused themselves and came to me. Some of the pieces were too large to swallow. These they stood on and pulled apart with their handsome black beaks. After finishing the meat, one bird worked on a thick piece of bark from the nest, tearing it to pieces. The young were well feathered now except for the head where the first feathers were just beginning to show.

On June 4, I was able to spend the full day in the blind. With a small speed light to replace the one disabled, I hoped to get some well lighted pictures. It had to be left turned on all the time and the battery could last but a few hours.

The birds were now fully feathered and might leave at any time. They flapped their wings with great vigor, gripping the nest with their talons to keep from being lifted off. But the parents did not come back until very late and, as I had failed to take the young when they were favorably placed, I did not get a single picture that day.

Like a mother too fond of her family, I hated to see the day when these young hawks would leave their nest.

The first sign of the inevitable came on June 9. As I climbed the rope ladder, I found one serenely viewing the world from a perch some 20 feet below the nest. It nonchalantly posed for pictures—as always. On the next two days I found all the young hawks back in the nest again, but, on June 12, they were gone.

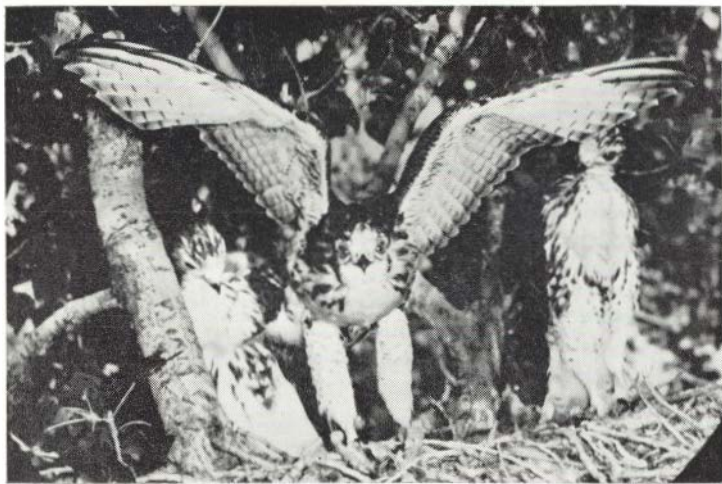
Hearing a rustle above my head, followed closely by a light thud, I looked up. There was my favorite hawk, perched on the pole that supported my speed light. It remained while I took several pictures, then, with a couple of wing flaps, went over to the nest. The two others, far out on the branches, soon came back to the nest for breakfast also.

The next day was most pleasant, calm and warm. All three hawks were out on branches again and uninterested in the nest in which were the remains

of Franklin's ground squirrels and pocket gophers. The bird nearest me worked along a branch into the warm sun, looking all around. Another got tired in half an hour and took off to a big dead tree to the north, where, the instant it lit, it was attacked by a female Baltimore Oriole. Some grackles joined her in tormenting the "greenhorn." Several times it nearly fell off its perch and finally headed back toward the nest where the mob did not follow.

On June 14, all three were in the big dead tree—unmolested. Probably their numbers kept off attack. My close acquaintance with the hawks was now at an end, though I still went out to their little grove each morning. Of June 24, I wrote:

"One hawk came to meet the car this morning. Another flew back and forth, lower than the trees, before I



Wing Practice—"Heads Down"

—Willis Hall

got to the grove. In the nest I saw the back fur and head of another big gopher, brought in the last day or two—at least since I had been up there Thursday (a week before).”

June 25: “This morning one hawk was flying over by the old gravel pit—it paid no attention to me. None appeared to greet me until I was almost at the grove. I took some movies of it as it came back several times, when I was near the nest, I heard a young one calling as it used to do when its mother flew over, or when one of the others was eating the liver—it couldn’t reach.

“I went slowly in the direction it seemed to be and heard a kingbird sounding off in that direction too. It was not until the youngster left its perch, high in a cottonwood, that I saw it—flying irregularly, trying to dislodge the kingbird that was on the nape of its neck. It came back to another nearby tree and began the plaintive calls again. But, again, before I could get closer, it left to fly below the trees, with the kingbird still after it.

“I met a couple of squirrels as I walked through the trees. Not more than thirty feet away they resumed their playing and exploring. It is strange that, in all the times I have gone there, no squirrel had become alarmed. It must indeed be an isolated little community.

“At the distant lone tree the sparrow hawk was frequently calling in his clamorous, excited way; no doubt some of the young red-tails were there, trying to bear with it.

“Now, at the last meeting with my red-tails, as I saw them soaring almost out of sight, I could recall many a pleasant hour spent with them. What

a privilege to have been able to share a small part of their family life.”—**Yankton.**



“How Do I Look?”

—Willis Hall

All halftones illustrating this story, including the cover, are the gift of Willis Hall.





“Watch This!”

—Willis Hall



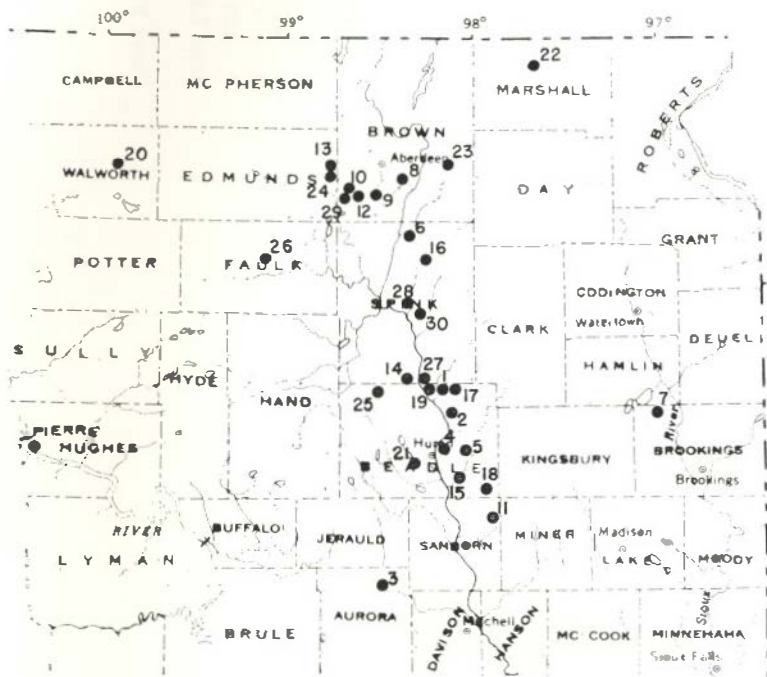
“How Am I Doing?”

—Willis Hall

**SNOWY OWL OBSERVATIONS IN EASTERN SOUTH DAKOTA, WINTER  
1964-1965—**

Number	Date	County	Observer
1. One	Oct. 15	Beadle	G. Jonkel
2. One	Nov. 16	Beadle	R. Dahlgren
3. One	Nov.	Aurora	G. Jonkel
4. One	Nov.	Beadle	G. Jonkel
5. One	Nov.	Beadle	H. Bandleman
6. Two	Dec. 9	Spink	Rev. J. Runner
7. One	Dec. 16	Brookings	R. Dahlgren
8. Two	Dec. 29	Brcwn	J. Sieh
9. One	Dec. 29	Brown	M. Anderson
10. One	Dec. 30	Brown	M. Anderson
11. One	Dec.	Sanborn	G. Jonkel
12. One	Jan. 10	Brown	J. Stoudt
(May be same as No. 9)			
13. One	Jan. 18	Edmunds	M. Anderson
14. Three	Jan.	Spink	R. Curtis
15. Two	Jan.	Beadle	R. Curtis
16. One	Jan.	Spink	R. Curtis
17. One	Feb. 1	Beadle	S. Hofer
(May be same as No. 13)			
18. One	Feb. 9	Beadle	R. Dahlgren
19. One	Feb. 10	Beadle	S. Hofer
(May be same as No. 13)			
20. One	Feb. 11	Walworth	H. Fettig
21. One	Feb. 15	Beadle	S. Hofer
22. One	Feb. 20	Marshall	E. McNeil
23. One	Feb. 22	Brown	J. Stoudt
(Reports not as many as recent years)			
24. One	Feb. 25	Edmunds	M. Anderson
(Found dead, shot)			
25. One	Feb. 26	Beadle	R. Dahlgren
26. One	Feb. 27	Faulk	M. McClure
(Others seen in area)			
27. One	Feb. 28	Spink	R. Dahlgren
28. One	Feb. 28	Spink	R. Dahlgren
29. One	Mar. 2	Brown	M. Rieck
(Have been owls in area all winter)			
30. One	Apr. 1	Spink	R. Curtis

The authors are compiling data on Snowy Owl observations in South Dakota and anyone who has information on location and dates is urged to send them to the address below. All information will be appreciated and acknowledged.—  
D. G. Adolphson, 669 Ohio, S. W., Huron, S. Dak., 57350.



## Area of South Dakota Where Snowy Owls Were Reported

The black circles mark the location of observations.

Identifying numbers adjacent are listed in column one in table on opposite page.

## Christmas Count, 1964

	Bad Lands	Brookings	Huron	Madison	Milbank	Rapid City	Sand Lake	Sioux Falls	Sturgis	Webster	Yankton
Mallard .....						495		1	6		24819
Gadwall .....						45					
Blue-winged Teal .....						2					
Wood Duck .....						1					
Common Goldeneye ..						76					12
Common Merganser ..						17					1
Goshawk .....						1					
Red-tailed Hawk .....								2			1
Rough-legged Hawk ..		3	3			4	7				1
Golden Eagle .....	3		1			1	2				
Bald Eagle .....											7
Marsh Hawk .....	1	1						5			
Prairie Falcon .....	1						3				
Pigeon Hawk .....						1					
Sparrow Hawk .....			1			1		1			
Sharp-tailed Grouse ..						2					
Pheasant .....		44	725	271	43	56	1915	44	44	2	17
Killdeer .....											1
Common Snipe .....						1					
Ring-billed Gull .....						1					
Mourning Dove .....		1			1			3			
Screech Owl .....		1		1				2			
Great Horned-Owl ...		11	4		1		4	9			2
Snowy Owl .....							3			1	
Short-Eared Owl .....		4									
Belted Kingfisher ...						2		1	1		
Flicker, Y-S .....		15	3		2			17		1	2
Flicker, Hybrid .....		1									
Red-Bellied Woodpecker .....		2					1	1			1
Hairy Woodpecker ...		12	9	5	5	7	5	27		1	2
Downy Woodpecker ..		45	13	2	10	9	14	46		4	1
Horned Lark .....	72	26	111	225	24	127	95	51	3	24	86
Gray Jay .....						5					
Blue Jay .....		24	2	5	12	28	6	23	5	4	2
Black-billed Magpie ..	22					41			8		

CHRISTMAS COUNT, 1964 (Continued)

	Bad Lands	Brookings	Huron	Madison	Milbank	Rapid City	Sand Lake	Sioux Falls	Sturgis	Weoster	Yankton
Common Crow .....		32	15	35	14	18	1	69	1		5
Pinon Jay .....						86			2		
Black-capped Chickadee .....		148	28	30	18	86	23	258	4	8	8
White-Breasted Nuthatch .....		29	6	4	3	12	2	51		2	2
Red-Breasted Nuthatch .....						5					
Brown Creeper .....		3	5			1		4			
Winter Wren .....						1					
Robin .....	62	6	32		1	55	63	1			
Mountain Bluebird ..	60										
Townsend's Solitaire ..						11					
Bohemian Waxwing ..			1			1					
Cedar Waxwing .....		15	2								
Northern Shrike .....		2	1		1	2	1				
Loggerhead Shrike ..								1			
Starling .....		114	203	53	43	399	80	1123	34		56
House Sparrow .....		1048	866	390	76	439	440	2388	24	8	106
Western Meadowlark ..		1	1	2				5			1
Red-winged Blackbird ..		6	1	1			200				
Rusty Blackbird .....							1				
Brewer's Blackbird ..											1
Common Grackle .....		2	1				3				
Cardinal .....		4	7	2	2			35			6
Evening Grosbeak ...			1								
Purple Finch .....		15	1								
Common Redpoll .....		1	29								
Pine Siskin .....						40					
American Goldfinch ..	1	60	41			70		61			16
Red Crossbill .....						107					
White-winged Junco ..						76					
Slate-colored Junco ..		151	51	10	14	119	4	351		4	14
Oregon Junco .....		1	2		2	158		11			
Tree Sparrow .....		357	26	315	8	11	60	333			250
Harris' Sparrow .....		14	39					77			13
Song Sparrow .....								1			1
Lapland Longspur ...			48		2						6
Snow Bunting .....			1	22			15			12	

# Birds' Nests of South Dakota

L. J. Merlarty

## A. O. U. #461 EASTERN WOOD PEWEE

(*Contopus virens*)

## A. O. U. #462 WESTERN WOOD PEWEE

(*Contopus sordidulus*)

ONE or the other—or both—of these small birds nest freely in parts of eastern South Dakota and in the Black Hills, though I have had no chance to find their nests in the latter area. The 1957 Check-List puts *sordidulus* in the Black Hills and *Virens* in the eastern part of the state. Around the Waubay Wildlife Refuge one is found plentifully throughout the breeding season, which seems to be rather late. The nests are hard to find because the birds keep to the undergrowth.

Of the two nests I have found in this area, one of July 10, containing 1 egg, was located about 8 feet above ground in a Russian olive tree, in a small upright fork. The other nest, found July 13, contained 3 pewee eggs and one cowbird egg, all apparently unincubated. It too was placed in an upright fork of a small dogwood bush, 3 feet from the ground.

The outside measurements of this nest were 2 inches deep and 2½ inches in diameter. The cup was 1¼ inches deep and 1¾ inches in diameter. It was composed of what looked like flax tow, with some very fine grasses circularly placed, the rim being firm and rounded, the bottom very thin. The whole was interwoven with spiderweb,

plant down, cotton from the cottonwood tree, and a few feathers, some from the pheasant. Bent says he has never seen the Eastern Pewee use feathers in the lining. The whole nest had a whitish-gray color.

The nest in the Russian olive was of the same grayish color with weed, sage bark, and the inner bark from dead weeds and trees. This nest was somewhat looser in construction but of the same general appearance.

The eggs in both cases were of an elongated oval shape measuring about .70 x .54 inches. They were of a rich creamy ground color having a definite pinkish hue. All were sparsely and rather finely spotted in a wreath, mostly around the larger end. There was no scrawling and spots were of reddish, milk chocolate color, giving them a beautiful pinkish tint, with no gloss.

One must constantly revise ideas in the light of increased experience. The Eastern and Western species of this bird so resemble one another that even the experts do not always agree.

So far, I have failed to find a nest saddled on the upper side of a large limb as described by Roberts in *The Birds of Minnesota* and under *The Eastern Wood Pewee* by Bent. I do however, find the birds most plentiful in the undergrowth around oak woods and water. Ridgway, 1877, says of the Western Pewee: "The nest of this species as is well known differs from that of *Contopus virens*, being almost invariably placed in the crotch between

(Concluded on Page 46)

## General Notes of Special Interest

**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER SOUTH OF HURON**—Young Charles Oviatt, grandson of Mr. Charles Miner, a farmer living 14 miles southeast of Huron on Pearl Creek, brought the bird to us. It had been found dead by Mr. Miner. At the time the cause of death was unknown. It was turned over to Biology Professor Gerald Konsler of Huron College, who made a study skin of it.

At least two pairs of these birds are known to have nested in the trees just north of the Miner farm buildings and have been seen in that area by the Miners for several years. Like those of other woodpeckers the nests were in trees at the edge of the grove, the entrance about 25 feet high. Both male and female help with the cutting. They often use the same hole more than one year and sometimes take over the abandoned hole of another woodpecker.

Last fall, Mr. Miner said, they gathered in a small flock near the house when the nesting season was over. The birds were so noisy with their varied calls, often of harsh and scolding nature, that he was seldom in doubt as to their presence, and found much pleasure in listening to them.—*Mary Aberdeen Ketelle, Huron.*

The woodpecker I received on February 9, 1965, referred to by Miss Ketelle, above, has been identified as a male Red-bellied Woodpecker, *Centurus carolinus*. The bird had two whole kernels of corn in its stomach and some unidentifiable insect matter. A skin of the bird was prepared on February 10,

1965 and is a part of the collection of Huron College.

The cause of the bird's death was a small pellet, about the size of a BB shot, passing through its body from center of breast to back, leaving a clean hole.—*G. R. Konsler, Department of Biology, Huron College.*

\* \* \* \*

**MATURE BALD EAGLES OVER SIOUX FALLS**—On February 18, 1965, an Ecology class of the Augustana College Biology Department was taking environmental measurements in Tuthill Park on the southeast edge of Sioux Falls. Weather Bureau statistics at the time listed partly cloudy skies, a northwest wind at 10 mph., temperature of 40° F and 70% relative humidity. Between 1:30 and 2:00 p. m., 29 students and I observed a mature bald eagle soaring over the city north of us. Delbert Nelson had a pair of binoculars and was the first to sight the bird. When first observed, the eagle was over Woodlawn Cemetery. As it circled, it gradually drifted downwind and out of sight. We estimated its altitude at about 500 feet. It would have been in sight of the Sioux River most of the time we observed it, and further to the east would again be able to pick up the river along the Iowa border. The river was open in spots that day.

We had been at Tuthill Park approximately an hour before we saw the eagle. During that time we had not heard any crows, but at the same time we were observing the eagle we heard many crows cawing northeast of us

(towards the eagle), possibly in response to the eagles' presence.

There were no reports of anyone else sighting an eagle in the Sioux Falls vicinity within the next several days. About this same time of year in 1957, Dr. Willard Rosine of Augustana sighted a mature bald eagle flying north over Sioux Falls. The only other report that I could find of a bald eagle in the vicinity of Sioux Falls is that of Larson writing in the *Wilson Bulletin* (1925). In a list of birds of the Sioux Falls vicinity he calls the bald eagle "rare" and states that two were taken in the fall of 1911.

It is postulated that the bald eagle had been wintering along the Missouri River, and in response to warming conditions a day or two prior to February 18, it had begun to move north.

On March 31, about noon, a mature bald eagle was again sighted by Delbert Nelson and was also identified by Dr. S. G. Froiland of Augustana College. The eagle was soaring and circling directly over the Augustana campus and gradually drifted downwind as before.

—**Dilwyn J. Rogers, Associate Professor of Biology, Augustana College, Sioux Falls.**

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**BLUEBIRDS NEAR MELLETTE**—On September 29, 1964, I saw 8 Eastern Bluebirds in Braun's pasture, 7 miles northeast of Mellette, adjoining the James River. No separation for age or sex was made.

On October 1, 1964, I counted 20 Eastern Bluebirds in Little's pasture, 6 miles southeast of Mellette, again adjacent to the James River. No separation was attempted for age or sex. On the following day 5 of the birds were still in the same pasture.—**Earl W. Watters, Mellette.**

(These two locations, and sightings of birds that might well belong to the

same flock, are interesting and remind me of the family of Bluebirds that nest with regularity at Fisher Grove, a mile west of Frankfort, also on the James. Likewise the Bluebirds seen in the Huron area are commonly near the James. Probably the river bottom is their migration route and the location of Bluebird houses in it, carefully situated in open fields and away from house sparrow competition, might be rewarding.—**Editor.**)

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**CALL FOR CONSERVATIONISTS**—Vice President Hubert Humphrey, speaking before the North American Wildlife Conference in Washington, called upon conservationists to let their elected representatives know how they stand on conservation issues.

Discussing the President's message demanding action on water pollution, roadside beauty, wetlands preservation and similar problems, Humphrey sought support from conservationists on principal bills now before Congress and the state legislatures.

"We seek now a new conservation—one of people as well as of land and resources; one of metropolitan areas as well as open country," he said. "The concerns of conservation are the concerns of every American, in and out of Government."—**Mass. Audubon Newsletter.**

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**MERGANSERS AND OSPREY IN CLAY COUNTY**—Being a western Nebraska birder, I perhaps should hesitate to report "unusual" species for Clay County, realizing that the term may not apply to the reported species:

Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus* (L.))

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator* (L.))

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus carolinensis* (Gmelin))



Observation date: April 14, 1965  
Observation location: On the Missouri River three miles south of Vermillion, Clay County, S. Dak.

Observers: Alan Heidecker, C. W. Huhtley

Alan Heidecker, a student at S. U. S. D. and the reporter, (also attending the University) observed a group of about six (6) Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus Serrator*) with other waterfowl on a quiet neck of water on the Missouri River April 14. Both male and female birds were seen. Lighting was ideal and Mr. Heidecker's identification was easily confirmed.

The female Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) were also in this same group of birds. These were checked in Peterson's **Eastern Field Guide**.

Moments after the Mergansers left, an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus carolinensis*) flew over, soaring momentarily and flew behind the trees. The bend and dark markings of the wings and the facial markings were distinctive. Later the bird was seen perched on an overturned tree root on an island on the river.

#### References:

Red-breasted Merganser:

... more characteristic of the ocean than the American . . . Peterson's **Eastern Field Guide**.

A rare migrant throughout (Nebraska). Raap, Rapp, Baumgarten, Moser's **Check-list of Nebraska Birds**.

Migratory only, as their nesting grounds are well towards the Arctic Circle. Over and Thoms' **Birds of South Dakota**.

Hooded Merganser:

Occasional migrant and winter visitor in the Missouri Valley Region. Former breeding records for east-

ern and northern Nebraska. Rapp, et. al. op. cit.

Osprey:

Rather rare in South Dakota. Over and Thoms. op. cit.

An uncommon migrant throughout (Nebraska), most abundant along the Missouri River. Rapp, et. al. op. cit.

Almost cosmopolitan. Peterson. **Field Guide to the Birds of Texas**—C. W. Huntly, 214 East Main St., Vermillion.

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**SHRIKE TAKES A SPARROW NEAR BELVIDERE**—About the middle of March (1965) we were attracted by the sound of something striking the picture window. As we looked out we saw first a Shrike sitting on a branch a few feet away. Then the children discovered a House Sparrow quivering on the ground, either stunned or killed. The commotion at the window drove the Shrike across the driveway to another tree, where it warily watched the house and the Sparrow. As the children left the window and I stepped back some distance with the binoculars, the Shrike swiftly swooped down, picked up the Sparrow and flew away to the grove.—Velma DeVries, Belvidere.

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**HUGE WINTERING CONCENTRATION OF ROBINS IN MISSOURI**—Following is the report of a flock of robins observed by U. S. Game Management Agent F. Charles Kniffin in Missouri in January, 1965.

"Dick Anderson directed me to the site of the wintering concentration of Robins. It is in the vicinity of Washington Park, Washington County, just across the Jefferson County line, and just off Highway 21.

"We reconnoitered the area from about 3:30 p. m. until dark on Saturday, Jan. 9. Robins began filtering into



## Great Horned Owl

—Etching Courtesy E. W. Steffen

a valley about 4 o'clock, and by 4:45 p. m. there was a steady flight of robins pouring into the area from, as best we could determine, all points of the compass. The afternoon was completely overcast, cold and windy. By 5:15 p. m. it was nearly dark and the flight was diminishing, but birds could still be seen against the skyline—though arriving in reduced numbers.

"Some starlings were also noted, flying in loose flocks above the robins, during the early part of the flight.

"All the birds seemed to be dropping into the cedars which were numerous, but not dense, pines and other trees in the valley.

"There was no shooting, to our knowledge, that afternoon. We did not see

anybody afield during our reconnaissance.

"Dick is a dead serious 'birder,' competent in the extreme. He holds a Salvage permit and has proved a good co-operator. Dick and a group of St. Louis birders had observed the concentration of robins, first on January 3, 1965. They understand from a local resident that the birds had not been using the area more than a couple of weeks. On that occasion, Dick and another man attempted to get an indication of the number of robins in the concentration and arrived at the figure of 1.8 million. On that Sunday afternoon, Dick advises he heard several shots which could have come from a person moving

around the area, or from more than one shooter. (1-3-65).

"It would be possible to stand along the back roads in the area, any place in the fields, even in the parking lot at the nearby fire tower, and have unlimited pass shooting. This would be pretty tempting for anyone looking for challenging shooting sport, but not very productive of meat. Dick and I walked into the area where the birds were landing and could have bagged a tote sack full with a .410 shotgun, by shooting from perches. The same could have been done with a .22 rifle. The area appears to be economically depressed. I would be surprised if any of the locals would waste shotgun shells on these birds. It would be more likely that some "sports" from St. Louis might find it fun to get some wing shooting practice on a nice Saturday or Sunday afternoon. Dick visited the area again yesterday afternoon (1-10-65) and called me to report that he had not heard shooting. So, if anybody was shooting at the robins, it must have been a "one-shot" occurrence on January 3.

"We could not get any really good indication of the area of the roost, if that is what it is. We could not circumnavigate the full 360 degrees around the area as the roads meander erratically. It did appear that robins were arriving from all directions, however.

"We took a position at the edge of a small tilled field and counted the number of robins passing over us between two trees which were about 15 feet apart. Dick tallied 150 in one minute, I counted 147 during the same period. If you care to project this, basing your computations on such assumptions as: We were roughly at the edge of a roost area having a diameter of one mile, and the birds arrived at this rate around the entire circumference (10 robins per

minute, per foot or circumference) for thirty minutes, plus earlier and later arrivals, you will find yourself calculating in millions.

"Dick tried for additional observations yesterday to enable him to have more of a basis for making an estimate of the number of birds using the area. He is now of the opinion that the original, 1.8 million, estimate was low. I wouldn't attempt to say that there was any particular number of robins using the area, other than that there are a lot of them.

"This is fairly open terrain, not dense woods. The cedar trees are good sized and appear healthy. There is a certain amount of meadow with knee deep grass in which cedars are openly spotted, at least one stand of pine trees and almost no tilled ground. The robins were not crowded as I have seen some blackbirds and crows at roosts. I noted one bird along a road which seemed ill or injured but when I left the car I couldn't find it in the gathering murk. Dick picked up a robin which died before he got back to St. Louis.

"I don't know how much interest, if any, this may be to others in our Bureau. It is the first contact I've had with such a phenomenon."—F. Charles Kniffin.

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**BELLE FOURCHE NOTES—Morc**  
**About Starlings**—Reports have come to this column from the rural sections of the Tri-State area telling of pheasants which feed in the ranch yard of burrowing owls and of young owls which have been raised as house pets; of white-winged juncos, western tangers, Steller and pinon jays; and on through the list of uncommon and common birds in uncommon and common behavior.

But in all the years, nothing was reported about starlings—until last week

Then came the following well-written account from a Camp Crook birder:

"I too have been pestered by starlings. They started coming in here to our ranch home, about six or eight years ago and drove out the goldfinches. Each year there were a few more and I was most unhappy about it. Last winter I saw an advertisement for a starling trap and sent for it, and it really worked for me.

"As the directions that come with the trap tell you, they won't start entering the trap till May or June, but by that time they would go in two or three at a time. It isn't very pleasant to dispose of them, but when I thought of the trouble and damage they do I could grit my teeth and do it.

"A few downy woodpeckers and sparrows got in the tray, but they are easily removed. I got rid of all the starlings, and the goldfinches came back; so I felt it was very worth while.

"I am enclosing a price list in case you are interested."

(Editor's Note: Irma didn't publish the price list but made it an item to be had on request. As an old starling sufferer this editor requested and received the following address: "Black Lily" Sparrow traps, Richwood Box Mill, Detroit Lakes, Minn. The Camp Crook birder got the single elevator trap and followed the directions carefully. The price list shows the single elevator trap as \$9.95, with a 30% discount for more than three traps. Good Luck! And I hope your starlings are no smarter than those of Camp Crook.)

Rumor has it that the Belle Fourche evening grosbeaks are in Hot Springs. A birder there is said to have told a birder here that never have evening grosbeaks been so numerous as they are this year. Their gold, black and white plumage brightens the lawns, almost every home has its daily grosbeak visitors. It sounds like the Belle

Fourche story of recent winters. And it's good news. The birds still are in the Hills and may be expected to return to Belle Fourche, at least those which nested here.

The tree sparrows returned in the storm—a big flock of them. They mixed with the Harris, white-throat and white-crown sparrows, the juncos and chickadees at the feeding tray, the mass of them swirling like leaves down to feed and back to perch in the trees above, as if taking turns in sections. They will swirl around the feeder all day—moving out of the way of the bluejays but swirling back when they leave.

There's no particular show of belligerence or fear—it's just getting out of the big fellow's way. And when the jays, the big hairy woodpeckers and the flickers feed at the suet in the elm tree, the chickadees merely hop to a twig above the suet. One cold morning, a chickadee and a bluejay ate suet together, a bit of distance, of course, but the jay acted as if the tiny bird were not there.

That's one lesson of the bird feeder that never varies: Cold and storm form a bond among wildlife. Big birds eat the big grains, little birds eat little grains under the big bird's feet. But let the weather turn mild, and all of them fight—even among their own kind.

And there's another thing the birder knows. Storms bring in the full bird population of the neighborhood, and always a newcomer or two. Wednesday's storm brought the waxwing.

#### When It's 18 Below

The only happy birds on our hill these cold winter mornings are the tree sparrows. The lower the temperature, the happier these little fellows appear. They bounce in from Hay Creek draw soon after daylight, perch on the feeding tray, flirt their tails and look to see

what's for breakfast. They are trim and well-groomed—none of the just-crawled-from-the-hay look even the bluejay has on cold mornings.

They are a picture in the snow—their light gray vests with the black stick-pin, their rusty caps and the pinkish wash on their side-breasts. Any designer, home or clothing, who wants to know the secret of blending grays and browns, should study the tree sparrow. He's a symphony of gray, black, brown, rust and pink. It takes a master to blend these colors.

Tree sparrows served as a pilot Friday morning to guide strangers to the terrace feeder—half a dozen horned larks. These are the small larks which rise from the country highways in flocks, swirl over the cars just inches from crashing into car hoods and windshields. So fast is their flight that the eye cannot catch details of their markings—except a light breast and some black about the head.

Feeding must be poor in the country or these larks would not have come to the hill beyond our pond and started walking around, as horned larks do, searching for food. When the larks saw a flock of tree sparrows swirl in from the draw, they followed and after watching from the tree above the terrace, dropped down to feed. They were so glad to find food that they paid no attention to the house or the person in the window only 15 feet away.

Rarely does a watcher find a horned lark quiet long enough to study its markings—the black head stripe which curves up into two little tufts of feathers like horns; the yellow and white face with black whisker mark and black chin curve, not unlike the meadowlark's black V. The bird is slightly larger than common sparrows and its colors are much in the tones of the tree sparrow. The two birds—sparrow

and lark—fed together in color harmony. The horns may or may not, be erected.

The bluejays do not appear until noon these cold days. The evening grosbeaks, likewise wait for the sun to warm, though occasionally a lone female appears early as if checking the food supply before summoning the flock.

As for the harbinger robin—it has not been seen for two days. It appeared after the first 18-below night. But after the following 15-below night—no robin. It was feeding at daybreak after the first bitter night. It fed at sundown the same day, greedily, as if stoking up for the night. But it has not been seen since. It may have found a better place to wait for the warm-up. We'll know it when it returns. In the past two weeks it has become as familiar as any pet.

Thus it goes—the kinship of man and bird—each struggling for survival and insisting upon doing it in his own way. —Irma Weyler, *Daily Belle Fourche Post*.

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WHOOPIING CRANES NEAR POLLOCK—Word from Jerome H. Stoudt of the Aberdeen office of the U. S. F. & W. S. advises that he saw two Whooping Cranes (age not stated) leaving a stubble field about 5 miles northwest of Pollock on the morning of September 11, 1964. They apparently had been feeding with some Sandhill Cranes but he did not see them until they were in the air. They flew toward the Missouri River but he was unable to locate where they lighted.

These birds were also observed by Walter A. Larsen, District Game Manager, Department of Game, Fish and Parks, on a sand bar northwest of Pollock on September 10. State Game Warden Lewis Smith, Mobridge, and Curtis Twedt, Biologist, F. & W. S.,

Aberdeen, also confirmed the identification. The birds mingled with a flock of Sandhill Cranes, flying to fields from this and other islands in the Missouri River. September 15, 1964 was the date of last sighting.—Paul F. Springer, Leader, Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, South Dakota State University, Brookings.

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**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER NEAR MELLETTE**—A male Red-bellied Woodpecker was observed at the farm of Ed and Ray Braun, on the James River, 6½ miles northwest of Mellette for about 6 weeks prior to February 28, 1965. I have seen the bird at distances of as little as 25 feet and at several different angles. He is really a gorgeous fellow. On the date mentioned, I was able to pick out, with the aid of a 8 x 30 binocular, the few reddish hair-like feathers on his belly.

The low-toned voice resembles the downy's low calls and his full blast voice is similar, to my ears, to the flicker's.—Earl W. Watters, Mellette.

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**REALITY IN SPRINGFIELD**—In politics, expediency holds twice the value of reality. So, when an official takes a firm stand on an emotional issue such as Dutch elm disease control, a doffing of hats is in order.

Mayor Ryan stated the simple truth: that a really effective program of Dutch elm disease control would be prohibitively expensive. He said that Springfield could not afford it. He could have added that no other city nor town can afford a thorough program.

Mayor Ryan went a step farther. He trekked into the fields of logic, which politicians fear more than quicksand. He said that tax money should not be wasted on expensive half-measures that would not solve the problem. In keeping with his decision, he cut out of

the Springfield budget the \$2291 earmarked for chemical spraying of elm trees.—Massachusetts Audubon Newsletter.

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## Birds' Nests—Concluded

nearly upright forks like that of certain empidonances, instead of being saddled on a horizontal branch." Headstrom: **Birds' Nests of the West**, indicates the western pewee sometimes uses a vertical fork but makes no mention of similar use by the eastern pewee in his **Birds' Nests**.

The nest placed on the upper side of large limbs may well be common but, due to the hidden locations, have escaped my observation. I shall continue to look and study.

Please, any one who finds a nest of these birds, describe, measure, give habitat location, and height and send the results to me.—Watertown.

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**ELM VACCINATION GETS FEDERAL OK**—The U. S. Department of Agriculture has given the marketing nod to a potent "vaccine" against Dutch elm disease. Injected into the trunk, it circulates to the outer-most branches and twigs and kills the elm bark beetles which carry the deadly fungus. Five years of testing showed nearly total protection for trees subject to severe disease conditions.

The insecticide, called Bidrin and produced by Shell Chemical Company, requires elaborate precautions to protect users. Thus, it will be available only to specially trained foresters, horticulturists and tree service experts. Once injected, however, it is harmless to humans, wildlife, domestic animals and the patient.—Michigan Audubon Newsletter.

## Book Reviews

J. W. Johnson

### **BIRDS OF PREY OF THE WORLD.**

By Mary Louise Grossman and Johns Hamlet. Photographed by Shelly Grossman. Profusely illustrated, including 70 color plates. Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., New York. 1964. \$25.

This is a big book (9½" x 12½") printed on heavy paper, and strongly bound in blue cloth. Being limited to the two orders: Falconiformes and Stringiformes, permits detailed coverage.

Part 1 (176 pages) has chapters on: Prehistory, Birds of Prey and Men, Ecology and Habits, Designs for Survival, and Conservation. Discussions under each chapter heading are full and well illustrated, often with excellent full-page color photos.

Two picture series of hawks and owls killing snakes are very well done. While many of the photographs are necessarily of captive birds, some of which are also under restraint, the fact is stated in the introduction and it is required for the intended purpose as a practical matter.

In Part 2 the birds are studied by family, Subfamily, genus, species, and variations. Good black and white pictures illustrate some species and there are drawings to bring out detail needed for identification of all. Small maps indicate range.

Included in the text is a vast amount of information on habits, life history, identification, and food.

The book is a pleasure to read, the pictures appeal as do their subjects. So

well has it fulfilled the author's intent, the closing paragraph of the introduction might well stand for my reaction.

"We have attempted to give the hawks and owls a 'fair deal' by dispelling out-of-date notions and prejudices and encouraging thoughtful observation. So little 'conservation' has been practiced to date that our consulting ecologist suggested changing the title of Chapter 5 to 'Man's Relentless War on Birds of Prey.' An occasional hopeful incident does occur. We recall a certain Florida farmer who refused to allow Burrowing Owls to be trapped on his property because he rightfully observed that their chief prey was a tiny field mouse which dug up and devoured the watermelon seeds he had planted. However, it is unfortunate that this man is still so much in the minority. The normal reaction to any hawk or owl is to reach for the nearest firearm. There is, we feel, no greater testimony to man's misunderstanding of nature than a row of hawks impaled, along with a crow or two, on some barbed wire fence."—**J. W. Johnson, Huron.**

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**LATE SNOWY OWLS**—On April 28, 1965, I saw and studied two Snowy Owls about one mile apart near the shore of Bitter Lake, using 9 x 35 binocular and 22 x 70 scope at hundred yards and less. Both birds appeared perfectly normal. Bent gives "April 12 as an unusually late date at Aberdeen, S. Dak."—**L. J. Moriarty, Watertown.**

**BIRDS OF THE BLACK HILLS.** By Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. and Nathaniel R. Whitney, Jr. 139 Pages, including list of Literature Cited and Gazetteer. Heavy paper covers. Special Publication Number 1, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. 1965. \$2.50.

This annotated check-list of the Birds of the Black Hills includes a wealth of information on, not only the birds of the area, but on their behavior and movements as well. Topography, geology, and vegetation are discussed adequately for indicating habitat and suggesting ecological relations.

For anyone living in the Hills or even contemplating a visit there, this book, with its detail of where-to-find is a must. It is the culmination of many

years of study of the area by both authors as well the work of many other people past and present.

For SDOU members it is the first step in the direction of the long hoped for **Birds of South Dakota**— and an example of what we would like but probably will find impractical in the larger work to come. Yet, as inevitably occurs, it takes the publication of the work to bring out the data impossible to raise in any other manner. Already additional information is coming in, and more can be expected, that will call for revision when a new printing is made. It is the way things and people are and it will happen when **Birds of South Dakota** is printed, we hope not too many years hence.—**J. W. Johnson.**

## Winter Meeting at Huron

Several gaps loom in the program for the winter meeting. With the stimulation of the Wilson meeting still upon us, possibilities for material should abound. While the glow still lingers, how about getting something in shape to present?

Special thanks go to Paul Springer who has agreed to bring us up to date on the survey of the flora and fauna of the Altamont Prairie, Nelda Holden who has agreed to review spring banding operations at Farm Island, and to Dave Holden who has proposed a panel on the present status of biology in the state.

With this as a start we can realize that many more exist that are now overlooked. So, how about communicating your ideas. please?—**Jean Jonkel, 1722 Kansas SE, Huron.**