

After the Storm

By CHARLOTTE E. VAN SICKLE

THESE RECORDS were obtained in Winnebago County, Ill., not far from the Wisconsin state line, about one hundred miles from Chicago. We have kept a bird record for more years than we would care to admit, but we have never done much "bird hunting" during the winter months. Usually our bird record by the first of March contains only the most common bird residents, such as the hairy and downy woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, crows, etc., with quite often a red-headed woodpecker seen near oak groves.

This year our record is different as Nature herself has conspired to literally drop birds, and such birds, into our laps, willy-nilly, looking for them, or not. After the unusually warm weather up until January, about the middle of this month we were blessed (the soil needed the moisture) with a regular, old-fashioned blizzard which blocked highways with drifts up to eight feet deep. We had our first thrilling experience on our first trip out to the nearby shopping center, Rockford, Ill., after the highways were cleared.

This city is about twenty miles from our home, and about half way there we cross quite a large river with bottom lands on both sides. As we were driving along the highway across this low land I saw what I took to be a hawk soaring over a barnyard, and the bird traveled on in the same direction as the highway. I had asked for less speed so that I might follow its flight as long as possible. Suddenly the bird turned and flew directly over our heads. As he turned I discovered his white head and tail and I am afraid I let out a scream to stop the car. My husband, who has great patience in driving our bird hunting group around looking for birds, but none when we can't instantly identify a bird on sight, stopped the car. He also said, knowing that I do not see great distances and that we had driven a mile since I had first seen the bird, that he thought I must be looking at an airplane. I stepped out of the car, with no galoshes, no binoculars, drifts four or five feet deep on all sides, and with open mouth (I am sure) watched a mature American bald eagle with white head and tail float majestically over my head and across the field.

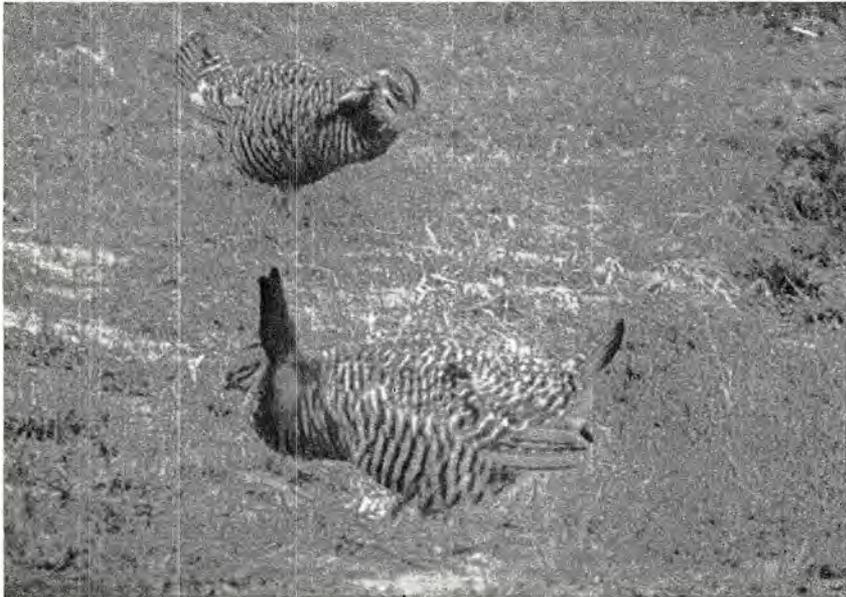
Two days later, a friend coming out from the city saw the same bird in almost the same locality. It has not been heard of since. We hope the dead body is not hanging on some farmer's barnyard fence, but who knows. Although we had never before seen a live eagle in this locality, they are not entirely unknown. Last fall we saw a young eagle that had been shot somewhere in this vicinity. My friend from the city had identified an eagle, a few years ago, only a few miles from where the one was seen this year.

The next day after the eagle episode, armed with binoculars and galoshes, we drove to another river where for some distance the gravel highway has on either side of it low lying land. Just before starting out someone told us that there was a flock of seventy-five prairie chickens along this highway. You know with what skepticism such news is received, with mental reservations to say the least.

Coming down the last hill to the flat land we saw a field with corn shocks still standing in it. Each shock, or so it seemed, had one or more

short-eared owls roosting on it. We counted ten at one time and there were probably more. A few rods farther on we discovered the flock of prairie chickens in a snowy, weed-grown field. The birds were quite a distance from the road but were easily identified with glasses. A little farther along the road a flock of ring-necked pheasants came single file from a field of standing corn out into a field of corn shocks. We counted twenty-three. There had been plenty of pheasants before the hunting season last fall but these were the first seen since then. On our way home we saw a covey of nine quail near a stack of soy bean straw.

This day had netted so many birds and in such quantities that the trip was repeated the next day with even better results. The owls could be studied at ease. One prairie chicken flew to the ground a few rods from the car. It stood and stared at us and we stared back. One could have counted his stripes had he so desired. On both days prairie chickens flew from one side of the road to the other, and one or two had flown over drifts and lighted in trees. Oh, yes they did. One chicken, some distance away, was raising a cloud of snow, easily seen with the naked eye. We could not tell whether he was doing it with his feet or his wings. We wondered whether he was digging in for the night (it was late afternoon) or digging for food. Nearly every year we get at least one record of prairie chickens along this



Prairie Chicken on the Booming Grounds
Photo by A. M. Bailey

road. Last spring we were out early, before any vegetation had started, and we had seen a dozen or more of the birds feeding among the weed stalks, but nowhere near as many as there were this year. Did someone ask

if there were seventy-five? We did not count them but there were a great many.

Again stopping at the place where we had seen the quail, we discovered that in the next field the ground was literally covered with small birds. We identified snow buntings, Lapland longspurs, prairie horned larks (yellow throat), and horned larks (white throat). That is the only difference we are able to make in separating the horned larks. One of our group was sure some of the longspurs were yellow enough to be Smith's. Before we reached home we saw a pair of meadowlarks feeding only a few inches from the concrete highway, where the snow had melted. After seeing all these birds in January, we are fearful that the rest of the year may seem rather tame.

Durand, Ill.



Summer Memories

By MARY RAY VANDERVORT

ONE OF the pleasures of a bird-lover during the lonely winter months is remembering the sights and sounds of summer. I will never forget an evening in August at Tuma Slough.

During the hot weather my companion and I frequently drove out to one of our favorite haunts toward evening, planning to arrive at the Slough just before sunset and the twilight. On this particular evening we first saw some American egrets, perhaps because we had only recently classified them and were watching for them. Quite a number of birds were coming in, eventually twenty-five or thirty. We immediately identified blue herons, both the great and little blues. Flycatchers were busily engaged in trees along the water's edge. We watched the blue-winged teal, Virginia rail, semipalmated plover and killdeer feeding, and close by three beautiful least bitterns.

A muskrat was attempting to carry something to shore or to its den without being seen while all the time he was leaving such a distinctive trail through the water. Some mallards, apparently alarmed by the muskrat, took wing.

Then when our joy seemed complete, watching all these sights and sounds of nature amid a perfectly beautiful sunset, two sandhill cranes came in, which seemed almost an anti-climax. We watched them until dark as we had the opportunity for comparative study of the cranes and the big blue heron, both on the wing and feeding. The flight of the crane is distinctive for while the great blue heron sometimes takes off with extended neck, he doesn't continue to fly like the sandhill crane. Apparently the cranes were spending the night at the Slough and we ourselves were loathe to leave at dark.

Chicago, Ill.



THE NEW cover which the *Bulletin* bears for this number is the work of Earl G. Wright of the Chicago Academy of Sciences and a director of the Society.