

THE NEWSLETTER

Of The Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

Number 46

October, 1944

Anyone who was afoot the last weekend, October 14-15, and so many of the club were out, must have seen some of the first arrivals of the winter flocks, Tree sparrows and juncoes, buffleheads, mergansers, old squaw, and greater scaup, mixed flocks of woods dwellers like hairy woodpeckers, black-capped chickadees, creepers and nuthatches were all moving in. Indeed the general impression was of the arrival of Winter.

It was with this feeling in mind that we decided to prepare another arrival chart for your use: this time a winter bird chart. Judging by the response to the preceding Warbler charts the members of the club find these charts very useful. Accordingly, it is our plan, gradually to extend the series until you have a complete table for all our more regular birds. For this reason we advise the members to keep the various charts as they appear so that they may have the complete table in time.

In this Winter Bird Chart some 35 species are listed. This does not, of course, include all the birds which occur in this region during the winter. There are some constant residents which it is not necessary to name; And there are some irregular winter visitants that occur so rarely that there is no value in arousing false hope of seeing them. The 35 species chosen for the list are typical winter birds with us. Most of them are present in our region only during the winter. A few have been known to nest in our area during the summer. These are marked with an asterisk as they are on the R.O.M.Z. check list. Ordinarily, however, we see them only in winter. A few that do not breed here do occur as stragglers in the summer; for instance, old squaw, golden-eye, greater scaup and king eider. But, as with the previous group, they are essentially winter residents with us all the year round occur in considerably increased numbers during the winter owing to the influx of more northern members of the species. Such birds as downy woodpecker, white-breasted nuthatch, blue jay, black-capped chickadee fall into this category.

The chart is arranged in check-list order. It shows the average arrival date in the fall, the earliest fall arrival, the average departure date in the spring, and the latest spring date. Mr. Baillic has again kindly co-operated in the preparation of this chart. His dates cover a 24-year period. Mine are for an eleven year period. They are arranged one above the other, as before, and the final column shows the number of years each of us has seen the species during our respective periods. The frequency of observation will give you some idea of what chance there is of seeing any particular species during the winter. Any observer who is out regularly during the winter months should see at least 50 kinds of birds, and as a rule, rather more than that.

WINTER BIRD CHART

Name of Bird		Average arrival date	Earliest fall date	Average departure date	Latest spring date	Number years record
Greater Scaup	S	Oct 21	Sep 7	May 20	June 14	11
	B					
Golden-eye	S	Oct.19	Sep.17	May 10	June 9	11
	B	Nov.12	Aug.17	Apr.23	May.24	24
Bufflehead	S	Oct.22	Aug.30	May 8	May 30	11
	B	Nov. 3	Sep. 3	Apr.24	May 26	24
Old Squaw	S	Oct. 9	Aug.26	May 30	June23	11
	B	Oct.28	Aug.19	May 24	July 4	23
King Eider	S	Jan. 7	Jan. 7	Feb.29	Feb.29	1
	B	Dec.30	Dec.16	Jan. 3	Jan.13	2
Common Merganser	S	Oct.23	Oct. 4	May 6	May 17	11
	B	Dec.15	Nov. 2	Apr.13	June18	24
Goshawk	S	Nov.14	Sep. 9	Mar. 6	Apr.20	8
	B	Dec. 5	Oct.24	Dec. 5	Jan.26	6
Rough-Legged Hawk	S	Oct.13	Sep. 5	Apr. 6	May 14	10
	B	Nov.11	Oct.14	Dec. 3	Jan.26	11
Glaucous Gull	S	Jan.12	Dec. 3	Apr. 6	May 27	10
	B	Feb. 3	Nov.12	Mar.30	May 12	15
Iceland Gull	S	Jan.28	Aug.31	Mar.11	Apr.27	10
	B	Feb. 2	Jan. 2	Mar. 6	May 23	5
Black-backed Gull	S	Sep.17	July30	Apr.16	Apr.25	11
	B	Oct. 9	Aug.10	Mar.29	June11	24
Snowy Owl	S	Dec.17	Nov. 2	Feb.16	May 4	7
	B	Dec. 3	Nov.12	Mar. 9	May 22	7
Barred Owl	S	Nov.10	Oct. 3	Feb.11	Mar.17	8
	B	Nov.12	Oct.23	Jan. 1	Mar. 6	8
Long Eared Owl #	S	Oct.16	Oct. 2	Feb.15	Mar.18	9
Short-eared Owl #	S	Dec.14	Sep.17	Mar. 8	Apr.23	10
	B	Jan. 2	Oct.23	Jan.18	Aug.23	8
Sawwhet Owl #	S	Oct.26	Oct.19	Mar. 1	May 16	9
	B	Jan. 3	Oct.14	Jan.24	May 23	13
Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker	S	Nov. 7	Oct.12			3
	B	Nov.12	Oct.31	Dec.22	Dec.31	3
Hairy Woodpecker #	S	Oct. 6	Sep. 5	May 13	June 4	11
	B	Nov.20	Oct. 3	May 3	Sep.29	24
Canada Jay	S	Dec.16	Oct.19	Mar.15	Mar.15	2
	B	Nov.20	Oct.12	Feb. 5	Mar.15	2
Brown-headed Chickadee	S	Nov. 7	Oct.24			2
	B	Oct.31	Oct.31	Oct.31	Oct.31	1
Tufted Titmouse	S					
	B	Nov.27	Nov.27	Nov.27	Nov.27	1
Red-Breasted Nuthatch	S					
	B	Oct.31	Aug. 9	Mar. 9	July27	22
Brown Creeper	S	Sep.25	Sep.11	May 7	May 20	11
	B	Oct.14	Sep. 4	May 7	Aug. 8	24
Carolina Wren	S					
	B	Dec.29	Oct.17	Jan.29	Apr. 6	5
Golden-crowned Kinglet #	S	Sep.25	Sep.13	May 6	May 20	11
	B	Sep.27	Sep.10	May 4	July 27	24

Bohemian Waxwing	S	Feb.21	Feb. 1	Feb.21	Mar.12	2
	B	Jan.10	Dec.18	Jan.10	Feb. 1	2
Northern Shrike	S	Dec. 6	Oct..26	Mar. 1	Mar.24	8
	B	Dec.22	Oct.29	Jan.28	Apr.11	15
Evening Grosbeak	S	Dec.22	Nov.13	Feb.10	Mar.29	6
	B	Jan. 8	Nov.13	Feb. 7	Mar.29	5
Pine Grosbeak	S	Dec. 7	Nov.10	Feb.23	Apr.12	8
	B	Jan. 1	Nov.18	Jan.25	Apr. 8	10
Hoary Redpoll	S	Jan.11	Oct.29	Mar.16	Apr. 3	9
	B	Oct.30	Oct.30	Feb. 1	Feb. 1	1
Common Redpoll	S	Nov.19	Oct.29	Apr. 7	Apr.23	10
	B	Dec.16	Oct.30	Feb.11	May 1	18
Pine Siskin #	S	Oct.29	Oct. 8	Mar.27	May 5	10
	B	Dec. 8	Oct. 8	Mar.13	May 22	14
Red Crossbill #	S	Dec. 6	Oct.31	Feb. 4	Feb. 4	3
	B	Feb.26	Jan.26	Feb.26	Mar.27	2
White-winged Crossbill	S	Nov.20	Nov.12	Mar. 6	Apr. 9	5
	B	Dec. 3	Oct.31	Jan.19	Apr.17	4
Slate-coloured Junco #	S	Sep.22	Sep. 5	May 9	May 20	11
	B	Sep.25	Aug.30	May 6	Aug. 1	24
Tree Sparrow	S	Oct.16	Oct.10	May 2	May 15	11
	B	Oct.24	Oct. 9	Apr.25	May 5	24
Lapland Longspur	S	Dec. 5	Sep.26	Mar. 7	Apr.26	8
	B	Jan. 1	Sep.27	Jan.30	May 16	10
Snow Bunting	S	Nov.13	Oct.18	Mar. 4	Apr.26	11
	B	Nov.25	Oct.24	Jan.21	Apr. 6	15

Last Spring we issued a number of excerpts from the letters of some of our naturalist friends in the armed forces. Club members found this of interest, so we have assembled another selection of such excerpts which show that our friends are finding time to observe birds even at the battlefield itself. It is a happy thought that their hobby can give them even a few moments of the relaxation they need so much. The letters come from England, France and Italy, so that a wide range of territory and experience is represented.

From Lt.R.G.Glover, HQ Army Troops, 1st Can.Army Overseas. "I have kept a list of the summer migrants and the dates I first saw or heard them, but as you won't know the birds it'll hardly interest you. There's a nightingale somewhere in the scrub around the hut in which I sleep. From time^{to}time one hears him during the day, and any decent night he'll be singing from shortly before blackout to about midnight (double DST midnight, I mean, of course). The nightingale strikes me as an over-rated singer. Some of his notes are very pure and sweet, - but some are almost harsh. Where he excels other birds is in his vigour - almost violence. How imbecile poets could fancy that the nightingale sang from the tender pangs of disappointed love I can't imagine.... A bird I listen to with more interest than the nightingale, and for whom I'm more likely to stop and stand to listen, is the Blackcap Warbler... He is utterly different from the nightingale. The nightingale is akin to the thrushes and shares their habit of sitting down in one spot to do a steady job of singing; only where our song thrush and blackbird and the American robin usually choose some high, conspicuous perch, the nightingale chooses the undergrowth. But the blackcap never sits down to sing. He is constantly moving through the foliage, grabbing a fat bug off the back of a leaf, then uttering a clear, flute-like phrase of music. He then slips along

to another branch, grabs a fly in passing and pauses to spill another phrase of liquid music. In quality his voice is perhaps akin to the Baltimore oriole, but purer, sweeter. And all done so casually. He's a lazy genius, the blackcap; and the nightingale an energetic and industrious virtuoso."

From Capt. F. Banfield, 17th Cdn. Met. Sec. May 25, 1944. "I have shifted my theatre of operations somewhat - down to sunny Italy in fact. I had a grand sea voyage down. It was calm with beautifully warm weather. The sea birds were really disappointing however. I saw kittiwakes, greater and lesser Blackbacks and one Iceland Gull somewhere of N.W.Scotland. Then all kinds of Manx Shearwaters, one Petrel and Gannets as far south as Gibraltar (mostly immature). In the Mediterranean more Shearwaters and Mediterranean Herring Gulls - darker mantles and yellow feet and bill.

Since I landed in Italy I have seen a few new birds, a European Kite, Woodchat Shrike, Crested Larks, Subalpine Warblers being the highlights. But I came immediately into action ... To-day I had a swim in the Liri River - some fun (except for the odd dead mule)".

From Cpl. Miller, D.S., RCAF (England) September 6, 1944
"Speaking of using binoculars in prohibited areas! Frank Banfield and I went (when I was down South) out in October of last year at a gun sight looking at "weders" and we were nearly hauled in as "suspicious spies"!

Now my big news! Remember when we saw a Grey-lag (goose) with a Canada (goose) at Sunnyside? Well I saw one to-day - as a matter of fact $\frac{1}{2}$ hour ago, and in its usual style it accompanied a flock of Canada Geese. Incidentally they are all wild. The gamekeeper was telling me they come every year at this time. I heard honking last night and investigated to-day. I guess they just landed last night. Our billets overlook a lake about half the size of Grenadier (Pond) and it really produces some good stuff. Besides the geese there were oodles of Great Crested Grebes, 300 - 400 mallards, tufted ducks, pochard and coots and gallinules galore. The other night I saw a flock of European Teal mixed with mallards, and once before I saw a European Widgeon."

From L/Sgt. Girling, W.G., 1 Can.Fld.Sqn., R.C.E.,C.A. (C.M.F.)
June 9, 1944 (Italy)

"My ornithological experiences since leaving Canada have been many. While in England I had several excellent opportunities of learning the species there and I began an article telling of some of my experiences. Since arriving in Italy I sent that article which is still very incomplete to my wife at London. I had some very good experiences with British birds and tried to some degree to keep a few notes. But that is a rather difficult thing to do when one moves about so much and luggage is supposed to be at a minimum.

My experiences with British birds have stood me in good stead for many of my observations in Italy. Just at the moment of writing a chaffinch sings from an oak tree. It is a song I have come to know very well for it is a common bird in England. This morning I awoke at 4.30 a.m. to listen to a splendid blackbird song, the rich full notes making a pleasant start for another day in the army.

Nightingales seem to be more common in Italy than in England. At least I have heard and seen more birds than I ever saw in England. At one camp we had a nightingale that sang all night outside our tent and the boys were quite pleased to hear it. And I have heard them several times in various places.

Green finches and goldfinches I see almost every day in my various activities, and of course I saw quite a number of them in England.

Just at the moment the swifts are touring the upper air and there is quite a good number. Not having many chimneys hereabouts I haven't discovered yet just where they do spend the night.

I have watched the house martins busily engaged building their mud nests beneath the eaves of wartorn, abandoned Italian farmhouses, oblivious to the fact that the strife of war is all about them.

Since being in Italy we have seen a great deal of the country. In the mountainous regions hawks are fairly plentiful, but aside from the fact that they are buteos, accipiters or falcons, I could not name them. But I have some very vivid mind pictures of them slowly sailing in large circles in the valley below, or flapping and gliding across my field of vision. Vultures, too, are not uncommon sight, and no doubt there is plenty of provender for them in the form of lost sheep or goats that die from exposure.

The evening sun is just sinking in the western sky, a large red-orange ball. The western sky is cloudless and no doubt tomorrow will be another fine sunshiny day with plenty of heat. The weather now is a decided change to that of the winter months which were mostly mud and rain. Now the earth is so hard that in places one would almost think the area had been paved. One wonders how the crops continue to grow, but the grain is ripening very quickly and the other growth is very far advanced". (This letter was written in the cab of a truck. Ed.)

From LAC Malony, C.E.G., RCAF

August 11, 1944. (France)

"Another chap and I are sitting out in a wheat field against a stook, both writing. A few minutes ago a small flock or covey of young grouse whirred by us barely a foot from the ground. Have flushed several coveys of young and some pairs of adults from time to time. But since I left my glasses in England my observations are all naked eye guesses. Flocks of rooks go by from time to time. They aren't as noisy as crows. And wood pigeons fly around everywhere, nearly always landing in trees. They are larger than the domestic bird back home. A pair have a nest near our tent, and keep up a most monotonous cooing. A carrion crow just sailed by. They are silent too, even more so than the rooks.

Other birds that I've seen here in France that I think are the same as the English species are the skylark - one was over us a little while ago, magpies - we see them any day around the cattle in our field probably catching flies from the dung. They too are probably nesting in a hedge on the edge of the field. Chaffinch, also in an around the hedge near us; the Great Titmouse and Blue Titmouse. Blackbirds and thrushes are rare over here; I've only seen an occasional blackbird and no thrushes, whereas in England they were among the commonest. Robins are not plentiful either - saw one last night in the hedge back of my tent. I've heard and caught a glimpse of the Little Owl and the Green Woodpecker but they aren't common. But I've seen several hawks - probably the Kestrel, hovering like our little sparrow hawks over the wheat field in one place for several minutes."

Royal Canadian Institute Lecture in Convocation Hall on November 4,

"Wings West from Florida"

by John H. Storer, A.B.

New members are always welcome in the club.

Annual fee \$1.00
