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Notes on the Occurrence of Birds During the Winters of 1948-1950, in Northern Emmet County, Iowa

By HENRY G. WESTON, JR.

During the winters of 1947-1948, 1948-1949 and 1949-1950 the author gathered data on the occurrence of birds in northern Emmet County, Iowa. Although data were gathered from February through July of 1948 and January through May of 1949 and 1950, this paper, for convenience, includes only the winter periods prior to March 1. Twenty days were spent in the field in the winter period of 1948, 46 days during 1949 and 45 days during 1950.

The area covered in this report includes northern Emmet County, in north-central Iowa. Entirely within the Wisconsin glacial drift soil area, the topography is generally gently undulating to rolling. Because approximately 98 percent of Emmet County is in farm land (Iowa Department of Agriculture, 1949) very few wooded areas are present. Trees present are found primarily in farm groves. Hence most of the data presented in this paper were gathered on open farm land devoted primarily to the raising of corn, oats, soybeans and hay.

General weather conditions in northern Emmet County during the period of this study showed considerable variation. The birds present, however, were not subjected to the stress of any apparent emergency winter conditions. The 1947-1948 winter was characterized by a general absence of snow which undoubtedly was advantageous for the survival of the wildlife present. Temperatures were in general, slightly above normal. In contrast, much of the 1948-1949 winter recorded near zero temperatures (F.) with at least two inches of snow present on the ground during most of January and February. Throughout much of the 1949-1950 winter period five to ten degree (F.) below normal temperatures were recorded. Scattered, light snowfalls were the general rule during this period.

The method utilized in gathering data on the occurrence of birds consisted primarily of recording observations of species made incidentally to the field study of the Ring-necked Pheasants of the area. Table 1 accompanying this paper gives a summary of the occurrence of the 26 species observed during the winters covered by this report. Nomenclature used here is based on Musgrove (1949).

The following list states briefly the status of each of the species recorded during the three winters of this study:

Table 1
Occurrence of birds during the winters of 1948-1950, in northern Emmet County, Iowa. X denotes presence recorded.

Winter Birds	1948	1949	1950
American Rough-legged Hawk	X	X	X
Marsh Hawk		X	
European Partridge	X	X	X
Ring-necked Pheasant	X	X	X
Mourning Dove		X	
Horned Owl	X	X	X
Snowy Owl			X
Short-eared Owl	X	X	
Northern Flicker	X	X	
Hairy Woodpecker	X	X	X
Downy Woodpecker	X	X	X
Horned Lark	X	X	X
Northern Blue Jay	X	X	X
Eastern Crow	X	X	X
Chickadee	X	X	X
White-breasted Nuthatch	X	X	X
Brown Creeper		X	X
Starling	X	X	X
English Sparrow	X	X	X
Meadowlark		X	X
Redwing		X	
Eastern Cardinal	X	X	X
Slate-colored Junco		X	
Tree Sparrow	X	X	X
Lapland Longspur	X	X	X
Snow Bunting			X

American Rough-legged Hawk. *Buteo lagopus*. This species, a fairly common winter visitant in this area, was regularly seen during each of the winter periods studied.

Marsh Hawk. *Circus cyaneus*. The Marsh Hawk, a rather uncommon winter visitant to this area, was observed only during the 1949 winter. During this time individuals were recorded only seven times.

European Partridge. *Perdix perdix*. The European Partridge, an introduced species, is now a permanent resident throughout much of northwest Iowa. During the 1948 winter one covey of 14 was noted. Two coveys of 7 and 10 birds respectively, were observed through the 1949 winter, while two coveys, 10 and 12 birds respectively, were noted off and on during the 1950 winter.

Ring-necked Pheasant. *Phasianus colchicus*. An introduced species in North America that has become well established as a

permanent resident in this area. Individuals were seen daily during each winter.

Mourning Dove. *Zenaidura macroura*. There seem to be very few published records of this species occurring in northern Iowa during the late winter period. No individuals were observed during this season in either 1948 or 1950. In 1949, however, two were recorded on January 23, and on February 17.

Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus*. Horned Owls were noted irregularly during all three winters. The species is a permanent resident of the area found restricted generally to farm groves or wooded areas.

Snowy Owl. *Nyctea scandiaca*. No Snowy Owls were observed during 1948 and 1949. On January 27, 1950, one was recorded in the region of this study. An unusually large number of individuals appeared in the midwest region of the United States at this time. The 1950 winter period may prove to have had one of the greatest flights of this species in the history of this central part of this country.

Short-eared Owl. *Asio flammeus*. This species was recorded only at very infrequent intervals during the winters of 1948 and 1949. None was recorded in 1950.

Northern Flicker. *Colaptes auratus*. Flickers were recorded infrequently in wooded areas during the 1948 and 1949 winters. None was seen during the 1950 period.

Hairy Woodpecker. *Dendrocopos villosus*. A common permanent resident, this bird was recorded all three winters. Individuals could be seen when visits were made to sections possessing trees.

Downy Woodpecker. *Dendrocopos pubescens*. The Downy Woodpecker, seen each year, was one of the most common of the winter birds. Seldom did a day go by without at least one individual being recorded. This species was much more abundant than was the Hairy Woodpecker.

Horned Lark. *Eremophila alpestris*. This species, a common winter resident, was almost always noted in flocks varying in size from six to fifty. Frequently the flocks were mixed, including Lapland Longspurs, and in 1950, Snow Buntings as well.

Northern Blue Jay. *Cyanocitta cristata*. A common permanent resident regularly seen on most winter days, usually among or near trees.

Eastern Crow. *Corvus brachyrhynchos*. A very common permanent resident, seen or heard almost daily.

Chickadee. *Parus atricapillus*. A common winter resident regularly seen and heard.

White-breasted Nuthatch. *Sitta canadensis*. This species was recorded rather commonly each winter when wooded areas were visited.

Brown Creeper. *Certhis familiaris*. The Brown Creeper, recorded only during 1949 and 1950, appeared rather irregularly.

Starling. *Sturnus vulgaris*. Now well established as a permanent resident in northern Iowa, this introduced species was noted almost daily in considerable numbers.

English Sparrow. *Passer domesticus*. An introduced species now established as a common permanent resident. Recorded daily around sites of human habitation.

Meadowlark. *Sturnella magna* (or *neglecta*). The Meadowlark is not a common winter visitant to this area. None was observed in the 1948 winter. However, several were recorded during the two following winters. In 1949 two individuals wintered at the north side of the town of Huntington. On February 6, 1950, one was observed in the same place.

Redwing. *Agelaius phoeniceus*. The Redwing is not a common winter visitant to the area studied. None was recorded except on January 23, 1949, when three males were seen on the Grass Lake Game Area.

Eastern Cardinal. *Richmondia cardinalis*. A rather common permanent resident to the wooded sections of the area studied.

Slate-colored Junco. *Junco hyemalis*. This species was recorded, in small flocks, at irregular intervals only during the winter of 1949.

Tree Sparrow. *Spizella arborea*. The tree sparrow was a very common winter visitant to the area during each of the three winters studied.

Lapland Longspur. *Calcarius lapponicus*. Each winter mixed flocks of this species and Horned Larks were regularly recorded. The flocks generally included about 30 birds. Throughout the 1950 winter Snow Buntings were added to the mixed flocks.

Snow Bunting. *Plectrophenax nivalis*. The Snow Bunting is a rather rare winter visitor this far south. None was recorded during 1948 and 1949. In 1950 this species was recorded regularly during January and February in mixed flocks of from 30 to 50 birds including also Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs.

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