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## Bird Records for the Season 1919-1920 in the Vicinity of Iowa City

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BIRD RECORDS FOR THE SEASON 1919-1920 IN THE  
VICINITY OF IOWA CITY

DAYTON STONER

Although the present report is based on notes and observations made, for the most part, in the vicinity of Iowa City, a few records are included from points some distance away. The records herein given cover the time between May 1, 1919, and March 10, 1920.

This paper does not purport to contain a complete list of the birds seen during this period but is a composite one made up largely of the more unusual findings of the season which have come to the writer's attention along with some notes on several of the more common species of the region. It is intended to supplement the information on migration and distribution which is already available and will, it is hoped, stimulate further local observations and studies in this branch of natural history.

Most of the observations have been made by the writer but acknowledgement is given in the proper places for whatever additional information has been furnished.

Among the more unusual and interesting records here reported are those of the Long-billed Dowitcher and Clarke's Nutcracker and the occurrence in winter of the Sparrow Hawk, Northern Flicker and Towhee.

Two important points with reference to bird distribution receive further corroborative evidence from the observations herein recorded: (1) The eastward dispersal of some of the typically western forms is further demonstrated; such an extension of range is to be noted also in other groups of animals of our state. (2) In spite of the fact that the past winter has been long and severe, some species not usually with us during the cold months chose to remain over. While the temperature has been extremely low but once, and below zero a comparatively few times, the local weather records show that between November 23, 1919, and February 20, 1920, not a 24-hour period passed when the mercury did not go as low as 32° Fahr. Usually at least one general thaw occurs during the winter. On February 8, 1920, the mini-

imum was 32° and the highest maximum between November 23, 1919, and February 20, 1920, was 42° on November 9.

1. Bonaparte's Gull. *Larus philadelphia* (Ord). On October 29, 1919, a specimen in the flesh and showing typical immature plumage was sent the writer for examination by Miss Ruth Nissen, a teacher in the schools of Norway, Iowa. The bird was killed just south of the town of Norway in Benton county by some boys on October 27.

2. Merganser. *Mergus americanus* Cassin. An adult female in winter plumage, taken at Iowa City, November 19, 1919, was brought into the laboratory of Prof. H. R. Dill. In addition to this record Professor Dill has kindly furnished several others herein mentioned and a number of specimens here recorded have been mounted by him and are in the University Museum.

3. Long-billed Dowitcher. *Macrorhamphus griseus scolopaceus* (Say). An adult male which the writer had the privilege of examining was killed along the Mississippi river near Muscatine on October 27, by Dr. L. W. Dean. The specimen is in the typical winter plumage.

4. Ruffed Grouse. *Bonasa u. umbellus* (Linn.). Two specimens, a male and a female, were taken by F. E. Horack early in December, 1919, in the woods near Wray's crossing about ten miles north of Iowa City. Both birds are mounted and are in the University collection. While this form is rare in this region, one is not unlikely to come across a single individual or a pair in or near heavily wooded areas.

5. Ferruginous Rough-leg. *Archibuteo ferrugineus* (Licht.). A male which had been caught in a steel trap was sent to the University Museum December 7, 1919, by A. F. Rahfeldt of Zearing, Iowa. This is another bird characteristic of western United States which only occasionally straggles into Iowa. It is reported as accidental in Illinois (Cory).

6. Golden Eagle. *Aquila chrysaetos* (Linn.). One individual of this species was shot near Solon in Johnson county about October 10, 1919. Occasionally a specimen of this bird is seen in the region and if the observer carries a gun the number of golden eagles in the state is usually decreased by one. Although the statement is trite it may be worth repeating here that 'the shooting of large and striking birds should be discouraged.'

7. Sparrow Hawk. *Falco s. sparverius* Linn. One example of this species, a male, was seen by the writer on December 26, 1919, along a wooded roadside about one-half mile west of Iowa

City. Anderson (Birds of Iowa, 1907, 257) lists this form as a common migrant in all parts of the state and a somewhat less common summer resident. He records a male taken at Iowa City, November 28, 1905. Bailey (The Raptorial Birds of Iowa, 1918, 170) indicates that this bird is rarely found in the state during the winter and mentions one specimen that was killed at Cedar Rapids in January.

8. Barn Owl. *Aluco pratincola* (Bonap.). An adult male was taken at Iowa City, November 1, 1919, by W. F. Kubichek.

9. Screech Owl. *Otus a. asio* (Linn.). A not uncommon winter resident about Iowa City, one individual frequenting a hollow maple tree near the writer's home all during the winter.

10. Red-bellied Woodpecker. *Centurus carolinus* (Linn.). This form has been noted in unprecedented numbers during the past season and several individuals have been seen at local feeding stations during the winter.

11. Northern Flicker. *Colaptes auratus luteus* Bangs. On December 26, one individual was seen in the woods along Iowa river a mile south of Iowa City. Although this form has been recorded locally a number of times in winter it is not commonly observed at that season. Anderson (*l.c.*) says that this form is but rarely seen in Winnebago county and Spurrell (Wilson Bulletin, XXI, No. 4, 1919, 120) gives it as a rare winter resident in Sac county. Stephens (Proceedings Iowa Academy Science, XXIV, 1917, 250) says: "This is not a common winter species" [in northwestern Iowa]. He records three specimens seen in January and four in February.

12. Clarke's Nutcracker. *Nucifraga columbiana* (Wilson). On November 30, 1919, an adult male was taken by A. W. Hemphill, near Tiffin in Johnson county about eight miles west of Iowa City. This is a bird of the western coniferous forest areas of North America and, so far as the writer is aware, this is the second specimen recorded from the state. The first record of the occurrence of this form within our borders was published by Prof. C. C. Nutting in 1895 (Proc. Ia. Acad. Sci., II, 1894, 44). The single specimen recorded at that time was taken at Boone, September, 1894, by C. F. Henning. It is now in the collection of the museum of the State University. The specimen here recorded is deposited for the present in the University Museum. General color almost uniform gray, a little lighter on the head and without brownish tinge.

13. Red-winged Blackbird. *Agelaius p. phoeniceus* (Linn.).

During the spring of 1919 this species was more than usually abundant in the vicinity of Iowa City and one of the places most frequented was a mud flat about 100 yards long by 20 yards wide on the west bank of the Iowa river just west of the University campus. This flat is thickly grown up with small willows and long, heavy water-grass and rushes grow in a tangled mass around them. Here, morning after morning, in late March and early April the noise made by the thousands of red-wings seemed almost deafening as one stood among the trees. And in the early morning before the birds began flying away to feed, the trees, grass and reeds seemed literally black with them. The sudden and uniform cessation of singing at irregular intervals when groups of twenty-five to one hundred birds rose in the air and flew slowly away was particularly noticeable. It was estimated that over 5,000 birds roosted in this small area when the number was at its maximum. Usually by 7:30 A.M. comparatively few of the birds remained and after April 3 fewer and fewer of the birds returned each succeeding evening.

It seems likely that the abundance of this as well as many other species of our common birds may be attributed, at least in some measure, to the dissemination and influence of knowledge relative to the value of our birds and a consideration of the laws that have been enacted to protect them.

14. Baltimore Oriole. *Icterus galbula* (Linn.). Ordinarily this bird arrives at Iowa City about May 6 to 8 but in 1919 several specimens were observed on May 2. This is the writer's earliest spring record for observations lasting over a period of seven years.

15. Bronzed Grackle. *Quiscalus quiscula aeneus* Ridgway. In the early autumn of 1919 this species appeared in unusual numbers about Iowa City and a great flock roosted each evening in the willow trees above described where the red-wings held forth in the spring. In late afternoons and early evenings groups of from a dozen to as many as 300 could be seen making their way to this roosting place. In the morning they were off again dispersing in all directions.

Groups of a hundred or more often visited the lawns in town. Flying down *en masse* from the tree tops they would begin at one end of a lawn and work across it rapidly, searching under the leaves and grass and no doubt in this way destroying thousands of insects and their larvæ. Never before had the writer observed

this species in the city in such numbers; the notable increase may be due in large part to the influence of bird protection propaganda which has been spread broadcast.

16. Purple Finch. *Carpodacus p. purpureus* (Gmel.). Small flocks containing both males and females have been observed all winter just west of town by Dr. R. W. Chaney. They were often to be seen with the goldfinches which frequented that locality.

17. Harris's Sparrow. *Zonotrichia querula* (Nutt.). An adult male in winter plumage was taken at Iowa City, November 11, 1919, by Russell Hendee. This species seems to be a rather rare and irregular spring and fall migrant in this part of the state.

18. Cardinal. *Cardinalis c. cardinalis* (Linn.). During the autumn of 1919 this species seemed less common than usual about Iowa City and the writer heard it but once between September 1 and October 17. However, during the past winter the birds have been plentiful enough and on a six hour field trip in late December ten individuals were seen.

19. Rose-breasted Grosbeak. *Zamelodia ludoviciana* (Linn.). At Iowa City the first arrivals in the spring of 1919 were noted on May 2, an unusually early seasonal record. Ordinarily they arrive from three to six days later.

20. Bohemian Waxwing. *Bombycilla garrula* (Linn.). One specimen, a female, was taken from a flock of four individuals seen at Brooklyn, Iowa, February 21, 1920. The specimen is now in the University collection. This species is very erratic in its appearance and irregular in its distribution. While it has been reported in most sections of Iowa these records have been mostly from the northern part of the state.

21. Cedar Waxwing. *Bombycilla cedrorum* Vieill. A flock of about twenty individuals was observed on North Capitol street just north of the University campus on March 9, 1920, by Mrs. C. B. Wilson. This form is also somewhat irregular in its appearance but at least a few are seen here every spring and fall.

22. Myrtle Warbler. *Dendroica coronata* (Linn.). At 8:00 A.M. on May 2, 1919, the writer, while walking along the banks of Iowa river west of the City Park at Iowa City, noticed a considerable number of myrtle warblers busily pecking in the sand under a large elm tree; this group was joined from time to time by other individuals. At the beginning of the observation the

group was composed of from twenty to twenty-five birds, one female myrtle warbler, one female black-throated green warbler and the rest of the company of male myrtle warblers.

So busily were the birds engaged that the observer approached within a few feet of them and watched them for several minutes. After examining the sand closely for insects and for the seeds of trees or plants the writer was led to the conclusion that the birds were eating minute grains of sand probably to assist the crop in the comminution of food. Never before had the writer observed this habit in the species.

23. Red-breasted Nuthatch. *Sitta canadensis* (Linn.). This species has been increasing in numbers in and about Iowa City and is occasionally seen during the winter. The writer's first autumn record was October 27, 1919.

24. Robin. *Planesticus m. migratorius* (Linn.). Robins were common about Iowa City until October 15, 1919, the autumn up to this time having been unusually warm and with but two or three light frosts. In spite of the severity of the past winter a few remained over. Mrs. C. B. Wilson reports that one individual visited her feeding table consistently all through the fall and winter.

25. Bluebird. *Sialia s. sialis* (Linn.). This species was with us until late in the fall. A flock of between fifteen and twenty is reported near Sharon, about ten miles south of Iowa City on February 13, 1920, by Dr. C. S. Grant.

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