

The Old Naturalist wandered on to the mammalogical section. Here he found the curator contemplating a tray of skins of the genus *Microtus*, while on the table lay a single specimen. After introducing himself, he enquired as to the identity of the specimen on the table.

"I don't know what it is," said the curator. "In fact, I am afraid it is impossible to say. You see it has lost its label, and without the locality I am entirely unable to say to what subspecies it belongs."

"But, if you cannot tell what it is without a locality label, it can hardly be worth bothering about," said the Old Naturalist.

"Oh, yes, indeed yes. That's not the point at all. If any two mammals come from different localities they *must* belong to different subspecies, whether we can see the differences or not, and we're all right, quite all right, as long as we have the labels."

"I thought that subspecies were named to facilitate reference, caused by climatic conditions, and that their chief interest lay in correlating these differences with the conditions under which they were produced."

"That, I know, used to be the old idea, but we have got far beyond that now, and we know that subspecies exist for each locality. It is a great improvement on the old method and quite simple as long as we have the labels."

The Old Naturalist left the curator hunting for his lost label, and proceeded to the botanical section. Here he introduced himself to Dr. Synn O'Nymm Seeker, Chief Taxonomist of the Order Rosales.

"I used at one time," said the Old Naturalist, "to be interested in the genus *Crataegus*. What is the situation in that genus at the present time?"

"The genus *Crataegus*?" exclaimed Dr. Synn O'Nymm Seeker, "why my dear sir, there is no such genus. It was discovered long ago that each of the old species of that so-called genus was really a separate genus, and that each of these separate genera had from fifty to a hundred species. But even this point of view is now obsolete, as Professor Splittem Finer has just found that every individual hawthorn is a distinct species and he is now engaged in the momentous task of going over the whole of North America tagging every tree with its own specific name."

The Old Naturalist turned sadly away. Poor old out-of-date chap! He returned to his home, spent the rest of his life in trying to catch up with a synonymy which got away from him in one group while he was working at another, and in trying in vain to find some rhyme or reason in the mass of published subspecies. So he wore himself out and died—and never wrote his book.

I remember the Old Naturalist well. He was a good worker and a progressive. He would have done even more practical field work if his time had not been so largely taken up in controversy with the conservatives of his day. However, we owe him a larger debt of gratitude than is generally realized. It was largely due to him a code of nomenclature was established which ended the existing practice whereby each individual crank was a law unto himself, the confusions from which we are only just straightening out to-day. He had a caustic pen too. His papers on *Turdus* vs. *Merula* in the old numbers of *Ornithologica* are classics of sarcasm and irony, and well worth occasional re-reading.

P. A. T.

## NOTES ON THE NESTING HABITS AND FOOD OF PRAIRIE HORNED-LARKS IN MANITOBA.

BY NORMAN CRIDDLE, TREESBANK, MAN.

The notes presented below are largely from observations made during the spring of 1918, and owe their origin to the fact that I was unable, at that time, owing to ill-health, to devote my attention to the more strenuous work which usually falls to the lot of a field officer of the Dominion entomological service. As it happened, the horned-larks were nesting close at hand and, therefore, presented opportunity for study without fatigue to the observer.

The horned-larks of Manitoba have already been dealt with in this journal,\* but as the present notes

add to what was previously written they seem worthy of record here.

Prairie horned-larks are the first birds to return to their summer homes from the south; they are usually with us in numbers by March 1 and at the end of that month are, as a rule, busily engaged in incubating a clutch of eggs. My 1918 records read somewhat as follows: April 18, young birds almost able to fly; April 30, young flying; May 3, nest with 3 eggs; young from this nest left on May 26. May 16, nest with 4 eggs, young hatched May 26 and left the nest June 4. On June 7, a nest with 4 eggs was discovered and on July 2 one

\*Ottawa Naturalist, Vol. XXX, No. 11, Feb. 1917.



with 2 fresh eggs. On July 14 still another nest was located, this one having 4 eggs. At this last date males were singing everywhere and the time was undoubtedly one of general breeding. From these records it will be seen that there is a nesting period of at least four months, also that the birds rear three and perhaps four broods in a season. It is interesting to relate that while the birds do not, as a general rule, rear two families in the same nest, one pair did so, while another couple built a second nest within a few feet of the first. One nest, under close observation, contained young which left it in nine days after hatching, and though they were still unable to fly at that time they had, nevertheless, acquired considerable feathering. The nest to which I devoted most attention was situated quite close to the house and within easy vision from a window; it was built among chips and sunken, as usual, in the ground, the locality being one frequented by humans as well as by dogs and poultry. When either of the first two drew near, the brooding bird slipped quietly from the nest, apparently trusting to the color similarity of the young and the nest to the surroundings to keep them from harm, but when a hen came within reach the small bird flew at her with such vigor as to cause the hen to become seriously alarmed and make her leave in a hurry.

The young birds were attended by both parents from the time they were hatched until they left the nest and both adults took an equal share in feeding their offspring, as well as cleaning the nest. As it began to grow dark the female fitted herself over the young for the night while the male after singing in the twilight went to rest in the vicinity.

Judging from the observations made in 1918, it would seem that the food of young prairie horned-larks consists very largely of cutworms which the parent birds dig out of the ground by aid of their beaks. The locating of these insects is performed with remarkable accuracy though it is due to a knowledge of the insects' haunts rather than to a perception of the exact situation in which they rest. Thus, parent horned-larks were seen, repeatedly, searching around clumps of weeds which were more or less isolated through being surrounded by bare spots, these being the situations which our observation have shown are most frequented by cutworms. The time occupied in securing one of those insects naturally varied, but on an average required rather less than four minutes. A pair of birds watched on June 4, feeding young a week old, and commencing at sunset, visited the nest with food on an average every two minutes. Judging from these and other observations we can, therefore, estimate the total number of cutworms consumed in a day at fully 400; in other words, nearly 3,000 a week, and

this does not take into consideration the number of insects eaten by the adults which would add considerably to the total.

Cutworm hunting is naturally a daylight occupation and since it continues until dark there is every reason to suspect that it commences soon after dawn, especially as the male birds begin to sing at the first indication of returning day. The birds I had under observation abandoned their work as the day grew dark.

A few mornings after the records mentioned above were taken, I found the young still in position in the nest, but at 8 a.m. the largest and oldest nestling followed its mother away and was soon after lost in the herbage, neither birds being seen again. The male continued to feed the remaining two until five minutes after nine, when the next largest followed him away. The third nestling was smaller than the others and I fully expected that it would be left to perish as often happens when food is scarce. For a time the male continued to devote all his attention to the one that had followed him but eventually he returned to the nest with a cutworm and shortly after with yet another. Feeling sorry for the hard worked little bird I placed five full sized cutworms on the edge of the nest and then awaited developments. The male soon returned with the usual fare, and then spying the insects placed near, he stuffed four of them in succession down the throat of his greedy charge, taking the last grub to the other bird. He continued to labor on behalf of both young until shortly after eleven o'clock when the remaining nestling followed him away.

The habit of the male bird continuing to support both young after the female had evidently deserted them is naturally a very important characteristic providing it is one that is generally followed. The question remains, would he have attempted to do so had food been scarce? The evidence is in the negative. It is common knowledge to those who have studied horned-larks that they seldom rear more than one of the first brood, the reason for this is apparently the scarcity of insect food at that time, especially the scarcity of cutworms. During June cutworms are at the height of their season and, therefore, the birds find little difficulty in rearing the full allotment of young. July is also a favorable month owing to the presence of locusts and caterpillars of various kinds.

The food of adult horned-larks is less insectivorous than is that of the young and is at least in part made up of seeds and sprouted plants of various kinds, but from the fact that enormous flocks of these birds sometimes continue on the grain fields for two or three weeks in spring time without doing



any appreciable harm we must conclude that they are either eating weed seeds or insects. We know that before the spring really opened that horned-larks partook daily of the weed seeds placed for them. This is doubtless why they became tame

and later nested nearby. We have also seen them repeatedly devour cutworms during the nesting season so that the evidence of their usefulness seems to be without question.

### BRIEF REPORT OF THE OTTAWA FIELD-NATURALISTS' CLUB FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2, 1919.

At the March, 1919, annual meeting of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club, the constitution was amended to make the club year coincide with the calendar year, and, therefore, each future volume of the club publication will cover one calendar year instead of parts of two as in the past. In spite of the fact that owing to this change in the constitution, the past year—the fortieth of the existence of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club, covering a period of only nine months—was the most successful in the recent history of the society, which now has a membership of 644, or more than double that of 1917.

The club activities are directed toward the popularizing and the diffusing of knowledge of the natural sciences, and are carried on in three chief ways: a course of lectures, two series of field excursions, and the publication of *THE CANADIAN FIELD-NATURALIST*.

Owing to the short year the lecture programme was not begun prior to the annual meeting. A list of thirty-six lectures to be given by club members has been sent to local societies, clubs, churches and schools from which they may select and request desirable talks.

The eight field excursions were well patronized, the average attendance being 23. Scientific men attended the excursions to direct interest and answer questions.

*THE CANADIAN FIELD-NATURALIST*, the official organ of the club which has completed its thirty-third volume, is also now being used as a medium of publication by the four affiliated societies listed on the cover.

At a recent meeting the council was informed that Mr. R. B. White had bequeathed the club one hundred dollars per year, which will be allowed to accumulate along with other funds in trust to form the nucleus of a trust fund the interest of which will eventually be used to promote natural history research work in Canada.

The officers and committee for the year 1920 are as follows:

President, M. Y. Williams; Vice-Presidents, L. D. Burling, R. M. Anderson; Secretary, Clyde L. Patch; Treasurer, Miss E. B. Crampe; Editor, Arthur Gibson.

Additional members of Council: Hoyes Lloyd, W. T. Macoun, G. A. Miller, Miss M. E. Cowan, C. B. Hutchings, C. M. Sternberg, H. I. Smith, P. A. Taverner, E. Sapir, F. W. Waugh, E. M. Kindle, W. J. Wintemberg, R. E. DeLury, F. Johansen.

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*Photography*—W. S. Hutton.



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