

quite distinct, might easily pass as an abnormal one of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

DICKCISSEL.

This bird was first recorded for the province by Mr. G. E. Atkinson, who took a specimen near Portage la Prairie on June 14, 1897. He concluded that the example was a straggler from the south, though the date at which it was taken would indicate that it was breeding in the neighborhood.

On June 24, 1921, I was out on grasshopper work in company with Mr. P. N. Vroom. We stopped at Melita and had gone out in the evening to do a little collecting south-west of the village. About half a mile away there is a ravine with stagnant pools of water, and just beyond, to the right, a rather wide dry meadow dotted over with low-lying shrubs consisting of Silverberry (*Elaeagnus argentea*), Western Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*) and a few others in lesser numbers. There is some high herbage, too, which provides abundance of cover for small birds. It was on the edge of this meadow, near the road, that I heard a song with which I was unfamiliar and which I traced to a small bird sitting upon a fence post. We soon obtained a close view of the singer, which I recognized by the characteristic black patch beneath the throat to be a Dickcissel. This was a male in full song and, interestingly enough, his song was answered by a second indi-

vidual about 80 yards away in the same valley. No nests were found or even sought for, but from the fact that there were two or more males singing there, I think we may safely conclude that the species breeds in the vicinity.

LARK BUNTING.

This species ranges east to Aweme, where it has been known to nest. It is, however, but a casual visitor in most parts of the province, though it breeds quite commonly in the extreme south-west corner.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER.

Two examples, both males, have been seen since my original record of this species. While these birds were not collected the markings are so distinctive that it would be an extraordinary lack of observation to mistake the species for any other.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD.

It is interesting to relate that this handsome species has taken readily to nesting boxes and that it is steadily increasing. Both this and the common Bluebird have made their nests in the vicinity of my home for some years past, and while the House Sparrow is there, too, and has a reputation for fighting, he is invariably vanquished when he comes in contact with the Bluebirds.

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM A TAME SPARROW HAWK.

By P. A. TAVERNER.

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Some years ago we kept what I was about to call a captive Sparrow Hawk; but the word "captive" conveys an erroneous impression of relationship. "Tame" is weak and equally misleading. Perhaps it is better to make a new start and state that, — once upon a time, I was on intimately friendly terms with a Sparrow Hawk. She had been taken from her deep, dark nest cavity a half downy youngster, inexperienced in the ways of Sparrow Hawks in the wide, wild world; and whatever she afterwards did or thought or attained was more the result of instinct and natural ability developed

through contact with human kind, than of normal Sparrow Hawk education. When I first met her, an adolescent bird, as friend and master, there is reason to suspect that experience with humans had not predisposed her in their favor; but, as events proved, nothing serious enough had happened to prevent the establishment of thorough confidence between us. During the two or three years this charming intimacy endured I had unusual opportunities for studying Sparrow Hawk nature in general and this bird in particular.

Ornithological observers are familiar





**FALCO**, a tame sparrow-hawk (*falco sparverius*).



with the fact that all wild creatures have certain fixed specific habits and mental reactions to various stimuli. Some species are particularly wary and cautious, others are constitutionally confiding or bold. What we also know but usually realize all too vaguely is that besides these characteristics common to a species, are other mental attitudes that are as strictly individual as many human traits. In watching Falco, as we called her, it was borne in upon us with all the force of a strictly new discovery that the Sparrow Hawks we thought we knew so well are not automata all cast in the same mould, that they each have mentalities of their own, personal habits that change in detail from time to time under whim or passing states of mind, individual likes and dislikes; in fact they have lives of their own to live and minds of their own to live them. Even a field naturalist is apt to acquire the habit of considering the birds he studies in the broad and general, as species and subspecies rather than as individuals. Not the least learned from association with this little hawk was this appreciation of her individual personality.

Next to these evidences of personality the most striking qualities Falco presented were affection, and, if the manner of dealing with unusual conditions is a criterion, her quite considerable intelligence. Though suspicious of strangers, she showed a decided liking for her immediate family, and enjoyed to sit upon our shoulders, fluffed up like a ball cuddling close to the neck and passing her bill delicately around the convolutions of the ear to the accompaniment of a contented little churring note of satisfaction. She knew even the sound of our foot-steps. A stranger's footfall along the concrete sidewalk leading to the outer door drove her precipitately to her safe citadel on top of her seldom occupied cage in the far upper corner of the room. The sounds of our steps on the same walk merely caused a look of expectation and a preparation to alight upon our shoulders as soon as we appeared. She recognized paper parcels as common containers of meat and showed interest in them accordingly. She knew that water could be obtained at the sink through our mediation, and came to it

when thirsty or wanting a bath. She recognized doors as the means of communication between rooms and when lonely and wanting to join us, came to them and scratched and churred for admission. A mirror perplexed her once but, finding nothing behind, she had no interest in it afterwards.

At times she was playful and enjoyed a certain game in which a long yellow pencil (no other color served quite as well) was pointed at her. On finally gaining possession of it she would brandish it most cleverly with feet and bill until it slipped to the floor, when she would look down, as if in surprise, and descend to obtain it again. She had many mimic fights with her distorted reflection in the curved base of a brass lamp, would hide from it behind books or obstructions, then pounce from ambush, striking vigorously with her feet and uttering low churs of pleasure.

Though nervous with strangers, especially men, she showed a surprising lack of appreciation of danger from hereditary or natural enemies, showing that fear of definite objects is not as instinctive as is commonly believed. A strange face at the window caused her to flee in terror, but I have seen her sit with only interested curiosity on the window sill within, whilst without a cat struggled to make through the glass at her. A dog was only an interesting phenomenon to her, nothing more.

Once a cigar box, with a hole in the side like a bird box, was prepared and hung near her usual perch. She was interested at once, and hardly was it fixed than she was peering in. She entered, and for the next little while nothing was seen of her except occasional glimpses of her bright little face looking out, but from within could be heard the sounds of scratching, thumping and excited ejaculation. Thereafter she spent many minutes, aggregating hours perhaps per day, in the box, always in an excited condition. It was evident that latent sexual instincts were aroused, and feeling half guilty at having raised unsatisfiable desires we removed the box.

In spite of the unnaturalness of the circumstances surrounding her she appeared content and happy, except for short



periods twice a year — early spring and late fall. In the spring, before the sap had stirred on the sunniest slopes, and whilst snow seemed the eternal order of things, and the season's advance was only to be noted by the calendar, she became restless and discontented. It was the "Season of New Song"; more, it was also, it seemed, the season of migration, and whether she knew the meaning of it or not something stirred within her in consequence and she was deeply moved. Normally serene and contented in her window, watching with bright, interested eyes all that passed within her ken, then she was restless and excited, pattering back and forth along the narrow runway of her window meeting-rail, pausing at intervals to half-raise her wings and chatter loudly the well-known Sparrow Hawk cry of agitation. Once at such a time I saw a wild Sparrow Hawk pass over without. She saw it too, for little escaped her piercing eyes. She followed it with her gaze from the time it first hove in sight, leaning against the glass to see around the window jamb until it passed from sight behind some trees. This condition lasted but a little while each season, a couple of weeks perhaps, but while it lasted it was nearly as hard on us, her friends, as upon herself. Shortly she was her old self again, content to watch the world go by from her observatory window, her only agitation the butcher's or grocer's boy that brought her food and sent her seeking safety to the high top of her empty cage. Similar disturbances to the even tenor of her way occurred in the fall. As the first frosts loosed the leaves and the grasshoppers were dropping numbed from the yellowing grass whence wild Sparrow Hawks had but lately gleaned them, nature stirred again within her. Its meaning I do not think she ever definitely recognized, but she became again uneasy, restless and difficult to please.

Now, neither before nor during these periods were there any perceptible changes in the conditions under which she lived. She was not reactive to differences or shortage of food, temperature or any other factor that could be humanly recognized. The change came from within, rather than from without. I think that as fruit and foliage grow through the season, in cer-

tain times ripen to maturity and then decline in metabolic activity, so the migrating and sexual instincts develop, culminate and decline in measured growth but slightly accelerated or retarded by variations in seasonal condition. And thus birds feel the urge to migrate, and depart in the fall before the lack of food, the ultimate necessity for such a movement, has sapped their energies and vigor. In the spring it works the other way; the onward urge toward a harder rather than a softer climate comes early, and they tread upon the very footsteps of winter, arriving north at the earliest moment that existence for their kind is measureably secure, to the end that they have the greatest length of season in which to raise their families to migrational maturity before the return of winter.

One of Falco's interesting physical characteristics was her comparative independence of water. She was fed principally on butcher's meat. When liver, English Sparrows or other moist meat formed a fair proportion of her food, water was only desired for bathing, and sometimes weeks went by without her drinking. After a spell of rather dry meat she desired water and asked for it in a way that we who knew her little idiosyncracies recognized perfectly. She enjoyed bathing, and splashed the water from her bowl far and wide, retiring afterwards to her sunny window to dry and fluff. As said before, her food was largely, and of necessity, from the butcher's shop, and when English Sparrows grew too wary to be readily obtained, it was found necessary occasionally to mix a little chopped tow or shredded rope end with it to supply the roughage for natural digestion and the pellet for regurgitation. She invariably avoided fat, tearing it from the lean in little shreds and impatiently discarding it. She also appreciated a variety in diet, and changes from beef to pork or mutton or back again always met with her approval. At times she even tired of English Sparrows and became satiated with her favorite tit-bits, June-bugs or Grasshoppers. It is evident then that birds enjoy a variety of foods, and no matter how plentiful some one supply may become, at times they will turn their attention elsewhere to balance



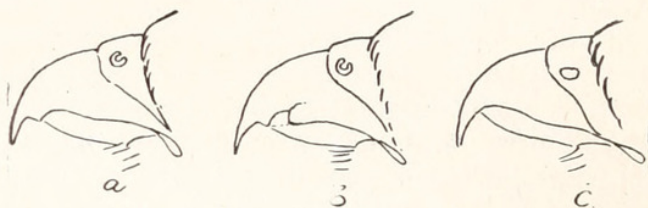
out the ration. This trait undoubtedly extends the usefulness of each species of birds and at the same time explains why, in time of great insect plagues, birds are not engaged in eating them to the exclusion of less abundant food. Some variety is desirable if not an absolute necessity to them.

The quickness of some of *Falco*'s reactions were remarkable. An extreme example can be presented. She slept on the top of her cage, canary-like, with her head under her wing as it is generally described, although really the head is hidden under the interscapular feathers between the shoulders.

Wishing to obtain a photograph of her in this attitude a camera was set conveniently, and late at night, when she was sound asleep, an explosive magnesium flash was fired. Of course she awoke immediately, but the speed of her movement was only appreciated when the resultant negative was developed. It presented two clear superimposed images without blur between. One showed her asleep with only a slight depression in the feather masses where the head was hidden; in the other she was wide awake regarding the light. What the duration of the flash was I had no means of telling; it was surely but a small fraction of a second, yet during this short period she had held her pose long enough to make a sensible impression on the plate. She had awakened, changed her position so quickly that the movement made no blur, and again held her position long enough to register another picture.

*Falco* had the habit of "caching" superfluous food. She did this from the first, and in so business-like and natural a manner that I am convinced that it was instinctive and is a regular specific habit. I have seen no suggestion to this in the literature relating to the wild bird. This case may not prove beyond question that wild Sparrow Hawks do hide stores, but it is strongly suggestive of its probability. When hunger was temporarily satisfied, the unconsumed remainder of the supplies was invariably carried in the bill to one of several usual hiding places. The most favored one was on top of the electric meter on the wall nearby. She would place the valued bit in the depression be-

tween the top of the meter and the wall, and stamp it down with her feet in a business-like manner, churring with a note of exultation and then withdrawing to view results. If not satisfied she would return and rearrange and hammer it again and when satisfied seek her perch. Any time thereafter a motion on our part towards her store would arouse anxious interest, and if the threatened theft were pressed she was immediately on hand to protect her property. Even if the attempt



a. — Normal falcon bill.

b. — Overgrown falcon bill, showing tendency of growth and loosening scale.

c. — Normal Buteo bill.

did not seem serious, after a minute she often made an investigation and even changed the hiding place. When hungry again she remembered her hidden store and, if it had been removed unbeknown to her, showed disappointment and perplexity most plainly.

Perhaps from a strictly scientific standpoint the most interesting discovery made from this little bird was the method of growth of her bill. The Sparrow Hawk, though small, is a true Falcon, a "Noble Falcon" in the old vocabulary of venery. The bill of this group of raptorial birds is distinguished from the less esteemed hawks by having a distinct notch and tooth on the cutting edge of the upper mandible just back of the hook. This tooth therefore is an important point in the classification of the order. *Falco* lived largely on soft meat, and her bill without the natural friction and wear and tear against the hard bony parts of normal prey overgrew. When this occurred the notch forming the tooth became almost obliterated, and the bill tended to resemble the form and character of the non-falconine hawks with a smoothly outlined lobe on the cutting edge. When this abnormal condition became well developed, and it seemed as if a falcon was about to assume a Buteo or Accipiter character, a crack



developed in the bill substance and grew until a flake of horn flew off, leaving the falconian notch fully developed again.

The significance of this is rather important as it indicates that the tooth-billed hawks are more highly developed than the others and appeared later in the evolutionary scheme; that the "Noble" is a specialized "Ignoble Hawk" instead of the contrary. It is, in fact, additional justification for contemporary classifications placing the Falcons at the head of their order.

Falco had a considerable measure of freedom, and seldom except for good reason was confined to her cage. When the robins without would leave her in peace and some one was about to ward

off cats she even had the run of the yard. Had she allowed her primaries to mature she might have had absolute freedom at any time. She always managed to break them off before full grown and was in a half flightless condition unequipped to fend for herself. Season after season passed in various attempts on our part to keep her wings in order, to prepare her for a fair fight with the world. Whether we succeeded in the end we do not know, but that is another story.

All told, little Falco was a most pleasing experience in the life of an ornithologist and we still remember her with affection, regretting that such happy associations cannot continue indefinitely.

#### NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS.

##### UNUSUAL MIGRATION RECORDS IN THE VICINITY OF MONTREAL. — MARCH 1921.

No doubt the mild weather during the past winter, and the abundance of fruit and seeds (especially coniferous seeds) limited the movements of a great many Northern birds. Throughout South-Eastern Canada and the North-Eastern States, at least in urban districts, the dearth of birds appears to have been general. Of the customary winter birds the following were seen in the vicinity of Montreal in very small numbers: Snow Owl (2); Saw-whet Owl (2); Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers; Snow Bunting; White-winged Crossbill; Pine Siskin; Goldfinch; Redpoll; Cedar Waxwing; White-breasted Nuthatch; Red-breasted Nuthatch; Black-capped Chickadee.

The unusual occurrences were: Herring Gull (last seen Jan. 15); Canada Goose (Magog, Jan. 16—N. Smith); and Robin (4) seen by Mr. Brown on Jan. 30. There were several other reports of Robins that I was unable to verify — one from St. Lambert, another from Westmount and a third from St. Andrews East. It is notable that the only unusual birds were north of their usual winter range. I have no records of Evening Grosbeaks, Bohemian Waxwings or Pine Grosbeaks. With regard to the latter I am told that they have wintered commonly in Newfoundland.

During January and February I saw

no ducks whatever, possibly due to the many areas of open water. As a rule, in the vicinity of St. Lambert, wintering ducks are congested within a small area of open water, and are easily seen. Following is a list of spring arrivals during the month of March. The earlier birds — Crow and Prairie Horned Lark, were late, while the others, almost without exception, were very early. I have taken the liberty of including several records secured by Mr. W. J. Brown, and one by Miss E. Luke.

- March 2—Crow.
- March 4—Prairie Horned Lark.
- March 5—Flock (15) of Robins on a sheltered southern slope, two Meadowlarks and a Red-shouldered Hawk, all seen by Mr. Brown.
- March 9—Song Sparrow (39 'song').
- March 11—Red-winged Blackbird (35 males, 'song'); House Wren—one seen in a sheltered garden by Mr. Brown.
- March 12—Bronzed Grackle — 6 seen (Mr. Brown); Bluebird — three 'song'.
- March 13—Marsh Hawk — one; Robins and Song Sparrows fairly common.
- March 1 —Slate-coloured Junco — one (Miss Luke).
- March 19—Canada Goose — one flock; Purple Finch—7 (Mr. Brown).





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