

the first suspicious sound, a low flight kept them screened by the friendly bushes until well out of gunshot. On the ditch they were usually scattered along singly or in twos, but on the river half a dozen or more might sometimes be found together. I probably saw not more than ten or a dozen different individuals on any one occasion along the mile or two of the river where I observed them.

Among the more open spots along this part of the river, small flocks of Pine Finches sometimes paused in their wandering, though they spent most of their time, when not moving about, in places where large stretches of tall dead weeds furnished abundance of seeds wherewith to stuff themselves. One day, leaving the river and walking out on the bare desolate plains, apparently so devoid of life, I came upon a flock that must have numbered two hundred, so busily feeding among some weeds that they did not stir until I was close to them. Then they rose and flew back and forth, circling around several times before they flew away. As the flock turned in the air the whir of their many wings was plainly audible.

The plains, though they seem so deserted, are not without life. They have one characteristic inhabitant, the Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris chrysolaema*), that may be met with scattered here and there in small numbers in whatever direction you go. Their colors harmonize well with the dull tints of the surrounding ground, and as one crouches low at your approach you are very likely to overlook him. They remind one of the fact that nature, the great economist, allows no available space to be wasted and adapts all to their surroundings. The Larks certainly seem well contented with their home, bleak and barren though it may be, and are, perhaps, especially fortunate in occupying a place their title to which no other bird is inclined to dispute.

COUNTER-NOTES ON SOME SPECIES OF BIRDS ATTRIBUTED TO POINT BARROW, ALASKA.'

BY E. W. NELSON.

IN 'The Auk' for April, 1885 (p. 200-201), Mr. John Murdoch makes some rather hasty criticisms upon certain statements made

by me in my notes upon the 'Birds of Bering Sea and the Arctic Ocean.'* Mr. Murdoch's strictures apply wholly to certain species which I claimed to occur at, or in the vicinity of, Point Barrow, and his tone would seem to imply that his residence for two years a few miles south of the Point proper has given him a complete knowledge of the birds of that vicinity, so that former or later observers must revise their lists to conform with his or else risk having their statements summarily discredited. I think any experienced field ornithologist will admit that Mr. Murdoch's implied claim of having exhausted the possible avi-fauna of a locality in two years' residence is the best work on record. I supposed myself to be a tolerably thorough worker in the field, but I yield the palm here. During over four years' residence on the Alaskan Coast south of Mr. Murdoch's location, I found that each succeeding season brought me a number of additions to my list of species observed and taken, and four years' longer residence would no doubt have continued to add to my list. Should I adopt Mr. Murdoch's plan of discrediting everything not taken by myself with twice two years' residence at a locality, I should reject *Cyanecula suecica* from the birds of St. Michaels, and although two specimens of *Ægialites mongolicus* were taken on Choris Peninsula by the English ship 'Plover,' yet, as on my visit of several days to that locality I found none, I should reject it. Such a method, however, is scarcely a scientific one, and the following notes in reply to Mr. Murdoch's criticism will show, I believe, that in every instance the notes upon the species as printed in my works under consideration should stand as they are published.

Ægiotus linaria.—On August 17, 1881, we landed from the 'Corwin' at the extreme end of Point Barrow, and during our visit saw flying about among the native huts, or perching on the numerous wooden frameworks scattered about, quite a number of Redpolls, and among the adults were seen both the light and dark-colored forms with which I had become so familiar on the coast further south. The birds were very tame, and at the time I was perfectly satisfied of the identity of the two forms, and see no cause for altering my opinion because Mr. Murdoch did not take them afterwards.

Passerculus sandwichensis alaudinus.—Stated by me to occur "all along the coast of Bering Sea and at least to Point Hope and probably to Point Barrow." This bird certainly occurs at Point Hope where it was seen by

* Cruise of the Revenue Steamer 'Corwin' in Alaska and the N. W. Arctic Ocean in 1881. Washington, 1883.

me on several occasions, and as Point Barrow is a little further north on the same coast with a suitable country intervening, my statement that this bird 'probably' occurs north to Point Barrow is not an unreasonable one, when we consider the wandering disposition of the present form. But since Mr. Murdoch's positive statement that the bird "does not occur there," *Passerculus* may think better of it and hereafter avoid the tabooed ground.

Asio accipitrinus.—Some fragments of a skin of this bird were seen by me among the natives less than one hundred miles south of Point Barrow on the coast, and the wandering habits of the species, and its abundance on all the open coast country to the southward of the point where the fragments mentioned above were seen, gives sufficient support to my statement that the species occurs "nearly if not quite to Point Barrow."

Ægialites semipalmatus.—When we first landed at Point Barrow a pair of these birds were found feeding in a sandy pool a few steps from where our boat was beached.

Ereunetes pusillus.—From the fact that I found this bird nesting wherever I made observations in Northern Alaska during the breeding season, and as I found it numerous at Point Barrow on our visit there, I naturally took for granted that it bred upon the adjacent suitable ground a short distance back from the shore. Mr. Murdoch's observations appear to show that it did not breed close to the Point the two seasons he remained there.

Numenius hudsonicus.—Skins of this bird were brought to me by natives from the headwaters of a river rising perhaps one hundred miles inland from Point Barrow, and the fact that these birds pass Kotzebue Sound in spring bound north, were the grounds upon which I based my statement that it occurs north to the "vicinity of Point Barrow."

Dafila acuta.—Among a lot of Ducks brought on board the 'Corwin' by the natives during our stay at Point Barrow, were several adults of this species with their primaries all moulted. These came from fresh water lagoons just back from the shore. As these birds, like most others of their kind, pass their summer moult upon their breeding ground directly after the breeding season, the capture of these specimens in the midst of the moult is pretty conclusive proof that these birds do breed in the near vicinity of Point Barrow, although Mr. Murdoch may not have found them during his two seasons there.

Nettion carolinensis.—My statement that this species occurs "nearly if not quite to Point Barrow" holds true, as a small flock of them were seen by me about one hundred miles south of the Point in a lagoon bordering the shore, and a little further south they were found quite numerous in the summer of 1881.

Mergus serrator.—During a dense fog that caused us to anchor a few miles off Point Barrow on the day of our arrival at that point, a flock of some half dozen individuals of this species flew close by the stern of the ship, heading for the shore, and others were seen at various not remote points along the coast.



Nelson, Edward William. 1885. "Counter-'Notes on Some Species of Birds Attributed to Point Barrow, Alaska'" *The Auk* 2, 239–241.

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