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The Passenger Pigeon

TO ENCOURAGE STUDY OF WISCONSIN BIRDS

VOL. II

July, 1940

No. 7

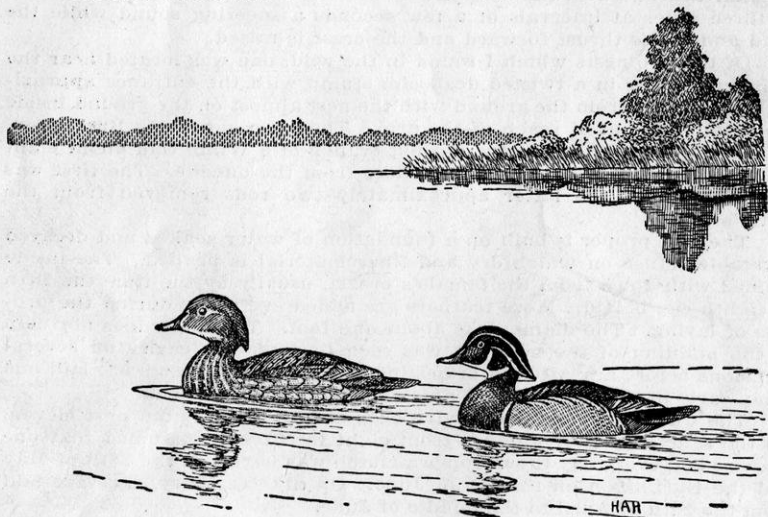
SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE WOOD DUCK

By DR. B. L. VON JARCHOW, Racine, Wis

The Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*), together with its close relative the Mandarin Duck of China, represents the most gorgeously colored species of ducks.

Formerly found in abundant numbers on practically every woodland pond it was threatened with extermination, and about 1910 the fate of the Labrador Duck was predicted for it by naturalists. Strict federal protection has made its numbers increase until today it is fairly common in some regions. It is truly a United States duck being more confined to the boundaries of this country than any other duck even during migration.

The nesting habits have intrigued observers for many years and some features are still unknown.



Wood Duck—Female and Male

By J. Arthur Hochbaum, Courtesy Wisconsin Conservation Department.

The molt begins about the middle of June when the ducks become extremely retiring, and full plumage is again acquired by the end of September until the middle of October, though the gonads do not begin to increase in size until approximately the middle of December and reach full maturity about the middle of February. In the female, like in most birds, the biggest size is attained approximately fourteen days later. Pairing apparently happens during all of the winter months until as late as May. Mating may definitely be observed about the middle of February. Evidence points to the pairs staying mated for life as under semi-wild conditions under my observations the same male and female pair were seen year after year. In the southern tiers of counties in the state they make their appearance as soon as the water is free of ice, approximately around the 20th of March, though occasional specimens are found all winter on

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open waters. Outside of migration, usually only one pair is found in some ponds, river sloughs, and inlets. The pair is very much devoted to each other and male and female may always be seen close together. During midday and on warm days they rest on floating logs, stumps, or stones in the water or near its edge. When flushed they often alight on trees and watch the intruder.

The courtship play is very typical with the male emitting its usual nasal whistle, which is also sounded when he is excited or in danger, though the mating seems to be almost always invited by the female. After the mating the female splashes in the water while the male assumes a peculiar attitude with the head drawn back to the body and emitting two or three times at intervals of a few seconds a sneezing sound while the head and tail is thrust forward and the crest is raised.

Of the two nests which I found in the wild, one was located near the Chippewa River in a twisted dead elm stump with the entrance approximately five feet from the ground with the nest almost on the ground inside the stump and out of reach of the arm. The other nest near Burlington, Wis., was found in the hollow of a big branch of a White Oak about eight feet from the ground and readily visible from the outside. The first was near the water, the latter approximately two rods removed from the water's edge.

The nest proper is built on a foundation of water soaked and decayed vegetable refuse on which dry and finer material is heaped. The inside is lined with down from the female's breast, usually by the time the fifth to eighth egg is laid. More feathers are added every day during the process of laying. The diameter is about one foot. The male does not help in the building of the nest but was seen to enter the cavity on several occasions before any attempt of nesting was made. The eggs are laid one a day early in the morning and number from eight to sixteen.

The Chippewa nest had twelve eggs and the Burlington nest eleven. On the sanctuary they number from eight to fifteen. Assumed that one egg was laid every day the Chippewa clutch was begun on the 28th of May and the Burlington on the 4th of June. On my sanctuary, eggs are laid from the 20th of April to the middle of June.

The eggs have a decided pinkish hue when first laid and it is usually possible to judge which egg was laid last since the rosy transparency disappears after a day or two.

Incubation begins in earnest after the last egg is laid, though the female may spend hours on the nest before the clutch is finished. The eggs, as in other duck species, are always covered more or less thoroughly with material pulled from the edge of the nest whenever the female leaves the cavity voluntarily. In most circumstances, when unmolested, the female leaves quite regularly around 6 o'clock in the forenoon and 6 o'clock in the evening for a period from thirty to seventy-five minutes. The male rests or feeds near by and is rather quiet and retiring during the day, however when the hour of the mate's feeding approaches he swims towards the nesting site and calls to her with a sharp nasal note. The mate then leaves the cavity with a sudden burst and lands right on the water near the male, both proceeding to the feeding grounds. Almost invariably she takes a very extensive bath much longer and more thoroughly than

usual and goes about feeding. During that time they usually mate once or sometimes twice, a practice which is continued during the whole time while the eggs are being incubated. This fact points to the possibility of a second clutch if the first one should be destroyed. Personally I have, however, never seen any evidence of a second clutch actually being laid even if the first was removed early.

The eggs measure $1\frac{1}{8}$ " by $1\frac{1}{2}$ " are dull white, and weigh around one and one-fourth ounces. Incubation lasts thirty days. The time for one hundred and twelve eggs hatched under domestic hens averaged thirty days and eight hours. In hatching they are opened in a quite regular circle around the duller end.

The newly hatched young were approximately three-fourths of an ounce and therefore are on the average one-half ounce lighter than the egg.

The question of how the young ducks get to the water from the great height at which the nest at times is supposed to have been found—forty to forty-five feet—has perplexed many an observer. It seemed hard to believe that the little ducks just hatched should tumble down from such heights without being hurt or killed. Bearing this in mind, even naturalists laying claim to competency have asserted that the mother carries its young to the water one by one in her bill, or pressing them against her breast with the bill or on her back, surely a most unorthodox procedure as far as birds are concerned. Some years ago a well known writer on nature topics wrote in a popular magazine that he actually had seen, somewhere in Florida a Wood Duck carrying the young in her bill.

Young Wood Ducks have positive heliotropism and will attempt to escape towards light. Approximately one day after hatching, which usually happens with astounding uniformity in the early morning hours, they will leave the nesting cavity, and with wings outspread and feet and webs stretched out behind them, they will tumble without hesitation from any height. In this procedure they are aided by an unusually well developed tail whose feathers act as a brake. Though approximately two-thirds the size of young wild Mallards, they will accomplish the almost unbelievable feat of crawling through one-half inch hardware cloth or squeeze through cracks in boards which one could not possibly consider large enough to admit their bodies. They are extremely agile and will readily cling with their sharp and well developed claws to any board and rough surface. When placed on a platform ten feet above the ground, they tumble without hesitation to the ground. The slight impact is dulled by a very thickly developed wadding of feathers on the abdomen. When a board or thick branch is interposed between the platform and the ground they will readily cling to it before proceeding further. The whole clutch leaves the nest at the same time tumbling out in a surprising hurry and following the mother to whose body they closely press.

In coloration they do not look unlike a young Mallard, however they are smaller, relatively much lighter, have a longer tail, sharp claws, and the peculiarly felted abdomen.

The male does not join the family until the young are of larger size, though he may be seen around the nest most of the time and judging by at least three observations in the wild, the male stays with the family for some time after the young are grown and able to fly.

Like the old Wood Duck, the young are great experts in hiding and can make astonishing good use of cover. From the beginning they feed themselves and also look out for their own safety. Even when a day old they are capable of scooting over the water with the help of their wings at a good speed, and are expert divers, staying at times from twenty to thirty seconds under water, though like the adults, they never make use of this ability unless very hard pressed. However, when coming to the surface, they assume the normal position, while the adult ducks when in danger will appear without any splash whatsoever, floating in an outstretched and quite submerged position while trying to reach cover unnoticed. The young ones learn to fly when about seven weeks of age.

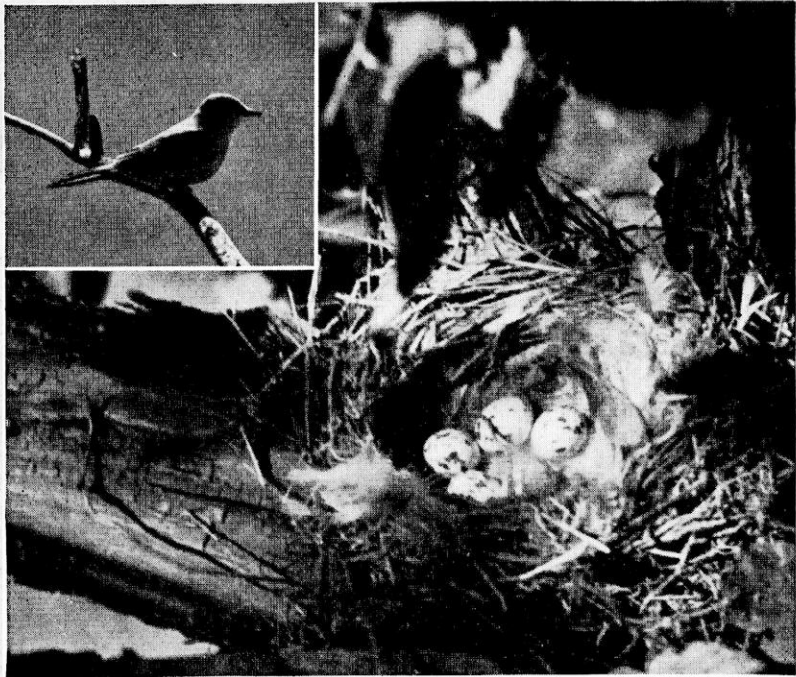
90 ARKANSAS KINGBIRD NESTING IN WISCONSIN

By O. J. GROMME
Milwaukee Public Museum

Miss Bernice Andrews of Beloit, Wisconsin, reported that on June 9, 1940 she and Miss Glenn also of Beloit, had positively identified an Arkansas Kingbird along the roadside near that city.

On June 20 Mr. Marvin Adams and Mr. Carl Berndt of the Museum visited the area with the hope that they may see the bird and possibly find a nest.

While conversing with a farmer lad they described the bird they were looking for, whereupon the little fellow informed them that a bird of such description was nesting in a tree on his father's lawn. The gentlemen from the Museum had some doubts but followed him and were rewarded by finding a pair of Arkansas Kingbirds, their nest and five eggs. The nest was constructed chiefly of grasses entwined with a few twigs and lined with several feathers. It was situated in the fork in an elm tree fifteen



Arkansas King Bird and Nest

Photo Courtesy of The Milwaukee Public Museum.

feet from the ground, and the tree was approximately twenty-five feet from the highway in the farmer's front yard. When the tree was climbed, both adults came to within five or six feet from which point they were easily photographed. The nest and eggs were likewise photographed and one of the eggs was taken as a record. After the fuss the adult bird immediately settled down to her brooding apparently unaware of the fact that she had made a contribution to science.

The farmer stated that for the ten years that he has lived on that farm the birds have been nesting there and probably even before he came. We concluded that it is very likely more of the same species can be found in the neighborhood.

Previous accounts of nesting or probabilities are as follows: On July 31, 1927 Mr. Griffiee and Mr. French saw three Arkansas Kingbirds near

Nakoma. Mr. John Main collected two of them which were immature birds. On the following morning Mr. A. W. Schorger collected the third which was an adult female. In their article in the AUK of October 1927, Mr. French and Mr. Griffie state that there is little doubt but that the young birds were reared in the vicinity.

On June 21, 1936 a pair of Kingbirds was found near Madison by Mr. A. W. Schorger. One of the birds was working on a nest. Mr. Schorger did not return to the vicinity until July 2 but the birds were not seen again on this or subsequent visits. See AUK, January 1939, volume 56, page 86.

On June 2, 1935 Mr. E. G. Wright secured two specimens of the Arkansas Kingbird in Kenosha County. Both sexes were represented, the male only being in breeding condition.

There are published other sight and specimen records of the Arkansas Kingbird in Wisconsin but none other than those mentioned above would indicate breeding here.

JUNE FIELD NOTES

By N. R. BARGER, Editor

Kindly send field notes to N. R. Barger, 132 Lathrop St., Madison, Wisconsin, at the end of each month. Use the A. O. U. order.

Pursuant to our policy we will introduce a few of our observers each issue; this time from Racine:

Edward Prins, 403 Park View. Age 20. Taxidermist for the Milwaukee Public Museum State Project, and a member of the Dr. Hoy Nature Club. Specializing in bird banding, mounting and photography, Prins identified 247 species of birds in Racine County. Among these were several only records as the Little Gull and the Parasitic Jaeger.

George Prins, younger brother of Edward, address same as given above. Age 17. Five years active in bird study, and also a member of the Dr. Hoy Nature Club. He is interested in general bird observation and he found the specimen of the Parasitic Jaeger.

Walter Nelson, 1915 Erie Street. Age 28. Active in bird study for 15 years and a member of the Dr. Hoy Nature Club. Machinist by trade.

Hans Zell, 1948 Twelfth Street. Age 45. Forester by vocation, Mr. Zell has done extensive study of birds in Germany and in America. He has listed 230 species for Racine County and is interested in photography and general observation.

Heavy rains in June caused much damage to nesting, Jones and Richter point out. The latter writes of June 23 and 24: "Known nests of Bobolinks, Meadowlarks, Leconte's Sparrows and Blue-winged Teal were drowned out. Incubated eggs were floating and were found drifted against lodged grass and weeds. A nest of the Blue-winged Teal with fairly fresh eggs had a few eggs still in the nest four inches under water. Other nests containing young and eggs were deserted. More water was in the marshes than when snow left in early spring."

The last of six Pied-billed Grebe nestlings left the nest June 13, at Racine, according to E. Prins; and on June 19, the second nest of six eggs was completed. Dr. Von Jarchow, June 15, saw a pair of Horned Grebes and one young on his sanctuary. Richter, of Oconto, records six Double-crested Cormorants there, June 10. On the same date he observed young Great Blue Herons in the nest from one to two weeks old. At this time the Black-crowned Night Heron's nest contained both young and highly incubated eggs, according to Richter. Zimmerman observed the latter bird in Winnebago County, June 26. A nest of the American Bittern, containing one fresh egg was found by Richter, June 3; and another with four eggs farther advanced in incubation. June 21, two young three or four days old and one added. On June 13, Bernath and E. Prins discovered two nests of the Least Bittern, one with five eggs and the other with one. The last nest of the American Bittern reported was by Richter, June 17, when he found four eggs partly incubated.

A male Redhead Duck was seen in Dane County by Main and others, June 2, and Richter of Oconto, records a pair in a marsh, June 3. More

unusual, however, is the record of the Golden-eye, June 12, by Richter for Door County; and by F. Jones on the same date in Dane County. Baldpates and Pintails remained in Dane County in numbers at least until June 10 (Robbins and F. Jones). A female Hooded Merganser lingered until June 2, (Main and others) in Dane County. Dr. Von Jarchow notes a female Red-breasted Merganser at Racine, June 26-28. While some of the foregoing ducks may have been wounded and so lingered longer than usual we do have evidence of the following breeding: Two nests of the Red-breasted Merganser in Door County by Richter, June 10. One contained eight eggs broken by predators, and the other was an improvised nest of but one egg. On the same date Richter defended a nest of twelve eggs of the American Merganser from a snake which had taken an egg out. Also in Door County, he counted three more nests of this bird, June 11. They were in all stages from fresh to hatching respectively. Zimmerman observed young of the Redhead and Gadwall, June 26, in Winnebago County, as well as those of the Mallard, Shoveller, Black Duck and Blue-winged Teal. Eleven fresh eggs of the latter were examined by Richter, June 21 at Oconto. In Juneau County, Burns Carter saw a day old brood of Mallard, June 1. Jones of Waukesha discovered a nest of the Black Duck containing two eggs of the European Partridge as well as those of the duck.

Richter reports an adult Bald Eagle on the Pensaukee River, June 20. Young Sparrow Hawks were at Racine, June 21 and observed by Dr. Von Jarchow. Out of four Ruffed Grouse nests under observation, Hammerstrom found but one had hatched by June 1, in Juneau County. On June 20, Richter flushed a female of this species with about twelve young in the downy stage along the Pensaukee River. At Oconto, June 29, he flushed another brood of about the same size. These were about as large as quail and could fly with ease. The female was very bold in defense of the brood. The Green Bay Club notes young Pheasants out of the nest, June 22. About six Hungarian Partridges were found in Jefferson County by Zimmerman, June 8.

Richter, June 4, found the nest and eight fresh eggs at Oconto, of a bird that is very difficult to see, not to mention finding the nest. It was of the Yellow Rail. He reports another bird June 21. A nest of the Sora Rail, containing thirteen eggs, June 8, were all hatched by June 13, say G. and E. Prins. They also report a nest of ten eggs of the Florida Gallinule, but four failed to hatch and were still in the nest June 19.

Miss Heisel notes the Wilson Snipe, June 29 for Oconto County and Mrs. Hussong reports a brood able to get around at Green Bay on the same date. A brood of young Upland Plover were found in Oconto County, June 9 (Richter). Five adults were counted in Jefferson County, June 8 (Zimmerman), and Miss Morse records several in Vernon County June 30 and after. Lesser Yellow-legs lingered in Dane County until June 2 (Scott), and in Oconto until June 5 (Richter). Scott also noted about 40 Semi-palmated Sandpipers in Dane County, June 2; and 6 Red-backed Sandpipers. A late date for the Solitary Sandpiper was made for Jefferson County, June 8 (Zimmerman). Young Spotted Sandpipers were out of the nest, June 21 (Green Bay Club). John S. Main saw a Turnstone at the very late date of June 13 at Duschek's Pond in Dane County.

On Green Island, Wis., Richter observed Herring Gulls in all stages of nesting. Some nests contained from one to four eggs, some held both eggs and young and some immatures were afoot. The same situation obtained in Door County. Two nests under observation on Green Island contained but two eggs instead of the usual three or more, and they were pale blue unmarked, instead of blotched. Jones of Waukesha observed the Forster's Tern in Jefferson County, June 8.

Young Mourning Doves were about June 21 (Green Bay Club). The Cuckoos, which usually arrive about the middle of May, were not recorded by Richter in Oconto County until June 1 (Yellow-billed) and June 3 (Black-billed). A nest of the Yellow-billed was found, June 17 at Waukesha, by S. Paul Jones. Mr. and Mrs. Backus observed the latter species in Trempealeau County commonly, June 25 and after. Another

good nest record made by S. Paul Jones was that of the Short-eared Owl at Waukesha. This nest was first discovered in May.

Young Red-bellied Woodpeckers were in the nest June 30, in Vernon County according to Miss Morse; and young Red-heads and young Flickers were on the wing by June 23 at Racine. A Kingbird was incubating June 8 at Racine (Zell).

Sam Robbins reports two Yellow-bellied Flycatchers for Madison, June 1, and another June 2. The uncommon Acadian Flycatcher was seen by S. Paul Jones at Waukesha, June 16. Incubation had already begun at a nest of Barn Swallows, June 10 (Richter). The nest contained four eggs. Five young Tree Swallows banded by Rossman at Waukesha were thrown from the nest later by English Sparrows, which killed them. G. Prins saw young Blue Jays leave the nest June 19 at Racine.

Dr. Von Jarchow recorded the southern Carolina Wren at his place from June 15 until the 29. This is the first 1940 record we have received of this species. Two nests of the Prairie Marsh Wren were found by Richter, June 21, one with five eggs and the other with one. Incubation had begun in the former. This nest was built between two false nests. All were in a straight line, with one false nest three feet to the northeast and the other three and one half feet to the southwest. He found another nest, June 26, containing five fresh eggs. Out of two dozen nests of the Short-billed Marsh Wren discovered by him, none were used. A Catbird's nest with three eggs was found by the Green Bay Club, June 2. The young left the nest June 26. In Oconto County, Richter found a nest of the Catbird, June 21 with one egg. On June 26 there were three eggs with incubation just begun; and on June 29 three young were about one third grown in the nest. Young Brown Thrashers were ready to leave the nest at Racine, June 13 (Bernath and E. Prins). Young Wood Thrushes left the nest June 17 at Racine (G. Prins).

Mr. and Mrs. Backus recorded the Yellow-throated Vireo in Trempealeau County in numbers June 26 and after. A nest of the Yellow Warbler contained three fresh eggs at Racine, June 1 (Prins); one at Green Bay contained two, June 2. The young left the nest June 26 (Club). The same party reports two eggs in the nest of the Redstart, June 2. F. Jones and Robbins report the Cerulean and Kentucky Warblers, and Yellow-breasted Chat, in Dane County, June 11.

A Bobolink's nest found June 21 by Richter contained two young and one egg ready to hatch. Another found by him at Oconto June 25, contained four fresh eggs; while a nest was found by Prins with four eggs, June 29 at Racine. On June 8, Prins saw Red-wings ready to leave their nests; while on June 3, at Oconto, Richter found four nests each containing four eggs. One was fresh, the other three were further along. On June 5, two more nests contained four eggs each, one fresh and the other incubated about twenty per cent. Meadowlark's nests found were: One at Oconto by Richter, June 3, with one egg and two of the Cowbird; one June 30, with one fresh egg and one of the Cowbird. One at Racine, by Bernath and Prins, June 3 contained four eggs, one already pipped. F. Jones observed a flock of eight Brewer's Blackbirds, June 17, at Mather, Wis. Scott and party noticed a rather high percentage of Yellow-headed Blackbirds to be females of a flock observed June 2 in Dane County.

Indigo Buntings were abundant in Trempealeau County, June 24 and after (Mr. and Mrs. Backus) and in Price County June 29. Dickcissels became very common in Wisconsin as reports show, beginning at Waukesha, May 30 (Jones); in Oconto County, June 4 by Miss Heisel and of course in the western half by all observers. Savannah Sparrow nests as follows: One June 29, at Oconto, contained three fresh eggs (Richter); and another June 30 at the same place held four. One found at Racine by Prins, June 4, contained three fresh eggs and three Cowbird's. Two fresh eggs of the Henslow Sparrow were examined June 1, at Oconto by Richter. Two White-throated Sparrows were seen by F. Jones, in Jackson County, June 17. Bernath and E. Prins found a nest of the Clay-colored Sparrow in much the same type of place as the Field Sparrow's, but somewhat better hidden. It contained one egg, one newly hatched sparrow and

one egg of the Cowbird. The young sparrow was covered with brown fuzz. Five eggs of the Song Sparrow were noted, June 2 at Green Bay by the Club; four eggs and one of the Cowbird, at Oconto (Richter) June 3; three eggs and one of the Cowbird at the same place, June 4; and on June 29, Richter again found four eggs (fresh).

BY THE WAYSIDE

B. W. Hubbard of the Conservation Department reports 2 Sandhill Cranes at the State Experimental Game and Fur Farm near Poynette in Columbia county on May 7.

E. W. Strehlow reports the following birds seen at various dates at Green Bay which were not previously mentioned in the field notes: Holboell's Grebe, May 3; Whistling Swan, May 10; Green-winged Teal, May 27; Barrow's Goldeneye, April 14; Bufflehead, May 19; Rough-legged Hawk, May 12; Pigeon Hawk, May 18; Prairie Chicken, May 26; King Rail, May 17; Yellow Rail, May 18; Piping Plover, May 26; Golden Plover, May 26; Arkansas Kingbird, May 18; Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, May 19; Tufted Titmouse, March 3; Brown Creeper, May 24; Orchard Oriole, May 27; Evening Grosbeak, Feb. 15; Pine Grosbeak, Jan. 7; Harris Sparrow, May 21.

Strehlow also reports for the Green Bay Bird Club the following nesting dates: Black-crowned Night Heron, May 26; Meadowlark, 4 eggs, May 26; Killdeer, 4 eggs, May 23; (Holterman) Bluebird, out of nest by May 2 (Langosch); Robin, out of nest by May 12 (Mrs. Hussong).

NEWS NOTES

W. R. Spellum of Viroqua lists the following partial albinos which were brought to him: 3 Robins, 2 English Sparrows, Horned Lark, Red-tailed Hawk, 2 Crows and a Barn Owl.

Ralph C. Conway of the Conservation Department reports that the lockkeeper at the Trempealeau dam recently found a juvenile albino Mourning Dove, which was reported to have been turned over to Mr. Ray Steele of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

All members should make it a point to send any Wisconsin notes on the Bald Eagle which they may have to Murl Deusing of the Milwaukee Public Museum immediately, as he is attempting to complete a report on the Bald Eagle in Wisconsin for a forthcoming issue of THE PASSENGER PIGEON.

Herbert L. Stoddard, an honorary member of this Society, recently visited Wisconsin, making various contacts throughout the state during his trip.

NEW MEMBERS—

Derleth, August, Sauk City

King, F. Holman, 913 Huron St., Manitowoc

Zicher, Eldon, State Game Farm, Poynette

CHANGE OF ADDRESS—

Anyone knowing the correct address of any of the following members, whose old addresses are given below, please notify the Editor.

Bunting, Vidamae, 58 Union st., Oshkosh

Kjolseth, Karine, 58 Union st., Oshkosh

Miracle, James, Shawano

Adams, Mabel, 1812 Adams st., Madison (Mrs. David Schmidt)

John S. Main advises the Editor that a correction should be made in a statement which appeared in the August, 1939 issue of THE PASSENGER PIGEON regarding the status of the Alberta Dowitcher in Dane county. He states that this recently discovered type is a sub-species of the Short-billed or Eastern Dowitcher and that any of the latter species that may be found in Wisconsin (and they are of very uncommon occurrence) are likely to be of said subspecies. Neither of them should be confused with the Western or Long-billed Dowitcher which is the common form in Wisconsin. Mr. Main states that this correction is made on the basis of additional information supplied by Harry C. Oberholtser of the Fish and Wildlife Service.