

**Spruce Partridge or Canadian Grouse.**  
(*Dendragapus Canadensis*).

R. R. McLEOD.

The male is a trim, elegant bird that shows off to good advantage beside his demure brown mate. This species is so gentle and approachable in the wild state that not a great deal is to be learned by keeping them in confinement. They are to be found all over Nova Scotia, but nowhere are they to be considered common. In certain localities within areas of a few square miles I have known them to be fairly common. It is an easy matter to take them alive by fastening a string snare on the end of a slender rod and slipping it over their heads while they are apparently wondering what you are about. They are easily kept on a steady diet of spruce leaves. They breed readily in confinement, and soon become tamer than domestic fowls.



SPRUCE PARTRIDGE (Female).

It is not for their elegance of form, or beauty of plumage, or intelligence, that I have chosen this species for treatment here. Quite otherwise, for it is their stupidity that challenges interest, and to get at the cause of it, and note the results of it, may be worthy of attention. The peculiar feature to be first noted is the fact that these grouse are wholly dependent upon the needles of spruce trees for their living. I have never found other food in them; and beyond, possibly, the slight taste of something else, they are wholly nourished by this plain fare of the

spruce that must be eaten in large quantities to sustain life and strength. An ounce of insects, or as much of seeds, would either of them outvalue as food, a pound of this spruce product. Evidently then, it was during hard times, when there was but little else to be had, that this branch of the grouse family tree got set apart from the other members. Nothing short of acute hunger would have created an appetite that would take to such commonplace stuff, and stand by it long enough to form a taste for it and a habit to subsist upon it, even when far better food was to be had for the taking. Somewhere from fifteen to twenty thousand years ago the northern hemisphere of land to the latitude of Texas, was during many centuries largely covered with a vast polar ice-cap called a glacier. It was the result of long continued cold weather, by which the snow of one winter lasted to the next, and thus accumulated to a great depth of more than a mile, and by pressure became solid ice that slowly crept to the oceans and broke away in icebergs. Before such a phenomenon all animal life either moved gradually southward or perished in the snow. Here in temperate North America previous to the glaciers there was vegetation, and birds and beasts. The spruces, and other cone-bearing trees would be among the last to disappear before the long winter of very likely thousands of years, and these trees would probably flourish along the southern borders of the slow encroaching glacier. Such an occurrence furnishes the conditions that might well result in this spruce-eating variation that has spread over all the region from Nova Scotia to the Pacific coast, and southward to northern New England, and northward to the Arctic circle. Within this wide range there are three well marked species and two varieties. The fact is that they are all mere geographical divisions of the same peculiar variation that long ago through the pressure of hard times became separated from the family stock. Once that our ancestral spruce partridge secured the advantage of maintaining life on such common food that the supply was inexhaustible, and to be had with the slightest effort, there seemed a brilliant outlook for this branch of the grouse family to become a numerous race, outstripping all other members that were obliged to pick up a berry here, and a bug there, a bit of mushroom in this place, and a seed in that. The very opposite has been the result of what seemed to be a streak of wonderful luck. It is not alone with mankind that he who concludes to take his ease, and lay back on his good fortune, finds in the long run that indolence is a fatal factor in life.