

BRIEF NOTES ON THE FAUNA OF LAMBTON COUNTY, ONT.

BY M. Y. WILLIAMS.

With the passing of the primeval swamps, have vanished the deer, wild turkey, and passenger pigeon which formerly abounded in Lambton and the adjacent counties of the Ontario peninsula. To-day wild life is inconspicuous, especially to passengers in the automobile. However, a few species of birds and mammals, either because of their size, color, numbers, or special liking for the roadside, can scarcely be overlooked.

To the visitor from Northern Ontario, or the Ottawa valley, perhaps the most conspicuous bird along the roadside and in the woods as well, is the tri-colored beauty, the red-headed woodpecker. His striking and contrasting coloring, of red, black and white, attracts attention, whether the bird is clinging to a tree limb, or telegraph pole, whether it is pursuing its undulating flight across the open fields or whether it is flying from tree to tree among the glades of the hardwood forest.

Although much rarer than the preceding species, the mourning dove may be frequently seen rising from near a bridge over a shallow stream, or clinging to a telephone wire, which seems unduly small for a bird of this size. The mournful wooing of this dove is a weird sound indeed and its origin along with the call of the cuckoo is rarely recognized by the casual observer. In coloring and general appearance the mourning dove recalls the extinct passenger pigeon, which formerly swarmed over the country in countless myriads. Unlike its more noted relative, the mourning dove is a solitary bird during the early summer, and moves about only in family parties later on.

The one straggling survivor of the fine game birds of the early days, is the quail or bobwhite as it is appropriately called. In the early evening the low but distinctly whistled "bob—white," with a long pause between the syllables, may occasionally be heard from the open fields, and the fortunate observer may once or twice during the summer see a clean-cut cock quail sitting on the top of a fence post by the roadside. The brown and white markings and modified chicken-like appearance of this little "friend of the farmer" serves readily to distinguish it. Its insectivorous habits during much of the season should secure its protection, but its fine game qualities have kept it in the sportsman's eye and even now under nominal legal protection it is to be feared that it is still being persecuted by those who should be its best friends. If quail are again to become numerous, absolute protection for a term

of years is essential. So far as could be learned, the quail of Lambton county are descendants of the native quail. I heard of no quail having been introduced.

The sight of turkey vultures circling low over the woods in the vicinity of Oil City and Oil Springs during the first week of August, suggested strongly a more southerly latitude. These large chocolate-brown birds, with naked, turkey-like head, follow the woodlands on regular beats, searching intently for carrion which is their favorite food.

Some years ago, Mr. Fletcher, who formerly kept the Fletcher House at Petrolia, now kept by Mrs. Fletcher and her daughter, Mrs. Bain, received two fluffy, white young turkey vultures from a farmer, and raised them successfully. They were quite tame and followed their owner about the town or perched on the roofs of the buildings. "Moses and Aaron," as they were called, were interesting specimens of domesticated wild life, but both suffered untimely deaths.

Of other birds of prey, the marsh hawk and sparrow hawk are the most commonly seen. A great-horned owl was disturbed one afternoon in the woods near Oil Springs, and was followed to its new roosting place by a noisy flock of robins. Either a long-eared or a short-eared owl was observed one evening near Wyoming.

Although there is little suitable water for waders and shore birds in the interior of the county, the great blue heron, American bittern, killdeer, and spotted sandpiper are fairly common. The black tern was observed along the lake Huron shore near Perch.

Of the smaller birds, the meadow lark is especially numerous, as have been the bobolinks. The horned-larks are fairly common, and the vesper is the commonest of the sparrows. Night-hawks and purple martins are very numerous at Petrolia.

Large flocks of bronzed grackles fly into Petrolia to roost at nights, to the discomfort and annoyance of the citizens near where they take up their quarters. Shooting has not driven them out successfully.

Black squirrels are occasionally seen in the woods of Lambton county and grey squirrels are reported; but the story related by one nature lover accounts for the scarceness of these fine, distinctive squirrels. He said "formerly the woods back of my farm contained a number of grey squirrels, but one day about two years ago a number of hunters came over from Sarnia and I haven't seen a grey squirrel there