

STRANGE VISITORS: THE STARLING, BURROWING OWL, AND HARRIS' SPARROW.

AMOS W. BUTLER, Indianapolis.

THE STARLING.

For the first record of the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris* Linn.) in Indiana, we are indebted to Prof. S. W. Witmer of Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana. December 18, 1924, he wrote me that two of these birds had been taken alive the day before, at the college farm. Later he sent me the skin of one of them for verification of the record. He also gave me the following facts concerning their capture:

On December 17 Mr. Eli Whirlidge and his eight-year old son, William, went to the Goshen College farm, nearly a mile south-west of Goshen. After dark, about 5:30 in the evening, Mr. Gibbs, the farm manager, went into one of the silos to shoot pigeons. The silo was incompletely covered and they found other birds besides pigeons had entered to seek shelter. The glare of the light used would occasionally bewilder some of these birds so that they fell fluttering to the floor of the silo. These falling birds were at first recognized as English sparrows, and were allowed to fall as prey to the cat. Presently Mr. Whirlidge noticed a bird falling which was not a sparrow. Mr. Gibbs caught it. A second bird of this kind fell and was caught by William. Mr. Whirlidge being familiar with pictures of these birds recognized them as starlings. The next day he brought the birds to the college and they were kept on exhibition in a cage. Later Mr. Whirlidge turned them over to Professor Witmer. The skin of one he preserved for the college; the other he sent to me.

Dr. W. M. Lyon, Jr., of South Bend, later, at the meeting of the Academy of Science, called my attention to an Indiana record of the starling in the records of the Bureau of the Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture. In response to my inquiry W. C. Henderson, Assistant Chief of the Bureau, says: "The only reliable record we have is of one found in Wells County (Ind.) in December, 1923, in an exhausted condition, by E. B. Williamson of Bluffton."

Prof. M. L. Fisher informs me that the starling has since been observed in Newton County. R. A. Johnson, a Purdue graduate, reported March 11, 1925, that he had discovered starlings at Brook. This was not verified by a specimen.

These are the only localities in Indiana from which the starling has been reported. It is probable that it will soon be found in other places.

The earliest known record of the attempt to introduce the European starling into the United States, was at Cincinnati, Ohio, in the winter of 1872-73.¹ So far as known, none of these survived. Similar experience was had at Portland, Oregon, in 1889.

¹ U. S. Dept. Agriculture, Department Circular 336, March, 1925.

"Proc. Ind. Acad. Sci., vol. 34, 1925 (1926)."

In 1890, 80 birds were released in New York City, and 40 more the next year. From these the species has been established. It has spread over the Eastern United States and has now been reported from every State east of the Mississippi River except Mississippi.

P. M. Jennes, Gaffney, S. Car., who is studying the distribution of this starling, writes me that the western limit of their breeding range for 1924 apparently was about central Ohio. When reports for this year (1925) are in I expect to find that this limit is nearly, if not quite at the eastern boundary of Indiana. The starling is nesting as far south as Greenwood, S. Car., this year.

The Chinese Starling (*Aethiopsar cristellatus*) has become established in the city of Vancouver, B. C.² Two pairs were noted in 1897, and in 1920 it was estimated that 1,200 occupied one main roost. There is one record of this species at Portland, Ore., February, 1922.

Evidently we are in for a foreign invasion. The result is problematical.

The same Department circular² gives the following conclusion:

After 20 years of unsuccessful attempts at introduction, the European starling became firmly established in New York City in 1890, and now, definitely occupying its place in this country, must be considered a naturalized member of the American bird fauna. In less than 35 years it has become one of the most abundant birds in the region contiguous to New York City, and of local occurrence from central Maine to central Ohio, and from Ottawa and Montreal, Canada, to Georgia and Alabama. Thus far the species has not been found to be as seriously destructive to crops in the United States as it is reported to be in some parts of the Old World. Nevertheless, it is probable that many people will always look with unfavorable eyes upon the starling as an alien.

THE BURROWING OWL.

The following account of the burrowing owl in northern Indiana, by Mr. Ashley Hine, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, (*The Auk*, Vol. XLI, Oct., 1924, Page 602) is of unusual interest.

"April 16th, 1924, while on a field trip with Leon L. Walters and Earl P. Schmidt, both of the Field Museum of Natural History, I shot a Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia hypogæa*) at Dune Park, Porter County, Indiana.

"The day was sunny but cold and a high wind was blowing. Few birds were to be found except in the more sheltered masses of woodland. While searching for perches suitable for bird mounts on an openly wooded hillside, just above the Dunes Highway and nearly opposite Dune Park Station on the New York Central Railway, I flushed an owl from the ground, among some pine branches. Recognizing it as a Burrowing Owl, I secured the shotgun, flushed the bird again and brought it down with a broken wing.

"It proved to be a male, now in the collection of the Field Museum of Natural History, in excellent plumage and in good flesh, with no sign of having been kept in captivity. This species has a wide range west of the Mississippi, but it does not appear to be recorded from Illinois,

² U. S. Dept. Agriculture, Department Circular 336, March, 1925.

and I believe this to be the first record of its occurrence in Indiana. Other accidental records from New York and Massachusetts are known.

"It is possible, though perhaps scarcely probable, that this occurrence of the Burrowing Owl in the Sand Dune area of northern Indiana is a forerunner of an actual colonization of this area by this form. Such an extension of its range would parallel the eastward spread of Franklin's Spermophile (*Citellus franklinii*) and of the Plains Garter Snake (*Thamnophis radix*)."

Mr. Hine, at the suggestion of Mr. Leon J. Walters, of the same museum, kindly supplied me with an advance copy of his article. In his letter to me, Mr. Walters says:

"We ought to have included in this notice mention of the fact that there had not been any storms or heavy wind for some time previous to its capture, which might by bewildering or driving out of its course have accounted for its presence here."

HARRIS' SPARROW.

Mrs. Percival B. Coffin informs me that her husband and she observed a Harris' sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) at their country home, The Brooks, Williamsburg, Wayne County, Indiana, May 12, 1925. It was closely observed and as they had met this species twice in the dune region of Indiana, they knew it. It was associated with white-crown sparrows which were singing in their vegetable garden. It was also seen there May 14, 15 and 16, 1925.

Later it has been reported two or three times from "The Dunes" in Indiana.

Recently they have been reported more frequently than before east of the Mississippi River. Among other references: one from Luce County, Michigan, May 12, 1924, reported by O. M. Bryans, McMillan. (*The Auk*, Vol. XLII, January, 1925, page 145.) October 5, 1924, one observed by Ben. I. Blincoe, near Dayton, Ohio. Later, on October 12, a specimen was secured from the same locality. This was probably the third Ohio record. (*The Auk*, Vol. XLII, April, 1925, page 275.)

The first Indiana record of Harris' Sparrow is an adult male taken May 4, 1907, near Sheridan, Hamilton County, Indiana, by Ernest P. Walker. (*Proc. Indiana Academy of Science*, 1908, page 49).

