

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

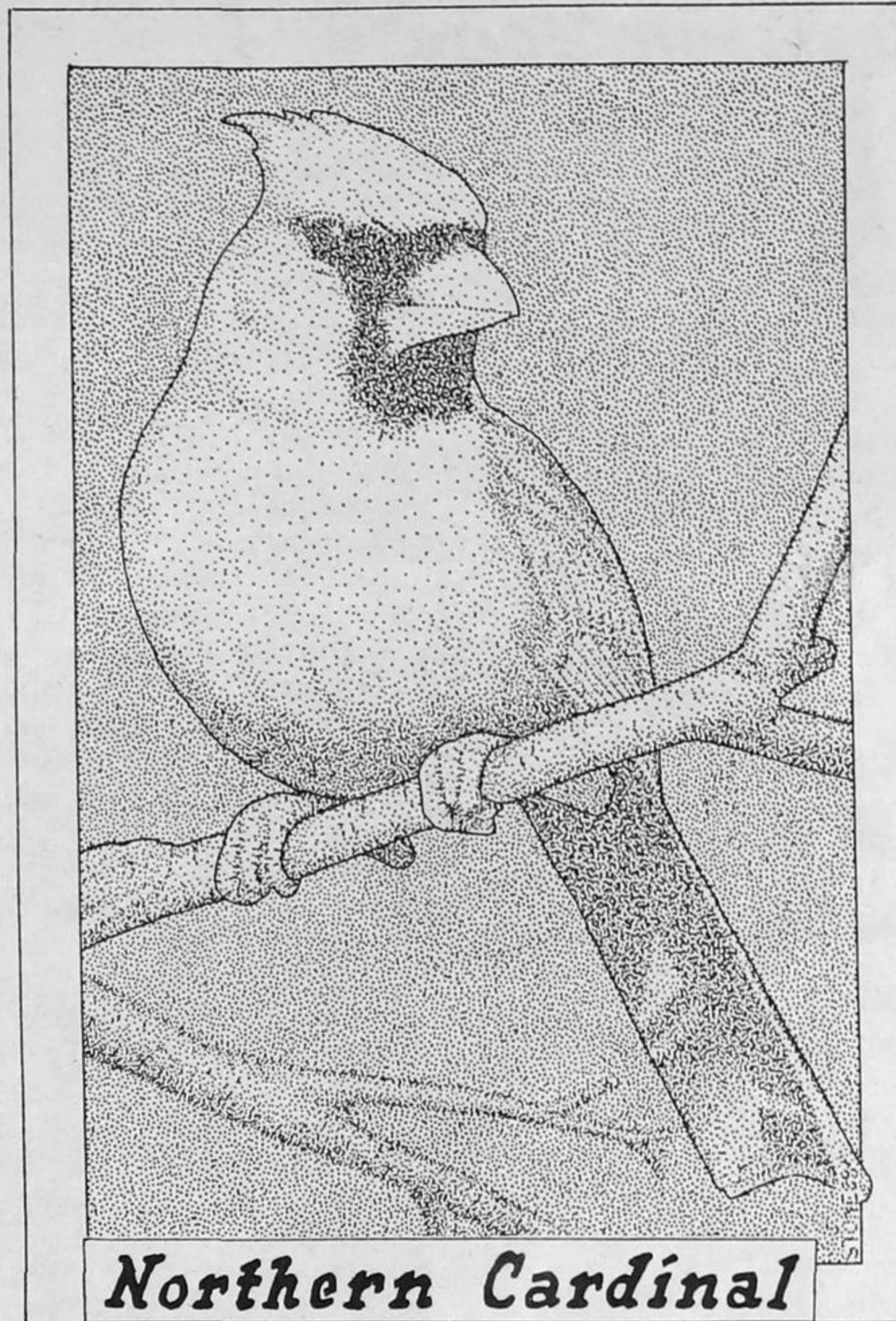
Marg Hendrick

It was March 7, the coldest day of the winter, when I first saw her. She was crouched down in the nest so that her eyes barely showed above the sticks. As I watched her from the distance through my telescope, her head feathers were ruffled about by the howling wind. It was bitterly COLD but she continued to sit tight in an effort to keep her eggs warm. I had decided to check out this platform nest, for over the years it has alternately served both Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls as a place to raise their young. Since Great Horned Owls do not build their own nests, but use that of another species, this nest was probably originally built by a Red-tailed Hawk.

The whole subject of nests can be very interesting and the different types of nests have been classified. Many birds of prey build platform nests of sticks and reuse them every year. Some choose to add more sticks every year and, as in the case of the Bald Eagle, their nest becomes enormous; others simply repair the nest as necessary. Some raptors build a new nest every year, often locating it in the same general area as before. Mourning Doves also build platform nests. Usually the nest of this species looks as though it had been thrown together by a committee. The two white eggs are often visible from below the nest, and when the gawky young gain a little size, one sometimes wonders how the whole mess manages to hold together. The scrape nest is probably the earliest type of bird nest. It can be a slight depression scratched out in the ground as in the case of the Killdeer, who will even nest in the middle of a gravel road. Belted Kingfishers, however, do it differently! They burrow out a tunnel in a sandbank or similar spot and lay their eggs in a scrape at the end of it.

The cup nest takes many forms and is constructed by numerous species. Being versatile, it can be used almost anywhere. Cup nests can be statant, adherent, pensile or pendulous. Statant nests have rims that are upright and receive their support mainly from below as in the case of the American Robin. The tiny nest of the ruby-throated Hummingbird, which has an inside diameter of 3/4"-1", also falls into this category. It is usually placed on a down-sloping branch to which it is affixed with spider silk.

Barn Swallows make adherent nests. They gather pellets of mud which are used both to make the nest and to plaster it to a vertical sheltered surface. Chimney Swifts also



Northern Cardinal

construct this form of nest. Flying by they break off small dead twigs, transfer them to their beaks and carry them to the nest site. There, inside a chimney or broken off hollow tree, they glue the sticks together and to the vertical wall, forming a nest. Their glue? Their own glutinous saliva!

Pensile nests are constructed by vireos. They suspend their neat little cups by the rims from forks of branches, making the nests of this family easy to identify.

Readers will be familiar with the pendulous nest of the much admired Northern Oriole. This species weaves plant fibers into bags which are suspended by the rim to a drooping branch. Inside the pouch they build a cup nest where they lay their eggs.

I have touched on a few cup nest builders. There are many more: Ovenbirds and Eastern Meadowlarks build domed nests on the ground; Marsh Wrens make ball nests which are attached to cattails; Eastern Bluebirds and Black-capped Chickadees make cup nests inside tree holes and birdhouses and so on.

It would take more space than is available to adequately cover the subject of nests. But perhaps the little that has been written will help to point up the amazing diversity of birds!

This month I want to emphasize sightings of birds returning from the south, rare species, and birds that have been difficult to find this winter.

On March 10, a delighted Shirley Carlson phoned to report an American Robin at Indian Lake, and 3 days later Annette Mess saw 4 near Delta. The arrival of 2 Red-winged Blackbirds in Miriam Parish's yard constituted the first spring sighting of this species. Then, on March 13, Marjorie Earl had good news, for an Eastern Bluebird appeared at her place.

By the time this is published your bluebird boxes should be ready for occupancy, so if they are not, get moving!

The North Leeds Birdwatchers (NLB) had a field trip to Amherst Island on March 15, where among other things they saw 2 more harbingers of spring, a Killdeer and a Common Snipe. The following day, John and Elsie Goodman had a Brown-headed Cowbird in their yard.

There was an interesting call from Anna Rees, for among other birds at her feeder, she had 2 Common Redpolls, a species that has been scarce this winter. Another species, the White-winged Crossbill, which has also been lacking in this area, has been reported by Lydia Blanchard of Athens. She has been lucky enough to have had a whole flock

visiting her active feeder. Not only has she had the above-mentioned species, but she has also had a Northern Flicker off and on. And to top it off both Lydia and her neighbour Helen Johnson have a Red-bellied Woodpecker coming to their feeders! Harrison Peters, who was fortunate enough to entertain this species last year, will be envious.

There have not been many Red-breasted Nuthatches mentioned this winter, but Miriam Parish has had one at her feeder. Dark-eyed Juncos are not too numerous but they are starting to appear and should increase in numbers soon. Snow Buntings were seen by Rene Waterfield near her home on March 12, and for a short period seemed to be more prevalent in North Leeds than earlier in the winter.

Pairs of Northern Cardinals were reported by Alice Campbell, Gladys Burt, Moreen Ready, Anna Rees and the NLB. I would be interested to hear if anyone finds a nest of this species.

Purple and House Finches have been seen by Margaret Bulloch, Harrison Peters, Don Fysh, Lydia Blanchard, John Goodman and Anna Rees. Nearly all callers have had Evening Grosbeaks and American Goldfinches at their feeders. Pine Siskins are still being seen both at feeding stations and in the wild.

In conclusion, as I was writing (March 19) a Loggerhead Shrike appeared at my feeder causing a great stir! The number to call with your sightings is 359-5178 and, until next month, GOOD BIRDING!

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