

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

The question often arises as to why a certain species of bird is seen in lower numbers than usual. Sometimes it is easy to find the answer. Perhaps weather conditions brought about a poor hatch year; food may be scarce, or bad conditions on the birds' wintering grounds may have resulted in the death of many. There are times when humans cause the problem by overhunting, use of chemicals and destruction of habitat, etc.

In the latter vein, a relatively new problem has arisen that endangers not only birds, but also many unique plants and animals; it poses a threat to our climatic conditions as well. It involves the destruction of tropical rain forests through logging operations etc. According to Dr. A.W. Diamond in an article in "The Blue Bill": "Tropical forest is being destroyed so rapidly that there is widespread scientific concern about global consequences." Much of what I am about to say has been gleaned from his article.

We know that many "Canadian" birds winter in the tropics. Some 90 species are involved in our discussion. Forty-four of these winter almost entirely in the tropical forests - the remainder winter both in the United States and the tropics (that is, in their migration some stop in the U.S.A. while the rest of their species continue on).

Because of the decimation in tropical forests it is estimated that "more than half of the species that breed in Canadian forests and that migrate to the tropics in winter are likely to lose more than 25% of their winter habitat by the year 2000, and 12 species are expected to lose half or more of their habitat." For instance, in just 11 years it is estimated that the Philadelphia Vireo will have lost 83% of its winter habitat! The North Leeds Birdwatchers (NLB) considered this serious problem at their annual meeting. They decided to join with other individuals and clubs throughout the world in a unique project. Through the World Wildlife Fund they have bought 1 acre of tropical rain forest in Costa Rica, and another in Brazil at a cost of \$25 per acre.

Of course the NLB will not "own" the land, but it, in combination with the many acres bought by others, will ensure the preservation of

large tracts of rain forest and thus help to protect an astonishing diversity of birds, plants and animals.

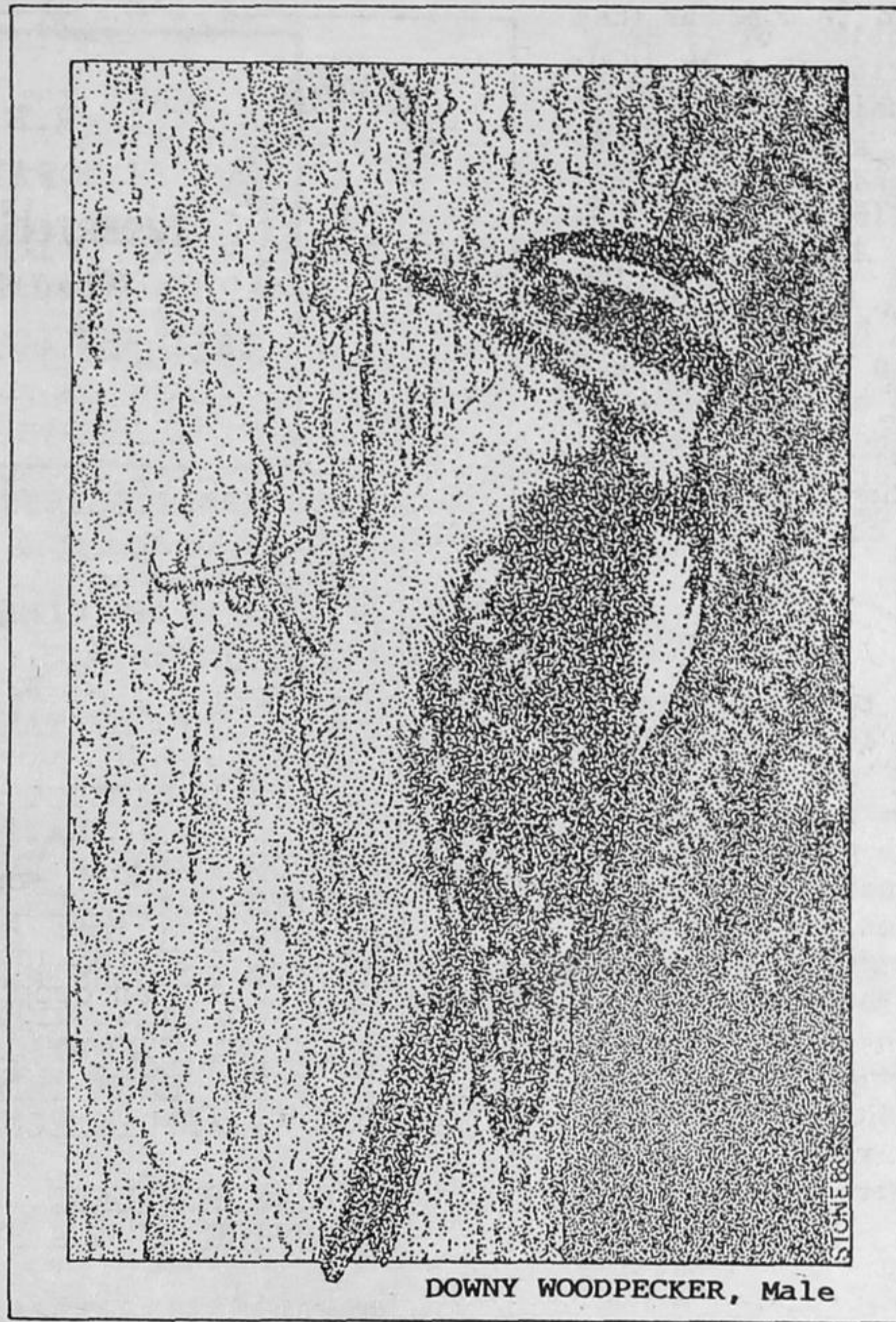
The NLB wondered if you would like to help by doing the same. If so, send your donation to The World Wildlife Fund, Rain Forest Preservation, 60 St. Clair Ave. E., Toronto, Ont., M4T9Z9. If you prefer to do it through the NLB, send your cheque, made out to the World Wildlife Fund, to Mr. Pat McManus, Portland, Ont., K0G 1V0.

One last word on the subject. Apparently people have been buying land in someone else's name as a birthday or other gift, where this is acceptable. It also occurs to me that at the death of a nature lover, a memorial of a living acre of rain forest would far outlast the finest floral display!

I had not intended to talk "money" two columns in a row and promise to "lay off" for some time to come. Now on to the bird sightings, which are going to be difficult to knit together because they originate from as far back as mid-November!

Winona Barker has been hearing a Horned Owl since early November and also saw a flock of Snow Buntings near Elgin on November 18.

Ruffed Grouse have been appearing at feeders in the area, but only Betty Blackman



DOWNY WOODPECKER, Male

has reported seeing Gray (Hungarian) Partridge. I would appreciate hearing from anyone else who has seen Gray Partridge as we get so few reports of them.

Winter finches have been scarce so far. Perhaps there is enough food farther north that precludes the necessity for some to move this far south. Evening Grosbeaks appeared at my feeder on November 7 and quickly disappeared. Harrison Peters and Maxine Fysh have had them at their feeders, but generally speaking they are present in fewer numbers than usual. Harrison reported the only Pine Siskin to date and tells me that he is feeding a good number of American Goldfinches and scads of House Finches. John Goodman and Katherine Sides also entertain these two latter species.

In December, Myrtena McVean noticed a flock of Purple Finches at the Senior Citizens apartment building, and Maxine Fysh has a nice group of these birds at her place.

Northern Cardinals are around. Clair Mills saw one in her yard on December 15. Gerald Thompson also had a visit from this species and Moreen Ready, Gladys Burt and David Burt each have a pair visiting their feeders. Annette Mess found 3 cardinals as she walked down a lane near her home.

On November 25, Rene Waterfield spotted a skein of late migrating Canada Geese, and on November 26 Marion Seeley saw a Common Loon on Sand Lake. Just before freeze-up Pauline Hockey enjoyed watching a flock of Goldeneye on Big Rideau Lake. Mourning Doves have been present at the Peters' feeder as well as the Goodmans', and Katherine Sides had a blackbird in her yard that might have been a Rusty Blackbird.

Eleanor Cope feeds a pair of wintering Red-winged Blackbirds and both she and her neighbours, the Duttons, enjoy seeing the Northern Mockingbird which resides in the Foster/Brown yard just up the hill from them. This bird, unusual for our area, enjoys the nearby juniper and mountain ash berries, as well as the berries on the dead asparagus stalks in the Dutton's garden.

Mrs. Gordon Simpson, of California, was delighted to have a visit from two American Robins on December 5. This species can also winter over on the same types of wild fruit that the mockingbird was eating.

Ozzie White has been seeing a little band of Dark-eyed Juncos at the South Crosby dump, and both Harrison Peters and Maxine Fysh have had this species at their feeders.

Pat McManus has had a Sharp-shinned Hawk in his yard and Gladys Burt had an accipiter sitting on the fence near her feeding station. Her husband Pep has been seeing another hawk, as yet unidentified, not far from their home. Edna Morris was upset when a Northern Shrike killed one of the birds at her feeder. There are very few birds deep in the woods these days so predators, and they have to eat too, go where the birds congregate.

Last but not least, Kay Williams spotted an immature eagle near an ice-fishing hut on Sand Lake near Westport. From her description I think it was a Bald Eagle.

A short resume of the local Christmas Bird Counts. The Westport Count, held on December 22 produced 45 species, one of which we don't see too often here - a Golden Eagle. The Rideau Ferry count, held on December 28, yielded 40 species.

The number to call with your sightings is 359-5178 and, until next month,

GOOD BIRDING!

by Marg Hendrick

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