

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CANADA.



Photo by P. A. Taverner.

Fig. 6. American Sparrow Hawk (female).

The Eastern fauna is comparatively homogeneous across the continent in a diagonal direction from the Atlantic coast to Alaska, with but slight variation in physical aspect, except in the prairie region of the central west. It is a country of low, even topography with good rainfall and covered with a uniform forest of little variety except such as is due to latitude and zonal distribution, but into it project the upper limits of the Great Plains characterized by great dryness, near-desert conditions and almost an entire absence of trees. This penetrates the moist continental fauna as a semicircular extension of the Transition Zone, its chord on the international boundary extending from the eastern Manitoban line to the mountains and north to Edmonton and Prince Albert.

The general tendency of this prairie fauna is towards small size and pale bleached colouration. Such species as are characteristic of it are those like the Prong-Horn Antelope, Bison, Coyote, Gopher, Prairie Chicken, Sage Hen, Burrowing Owl, Leconte's Sparrow, and Lark Bunting whose open country requirements debar them from wooded land. The remainder of its fauna is similar to that of the eastern country but generally subspecifically differentiated from it through the dryer climate and desert-like conditions. Some species that can be exemplified under this division are Western Horned Owl, Say's Phoebe, Desert Horned Lark, Pale Goldfinch, Western Clay-coloured Sparrow, Dacotah Song Sparrow, Prairie Marsh Wren, etc.

The true Eastern fauna, though generally similar from the far northwest to the Atlantic coast, does show a slight tendency to variation north of these plains, but the influence is slight and in broad treatment can be disregarded. Many species extend unmodified throughout the area, or when modification occurs it can usually be attributed to either thermal differences or the influence of the closely allied neighbouring prairie forms it comes into contact with in migration or on its edges. In general, most of the subspecific forms mentioned as prairie or western are represented by type subspecies in this great eastern fauna, which is perhaps the typical fauna of Canada and which gives distinctive character to our biotal resources.