



The Redstart

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FEBRUARY MEETING

A regular meeting of The Brooks Bird Club will take place on Friday, Feb. 28, at the assembly room of The Wheeling Chamber of Commerce in the Market Auditorium Building, Wheeling. Mr. Russell West will discuss, "Bird Habitats of Oglebay Park," Miss Bertha Quantz will have as her subject, "Ornithological Literature of the Ohio County Public Library." The meeting will start at 8 p.m. and visitors are welcome.

SOME NESTING OBSERVATIONS

by
Charles Conrad

(An abstract of a paper read before The Brooks Bird Club.)

Most Catbirds build their nests of twigs, rootlets and grasses and appear content with these materials. This was not true of one Catbird of my acquaintance which seemed to have turned "modern." Upon examination of her nest, I found the following items "built in:" a small bit of waxed paper, part of a paper bag, fifteen feet of cord, a cigarette paper, and a piece of an old tobacco pouch. This nest measured nearly six inches across, and weighed four ounces, in contrast to a nest built entirely of natural materials and which measured four inches across and weighed just two and one-half ounces.

In the case of the latter nest, I determined to learn with reasonable accuracy how much effort had been involved in transportation of materials. Not being able to be present for the entire building process, I did the next best thing and, when the nest was abandoned, took it apart and counted the individual "beak-loads which went into its construction. From this count it was

possible to estimate that the bird must have made 184 trips to the nest site with bits of building material. This, of course, does not account for any carrying of material which may have been of no use to the builder.

In the examination of nests of 26 species of birds, during the Summer of 1934, I found the lightest of those examined was that built by a Chipping Sparrow. It was less than an ounce in weight, although it measured about three inches across. The heaviest nest examined, that of a Robin which was constructed upon an old nest of the Cardinal, weighed nearly two pounds.

As usual, House Wrens found the most unusual locations for nests during the season mentioned. One nest of this species was built in a half-gallon can. Another Wren hatched and reared young in a man's felt hat, which hung on a nail against the side of a house and was protected from weather by a porch roof. Three nests were inside the weather boarding of buildings, entrance being effected through knot-holes in each instance.

A House Wren, attempting to build in the vacated nest of a Barn Swallow, provided an amusing and interesting experience for me. The nest appeared complete when the Wren essayed an addition -- a heavy twig, some ten inches long. It was almost too much for the Wren to lift. When I saw the bird with it, the twig was on the ground, directly beneath the nest site, which was about ten feet above. The bird seemed to try to balance the weight of the twig evenly in its beak and then actually to push into the air with it. Sometimes, this resulted in a rise of a foot or so, when the twig would be dropped and the effort attempted again. Ten times the Wren reached the nest location and attempted to place the twig, which fell to the ground on each occasion. The eleventh trip was successful -- whereupon the House Wren left the site and, so far as I could learn, made no attempts to use the nest.

Nor was this the only fruitless toil which that location provided for a House Wren. A persistent Robin previously had built three nests on the abandoned Swallow's nest, a Wren tearing up each of the Robin's nests and dropping the materials of them to the ground. The Robin finally gave up the contest and nested in a basket of ferns, hung a few yards from the Swallow nest.

The tenacity of certain birds in clinging to a nesting place in the face of obstacles was demonstrated at my home in Warwood, Wheeling, W. Va., during the 1934 season.

My sister, Dorothy, and I decided to encourage a pair of Cardinals which we heard and saw in the yard of our home, to use a Wisteria vine at one end of our porch as a nesting place. The previous season, a pair of Cardinals had hatched and reared a brood of young in this location, and we were anxious to have the vine used

again for this purpose. By placing food, we soon accustomed a male Cardinal to coming to the porch and, on May 8, 1934, this bird was seen investigating the Wisteria vine. On April 11, we noted a pair of Cardinals in the vine.

It was at this point that the villain of the piece appeared, in the guise of a female Robin! The Robin immediately appropriated the old Cardinal's nest and drove from the vines the pair of Cardinals. By April 14, the Robin had built an addition to the 1933 Cardinal nest and was placing finishing touches upon it.

Since we preferred that the Cardinals should use the location, the nest of the Robin was removed from the vines. The Robin's subsequent appearances in the vine were discouraged by members of our family, who frightened the bird from the porch whenever it was noticed there. Regardless of many discouragements of this nature, the Robin finished a second nest on April 17. This structure, also, was removed by us, and we felt that, by this time, surely, the Robin would be discouraged and leave the scene, leaving it to the pair of Cardinals which still remained in the vicinity and came to the vine during absences of the Robin.

The Robin, however, built a third nest which was finished April 20 and in which an egg had been deposited on April 22. The Conrad's decided that the Robin had earned her right to use the vine, and left this third nest unmolested. Four young were hatched and reared. As might have been expected, the adult was entirely undisturbed by our frequent and close observations of her brooding and feeding activities. In the meantime, we tried to make up to her for our previous lack of hospitality.

Warwood,
Wheeling, W.Va.

FIELD NOTES

Behavior of Starlings at a Feeding Shelf. During a heavy snow-storm on January 20, 1936, I had an excellent opportunity to observe the behavior of Starlings, Sturnus vulgaris, at a feeding shelf in the yard at the rear of the home of Mr. and Mrs. James T. Handlan, Wheeling, W. Va. The feeding shelf is atop an iron pole less than ten yards from the kitchen windows of the house, through one of which I watched the shelf and its occupants with the aid of a 4x opera glass. In the course of the hour during which I watched the shelf, it was visited by House Sparrows, Passer domesticus, Tufted Titmice, Baeolophus bicolor, and a single male Cardinal, Richmondia cardinalis, in addition to three Starlings which made numerous excursions to the shelf from perches in a sheltered tree in a neighboring yard.

None of the Starlings tolerated the presence of birds of other species at the shelf, stopping feeding to drive away the smaller birds. One of the Starlings, with much yellow on the bill and somewhat larger than the other two, completely dominated the scene when at the shelf, pecking at the heads of its two companions when they came within reach of his position atop a wire suet-holder. On four occasions, the largest bird left the suet-holder and successively fought the other two Starlings from the shelf, flying against them and striking with its bill and wings. The Starlings, while I watched them, at least, paid little or no attention to bread-crumbs, sunflower seed and cracked grains (chick-feed) scattered on the feeding shelf, but devoted themselves to the supply of suet. Nevertheless, they refused to tolerate the presence of other birds anywhere on the shelf and the largest of the Starlings declined to permit its two fellows a share in the food.

From the colors of the bills of the Starlings, and other external characteristics, I took the largest bird to be a male and the two smaller ones to be females (see Hicks, L. E., "Individual and Sexual Variations in the European Starling," Bird Banding, Vol. V, No. 3, July, 1934.)

---J.W. Handlan
Wheeling, W.Va.

Gray-cheeked Thrush in West Virginia. I collected an adult male Gray-cheeked Thrush, Hylocichla minima alicae, on Sept. 16, 1935, about ten miles north of Bethany, W.Va., on the DeGarmo farm. The specimen was identified by Dr. George M. Sutton. Another specimen, an immature female, was taken Sept. 25, 1935, in Monongalia County, W.Va., about three miles Southeast of Morgantown. For comparison, I collected an Olive-backed Thrush, Hylocichla ustalatea swainsoni. It is my belief that an observer, with good binoculars, could identify the Gray-cheeked Thrush in the field, if the light is favorable.

--Karl Haller,
Morgantown, W.Va.

A Winter Yellow Palm Warbler. I had often heard of Wood Warblers being seen in Winter, but until a few weeks ago I had never been able to list any. On Dec. 3, 1935, I noted a small bird feeding on the ground at the side of a road in Morgantown, W.Va. I was able to approach to within ten feet of the bird and identified it as a Yellow Palm Warbler, Dendroica palmarum hypochrysea. The jerking of the tail and the white patches on the outer tail feathers were easily seen; the peculiar "chip" note was heard. The prevailing cold weather and snow apparently had little effect upon the bird.

--Karl Haller
Morgantown, W.Va.

Songs of Wood Warblers. I greatly enjoyed Mr. Russell West's paper on the songs of Warblers, in the December issue of The Redstart. I went to my diary of bird notes on birds of West Virginia and found a few observations that seem pertinent to offer at this time. These observations were made in Marion and Monongalia Counties, West Virginia.

May 30, 1920 -- I discover that the Black and White Warbler has two distinct songs: a uniform "Che-wee," *///* uttered rapidly; a series varied near the end by one rich, distinctive tone, *///*. Again, it has a twittering conversational note, as do the Sparrows.

Mr. West's drawing of the Hooded Warbler's song (No. 15) is exact. It sounds like, "O you lit'tle Hooded' War'bler," the ed syllable corresponding to his high line, and warbler to his curve. A minor song, sounded in the tree tops, sounds like "O'you, o'you. See me? See me?" The last two notes seemed to say, also, "Swe-ah! Swe-ah!" This Warbler's call is a sharp "chip," accompanied by a spreading of the tail.

--Mrs. Lena G. McBee
El Paso, Texas.

Observations at a Feeding Station. During two recent "cold spells," I have maintained three bird-feeding stations at the home of my parents in Wheeling. Two are located on porches and a third beneath a grape arbor at the rear of a yard. Dry bread, rolled oats, commercial "scratch feed," mixed canary seed, suet and small bits of gravel have been kept on the feeding shelves. As usual in the city, English Sparrows, Passer domesticus, have been present in greatest numbers. The Starlings, Sturnus vulgaris, are second with Cardinals, Richmondena cardinalis, a good third. In order, then, are Chickadees, Penthestes, Tufted Titmice, Baeolophus bicolor, domestic Pigeons and a single example of the Downy Woodpecker, Dryobates pubescens. It seems probable that native Sparrows would have been present from time to time, but if they were they were not noticed.

In order of arrival at the feeders, Cardinals invariably were first, with the English Sparrows, second. After them usually came Chickadees and Titmice. Starlings always were among the last to arrive. Cardinals seemed to enjoy the scratch feed and sometimes pecked at suet, while the English Sparrows seemed to prefer bread, although they ate suet and scratch feed, also. The Titmice ate suet and smaller grains. The Starlings ate anything and everything in very large quantities!

-- Walter Ammon
Wheeling, W. Va.

EDITORIAL

A New Honorary Member. Mr. A. B. Brooks, of Oglebay Park, Wheeling, has accepted election as an Honorary Member of The Brooks Bird Club in a letter dated January 22 at his country place at French Creek, W. Va. Local residence originally barred Mr. Brooks from Honorary Membership in the organization named for him. Change of the club's by-laws to permit election of local residents to the honorary membership classification immediately was followed by Mr. Brooks' election and his acceptance. With the letter of acceptance, Mr. Brooks included an exceedingly interesting account of activities at a bird-feeding shelf at French Creek throughout an entire day. The article will be published as a feature of the March issue of The Redstart.

Acknowledgment. The Club is indebted to Mr. A. V. Fisher, of 4001 Jacob Street, Wheeling, W. Va., for a copy of the magazine section of the December 15 issue of The Sunday Item-Tribune, of New Orleans, La. The section includes, on pages 2, 10 and 13, an interesting article concerning the new interest in falconry. Mr. Daniel P. Mannix is the author.

The 1936 Spring Migration Chart. Certain disputed points regarding the plan for filling in the Brooks Bird Club's annual Spring Migration Chart for 1936 await settlement, preferably at the February meeting of the Club. Active members will recall that Mr. Tom Shields has vigorously opposed the club's general plan for these charts for the past several years.

In the Cadiz, Ohio, Christmas census published in The Redstart for January (III, No. 4, p. 31) is listed a Hermit Thrush which was recorded near Cadiz on December 21. How, then, shall we determine the date of arrival of migrant Hermit Thrushes in this section? Would not the recording of a single bird or two early in the season make us wonder whether or not they are wintering individuals, rather than migrants? Shall we set an arbitrary number of individuals of a species which must be recorded before we fix a Spring "arrival date" for the species? The same set of questions, and others like them, may be evolved around the item on Page 38 of this issue, in which Mr. Karl Haller records a Winter record of the Yellow Palm Warbler.

In a letter to Mr. Clyde Upton, then Chairman of the Club's executive committee, Mr. Shields suggests certain modifications of the club's general plan for fixing arrival dates in Spring. He cites such species as the Robin, Flicker, and Towhee, all of which usually winter, sparingly at least, in this region. For these birds he would set as "arrival date" a date upon which these species are present in noticeably increased numbers. He would set as Spring arrival date for species known to have wintered here in the past, but not known to have wintered in 1935-36, that date upon which an individual of the species is first recorded.

An Encouraging Sign. The American Wildlife Institute announces the appointment of certain committees in its official pages of the January, 1936, Field and Stream (XL, No. 9, pp. 40-41). A "wildlife restoration planning committee" of fifteen members includes such widely known sportsmen-writers as "Nash Buckingham," such organization leaders as Seth B. Gordon, and such politico-conservationists as Ex-Senator Harry B. Hawes. Mr. Gordon writes that "recognizing the need for guidance by experts," the Trustees of the Institute ordered appointment of a "technical committee" of five members. The technical committee is headed by Aldo Leopold, professor of game management at the University of Wisconsin, Herbert L. Stoddard, of fame for the co-operative quail investigation in the South, Dr. Gardiner Bump, of New York, noted for his studies of the Ruffed Grouse, and two others, fisheries experts, from Cornell University and the University of Michigan, respectively.

It surely is encouraging to those conservationists, hunters or not, who would put conservation affairs in the hands of trained men to note that the Institute "recognizes the need" for technical guidance. It remains to be seen whether or not the sportsmen will permit technical guidance which may seem to the sportsmen inimical to their own interests afield. There still are politically-appointed "practical men" in many a seat of authority in conservation. Even those more intelligent and better informed than the average are selfishly inclined to belittle the wildlife "technician" as compared to the "practical man."

Senator Hawes recent book on wild life and subsequent fiery, dissenting views by H. E. Anthony and William Vogt, respectively, afford a striking case in point of the contrast in views of the conservation picture as seen by a leading "practical man" and two scientists. The sportsmen immediately would gain support from many non-hunting conservationists if they give as an evidence of good faith, heed to technical advice.

The Redstart is distributed, free, to all members of The Brooks Bird Club. Dues of Active Members (elected to membership) are \$1.00 annually. Dues of Corresponding Members (membership upon application) are 50 cents annually.

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