



The Redstart

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Edited by J. W. Handlan

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Our introduction to the bird life of a southern seacoast occurred in November, 1937. At that time we went to Charleston, South Carolina, to attend the 55th stated meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union. We enjoyed, thoroughly, our participation in sessions of this meeting and the social events which accompanied it and our association with the friendly and hospitable people who were our hosts. Even more did we enjoy our opportunities to observe birds in variety and numbers which exceeded our most optimistic expectations.

It is with our ornithological observations along the Carolina coast that this paper is concerned. These observations are of little importance to any others than ourselves. We were, frankly, out to "see new birds," and to further our acquaintance with others which were rare in our previous experience. The pleasure which we had in fulfillment of these desires has left us enthusiastic over the Carolina coast as a "happy hunting ground" for amateur ornithologists. It is to call the attention of other inlanders like ourselves to the Autumn and Winter possibilities of this coast region that this paper is published.

Those observers familiar with the region of which this is written may smile at our enthusiasm over what, to them, are commonplaces. They will forgive us, surely, when they realize the geographical limitations of our former field experience. So limited had this been that such common forms as Black Vultures and Mockingbirds were virtually new to us. Our opportunities for observing waterfowl and shorebirds had been sharply limited. The very sight of the sea was

new to us, as was the botanical background for the birds of the region with its Liveoaks, Magnolias, Bald Cypress and the omnipresent "Spanish moss."

Mr. Maurice Brooks, of the faculty of West Virginia University, and Mrs. Brooks had been forced to cancel plans to accompany us. We traveled by automobile and followed a route which Mr. Brooks had selected as being most likely to be productive in the matter of ornithological interest. Once across West Virginia, we turned southeast to Elizabeth City, N. C. by way of Richmond. From Elizabeth City we followed the coast highway (U.S. 17) into Charleston. Our return trip followed the same route to Elizabeth City, from where we went on to Williamsburg, Va. From Williamsburg our route crossed the mountains to Roanoke, Va., thence to Keenan, W. Va., and, finally, home to Wheeling along the West Virginia mountain highways.

Two principal stops were made for ornithological observation on the coast. One was a half-day spent in the vicinity of Currituck and Albemarle Sounds, on the narrow sandspit which parallels the North Carolina mainland from Currituck to Kitty Hawk, and beyond -- excellent roads extend along this 100-mile-long, two-to-five-mile-wide strip. Charleston, South Carolina, and vicinity, where we spent four days was the second and principal area for our observations. One of those days was spent on and near Bull's Island, South Carolina, the most interesting place we have visited.

Bull's Island is part of a great wildlife refuge administered by the United States Biological Survey. It lies several miles off the South Carolina coast about 25 miles north of Charleston. The island is seven miles long and some two miles wide. Its interior is virtually all swamp, dotted at frequent intervals with fresh-water ponds of considerable extent. It boasts about nine miles of ocean beach. From the mainland it is reached by boat, along twisting channels which wind between banks of marine vegetation. With the tide out -- extensive mudflats appear at either side of the channel. All in all, a better place for observation of waterfowl, waders and shorebirds could scarcely be desired.

Our round-about trip to Charleston and return took us nearly 2,500 miles and occupied two weeks. Our two major places for field work and casual observations along the roads we traveled resulted in our compiling a composite bird list of 129 species for the trip -- most of these recorded along the coast and in the areas mentioned above.

It is difficult to select "high points" of our observations for comment here. Perhaps of greatest ornithological significance was the presence, on Bull's Island, of an Arkansas Kingbird, Tyrannus verticalis. A single individual posed in the tops of Liveoaks on the Island or darted into the air for insect prey while some 50 observers looked on. Some of those who saw and agreed upon the identity of the bird said they were thoroughly familiar with the species.

In literature available to us, including Chamberlain's "Seasonal List of South Carolina Birds, Revised to November, 1936," (1) we find no reference to a South Carolina record for the species.

Two species of special interest to us were the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Dryobates borealis, and the Brown-headed Nuthatch, Sitta pusilla pusilla, which we found in pine woods near Charleston. But it was scarcely less remarkable, from our point of view, to observe Black Vultures sharing the air with the familiar Turkey Vultures, or to find Mockingbirds common in the very city of Charleston. Along the highways in both the Carolinas, Mockingbirds were noted almost anywhere where perches existed. In the same situations we saw numerous Sparrow Hawks and Shrikes, the latter presumably Lanius l. ludovicianus, the resident Loggerhead Shrike.

But the abundance of waterfowl, waders and shore birds perhaps was the most impressive feature of our trip. No child at Christmas ever was more delighted than were we inland hill-dwellers at the wealth of opportunity we found for observation of these water- and shore-dwellers which previously had been so scantily represented in our ornithological notebooks.

In the notes that follow, "Currituck" is employed to describe the general region mentioned in that connection above. "Bull's Island," similarly, is used to designate not only the Island itself but its approaches and general situation, as well.

Prominent in our list of waterfowl was a flock of seven Whistling Swans, two adults and five in the grayish plumage of immaturity, noted at Currituck. These we saw in flight, sunning themselves on a nearby sandbank and, finally, swimming within easy range for observation. Conrad was so fortunate as to be with a small party on Bull's Island which recorded a small, mixed flock of Snow Geese, Chen hyperborea (subsp?), and Blue Geese, Chen hyperborea. The same party recorded the only Canada Geese noted on the Bull's Island field trip.

Of the surface-feeding ducks our list contains an excellent representation. Included upon it are Common Mallard, (Common?) Black Duck, Gadwall, Baldpate, American Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Shoveler and Wood Duck. It was especially pleasant to note that Wood Ducks were common at Bull's Island, as indeed, were most of the other ducks noted.

Diving ducks were found in numbers, also, both at Currituck and at Bull's Island, including the Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Canvas-back and Scaup (affinis?). One record for Bufflehead was made.

We three missed a flock of White-winged Scoters noted by part of the Bull's Island party, but added a number of records of Ruddy Ducks. Of the mergansers, the Hooded and Red-breasted were listed.

Shorebirds were well represented on our list. They included such species as the Killdeer, Black-bellied Plover (perhaps most numerous of those we noted), Ruddy Turnstone, Long-billed Curlew, (Western?) Willet, both species of Yellowlegs (Totanus), Pectoral Sandpiper, Sanderlings and others.

Ring-billed, Laughing and Bonaparte's Gulls found their way to our list as did the common Herring Gull, which we found in what seemed to us a bewildering variety of plumages, ranging from the snowy-white adults to the brownish, first-year immatures.

Small terns which we noted on several occasions we presume to have been examples of Sterna forsteri, Foster's Tern. We had excellent opportunity, also, to observe the big American Caspian Terns, Hydroprogne caspia imperator, at close range.

The foregoing gives some idea of the pleasure we experienced in this interesting region and tells something of the bird life to be found there in Autumn and on into the Winter. The usual inconsistencies cropped up, of course. For example, we were in an area known as one of the greatest concentration points for the Canada Goose, yet our list contains only a single record for this species, made by Conrad. All our observations were made, also, under bright, sunny weather conditions. This, we were told by local residents, worked against our seeing additional waterfowl, as on bright, warm days the birds usually were too far offshore for observation from the land.

Lack of time prevented a visit to Lake Drummond, said to be outstanding for its winter concentrations of geese and to Lake Mattamuskeet, a notable concentration place for Whistling Swans.

These omissions will be remedied -- so far as we are concerned! We are unanimously determined to visit the South Carolina coast again!

Oglebay Park
Wheeling, W.Va.

- (1) Chamberlain, E.B., "Seasonal List of South Carolina Birds, Revised to November, 1936," The Charleston Museum Leaflet No. 8, pp. 1-21 (Charleston, S.C., 1937).

BACHMAN'S SPARROW IN WEST VIRGINIA -- A CORRECTION

In The Redstart for August (Vol. IV, No. 7, p. 72) appears a note on the Bachman's Sparrow which reads: "A singing male was taken near Fort Gay, Mason County, June 24, 1937." This should read: "----- taken near Fort Gay, Wayne County," etc.

--- Karl Haller
Route No. 1
Short Creek, W.Va.

GENERAL NOTES

An Invitation from Buffalo, N. Y.: - Mr. Harold D. Mitchell, of Buffalo, N.Y., issues an invitation for an informal ornithological expedition at Buffalo, next spring. Mr. Mitchell speaks for the Buffalo Ornithological Society and for the Buffalo Audubon Society when he writes:

"Both of the above mentioned organizations join in inviting the 'Pymatuning group' to come to Buffalo either the week-end of May 21-22 or the week-end of May 28-29. We would make arrangements for a meeting place somewhere in Buffalo for luncheon Saturday noon. The afternoon field trip would either be along the Canadian shore of Lake Erie to Point Abino and beyond, or an alternate trip down the river to the Falls could be taken. A dinner, either in downtown Buffalo or the Museum could be arranged for Saturday night and the museum thrown open to the group after dinner. The mounted specimens and study skins of birds of Western New York, the egg collection and the five-year migration chart would there be available to visitors.

"Sunday we would plan to visit the Oak Orchard Swamp region, ----- including visits by boat to the Prothonotary Warbler breeding area.

"The earlier week-end would have the greatest possibilities for Warblers and other migrants, with the exception of the shorebirds, and mosquitoes would be less in evidence than the following week. However, except for the mosquito nuisance, there are advantages in considering the following week-end. The shorebird migration will be at its height, with good chances of seeing Knots, Red-backs, Turnstones, Sanderlings, Hudsonian Curlew and others."

The invitation from Mr. Mitchell is generally addressed to the "Pymatuning group," which, in general, means the ornithologists of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Western New York and West Virginia. This group has no formal organization, but nevertheless has met informally in field activities in the Pymatuning Lake area for the past two years. Members of The Brooks Bird Club are considered as part of this group, even though the active, Wheeling representation of the club has been remiss, in the past, in participating in these ornithological outings.

The A.O.U. Meeting at Charleston: - Mrs. Handlan, Mr. Charles Conrad and the editor constituted West Virginia's representation at the 55th meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union at Charleston, S.C., November 15-18. Mr. Chester Shafer, enroute to Florida for the winter, reached Charleston in time to participate in the November 19 field trip to Bull's Island, final official event of the meeting, and made the Mountain State delegation four in number.

The West Virginia group did not reach Charleston until the late afternoon of November 16, thereby missing both morning and afternoon sessions of the first day upon which papers were presented.

On November 17, it was necessary to decide between popular and technical section meetings, which united in the afternoon. Single sessions occurred, also, on November 18 in the morning and afternoon.

Social features of the meeting included the reception for visitors at the Charleston Museum, the annual dinner held in a downtown hall at Charleston, a tour of a half-dozen ancient Charleston homes and, on November 19, an all-day field trip to the Bull's Island sanctuary.

The West Virginians were impressed by the excellence of the illustrative material presented by many of the speakers in the formal sessions. Motion pictures by Samuel A. Grimes, of Jacksonville, Fla., of Glossy Ibis and White-faced Glossy Ibis (in color), Cleveland Grant's fine movies of the Duck Hawks of Bonaventure Island, Howard Cleaves remarkable "Wilderness Night Filming," motion pictures, Olin Sewell Pettingill's fine colored films of the Atlantic Puffin and other "Birds of the Machias Seal Island," and Dr. A. A. Allen's latest product of film and microphone, "A Season with Camera and Microphone," were particularly impressive.

Our Charleston hosts were the most gracious, hospitable people whom we have met. The local committee performed its duties in a way which made this annual meeting an occasion we shall always remember with the greatest pleasure.

The local amateurs, as well as many of the amateur and professional visitors familiar with the bird life of the Charleston area, were most generous with their time and patience as they assisted us to become acquainted with the bird life of the region. Their friendly help was particularly appreciated.

An interesting feature of the meeting was an exhibition of paintings in various media by the nation's outstanding ornithological artists and a somewhat smaller exhibit of notable ornithological photography.

Charleston itself proved a delightful winter vacation place and one of greatest interest, historically and otherwise.

---J.W.H.