



The Redstart

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OBSERVATIONS OF THE NESTING OF THE CAROLINA WREN

by
Walter Ammon

The Carolina Wren, Thryothorus l. ludovicianus, shares with various species of birds the tendency to congregate in certain suitable localities for nesting purposes, often to the exclusion of other, and apparently even more favorable, locations. The writer is thoroughly familiar with one very interesting focal point of the Carolina Wrens in northern Marshall County, West Virginia, a locality which appears to retain its popularity with birds of the species under discussion year after year.

A general idea of the topography of this site may be obtained by imagining a low hill, rising steeply from a creek bottom on one side, between twenty and fifty feet to a rather broad crest. From this crest, the land slopes gently to bottom land on the other side. A thick stand of young trees, primarily Black Locust and Sassafras, covers the area, with a few large White Oaks growing among them. The territory is by no means isolated. It contains a number of small buildings within its limits and a much-traveled path parallels the creek and the steep side of the low hill which has been mentioned.

Despite this frequent intrusion by humans in the territory, an unusually large number of Carolina Wrens claim this for their nesting grounds, while in other, apparently similar and far more isolated sections nearby, only a few pairs of these birds may be found brooding.

During the summer of 1937 three nests of this species, in particular, were watched carefully.

The first of these was discovered on a 2x4 timber near the roof of an open wash-house, between a wall, on one side and an often-opened locker on the other. The nest was first observed during the first week of June and at that time contained three, half-grown young. In spite of repeated human intrusion, the parent birds continued

regularly to feed their young and otherwise care for them and the nest. Then, as if to surpass all former discourtesies shown to the birds, it was found necessary to cut a doorway through the wall against which their nest was placed. The female adult remained on the nest for a time until the noise and vibration caused by the saws drove her to a perch some six feet from the nest. From this vantage point she unloosed a steady stream of expletives until the door-cutting process was completed, when she immediately returned to the nest. The three young eventually left the nest and were not identified in any subsequent observations.

The second nest observed was constructed on a window sill of a building used as a camp hospital (the observations all occurred within the area owned and used by a Boy Scout camp). This nest was between a screen and a loosely-closed shutter, the birds taking advantage of an opening at the bottom of the shutter to enter and leave the nest site. These birds were subject to daily observation by those within the building and even to a bright light which burned until late each night. They completed their nest, however, and two eggs were laid. At this stage their tolerance of nearby humans apparently became exhausted. At any rate the nest was deserted.

The third nest was observed from the time the nest was partially built until it was left by the young which were hatched and reared in it. The nest was observed -- half completed -- about the middle of July. This nest, also, was in a building, constructed on a cross-beam at the side of a door and little more than four feet from the floor of the building. The frequent slamming of the door and the presence of humans frequently passing within a foot of the nest would be thought sufficient reason for deserting the nest which, when first seen was only partly completed. The female, starting July 18, laid five eggs in the succeeding six days. It was noted that two of the eggs were decidedly lighter than the others, lacking almost entirely the pinkish hue of the three others.

The first egg hatched in 12 days, and three others the following day. The first bird hatched was a little larger than the others but appeared to cause its nest-mates no trouble at feeding time because of its larger size. During the forenoon, each bird was fed two to three times each hour. Only three of four meals were provided during the hottest part of the day, but more frequent feedings resumed in the early evening. The food consisted of small worms and of winged insects, with no especial effort being made to determine the exact nature of the meals for fear of frightening the adults from their young. Twelve days after the hatching of the first bird, all young had left the nest and were in trees nearby, where they remained until the following day.

One incident in connection with these birds always will remain in the author's mind. One evening he looked closely into the nest to observe the eggs. In the dim light, the brooding adult was not visible, nor did she fly until the face of the observer was within some eight inches of the nest. The location of the nest was such that the birds leaving it could fly to neither one side nor the other, but only "straight out."

The brooding bird proceeded to fly "straight out." Its sharp beak hit, and marked, the human intruder's face about an inch below one eye. The bird could not have been more startled than the observer!

One description will serve for all three nests observed, since they differed from one another only in location and accomplishment of purpose. They were dome-shaped, with an interior about three inches high, three inches wide and five and one-half inches long. Dry grasses, leaves and shreds of plant fiber composed the bulk of the nests, which were sparingly lined with hair and small feathers.

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A GUIDE FOR TEACHING CONSERVATION TO WEST VIRGINIA CHILDREN

What is, perhaps, a unique plan for preparing a teacher's guide to the instruction of children of West Virginia's public schools is now in operation in West Virginia. Armed with an admittedly tentative and not complete preliminary draft of such a guide, 55 county committees have been appointed and, presumably, are proceeding to put their own ideas concerning such a guide upon paper for eventual submission to the State Conservation Commission and the State Department of Education.

Representatives of 32 of these county committees (each composed of five teachers, one representative of a local sportsmen's organization and one representative of the State Department of Conservation) met at Charleston, W.Va. on March 11 and 12, 1938, for a discussion and agreement upon general policies in regard to the proposed teaching outline. With them were official representatives of the two state departments, the United States Soil Conservation Service, the Affiliated Sportsmen's Clubs of West Virginia, and interested, unattached laymen.

From this meeting there emerged the following general agreements by those concerned:

- (1) The proposed outlines should NOT constitute a separate course in the public school curricula, but should be integrated with the general work of the various schools.
- (2) The work should begin in the primary grades and be continued through twelfth grade (high school).
- (3) West Virginia teachers are, on the average, quite unprepared in any degree of understanding conservation or teaching of its general principles and some instruction along these lines should be offered in the teacher-training institutions of the state.

There appeared to be a general sentiment that public school instruction in conservation is particularly essential in West Virginia. It was brought out that approximately two-thirds of the state's area is unsuited to agriculture and is, actually, or potentially, land which should and must be devoted to outdoors recreation --- camping, hunting, fishing and other tourist attractions --- and to production of timber.

The completed committee reports -- 55 of them if all county committees do the work expected of them -- will be returned to the state Conservation office and from these local committee documents will be prepared a general guide for teachers in all of the state's public schools.

Throughout the conference the necessity for utter simplicity in planning of the proposed teachers' guide was stressed, as was the simple approach of an "ecological viewpoint."

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

FIELD NOTES

Sight Record of the Red-legged Black Duck at Oglebay Park: - While I walked along the Brooks Trail at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W.Va. on March 12, 1938, I was startled to note the circling above me of a duck-like bird. Stopping at once, I trained my 8x glasses on the circling bird. As I watched, the bird circled down and alighted on a small sand-bar of the stream which parallels the Brooks Trail and which is scarcely four-feet wide. From a distance of less than 20 feet I watched the duck for about five minutes, during which time it stood upon the sand strip, alertly observing its surroundings but apparently paying no attention to me as I stood as quietly as possible to watch it. I was at once struck by the bright red color of its legs and feet. It took to the air again, after some five minutes rest, and disappeared toward the East. The hour of day was 4 o'clock p.m. Conditions under which I observed the bird were excellent and I believe it to have been an example of the Red-legged Black Duck, Anas rubripes rubripes. I had previously seen Black Ducks, but never at such close range. I was able clearly to see the white edging of the feathers of the dark blue speculum on the wings. The bright color of legs and feet showed plainly in the glasses while the bird was in the air and were even more clearly evident as it stood upon the sand bar.

Under the circumstances I feel justified in claiming a sight record of a new sub-species for Oglebay Park and, to the best of my knowledge, for the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia.

---Polly A. Handlan
Wheeling, W. Va.

Trapped Red-tailed Hawk Found at Lost River Park:-

On February 12 we found a dead Red-tailed Hawk, on a trail at Lost River State Park, Hardy County, W.Va. Upon examination of the body of the bird we found its right leg caught fast in a steel trap, the trap attached to a length of chain. The bird probably died from starvation, being unable to secure its natural food because of the trap and dangling chain. Upon examination, the stomach contained nothing but two berries. The bird had apparently died some 36 to 48 hours before we found its body.

--L. Wayne Wilson,
Lost River State Park
Mathias, W.Va.

A Five-year Record of the Fall Migration of the Nighthawk: -

On August 21, 1933, I knowingly saw my first Nighthawk, Chordeiles minor, On this occasion, I stood upon the back porch of my parents' home in Warwood, Wheeling, W.Va., and counted 67 birds. At this date I had been interested in birds long enough to convince myself that I was observing the Nighthawk for the first time, the easy flight-marks being plainly evident. I have since been particularly interested in this species and each summer watch for the appearance of the birds above Warwood. In the five years for which I have records, there is the impressive fact that for only one year have I a date earlier than August 21 for their appearance in the sky above Warwood and this occasion was only one day earlier (1935). On the other hand, no record of mine (nor of any of my ornithologically-minded friends of my neighborhood) is later than August 21 for the first Autumn flight appearance of Nighthawks in the area of which I write.

Following is a summary of my five-year "first Autumn records:"

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time P.M.</u>	<u>Weather</u>	<u>No. Individuals Seen</u>
1933 August 21	7:00-7:30	Clear -- Warm	67
1934 August 21	7:00-7:30	" "	42
1935 August 20	7:00-7:30	" "	27
1936 August 21	7:00-7:30	" "	34
1937 August 21	7:00-7:30	" "	17

---Charles Conrad
423 Warwood Ave.,
Wheeling, W.Va.

Winter Robin Records in Monongalia County, W.Va.: - Robins were noted in the vicinity of Buzzard Rocks, near Cheat Lake, Monongalia County, W.Va., near Morgantown, on January 22. The birds were perched in trees and were singing at the time of observation, a number of individuals being noted.

---John Pattison
W.Va. University
Morgantown, W.Va.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Club Project Praised by Editor Vogt.:- The editor has received from Mr. William Vogt, editor of Bird Lore, a letter heartily commending the Brooks Bird Club for its 1938 field project as outlined in the January issue of The Redstart (V, 4, pp. 20-21, 1938). The first Spring migrant birds already have made their appearance in Oglebay Park as this is written in mid-March of 1938, a reminder to members of the club that an effort should be made immediately by each to carry on at least part of his Spring field work in the area designated by the Executive Committee for purposes of the 1938 project. All sorts of incidental records may enter the final summary, as well as those more specifically of interest for the purposes of the project. The sight record of the Red-legged Black Duck noted by Mrs. Handlan in this issue (p.40) was obtained just beyond the boundaries of the area in which the 1938 project will be carried on.

What About These "Vermin Contests?"- In the course of the meeting of county committeemen at Charleston on March 11 and 12, as described elsewhere in this issue, Mr. Ed Buck, of Richwood, W.Va., secretary of the West Virginia Affiliated Sportsmen's Association, said, in effect:

"I hate to think of a time when I'd walk in the forests of my country with the knowledge that all the Wildcats had been cleaned out."

Expressed, or implied, by a half-dozen other speakers at the meeting was criticism of the "vermin killing contests" which are so popular with West Virginia's organized sportsmen, among them Mr. Edgell Dean, of Richwood, president of the Affiliated Sportsmen. Along with a great volume of printed matter distributed to chairmen of county committees by the West Virginia Department of Conservation was a folder of re-printed advertisements of the Federal Cartridge Corporation of Minneapolis. One of the reprints was of an advertisement advising gunners to "let the hawks alone" and stating that "the two bad owls are good owls."

In other words, here was direct evidence that not all sportsmen and leaders of sportsmen favor the Roman holidays of vermin-killing promoted by organized sportsmen's clubs and encouraged by the state Conservation authorities.

As if to balance this favorable sign of some sanity in the approach to the matter of vermin-control in the state, the West Virginia Conservation Bulletin, official organ of the state department, appeared almost simultaneously with the meeting with an announcement of an increase of \$10.00 prize money offered by the Conservation Department to each county in which the vermin kill totals 2,500 animals or more. Each county qualifying is entitled to \$50.00 prize money. Furthermore, the State adds to its bounty policy by adding the Gray Fox to the Wildcat as an animal for whose killing a bounty is offered.

The Redstart never has been, and is not, in favor of protecting so-called "vermin" at any cost. It believes that Cooper's Hawks have no place in the vicinity of a pheasant hatching and rearing station, for example, and that watersnakes absolutely do not belong in the vicinity of a bass-rearing pond. But this journal does believe, and always will believe from the evidence at hand, that vermin-killing contests are an absolute evil and should have no place in any attempts to manage the state's wildlife resources. If predatory animals must be controlled, let it be by people who know what to kill and when to stop killing a particular species. Predatory-control is absolutely NOT a job for every Tom, Dick and Harry who can shoot a gun or set a trap. We'll all be better off when the vermin-killing contests are discontinued.

---J.W.H.
