



The Redstart

Published Monthly by the Brooks Bird Club
Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W. Va.

Vol. VI, No. 2

Edited by J. W. Handlan

November, 1938

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF BREWSTER'S WARBLER

by
William A. Lunk

An adult male example of Brewster's Warbler, Vermivera leucobronchialis, in typical plumage was observed to spend at least the early part of the summer of 1938 near Fairmont, W.Va. This is one of the very few West Virginia records for this hybrid and the second, to my knowledge, in the breeding season in the State.

I first observed the bird on May 19, on the east slope of a hill not far west of Fairmont. Most of this hillside has a scattered growth of Locusts, Hawthorns, and other small trees and is almost entirely covered by dense thickets of Blackberry. The Warbler was singing from a large, dead Chestnut tree near the foot of the hill. It had a narrow, distinct eye-line, deep yellow crown and slightly paler wing-bars and was clear white below.

On May 20, and on several dates later in May and early June, the bird was seen in the same place, generally in the same tree. On June 6, Mr. Maurice Brooks was one of a party which came to see the bird and all in the group examined it, with the result that my identification of the Brewster's Warbler was substantiated.

During the week of June 19, I spent considerable time in an attempt to establish the fact of the bird's nesting, but was unable to draw a definite conclusion. On June 19 I saw two young birds being attended constantly by a Golden-winged Warbler which seemed to have the plumage of a male but which I later concluded was a female. Later I discovered a single Golden-wing on the area, but the two were so nearly alike that I was at great difficulty to distinguish them from one another.

The bird I took to be the male appeared to remain near the other and the young, but I seldom heard it sing and, for the reason just explained, I could not be sure of the sexes excepting when I saw the adult birds together. Once they perched on the same branch for a few moments and then flew away, one pursuing the other out of my sight. The Brewster's Warbler also was frequently seen near the young and, on at least three occasions, was observed closely following one or the other of the Golden-wings for some distance, but it seemed to range much more widely over the hill than did the others. I thought that each male (Golden-wing and Brewster's) fed a young bird once but may have been mistaken in either case. Later in the week I noticed that the two young appeared to be typical Golden-wings.

The Brewster's Warbler sang frequently every time I was in the territory, giving me an excellent opportunity to study the variations in its song. The usual song was practically identical with that of the Golden-winged Warbler:- "zweee-zee, zee, zee." It was very often shortened to three notes, or to two, then probably resembling the Blue-winged Warbler's song. Occasionally a fifth note was added. As a rule, the introductory syllable was higher than the following notes, but once in a while I heard it sung on a lower pitch.

On several occasions the bird sang a song of an entirely different pattern although the peculiar, husky quality was the same; and, strangely, the male Golden-wing on the same hill sang identically the same song. I never heard any other from him. It begins with four to about eight (very often, five) short, rapid notes followed by a prolonged "buzz" on a higher key. It might be written:- "ze, ze, ze, ze, ze, zweee." A few times I heard this song sung twice, without a pause between, while the bird, the Golden-wing, I believe, was on the wing.

I spent a total of about 24 hours at the place from June 19 to 26, but at no time could I locate a typical female. Neither did I see any young, excepting the two to which reference has been made and in which all three adults observed appeared to show some interest. All of my observations were hampered by the extremely heavy undergrowth, chiefly of Blackberry, in which the birds, especially the young, remained much of the time. Thus, I seldom enjoyed more than brief, sometimes confusing glimpses, when I could see anything at all!

Under these circumstances I cannot, of course, state whether or not the Brewster's Warbler under observation actually nested, either with the female described, or with another which I may have failed to discover.

Fleming Avenue, Edgemont
Fairmont, West Virginia.

FIELD NOTES

Broad-winged Hawk in Eastern Ohio:- On September 5, 1938, Mrs. Skaggs and I saw a Broad-winged Hawk, Buteo platypterus platypterus. The place of the observation was about halfway between New Philadelphia and Urichsville, Ohio. The white band in the tail was plainly evident.

--- M. B. Skaggs
South Euclid, Ohio

Bald Eagle at Spruce Knob, W.Va.:- A mature Bald Eagle, Haliaeetus leucocephalus leucocephalus, was observed on Aug. 23, 1938, on top of Spruce Knob, Pendleton County, West Virginia, by Mrs. Fred E. Brooks, Misses Laura B. and Dora Moore, and the writer. The white head and tail were seen distinctly. Although the Golden Eagle is not uncommon in the higher mountains of West Virginia, the Bald Eagle is apparently rare in all parts of the State.

--- Dorothy Brooks
Morgantown, W. Va.

Hawks in eastern West Virginia:- In the course of a brief visit to Lost River State Park, in Hardy County, West Virginia, and vicinity, some field observations were made of a Vulture and certain Hawks, several of more than ordinary consequence. These and others are set forth in the briefly annotated list which follows:

Black Vulture. Coragyps atratus atratus. A single Black Vulture was observed by Mrs. Handlan and me near Petersburg, W.Va., but in Hardy County, on September 28, 1938. The bird first was noted from our moving automobile as we drove from Moorefield toward Petersburg and its appearance as it swung low over a nearby field was so markedly different from the common Turkey Vultures of the region as to cause us to stop for further observation. Subsequent examination of the bird with the help of good binoculars confirmed our first identification.

Sharp-shinned Hawk. Accipiter velox velox. Mrs. Handlan and I watched two birds of this species from a cabin window in the Park on the morning of Sept. 28. They were perched in a dead tree near the cabin and one of the two was in unusually dark plumage, although unmistakably a Sharp-shin. Later in the day one was seen along Helmick's Ridge near the Park.

Cooper's Hawk. Accipiter cooperi. Mr. George Flourer and I saw a single example of this species on two occasions on September 27, both in the same general locality. On Sept. 28, Mrs. Handlan, Mr. Flourer and I again saw a Cooper's Hawk in the same area. Possibly all three observations were of the same individual. On each occasion the bird observed permitted very close approach before flight. The observations were made within the Park.

Eastern Red-tailed Hawk. Buteo borealis borealis. On September 28, Mrs. Handlan and I watched a fine adult Red-tail being attacked by Crows along the state road near Petersburg, in Grant County, W.Va. The Crows deserted the towering hawk as we stopped our car to observe the battle.

Broad-winged Hawk. Buteo platypterus platypterus. Mrs. Handlan noted a number of circling hawks as we drove along the crest of Helmick's Ridge on Sept. 28. We emerged from the automobile to be astonished by the sight of a whole flock of Broad-wings, circling together not far from where we stood along the road. The hawks were easily identified without the help of binoculars. They soared quickly and then, abandoning their circling flight, flew swiftly southward. I used the binoculars to count 55 in the flock before they moved beyond range. I suspect that at least 65 and possibly 75 birds were in the flock --- the first of migrating hawks either of us had seen. Before leaving the place where the observation was made, Mrs. Handlan discovered one more large flock of circling hawks, these moving so high and so far away we were unable to identify them.

Duck Hawk. Falco peregrinus anatum. Mrs. Handlan, Mr. Flower and I, enroute by automobile to the Lookout Shelter in Lost River Park on Sept. 28, came suddenly upon a large hawk perched atop a dead Chestnut tree which, although quite tall, was scarcely ten feet above the road level because of the steep mountain slope on which it stood. Mr. Flower stopped the car 30 feet distant from the motionless bird. We identified it at once as a Duck Hawk, the first any of us had ever seen. It remained for nearly a minute, ample time for us to train binoculars upon it. The bird was an adult, and, as it turned upon its perch and slanted away from us on the wing, we plainly noted the black facial markings and the fine, dark upper plumage.

--- John W. Handlan
Wheeling, W. Va.

Northern Raven in Hardy County:- Mr. George Flower called Mrs. Handlan and me outdoors near his residence in Lost River State Park, Hardy County, W.Va., at 5 o'clock p.m. the afternoon of September 27, 1938, to hear a Great-horned Owl which was calling, in broad daylight, near the house. As we listened we heard the call of a Raven, Corvus corax principalis, which immediately was identified by Mr. Flower. In a few moments the Raven flew directly overhead, alternating its series of wing-beats with the peculiar "coasting" or gliding, with the wings close to the body, which often marks the flight of this species.

--- John W. Handlan
Wheeling, W.Va.

Short-billed Marsh Wren at Fairmont, W.Va.:- At about 5 p.m. on May 19, 1938, I discovered a Short-billed Marsh Wren, Cistothorus stellaris, on a grassy hillside a short distance west of Fairmont, W.Va. A rather heavy woods extends to the brow of this hill and the bird was creeping about in an area of very dense, matted grass just below some small Locust trees at the edge of the woods. As it was

singing frequently, I first recognized its song which sounds to me like:- "chap --- chip --- chap -- cha-cha-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch." Then, a half-hour's watching, with occasional "squeaking" brought me several good views at close range, through excellent 7x binoculars. I was able clearly to see the streaked back and crown, hardly noticeable eye-stripe, comparatively short bill, and conspicuous buffy washing on the underparts --- in short, more than enough details to identify the bird even without the help of its characteristic notes.

--- William A. Lunk
Fairmont, W.Va.

A Second Panhandle Record for the Blue Grosbeak:- August 25, 1938, I arose at 5 a.m. to do a "bird walk" at Oglebay Park, Ohio County, West Virginia. My route led from the Park Restaurant, via the Mansion to the Brooks Trail. It was far down this trail near the assembly place that the chirp of a strange bird was heard. The bird soon was located in a small tree near the trail and proved to be a male Blue Grosbeak, Guiraca caerulea caerulea. For several minutes I observed him as he sat quietly or chirped from his perch in the tree branches. After a time a female of the same species joined him, the two remaining for several more minutes of observation. This was done at distances of 30 to 50 feet. This is, I believe, the second record for the species in the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia, Sutton having recorded them previously.

--- I. B. Boggs
W.Va. University
Morgantown, W.Va.

Bachman's Sparrow at Jackson's Mill, W.Va.:- Early on July 9, 1938 I was checking birds in an old field north of Jackson's Mill, Lewis County, W.Va. The field, overgrown with briars, grasses and shrubs has a western exposure and is situated on top the hill near the "Tecumseh Tree." Presently the clear, ringing song of a Bachman's Sparrow sounded in the distance. The singer was found perched on a telephone wire in a nearby field. He sang there for fully 15 minutes. Then, he flew to a wire fence where a female Bachman's Sparrow joined him. They fed among the weeds and grasses for a short time, the male then flying to a small bush again to utter his fine song. For the next few minutes he alternated between feeding with the female and singing from bushes or fence posts. Only once after that day did I hear the song again, this on the morning of August 3.

--- I. B. Boggs,
Morgantown, W.Va.

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL JOURNALS

Auk, The, Vol. 55, No. 4, October, 1938:- Of special interest to Redstart readers in this issue are notes on specimens from the private West Virginia collection of Karl Haller, corresponding member of The Brooks Bird Club. His notes refer to Wilson's Snipe; Western Sandpiper (these establishing sight records by Lloyd Poland from Leetown, Jefferson County); a Shrike (Lanius l. subsp (?)); Western Palm Warbler; Grinnell's Water-thrush (taken in Brooke County and apparently, the author writes, the only two specimens taken in the State); Giant Red-winged Blackbird and the common Eastern Red-wing, all from Mason County.

In this issue, Mr. W.E.C. Todd, of the Carnegie Museum, describes a new race of the Canada Goose which he calls Branta canadensis interior, and which he differentiates chiefly from the Atlantic Coast birds as being darker in color than the latter. With the exception of notes on the nesting of the Rufous Hummingbird and Mr. McIlhenny's paper on Florida Cranes as residents of Mississippi, virtually all the longer papers in the issue are symbolic of the "laboratory approach" to ornithology which becomes increasingly marked in the technical journals.
(American Ornithologists' Union, Lancaster, Pa.) --- J.W.H.

Bird Lore, Vol. XL, No. 5, Sept.-Oct., 1938:- William Vogt's "Birding Down Long Island" is excellent -- and constitutes a tempting picture to those of us whose inland residences make our limited chances to observe shore birds and water fowl matters for long trips and considerable inconvenience. The beautiful photographs which accompany this article are worthy of more than mere comment. W. L. Dawson's photo of Marbled Godwits and Vogt's of the Black Skimmer seem particularly fine to the editor.

An interesting basis for discussion are Bird Lore's suggestions for the "basic bird library." As the editor suggests, no one could select such a list and please everybody! This reader, for example, would be loath to give up his copies of Wetmore's and Rowan's respective works on migrations of birds in favor of an anthology of poems about birds! It is stimulating to note that Aldo Leopold's book on game management and Stoddard's on the Bob-white Quail are included.

Summary of the second annual breeding-bird census will serve to remind members of The Brooks Bird Club of their failure to complete such a project at Oglebay Park, even though some work has been accomplished to serve as a basis for a completed job next season. (National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.) -- J.W.H.

Indiana Audubon Society, Year Book of The, Vol. XVI:- The title-page note: "The Indiana Audubon Society, as such, will not vouch for the scientific accuracy of the articles appearing in its annual year book," introduces the usual (and interesting!) mass of

scientific, semi-scientific and sentimental material which regularly appears in this Year-Book.

That the title-page statement quoted above is not entirely ornamentation is evidenced by acknowledgement of an error in the 1937 year book which appears of page 33 of the current issue. In it, an observer confesses himself in error reporting the arrival of Swainson's Warblers at Campbellsburg, Indiana, not only for 1937, but for 12 previous years, and that he was in error reporting them at all from Campbellsburg! There are various county lists and migration records and some general articles, as well as brief notes (Indiana Audubon Society, Noblesville, Ind.) --- J.W.H.

Prothonotary, The, Vol. 4, No. 9, Sept., 1938:- In this issue, Mr. Harold D. Mitchell calls attention to the nine years activities of the Buffalo Ornithological Society as being in the nature of a "training course" for a now considerable number of competent field observers. He puts up to the club members the decision as to whether the group is to continue as a social organization or whether it will become of more scientific importance. He suggests individual and group projects as a medium for mixing science and pleasure. The Editor of The Redstart suggests that publication of The Prothonotary, alone, constitutes a considerable contribution to the sum of knowledge of birds of the Buffalo region. He concurs, entirely, in Mr. Mitchell's opinion that papers based on club members' original projects would form the best possible material for regular meetings of the club. Members of The Brooks Bird Club will agree, without exception, that their club's most interesting meetings have been those marked by presentation of just such original material.
(Buffalo Ornithological Society, Buffalo, N.Y.) --- J.W.H.

Wilson Bulletin, The, Vol. L, No. 3, Sept., 1938:- Lawrence Hicks' notes on "A Unique Population of Water Birds in Northern Ohio - 1937," is of especial interest. Notes and tables by William Charles Barrett on highway casualties of wildlife in central Illinois show a surprising number of birds killed by automobiles. He observed only three Skunks killed on roads in 1937, a marked contrast to the situation in northern West Virginia, where one sees that many casualties in the course of a few hours drive within the state --- and almost no bird casualties.

George M. Sutton and O. S. Petingill, jr., describe the making of good lantern slides in one article. This editor enjoyed George Petrides "Life History Study of the Yellow-breasted Chat," although the title seems rather ambitious for studies made at two nests, only. The photographs presented, among the very few ever taken of the Chat, are excellent. Field Notes are scarcer than usual in this issue and a number of them refer to Ohio records, with a single reference, also, to Pennsylvania.
(Wilson Ornithological Club, Sioux City, Ia.) --- J.W.H.