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SOME BIRDS OF PLEASANTS COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

by
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In March, 1935, an article by Maurice Brooks was published in THE REDSTART concerning the future of the Brooks Bird Club (1). One item in it attracted my particular attention. It read: "Just to the South of the Panhandle there is, through Wetzel, Tyler and Pleasants Counties a large Scrub Pine belt. Who knows what species are nesting here? Yet this area is close to Wheeling."

The area mentioned seemed worthy of investigation, so Harold Bergner and I took a trip to that district on May 25 and 26, 1935. We stopped near Raven Rock, Pleasants County, and spent most of our time working in the hills nearby. The results seemed very good to us.

On May 30, 1935, in the company of Chester and Alston Shields, I again visited the same section and spent practically the entire day in the field. Three years later, May 29, 1938, sixteen Brooks Bird Club members spent a day in the field of Pleasants County, working in small groups. The observers were Harold and Ralph Bergner, Carolyn, Dorothy and Charles Conrad, Russell West, Leo Tighe, J. G. Worley, Walter Ammon, Harold Olsen, Robert Patterson, Helen McGill, Bertha Quantz, Beth Ann Waddell and Violet and Tom Shields. Again, on June 19, 1938, a group of students from the Oglebay Park Nature Leaders Training School visited the same place.

All of the data I have assembled is the result of these four field trips, totaling five days in the field. The list of birds is strictly a preliminary one, as the territory covered and time spent in the field were small. Very little of Pleasants County has been touched, ornithologically speaking; much more work must be done before a reasonably complete list can be published. However, inasmuch as nothing, apparently, has been published about Pleasants County birds, it seems worth while to make a beginning.

Pleasants County, bordered by Tyler, Ritchie and Wood Counties, of West Virginia, and the Ohio River, with Washington County, Ohio, beyond, has an elevation ranging from 602 feet to 1,225 feet. There are many hills, which rise sharply from the river or creek beds. Hickory, Elm and Maple trees grow abundantly in the woods, where greenbrier and blackberry are to be found in plenty. The higher parts of the county remind one of the West Virginia mountain area. About five or six miles from the Ohio River is a scrub pine belt, but this has not been worked, as yet, in an ornithological sense.

The three parts of the county which were visited was the hill above Raven Rock, with an elevation of 1,163 feet, Middle Island Creek, with an elevation of 624 feet, and the town of St. Marys, which is about 615 feet above sea level.

A total of 74 species of birds was recorded, and breeding records for 27 species were established. Several other species occur in such numbers that we are quite sure representatives of these are breeding birds, although no positive records were obtained for them. We found the nesting season in Pleasants County is approximately two weeks earlier than in Ohio County. Furthermore, I am convinced that all of the birds listed are summer residents of Pleasants County, with the exception of three or four species.

Pleasants County is presumed to be in the Upper Austral Life Zone, but it will be seen that some of the species recorded are Transition forms, and a few others seem typical Canadian forms. The Blackpoll Warbler recorded in the following notes, certainly must have been a late migrant. However, the Magnolia Warbler records are not so easy to explain. Birds of this species had the actions of resident birds, although no breeding records were obtained. Such Transition forms as the Least Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler and American Redstart do nest in the county, and others, like the Blue-headed Vireo, Black-throated Green Warbler and Chestnut-sided Warbler probably are breeding species. One would expect, when traveling 60 miles southward at approximately the same elevation as Ohio County (Wheeling) to find fewer birds of northern affinity, but the opposite seems true in this case. Most of these more northern species found in Pleasants County do not occur, or occur sparingly, only, in Ohio County during the breeding season. On the other hand, there are a few more northern species, such as the Black-billed Cuckoo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Savannah Sparrow which are known to nest in Ohio County and have not yet been found as breeding birds in Pleasants County.

The annotated list of birds observed in Pleasants County follows:

1. Bob-White. Colinus virginianus. Fairly common summer resident.
2. Sora. Porzana carolina. I saw one of this species in a small marsh below St. Marys on June 1, 1935.
3. Spotted Sandpiper. Actitis macularia. Two seen at Middle Island Creek by the Brooks Bird Club group on May 29, 1938.
4. Mourning Dove. Zenaidura macroura. Uncommon, but listed on all field trips.
5. Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Coccyzus americanus. Recorded only once, on May 29, 1938.
6. Chimney Swift. Chaetura pegalica. Common on all trips. Undoubtedly nests in the towns.
7. Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Archilochus colubris. Seen once, by Harold Bergner, on May 29, 1938.
8. Flicker. Colaptes auratus. Fairly common.
9. Pileated Woodpecker. Ceophloeus pileatus. On May 29, 1938, the Brooks Bird Club group saw one individual at close range on the hill above Raven Rock.
10. Hairy Woodpecker. Dryobates villosus. Listed only on the May 29, 1938, trip, when several were seen.
11. Downy Woodpecker. Drobates pubescens. On May 30, 1935, Alston Shields found a nest of this species in a hole in an apple tree on the Raven Rock Hill. Adults fed several young in the nest while he watched. Helen McGill and Leo Tighe saw two young on May 29, 1938.
12. Kingbird. Tyrannus tyrannus. Seen only on the first field trip, by Harold Bergner and myself.
13. Crested Flycatcher. Myiarchus crinitus. Uncommon, but listed on all field trips.
14. Phoebe. Sayornis phoebe. Harold Bergner found a nest of this species with two eggs in it on May 29, 1938. On the same date, Ammon and I saw two adult Phoebes feeding one young bird.
15. Acadian Flycatcher. Empidonax virescens. Uncommon, but seen or heard on each field trip.
16. Least Flycatcher. Empidonax minimus. Worley and Charles Conrad found a nest of this species on May 29, 1938. The nest was about 20 feet up in an elm tree.
17. Wood Pewee. Myiichones virens. Recorded once on each trip.

18. Rough-winged Swallow. Stelgidopteryx ruficollis. Seen along the Ohio River on the first field trip.
19. Barn Swallow. Hirundo erythrogaster. Seen only on May 29, 1938, at a farm on Middle Island Creek.
20. Crow. Corvus brachyrhynchos. Common.
21. Chickadee. Penthestes sp. ?. I saw a young Chickadee, not long out of the nest, on May 26, 1935. This bird we found common on all field trips. The species here is, presumably, P. carolinensis.
22. Tufted Titmouse. Baeolophus bicolor. Harold Bergner saw adults with young on May 29, 1938.
23. White-breasted Nuthatch. Sitta carolinensis. Recorded only once, May, 1938.
24. House Wren. Troglodytes aedon. A farmer boy showed several of us the nest of a House Wren, under a chicken house on May 29, 1938.
25. Bewick's Wren. Thryomanes bewicki. A. B. Brooks was shown the nest of this species at a farm on June 19, 1938.
26. Carolina Wren. Thryothorus ludovicianus. Fairly common.
27. Catbird. Dumetella carolinensis. Carolyn Conrad and Ralph Bergner found a nest with four young in it on May 29, 1938.
28. Brown Thrasher. Toxostoma rufum. Charles Conrad saw adults feeding young on May 29, 1938.
29. Robin. Turdus migratorius. Common. Ammon saw adults with young on May 29, 1938.
30. Wood Thrush. Hylocichla mustelina. Chester Shields found a nest of this species, with four eggs, on May 30, 1935. The nest was in a wild rose bush.
31. Bluebird. Sialia sialis. A farmer boy showed some of us a nest of this species, containing two eggs, on May 29, 1938. We also saw several immature Bluebirds on the same farm.
32. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Polioptila caerulea. Fairly common.
33. Cedar Waxwing. Bombycilla cedrorum. Fairly common.
34. Starling. Sturnus vulgaris. Apparently uncommon.
35. White-eyed Vireo. Vireo griseus. Very common. Carolyn Conrad found a nest of this species in a young red maple tree, about two and one-half feet from the ground. The nest, found on May 29, 1938, contained three eggs, one of which had hatched when we visited the nest a second time on the same day.

36. Yellow-throated Vireo. Vireo flavifrons. Listed on two trips.
37. Blue-headed Vireo. Vireo solitarius. Recorded once, only, this in the course of the May 29, 1938, field trip.
38. Red-eyed Vireo. Vireo olivaceus. Common on all occasions. Pleasants County appears to be the best place for the study of Vireos which has been visited by the members of the Brooks Bird Club.
39. Warbling Vireo. Vireo gilvus. Not common, but reported on two field trips.
40. Black and White Warbler. Knitotilta varia. Charles Conrad saw young birds of this species bathing in a small stream, on May 29, 1938.
41. Worm-eating Warbler. Helmitheros vermivorus. Listed once, only, on May 29, 1938.
42. Golden-winged Warbler. Vermivora chrysoptera. The fact that this species was common on each trip, caused us to look, especially, for a nest. On May 29, 1938, Violet Shields and I found two young, just out of the nest. I caught one of the young and held it temporarily captive, so that others of the group had an opportunity to examine it closely.
43. Blue-winged Warbler. Vermivora pinus. Recorded once, only, on May 29, 1938.
44. Yellow Warbler. Dendroica festiva. Ammon found a nest of this species, with young in it, on May 29, 1938.
45. Magnolia Warbler. Dendroica magnolia. Listed on two trips. The birds' actions were those of residents, but no breeding record was established.
46. Black-throated Green Warbler. Dendroica virens. On May 29, 1938, several pairs of this species were found near Middle Island Creek. We believe the birds to have been residents and anticipate a nesting record when we shall have progressed inland farther toward the Scrub Pine Belt. Maurice Brooks informs me that the species nests in a few places across the river in Ohio.
47. Cerulean Warbler. Dendroica cerulea. Recorded only on May 29, 1938.
48. Chestnut-sided Warbler. Dendroica pennsylvanica. Listed on the May 29, 1938, trip, along Middle Island Creek.
49. Blackpoll Warbler. Dendroica striata. Recorded once, on May 29, 1938, an individual of this species undoubtedly was a late migrant.
50. Prairie Warbler. Dendroica discolor. Common on all field trips. On May 29, 1938, Helen McGill and Leo Tighe found a nest of this species. The nest contained three eggs and was three and one-half feet from the ground in a Pignut Hickory tree.

51. Oven-bird. Seiurus aurocapillus. Rather common.
52. Louisiana Water-thrush. Seiurus motacilla. Record on May 29, 1938.
53. Kentucky Warbler. Oporornis formosus. Harold Bergner and I found a nest, containing three eggs, of this species on May 26, 1935. Ralph Bergner found a nest with three eggs on May 29, 1938, and, on the same date, Bertha Quantz and Russell West found a nest containing five eggs.
54. Yellow-throat. Geothlypis trichas. Harold Bergner and I saw a partially completed nest on May 26, 1935. On May 30 of the same year, the nest was complete and contained one egg.
55. Yellow-breasted Chat. Icteria virens. I found a nest of this species, with three eggs, May 25, 1935. The species is very common.
56. Hooded Warbler. Wilsonia citrina. Fairly common.
57. American Redstart. Setophaga ruticilla. Alston Shields found a nest on May 30, 1935, in a hickory sapling. The species was found to be common in the course of all field trips.
58. English Sparrow. Passer domesticus. Common in and near towns. Russell West saw a nest under the eave of a house, May 29, 1938.
59. Meadowlark. Strunella magna. Fairly common.
60. Red-wing. Agelaius phoeniceus. Uncommon, but recorded in fields along the Ohio River.
61. Baltimore Oriole. Icterus galbula. Noted once, only, and in St. Marys.
62. Bronzed Grackle. Quiscalus quiscula. Uncommon, but noted along the Ohio River during two field trips.
63. Cowbird. Molothrus ater. Common.
64. Scarlet Tanager. Piranga erythromelas. One or two individuals listed during each field trip.
65. Summer Tanager. Piranga rubra. Robert Patterson found a nest of this species, 25 feet up in an Elm tree, on May 29, 1938. The species seems not to be common, only one other record being secured and that on the same date.
66. Cardinal. Richmondia cardinalis. I saw an immature Cardinal, not long out of the nest on May 25, 1935. Walter Ammon saw another young bird of this species on May 29, 1938.
67. Indigo Bunting. Passerina cyanea. Quite common, but no breeding record was obtained.

68. Goldfinch. Spinus tristis. Common.
69. Red-eyed Towhee. Pipilo erythrophthalmus. I saw a young Towhee on May 30, 1935, on the hill above Raven Rock.
70. Grasshopper Sparrow. Ammodramus savannarum. Recorded once, on May 29, 1938.
71. Vesper Sparrow. Pooecetes gramineus. Listed once, on May 29, 1938.
72. Chipping Sparrow. Spizella passerina. Harold Olsen and Charles Conrad saw a young Chipping Sparrow on May 29, 1938.
73. Field Sparrow. Spizella pusilla. Chester Shields and I found a nest of this species, with three young, on May 30, 1935.
74. Song Sparrow. Melospiza melodia. Common, but we failed to establish a definite breeding record for this species.

(1) Brooks, Maurice, 1935, "Looking to the Future of the Brooks Bird Club," THE REDSTART, Vol. II, No. 6, pp. 39-40 (The Brooks Bird Club, Wheeling, W. Va.)

Wheeling, West Virginia.
