



The Redstart

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NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIRD OBSERVATION IN EASTERN OHIO

Members of The Brooks Bird Club whose homes are in or near Wheeling, W. Va., are "discovering" a new area of opportunity for observations of waterfowl within a comparatively short distance from their homes as a result of the gradual filling of the Tappan Reservoir in Eastern Ohio. The dam on Little Stillwater Creek, in Harrison County, is some six miles Southeast of Dennison and one mile Northwest of Tappan, Ohio. The permanent reservoir will occupy some 2,350 acres and will have a water-capacity covering 3,100 acres.

A part of the series of 14 reservoirs which will comprise the principal units in a comprehensive plan of flood control in the Muskingum River watershed, in Ohio, the Tappan reservoir will be one of the largest in size of the 14. The dam which creates it is 1,600 feet in length, and 52 feet high, and has been built at a cost in the neighborhood of one-half million of dollars. Reallocations of public utilities, such as electric lines, gas lines, etc. has cost another \$204,212.00 and reallocation of 22 miles of highway is set at a cost of about one and one-half millions of dollars.

The more-than-two-million total, which is a part of a project which will involve the expenditure of a grand total of almost 50 millions of dollars, doubtless will play a major part in flood control in the Muskingum watershed. From the standpoint of ornithologists of the region, a particularly interesting "by-product" already has resulted in, at least, the Tappan Reservoir and, doubtless, is duplicated on larger or smaller scale in the 13 other reservoirs created by the project.

Those of us whose homes border the Ohio River occasionally have an opportunity to observe waterfowl on that stream, polluted as it is by industrial and domestic sewage. Seldom, however, within recent years at least has that opportunity gone beyond an occasional sight of flocks of Scaup, or of Golden-eyes and a few scattered Mergansers or Grebes.

This Winter and early Spring many of us learned that within an hour and one-half of automobile ride from Wheeling we may find opportunity to view waterfowl in numbers and variety heretofore beyond our immediate field of operations!

For example, on April 2, 1939, Mr. H.B. McConnell, editor of The Cadiz Republican, and a number of other observers visited the Tappan Reservoir and compiled a list which includes: one Common Loon, three Pied-billed Grebes, eight Mallards, three Common Black Duck, 36 Baldpate, six Pintail, two Blue-winged Teal, five Shoveller, 90 Redheads, 100 Ring-necked Duck, three Red-breasted Merganser, 18 American Coot, and four Bonaparte's Gull, among other species.

Participating in these observations were: Mr. E.S. Thomas, of Columbus, Ohio, curator of natural history for the Ohio State Museum, Mrs. Thomas, and a party of Cadiz people including Misses Mary Mitchell, Mary Margaret Kerr, and Natalie Ramsey, Judge J. G. Worley, and Messrs. Raymond Reed, George Bier, John Mitchell, Milton M., Samuel and Richard Ronsheim, and H.B. McConnell. An account of the day afield is to be found in The Cadiz Republican, of April 6, 1939.

The waterfowl species listed, and others in addition, were recorded, in far greater numbers, by Mr. and Mrs. Maurice G. Brooks, of Ann Arbor, Mich., and Mr. and Mrs. J.W. Handlan, of Wheeling, on April 11. On April 16, a party of Brooks Bird Club members, guided by Judge Worley and Mr. McConnell found similarly "good hunting" and added numbers of Wood Duck, among other new species, to the list for the Spring.

As the reservoir fills, it becomes increasingly evident that the Tappan Reservoir will afford resting and feeding area for more and more waterfowl and that members of The Brooks Bird Club will profit by this near-at-hand opportunity to observe them.

Birds noted there in the Spring of 1939 were noticeably wilder and less easily approached than are those which were observed the same Spring at Pymatuning Lake in Ohio and Pennsylvania -- the latter apparently being more "educated" to the approach of automobiles bearing humans.

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

FIELD NOTES

Auroral Flight of the Woodcock:- On the morning of April 1, 1939, three of us decided to test the devotion of "our Woodcock," which is at least one example of Philohela minor which inhabits the wooded area of the Darrah farm, one mile west of Martins Ferry, Ohio. We were quite sure, from previous observations, that he liked to perform in the moonlight and (much to our discomfort) that rain failed to dampen his activity to any appreciable degree. We remained doubtful, however, about his morning flights.

About 4:45 a.m. we reached his territory and waited. Both Mars and Venus were bright in the sky and all the first magnitude stars seemed to mock at us for expecting gymnastic "sky-dancing" by a bird "before breakfast" -- but we waited.

At 5 a.m. there came the first warning notes of a Woodcock, the whistling sound of its "take-off" and, in a few seconds, the descending song of the sky-dancing bird. Three flights we accepted "on faith" as it was too dark to see the bird. Then, Robins began to sing with gathering light in the East and two more flights by "our Woodcock" were fairly well visible against a now-pinkish sky.

-- Catherine Pugh
William Young
Roger Riggs
Zane Jr. High School
Martins Ferry, Ohio

A Phoebe in Winter in Marshall County, W. Va.:- January 22, 1939, was a particularly cold Winter day, with a half-gale blowing when I decided to take part in the regular Sunday afternoon nature field trip at Oglebay Park. I started to walk to the Park from my home in Fulton, Wheeling, W. Va., was "picked up" by a friend who was driving his car to the park and, on a sudden "brainstorm" deserted my comfortable seat in the car to change my course and head for the Big Wheeling Creek Valley, beyond Elm Grove, and in Marshall County, West Virginia.

I walked through Elm Grove, Patterson and up the Creek valley to my uncle's residence about a mile above the mouth of Britt's Run. He suggested my return later in the afternoon for sandwiches and coffee and I eagerly assented, as, by this time, I felt half-frozen! I watched a Song Sparrow, Melospiza melodia, moving about in the stubble of the creek bank and, farther along my way, a flock of Cardinals seemed literally to be "blowing" through some corn stubble. A warm chase after my hat, which the strong wind blew from my head, and progress through a heavy, dead stand of Giant Ragweed near the Creek bank, warmed me considerably!

A Song Sparrow flushed from almost beneath my feet, but not another bird did I see until I had come within sight of the Boy Scout Camp. By this time my cold hands scarcely could adjust my binoculars, and I was clambering up the steep creek bank when a bird flew from the bank cover and moved upstream. It alighted on a branch of an Elm above the half-frozen creek and, before my cold hands could focus my binoculars upon it, it moved farther upstream. By now I had seen enough of this bird to become much interested and I followed as quickly and as quietly as I could to where I had seen it take cover.

Finally, not 25 feet from where I stood, I saw a Phoebe, Sayornis phoebe, as big as life and just as if it were April instead of a cold day in January! In fact, instead of seeking insects, the bird was engaged in investigating the interior of a cardboard box which lay on the Creek bank. The bird took something from the box and flew to a nearby tree limb where I saw it eat whatever it was it had found in the box. I could scarcely believe my eyes, but there perched the bird, just a few feet from me and in excellent light, twitching its tail in typical Phoebe fashion.

It soon left its perch, flew up-stream beyond my sight and I believed I had seen the last of it. I stopped, briefly, at the Andrew Langmyer farm house to chat with the Langmyer family and bask in the warmth of the home and then trudged along, moving a mile and one-half more up the Creek road before I turned to start my hike back to my uncle's home. On the way I noted Cardinals, Chickadees, Tufted Titmice and once flushed a Grouse, Bonasa umbellus, from woods near the roadway. By this time I was pretty well "froze", my eyes were watering, my forehead felt like someone had struck it with a meat cleaver, and I was tired and hungry.

At my uncle's home I enjoyed a warm meal, a smoke and a talk and set out in the darkness for Fulton and the proverbial "home sweet home."

I still rather doubted the indisputable evidence of my eyes, so far as that Phoebe was concerned. It simply couldn't be! But on March 12, I visited the Boy Scout camp once more and there talked with Mr. C.L. Stuckman, one of the local council's field executives. As we stood near his home, which adjoins the camp, a Phoebe alighted on a telephone wire nearby and we both remarked its presence. Mr. Stuckman mentioned that Mrs. Stuckman had called his attention to the presence near their home of a Phoebe which was observed at intervals throughout the Winter, in and near a barn on the property.

It was then that I recalled that my last view of the "January Phoebe" was in the course of its flight in a direction which would take it to the Stuckman barn, which was not far from the place at which I observed it. With the corroborating evidence supplied by the Stuckman's, I have summoned the courage to report the local occurrence of this bird in January.

-- George Brieding
Fulton
Wheeling, W. Va.

Mockingbird in Ohio County, W.Va.:- The Mockingbird, Mimus polyglottos, is unusual enough in Ohio County, West Virginia, to merit a note on its presence in Winter. Mrs. Handlan, Mr. George Brieding and I saw a Mockingbird in a dense Barberry thicket on the estate of Mr. George W. Lutz, near Oglebay Park, Ohio County, on February 15, 1939. Mr. Harry Lutz, who lives at his uncle's home, later told us he believes the bird had been in the vicinity since early in the previous Fall.

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

Blue Jays at Oglebay Park, W.Va.:- Blue Jays, Cyanocitta cristata, which were present in numbers in Oglebay Park in the Winter of 1938-39, continued to be represented there in the Spring of 1939. It is the first time in at least ten years in which these birds have been recorded in the Park, which is in Ohio County, W. Va. On March 21, 1939, I saw a single individual in the Park and on March 22 heard another calling. On April 17 I heard and saw at least four Blue Jays and on May 7 I watched a pair of birds as they called and flew about in the Park.

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

Dickcissel Colony in Mason County, W.Va.:- I found a small colony of Dickcissels, Spiza americana, near Gallipolis Ferry, Mason County, W.Va., during the second week of June, 1938. I noticed seven or eight singing males. Four of these had taken singing perches on a telephone line along the highway, while others were singing from the alfalfa field beyond.

When the Dickcissels on the wire were frightened, they retired to the alfalfa patch, but soon would return to their perches on the wire.

I was unable to determine whether or not the birds were nesting, as I found no nests and could not flush female birds from the surrounding territory. Nesting may have been interrupted; as at this time the alfalfa was being cut. As long as I lingered in the vicinity I heard the songs of the Dickcissel, which sound to me like dick-dick-dick-cissel and chip-chur-chee-chee-chee.

-- Karl Haller
Bethany College
Bethany, W. Va.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The 12th Nature Training School:- The 12th annual Nature Leaders' Training School opens at Oglebay Park on June 12, will be in session there for two weeks and resume for an additional two weeks at Lake Terra Alta, in Preston County, W.Va. Folders which describe the opportunities offered to those who take part in the Nature School are available for the asking at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W.Va. and THE REDSTART would be particularly pleased if members of the Brooks Bird Club did their part to place these folders in the hands of those who may benefit from them.

The West Virginia Nature Association, which is sponsor of the Nature School, recently assumed the lease of some 18 acres of land at Terra Alta which eventually will probably become the base of the school's operations. It is hoped to begin the building, on this site, and within the next few months, of a permanent camp set-up. The Nature School operates upon a very slim margin of profit, and such receipts as accrue after expenses are paid are accumulated for the ultimate benefit of the school and its patrons.

Every enrollment in the Nature School helps this cause -- and incidentally offers to the enrollee far more than his money's worth in the way of nature instruction and the other good things which go with attendance at this school. The active membership of The Brooks Bird Club, if not the actual being of the club itself, has depended very much upon the Nature School. This institution has been the means of arousing the enthusiasm and interest which has made the bird club possible. Unfortunately, all of us cannot attend the school each session. We can help very much, however, by supplying the names and addresses of non-members of the Club whom we believe are good material for this school. Send them, if you please, to the Director, Nature Training School, Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W.Va.

We hope very sincerely that you may be present when "Uncle Bert" Cromes, chef for the Nature School for the past several years, shouts "Come and get it!" If you can't be there, may you have a representative or two to speak (and eat) for you!