



The Redstart

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

Vol. VI, No. 9,

Edited by J. W. Handlan

June, 1939

SOME ADDITIONS TO A LIST OF THE BIRDS OF PLEASANTS COUNTY

by
Harold J. Bergner

On Sunday, May 21, 1939, the Brooks Bird Club made its second annual field trip to Pleasants County, West Virginia, in the vicinity of Raven Rock, to study the birds and plant life of the region. Although this was the second planned field trip of the Club to this locality, three previous visits to the region were made by members of the Club or by students of the Nature Training School of the West Virginia Nature Association. A summary of results of all field trips previous to that of this year was prepared and published by Mr. Tom E. Shields in THE REDSTART of January, 1939 (Vol. VI, No. 4 pp. 23-29).

Referring to Mr. Shields' article, we find a total of 74 species of birds recorded for Pleasants County with breeding records established for 27 species. It will be noted that most of the breeding records were established on the dates of May 29 and May 30, more than a week later than the dates of the field trip with which this paper deals. Those who planned the 1939 field trip deliberately selected an earlier date than those of previous trips, since it was anticipated that the height of the breeding season might be expected to occur on or about May 20. It was generally agreed after the 1939 field trip, however, that it was scheduled too early for us to find the breeding season at its height.

On this trip, however, a total of 73 species of birds were recorded, including 14 species which had not been included in Mr. Shields' list to which reference is made above. The additional species observed brings to 88 the total noted for the county.

The "new" species for Pleasants County include: Pied-bill Grebe, Black Duck, Scaup Duck (sp. ?), Cooper's Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Sparrow Hawk, Ruffed Grouse, Killdeer, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Bank Swallow, Tennessee Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler and Blackburnian Warbler. No collecting was done and the birds are recorded on the strength of sight records carefully made by the group, many of whom are experienced observers.

Nests of four species not previously reported from Pleasants County were found and evidence that four additional species nest in the county was established. These "new" breeding records or evidences of nestings included:

1. Bob-white. Colinus virginianus. James Handlan observed young birds of this species.
2. Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Archilochus colubris. A nest was found, containing two eggs, by Harold Olsen.
3. Flicker. Colaptes auratus. A nest of this species was found by Harold Olsen.
4. Starling. Sturnus vulgaris. A nest of this species was found by Harold Olsen.
5. Worm-eating Warbler. Helmitheros vermiverus. James Handlan observed adults of this species carrying food.
6. Oven-bird. Seiurus aurocapillus. James Handlan observed birds of this species carrying food.
7. Indigo Bunting. Passerina cyanea. James Handlan observed birds of this species carrying food.
8. Song Sparrow. Melospiza melodia. A nest of this species was found by Harold Bergner and George Breiding. The nest contained four eggs.

Nests of four species were found for which previous breeding records were based upon observations of young birds. These included:

1. Brown Thrasher. Toxostoma rufum. A nest was found by George Breiding.
2. Robin. Turdus migratorius. A nest was found by James Handlan.
3. Red-eyed Towhee. Pipilo erythrophthalmus. Two nests of this species were found by Miss Dorothy Conrad, Harold Olsen and James Handlan.
4. Chipping Sparrow. Spizella passerina. A nest of this species was found by Harold Olsen.

Nests were found for several species for which actual nesting records previously has been established and published. These included nests of the House Wren, found by Harold Olsen; Catbird, found by James Handlan; Wood Thrush, found by Ralph Bergner; and Kentucky Warbler, found by Charles Conrad.

Thirteen nests were found during the field trip, representing 12 species of birds. The trip proved interesting and satisfactory from the standpoint of results achieved, and it is hoped that future expeditions to this territory by the Brooks Bird Club will result in gradual accumulation of data upon which to base a representative list of the birds of Pleasants County.

Those who participated in the 1939 Club field trip included: Ralph Bergner and Charles Conrad, Misses Dorothy and Carolyn Conrad, Harold Olsen, George Breiding, Ted Frankenburg, James Handlan, jr., and the writer, all Active Members; Judge John G. Worley, a Corresponding Member; and Misses Betty and Ursula Counihan and Gertrude Vennum, and Messrs Palmer, Carter and Tice, non-members.

420 Warwood Avenue
Wheeling, W. Va.

BROOKS BIRD CLUB SPRING MIGRATION CHART FOR 1939

Observations of the 1939 spring migration of birds in the general vicinity of Oglobay Park, Wheeling, West Virginia, were hampered, to a certain extent, by week-end expeditions of The Brooks Bird Club to various points outside the general region in which migration observations have been made for the past several years.

Nevertheless, part, at least, of the Club's active membership, along with other experienced observers appear to have established an "earliest arrival" chart for the year which is quite comparable with those of preceding seasons. There were no notable reductions in normal numbers nor increases in normal numbers of various species reported. Black-throated Blue Warblers appeared to be present in greater numbers than ever before and Black-throated Greens, for years considered our most abundant transient Warbler visitor, appeared to have increased little in numbers over the comparatively few recorded in 1938. Chestnut-sided Warblers appeared once more in normal numbers after a "lean year" in 1938.

Earliest arrival dates were recorded as follows:

BROOKS BIRD CLUB SPRING MIGRATION RECORDS

GREBES

Pied-billed ----- 4/7

HERONS

E. Green ----- 5/14

HAWKS

Broad-winged ----- 4/16

SHORE BIRDS

American Woodcock ----- 3/6

Spotted Sandpiper ----- 4/22

Solitary Sandpiper ----- 4/23

Mourning Dove ----- 4/1

Yellow-billed Cuckoo ----- 5/7

Whippoorwill ----- 5/4

Nighthawk ----- 5/21

Chimney Swift ----- 4/13

Hummingbird ----- 5/2

FLYCATCHERS

Crested ----- 5/2

Phoebe ----- 3/14

Least ----- 5/7

Wood Pewee ----- 5/7

SWALLOWS

Bank ----- 4/24

Rough-winged ----- 4/17

Barn ----- 4/23

Purple Martin ----- 4/10

WRENS

House ----- 4/17

Bewick's ----- 4/23

MOCKERS

Catbird ----- 4/24

Brown Thrasher ----- 4/11

THRUSHES

Wood ----- 4/23

Hermit ----- 4/16

Olive-backed ----- 5/14

Veery ----- 5/7

OLD WORLD WARBLERS

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher ----- 4/23

Ruby-crowned Kinglet ----- 4/16

VIREOS

Yellow-throated ----- 5/7

Red-eyed ----- 4/24

Warbling ----- 4/25

WOOD WARBLERS

Black & White ----- 5/7

Blackburnian ----- 5/8

Blue-wing ----- 4/23

Tennessee ----- 5/7

Nahsville ----- 5/7

Parula ----- 5/7

Yellow ----- 4/22

Magnolia ----- 5/7

Cape May ----- 5/7

Black-throated Blue ----- 5/7

Myrtle ----- 4/26

Black-throated Green ----- 4/23

Cerulean ----- 5/7

Chestnut-sided ----- 5/7

Bay-breasted ----- 5/7

Blackpoll ----- 5/14

Ovenbird ----- 5/7

Louisiana Waterthrush ----- 4/9

Kentucky ----- 5/7

Yellowthroat ----- 4/23

Yellow-breasted Chat ----- 4/23

Wilson ----- 5/14

Hooded ----- 5/7

Canada ----- 5/14

American Redstart ----- 4/23

BLACKBIRDS

Redwing ----- 4/8

Orchard Oriole ----- 5/7

Baltimore Oriole ----- 4/17

Grackle ----- 3/11

Cowbird ----- 4/6

Scarlet Tanager ----- 4/28

SPARROWS

Rose-breasted Grosbeak ----- 5/7

Indigo Bunting ----- 5/7

Savannah ----- 4/25

Grasshopper ----- 4/23

Vesper ----- 4/23

Chipping ----- 3/26

Field ----- 3/25

White-crowned ----- 4/22

White-throated ----- 4/23

FIELD NOTES

Whip-poor-will at Oglebay Park, W.Va.:- Repeated singing by a Whip-poor-will, Antrostomas vociferous, awakened us at 3 a.m. on the morning of May 5, 1939. The singing bird apparently was on a branch of a Plane Tree which comes within a few feet of one of the bedroom windows of our residence at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, West Virginia. Any doubts we may have had about reported carrying powers of the Whip-poor-will's voice were settled by this close contact with a singing bird. The song literally filled our house with incredible volume.

The Whip-poor-will is of apparent rare occurrence in the Park in migrations and does not nest in the immediate vicinity, so far as we are aware. As a boy, camping along Big Wheeling Creek about 10 miles from what now is Oglebay Park, I distinctly recall nightly singing by Whip-poor-wills at that location. So far as I am aware, there exist few records of the species for the Park and this seemed to justify publication of this note. Mrs. Handlan shared the unique experience of hearing this bird's song from within a few feet of our ears.

--- J.W.Handlan
Oglebay Park

Unusual Nesting Site of the Red-winged Blackbird:- Members of a class in bird study at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W.Va., found a nest of the Red-winged Blackbird, Agelaius phoeniceus, at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W.Va. on June 14, 1939. The nest, which contained four very young birds, seemed no different than any other nests of the species. However, it was suspended about six inches above ground in a clump of Daisy Fleabane and we were told that this is the first nest of the Red-winged Blackbird found in the Park which has not been in Alfalfa. Records kept at the Park and word-of-mouth testimony of experienced observers of the Park birds support this statement.

--- Priscilla McCoy
Slippery Rock, Pa.

So far as the Editor is aware, the Redwinged Blackbird's nest reported by Miss McCoy and observed by many of us is the first of its kind to be found in the Park in any other setting than Alfalfa.

--- J.W.H.

Apparently "Logical" Behavior of a Chipping Sparrow:- A class in bird study at Oglebay Park, Wheeling, W.Va. observed on June 17, 1939, actions of a Chipping Sparrow, Spizella passerina, which are difficult to reconcile with the generally accepted belief that birds are incapable of logical behavior, or virtually so.

We first observed this particular Chipping Sparrow in a bridle path along which we were walking. The bird was within 20 feet of us. The path had been dug level along a sloping hillside field and the upper border of the path was overhung by Orchard Grass. As we

watched the Sparrow, it flew from the path to a stem of grass, alighting very near to the head of the stem. The weight of the bird gently eased the top of the stem to the open pathway. The bird retained its position on the stem and fed from the head, which then lay on the ground. The bird moved from the stem, which immediately sprang upward to its original position. While we watched, the Chipping Sparrow repeated this procedure, feeding successively from the heads of five other stalks of grass.

In other words, we watched this bird "ride down" a grass stem, feed from its top, release it and proceed to the next stem in line on five occasions. The sixth performance was followed by flight of the bird away from that immediate vicinity.

This observation supports one which my father and mother, James T. Handlan, sr. and the late Mary V. Handlan, made several years ago in the yard of the family home in Wheeling. They repeatedly watched Goldfinches, Spinus tristis, "ride down" the stems of Cosmos, upon which, when the seed-bearing heads had reached the earth, the "riding" bird fed. On numerous occasions, also, companions of the "rider" awaited upon the ground and joined in the feeding made easily available by their companion's action. They reported this behavior, also, for English Sparrows, Passer domesticus. On one occasion I saw the latter species go through this performance, one bird riding down a stalk, others joining in feeding upon the flower-seeds when the head reached the ground.

It is quite easy to understand how this "trick" might accidentally be learned by birds accustomed to ground-feeding. Yet, to observe it repeatedly, as was our case in observing the Chipping Sparrow, is to find it surprisingly difficult to reject it as a "planned" procedure on the part of the bird.

--- J.W.Handlan
Oglebay Park

GENERAL NOTES

A Small Boy Has his Doubts About Robins! Mr. A. B. Brooks, naturalist of the Oglebay Institute staff, at Oglebay Park, recently received a letter from a boy attending Clay School, Wheeling. The letter, which Mr. Brooks says is typical of many inquiries received by him to evince the interest of young people in nature, is as follows:-

"Dear Mr. Bird Man:

"I want to know if a robin is mean to other birds. Does he peck the other birds to death and does the robin start the fight or do the other birds. Thanks. Sincerely yours

Tom McCoy."

Texas Bird Observer Visits Oglebay Park:- Mrs. Clarence H. Miller of Harlingen, Texas, recently visited Oglebay Park on her way home from Washington, D.C. where she personally delivered various ornithological records to Dr. H.C. Oberholser, of the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey. The records consist of Mrs. Miller's field notes on birds of Cameron County, Texas, a result of 14 months intensive observation, and these were placed at the disposal of Dr. Oberholser in connection with his proposed book on "The Birdlife of Texas."

Mrs. Miller is keenly interested in conservation activities and has been prominently identified with them in her home state. She expressed much interest in the nature program which revolves around Oglebay Park and left names and addresses of Texans whom she believed would like to be on the nature mailing lists of Oglebay Institute.

Incidentally, she left one dollar as payment of annual dues of a Corresponding Member of the Brooks Bird Club.

An Invitation from Dr. Waldron:- Dr. R. A. Waldron, of Slippery Rock State Teachers College, Pa. has asked that the Brooks Bird Club and other nature study groups of the Wheeling area place upon their 1940 calendars the last week-end in April as a time to visit Slippery Rock. At that time, he said, a number of nature students will be present for a general gathering which will include field trips and meetings and he would like very much to have some of the "Oglebay group" present.

The Editor respectfully suggests to officers of the Brooks Bird Club that this date be placed upon the Spring field trip schedule for 1940 and that as many of the Active Members, and nearby Corresponding members of the club as possible, plan to attend. Dr. Waldron and his fine group of nature enthusiasts from Slippery Rock are, themselves, important factors in the Oglebay nature program and are more than deserving of any cooperation the Club can extend.

Dues of Corresponding Members:- Another reminder ---- annual dues of Corresponding Members of The Brooks Bird Club are \$1.00, instead of 50 cents. The increase in dues is made necessary by the fact that the club no longer receives much of its materials for mimeographing of THE REDSTART without cost to the organization. Active Members always have paid \$1.00 dues and, in addition, have contributed the volunteer work and time necessary for operation of the club and publication of the Club's journal. Temporarily, at least, there will be no increase in the dues of Active Members. The Club solicits the Active Membership or Corresponding Membership of anyone interested in bird study. Active Membership involves attendance at regular monthly meetings and is by election, only. Corresponding Members are admitted upon application.