



The Redstart

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

Vol. VIII, No. 5.

J. Harold Olsen, Editor

February 1941

THE TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA, NOV. 21-24, 1940

Lawrence E. Hicks

The writer has attended every annual meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Club since 1925. Fifteen years ago, Dr. Lynds Jones, of Oberlin, Ohio, one of the three living Founders, had just retired after 36 years' service as Editor of The Wilson Bulletin. The organization then had only about 550 members, and less than a hundred attended its annual meetings, including a faithful group of no more than 40 or 50 out-of-town visitors. Today, the Wilson Ornithological Club has a widely distributed membership (which in 1939 passed the 1000 mark) and several hundred delegates from many states attend its carefully planned meetings in fact one of the evening sessions at Minneapolis established a new record, with more than 500 persons present. The Wilson Bulletin is one of the most carefully edited of all ornithological publications and four times a year brings to its members an amazing amount of worthwhile material in spite of the fact that most of its limited budget comes from \$1.50 associate memberships.

The visit to the 1940 meeting involved a round-trip of some 1,780 miles from Columbus, Ohio - since ornithologists once bitten by the travel bug never travel as directly "as the crow flies." There was much to see in spite of the fact that the route was well-known - a nice flight of Rough-legged Hawks across Indiana, another of Red-tailed hawks on the return. Worth the whole effort was the 120 mile cruise along the entire length of the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge which lies along the Mississippi River between Wisconsin and Minnesota. From the highway on the highlands of the west bank one can look up and down the river for many miles and across a valley two to six miles in width which is mostly filled with water impounded by a series of navigation dams. At intervals flocks of waterfowl are seen; especially on the thousands of acres of marsh land and shallow waters where one can count 500 to 2,000 large muskrat houses from any one of a number of observation points.

Readers will recall the sudden and most severe Armistice Day storm of 1940 which trapped so many waterfowl and deer hunters, and resulted in not a few deaths. Sub-zero temperatures and mountainous drifts caused the University of Minnesota to postpone its activities for several days. As we approached the Twin Cities

on Thanksgiving Day, a thaw had nearly cleared most of the roads, though highways to the north were still blocked, so that field trips had to be cancelled. An impenetrable fog blanketed everything for 150 miles. However, it was impossible to leave the road in many places as snow banks left by the big plows walled either side of the road, sometimes higher than the roof of our automobiles.

The W. O. C. President in 1938-39, Margaret M. Nice, of Ohio Song Sparrow fame, made the last part of the trip with us. Our Thanksgiving dinner was a little late, but we managed to finish in time to join the other members for a most profitable session of the W. O. C. Council: Dr. George M. Sutton, 1st Vice-Pres.; Dr. S. Charles Kendeigh, 2nd Vice-Pres.; Dr. Olin S. Pettingill, Jr., Secretary; Dr. Gustav Swanson, Treasurer; Dr. J. Van Tyne, Editor; and the three councillors, Dr. Miles D. Pirnie, Lawrence H. Walkinshaw, and Prof. Maurice Brooks; -- nearly all well known to readers of THE REDSTART.

Dr. Sutton, Roger T. Peterson, Walter J. Breckenridge and others served on the 1940 Bird Art Exhibit Committee which brought together possibly the largest and most representative collection of ornithological art yet to be assembled. The University Art Galleries, located in a new million dollar building and with a staff of some 40 employees, arranged for the loan, shipping, and display of these art treasures -- some 260, many of especially large sizes not seen in most exhibits.

Dr. Sutton was also made Chairman of the new Illustrations Committee to obtain additional illustrative materials and an occasional color plate for The Wilson Bulletin -- the accumulated income from the endowment fund to be supplemented by other funds donated for this purpose. That this Committee is functioning is evidenced by the magnificent color plate of Dr. Sutton's (the Emerald Toucanet) used to illustrate his paper on certain birds of Mexico in the last issue (December 1940) of The Wilson Bulletin.

Maurice Brooks, as Chairman of the Affiliations Committee, presented a splendid report of the principles involved concerning local or sectional organizations, such as The Brooks Bird Club, which might wish to adopt a loose affiliation with the W. O. C. He also presented a recommendation which the council accepted, that the W. O. C. accept the invitation for affiliation with the American Ornithologists' Union. Affiliation with the A. O. U. was made available to the W. O. C. and the Cooper Ornithological Club, including a voting representative on the A. O. U. Council, so that there would be a body sufficiently representative to consider ornithological matters of continental scope, and give official weight to the Check-list of North American Birds.

Among the 24 papers presented which would have been of particular interest to readers of THE REDSTART were: (1) Swainson's Warbler in the Mountains of West Virginia by Maurice Brooks, (2) Notes on the Sycamore Warbler by Albert F. Ganier, (3) First Impressions on the bird life of southern Arizona by George M. Sutton (illustrated by original color paintings which were passed through the audience during the lecture), (4) the Conservation Symposium on Inter-relationships of

game and non-game species of birds and techniques of harvesting and producing game crops, by Prof. Aldo Leopold, Chairman, Lawrence E. Hicks and Dr. Warren W. Chase, and, (5) the amazingly beautiful color films (which each year seem to have reached the ultimate of perfection, only to be surpassed a year later) of Pettingill, C. Grant, Wright, and Breckenridge.

As usual the program was crowded with fascinating things to do and interesting people to see, until even the most rugged of us nearly dropped from exhaustion as we left the new Museum Building each evening, passing through the underground garage made available to us (a city block in size) to the gorgeously furnished Continuation Center, which, together with rooms and dining halls, was turned over to our out-of-town visitors for the duration of the meeting.

The annual dinner, with about 200 present, was held in the new two million dollar Coffman Memorial Union -- yes, those Minnesotians do things in a big way, even their football teams. Big institutions, big programs and big buildings usually have some big men that make them possible -- and thus it was altogether fitting that the W. O. C. at its Annual Dinner gave special honors to Dr. T. S. Roberts (author of perhaps the finest of all state bird faunas -- the two-volume "Birds of Minnesota") and to Walter J. Breckenridge and the other co-workers of Dr. Roberts, including the entire local committee, that somehow succeeded in doing the impossible in arranging a superb meeting.

Members of The Brooks Bird Club attending the Nature Reunion in October of 1940, will recall the strange bird specimen (1) of many plumages which some of its members created and brought there. Loaned to the writer, this bird passed through several additional moults and acquired marvelous abilities such as no bird yet described can equal. Thus the "Flu-flu" bird -- the bird with no present or future, only a past -- made the trip to Minneapolis, "flabber-gasted" each and every ornithologist attending the annual dinner, and, exercising all of the perogatives which any Flu-flu possesses, delved down into his infinite wisdom and from his avian past, told the assembled multitude the things that it ought to hear -- once -- but only once, in a lifetime.

The Minnesota Ornithologists' Union, issued a special number of their printed magazine, The Flicker, to commemorate the W. O. C. meeting; the articles contained in it each concerning some phase of the life of Alexander Wilson, the father of American ornithology and the great ornithologist from whom the W. O. C. takes its name. A copy was placed at each banquet place, together with the menu folder which listed the seven birds which take their vernacular name from Alexander Wilson: Wilson's Tern, Wilson's Phalarope, Wilson's Petrel, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Plover, Wilson's Warbler, and Wilson's Thrush. Mr. Breckenridge (to stimulate some discussion) made a fine habitat sketch of a female Wilson's Phalarope being followed by four downy chicks in a smartweed marsh, to adorn the cover and back. Does a female Phalarope ever tend her own chicks? Or is it the duty of the males only? Wouldn't THE REDSTART readers -- Ohio hill-rovers or West Virginia mountaineers -- give a great deal to be able to answer a thousand similar questions about breeding marsh birds by local observation?

Since none of the eastern or southern cities (Columbus, Wheeling, Nashville) were in a position to sponsor the 1941 meeting, Champaign, Illinois, was selected with Dr. S. Charles Kendeigh as Local Committee Chairman and the facilities of the Illinois Natural History Survey, the Ecological Laboratories and the Vivarium of the University of Illinois being made available. It is planned to have for the 1941 meeting an extensive demonstration and exhibit of ecological procedures, techniques, and equipment. The Inland Bird Banding Association, which also met with the W. O. C. at Minneapolis, voted to exhibit bird banding traps and methods. All ornithologists are urged to attend the Champaign-Urbana meeting -- a place readily accessible to most of the readers of THE REDSTART. Remember the dates -- the Friday and Saturday following Thanksgiving Day, 1941.

Since Dr. Sutton is scheduled to be the next W. O. C. President, it now seems probable that the 1942 meeting will be held at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, also well within reach of those dwelling in the West Virginia area.

-- Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio (2)

(1) -- Dr. Hicks refers to the "bird" mounted by Frank Connor, of Morgantown, and the other members of the Brooks Club that either reside in that city, or are enrolled in the West Virginia University situated there. It consisted of parts of various birds and mammals, and was a conglomeration of claws, tails, furs and feathers.

(2) -- Dr. Lawrence E. Hicks is director of the Ohio Wildlife Research Station, President of the Wilson Ornithological Club, and Secretary of the American Ornithologists' Union. He very kindly agreed to write the report of the W. O. C. meeting at the request of this editor.

FORAY COMMITTEE SELECTED FOR 1941

A general committee of five has been appointed to further plans for the second annual nature study foray to be conducted in June, 1941, under the sponsorship of The Brooks Bird Club. Committee members, whose appointments were approved by action of the club's executive committee at its regular meeting on January 28, include:

Charles Conrad, chairman, Dorothy Conrad, Dorothy Neuhard, Russell West, all of Wheeling, and, E. R. Chandler, Chester, West Virginia.

Definite responsibilities for the '41 foray will be allocated the committee members at an early meeting of the general committee. Prospects are that sub-committees, each including additional active and corresponding members of the Club, will be assigned separate duties in connection with the forthcoming activity.

Selection of a location for the 1941 field excursion and choice of definite dates are a prime responsibility of the general committee. Club members with recommendations to make in either of these matters are urged immediately to address the Foray Committee at the Club's headquarters, 113 Edgewood Street, Wheeling, West Virginia.

Carolyn Conrad, secretary-treasurer, and John W. Handlan, president, are ex-officio members of the general committee.

-- John W. Handlan
91 Lynwood Avenue
Wheeling, West Virginia

GENERAL NOTES

Instruction Classes, General Anatomy, 1:

As announced in the December 1940 issue of THE REDSTART, The Brooks Bird Club will sponsor a series of informal science lecture demonstrations dealing with the physiology of the bird. The arrangements, now, have been completed.

The first meeting will occur on Tuesday night, February 11, in the club-rooms at 113 Edgewood Street, and will, of course, be an explanation of the purpose, methods, and materials to be used during the remainder of this month, the month of March, and the first three weeks in the month of April.

We were fortunate in that James T. Handlan, Jr., M. Sc., could obtain permission to allow him to plan the course for us. In addition to having his Master of Science Degree in Zoology, he has studied for one year in the University of Munich, Germany, and is an excellent man to outline such a course.

The Club has secured the use of some 30 sets of dissecting instruments, has ordered specimens of invertebrates and vertebrates for dissection and demonstration purposes, and has completed the arrangements whereby the entire course may be made available, free of any charge, to every member of the club.

Provisions have been made, also, that if any who are not members of the Club care to enroll, they have only to join, pay the nominal fee required for active membership, and receive every privilege.

The course will be a comparative study of the musculatory, skeletal, and nervous systems of invertebrates and vertebrates, in general, and a detailed study of the vertebrates, only.

From the preliminary outline describing the course, one paragraph clearly states the purpose: ". . . In a beginning course of this nature, in which the entire animal kingdom will be briefly surveyed, it is impractical to consider any particular animal in detail. In the life group, Invertebrata, however, an attempt will be made to acquaint the student with the gross structure, external and internal, of at least one "type" specimen from each class of vertebrates. The bird will be the only animal studied in detail. As far as possible, charts, visual aids of other types, and microscope slides will serve as perceptual aids during this course. It is hoped that the student, after completing this study, will have a general idea of the complexity of the animal kingdom, the evolutionary relations between different groups of animals, the morphological relations of various organs and systems in the same and in different individuals of life groups, a fairly thorough concept of the details of bird anatomy and of other vertebrate anatomy, and a fairly complete knowledge of dissection."

-- J. H. O.

Emergency Feeding of Game Birds:

At the January meeting of The Brooks Bird Club, Herbert J. Moore, a director of the Board of the Ohio County Wildlife League, visited with us, and discussed the emergency feeding program the League has in charge, and immediately was offered the cooperation of the Club in that connection.

Through Walter Howard, district game protector, Julian Ulrich, chairman of the local Game Committee received the information from the Charleston headquarters to the effect that the state is prepared to stand the expense, within limits, of feeding wild game birds in times of heavy snows, or of freezing of lighter snows, leaving a hard crust which would entirely cover the normal food of these birds.

Ulrich, acting for the League, and John W. Handlan, as president of the Brooks Club, and, a director-chairman of one of the League board's committees, are to work out a plan for this emergency feeding program as soon as it is possible to do so.

The executive committee of the Bird Club has not, as yet, acted officially upon the terms of cooperation, but it is expected that they will endorse, enthusiastically, the entire program.

Handlan, in his "Outdoor" column in the Wheeling News-Register, wrote, on Sunday, February 9: ". . . This forthcoming cooperation between the two organizations is actually a logical and helpful one for both, and it is to be hoped, the first of a series of cooperative activities. In the long run, the two groups are interested in the same general idea of wildlife conservation. Few of the Bird Club members are hunters and anglers although there are several who are. All are fully conscious, however, that the sportsmen license buyers "pay the freight" for what we have in West Virginia in the way of laws for game protection. Most hunters and anglers are, whether they realize it, part naturalist, too, and well able to understand the enjoyment the Bird Club members derive from observing, rather than shooting, wild creatures."

-- J. H. O.

FIELD NOTES

Behavior of Ruffed Grouse:

In the June issue of THE REDSTART, Vol. VII, No. 9, p.55, I wrote of the behavior of the Ruffed Grouse, Bonasa umbellus, and have this observation to add to that report.

All during the month of October, 1940, one or two individuals of these species of bird were always to be found somewhere along the territory between home and the park office, and with one or two possible exceptions, they appeared very tame, would not fly from the ground with the customary "whirl" of wings, but would walk - nonchalantly, it seemed -- into the woods and out of sight.

On several occasions my young son, Jack Flower, would have accompanied me on my walk, and even while I pointed, and talked to him about the birds, and while he would gesticulate and proclaim his delight in a loud voice, the birds would neither hurry off, or pay the slightest of attentions to us.

My only explanation of the birds being there would be that they were sunning themselves, there in the open roadway, and lawns about the buildings. We always found them in the same spot -- never over 25 or at the most, 50 feet away from the "usual" place.

-- George Flower
Lost River State Park
Mathias, West Virginia

Flight of Raven, in Lost River State Park, W. Va.:

The peculiar flight characteristics of the Raven, Corvus corax, have always been observed, with extreme interest, by the writer whenever allowed the occasion to do so. Not long ago, a Raven flew by my cabin in Lost River State Park, Hardy County, West Virginia, and I watched -- without the aid of binoculars, for the bird was very close -- the motions as it went past. It seemed to me, that with each "drop" in his flight, it would cry, as the writer would describe it, "croawk." This was a new call, for I had never heard it before, whether the birds were flying, or not, in this peculiar manner.

It is, of course, exceedingly difficult accurately to judge distances when looking up into a clear sky with nothing with which to compare sizes and distances -- but it may be of interest to mention that it appeared to me that these "drops" in flight, that is, flying at a normal height, folding the wings and dropping, only to rise again to the original height, would have been nearly 100 feet in depth. With this estimate of the distance of each drop, it might be possible for the readers to picture the curious, undulating flight I observed.

-- George Flower
Lost River State Park
Mathias, West Virginia

White-throated Sparrow, Red-eyed Vireo Notes:

On the Club's Thanksgiving Day bird walk, the members and friends climbed the hills back of my home in Warwood, near Wheeling, W. Va. It was a nice day -- for the sun was shining, and the air was warm enough to allow us to dress lightly, and yet comfortably.

Fifteen species of birds were listed during the walk, and of them, two seem to be worthy of a note in this journal. The White-throated Sparrow, Zonotrichia albicollis, sang from a distance, and most of us "froze" hoping to hear it sing again. As we moved on to a growth of trees overgrown with wild grapevine, and with an undergrowth of many smaller trees and weeds, we found a number of this species of bird feeding and hopping about in the branches. These birds are not a rarity, of course, but they are not commonly found in this section of the country as far as this writer's knowledge, or the results of notes published in THE REDSTART, are concerned.

Near the same location we heard and saw a flock of Red-eyed Vireos, Vireo olivaceus, which, again, are not so commonly seen in flocks in this area.

-- Dorothy Conrad
423 Warwood Avenue,
Wheeling, West Virginia

Ruffed Grouse in Ohio County:

On Sunday, November 23, 1940, a few members of the Club conducted a walk up, and over Stratford Hill which lies back of the section of Wheeling that is Woodsdale. A light snow covered the ground, and not many birds were found. One Ruffed Grouse, Bonasa umbellus, was flushed from the cover not more than four feet from the leader of the group. Grouse have appeared very sparingly on our bird lists.

-- Dorothy Conrad
423 Warwood Avenue,
Wheeling, West Virginia

THE REDSTART is published monthly by and for the members of The Brooks Bird Club. Corresponding Membership may be obtained upon payment of \$1.00 which includes a twelve-month subscription to THE REDSTART. Members are invited to send in for publication, pertinent field notes. These are subject to editing to insure the greatest possible accuracy and consistency with the editorial policy. Memberships, field notes, and correspondence should be addressed to The Brooks Bird Club, 113 Edgewood St., Wheeling, W. Va.
