



The Redstart

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

Vol. IX, Nos. 6 & 7

Karl W. Haller, Editor

March & April 1942

"HALLER'S TRIP"

by

Karl W. Haller

The long arm of Hudson Bay that stretches to the south nearly three hundred miles meant only a large body of salt water in the north country to me. However during the early part of March 1941, I made plans to accompany Mr. W. E. Clyde Todd, of the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on a two-man bird-collecting expedition to that region.

The plans were laid to visit this body of water known as James Bay. Never having taken part on an expedition to such a remote region, I looked forward with many pleasant anticipations to the work ahead. Mr. Todd, having travelled extensively in this area and other parts of the Labrador Peninsula, was an expert counsellor on matters pertaining to such a trip.

As Mr. Todd had already laid the primary plans for the summer, my first job was to locate and collect the equipment which he thought necessary (and also that which I included of my own accord!). Camera, adequate clothing, collecting materials, notebooks, and the usual run of such equipment was included. The gear for camping and the normal course of living in the north country was collected at, and forwarded from Pittsburgh. This included a canoe and outboard motor, mosquito-proof tent, cooking utensils and similar appurtenances that were the property of the Carnegie Museum.

Finally on May twenty-fifth, we left Pittsburgh for Toronto, Ontario. The next morning, we passed through the usual formality of the Canadian Customs. In the evening we actually began our long trip with Moosonee as our next

terminus. This town, at the southwestern corner of James Bay is where the railroad portion of our journey ended. We made our headquarters on Moose Factory Island which is near the mouth of the Moose River which in turn empties into James Bay. This small body of land is several miles from Moosonee and is the headquarters (trading post) of the local representative of the Hudson's Bay Company.

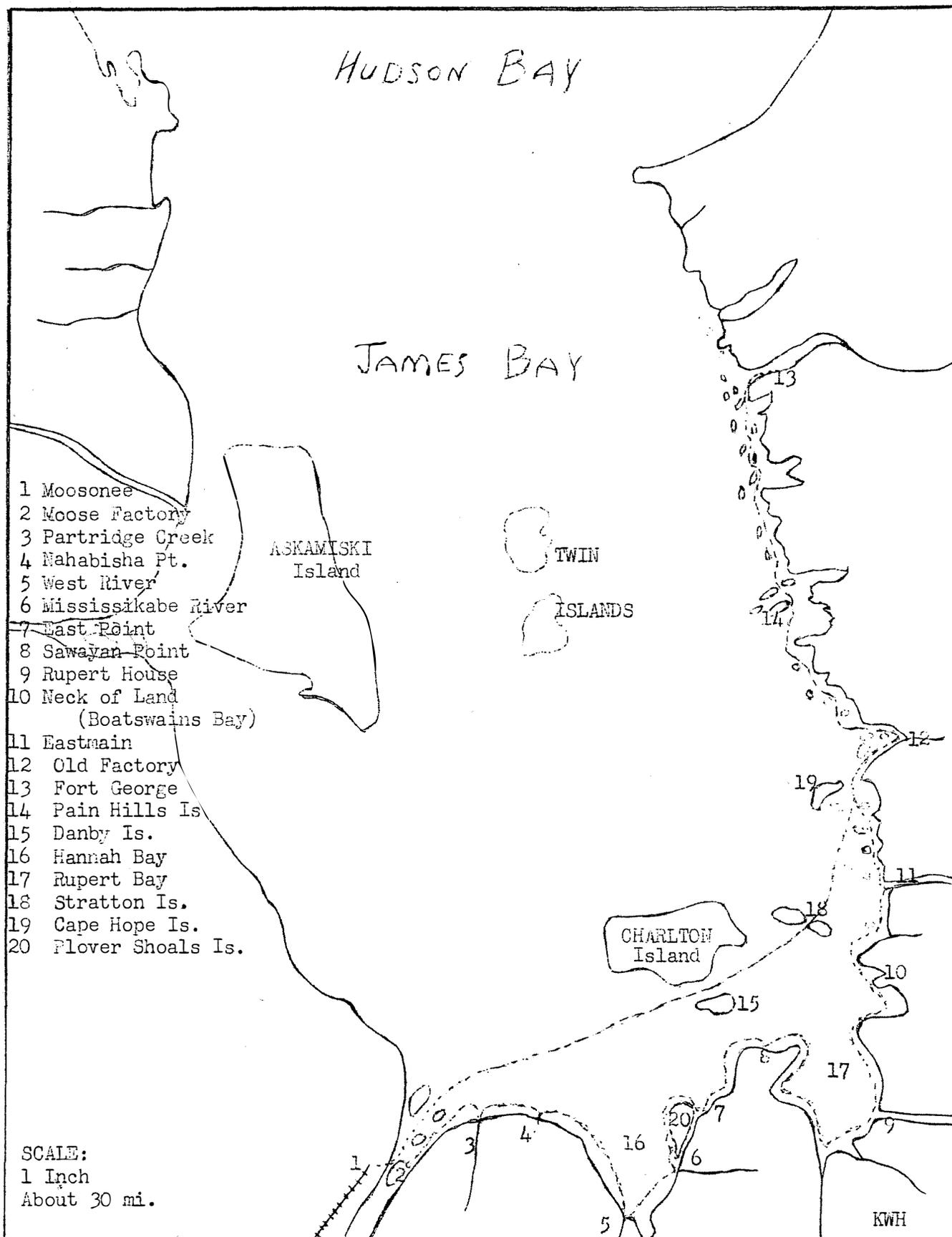
Moosonee is approximately one thousand miles north of Pittsburgh. The first portion of our journey (from Pittsburgh to Toronto) entailed an overnight trip. The balance beginning on May twenty-sixth, continued for three days and nights to the end of the railroad at Moosonee. Our trip from that point to Moose Factory with our equipment was made by canoe. This latter settlement was destined to be our headquarters for about ten days. The train arriving at Moosonee but once a week from Cochrane did not carry some of the supplies, which we were expecting, so it was necessary to wait for the next delivery.

The town of Moosonee, being the railroad terminus, is also the loading depot for the Hudson's Bay Company supply boats that ply James Bay and southern Hudson Bay to carry food and materials to the various posts on the bay. Some of the southern posts such as Rupert's House, Eastmain, Old Factory and Fort George are fortunate in having two or three trips made to them during the summer months. But more northern posts as Great Whale River and the Belcher Islands get their supplies but once during the summer. These supplies, of course, must last until the next summer when the boats will once again make their trip.

When we were working on Moose Factory Island, I met Capt. Joe Nielson, a person of long acquaintance with Mr. Todd and who lent a new character to me. Capt. Nielson has been in the James Bay region since 1903 when he was shipwrecked. He is now skipper of the Fort Charles, an 85-foot power boat hauling some 65 tons of freight. We made arrangements with Capt. Nielson to meet him at Fort George as they were making a trip to that post around the thirtieth of July. We could then return to Moosonee on the Fort Charles.

On June tenth, following the leadership of our guide, George Carey, we loaded our canoe, this being the first day that the weather was favorable. This task consumed almost the entire morning and it was nearly noon that we were enabled finally to start our outboard motor and make the final step into the northland. This first day of travel was but 20 miles into a region known locally as Partridge Creeks which were a series of streams entering into the wide mouth of the Moose River. We camped at the edge of one of the streams several miles back from the Bay so that we would be in a suitable location to collect birds and also that our camp be placed in a spot protected from strong winds and unexpected high tides.

The country-side surrounding Partridge Creeks was composed of marsh-lands; partially because of the occasional excessive tides in the low-lands and because of the altitude, which is approximately at sea-level. This, to me, appeared much like the prairie country of the mid-west under "flood conditions". While we had intended to stay here but a day or two, the weather continued to be so extremely bad that we stayed much longer than we expected. This was not altogether a disappointment as George was an excellent cook and this helped to alleviate some of the difficulties.



The marshy area of this region afforded ideal breeding conditions for many shore birds and occasional wild Canada Geese were seen. Some of the more interesting land birds seen at this point were Leconte's Sparrow, Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Yellow Rail (a few seen, the balance heard) Wilson's Snipe, Marsh Hawk, Short-eared Owl, Green-winged Teal, an occasional Pigeon Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Alder Flycatcher, Lincoln's Sparrow, Yellow Warbler, Tree Swallow, Yellow-throat, Canada Jay, Canada Warbler and countless numbers of Savannah Sparrows.

To me, the Yellow Rails were not only the most interesting, but they were one of the most common of the birds in the area. This we knew because of the clicking noise that these birds make. Once in a while, we were able to flush one of the birds but most of them were located and identified by their "calls". Generally these birds were found in the heavy marsh grass that edged the water courses and water holes. Where the water permitted a greener growth of grass, these birds would use as their last resort when we attempted to flush them from the more heavily matted areas. If we heard a "clicking" from the heavy (and somewhat brown grass) we would try to flush the bird. Almost invariably this individual would move toward the damper spots and the more lush grass. It was at these points that we were able to occasionally cause the bird to move into the air and to observe its erratic flight. By erratic, I do not mean that the course of the flight of the bird is zig-zagged, but that it is up from the heavy grass, somewhat curving and back again into cover. We did not get any specimens of Yellow Rails at this point but at a later date we were fortunate to collect several of these species despite the difficulties encountered.

From Partridge Creeks we canoed to our next site at Nattabisha Point, a vast marshy area. We encountered Marsh Hawk, Yellow Rail, Black Duck (with young), Olive-sided Flycatcher, Semi-palmated Plover, Wilson's Phalarope, Killdeer, Leconte's Sparrow, Sharp-tailed Sparrow and again myriads of Savannah Sparrows. At the edge of the marshy area in the alders, we found Alder Flycatchers, Swamp Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows and Fox Sparrows. In the heavier spruces were Ruffed Grouse and Spruce Grouse.

There came a time when it seemed to me that a bath was an absolute necessity. At Nattabisha we had camped near the banks of a very clear trout stream so I determined that at last, soap and water should do their job. But after getting completely soaked, the water became so cold and the flies and mosquitos so pesky that in order to finish the job, I found it necessary to put on my long underwear and finish my bath semi-clothed.

The southern portion of Hudson Bay presents tremendous difficulties to a party such as ours that was moving in a heavily-laden canoe. The wind over the water had a tendency to squall at frequent and unanticipated times so that travelling was risky many times during the trip. The shore line of the country by which we were traveling was not abrupt or steep. In most cases the water was but a few feet deep. In fact, any number of times the short paddle which I was using would very easily touch the bottom of the bay. While the shallow waters do permit somewhat smoother boating, it is necessary that the guide be well acquainted with the tide. Strangers canoeing, and

being unacquainted with the water conditions might very possibly find themselves stranded on a mud flat several miles from the shore when the tide goes down. It would be a very tiresome job to carry a canoe and duffle to dry land once the tide had lowered the water and moved the shore outward. It was many times our bad fortune to find that when the weather conditions were satisfactory for proper travel, the tide would not be sufficiently high to permit us to move, or the exact opposite conditions might prevail. This caused numerous delays in our trip. While these delays did break up our trip schedule, nevertheless, we took advantage of these opportunities to do considerable ornithological study at several points throughout our expedition.

Our next stop was the West River, and from there we travelled to the Mississikabe River. Having to spend several days at this point was not altogether a waste of time as new birds were observed or collected. We located our camp near a winter Indian camp among the willows and alders. This particular camp was quite large as was seen by the many "derby-shaped" frame works of alder branches and used as dwellings. However, at this time the Indian camp was deserted as all had gone to the posts to spend the summer months. Many of them had canoed to Moose Factory and Rupert's House.

By this time I had become much better acquainted with the leader of our trip. I have always had an enormous admiration for Mr. W. E. Clyde Todd's work in the Carnegie Museum at Pittsburgh, and I knew something of the care which he exercised in his studies of the collections in the Museum, but it was not until I had had some rigorous travel with him in the North country that I fully realized the ambitions to perform a task that can keep a man going at his work. Mr. Todd made his first trip into this part of the North country in 1908 and since then, he has come time and again to study the birds of Northern Canada. In many parts of this country, Mr. Todd was the first white man to travel so I realized that mine was a very unusual privilege in being permitted to visit this part of the Hudson Bay region with him.

From the Mississikabe River it was necessary to pass wide around the treacherous Plover Shoals Islands, a rocky and shallow portion along the east coast of Hannah Bay. At Plover Shoals, we saw many Ring-billed and Herring Gulls as well as common and Arctic terns and loons. They were apparently nesting on the rock strewn grassy islands but we did not have time to investigate. The tide was running out in a brisk wind and we had to cross to East Pt. amid the heavy ice flow that made the latter part of the journey somewhat dangerous. While camped at this spot, we found numerous yellow rails, some red-winged blackbirds, Lesser yellow-legs, semi-palmated plover, black ducks, Canada jays, magnolia warblers, redstarts, Tennessee Warblers, solitary sandpipers, and pine grossbeaks.

At East Point I had photographed my only nest. There was not much of a thrill in this find for it was but the nest of a song sparrow. However, several interesting flowers were photographed. When we broke camp at East Point, the weather conditions were fairly satisfactory (except for a cold rain which lasted the entire day) that we were able to make one of our longest day's travel. From here to Mesakonon Point is a distance of 15 miles. At Mesakonon it was necessary to pull into shore among the ice floe as the handle on the

motor broke. The guide repaired it by replacing the broken part with a stick of dried wood. We were wearing every bit of clothing that we could possibly carry but were still unable to keep our bodies warm. Now, for a while, we were able to leave the shallow waters of the shore line and get out into the deeper portion of James Bay. While the danger of hitting submerged rocks now confronted us, we were able to get away from the fear of being stuck on a mud flat with the lowering of the tide.

At Sawayan Point, we made camp again after traveling about 30 miles. This time amongst the tall black spruce that grew almost to the water's edge. Here we saw the wreck of a Hudson's Bay Company boat which we were told floundered about the year of 1900. From our observation, the timbers in this boat still seemed to be in good shape and as it was high above the waters, it would probably stand for many years to come. Here at Sawayan Point I had the first opportunity to see white whales. These mammals were near the shore, in fact they were practically at our feet, and we had a good opportunity to watch them through our binoculars. To me the whales seemed to be about 9 feet to 12 feet long.

At Sawayan Point I collected a garter snake of a form different than any I had ever before seen. The white stripes which are usual on this reptile were almost completely absent. In the place of the whitish or yellowish markings usually found on garter snakes, the sides of this specimen were reddish. I was very fortunate in getting some very good color photographs of this reptile.

One afternoon while Mr. Todd and I were sitting behind a wind break of small spruce trees, an unusual bird, a female white-winged crossbill flew into camp and perched atop a small spruce tree almost over our heads. I call this bird unusual because it was the only one of the species to be seen or heard by either of us on the entire trip. Mr. Todd told me that on previous trips, many white-winged crossbills were seen.

After being held up at Sawayan for nearly a week we decided to travel to Rupert's House, at the south end of Ruperts Bay; our food and gas supplies were getting low, as half of our supplies had been shipped from Moose Factory to Eastmain on a H. B. Company boat making its first trip to that post. We intended to pick up our supplies there (Eastmain) and continue north to Fort George.

We crossed the Notaway River to Ruppert's River and visited the Ruppert's House post of the Hudson's Bay Company. By now it was July 5th and we had been traveling for 25 days - almost twice as long as we had planned to use on the trip to Eastmain. During all this time, we saw only two persons, both of these being Indians, so we were very glad to meet the Jimmy Watts. Mr. Watt is manager for the Hudson's Bay Company post at Ruppert's House. This Hudson's Bay Post was very interesting as we were told that it was the first post to be established by this old company. We had difficulty in unloading our canoe at this point for there are Cree Indians living at Ruppert's House and apparently everyone of them came down to watch and greet us coming in. They crowded around our canoe so that it made it very difficult to unload our equipment and to transport it to the post.

During our stay at the post, we visited the canoe factory. Here a number of Indians are engaged in making several different types of canoes by hand, which are used not only locally but are shipped throughout the entire James Bay region.

From Ruppert's House, we travelled north to a point called Neck-of-land, (Boatswains Bay) and here the insect life of the Northland made living and traveling conditions even more difficult. Large horseflies, black flies and mosquitoes made life miserable.

Mr. Todd told me of times on other trips to the region, when travelling through the bush these insects were so thick that he could see but a few feet ahead and the buzzing of their wings was so loud as to make bird songs unheard! Bothered as we were by these insects, it was very amazing to see the lack of effect they would have on the Indians whom we contacted. They seemed to have no more effect on the Indians than an ordinary house fly would have on us back home.

It was in Neck-of-land that we again found great numbers of yellow rails. There are many hundreds of acres of marsh land at this point all covered by the tall marsh grass which grows to about four feet during the summertime. When the winds and snows and rains of the fall arrive this grass is pounded into thick cushions which cover the entire landscape. It is in this yellow knotted grass that the yellow rails are found. Everywhere we travelled we could hear the click-click-click, click-click. As this call was very easy to imitate, we found it possible to attract these birds almost to our very feet, but still it was only occasionally that we got to see one of them for the grass was so thick and these birds stayed on the ground, hiding so closely that they might be but two or three feet away and still be completely out of sight.

It took us six days to travel the eighty miles from Ruppert's House to the Hudson Bay Company's Eastmain Post on the Eastmain River. We were the guest of Elmer Duxbury, post manager, for several days. Here, also, we found a party of Canadian government surveyors who were using an aeroplane fitted with pontoons to travel from one base to another. Two of these men, we found, were somewhat interested in birds, and they asked us regarding a clicking noise which we identified for them as yellow rails. We were also in an area where the American and Three-toed Woodpeckers were found. Ducks of many species were seen every day.

Bathing privileges on a camping trip into the North country are few and far between. At some places small pools of water in the rocks along the shore would be filled by the rain and if the days were sufficiently warm and and sun sufficiently bright, this water might warm up enough so that it would be possible to take a scrubbing. Aside from the few occasions where we found the condition, it was necessary to "go native" and get used to going without a bath.

In contacts with Dr. George M. Sutton, who has spent some time in the North Country, he told me some stories of the Eskimos and their games. He told me of the fervor with which card games are played and the pleasure which the

Eskimo apparently get from their long drawn-out game. I was to find the same condition among the Indians on my trip. At the posts the Indians would make checker boards from a piece of box, drawing the squares with a pencil or crayon. Black and white stones would be used for the counters. The games would be played so hard that sometimes the checker boards would be worn out after a single day's play. It was very amusing to watch these games in progress for whenever cards or checkers were the order for the day, the players would whoop and yell at the top of their voices each time a play was made.

We left Eastmain after breaking our camp and the total length of the trip for the day was approximately two miles. We found it necessary to put our boat in on an island near the mouth of the river and we were marooned for an entire week. This part of the North Country being flat has a condition to be found everywhere in level land - the wind always blows, at times it blows stronger than others, sometimes at night there is a strong wind. To one from the hills, it is almost impossible to get used to the continuous breeze and there were times during our trip when it was necessary to pitch our tent in such a manner that it almost hugged the ground. Speaking of our tent, this was, of course, waterproof and the solution used apparently was paraffin. Occasionally we would have an exceptionally warm day and the paraffin would become soft. The "bulldogs" the name for the large flies which are found in this country, would settle in huge swarms - whether they found anything to eat on the paraffin-covered tent, or whether they got wax for their own use, I do not know, but I do know that in warm weather the tent was almost black with these so-called "bulldogs".

The rocky island on which we were marooned was not large enough to support many birds as it was possible to count nearly every individual one. There were two pairs of yellow warblers and song sparrows, a few robins and several spotted sandpipers. Occasionally a crow was seen flying overhead as well as the two species of gulls and terns already mentioned in this paper. Probably the most numerous birds were the redpolls that came in flocks from the mainland, a mile or so distant. Ravens were also observed although they were more frequently heard calling. While marooned on the island near Eastmain, the Fort Charles came to deliver supplies to the post. Since weather conditions were undependable, we contacted Skipper Nielsen on the Fort Charles and made arrangements to travel as far as Old Factory River with him.

At Old Factory, because the southward migration had already begun, we found many birds which were unusual in our everyday experiences. Numbers of Hudsonian curlews and knots were found. There were pectoral sandpipers and numerous semi-palmated plovers, common and Arctic terns, ring-billed gulls, scoters, loons, and the pigeon hawk were included on our list. It was at Old Factory that we saw our first Eskimos. After becoming acquainted, we found them quite different from the Cree Indian. In appearance, they were much alike, possibly the Eskimos were slightly smaller and to me, their faces appeared to be more rotund. It was in their natures that the greatest difference appeared. At other stopping points the Indians would come down to watch us unload our boats, pitch our camp, but they never offered to help.

Whenever we contacted Eskimos, they not only were very glad to see us and express their sentiments, but they lent willing hands to the unloading of the boat and setting up of camp. Many interesting pictures of Eskimos and Indians were taken here.

It was now the middle of July and we still had 125 miles to go to Fort George, so rather than risk the balance of the trip by canoe, we made arrangements to travel on the Nouveau Quebec to our final destination, Fort George. The Nouveau Quebec is a freight boat which hauls supplies for the Catholic Missions located in the bay region. Again, we were fortunate in finding a boat going our way as we had but a week to get to Fort George to meet Skipper Nielson. As the Nouveau Quebec was packed with supplies for Fort George, it was necessary for us to sleep several nights over the hold. We were protected from the elements by a tarpaulin thrown up in the form of a tent over the hold. Enroute to the post we observed many guillemots, mergansers, loons, white-winged and American Scoters, terns and gulls, as well as a few whales and seals. When we finally reached Fort George and began our studies, we were pleased to find Orange-crowned Warblers.

One of the most surprising things to me during our trip was the fact that forest fires, whenever we were in wooded country, could be seen most everywhere. I recall that in one day I counted 15 different spirals of smoke from forest fires. The natives in this section express an opinion that I have heard in other parts of the country - they claim that forest fires are of a benefit, permitting the destruction of heavy underbrush and the growth of young straight timber. The fires in this country are not set by hand of man as is common in our own country, but it was my understanding that most of them were set by lightning. One of my best pictures of the Post at Fort George shows four spirals of smoke in the background.

It was now the first of August so we did not delay too long at Fort George but as soon as the boat was ready to return to Moosonee, we packed in our duffle and travelled south with them. From Fort George the course was through the channels among the islands south to the Cape Hope Islands. From there it was southwest through the Struttons to Charlton Island and thence to Moosonee. We arrived at our destination two days before the weekly train was due to leave for the south. This gave us ample time to repack all our duffle, settle our accounts with the Hudson's Bay Company and bid farewell to our friends.

--Martindill Apartments
Wheeling, W. Va.

1942 BROOKS BIRD CLUB FORAY

Watch for the next issue of THE REDSTART for it will carry more news and announcements of the 1942 Brooks Bird Club Foray. Charles Conrad has already prepared the principal portion of the formal announcement that will be sent by mail to those requesting detailed information.

Advance data: The dates, June 13-20, 1942; the location, Holly River State Park, (subject to the availability of facilities); the leader, Charles Conrad. Watch for THE REDSTART for further information and make your reservations as soon as possible. If you want complete details, write for the folder that will be available within the next couple of weeks.

STATE PARK CUSTODIAN'S SCHOOL

A letter from Christian Dill representing the State Park Division of the West Virginia Conservation Commission was received in Wheeling recently with the expression of much pleasure by the members of the Brooks Bird Club. This letter carried an implication that the activities of the bird club in conducting their forays (summer camps) in Lost River State Park during 1940 and 1941 were watched with much interest by the state officials. It also carried a direct request that some member of the bird club be appointed to bring to Jackson's Mill on March 1-5, 1942, during the meeting of the state park custodians, the story of the success of these annual forays.

The writer was appointed to do this "work" and attended three days of the conference. On the second day, he was privileged to outline to the assembled custodians, rangers and headquarters representatives, the many advantages we had found in group camping in the state parks. In the course of the discussion, suggestions were also given for nature study and other programs in the state parks.

The report given to the bird club on the writer's return to Wheeling was filled with enthusiasm on the character and calibre of the employees of the Division of State Parks. We are sure that if any similar organization is able to weather the present and coming storm of economic and political disturbance, it is this group of men and the facilities that they command.

--Russell West
113 Edgewood Street
Wheeling, West Virginia

A. B. BROOKS

After fourteen years of work deserving of recognition of both Ripley and Who's Who, A. B. Brooks has decided to devote some of his time to rewriting his justly celebrated work on the "Trees of West Virginia," as well as doing other work that will climax a life-time of service.

A. B. Brooks might be designated by Robert Ripley in his "Believe It or Not" column because he has done a job that is absolutely unique in the field of adult education. He has introduced to thousands of people the pleasures of early-rising, of walking in the out-of-doors, of listening to the song of a bird, of the color of a flower. The recognition of biologists and recreational leaders has given proper acclaim to his accomplishments as naturalist in Oglebay Park.

Since 1928 Brooks has led Sunday morning nature walks during the spring, summer, and fall. How many thousands have attended and enjoyed these weekly walks can only be estimated but we do know that one May morning 250 were counted during the trip.

It was not surprising that "A. B." instilled in a great many people an appreciation of the out-of-doors. And it was not surprising that in a small minority of his followers there grew even more than an appreciation of some of the life-forms. That is the story of the founding of The Brooks Bird Club.

There are many other viewpoints of the work of A. B. Brooks as Naturalist in Oglebay Park. The one expressed here is that of the members of the local bird club. There is one thing in common in all viewpoints, that is the enthusiasm of everyone of the impressions made for Oglebay Park and for the City of Wheeling by the work of this one man.

We wish him continued success for a long, long time.

--Russell West
113 Edgewood Street
Wheeling, West Virginia

THE REDSTART is published monthly by and for the members of the Brooks Bird Club. A corresponding membership may be obtained upon payment of one dollar which includes a twelve-month subscription to THE REDSTART. All members are permitted to contribute field notes for publication. The Brooks Bird Club, 113 Edgewood St., Wheeling, W. Va.