



The Redstart

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CAMP D'EAU, 1899

by

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The title of this article suggests that which is meteorological rather than ornithological. Yet any one who has studied birds knows how closely the weather is related to all sorts of outdoor activities, and how much the birds are influenced by all sorts of weather conditions. The younger ornithologists who may peruse these few pages have already observed the suppression of bird activities in some types of weather and the activation of bird life on favorable days.

Forty-five years ago this coming July, my schoolmate and friend, "Billie" Montgomery (the Rev. Donnell Rankin Montgomery, who later on became a home missionary in Alaska) and I made a three-day trip into a region then known as "The Pines". Many West Virginia bird students have been there in more recent years. This delightful section - delightful before it was spoiled by lumbermen - is in the Rich Mountains, not far from Pickens, in Randolph County. The most generally known mountain in the region is Turkey Bone Mountain, so called because of marks on a rock that seem to resemble one of the bones of a turkey. The general elevation is near 4,000 feet above sea-level. The usual tree species of the southern Appalachian Mountain region are found there. Notably common is the balsam fir, formerly called "Blister Pine" by the people of that region. Many red spruces are mixed in with the firs. Many wild fruits, thickets of briars, old dead trees, an abundance of insect life and undisturbed conditions made this a most favorable place for bird study. Having spent my earlier life in the hills of the central part of the State, it was a wonderful experience to spend a few days in this higher region where northern forms of life were to be found in such variety and abundance.

As "Billie" and I passed along the old road that traversed the tops of the mountains, on the evening of July 3, 1899, darkness gathered and we had to find a shelter for the night. At the right-hand side of the road, about a

mile beyond the Zender farm, we saw an attractive-looking cabin among the great evergreen trees that then grew in their virgin beauty. Being tired and hungry we were ready to sleep as soon as possible. So we took immediate possession of the shack, remodeled the 'browse bed' that we found therein, carried in some fresh fir branches and proceeded to make ready for our supper and for a night of rest. In the middle of the night our slumbers were disturbed by a family quarrel in a nest of deer mice that had previously occupied this shelter. "Billie", being from the state of Illinois and not at all accustomed to forest experiences, was quite excited and responded rather nervously to some of the sounds we heard. I may as well confess that I had similar emotions especially when I heard an oft-repeated noise such as I had never heard before and which I have heard just once since then. The wheezy, asthmatic vocalizations suggested hyperpnea, and caused me to hold my breath in expectation of an attack of some sort. But the bird disturbed us only by his voice. Many years later, when camping at the Cranberry Glades in Pocahontas County, I heard the same sounds, repeated in the same way. This second performer was so considerate as to utter some other notes that enabled me to identify the bird as a barred owl.

Our night having passed we were wakened by a chorus of bird songs such as I have rarely heard in any part of the country. The first night, thrushes, which I now believe to have been olive-backed thrushes, lulled us to sleep and the same musical birds began their morning chorus. Winter wrens sang beautifully near by; many warblers, juncos, chickadees and nuthatches added their songs to the morning hymn; suggestions of a more northern region were to be observed everywhere; on all sides life seemed to be so natural, free and fascinating to the two of us who had so recently turned our minds from theologically profound studies.

Before we take up a brief consideration of some of the species that were observed it may be well to explain the name that was given to our camp. In the late afternoon it began to rain. At once we came in from our walks out among the birds and took what we thought was shelter in our shack. When the rain poured through the new clapboard roof just as copiously as it did outside, we began to examine the structure of the cabin. All was rather new, built as we thought by some inexperienced men or boys from some city, but their architectural knowledge seems to have lacked intelligence for they had begun laying the split shingles at the top of the roof, rather than at the bottom, and they overlapped in the wrong way, the lower end of each shingle and not the upper end being covered by the row of shingles next below. Rain poured through so freely that we found no shelter there. "Billie" suggested that the camp be called CAMP D'EAU and it was thus named. The second night we spent in a comfortable room in a little hotel in Pickens, then we came back to Turkey Bone for the third day.

Here follows a list of the species which I recorded and studied for the brief period:

Red-tailed Hawk. One male bird was seen back in "The Pines".

Sparrow Hawk. Observed flying over the fields near the top of Turkey Bone.

Ruffed Grouse. Several were heard the first day. On other occasions, when I visited this same region, I have found the grouse in very considerable numbers.

Bob-white. Very common the Winkler farm.

Barred Owl. Heard the first night uttering its breathy note.

Chimney Swift. Observed on both July 4 and 5 flying over the dense forest and out over nearby fields. Quite common.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Feeding among wild flowers near top of Turkey Bone.

Flicker. Seen only among the trees near top of Turkey Bone.

Red-headed Woodpecker. This species was observed on Turkey Bone among old dead trees.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Observed on each of the three days we were there. It was especially abundant among the sugar maples near the top of Turkey Bone and was found in the evergreen forest also.

Hairy Woodpecker. Observed once or twice among the evergreen trees far back in the forest.

Downy Woodpecker. On both July 4th and 5th this species was observed in "The Pines" and in open woodlands near summits of mountains.

Kingbird. Observed on July 4th as we were passing through old fields not far from the more densely wooded sections.

Wood Pewee. This species was not observed on our 1899 trip but was seen on Turkey Bone in August 1907.

Barn Swallow. Common about the farms that adjoin the forests. In 1907, a nest with young was found on Mr. Eggleston's house, and this species was quite common in that region.

Blue Jay. Observed in "The Pines" on July 3, 1899, and on August 28, 1902. Often seen in this region.

Crow. Several were seen on July 5th flying about the summit of Turkey Bone.

Black-capped Chickadee. Though I may have erred in my identification, the chickadees about those mountains were apparently of this species. In the transition zone, through which one passes as he nears the Canadian zone on top of the mountains, I have always observed the Carolina chickadee, Penthestes carolinensis, but the species far up among the higher elevations seems to be P. atricapillus, as indicated by song, size and colors.

Tufted Titmouse. Seen and heard in "The Pines" as well as about the summit of Turkey Bone.

White-breasted Nuthatch. As we approached the dense forest on the late evening of July 3, this species was observed.

Red-breasted Nuthatch. Heard among the tall spruces in early morning; abundant. Far more common than the white-breasted nuthatch. In the early

summer of 1907 (I think that was the year) my two brothers, Fred E. Brooks and A. B. Brooks, and I found the nest of this species in a hole in a living spruce tree about 20 feet up.

Brown Creeper. In August, 1907, this species was observed in "The Pines". Two were seen on trunk of spruce tree; heard them all morning.

Winter Wren. On July 4, 1899, this species was observed many times. Early in the morning these miniature birds were singing volubly and most delightfully. My notes bear this record: "Nest of winter wren in old up-turned root of a spruce. Nest made of moss and spruce twigs. Narrow entrance - one inch in diameter. Nest lined with feathers of wild birds - mostly ruffed grouse feathers. Six eggs, white, dotted with very reddish brown; dots condensed in circle around the larger end. Nest not well concealed. Bird flushed from nest. The female showed no agitation, and returned to nest while observer was in sight and did not seem to notice that nest had been disturbed." On the same day another nest of this species was discovered. It was in a pocket of moss hanging on side of a beech tree. Nest in process of construction. Entrance one inch in diameter. Made of spruce twigs. Bird in voluminous song.

Catbird. Seen on July 4th in upper transition near "The Pines".

Robin. Rather common in all that region. Several observed far back in the forest as well as about the fields in the beautiful farming district adjacent to the forests.

Wood Thrush. This species was observed in "The Pines" and added its voice to the grand chorus which we heard during the first evening.

Veery. In full song late in the evening far back in the forest. (I now believe, since becoming well acquainted with the olive-backed thrush, that this species was also present. My recollections of the thrush songs which we heard certainly suggest the song of the olive-back.)

Bluebird. Observed in the woodsy fields about the top of Turkey Bone.

Cedar Waxwing. Seen near edge of "The Pines".

Yellow-throated Vireo. Not observed on my first trip into this region but seen and heard in "The Pines" on August 28, 1902.

Mountain Vireo. This subspecies was not observed in 1899, but on two visits in that region in the years immediately following, I recorded this species and wrote these words, "presumably V. s. alticola". Many seen.

Red-eyed Vireo. Observed several times near the edge of "The Pines" but not back in the dense forests.

Black and White Warbler. Seen among the trees near the top of Turkey Bone.

Blue-winged Warbler. In my notes I find the following brief record - "One seen near summit of Turkey Bone".

Parula Warbler. Observed on July 5th near summit of Turkey Bone.

Magnolia Warbler. This species was quite common. On July 4th I made this note - "A young bird flushed having appearance of magnolia warbler. Squeak-call made and adult male and female magnolia appeared showing uneasiness". Later, on the same day, other magnolia warblers were seen with young.

Black-throated Blue Warbler (probably Cairns' Warbler). Along the road leading from Pickens to the tops of the mountains we frequently saw this bird and heard its song. On July 4th, back among the spruces, we saw a male bird feeding its young. Though no specimens were taken at that time, in later years I have collected birds in that region and have observed many of them closely and have found them to have marks indicating that they are of the subspecies Dendroica caerulescens cairnsi. On August 14th of the year 1899 I saw this species along Fork Ridge somewhat to the west of Rich Mountains.

Black-throated Green Warbler. On July 4th this species was observed feeding young. Quite common in Turkey Bone region.

Ovenbird. Seen and heard near edge of "Pines".

Yellow-Throat. Heard only in the fields as we approached the forested section, though, in August, 1902, they were observed near the edge of the spruce and fir forest.

Hooded Warbler. Observed both in "The Pines" and about the top of Turkey Bone. I remember so well hearing this rather southern species in full song in a great tangle of young evergreens in a ravine not far from Camp D'Eau.

Canada Warbler. Many of them in song about our camp.

American Redstart. Not observed in the Rich Mountains but seen in August, 1899, along Fork Ridge.

Scarlet Tanager. Found only among the sugar maple trees that grew so abundantly on the top of Turkey Bone. One day, as "Billie" and I walked along the road at the edge of the Turkey Bone fields, I saw a brilliant male scarlet tanager fly into a bush of mountain elder that was bearing great quantities of scarlet fruit. The tanager ate freely of these fruits and the color combination was most striking.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak. A beautiful male adult was seen in "The Pines". A few years later, possibly in 1907, I saw a grosbeak of this species building its nest in the spruce forest.

Indigo Bunting. Observed in the fields and among the briars at the forest edge. Rather common.

Purple Finch. This species was not observed in 1899 but on August 28, 1902, it was abundant in "The Pines". I saw a pair of them drinking water at a spring. Flying everywhere among the trees and about the farms. Adult males were observed in full plumage.

American Goldfinch. Observed near edge of "Pines". In August, 1902, I found them very abundant about the farms.

Towhee. A very common species at the edges of the woods. Especially common on Turkey Bone. It was on a trip into this region, a few years later, that Fred E. Brooks and A. B. Brooks defined the range of the towhee in very suggestive words - "From the North Pole southward".

Vesper Sparrow. The fields, as we approached the spruce forest, were in many places, covered with young evergreen trees of the two prevailing species - red spruce and balsam fir. The grass was clean and flourishing and there were many places that seemed to be very attractive to the birds. In the last field, as we approached "The Pines", we heard the lovely evening song of this species. Observed also on Turkey Bone.

Carolina Junco. It seemed to me that the most interesting bird of that region was the Carolina junco. Everywhere old nests were seen and there were signs of nesting. Great numbers of the birds were singing in their chorus fashion.

In later years I have found many nests along the road-banks, in the roots of old fallen trees, and in many other places. The indications are that the birds found in the Rich Mountains are Junco hyemalis carolinensis. In recent years I have collected many birds in that general region, and have examined many nests and measured many eggs. This species was, in the old days, exceedingly abundant throughout that region.

Chipping Sparrow. Found among the small evergreen trees at edge of the forest.

Field Sparrow. A number of these birds were observed in the fields and on top of Turkey Bone.

Song Sparrow. Seen only on the top of Turkey Bone.

This completes the list, though in more recent years, I have collected other species in that region and among the other mountains not far away. No great effort has been made to determine the subspecies that we saw on that memorable trip. In fact many subspecies now recognized were not known at that time.

The chief value of this article, if it has any value, will be found in the comparisons that may be made. What changes have taken place in these years? Here is suggested a problem for our young ornithologists to pursue. However, the almost primeval forest has gone and many changes have taken place. How much these man-made changes have influenced the avifauna of the region may be easily studied. This list may be of help. But, whatever of pleasure some present-day bird-student may find, he can never go back to the fantastic shelter and the weird conditions of Camp D'Eau.

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WHITE PELICAN IN KANAWHA COUNTY, W. VA.

Literally hundreds of people saw a single White Pelican, Pelecanus wrythrorhynchos, at South Charleston, Kanawha county, West Virginia, in late October and early November, 1943.

Mr. Roy Roberts of Milton, W. Va. told the writer on October 30 that "a big white bird, with a long bill and some yellow on the throat" had been seen in Kanawha river backwater in South Charleston. On October 31, Mr. Frank Knight, of Charleston, W. Va., telephoned the copy desk of the Charleston Gazette, where Roberts and the writer are employed to say that "a pelican" was present in the same situation in which Mr. Roberts previously reported it. The latter confirmed the story on November 1. Numerous school children and grownups were looking at the bird during the noon hour, he said.

Mr. Russell DeGarmo, game technician of the Conservation Commission, and the writer went to South Charleston the afternoon of November 1 and there found a White Pelican, perched on a stump in a backwater inlet of the Kanawha near the Dunn Hospital. We carefully examined the bird, using good 7x binoculars at a distance we estimated as less than 100 feet from the shore. Mr. DeGarmo, formerly employed by the old U. S. Biological Survey in Louisiana, is thoroughly familiar with the species.

We saw the bird rise from the stump on which it perched to the length of its yellow legs and flap its black-marked wings vigorously. The stump itself was liberally whitened by droppings.

Mr. DeGarmo planned to collect the bird for official record, but duties intervened and he was unable to return to the spot in which it had been seen before the pelican disappeared. It was last reported on November 3. We have been unable to verify rumors that the bird was shot and removed by persons interested from the standpoint of curiosity or motivated by the idea that the pelican affords good eating!

The location in which the bird was seen is quite near the high fence surrounding the reservation of the U. S. naval ordnance plant operated at South Charleston by the Carnegie-Illinois Steel Company and it is unlikely that anyone would use firearms in that vicinity without attention from the U. S. Marine guard detail stationed on the reservation. Mr. DeGarmo and the writer notified Marine headquarters by telephone of our plans to use binoculars in the vicinity of the plant before journeying to South Charleston.

---John W. Handlan
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