



# The Redstart

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

VOL. XI, No. 12

Maurice G. Brooks, Editor

September 1944

## NOTES ON SWAINSON'S WARBLER IN KANAWHA COUNTY, W. VA.

by

John W. Handlan

Swainson's warbler, Limnothlypis swainsonii, has been established as a summer resident in Kanawha county, West Virginia, as a result of observation by members of the Brooks Bird Club's Charleston chapter. Brooks and Legg (1) list the species as having been taken in Monongalia, Lincoln and Nicholas counties. Legg and others found Swainson's warbler rather common in Holly River state park, Webster county, in June, 1942 (2). The new stations apparently then establish Kanawha county as the fifth\* in the state in which the species is known to have occurred.

No positive breeding records were established for any of several fairly well marked territories occupied by singing males during the spring and summer of 1944, nor were any specimens taken. At one Kanawha county station, an adult was seen with young as will be recorded hereafter. But there seems little doubt that the species was established in the vicinity of Charleston during 1944 as a summer resident. Such "circumstantial evidence" as is available is here presented.

On April 23, 1944, the writer, leader of a field trip in Jenkins hollow, called the attention of his group to a singing bird which he identified as being a Swainson's warbler. The bird was not seen by any of the group, but it was heard to sing repeatedly.

Alston B. Shields and the writer on May 7 heard at least two singing Swainson's warblers, one in Jenkins hollow and another in Chappell's hollow, less than a mile distant.

On May 8, Russell DeGarmo found and watched for more than an hour two Swainson's warblers on a low hillside between the two hollows mentioned above. These birds apparently were a pair. Mr. DeGarmo previously had been acquainted with the species in the deep south and reported his observations without knowledge that singing individuals had been recorded two weeks previous to his find.

From that time until late summer Swainson's warblers were seen and heard by numerous observers in at least three well-defined stations. All of these were in the Jenkins hollow-Chappell hollow area just beyond the boundary lines of Kanawha City (Charleston) and less than a mile from the Kanawha river at elevations of approximately 600 feet.

On May 13, Mrs. Handlan, little John Williamson, and the writer heard and saw a singing Swainson's in open woods at a distance of less than 30 feet. On May 14, half a dozen observers watched and heard a Swainson's at this same station. It occupied the same song perch as on the preceding day. Eight observers stood within less than 15 feet of a singing male on the morning of May 21. For perhaps 15 minutes we watched and listened to this bird which did not leave its song perch (about 20 yards from the one mentioned above) until after we had left.

Numerous individuals and small groups of observers watched and heard Swainson's warblers in these hollows well up through the latter part of July.

Dr. Lawrence E. Hicks, George Breiding and Forest Buchanan visited Charleston the weekend of June 24 for the express purpose of seeing and hearing Swainson's warbler, and, in company with Mrs. Handlan, Mr. and Mrs. Alston B. Shields and the writer, heard the bird engage in intermittent periods of singing. Dr. Hicks later saw an adult with two young, the latter barely able to fly - this at a station in Jenkins hollow. No nests were found.

Because of the especial tameness of a male which occupied territory in Jenkins hollow, numerous observers were able to make careful notes of its song and mannerisms on the song perch. This bird only once was seen in company with another of its species, but gave every indication of strong territorial attachment, becoming increasingly wary and more difficult to approach as the summer passed.

The birds under observation sang a song remarkably like that of a Louisiana Water-Thrush so far as its two opening notes were concerned. The usual song was five notes, with an occasional variation which added a sixth but which was seldom heard. When in full song the individual which we watched most closely sang at 45-second intervals. In delivery of the song, the bird's head was thrown far back and the entire body quivered noticeably with the evident violence of its singing effort.

Brooks' and Legg's paper mention the thick rhododendron cover in which the bird was observed in Nicholas county and the same type of vegetation appeared at its home in Holly River state park. The Kanawha county birds were found in fairly heavy deciduous cover along small streams with sassafras, spice-bush, greenbrier and blackberry tangles forming an under-story for mature elm, red maple, yellow poplar, a variety of oaks, and occasional clumps of pitch pine.

Other species with which the Swainson's warblers were associated included the Louisiana water-thrush (not common) hooded warbler, yellow-breasted chat, worm-eating warbler, black-and-white warbler, white-eyed and yellow-throated vireos. Cerulean warblers and redstarts were occasionally noted in the neighborhood as were chickadees and titmice.

So far as we are aware the species has not been reported for Kanawha county in previous years, perhaps because the county has been more or less overlooked by resident students of bird life in the past. It is needless to note that members of the Brooks Bird Club chapter of Charleston are looking forward to another season with the possibility of making a definite nesting record for the species.

- (1) Brooks, Maurice, and Legg, William C. "Swainson's Warbler in Nicholas County, West Virginia", Auk, The, Vol. 59, pp.76-86, Jan., 1942
- (2) Handlan, Polly and Frankenberg, Ted., "Webster Co. W. Va. Observations", Redstart, The, Vol. IX, Nos. 10-11, pp. 59-64, July-August, 1942

\* Editor's Note: Swainson's warblers have also been found in Fayette and Braxton counties.

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#### OBSERVATIONS OF A PET SPARROW HAWK

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Authorities appear agreed that the sparrow hawk, Falco sparverius, breeds but once a year and that in the early spring. Nevertheless, the sparrow hawk which this paper concerns came to us Sept. 8, 1937, fully feathered but not as yet able to fly. The bird, a female, was obviously of a brood which appeared much later than usual in the year or, perhaps, a result of a second nesting.

She was hatched and reared atop a ledge of the Hotel Windsor in downtown Wheeling, W. Va. and taken from the nest by a hotel employee who gave her to us. My husband and I determined to see whether or not we could rear her as a pet.

We found a roomy cage for her, installed perches and drinking water and placed the cage and its new occupant in a sheltered corner of a porch. The little hawk sidled nervously away from our approaching hands, moving sidewise in an avian burlesque of a then-popular, eccentric dance fad - the "Susie Q." "Susie" immediately became her name.

On her first day with us she devoured small bits of raw beef without particular signs of enthusiasm, but screamed and fluttered at the sight of large grasshoppers which we found to be her preferred food. We suspected that small birds probably had furnished much of her early diet of solid food (as is the case with many city-hatched hawks) but, lacking facilities to secure these, we planned to concentrate on grasshoppers, mice and, when necessary, bits of beef and beef liver.

It fell to my lot to supply grasshoppers for Susie, who appeared perpetually hungry. We early decided to whistle in a certain fashion as we approached her cage with food and within a week she learned to scream and flutter at the sound, even before she could see the approach of the food-bringer.

Her first mouse, a half-grown meadow mouse, was placed alive in her cage on September 25. She promptly flew to the highest perch, giving every sign of

fright. For perhaps two minutes she turned her head this way and that to follow the movements of the mouse as it sought a hiding place in the cage. She suddenly dropped on the mouse, clutching it with the talons of both feet and killing it instantly with a blow of her beak to its head. She devoured the little mammal in exactly  $3\frac{1}{2}$  minutes, even eating the tail.

On September 27 we decided to start Susie to become a huntress "on her own." Miniature and improvised falconer's "jesses" were attached to her legs and a long line, equipped with a small swivel, was fastened to the jesses for control. She had long since become accustomed to accepting food from my hand and submitted occasionally to having her head gently scratched. However, she fought like a small demon and screamed lustily as we "harnessed" her for the field.

However, she perched calmly on my shoulder as I walked to a nearby field where I caught and fed her perhaps a half-dozen grasshoppers before she decided to secure some for herself. She caught three grasshoppers and ate them before her appetite appeared satisfied. She then flew to my head and I bore this living head ornament back to her quarters on the porch.

By this time, the little hawk had learned to call noisily when she was hungry and we managed to find her an average of 30 grasshoppers a day throughout September, with occasional help from Susie herself on brief chaperoned hunting expeditions in the neighboring field.

On October 9 a friend brought us two live house mice and we placed both in Susie's cage at once. She seemed startled for a moment, but then struck both mice, grasping one in each set of talons. She immediately released one of the little mammals, however, and struck the other about the head to kill it. She promptly ate it and retired to a perch, leaving the other unharmed. This was about 10 a.m. and at 4 p.m. she killed and ate the second mouse.

We found a few grasshoppers for Susie up until October 28, when this source of food failed and, with the exception of occasional mice, she was forced to a beef and beef liver diet. To try her taste in such matters we offered her a small crust of bread and found that she appeared to like this strange food which, however, we hesitated to feed a meat-eater. She appeared, also, to like an occasional sunflower seed. On December 7 she seemed definitely to notice our first deep snow. Throughout January she appeared in normally good health and spirits on her mouse-and-liver diet.

In the course of a field trip with a dozen friends on February 13 a dozen grasshoppers were found and brought to our house, along with two white-footed mice. We introduced the mice to Susie's cage at once, but she declined to eat before an audience.

Next morning bits of fur in the cage and the absence of a mouse gave evidence that the hawk had eaten after observers left. The second mouse vanished on the following day, bits of fur and a skull testifying to its fate.

By early March, Susie developed a trait which resulted in her appearing to store food for future reference. Offered a bit of liver, she would seize it, deposit it in a far corner of her cage and return to the cage door to beg for more. This happened March 3 when she was offered a dead mouse, trapped the preceding day. She "hid" the little body, begged for more and, when no more

was forthcoming, after insistent screaming and fluttering, retired to her perch. Later in the day she ate the mouse.

Actual movement of potential food, the actions of grasshoppers or mice, appeared necessary to stimulate her to immediate consumption of food unless she happened to be very hungry.

March 31, 1938, was a warm, sunny day and Susie's cage was placed on the lawn before my husband left for an all-morning meeting. I was ill and in bed. A sudden, severe rainstorm occurred, and at 1 p.m. the little bird was found half-drowned, seemingly dead on the floor of the cage.

The little hawk seemed never fully to recover from this occurrence. For weeks we kept her in the kitchen, near the stove and coaxed her to eat small bits of meat. By April 18 she was eating normally and had the run of the kitchen most of the day, scuttling about on the floor or flying to chair-back perches. She became quite indifferent to handling and perched on our fingers when we whistled the signal that food was forthcoming. She literally "ran" to the kitchen door like any ground-dwelling domestic bird when one of us entered and called her.

On May 12 we found her dead after an illness of two days in the course of which she appeared to become partially paralyzed.

We regretted, of course, the loss of an attractive and interesting pet but we had long since determined to release her from captivity, and were awaiting her complete recovery to set her free.

That same spring we received two more young sparrow hawks and kept them only until they were able to fly well, releasing them after a period of some two weeks.

--Polly A. Handlan  
Charleston, W. Va.

Bobolink at Oglebay -- On Sunday, May 16, 1943, Rhys Ritter and the writer saw and identified a male bobolink at Oglebay Park. The bird was observed in the section of the park commonly known as Telescope Hill. The elevation is a little over 1200 feet and the hill is completely covered with grass and scattered patches of alfalfa.

The bobolink was not seen again until the latter part of June and this time with the company of a female and possibly two females. One female was seen carrying food, but our efforts to locate the nest, if there was one, were fruitless.

The birds were observed up to the end of June, at which time the field was mowed. They were noted on only two occasions thereafter.

According to bird club records, this is the first occurrence of the bobolink in Oglebay Park.

--William Wylie  
Pleasant Valley, Wheeling, W. Va.

Pine Siskins in Kanawha County, W. Va. -

At least four records of the occurrence of the pine siskin, Spinus pinus, in Kanawha county, West Virginia, were established in the early spring of 1944, and these occurrences provided opportunity to note behavior of these birds while feeding which seems of enough interest to pass along to others.

Polly Alford Handlan saw a flock of small birds feeding in trees and on lawns along MacCorkle avenue, Kanawha City, Charleston, on March 21, 1944. She returned to the location with John Handlan shortly afterwards and the birds were identified as pine siskins. Between 50 and 60 individuals composed the flock.

Other records made within the same week were: Thirteen pine siskins in approximately the same MacCorkle avenue location on March 30, by John Handlan; three examples noted along a fork of the Chappell hollow road April 2 by 13 members of the Charleston chapter of the Brooks club, including Misses Sarah and Lucy Barber, Eleanor Sims, Maxine Thacker, Mary Jean Grosscup, Mary Luke, Mr. and Mrs. W. Russell DeGarmo, Mr. and Mrs. Alston B. Shields, Stacy Grosscup, and John Handlan. Eight siskins were observed at the MacCorkle avenue location on April 3 by John Handlan.

The three birds noted in Chappell hollow flushed from the road and flew into a small pitch pine tree for a few moments before moving away from the observers. The three occasions on which the siskins were noted on MacCorkle avenue, however, provided opportunity to observe feeding behavior.

The MacCorkle avenue location is between 40th and 41st streets on a main highway which carries heavy vehicular traffic. The street is bordered by large examples of sweet gum, Liquidambar styraciflua, and sycamore, Planus sp. On three occasions during which the siskins were noted at this location, the birds were investigating the seed heads of sweet gum, either those fallen from the trees or those remaining on the twigs.

In the trees siskins clung to the spherical, spiked fruit heads in goldfinch-fashion, occasionally hanging upside down. On the ground, the siskins frequently fluttered in the air to alight atop seed heads, the latter usually rolling beneath the birds' weight. When this occurred the feeding birds actually rested on their sides, feet still clutching the seed heads and beaks still probing them. The birds showed little fear of traffic passing about 12 feet from where they were feeding. Furthermore, they permitted observers to approach within three feet, fluttering and rolling about on the ground literally at the watchers' feet.

The siskins "talked" in low notes as they fed or made brief flights away from the feeding place.

Of local observers only W. Russell DeGarmo and the writer previously had seen this species, the writer's one previous view of siskins having occurred in Ohio county, W. Va. in the winter of 1930-31.

—John W. Handlan  
Charleston, W. Va.

## SOME 1944 SPRING MIGRATION DATES FOR CENTRAL OHIO

|                                   |                         |                          |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3/18 - Loon                       | 5/3 - Y-b. Cuckoo       | <u>Warblers</u>          |
| 4/23 - Horned Grebe               |                         | 4/23 - Black & White     |
| 3/19 - P-b. Grebe                 | 4/15 - L-eared Owl      | 4/29 - Blue-winged       |
| 4/23 - D-c. Cormorant             | 4/23 - Nighthawk        | 5/6 - Tennessee          |
| 3/12 - G.B. Heron                 | 4/12 - C. Swift         | 4/16 - Orange-crowned    |
| 4/30 - Green Heron                | 5/3 - R-t. Hummingbird  | 4/30 - Nashville         |
| 3/24 - B-c. N. Heron              | 4/15 - Flicker          | 4/24 - Yellow            |
| 4/22 - A. Bittern                 | 4/15 - R-h. Woodpecker  | 5/7 - Magnolia           |
| 3/19 - Can. Goose                 | 3/31 - Y-b. Sapsucker   | 5/3 - Cape May           |
| 3/12 - E. Widgeon                 | 4/23 - Kingbird         | 4/23 - Myrtle            |
| 3/5 - Baldpate                    | 4/29 - Cr. Flycatcher   | 4/23 - B-t. Green        |
| 3/12 - G-w. Teal                  | 3/15 - Phoebe           | 5/3 - Cerulean           |
| 3/19 - Wood Duck                  | 5/4 - Ald. Flycatcher   | 4/29 - Blackburnian      |
| 3/12 - Redhead                    | 3/19 - Tree Swallow     | 5/4 - Chestnut-sided     |
| 3/12 - R-m. Duck                  | 4/8 - R-w. Swallow      | 5/3 - Bay-breasted       |
| 3/12 - Canvasback                 | 4/22 - Barn Swallow     | 5/3 - Blackpoll          |
| 3/12 - Scaup                      | 4/26 - Winter Wren      | 4/30 - Pine              |
| 3/12 - A. Golden-eye              | 3/25 - Bewick's Wren    | 3/26 - Palm              |
| 3/18 - Ruddy Duck                 | 4/24 - Catbird          | 4/25 - Ovenbird          |
| 3/12 - H. Merganser               | 4/6 - Br. Thrasher      | 4/26 - Grin. Waterthrush |
| 3/19 - R-b. Merganser             | 4/2 - Hermit Thrush     | 4/16 - La. Waterthrush   |
| 2/20 - T. Vulture                 | 4/26 - C-b. Thrush      | 5/9 - Kentucky           |
| 4/22 - B-w. Hawk                  | 4/20 - B-g. Gnatcatcher | 5/2 - Y-b. Chat          |
| 4/19 - A.R-l. Hawk<br>(last date) | 3/25 - R-c. Kinglet     | 4/25 - Hooded            |
| 4/19 - Marsh Hawk                 | 3/18 - A. Pipit         | 5/4 - Wilson's           |
| 4/15 - Osprey                     | 4/17 - M. Shrike        | 5/14 - Canada            |
| 4/23 - Sora Rail                  | <u>Vireos</u>           | 5/8 - A. Redstart        |
| 3/12 - A. Coot                    | 4/25 - White-eyed       | 5/1 - Bobolink           |
| 3/11 - Killdeer                   | 4/29 - Red-eyed         | 3/11 - Redwing           |
| 3/17 - A. Woodcock                | 4/30 - Blue-headed      | 5/4 - B. Oriole          |
| 4/15 - Upland Plover              | 4/30 - Warbling         | 3/25 - Cowbird           |
| 3/18 - Wilson's Snipe             |                         | 4/23 - Sc. Tanager       |
| 4/22 - Sp. Sandpiper              |                         | 4/29 - R-b. Grosbeak     |
| 4/19 - Gr. Yellowlegs             |                         | 5/3 - Indigo Bunt.       |
| 4/19 - Less. Yellowlegs           |                         | 4/26 - Purple Finch      |
| 3/18 - Pect. Sandpiper            |                         | 5/3 - Goldfinch          |
| 2/6 - M. Dove                     |                         | 3/5 - Towhee             |
|                                   |                         | 3/18 - Sav. Sparrow      |
|                                   |                         | 3/22 - Chip. Sparrow     |
|                                   |                         | 4/15 - W-thr. Sparrow    |
|                                   |                         | 3/18 - Fox Sparrow       |
|                                   |                         | 4/15 - Swamp Sparrow     |

In the above list it will be noted that some species are not strong migrants and some overwinter to a small degree in this locality in places suitable to them. The dates given for such species are ones on which these species were seen in considerable numbers or concentrations. Quite a few species are omitted, this being due to the fact that they were not observed during the actual migration period, or were noted at such time they could not be considered among the early arrivals. All the dates above except for those which an explanation has been given are "first arrival" dates for this observer.

--George H. Breiding

-76- Columbus, Ohio