



The Redstart

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WINTER BIRDS IN THE REGION OF

HUNTINGTON, W. VA.

by

N. Bayard Green

Notes on the birds of the Huntington region are few and scattered throughout the literature, the most complete being those of Karl Haller in THE REDSTART (Vol. VII, Nos. 7-8). The Huntington Bird Study Club, organized in 1940, has been keeping a bird calendar, which attempts to record, through observations of the club members, the relative abundance of each species throughout the year. The material for this paper is largely a summary of those records from the middle of November to the last of February of the following year. It is supplemented with material from the author's field notes.

The list, although admittedly incomplete, lists 62 species.

Pied-billed Grebe, Podilymbus p. podiceps. Frequently seen on the Ohio River, as well as small streams in the area.

Mallard, Anas p. platyrhynchos. Frequently seen in flocks on the river.

Black Duck, Anas rubripes. More common than any other species of duck in this area.

Lesser Scaup, Nyroca affinis. Common.

Turkey Vulture, Cathartes aura septentrionalis. Occurs in Wayne County in the South of Huntington.

Eastern Goshawk, Astur a. atricapillus. One specimen seen over the Ohio River by Jim Handlan, Bill Waldron and myself while taking the 1941 Christmas Census.

Sharp-shinned Hawk, Accipiter velox. Common throughout the area. Specimens invade the residential sections of the city where they prey upon birds at the feeding shelves.

Cooper's Hawk, Accipiter cooperi. Frequent but not so common as A. velox.

Eastern red-tailed Hawk, Buteo b. borealis. Fairly common in the area but rarely seen at Huntington.

Northern red-shouldered Hawk, Buteo l. lineatus. Same status as B. borealis.

Broad-winged Hawk, Buteo p. platypterus. This hawk has been seen twice in December on the Ohio side of the river; in 1941 and 1943.

Marsh Hawk, Circus hudsonius. Frequents bottom land along the Ohio River at this time of the year.

Duck Hawk, Falco peregrinus anatum. One specimen was seen flying over the college campus on Feb. 5, 1941 by Edward Seeber.

Sparrow Hawk, Falco sparverius. Common throughout the area, even in the residential sections of Huntington.

Ruffed Grouse, Bonasa umbellus. Occurs in the mountainous sections of Wayne County.

Eastern Bob-white, Colinus v. virginianus. Common throughout the area. Seen frequently in my back yard as well as other parts of the city.

Ring-necked Pheasant, Phasianus colchicus torquatus. Occurs in the northern part of Cabell County.

Killdeer, Oxyechus v. vociferus. Flocks ranging from 15 to 35 individuals forage in open grassy meadows throughout the area.

Herring Gull, Larus argentatus smithsonianus. Large numbers of these birds winter around the dam at Gallipolis. From this point they forage up and down the river.

Eastern Mourning Dove, Zenaidura macroura carolinensis. Found in sheltered fields throughout the area.

Eastern Screech Owl, Otus asio nevius. Common.

Northern Barred Owl, Strix v. varia, Frequent.

~~Eastern Belted Kingfisher,~~ Megasceryle a. alcyon. Occasional.

Northern Flicker, Colaptes auratus luteus. Common.

Pileated Woodpecker, Ceophlaeus p. pileatus. Seen occasionally in the wooded areas of Wayne County.

Red-bellied Woodpecker, Centurus carolinus. One specimen stayed around the home of Mrs. H. C. Hale in Spring Valley during the winter of 1943-44.

Red-headed Woodpecker, Melanerpes erythrocephalus. Individuals of this species winter in Rotary Park, on a hill overlooking Huntington.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Sphyrapicus v. varius. Common throughout the area.

Hairy Woodpecker, Dryobates villosus. Two distinct sub-species of this bird are found at Huntington during the winter, one much larger with more white on its back. Hairy woodpeckers have been numerous during the winter of 1943-44.

Northern Downy Woodpecker, Dryobates pubescens medianus. Common.

Prairie Horned Lark, Otocoris alpestris praticola. Large flocks are fairly common in meadows along the Ohio. Frequently seen at the Huntington Airport.

Northern Blue Jay, Cyanocitta c. cristata. Common throughout the area, especially in the residential parts of Huntington.

Crow, Corvus brachyrhynchos. The eastern and southern crow are found together in large flocks that feed in the bottom land along the Ohio. Some of these flocks number more than 2,000 individuals.

Carolina Chickadee; Penthestes c. carolinensis. Abundant everywhere.

Tufted Titmouse, Baeolophus bicolor. Occurs in small groups with the chickadees. Abundant.

White-breasted Nuthatch, Sitta c. carolinensis. More common during the winter than the summer.

Brown Creeper, Certhia familiaris americana. Observed regularly.

Eastern Winter Wren, Nannus h. hiemalis. Occasional.

Carolina Wren, Thryothorus ludovicianus. Common everywhere.

Mockingbird, Mimus polyglottos. Occurs singly or in small flocks where food is available.

Catbird, Dumetella carolinensis. One specimen was seen throughout the winter of 1942-43 within a small area.

Robin, Turdus m. migratorius. Occurs throughout the area.

Eastern Bluebird, Sialia s. sialis. Common in small flocks.

Eastern Golden-crowned Kinglet, Regulus s. satrapa. Common throughout the area in open woods and thickets.

Cedar Waxwing, Bombycilla cedrorum. Flocks of twenty or more range over the area taking advantage of available food supplies.

Migrant Shrike, Lanius ludovicianus migrans. Occasional.

Starling, Sturnus v. vulgaris. Abundant.

Myrtle Warbler, Dendroica coronata. Common in wooded sections of the area.

Pine Warbler, Dendroica pinus. Occasional.

English Sparrow, Passer d. domesticus. Abundant everywhere.

Eastern Meadowlark, Sturnella m. magna. Common in fields and open areas.

Eastern Cardinal, Richmondia c. cardinalis. Abundant.

Eastern Purple Finch, Carpodacus p. purpureus. Occurs in open woods.

Eastern Goldfinch, Spinus t. tristis. Common.

Red-eyed Towhee, Pipilo e. erythroptalmus. Occurs in small flocks in protected areas.

Slate-colored Junco, Junco h. hyemalis. Found in small flocks in thickets.

Eastern Tree Sparrow, Spizella a. arborea. Distributed over the area in small flocks.

Eastern Chipping Sparrow, Spizella p. passerina. Occasionally found wintering in sheltered areas.

Eastern Field Sparrow, Spizella p. pusilla. Common.

White-crowned Sparrow, Zonotrichia l. leucophrys. Occasional.

White-throated Sparrow, Zonotrichia albicollis. Occasional.

Mississippi Song Sparrow, Melospiza melodia euphonia. Abundant.

— Marshall College
Huntington, W. Va.

CHARLESTON CHAPTER OF THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB

Selection of acting officers and committees by 20 men and women who met in Charleston, W. Va. on Feb. 29, 1944, launched the first "local chapter" in the 12-year history of the Brooks Bird Club. Adoption of a name for the chapter, of by-laws, and schedules of meetings and field trips are included in business to be transacted by the new chapter at a meeting late in March.

John W. Handlan, Charleston newspaperman, and Miss Gladys Murray, Charleston school teacher, are acting chairman and acting secretary-treasurer of the chapter, respectively. Acting committee chairmen include Miss Sarah Barber, Mr. and Mrs. W. Russell DeGarmo and Alston B. Shields, all resident in Charleston.

Corresponding membership in the Brooks Bird club already has been made a prerequisite for membership in the chapter. Four of the chapter members already hold Brooks club cards and several others previously were affiliated with the parent organization.

The chapter's first meeting was held in the offices of the Conservation Commission of West Virginia and the initial program included showing of duplicates of the A. A. Allen bird Kodachrome slides, also by the courtesy of the Commission.

— John W. Handlan
409 41st St., S.E.
Charleston 4, W. Va.

FIELD NOTES

Short-eared Owl in Upshur County

On Saturday, February 19, Maurice Brooks and myself were surprised to see two short-eared owls, Asio flammeus flammeus, in the vicinity of French Creek in Upshur County. The birds were flushed from trees in a coniferous planting early in the afternoon. A barn owl, Tyto alba pratincola, was also disturbed from his daylight perch in the same location.

Mr. Brooks stated that this was the first time he had noted the occurrence of short-eared owls in the vicinity of his farm, although, he added, the planting of pines, spruces, etc. were favorite haunts for wintering owls.

— William F. Strunk
700 Madison Avenue
Morgantown, W. Va.

Sparrow Hawks Abundant in West Virginia This Winter

It has been interesting to note the large numbers of sparrow hawks, Falco sparverius, wintering in Pocahontas and Greenbrier counties, West Virginia, this season. On December 22, 1943 they were seen frequently along U.S. Route 219 from Marlinton to Lewisburg, and along U.S. Route 60 from Lewisburg to Richlands. At a later date, February 10, 1944, large numbers were again observed in the same regions. These observations coincide with others made in various parts of the State. Not in many years have so many of the birds been in winter residence, so far as observations show.

— Charles K. Peck,
Division of Forestry,
West Virginia University
Morgantown, W. Va.

A Hungry Woodpecker

For observation and for the benefit of such bird life as is to be found in the heart of Charleston, we have been supplying some nourishment this winter.

Among other things a small piece of suet has been attached to a tree just outside the window of our apartment. So far as we were able to observe, it was completely ignored for a week.

Then on January 8th, four inches of snow fell and for the first time the suet began to receive some attention. At approximately 1 P.M. three downy woodpeckers (one male, two females) arrived and the male immediately took position at, and possession of, the suet. During the following three hours he left the tree, but once, and then for only a few minutes. He would occasionally move a few feet from the food and a carolina chickadee would move in, which didn't seem to worry the downy. However, when one of the female downys got near, it was immediately driven off. To the best of our knowledge, neither of the females have tasted suet yet.

About two o'clock complications set in. A small truck was driven up the alley and parked beside the tree about ten feet from the base. The driver came into the apartment building on a walk which passes four feet from the tree. Since the suet was fastened but seven feet above ground, we expected the bird to depart. However, he held his ground (or tree) and resumed feeding.

In a few minutes the driver returned and, evidently waiting for a passenger, began racing his motor. Even this racket, repeated every minute or so, failed to excite the male although one female departed and the other was very jittery. After about ten minutes of this noise, apparently disgusted, the birds flew away. The truck departed soon after and within two or three minutes all the woodpeckers were back.

So what we're wondering is, what does it take to keep a downy away from a week-old piece of frozen suet, when he's hungry? We probably won't find the answer; after all two female downys don't seem to know either.

— Louise and Alston Shields
1516 A Lee Street
Charleston, W. Va.

"Berries from Heaven"

While tracking two ruffed grouse, Bonasa umbellus, after one of the late snowfalls of last winter, it was noticed that their trail led toward a thicket of holly, Ilex opaca, rhododendron and other shrubs and trees. Previously I had noticed that holly berry seeds were common in grouse droppings, so being suspicious that the birds might be found feeding under the hollies, my approach was made very cautiously behind cover. Both birds, fortunately, were discovered feeding on the berries which were raining down through the thick foliage of the hollies. For awhile, due to the thick cover, I was puzzled why the usually persistent berries were shedding in such considerable numbers.

Soon, however, a flock of cedar waxwings, Bombycilla cedrorum, were heard and later seen. They were picking the berries, eating a few of them, but dropping the greater portion.

On other occasions, waxwings have been observed dropping berries of this holly in the manner mentioned, but it was quite a happy coincidence to be nearby watching grouse feast on the freshly picked berries as waxwings dropped them. At such moments one feels very fortunate indeed.

— W. C. Legg
Mt. Lookout, W. Va.

THE GREAT SMOKIES AND THE BLUE RIDGE

Edited by Roderick Peattie.

Vanguard Press, New York. 1943. Pp. x+372, illustrated. \$3.75.

For a long time we have been waiting for a really definitive book on the West Virginia mountains, their history, their people, and their biota, but until such a volume appears the present work will serve. While the center of its interest is three hundred miles south of our own Alleghenies, its contents are so rich as to overflow, reaching out to West Virginia on many a page.

Roderick Peattie is editing a series of books known as the American Mountain Series, and this is Number Two among these works. For assistance he has called upon the facile pen of his brother, Donald Culross Peattie, upon our Own Alberta Hannum, upon Arthur Stupka, park naturalist of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, and upon other good and valid authorities.

In no other volume have I found so exact, and so sympathetic, a treatment of the mountains and their people. Too many writers, trimming their work to the desires of the slick magazines in metropolitan centers, write of the mountaineers not as they are, but as city people think they are. Authors like Jesse Stuart do little more than caricature their own people, dwelling only on the grotesque and the unlovely. Alberta Hannum knows these mountain people, has lived with them, likes them, and shows it in every paragraph.

Donald Culross Peattie tells us of the history of the southern Appalachians, and of their trees and flowers. Arthur Stupka carries us through the year, month by month, depicting for us some of the high spots to be looked for at every season. There are excellent chapters on the native crafts of these hills, on their ballads and folklore, on the climate of the region, and on planning a trip through the area. There is also a somewhat labored chapter on the geology of the region, the only portion of the book which is not intelligible and interesting to the average reader.

West Virginians, thinking of their own mountain forests which have been so destructively cut, will envy a region which still has more than two hundred thousand acres of virgin timber, much of it red spruce and balsam. They will read with interest of the vast rhododendron and azalea beds, of the wealth of trees and bird life, and of the multitudinous wildflowers, since, in a

lesser measure, we have these same things here at home.

Perhaps our greatest interest, however, will be reserved for Mrs. Hannum's chapter. Here is a wealth of material drawn from her experiences in West Virginia. We read of the Pocahontas Times, "a little bit of quiet in a noisy world"; we find stories from the Smoke Hole; and the editor even finds one from his native French Creek. Best of all, for Brooks Bird Club readers, there is John Handlan's "Hounddog and Squinteye" story to the life, down to the last basket of remains. Thus it achieves the immortality it has long deserved.

With the minor exception noted, I followed every page with keen interest and real excitement, since there is here the authentic touch, the real essence of our home and its people. I cannot wish for greater luck for any Brooks Bird Club member than that he buy, beg, borrow, or steal the book, and read it from cover to cover.

M.B.

FORTHCOMING NUMBERS OF THE REDSTART

It is not the policy of THE REDSTART to publish too many double numbers; nevertheless on occasion a long article is submitted which needs inclusion in a single large number. Such an article is planned for our April-May issue, an account of the birds of western Nicholas County, by W. C. Legg, Mr. Legg's region (the center of the Swainson's warbler range in West Virginia) is one of great ornithological interest, and we are happy to present some of the results of his tireless observations.

For the June issue we have the promise of an article by Dr. Earle a Brooks on his first visit to the spruce-clad West Virginia mountains, a paper which will be valuable for contrast and comparison with conditions as they are nearly fifty years later.

In the meantime, the editor welcomes the shorter notes which will not be forgotten. It is our hope that every bird student, amateur or professional, in the tri-state region will feel that the columns of THE REDSTART are open to his worthwhile observations.

M.B.

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 and fifty cents which includes a twelve-month subscription to THE REDSTART. All members are permitted to contribute field notes for publication. _____

The Brooks Bird Club, Fifth St., Warwood, Wheeling, W.Va.