



The Redstart

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BREEDING OF THE PROTHONOTARY WARBLER IN WOOD COUNTY

by

Louise and Alston Shields

During one of the first organized walks of the Charleston Chapter of the Brooks Bird Club in the spring of 1944, we were tipped off to the possibility of finding the prothonotary warbler, Protonotaria citrea, by Mr. John Handlan. (Many thanks John!) Prior to this discussion, we had not thought seriously of this bird as anything but an accidental rarity. Mr. Handlan was at the time president of the local club, and we knew that the warblers were his special pets, so we took heed.

Louise is also partial to this group of birds, and the idea of finding one so beautiful, and so rare, greatly appealed to her. However, our thoughts were that Putnam or Mason county along the lower great Kanawha River would be the probable locale for a successful hunt. This opinion was shared by most club members - see remarks of Mr. Handlan in The Redstart, Vol. X, No. 10, July, 1943. Since we seldom were able to visit this territory, we merely filed away the idea in the back of our minds.

Then as luck would have it, we chanced across an old article by Professor Maurice Brooks (Wilson Bul. Vol. 52, No. 4, Dec. 1940) which gave Washington county, Ohio, as a known breeding place for the prothonotary warbler. Our interest immediately picked up at this, for Washington county is just across the Ohio River from Wood county, West Virginia, where we spend our vacation every year. Here was a great chance. (Many thanks Prof. Brooks!) For the next two years, finding this species was our primary objective.

In the summer of 1946, we set out to look over historic Blennerhassett Island in the Ohio River, two miles below Parkersburg. The trip was made by canoe and three things went wrong: (1) we didn't find the bird, (2) we didn't find suitable marshes, and (3) when a high wind came up we were lucky to get back. We fared no better in other places, and so the first summer was lost.

The following year, 1947, a spot north of Parkersburg by some 10 miles was chosen for search and on our first visit, May 4, we were able to prove that the prothonotary warbler actually is a part of West Virginia bird life. Eight days later, May 12, we discovered the nest of this pair, and thus established the first West Virginia breeding record for the prothonotary warbler.

The location is just what a textbook description would indicate. A swampy woods at an elevation of 610 feet, in a section inundated by spring floods, with the nest in a stump standing in the water. It is located along U.S. route 21 in northern Wood county one mile north of the town of Boaz. At this point the road parallels the Ohio River at a distance of some 400 yards. The swamp lies between the two and equidistant from them. It is one part of a section of standing water, maintained solely by rainfall, which extends for three-fourths of a mile and never exceeds 30 yards in width. The water is divided rather equally in this manner; the south end is a narrow cattail marsh, and the middle and widest section is an open pond bordered by some medium-sized willow, and the north end is the swamp, full of water-killed willow sprouts and bordered by rather large trees, notably sycamore and elm. This is the section in which the prothonotary warblers nested and they were not seen out of it at any time. The water in the swamp never exceeds two feet in depth and averages about one foot. Completely sustained by rainfall, this entire area went dry in 1946, and all fish died. The surrounding land is plowed fields and pastures.

The shallow nest was placed three feet down in a six-foot stump which inclined to the east. The eastern side was decayed and broken out, from the top, half way down. The other side of the stump, the shoreline side, was intact thus giving protection from prying eyes as well as storms. On May 12, when we first looked in, the water covered the base up to eight inches, and the shore was five or six feet away. After some rain we found the water to be 10 inches deep and dry land 10 feet away. There were six eggs on May 12 and this number never changed. However, only four were warbler eggs, the other two being those of the cowbird, Molothrus ater. This nest was under surveillance until late evening of May 20, at which time our vacation ended and we were forced to leave without having seen an egg hatch. On May 20 we eliminated the two cowbird eggs and the female warbler continued incubation without too much concern over this fact. The eggs were very pretty, having a buffy background heavily spotted with lavender-brown.

Allowing a 10-day incubation period for cowbird eggs we must have seen this clutch almost at the instant all eggs were deposited, as we watched them over a nine-day interval. The young warblers should have hatched about May 22 or 23. Anyone with a few years of field experience could identify this species. It is just as described in the books.

The female appeared to do all the incubating. She left the nest once every 30 to 60 minutes and then only for five to ten minutes at a time. She was extremely difficult to flush, and when she did leave she flew out 15 to 20 feet, jumping around in a "hunch-back" position with wings and tail extended. The large amount of white in the tail feathers reminded one of a hooded warbler, Wilsonia citrina, but was not so obvious in her mate. Unconcerned over the close presence of catbirds, Dumetella carolinensis, and yellow-billed cuckoos, Coccyzus americanus, she balked only once at entering the nest when a crested flycatcher, Myiarchus crinitus, was a few feet away.

The male remained about the nesting site only while the nest was under construction. Afterwards he stayed farther up the swamp - as far as 400 yards away. He visited the nest vicinity about every 15 to 20 minutes. On these visits he came quickly and silently on a direct line from far up the swamp. Seldom did he actually light on the nesting stump, generally approaching no closer than 20 to 25 feet. Then after three or four minutes he would fly straight up the swamp, low over the water, until out of sight (at least 100 yards). We heard the song on only one of our several visits. The song perch was one of the middle branches of a 30-foot tree overhanging the water. This was the highest spot either of them visited, for they usually remained within six feet of the ground. The song was as described, "Sweet - Sweet - Sweet, etc." This note was repeated about 11 times, but the first three or four were rather low and, to the passerby, only the last six or seven would register. The tone was sweet and reedy, a little like that of a pine warbler, Dendroica pinus. The speed of the song was moderate, not so fast or sharp as that of the Tennessee warbler, Helminthophila peregrina, singing nearby, and much slower than the song of a yellow warbler, Dendroica aestiva. On one occasion he sang for five minutes, then left without visiting the nest, returning to the exact spot in 10 minutes and singing again.

There are not many swamps of this type in West Virginia, and how large a population of this species could succeed here is hard to guess. Between Wheeling and Parkersburg, an 80-mile stretch of river, we know of no other such spot at present. Along the lower Kanawha River are some good spots as previously mentioned. About one mile north of "our" swamp near the village of Williamstown a stream known as Big Run meanders across the flood plain. Its banks are lined with very large trees, which are often surrounded by water and a pseudo-swampy habitat results. We think it possible that one or more pairs might utilize this area although it has not yet been worked.

It is a little surprising that Wood county should be the site of this find, considering that Mr. P. C. Bibbee worked here so diligently and never listed the bird. Does this indicate its recent entrance into our state?

Louise and Alston Shields
Charleston, West Virginia

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE BIRDS OF
CABWAYLINGO STATE FOREST

The Huntington Bird Study Club conducted its first Annual Outing to Cabwaylingo State Forest during the week end of May 10-11, 1947. The group occupied several of the comfortable log cabins available, having meals together in one of the larger cabins. Forty-one members and guests were present for the baked ham dinner Saturday night. Later in the evening an indoor campfire was held, since it was too chilly to be outdoors as planned. The program included a short business session followed by chatting, singing, and an informal enumeration of bird experiences by a discharged Navy officer. Sunday was spent birding, the first groups going out at 5:00 A.M. The morning was clear and cold, with frost abundant. By mid-morning the sun had warmed the air sufficiently to make the day most enjoyable.

Cabwaylingo State Forest is located in Wayne county, West Virginia, about 50 miles south of Huntington and two miles off U.S. route 52. It comprises

6705 acres of rugged deciduous wooded hills ranging in elevation between 760 and 1500 feet. The valleys are narrow and uncleared except for the main camp area. Most of the area is in a natural state with trails winding about the flower-strewn cliffs.

Our combined list of birds reached a total of eighty-four species. Since migrating birds were still present and we were limited to one day for birding, little attention was given to nest hunting. Our time was largely confined to sight and song records. The status of birds observed is indicated as follows: Rare - one or two records; Infrequent - three to five records; Common - observed by most of the group; Abundant - present in large numbers; (*) nests found.

Turkey vulture	Infrequent
Sharp-shinned hawk	Rare
Red-tailed hawk	"
Red-shouldered hawk	"
Sparrow hawk	"
Eastern bob-white	"
Spotted sandpiper	Infrequent
Solitary sandpiper	Infrequent
Mourning dove	Rare
Yellow-billed cuckoo	Infrequent
Barred owl	Rare
Whip-poor-will	Infrequent
Chimney swift	Infrequent
Ruby-throated hummingbird	Rare
Belted kingfisher	"
Flicker	"
Pileated woodpecker	Common
Red-headed woodpecker	Rare
Hairy woodpecker	Rare
Downy woodpecker	Common
Kingbird	Rare
Crested flycatcher	Infrequent
Phoebe	Abundant (*)
Yellow-bellied flycatcher	Rare
Acadian flycatcher	Infrequent
Alder flycatcher	Rare
Wood pewee	Common
Barn swallow	Rare
Purple martin	Infrequent
Blue jay	Rare
Crow	Infrequent
Chickadee	Common
Tufted titmouse	Abundant
White-breasted nuthatch	Infrequent
House wren	Rare
Carolina wren	Common
Catbird	"
Brown thrasher	"
Robin	Infrequent
Wood thrush	Abundant (*)
Olive-backed thrush	Rare
Gray-cheeked thrush	Rare
Veery	Rare
Blue-gray gnatcatcher	Common

Starling	Rare
White-eyed vireo	Common
Yellow-throated vireo	"
Red-eyed vireo	Abundant
Warbling vireo	Common
Black and white warbler	"
Worm-eating warbler	"
Blue-winged warbler	"
Parula warbler	"
Yellow warbler	" (*)
Magnolia warbler	"
Cape May warbler	Rare
Black-throated green warbler	Common
Cerulean warbler	"
Chestnut-sided warbler	Infrequent
Bay-breasted warbler	"
Prairie warbler	"
Oven-bird	Abundant
Louisiana water-thrush	Infrequent
Kentucky warbler	"
Yellow-breasted chat	Common
Hooded warbler	Infrequent
Canada warbler	Rare
American redstart	Abundant (*)
English sparrow	Common
Cowbird	Infrequent
Bobolink	Rare
Scarlet tanager	Common
Summer tanager	"
Cardinal	"
Rose-breasted grosbeak	"
Blue grosbeak	Rare
Indigo bunting	Common
Pine siskin	Infrequent
Goldfinch	Common
Red-eyed towhee	Infrequent
Chipping sparrow	Common
Field sparrow	Infrequent
White-throated sparrow	Infrequent
Song sparrow	Common

Total Species 84

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NOTES ON THE GREEN HERON AND WOOD DUCK
AT McCULLOUGH'S POND

In 1942 Gilbert, Green, and Seeber⁽¹⁾ published a paper on "The Ecology of McCullough's Pond." They reported a green heron, Butorides virescens virescens, to be common and probably nesting, but did not see any wood ducks, Aix sponsa, hence the interest in the following observations.

McCullough's Pond is located about twenty-three miles northeast of Huntington, West Virginia, near the village of Ashton, on State Route 2. It is, no doubt, a portion of a winding old stream bed about two-hundred yards long, varying in width from ten to thirty yards, and a depth up to about four feet. It is probably the most interesting pond in the southwestern part of the state. A more complete description may be found in the above mentioned paper.

On May 10, 1947, H. C. Darlington reported finding a green heron's nest with one egg hatched and another hatching. The nest was about six feet above the water in a button bush, Cepalanthus occidentalis. On June 16, 1947, the writer observed two young herons come back to the nest and sit down side by side. When stalked they climbed out of the nest and about the branches, finally flying away. On July 4, 1947, the same nest contained five eggs. Both eggs and nest were collected. Four of the eggs were a pale greenish blue, while the fifth was much paler, almost gray; all were slightly incubated. Is this a case of a second brood or some other pair of birds using the same nest?

Five wood ducks, about one-third grown, were found on June 16, 1947. One of the downy young was captured, photographed, and then released. There may have been more, since the young kept very well concealed. On July 4, 1947, the young birds were able to fly about one hundred feet, and then drop back to the water. As far as the writer can ascertain, this is a first breeding record at this pond.

- (1) Gilbert, F.A.; Green, N.B.; & Sieber, Edward 1942 "The Ecology of McCullough's Pond" Proceedings W.Va. Acad. of Sci. W.V.U. Bulletin Series 42 No. 8 - 11 p. 107-110.

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PIGEON HAWK IN WEBSTER COUNTY

The scarcity of records for the pigeon hawk, Falco columbarius columbarius, in West Virginia is undoubtedly due to the difficulty of obtaining good observation for the species. On the evening of September 27 the writer had an occasion to carefully observe a mature male bird of this species at a small pond near Cowen, in Webster county, West Virginia. While a routine check of the pond was being made, the hawk was seen giving chase to a killdeer, Oxyechus v. vociferus, over the pond. After two unsuccessful efforts to capture its intended prey, the hawk abandoned the chase and flew to the dead top of a tree within 100 feet of the writer. There it remained in excellent light, for about five minutes, turning first one way, then another. The distinguishing characteristics, the banded tail, the bluish back, the white spots in the primaries, the light patch above the eyes, and the heavily streaked breast all showed to good advantage. It was the writer's first opportunity to definitely identify a bird of this species.

W. R. DeGarmo
Charleston, West Virginia

"WILD WINGS" BY JOSEPH JAMES MURRAY
A Book Review

1947 - Murray, Joseph James, "Wild Wings," 123 pp., illus., John Knox Press, Richmond, Va. (\$2.50)

This reviewer has the questionable habit of neglecting the reading of fore-words and prefaces until after he has dipped into the text of a new book and it was so in the case of Dr. J. J. Murray's "Wild Wings." Chapters selected at random in the text immediately reminded the reviewer of Dr. Murray himself. The writing was straight-forward, simple and sincere - very like the conversation and personality of the man who wrote it. In those chapters was the implied "sermon" (and Dr. Murray does not preach sermons, literally speaking, when he is not occupying his pulpit at the Lexington, Virginia, Presbyterian Church) that it is an excellent idea for amateur ornithologists to keep complete records and journals.

Then, still dipping into the text, we began the last chapter which is headed "Behold the Fowls of the Air." This is beautifully done. It reflects a serenity of conviction, a sure knowledge of the subject, a fervency of belief in the avocation which all of us share. The Biblical quotations take on new meaning to one unfamiliar with their import with the support of Dr. Murray's scholarship and literary craftsmanship. Fine as are the preceding chapters, this left the reviewer with the wish that the author had handled all his subject matter as he handled the concluding unit of his book.

It was then that the foreword was read! The earlier chapters originally appeared as units of a series in Onward, the young people's paper of the Presbyterian church. The concluding chapter had appeared originally in Audubon Magazine. All but that splendid conclusion had been written for younger readers - and well written, let us hasten to reaffirm - and the finale for older ones.

Dr. Murray's sketches of his ornithological experiences in and near Lexington will strike a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of his West Virginia readers. He writes unusually well of the things which most of us have experienced. His discussion of birds of the deep south awakes memories of our own brief experience in southern ornithological fields. His English and continental sketches are European ornithological jaunts through American eyes - much as most of us might imagine we would view them.

The text is illustrated with photographs from the files of the National Audubon Society and the blue cloth cover is unusually attractive, with its reproduction of a heron in flight above a marsh. The press work is exemplary and the format attractive.

John W. Handlan
Charleston, West Virginia

SPECTACULAR FLIGHTS OF NIGHTHAWKS

During the evenings of September 6 and 7, 1947, there occurred over Charleston two of the heaviest flights of nighthawks, Chordeiles minor, ever recorded by observers of the Charleston chapter of the Brooks Bird Club. Previously, fairly heavy flights had been noted during the weeks of August 25 and September 1 in Braxton, Upshur, Tucker, and Kanawha counties, but not in such great concentrations as to cause particular comment.

However, about 4:30 on the afternoon of September 6 the writer happened to notice the large flight of birds over the city, and spent the period between this time and darkness in observing the flight. Huge flocks filled the valley, all flying up-stream. Mr. C. O. Handley, studying the flock at the same time, counted birds passing over one small section of the valley at a rate of 400 per minute. This could have been no more than one third of the actual flight, as birds were flying at various heights, some of which were visible only with the aid of binoculars.

On the evening of September 7, as C. O. Handley and the writer were leaving Charleston about 4:00, we noticed only a few scattered birds, this time flying downstream. Later, the heavy flight was resumed, this time under the observation of John W. Handlan. Once again the flight was up-stream, and more or less occupied the entire valley. In the course of the flight, a conservative estimate of 200,000 birds was made as they moved overhead.

Following these large flights, the number of birds noted in migration dwindled rapidly. No more birds were seen in Charleston until a lone bird appeared at dusk on September 21. In extensive travels over the state during the ensuing two-week period, the writer saw only one small flock near Hico in Fayette county on September 19.

W. R. DeGarmo
Charleston, West Virginia

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* This list is complete to October 1, 1947. The secretary would appreciate immediate notification of any omission of names and changes in address, or errors in the spelling of names.

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REDSTART EXCHANGES

Natural History Magazine	Am. Mus. of Nat. History, New York, N. Y.
The Audubon Magazine	National Audubon Soc., New York, N. Y.
Indiana Audubon Yearbook	Ind. Aud. Soc., Inc. Indianapolis, Ind.
The Carnegie Magazine	Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Pa. Pa.
Cassinia	Delaware Valley Orn. Club, Philadelphia/
Iowa Bird Life	Iowa Orn. Union, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Kentucky Warbler	Louisville, Kentucky
Lancaster County Birdclub Bulletin	Lancaster, Pennsylvania cago, Ill.
Wildlife Review	U.S. Dept. of Int. Fish & Wildlife, Chi-/
The Migrant	Tenn. Orn. Soc., Nashville, Tenn.
Maryland	Nat. History Soc. of Md., Baltimore, Md.
The Prothonotary	Buffalo Orn. Soc. East Aurora, N. Y.
Reading Public Mus. & Art Gallery	Reading, Pa.
Library, Fish & Wildlife Service	Washington, D. C.
The Wilson Bulletin	Univ. of Mich., Ann Arbor, Mich.
The Passenger Pigeon	Wis. Soc. of Orn. Inc., Madison 5, Wisc.
The Raven	Lexington, Va.

AFFILIATION

During 1947 the Brooks Bird Club became an affiliated society of the
 Wilson Ornithological Club

TAPPAN OHIO REPORT - 1947

The March 23 field trip to Tappan Dam, by members of the Brooks Bird Club which was postponed due to cold weather and frozen water, was made on Sunday, April 13. For all those who made the trip, instead of being an unlucky "13" it proved to be just the opposite. All in all, we really had good birding, and recorded 47 species as did DeGarmo and Conrad the week before. However, the abundance of ducks and the recording of the osprey and bald eagle were outstanding.

Late in the afternoon, between four-thirty and five, as we were working the side roads on our way back to Cadiz, we had stopped to observe several groups of ducks. After spending some time at the spot the writer noticed a large bird in a near-by tree. She remarked to passengers in the car: "There is either an eagle or a big marsh hawk." Upon closer observation with glasses, and informing the rest of the group, the bird flew and proved to be an immature bald eagle, Haliaeetus leucocephalus. We followed the eagle with glasses and telescope until it landed in a distant tree and made additional check up possible. The bird was flushed again and sailed over the near-by ridge only to return later and cross the body of water to our front and roost in a tree on the opposite side.

In the meantime, one member of our group pointed out another large bird, and at the same time most of us saw it hit the water with a splash. Of course, its identification was easy then, an osprey, Pandion haliaetus. The osprey did get a fish and was observed several times before we finally departed. This, incidently, is an early record for the osprey.

The weather was clear and warm, being about 55°, and only a slight south-west wind. The group numbered twenty-five which included Mr. & Mrs. Merit Skaggs from East Cleveland, Ohio, who were on their way home from St. Clairsville, Ohio, where they had been visiting and were doing a little birding on the way.

The following list of birds were recorded by the group: common loon, pied-billed grebe, great blue heron, green heron, mallard, black duck, baldpate, pintail, blue-winged teal, shoveller, redhead, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, American golden-eye, American merganser, turkey vulture, bald eagle, marsh hawk, osprey, sparrow hawk, coot, killdeer, herring gull, belted kingfisher, flicker, red-headed woodpecker, downy woodpecker, phoebe, purple martin, crow, chickadee, tufted titmouse, robin, bluebird, starling, English sparrow, meadowlark, red-wing, grackle, cowbird, cardinal, goldfinch, towhee, vesper sparrow, chipping sparrow, field sparrow, and song sparrow.

Mary Catherine Conrad
1206 Warwood Avenue
Wheeling, West Virginia

NOTE ON THE HENSLOW'S SPARROW

In the early evening of May 4, 1947, two singing male Henslow's sparrows, Passerberbulus henslowi, were observed in a field of tall grass at the head of Falling Run, Morgantown, Monongalia county, West Virginia. The birds were kept under close observation until the first of June. Three pairs were observed during the month of May, and each pair had a definite territory. On a return visit on July 13, the grass had been cut and no birds were observed.

Earl and Rhea Smith, "Red" King,
and William Wylie
Morgantown, West Virginia

SOME BIRDS OF HAMPSHIRE COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

On June 22, 1947, Professor and Mrs. H. A. Davis, Wilbert Frye, and the writer spent the entire day exploring the back roads between Capon Bridge and the Virginia border in Hampshire County. We found there a blue grosbeak, Guiraca caerulea caerulea, and three migrant shrikes, Lanius l. ludovicianus. Mockingbirds, Mimus polyglottos polyglottos, were quite common, and one nest with young was located. Orchard orioles, Icterus spurius, were also quite common; One nested in a maple tree in Mr. Frye's yard. I saw several pine warblers, Dendroica pinus. A red-bellied woodpecker, Centurus carolinus, nested by the neighbor's doorstep. It was also observed that the yellow-throated vireos, Vireo flavifrons, were more common than the red-eyed, Vireo olivaceus. Mr. Frye trapped a bare-tailed mole, Scalopus aquaticus, which Gene Frum said had been taken only twice before in West Virginia, in Morgan and Hardy counties. There were ducks along the Cacapon River which were found to be wood ducks, Aix sponsa, a nest of one pair having been discovered in a tree. Last year Mr. Frye showed me a large colony of cliff swallows, Petrochelidon albifrons, at his brother's barn, and he states they are well distributed throughout the county. In 1944 we found a nighthawk, Chordeiles minor, nesting at Romney.

The list for Hampshire County for June 21, 22, and 23 is as follows: turkey vulture, broad-winged hawk, sparrow hawk, ruffed grouse, bob-white, killdeer, rock dove, mourning dove, black-billed cuckoo, whip-poor-will, chimney swift, belted kingfisher, flicker, pileated woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, kingbird, crested flycatcher, phoebe, Acadian flycatcher, least flycatcher, wood pewee, rough-winged swallow, barn swallow, cliff swallow, crow, tufted titmouse, house wren, Bewick's wren, Carolina wren, mockingbird, catbird, brown thrasher, robin, wood thrush, bluebird, blue-gray gnatcatcher, migrant shrike, starling, yellow-throated vireo, red-eyed vireo, black and white warbler, worm-eating warbler, golden-winged warbler, parula warbler, yellow warbler, pine warbler, prairie warbler, oven-bird, Louisiana water-thrush, yellow-throat, yellow-breasted chat, hooded warbler, redstart, English sparrow, meadowlark, red-wing, orchard oriole, Baltimore oriole, purple grackle, cowbird, scarlet tanager, cardinal, blue grosbeak, indigo bunting, goldfinch, towhee, grasshopper sparrow, vesper sparrow, chipping sparrow, field sparrow, song sparrow.

Wayne Davis
Morgantown, West Virginia