



The Redstart

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WEST VIRGINIA ORNITHOLOGY IN 1946

By Maurice Brooks

As in past years, I shall attempt to give a review of ornithological happenings and trends in West Virginia during the year 1946. The year witnessed the happy return to the state of many of our field workers who were in the armed services. Readjustments following the war have seriously interfered with field work; nevertheless there is the promise of more active work in the future, and we expect that 1947 will see more significant contributions to ornithology than we had in recent years.

The year began with a remarkably open late winter, and a very early spring, almost, but not quite, as advanced as was the spring of 1945. Because of the generally equable weather, there were few waves of birds, nor have there been reports of storm-borne rarities or concentrations.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the winter was the presence in the state of considerable numbers of evening grosbeaks. They first appeared in the late fall, and were present later in the winter at such widely separated points as Huntington, where they were reported by L. E. Hicks; and Shepherdstown, where they were under observation by Mrs. H. P. Schley; and were seen by Roger Tory Peterson and others. In the Shepherdstown region they lingered until May 19, feeding extensively on the fruits of hackberry. West Virginia shared in the most extensive southern movement of these birds which has yet been recorded. They were locally common in southern Virginia, Kentucky, and eastern Tennessee. So far there have been no reports of these birds during the winter of 1946-47.

During the spring and early summer a number of observers made intensive efforts to find Sutton's warbler again. Roger Tory Peterson made two trips to the Martinsburg-Shepherdstown region; George Thorp searched during the Memorial Day period; and Lloyd Poland and others combed the ground; all without success. The mystery of this bird grows. Many

bird students who have seen the skins incline to the view, at present at least, that the two specimens taken represent a strongly-marked race of the yellow-throated warbler. This explanation still leaves much to be explained, notably the double-parula song which first brought the bird to the attention of Karl Haller. Both Hicks and George Breiding noted this song, which sounds like a parula song twice repeated, in the bird which they reported from Morgan County in 1945. One would scarcely expect that a race, no matter how strongly marked, would depart in song so far from the song-pattern of other yellow-throated warblers.

This confusion as to song gives rise to an interesting question. Many students of the Oglebay Nature School which met in Berkeley County in 1934 will recall that we all had difficulty in straightening out the supposed parula songs, particularly in the Spruce Pine Hollow region, in Morgan County, the same locality, by the way, from which Hicks and Breiding reported a Sutton's warbler in 1945. Most bird students of our region are familiar with two songs of the parula, one which is a smoothly-ascending trill that explodes at the end, the other remarkably like the song of the cerulean warbler. In the Spruce Pine Hollow region we all heard, and puzzled over, songs from birds which we identified as parula warblers, but which were wide variants from the two familiar songs of that bird. Were we possibly hearing Sutton's warblers? Perhaps we shall never be sure, since the fine forest stand in Spruce Pine Hollow was destroyed by lumbering during the late war.

There is still the point to be made that no bird student has reported a yellow-throated warbler from eastern West Virginia, unless the two specimens taken by Haller represent a race of that species.

A curious situation as regards the Cape May warbler prevailed, in the Morgantown region at least. Here spring Cape Mays are usually scattered or notably scarce. In the spring of 1946 they were abundant, singing males being found everywhere throughout the region for several days during May. On the other hand, fall Cape Mays usually swarm through this territory, but last year they were scarce and scattered. In soft maple trees about the University campus, where during September, I am usually able to find the birds by dozens feeding on aphids and scale insects, I failed to see a single individual.

The most notable contribution to our knowledge of the state's breeding birds came from Charleston, where Miss Eleanor Sims and others made careful observations on the nests of six pairs of Swainson's warblers, all near the city limits of Charleston. Miss Sims will report elsewhere in detail on her interesting and highly important observations. Russell DeGarmo located Swainson's warblers during the nesting season in Upshur County, somewhat to my embarrassment, since his birds were found within a few miles of my home there. We now have summer records for this interesting an elusive warbler from Monongalia, Upshur, Webster, Braxton, Nicholas, Fayette, and Kanawha Counties, and a spring record (Metmore's) from Lincoln County. No doubt the birds will be found in time in the majority of our counties west of the Alleghenies.

The continuing presence of red crossbills in the Cheat Mountains is a matter of local interest. I was able to find only a single crossbill on Gaudineer Knob in May, but Dr. J. J. Murray, of Lexington, Virginia, had a flock of six under very close observation near the spring just below

Gaudineer Tower in November. During the fall and early winter there have been large numbers of pine siskins in the Cheat region, as well as in many other parts of the state.

Thus far during the present exceedingly open winter there have been no reports of wandering northern visitors to the state. Persons who habitually feed birds in winter have been complaining of the scarcity of winter birds, but this condition is apparent rather than real. So abundant were the crops of wild fruits and nuts in 1946 that the birds have found plentiful supplies of natural food, without having to resort to feeding stations. At the time of our Christmas bird count at Morgantown we found winter birds abundant in beech woods and in tangles of wild grape vines. Robins in large numbers have been in the Morgantown territory all winter.

None of the local observers were fortunate enough to find any large concentrations of waterfowl on Cheat Lake this fall, but DeGarmo reports a good flight of wild ducks on the Elk and Kanawha rivers. I. B. Boggs noted a large flock of whistling swans over Morgantown, and wild geese seemed more numerous than usual. There has been an unusual number of reports of ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls about the rivers and lakes this winter. The double-crested cormorants reported by Boggs and Earl Smith from Cheat Lake on the Christmas bird count constitute our first winter record for this species locally.

During the year a number of persons with ornithological interests visited West Virginia. As already noted, Peterson, Thorp, and Murray made trips to the state. The Audubon Society of the District of Columbia conducted a field trip into Cranberry Glades in June, and this interesting region was also visited by two groups from Cleveland, Ohio. It is encouraging to see a wider recognition of West Virginia's attractiveness for the "birding" fraternity.

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BEAVER AND BIRDS

The average person does not normally associate birds with Castor canadensis, engineer of the rodent world. Beaver to most people mean stick dams, ponds, lodges, canals, and gnawed trees. They immediately think of a large robust mammal with a canoe paddle tail and bright orange buck teeth. To many women it brings to mind a wonderful, dark and soft fur coat.

To the bird student who has spent considerable time studying beaver and those animals associated with them, ducks, woodcock, red-winged blackbirds and other aquatic-loving birds are the things that go through his mind.

Before the beaver made its comeback in West Virginia, ducks were difficult to find except during spring and fall migration. Areas with shallow water containing an abundance of duck food did not exist. Our streams were all too fast and our lake shores were too deep. The few ducks that were observed had come down to rest than passed on to areas suitable for nesting and rearing of young.

Beaver ponds scattered throughout West Virginia, and concentrated in the counties of Tucker, Randolph, and Pocahontas have changed this picture considerably. Numerous pairs of adult black ducks (Anas rubripes) and one

black duck in downy plumage were observed in beaver ponds on the Blackwater River in Canaan Valley, Tucker County. Although nests were not found the presence of these numerous adult birds and this young duck provides ample evidence that these ducks do nest in this area. A flock of seventeen black ducks have been observed throughout the winter in this area. When observed they are always in or adjacent to beaver ponds.

The wood duck (Aix sponsa) population is concentrated in Randolph County at the headwaters and along the tributaries of Laurel Fork and Glady Fork of Cheat River. This area is heavily wooded, which provides shelter and nesting cover; and the abundant beaver ponds provide feeding areas. Two broods of wood ducks were noted on the Beaverdam Wildlife Management Area of the Monongahela National Forest during the past summer. The species is abundant enough that one can be assured of seeing this beautiful little duck when visiting this area.

Woodcocks (Philohela minor) also frequent areas adjacent to beaver ponds. The moisture provided by ponds results in soil damp enough for this bird to probe with his tweezer-like bill and secure earthworms; his favorite food. Flushing a woodcock and thrilling to his whistling erratic flight is not a new experience to anyone that, during summer or fall, has walked along a stream occupied by beaver. Another of the Scolopacidae frequently found along beaver ponds is the spotted sandpiper (Actitis macularia).

Great blue herons (Ardea herodias) and eastern green herons (Butorides virescens) are also frequently observed standing knee deep in a beaver pond waiting to make a meal of one of the many frogs found there in large numbers.

Beaver ponds that have been established for three or four years begin to support a good growth of cattail (Typha) and Rush (Scirpus). One cannot complete the picture without the black and scarlet and the "tee-ree" of the red-wing (Agelaius phoeniceus). Early morning and evening find him swinging on a cattail and filling the air with his song.

Late in the evening cedar waxwings (Bombycilla cedrorum) are frequently observed getting an evening meal over beaver ponds. They perch on a water-killed tree, fly out and catch an insect in mid-air and return to the tree until another hapless insect flies by.

Areas adjacent to beaver ponds frequently support a thick growth of nine-bark (Physocarpus opulifolius), shrubby St. John's wort (Hypericum proli-
ficum), and wild spiraea (Spiraea sp.). In this impenetrable tangle we find the birds of the thickets such as the towhee (Pipilo erythrophthalmus) and catbird (Dumetella carolinensis).

So we see that the beaver is more than a builder of dams and lodges. He is an animal that is creating an ecological habitat that was rare or non-existent in West Virginia prior to his reintroduction. As the beaver population increases beaver dams will increase. In each beaver pond created there will exist an opportunity for one or more of the birds associated with these ponds to build a nest, secure food and successfully raise young. Beaver ponds have made a richer bird life for a small area in West Virginia. It is believed that this area can and will be enlarged to cover every part of the state where beaver habitation is practical.

Wendell G. Swank
Conservation Commission
Elkins, W. Va.

SOME AUTUMN NOTES ON WEST VIRGINIA BIRDS

From September 16 to 27, 1946, time was devoted to observing birds at Lake Terra Alta, Preston County; at the Sand Hill district, Marshall County; and at the Stackyard Hollow region, Ohio County. Three to four hours were spent each trip afield.

The dates for each place worked are as follows: Preston County, September 16 to 19 inclusive; Marshall County, September 23 and 24; Ohio County, September 25 and 27. A combined total of 56 species was recorded for all places visited. The table presented below summarizes the data gathered at the different localities.

Species	Preston Co.	Marshall Co.	Ohio Co.
Turkey Vulture	Several seen in flight		
Red-shouldered Hawk	Two were heard and seen		
Sparrow Hawk		One was seen	
Ruffed Grouse	One was heard drumming September 17		One was flushed at Stackyard Hollow
Killdeer	Several were recorded each trip afield	A flock of 17 was seen on the Langmeyer Farm	
Rock Dove	Recorded	Two were seen	Several observed
Mourning Dove	Several were seen in flight on September 18		
Black-billed Cuckoo			One was collected on Fulton Heights on September 27
Chimney Swift		A small flock was noted along Big Wheeling Creek	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	One was seen on September 17		
Belted Kingfisher	Heard calling about the lake	Observed along Big Wheeling Creek at Camp Agaming	
Flicker	Commonly recorded	Several observed	Six were noted at Stackyard Hollow on September 25
Pileated Woodpecker		Heard calling on the hillside above Miller's Run	

Species	Preston Co.	Marshall Co.	Ohio Co.
Hairy Woodpecker	Scattered about the wooded area		Two were observed on September 25
Downy Woodpecker	Commonly observed	Several observed	Commonly observed
Eastern Phoebe	Frequently noted	Several seen	
E. Wood Pewee		One was seen at Vern-Gay Camp	
Blue Jay	Commonly observed		One was heard on Sept. 25. This species has not been recorded in this particular area for over five years.
Crow	Small flocks were noted at all three localities		
Black-capped Chickadee	Common		
Carolina Chickadee		Common	Several small flocks
Tufted Titmouse	Scattered; commonly observed at all three points		
House Wren	Several observed		One was seen on Fulton Heights on Sept. 25
Carolina Wren		Several were seen and heard singing	One was collected on Sept. 25. Several others were seen and heard calling and singing on the above date and on Sept. 27.
Catbird	Present in small numbers at all three points		
Brown Thrasher	One was seen on the west side of the lake on Sept. 17		
Robin	Small flocks were observed at all three points		
Wood Thrush	One was heard calling on Sept. 17	One recorded on September 24	One was heard calling on September 25
Olive-backed Thrush	One was seen on September 18		Call note heard on September 25
Eastern Bluebird	Commonly observed	Several were seen and heard	
Cedar Waxwing	Flocks of 15 to 25 were frequently seen. Probably the most common species in this area.		

Species	Preston Co.	Marshall Co.	Ohio Co.
European Starling	Several very large flocks were seen. Small flocks scattered and common.	Scattered	
White-eyed Vireo			One was collected at Stackyard Hollow on September 25.
Blue-headed Vireo			One was seen at Stackyard Hollow, Sept. 27
Red-eyed Vireo	One was collected on Sept. 16		
Black and White Warbler	Several were seen		One was seen on Fulton Heights on Sept. 25
Tennessee Warbler	One was collected on Sept. 18		One was seen on Fulton Heights on Sept. 25
Magnolia Warbler	Several were seen	One was seen on September 24	
Cape May Warbler	Small flocks were observed		One was seen at Stackyard Hollow on Sept. 27
Black-throated Blue (Cairn's?) Warbler	Fairly common		
Black-throated Green Warbler	Common		One was collected at Stackyard Hollow on September 27
Black-poll Warbler	Small flocks were commonly observed. Probably the most common wood warbler in the area.		Several were seen on September 25
Ovenbird			Seven were seen scattered over the territory worked
Yellowthroat	One was seen and heard giving call note	One was seen and heard giving call note	
Hooded Warbler			A male was seen on September 25
American Redstart	Several were seen		One was seen on September 25 and 27
Baltimore Oriole		Several were seen together on the Langmeyer Farm	
Scarlet Tanager		One was heard calling on the Jarr property	

Species	Preston Co.	Marshall Co.	Ohio Co.
Cardinal		Common	Common
Indigo Bunting		One was seen	One was seen
Goldfinch	Common	Several observed	Several heard
Red-eyed Towhee	Scattered; fairly common	Several observed	Several heard
Chipping Sparrow		Several observed	
Field Sparrow	Several small flocks were observed	Common in fair sized flocks	Several individuals observed
White-throated Sparrow	One was seen on Sand Hill road on Sept. 23		One was seen at Stack-yard Hollow on Sept. 27
Song Sparrow	Fairly common	Fairly common	

George and Jane Breiding
Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio.

THE 1946 MEETING OF THE WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

The twenty-eighth annual meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Club was held at Omaha, Nebraska, on November 28-30, 1946. This, the first open meeting since 1941, was well attended, particularly by bird students from the middle west and the Rocky Mountains states.

Of particular interest to members of the Brooks Bird Club was the favorable vote by the W.O.C. Executive Council on affiliation between the Wilson Club and the B.B.C. This affiliation has now been completed by the signing of the proper articles. In this connection, Dr. George Sutton has made available to the Wilson Club the sum of five hundred dollars to encourage research work, and to further closer relations between the W.O.C. and its affiliated societies. It is also planned that each affiliated society name a representative to sit with the Executive Council of the Wilson Club. By this action, Dr. Sutton becomes the first patron of the W.O.C.

Local representatives at the meeting were George B. Thorp, from Pittsburgh; L. E. Hicks, from Columbus; and the writer. Dr. Sutton was re-elected as President of the Club, and other officers being: First Vice-President, Dr. O. S. Pettingill, Jr.; Second Vice-President, Maurice Brooks; Secretary, James B. Young; Treasurer, Burt L. Monroe; and Elective Members of the Council, Rudolf Bennett, George H. Lowery, Jr., and Milton B. Trautman.

Next year's meeting is planned for Columbus, Ohio, during the week-end following Thanksgiving. It is hoped that a large portion of the B.B.C. membership will be able to attend this meeting.

Maurice Brooks,
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FRICK PARK, PITTSBURGH
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

(Editor's Note: The following Christmas Bird Count was received too late to be included in the January-February issue, and is included as a matter of record.)

Frick Park, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, December 21, 1946; ground covered with two to three inches snow; temperature 28° F; wind NW. approximately 15 mph. Three observers in one group. Total hours, nine on foot. Cooper's hawk, 1; ring-necked pheasant, (females) 12; hairy woodpecker, 1; downy woodpecker, 4; chickadee, 4; white-breasted nuthatch, 7; brown creeper, 2; cardinal, 5; goldfinch, 1; slate-colored junco, 19; white-throated sparrow, 1; song sparrow, 1. Total: 12 species; 57 individuals.

Observers were John R. Lehman, C. B. Shoemaker and William L. Black.

John R. Lehman
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

WINTER RECORDS FOR EVENING GROSBEAK AND PURPLE FINCH

On February 15, 1947, the observer was fortunate enough to see about one dozen evening grosbeaks (Hesperiphona vespertina) along the edge of the snow-banked road about 100 yards from the summit of Allegheny Mountain, near U.S. Route 33, Randolph County.

A purple finch (Carpodacus purpureus) was observed on February 15, in Pendleton county, about three miles from Mouth of Seneca on Allegheny Mountain. Another purple finch was seen in Upshur county, near French Creek on February 17, 1947.

Fred A. Glover
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WATERFOWL OBSERVATIONS ALONG KANAWHA RIVER

On January 1, 1947, W. R. DeGarmo and the writer spent the greater portion of the daylight hours traversing the Kanawha River in the Charleston area. The ground was covered by a two to three inch snowfall and there was an almost continuous light rain throughout the day. Waterfowl observed during the day numbered approximately sixty individuals in three flocks. The composition of these flocks by species and number follows:

1. Just below the mouth of Elk River - 27 birds noted - 5 redheads, 20 ringnecks, 1 greater scaup, and 1 horned grebe.
2. Approximately 150 yards below Patrick Street Bridge - 3 birds noted - all goldeneyes, 1 male, 2 females.
3. Near State Capitol Building - 23 individuals - 5 redheads, 10 ringnecks, 1 canvasback, 1 greater scaup, 3 ruddy ducks, 2 female buffleheads, and 1 black duck.

Also observed were a mixed flock of about 25 gulls on a bar near the mouth of Elk River. This group consisted of herring gulls (both 1st year and

adults), ringbills (adults), Bonaparte gulls (adults) and several gulls intermediate in size in comparison with the ringbills and Bonapartes, but whose identification could not be made with certainty. Also represented was a tern which could not be identified.

Game Protector Noah Payne also reported flocks of ducks totaling several hundred individuals along the Kanawha River between Marmet and Cedar Grove during the period from January 2 to January 8.

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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.

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